

S6 E30: GG Got Game

(AJ II & Gazmine 'GG' Mason)

Previously recorded on Monday, March 16th, 2020

0:00 AJ: During women's history month, we're celebrating the vital role of women in society. In 2016, Gazmine GG Mason became the first African American to win Olympic Singles and All Events gold medals for team USA. This week on *Max Out Time*, stay tuned because She Got Game.

0:21 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:58 AJ: GG, how are you today?

1:00 Gazmine: I'm good, how about yourself?

1:02 AJ: I'm doing fine, but I am trying to stay healthy as as good as possible, no germs, don't want anything around me to get infected or sick, or anything like that. So I'm isolated right now in the studio, but the show never stops. Thank you so much for coming on.

1:17 Gazmine: Of course.

1:18 AJ: How did that groundbreaking moment, winning Olympic gold, how did that feel?

1:26 Gazmine: I believe it was in 2016 world youth championships. I had actually won Gold before, the year before. 2016 is when I became the first African American to win Gold and certain events for the USA –

1:45 AJ: Say it again.

1:46 Gazmine: That's when I became the first African American to win gold for USA in the Single Event and all events.

1:53 AJ: Wow. That is remarkable.

1:55 Gazmine: Thank you. And so like at the time, I didn't think anything of it, I was just like you know my job and my goal was to come out with metals and obviously, I wanted to be number one. So at that moment, it didn't really like settle in. Probably sometimes here and there it doesn't as well but my dad has to kind of remind me like hey, you just made history, and you're going to continue to break barriers, you're a trailblazer, and pioneer, stuff like that.

2:29 AJ: It's still surreal to you?

2:30 Gazmine: Exactly, it is. More so to, it's not because, oh I was the first to do it. But because, there were so many people who messaged me and DM'ed me or whatever, and they were like, you're the reason why I started or why I kept going, or I want to go to this college. It's more so the amount of people, I've been able to inspire with the win, rather than it is, like oh I was the first do to it.

2:59 AJ: What is that responsibility like? What's the weight like on your shoulders?

3:04 Gazmine: You know, I just do what I do. You know just continue to be myself and to share my story, and inspire as many people as I can on the way. I don't think – I think it's

everyone's responsibility - while we're here on earth to inspire those around us, but I don't think it's a big weight lifted on my shoulders.

3:28 AJ: You have been inspiring literally for years, I mean been going back before 2016. In 2015 as a part of the Nebraska women's Bowling team, you won a national championship.

3:41 Gazmine: Yeah we did! [laughs]

3:43 AJ: [laughs] Y'all won a national championship, you literally have been in that limelight and kind of the upper echelon of your sport for you know half a decade. Take us through some of the other barriers and challenges you had to get through.

4:02 Gazmine: It's kind of ironic, because when I grew up, I was in a league where majority of the people were black. My dad's friend's girlfriend started a program called *Providence Senate* and it was to get the inner city kids off the street, they're black themselves. When I first started, the barriers I had to go through or the struggles, they weren't necessarily like my upbringing, it was in the sport. When I actually--because we don't have high school Bowling in Rhode Island--I had to travel to different tournaments across the US and compete. So, I was doing that, as well as I went to college, that's when in college, I was the only black one on the team and I became the first African American to compete for the University of Nebraska Women's bowling team.

4:52 AJ: In 2014, how long did the school had a bowling program?

4:57 Gazmine: That I'm not sure of, I know that they were a club team before they came NCAA, so it's a long time, I know that for sure. They have a lot of club championships as well as NCAA national championships. But yeah there was a girl there before me who was black, but she didn't play, she left. I was the first one to compete for the University of Nebraska bowling team and I was the first one to become an All American.

5:26 AJ: So you grew up in an all black bowling league and this was in Providence, Rhode Island?

5:31 Gazmine: Yeah.

5:32 AJ: Not Detroit, not Oakland, not Baltimore, we're talking about Providence.

5:38 Gazmine: Yes. Yes sir.

5:39 AJ: I thought you were going to say the complete opposite. So the shell shock didn't even come until you got into college?

5:45 Gazmine: Seriously, they make out as if there are no black people in Rhode Island and I'm like there's more of us than you think. You just have to go, in every State –

5:56 AJ: You got to find the pockets.

5:57 Gazmine: Exactly.

5:58 AJ: Exactly.

6:00 Gazmine: So at the University of Nebraska, I was the only black one on the team, my four years there. Now as a pro, I am the only black one full time. It didn't really bother me too much and it still doesn't. It's something that I can handle because my parents have prepared

me. You know every little kid is like “we’re the only black family here”, when you go out to dinner and you’re the only black family there.

6:26 AJ: It’s that token syndrome, when you get there and you notice there is no more of you. It’s a it’s a surreal feeling.

6:33 Gazmine: So they prepared me for it. So like I said, being the only black one at Nebraska, it wasn’t something that bothered me too much. It bothered me because you want to see more people like you but it wasn’t really hard to deal with. And the same thing as being a pro now but of course I want to see more people who look like me up there because I feel like that’s how you create change and break barriers together.

6:57 AJ: More people that look like you. You were featured in an article in the *Undefeated* last year and one quote that stood out to me was, you said, “It’s about saying we have a place in this sport. We used to be the janitors, we used to set up the pins, then we started our own leagues.” Can you talk about the history and what it means for you to be a professional bowler?

7:23 Gazmine: I feel like black people have always had to do more and go the extra mile and it’s not something new, we all know how it is. I can’t accept the things that I have accomplished without thanking all those who came before me. Her name is Kim Terell, at the time, her name is Kim Terell Turney now and she coaches, what do you call it...

7:56 AJ: A&T.

7:59 Gazmine: Yeah I was going to say NC & T but no.

8:00 AJ: Them Aggies!

7:57 Gazmine: Yes, I was going to say NCAT, but let me say A&T. She coached me when I was on junior team USA and she was coaching me when I won the gold medal and became the first African American to do so. That was super cool having her coach me when that happened. Even before then she was coaching at Delaware State. She was a professional bowler, she’s a hall of famer, she has titles.

8:27 AJ: You built that mentor mentee relationship with another black female.

8:31 Gazmine: Yeah, so you know, even when I am struggling now, I still have someone I will text or call. There’s her, there’s Cheryl Daniels, there’s a lot more off the top of my head that I can’t remember. One in particular, Louise Fulton, just is one you can’t forget. She’s the first African American to win the professional women’s title.

8:57 AJ: First African American to win a professional women’s title. It might be March, but we’re doing Black History month all over again, I love these facts.

9:04 Gazmine: Yeah, let me look that up but yeah I believe she was the first one to win a women’s title.

9:11 AJ: Well, black history month is every month when you’re speaking to someone like yourself who is the only black female, an an all American bowler, a national champion, a gold medallist, it’s every day with you. But how are you inspiring the next generation of black female bowlers?

9:31 Gazmine: Wait, sorry, before I go into that I wanted to correct myself. She was the first African American to capture a professional women's title.

9:39 AJ: There we go.

9:40 Gazmine: There we go, so honestly how that really started, I was on junior team USA in 2015 and 2016, and then I aged out, out of youth. In 2017, that's when I started trying out for the adult team USA, you know no no longer in youth. There's this tournament, every year in Vegas and it's called Team USA trials and that's the opportunity for those to come out and secure your spot on either the youth team or the adult team. In 2017, I did not make the adult team, a little bit of adversity and a little bit of a shift from a youth to an adult. You know at the end of the tournament, I looked and there was no one who looked like me, on either the men's team or the women's team or the youth team – men or women.

10:38 AJ: You were the only one?

10:40 Gazmine: Well, in 2017 because I aged out of the youth and I was on the adult team and no one on the team was black. I didn't make the adult team in 2017, so you know my name wasn't called, I was congratulating everyone and clapping but when I looked at all the people that made it or who were picked, there was no one of color. This is in 2017 –

11:04 AJ: So that sparked something in you?

11:06 Gazmine: Exactly, and this is the story of Black Girls Can Bowl 2 got started. I was happy for everyone that made it, I didn't envy anyone. I was just like okay, this is a lesson learnt and I need to work harder. I was just very upset, you know I expressed my frustrations to my parents, just of the lack of diversity. My dad was like, what are you going to do about it? And I was like, I don't know, black girls can bowl too!

11:33 AJ: [laughs] Papa came through with it. He said, come on!

11:35 Gazmine: Yeah, exactly, and then I was like, I am going to create a group called, "black girls can bowl too." It was something that I was very upset, more so frustrated and yeah it just happened. So you know we probably started with ten followers and at first it was more of a secluded group on Facebook, but now you want to open it up to anyone that wants to follow. Facebook page and Instagram page, and we have about 600 followers and it's really just a platform to share each other's success stories. Whether you are 10, whether you are 60, you know I had a lady message me saying, I am 60 years old, and I've just picked up a bowling ball and I love it, we share her story and her picture. When I was in college, you know there - like I said - I was the only black one on my team but there would be other teams like A&T, HBCU and they would have black people on their team.

12:44 AJ: Right so it's all Black.

12:45 Gazmine: Exactly! Exactly! So yeah the most that I would do to the other players, I would say hi and keep it moving. I was the only one to have tournaments and then I am able to interact with others who look like me and I don't take advantage of that opportunity and it kind of stuck. That was another reason why I created this group because I wanted girls from all different teams to be able to speak to each other, whether they know each other or not. Now I have them sending group pictures and pictures like hey, I met a girl from this team.

13:21 AJ: And this hashtag is doing well too, right?

13:23 Gazmine: Yeah! It's just really cool to see, we just share each other's success stories and we uplift each other. That's something we need in the bowling community and I was like f it, I am going to do it, I was just sad and I did it.

13:41 AJ: Sometimes you got to take that leap of faith which you and I both know. Taking those leaps of faith and what it can lead us to. Not only are you inspiring but you are leading movement of women and girls of all ages and that's something you should be applauded for.

13:58 Gazmine: Thank you. I don't really do stuff for recognition but it's always nice to be recognized. I just do it because in the moment I was like black girls can bowl too! Whatever my heart feels, it's just what I do.

14:13 AJ: Black girl magic, that's that's what it's all about!

14:16 Gazmine: Yes!

14:17 AJ: That's what it's all about! That's what I love about it, it's black girl magic and it's in a lane, no pun intended, that you don't really hear about often.

14:25 Gazmine: You don't, and you know I'm really excited for bgcb2 to grow and more people to learn about it. I was actually at this event, and some lady came, one of my bowling committee bosses came, I mean, sent me out to do an event. This lady came to me, two professional bowlers including myself, we were at a high school tournament, we were watching the kids and interacting and signing autographs. She came up to me and was like, oh what do you do? I told her I was a professional bowler and about my company. She came up to me because, well you know, one, I was black and she adopted a bi-racial daughter, and I told her about black girls can bowl too and she was like, oh my gosh, I have to tell her about you and I have to tell her about black girls can bowl too, and you know maybe -- maybe she would try bowling whether she gets into it or not, it can be an option. I said yes, present it as an option. My mission is never to tell anyone to become a professional bowler but just to let people know the opportunities about it, that bowling presents, so yeah.

15:38 AJ: You're creating lasting memories for all these women and it's so powerful. You're basically changing the whole narrative behind what black women can and can't do. And it really -- it really is amazing and remarkable like I said before. But not only women, but sport and putting it on a platform and shining a light on it. Got Game LLC. your other, your company, your online platform. How is that doing?

16:09 Gazmine: I think Got Game is slowly but surely doing well and catching on. The mission is really to elevate the sport of bowling so that we have the equal opportunity as traditional sport such as basketball, football, baseball. Because when I tell people --

16:30 AJ: What do you mean? Bowling and basketball are not competing for viewership?

16:33 Gazmine [laughs] Well what I say is, the traditional sports NBA, NFL whatever, they get paid to do what they love to do. As far as bowling goes, or other non-traditional sports, I feel like, I'm not going to speak too much on this because I don't know. But my sport specifically, we have to bowl well in order to get paid to do what we love to do. I tell my dad, it's not about the money, it's about the opportunity to try and bridge that that whole gap between the two, the non-traditional and the traditional sports. I tell my dad, if I was in another sport, say I played basketball or volleyball, or whatever the case may be, another

traditional sport and I accomplished the things I have now, I would have already achieved the goals that I am trying to achieve.

17:30 AJ: That's crazy, if you had more of a platform, with the fans, and the viewership and the endorsements.

17:34 Gazmine: Exactly, my dad is like, you're a pioneer, you're a trailblazer. It's not going to be easy, you're trying to create change and break barriers. I'm like, this is so hard but I'm not going to keep – and that's one of the things too, one of my goals is to be sponsored by a major sports company. So hopefully that could - what do you call it - create opportunities for other players and other non-traditional sports as well as the tour itself. Because we have to pay for our entry fees, travel expenses, all that stuff, and it's all out of pocket, you know so it kind of gets difficult at times. So, people are going out there and they're competing and they're like, "oh, it's a waste, I'm not even making the first cut, I'm not getting my money back." It's negative after negative, week after week, and they're not making their money back, it can get really difficult. It's one of my biggest goals and Got Game as products and services, t shirts and stuff like that. Also, services which are inspirational speaking. I've gone to LeBron James' I promise school to speak, I've been on the Karen Hunter show to share my story –

19:02 AJ: I don't know, you might not have an endorsement, but you're definitely a celebrity. I'm talking to a true celeb right now!

19:08 Gazmine: Thank you! I've been on Gil's podcast Gilbert Arenas.

19:15 AJ: Agent Zero. Wizards for life!

19:20 Gazmine: Yay! And you know I spoke around my area, to boys and girls clubs, high schools, I have spoken to University of Maryland Eastern Shore their women's Bowling team, their NCAA. So yeah I'm just doing my best to share my story, to really inspire people not to just become bowlers but do what they love to do. Also shed light on my sport and make people aware of the struggles that we have and different opportunities that it could present. And although my journey may be a little more difficult, compared to someone who plays basketball, I wouldn't trade it for anything else because I feel like God chose me so I must make it happen.

20:06 AJ: You got to make it happen.

20:07 Gazmine: I'm going to! It's going to happen!

20:10 AJ: Breaking barriers, pushing the narrative, speaking and promoting for this sport and for women and black women and girls everywhere. GG, Gazmine, thank you so much for being my special guest today, I really appreciate it.

20:25 Gazmine: You are welcome, I appreciate you!

20:27 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @gazminemason on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

20:45 Outro Song: 'For The City'

21:12 –End–

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