

= Paul Bako =

Gabor Paul Bako II (/ ˈbʰəkoʔ / ; born June 20 , 1972) is a retired catcher in Major League Baseball . Bako is an example of a baseball " journeyman " , having played for 11 different major league teams during his 12 @-@ year career . He is officially listed at 6 feet 3 inches (1 @.@ 91 m) and 210 pounds (95 kg) .

Bako attended high school and college in his home state of Louisiana , winning two conference championships at the University of Southwest Louisiana . After reaching the majors with the American League 's Detroit Tigers in 1998 , Bako spent seven seasons in the National League , playing with six different teams . He returned to the American League with the Baltimore Orioles and the Kansas City Royals , then played for the Cincinnati Reds and the Philadelphia Phillies for one season each .

= = Baseball career = =

= = = High school and college = = =

In 1990 , Bako was drafted out of Lafayette High School ? who later retired his number 6 ? with the ninth pick of the sixth round by the Cleveland Indians . He chose not to sign , and attended the University of Southwest Louisiana . In his college career , Bako caught for the Ragin ' Cajuns during two consecutive conference championship seasons : 1991 in the American South Conference , when they finished with a 49 ? 20 record , 14th @-@ best among Division I squads ; and 1992 in the Sun Belt Conference , when Southwestern Louisiana 's pitching staff amassed a 3 @.@ 50 earned run average , 29th @-@ best in Division I. In 1993 , he was named to the second team of the all @-@ Sun Belt Conference baseball team , and was selected by the Cincinnati Reds in the fifth round of the 1993 June draft .

= = = Minor leagues = = =

Bako began his professional career with the Pioneer Baseball League 's Billings Mustangs , a rookie @-@ league farm team of the Reds located in Montana . During the 1993 season , Bako amassed a .314 batting average , second @-@ highest on the team that season behind Chris Sexton . Bako walked 22 times , stole 5 bases , and batted in 30 runs , while excelling defensively compared to the other catcher on the team . His fielding percentage was .988 , and he posted only four errors that season . He was also named a Pioneer League All @-@ Star .

Bako moved on to the high @-@ A Winston @-@ Salem Spirits in the Carolina League for the 1994 and 1995 seasons . He struggled during the 1994 season , batting only .204 with three home runs and 26 runs batted in (RBIs) . 1995 was more successful , with an 81 @-@ point boost in batting average (.285) , seven home runs and 11 doubles . After the season , Baseball America rated him the top @-@ ranked catching prospect in the Reds farm system .

Bako 's 1995 performance earned him a promotion to the Southern League 's Chattanooga Lookouts , the Reds AA @-@ level affiliate , for 1996 , where he was named a Southern League All @-@ Star . He was second on the team in strikeouts (93) and fifth among regulars with a .294 batting average . He hit a career @-@ high eight home runs during that season , adding 27 doubles and 48 RBIs in 360 at bats . In 1997 , playing for the Indianapolis Indians , Bako was a teammate of brothers Aaron and Bret Boone . That year , he batted .243 and matched his previous year 's career @-@ high home run total . He had 78 hits in 321 at @-@ bats . Bako 's game management earned him a reputation , even in the minor leagues . Brett Tomko , who played with Bako in the minors in 1996 as a member of the Lookouts and in 1997 with Indianapolis , recalled one of their mound conversations :

Bako : Are you really trying out here ? Tomko : What do you mean ? Bako : Because your stuff is horrible today and if you don 't try a little harder , you 're not going to make it out of this inning .

On November 11 , 1997 , Bako was traded by the Reds to the Detroit Tigers in an offseason deal that included Donne Wall . After playing 13 games with the Tigers AAA @-@ level affiliate ? the Toledo Mud Hens ? in 1998 , Bako was called up to the Major League club .

= = = Major leagues = = =

= = = 1998 ? 2000 = = =

Bako made his major league debut with the Tigers on April 30 , 1998 , going 0 @-@ for @-@ 4 with three strikeouts . His first Major League hit , a bases loaded double , came the next day off Bill Swift , when he went 2 @-@ for @-@ 5 against the Seattle Mariners in a 17 ? 3 Tigers win . He hit his first major league home run on May 15 against the Oakland Athletics ; it came off Mike Mohler in the bottom of the sixth inning with two runners (Damion Easley , Joe Randa) on base . He also went 4 @-@ for @-@ 4 against the New York Yankees on July 21 . Bako 's rookie season was arguably his most successful : he posted a .272 batting average , hit three home runs , batted in 30 runs , and collected 106 total bases . After the season , the Tigers traded Bako to the Houston Astros in a seven @-@ player deal that included Brad Ausmus .

Bako appeared in 73 games for the 1999 Astros ; he got at least one hit in his first six games with Houston after beginning the season in the minor leagues , highlighted by a 3 @-@ for @-@ 4 performance on April 30 , the anniversary of his debut . He added another 4 @-@ for @-@ 4 game to his résumé on July 29 against the Colorado Rockies . Bako hit .256 with two home runs , 17 RBIs , and 16 runs scored in the 1999 season ; he was part of Houston 's roster for the 1999 National League Division Series , but did not play . After one game for the Astros in 2000 , Houston traded Bako to the Florida Marlins . He played his first game for Florida on April 13 , going 0 @-@ for @-@ 4 with a strikeout . Bako played for the Marlins until July 20 , batting .242 with 14 RBIs . He was waived on July 21 and claimed by the Atlanta Braves , who acquired Bako from their division rivals . He batted .190 with the Braves and played in his first career game at first base in the last two months of the 2000 season .

= = = 2001 ? 2004 = = =

Bako remained with the Braves for the 2001 season , where he was the backup to Javy López . He batted .212 , amassing the third @-@ highest (20) walk total among Atlanta 's bench players and batting in 15 runs . His top performances of the season were a 3 @-@ for @-@ 4 game against the Montréal Expos in August and a 2 @-@ for @-@ 3 night ? with 2 walks ? in October against Florida . Bako appeared in three games during the 2001 National League Division Series (NLDS) , his first playoff appearances , and three more during the National League Championship Series (NLCS) . In Game 3 of the NLDS , Bako went 2 @-@ for @-@ 2 with a two @-@ run home run in the second inning ; he also batted in a third run on a squeeze bunt in the fourth .

In a trade of catchers , the Braves acquired Henry Blanco from the Milwaukee Brewers in exchange for Bako and José Cabrera . Bako played in 87 games for the Brewers in 2002 , his most extensive playing time since his rookie season ; behind him , the team used four additional catchers . Bako batted .235 with four home runs for the season . His top performance of the year was against the Minnesota Twins in interleague play ; Bako went 3 @-@ for @-@ 5 with a two @-@ run home run in the top of the fourth inning and a bases @-@ loaded single to drive in a third run .

After the 2002 season , Milwaukee traded Bako to the Chicago Cubs , where he spent two complete seasons ; 2003 and 2004 were the only consecutive seasons that Bako spent with the same organization . Over his two years , he backed up Damian Miller and Michael Barrett , and was reunited with former Braves teammate Greg Maddux in 2004 . In his first Chicago season , Bako batted .229 with 22 walks and 13 doubles ; a 4 @-@ for @-@ 5 performance in his second game of the year was his best of the season . In that game , he batted three times against the Reds with the bases loaded , notching a triple , two singles and six RBIs . Bako batted only .203 for the Cubs in

2004 . He hit one home run and eight doubles , displaying his defense with a .989 fielding percentage . His top performance that year was in the second game of a doubleheader against Florida , when he went 3 @-@ for @-@ 3 and batted in two runs .

= = = = 2005 ? 2009 = = = =

As a free agent , Bako signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers for the 2005 season . He batted .250 for the Dodgers in 13 games with two doubles and four RBIs . He backed up both Jason Phillips and Dioner Navarro in 2005 , but underwent season @-@ ending surgery on his anterior cruciate ligament in June of that season . The Dodgers granted Bako free agency after the season , and he signed with the Kansas City Royals in December 2005 . After beginning the 2006 season in the minor leagues , Bako returned to the majors with the Royals , where he batted .209 backing up John Buck . He played in 60 games with the Baltimore Orioles in 2007 , amassing five extra @-@ base hits and batting .205 . He tied for the highest total of walks off the Orioles bench and batted in eight runs for the season .

On February 1 , 2008 , Bako signed a minor league contract with an invitation to spring training with the Cincinnati Reds . At the end of spring training , he was added to the 40 @-@ man roster . Though he batted only .217 , Bako appeared in a career @-@ high 99 games in 2008 , hitting six home runs and notching 35 RBIs . On January 30 , 2009 , the Chicago Cubs signed Bako to a one @-@ year contract . However , he was unconditionally released near the end of spring training . On May 18 , Bako signed a minor league deal with the Philadelphia Phillies , and was called up from the Reading Phillies to the Major League roster on June 9 . He became the Phillies only backup catcher when the Phillies waived " folk hero " Chris Coste on July 10 ; Coste had broken into the big leagues for the first time with Philadelphia at age 33 . The next day , Bako came to the plate in the bottom of the ninth inning against Pittsburgh Pirates closer Matt Capps with the score tied , 7 ? 7 ; the Phillies had been behind by four runs before home runs by Matt Stairs and Ryan Howard tied the game . With the bases loaded , Bako hit a single through the left side of the infield , driving in the winning run (Raúl Ibáñez) and sealing the Phillies fourth consecutive victory in a season @-@ high ten @-@ game winning streak . After the acquisition of starting pitcher Cliff Lee , Bako caught all of his first five starts with the Phillies , when Lee posted a 5 ? 0 record and an 0 @-@ .68 earned run average . Bako said , " With as many strikes as he throws and as many weapons as he has , it 's a lot of fun to catch him . " Manager Charlie Manuel , however , denied that Bako was scheduled to be Lee 's personal catcher , as he had done for Maddux in 2001 . " [Bako] ' s [sic] not his personal catcher ... Of course you guys will write whatever you want to write . If you want him to be his personal catcher , go right ahead . But I 'll handle it anyway , so it doesn 't matter . "

As the 2009 season wore on , regular catcher Carlos Ruiz spent some time recuperating from an injury , allowing Bako expanded playing time near the end of the season . From September 18 to 29 , Bako played in all but one of the team 's games ; his best stretch was from September 24 through September 27 , when he went 6 @-@ for @-@ 13 with two RBId over three games . He finished the year with a .224 batting average . After winning the National League East for the third consecutive year , the Phillies faced the Colorado Rockies in the National League Division Series , the Los Angeles Dodgers in the National League Championship Series , and the New York Yankees in the World Series ; Bako did not appear in any games during the postseason . After the 2009 season , Bako filed for free agency ; considered retirement , according to teammate Scott Eyre ; and did not play during the 2010 season .

= = After baseball = =

As of 2011 , Bako is currently an equipment representative for the Marucci Bat Company , based in Baton Rouge , Louisiana . He and former Orioles first baseman David Segui are part @-@ owners of the company .

= = Personal = =

Bako lives in his hometown of Lafayette , Louisiana , during the offseason . He has a wife , Laurie , and two children : a son named Will and a daughter , Abbey .