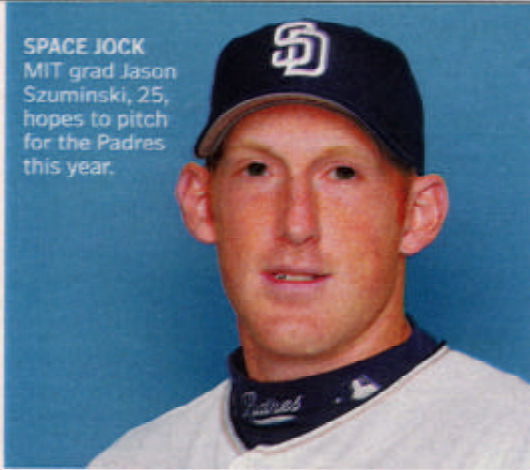


SPACE JOCK
MIT grad Jason Szuminski, 25, hopes to pitch for the Padres this year.



3 QUESTIONS FOR

Jason Szuminski

Forget soaring rockets. This MIT grad wants to throw heaters in the majors.

You went to MIT to study aeronautical engineering, graduating in 2000, but now you're in spring training with the San Diego Padres and hope to make the major-league roster. How'd that happen?

I started playing organized ball when I was 8 years old, and I've never missed a year since. As a kid, I wanted to play in the big leagues, but I never thought it was possible. I went to MIT because I thought it would be the best thing for my future. I knew I would be able to play baseball there, and I thought I would just keep playing for fun, but I didn't see a future in it. It wasn't until the end of college when I realized I had an ability a lot of people don't have. I started getting some attention from the scouts and knew that if I worked at it, I might have a chance.

MIT's not exactly an athletic powerhouse. What do the students think of sports, and what would it mean to be the first MIT grad to make the majors?

It was almost an escape for us. Being such a tough academic school, it was so much fun to get out on the field a couple of times a week and get away from the classes and all the hard work we did in there. MIT is famous for people accomplishing incredible things - more than just the tech jobs that people expect from MIT grads. [Making the majors would reinforce MIT's philosophy that] you can accomplish anything you want if you work at it. I'm excited to have made it this far.

I'm sure your focus is with the Padres, but what about the Sox? What do you predict for them?

They're looking pretty good. I know they always compete, but from what I've read and what I've seen, they've made huge strides to get that much better. I know they try to stack their lineup and their team so they can beat those hated Yankees. I wish them the best of luck in doing it, too. It's good that we're in different leagues, so I can still wish them well.

- Julia Tolliver Maranan

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPHER BEFF; JASON SZUMINSKI PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS HARDY/SAN DIEGO PADRES

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