

= Evan Gattis =

James Evan Gattis ( born August 18 , 1986 ) is an American professional baseball designated hitter and catcher for the Houston Astros of Major League Baseball ( MLB ) . He made his MLB debut with the Atlanta Braves on April 3 , 2013 . Gattis has also earned the nickname of " El Oso Blanco " or The White Bear , due to his raw power capabilities , and his large beard . While with Atlanta , he played catcher and occasionally left field .

Gattis was a premier amateur baseball player in the Dallas ? Fort Worth area through high school . However , anxiety and substance abuse led him to abandon his scholarship to Texas A & M University . After wandering around the Western United States for four years , he returned to baseball , and was drafted by the Braves in 2010 .

After playing in minor league baseball for the Braves , Gattis made the team 's Opening Day roster in 2013 . Receiving playing time with Brian McCann on the disabled list , Gattis won the National League Rookie of the Month Award for both April and May 2013 . He became the Braves ' primary catcher in 2014 , but was traded to the Astros before the 2015 season .

= = Early life = =

Gattis grew up in Forney , Texas , and began playing baseball at the age of six . His parents divorced when he was eight years old , and at the age of 12 , he moved from his mother 's house to live with his father 's new family . Busy playing baseball , Gattis never processed his parents ' divorce .

Gattis played for the Dallas Tigers , one of the premier amateur teams in the Dallas ? Fort Worth metroplex . Clayton Kershaw , Corey Kluber and Yovani Gallardo were some of his teammates . He played on traveling All @-@ Star teams with Austin Jackson and in the Junior Olympic Games with Billy Butler , Homer Bailey , and Justin Upton . He attended high schools in the Dallas area , including R. L. Turner High School , Forney High School , and Bishop Lynch High School , in order to play for specific coaches .

Projected as a potential draft pick in the first eight rounds of the 2004 Major League Baseball ( MLB ) Draft , Gattis instead intimated that he intended to attend college and play college baseball . While Rice University offered him a scholarship to play first base , he accepted an offer from Texas A & M University , who wanted him to play as their catcher . However , the divorce of his parents and anxiety derived from the fear of failing at college baseball led Gattis to abuse alcohol and marijuana . He went undrafted in the 2004 draft .

Instead of going to college , Gattis ' mother took him to a drug rehabilitation facility , where he had a 30 @-@ day inpatient stay . He then went to Prescott , Arizona , where he had three months of outpatient therapy while living in a halfway house .

Gattis enrolled at Seminole State College , a junior college in Seminole , Oklahoma , after receiving a recruitment phone call from the team 's coach . Gattis redshirted as a freshman and played for half a season in 2006 . He injured his knee at Seminole State , became burned out on baseball , and quit .

Gattis ' first job after quitting baseball was as a parking valet in Dallas . He then visited his sister in Boulder , Colorado , and decided to reside there . He sold his truck and worked in a pizza parlor and as a ski @-@ lift operator at the Eldora Mountain Resort . Depressed , unable to sleep , and contemplating suicide , Gattis entered an inpatient psychiatric ward for three days in the summer of 2007 , where he was diagnosed with clinical depression and an anxiety disorder . He was released into the care of his father .

After living in Colorado for seven months , Gattis then moved to Dallas with his brother , where they worked as janitors for Datamatics Global Services . He met a New Age spiritual advisor there , and on her advice , he followed her to Taos , New Mexico . There , he lived in a hostel and worked at a ski resort . Three months later , he moved to California to find more spiritual gurus . Gattis also moved to Wyoming , where he worked at Yellowstone National Park .

= = Baseball career = =

= = = College and minor leagues = = =

Gattis decided to return to baseball in 2010 . His step @-@ brother , Drew Kendrick , was a college baseball player at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin . Brian Reinke , the coach of the Texas ? Permian Basin Falcons , remembered Gattis from his high school career , and offered him a spot on the team . That season , he had a .403 batting average and 11 home runs . He was named the Heartland Conference 's player of the week for the week ending February 7 , and to the Conference 's post @-@ season first team .

The Atlanta Braves selected Gattis in the 23rd round of the 2010 MLB Draft . He batted .288 with four home runs in 35 games for the Danville Braves of the Rookie @-@ level Appalachian League that year . He failed to make the opening day roster of any Braves minor league team in 2011 , and remained in extended spring training . He was added to the roster of the Rome Braves of the Class A South Atlantic League ( SAL ) in May . Gattis won the SAL player of the week award twice during the season , and won the SAL batting title . After the season , the managers of the 14 teams in the SAL named Gattis to the post @-@ season all @-@ star team .

Gattis started the 2012 season with the Lynchburg Hillcats of the Class A @-@ Advanced Carolina League . After starting the season with a .385 batting average , nine home runs , and 29 runs batted in ( RBIs ) in 21 games , he was promoted to the Mississippi Braves of the Class AA Southern League at the end of April . With Brian McCann starting for the Braves and top prospect Christian Bethancourt regarded as an excellent catcher , Gattis was shifted to left field . After the regular season , he played in the Venezuelan Winter League , where he batted .303 with 16 home runs and a .595 slugging percentage in 53 games , leading the league in home runs and slugging percentage . He earned the nickname " El Oso Blanco " , Spanish for " the White Bear " .

= = = Atlanta Braves = = =

The Braves invited Gattis to spring training in 2013 as a non @-@ roster player . With a 19 @-@ for @-@ 53 ( .358 ) performance in the Grapefruit League and McCann starting the season on the disabled list , the Braves added Gattis to their Opening Day roster to share catching duties with Gerald Laird . On April 3 , 2013 , Gattis made his major league debut . He recorded his first hit as a major leaguer , a home run off of Roy Halladay , in his second at bat . He batted .333 in his first eight games , also homering off of Stephen Strasburg . Gattis was named the National League ( NL ) Rookie of the Month for April 2013 , in which he batted .250 and led all major league rookies with six home runs , a .566 slugging percentage ( SLG ) , 16 RBIs , and 43 total bases .

Following the return of McCann from the disabled list and an injury to outfielder Jason Heyward , Gattis began to play left field for the Braves . Gattis was again named NL Rookie of the Month for the month of May , after batting .303 with a .362 on @-@ base percentage and a .683 SLG for the month , while leading all rookies with 16 RBIs and tying Jedd Gyorko for most home runs as a rookie with six . Gattis became the first rookie to win consecutive Rookie of the Month awards since Heyward in 2010 . Gattis was on the disabled list from June 19 through July 14 with a strained oblique muscle .

With a 5 @-@ for @-@ 36 ( .139 ) slump in August and McCann catching regularly , Gattis began to lose playing time . The Braves sent Gattis to the Gwinnett Braves of the Class AAA International League on August 31 so that he could play regularly . They recalled him on September 3 , when the International League season ended . On September 8 against Cole Hamels , Gattis recorded the longest home run of 2013 , calculated at 486 feet ( 148 m ) , which was also the longest home run in the history of Citizens Bank Park . Later in that same game Gattis hit another 400 + foot home run off of Hamels after flying out to the warning track in a previous at bat . Hamels was quoted as saying " I felt like I was throwing a golf ball and he had a driver . He 's probably going to be in the strongest man competition . " He ended the season with a .243 batting average , 21 home runs and 65 RBIs .

He played a total of 47 games in left field and 38 at catcher . Gattis finished tied for seventh in NL Rookie of the Year balloting .

During the offseason , Gattis had surgery to remove a bone chip in his knee , which had bothered him since 2006 . With McCann leaving the Braves to sign as a free agent with the New York Yankees , Fredi González , the Braves ' manager , declared that he planned for Gattis to start between 100 and 110 games at catcher , with Laird catching the remainder , during the 2014 season . On April 16 , in a 1 ? 0 win against the Philadelphia Phillies , Gattis went 4 @-@ for @-@ 4 with one home run , the first time a player has accomplished this in a 1 ? 0 victory since Rogers Hornsby in 1929 . On April 21 , Gattis hit his first career walk @-@ off home run , a 2 @-@ run shot off of Miami Marlins reliever Arquimedes Caminero in the 10th inning to give the Braves a 4 ? 2 victory . In June , he had a 20 game hitting streak . He went on the disabled list on June 30 with a bulging disc in his upper back , and returned to the Braves ' lineup on July 21 . Gattis hit the game winning home run , his 22nd of the season , against the Miami Marlins in the top of the 10th on September 6 , 2014 . This would give him a new career high and make him the first Braves catcher to hit 20 or more home runs in his rookie and sophomore seasons .

During the 2014 ? 15 offseason , the Braves traded Heyward with the intention of shifting Gattis to left field , with Bethancourt at catcher .

= = = Houston Astros = = =

The Braves traded Gattis and James Hoyt to the Houston Astros for Mike Foltyniewicz , Andrew Thurman , and Rio Ruiz on January 14 , 2015 . Gattis said he was a fan of the Texas Rangers as a youth and not the Astros , but also said it is a " good environment " in Houston . During the 2015 season , Gattis hit 27 home runs in a career @-@ high 604 plate appearances , spending most of the season as the Astros ' primary designated hitter . He also recorded 11 triples , despite entering the 2015 season with one career triple and being the second @-@ slowest player in baseball , behind David Ortiz of the Boston Red Sox .

Gattis lost approximately 20 pounds ( 9 @.@ 1 kg ) during the 2015 ? 16 offseason by focusing on his nutrition and working with a personal trainer . He started only 11 games in left field in 2015 , none at catcher , and 136 at designated hitter . The Astros planned to play Gattis in the field more for the 2016 season , including left field , first base , and his original position of catcher . Eligible for salary arbitration , the Astros and Gattis agreed on a one @-@ year contract on February 16 , 2016 . The contract will pay Gattis \$ 3 @.@ 3 million for the 2016 season , with a \$ 5 @.@ 2 million club option for the 2017 season . Gattis underwent hernia surgery on February 9 , 2016 , causing him to miss spring training . He was activated in April 2016 , having missed seven regular season games due to the operation . In his first 20 games of 2016 , he batted .203 with a home run and seven RBIs . He was optioned to the Corpus Christi Hooks of the Class AA Texas League on May 7 , 2016 , in order to transition back into a catcher . He was recalled on May 18 , and started at catcher the next day .