

HOLLYWOOD

A heart-to-heart with entertainment industry stars and insiders who are citizens of Cardinal Nation



Hamm added to his famous collection of Cardinals hats – it numbers in the triple digits – when he suited up with Ozzie Smith last season for the Legends & Celebrity Softball Game during All-Star week in Kansas City.

By Jessica Radloff

Jon Hamm is a man of many suits – “Mad Men” fans have come to appreciate the St. Louis actor’s passion for fashion during the TV drama’s six seasons – but he also is a man of many hats.

Most of them Cardinals hats.

As a full-time ambassador for the Birds on the Bat – a role that requires no rehearsal – he wears every one of them proudly, whether in Los Angeles, New York or even Kansas City.

Hamm is to St. Louis what Jerry Seinfeld is to New York and the Mets, what Ben Affleck and Matt Damon are to Boston and the Red Sox. They all love baseball, and they wear their colors in their hearts and on their sleeves for the teams in the cities where they grew up.

Fans of “Mad Men” might want to claim cool and suave advertising exec Don Draper as their own, but the actor who

portrays him will belong to St. Louis forever.

Clearly, acting invigorates Hamm, the dashing 42-year-old alumnus of John Burroughs School and Mizzou. But is it his passion? Certainly he does it very well, and he has the awards to prove it.

But ask him to identify his *first* love, and the answer is baseball – Cardinals baseball.

Hamm, the narrator of the official 2011 World Series DVD, is currently working on a project that combines his two loves – baseball and acting. He will star as sports agent J.B. Bernstein in the Disney drama “Million Dollar Arm.” He’ll also host the 2013 ESPY awards show, set for July 17 on ESPN.

Hamm recently visited with *Cardinals Magazine* from his memorabilia-filled office, waxing about his unusual collection of all-things-Cardinal, wearing Redbirds gear in Kansas City, eating at “Stan and Biggie’s” and texting with David Freese.

You were called St. Louis’ No. 1 celebrity not long ago in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. What does it mean when you hear something like that?

Hamm: I don’t know if I would agree ... I think there are quite a few people significantly more famous or important than me who come from St. Louis. It’s obviously a very nice thing to hear, especially given that I identify so strongly with being from St. Louis. I may quibble with where I rank on that scale or that list, but it’s very nice of someone to say that.

You’re always photographed around Los Angeles in Cardinals hats. How many of them do you actually own?

Hamm: (Laughs) If I were to count, you’d be surprised by the amount I have. I’ve been given a lot, but most of the ones I wear are ones I’ve purchased. It’s up in the high two digits or low three digits. There are several shelves in my house covered with them. You never know ... what if one day you need a green one?

It sounds like you might need a separate room in your house just to hold all the Cardinals memorabilia!

Hamm: Well, I do, in fact. I’m sitting at my desk right now and staring at a Cardinals garden gnome that’s holding a baseball in one hand and a World Series trophy in another. My friend sent it to me

after the 2011 World Series. I have a lot of things like that, and a lot of baseballs, and a lot of other things throughout the years that I've accumulated. I'm very proud of them.

Do you purposely wear your St. Louis caps in public, knowing you'll be photographed?

Hamm: It's more of a second thought. I'm very proud to represent the Cardinals and the Blues, and obviously they are very much a part of my everyday sports existence. But it's certainly not a calculated thing. There are people who just sort of follow you around and want to take your picture. It's mostly just happenstance. It's just that I have a lot of that gear, and I'm most often wearing it. (Laughs)

If you don't want to be noticed, you could just wear a Cubs hat!

Hamm: Ha-ha! Cubs nation will be very angry – that is the one hat I will rarely wear, even in jest. I was at the All-Star Game in Kansas City last year and they got very mad at me for wearing Cardinals gear. They wanted me to wear a Kansas City hat, and I said, "I'm sorry, it's not gonna happen!" No offense to the Royals, they are a lovely franchise.

Editor's note: A few weeks before, Hamm was one of several celebrities who participated in a fund-raising Wiffle ball game in Kansas City. Required to don a blue Royals jersey for the event, he made sure it was adorned with the number "85" and "Denkinger" on the back.

What fueled your passion as a die-hard Cardinals fan?

Hamm: I grew up in the '70s, sort of lean years for Cardinals fans. My dad took me to a lot of games, and I just loved the experience of going to the ballpark. You kind of cast the die and start rooting. Then in 1982, we went to the World Series. I remember thinking as an 11-year-old boy that this is *the greatest thing that I will see in my life*.

Growing up, one of my best friends was John Simmons, whose father was Ted Simmons, who played for the Cardinals for many years. Then, before the 1981 season, he was traded to the Brewers, who were in the American League then. And, of course, we played the Brewers in the 1982 Series. I have this incredible memory of this wonderful thing happening to me. But meanwhile, my best friend, whose father was playing for the other team, remembers it as one of the worst things in his life. We constantly go back and forth talking about whose experience was more valid in that particular time, but we're still friends, so that's really nice.



The desktop of the suave and sophisticated ad exec drops all pretense in the real world, where Hamm the St. Louisan throws his passion full-tilt into all things Cardinal (right).

The recent passing of Stan Musial reminded us of how special he was. Did you ever meet him?

Hamm: I met him a couple times when I was a little kid growing up in north St. Louis County. My dad would take us to brunch on Sundays at "Stan Musial and Biggie's" restaurant and Stan was very often there. It was amazing because you were always like, "I can't believe somebody this famous is here." It was really cool.

How do you keep up with the team now during the season?

Hamm: Pretty much online. I've watched World Series games on my phone, pitch by pitch. I remember reloading and reloading to watch Chris Carpenter beat Roy Halladay of the Phillies in Game 5 of the NLDS in 2011, and then watching that crazy Game 6 of the World Series between my phone and a TV in the trailer. It was remarkable and exciting ... it felt like I was a kid again. That's what baseball does. It makes you feel young.

But if a game comes on national TV, oh yeah, I'll stay home to watch if I don't have plans. Even if it's an early game in April. If it's on, I'm watching it.

Baseball is the common bond that most native St. Louisans share, no matter where they might live now, because it reminds them of home.

Hamm: I totally agree. Players come and go, and dreams come and go, and the quality of the time rises and falls, but every

spring hope springs eternal and you get newly energized and newly motivated. There's a reason the season starts in the spring and ends in the winter. It's a very cyclical, beautiful game that way. It's fun to go to games out here in California, and Dodger Stadium is a beautiful place to see a ballgame, but there's nothing like being in St. Louis, especially during a playoff run when the air is crisp and everyone is in red. It's just tremendously exciting.

You told *Esquire*, "Someone recently made the comparison of saying the world's biggest Dodger fan in L.A. is pretty much equivalent to the average Cardinal fan in St. Louis. And I would only partly disagree with that exaggeration." What did you mean?

Hamm: Obviously there are crazy Dodger superfans who eat and breathe Dodger baseball. I mean, look at Tommy Lasorda. That's a perfect example of a guy who breathes blue. It's just a different thing in California. There's so many other things going on. That's not to say there's not a lot that happens in St. Louis; it's just that what happens in St. Louis, the Cardinals are a major priority. It cuts across race and class and social strata and age. It has this incredibly communal, expressive feeling.

I'm not saying the Dodgers haven't had situations like that before. I remember that crazy '88 season, when Kirk Gibson hit the walk-off home run. That was spectacular. But that was spectacular even as a baseball fan. The Dodger faithful, I think, are outnumbered by the St. Louis faithful.

Tell us about becoming friends with David Freese.

Hamm: I was in town at a Blues game, and the Cardinals had just gotten their 2011 World Series rings. Chris Carpenter was there, David was there, and it was just very, very cool ... a lot of showing off their jewelry that night. I was with a couple friends from when I was a kid in St. Louis, and we were all immediately transformed back into 16-year-old boys. It was like, "This is just the coolest thing ever." Then I ran into David again last year at the All-Star Game, and we hung out. We text each other, saying things like, "stay healthy" or "keep up the good work."

Your girlfriend - actress and producer Jennifer Westfeldt - said that narrating the official 2011 World Series video was the highlight of your life. Does it trump all other career achievements?

Hamm: It's interesting because none of those things happen unless "Mad Men" happened, so it's definitely a situation where one thing is predicated on the other. "Mad Men" is obviously my job where I go to work every day ... that's the one thing I have to do that enables me to do all this other fun stuff. But the opportunity to have a presence in the Cardinals atmosphere is very special. When they asked me if I'd consider doing the voice-over to the World Series DVD, I was like, "Are you kidding me? Yeah, I'll do it tomorrow! Where do you want me to be? I'll be wherever you want!"



During All-Star Game festivities in St. Louis in 2009, Hamm and fellow St. Louisan Jenna Fischer connected as passionate Cardinals fans, and as teammates in the Legends & Celebrity Softball Game.

In previous editions of "Postcards from Hollywood," Ellie Kemper and Jenna Fischer both talked about how great it is to share their Cardinals appreciation with you.

Hamm: I'd get these adorable pictures of Jenna's little boy in Cardinals gear, and you immediately flash back and all the Hollywood stuff goes out the window. You go, "Yes! Where are you watching? What's happening? Where are you?" I had the same with Ellie, honestly, with both her and her sister (writer Carrie Kemper). It's a very shared experience.

I didn't know Jenna growing up. I only met her out here, and I didn't even know she was from St. Louis. It was early on during "The Office" that we ran into each other at the Golden Globes and had a 15-minute conversation about St. Louis. All these famous people are running around behind us, and we're just talking about Imo's and toasted ravioli. It was an immediate kind of connection.

And we had a blast when we got to play in the Legends & Celebrity Softball Game in St. Louis at the 2009 All-Star Game. (Hamm ripped a two-run double to the fence in his only at-bat and backhanded a line drive at third base to rob professional softball player Kristen Butler of a hit). I still play in a baseball league on Sundays out here, and baseball will always be a part of my life. I'll keep playing until I'm too old to pick up a ball. 

St. Louis native Jessica Radloff covers the entertainment industry for Glamour Magazine.