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Wednesday, June 15, 2005

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## Sports

### Reds star has plight of Lawrence on his mind

By John Tomase

Staff writer

BOSTON — Cincinnati Reds outfielder Adam Dunn stands 6-foot-6 and weighs 275 pounds. He's an unlikely candidate to sport a T-shirt emblazoned with the word "geek."

But it's not every day a teammate asks him to help the city of Lawrence, either.

"Hey, could we get one a little smaller?" Dunn deadpanned, his bulging biceps and pectorals shrink-wrapped while a half dozen teammates howled with laughter yesterday at Fenway Park.

Dunn was just one of the Reds modeling T-shirts from "Labels are for Jars", a group started by Lawrence priest Paul O'Brien and supported in large part by Reds first baseman Sean Casey, who has never set foot in Lawrence, but nonetheless has pledged to help raise \$1.4 million to build a meal center there.

Casey and the Reds came to Fenway yesterday for a three-game series. Tomorrow, Casey will visit St. Patrick's parish in South Lawrence, where long-time friend O'Brien is stationed.

"Paul's one of my best friends in the world," the 30-year-old Casey said. "I know he loves Lawrence and is trying to make a difference there. He's reaching out to the community and people have responded. It shows that a little bit of love can go a long way."

Casey and O'Brien met in the summer of 1994 when the former was playing in the Cape Cod baseball league as a Richmond undergrad. They struck up an enduring friendship, with O'Brien officiating at Casey's wedding and baptizing his two children. They speak almost daily during the season.

O'Brien's travels as a Catholic priest have taken him from Calcutta, where he worked alongside Mother Theresa, to Rome, where he comforted AIDS victims. The Harvard grad (he was one of Conan

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O'Brien's roommates, though the two aren't related) came to Lawrence in 2001.

Devoutly Catholic, Casey knows as much about St. Patrick's as any resident of Lawrence. He asks O'Brien about the new high school basketball league and is intimately involved with Cor Unum (One Body), the meal center that is scheduled to open next year.

That Casey would be so giving to a community he's never visited doesn't surprise his teammates in the least.

"He's one of the most popular guys in Cincinnati," said outfielder Ken Griffey Jr. while sporting a "Slacker" shirt. "We call him 'The Mayor.' Wherever you go in baseball, you'll never hear a negative word about Sean Casey — except that he's a filthy pig, which is the word in here."

The outgoing Casey's a natural target for such ribbing because he's so good-natured. But O'Brien would argue he's even better hearted.

"Sean is most fundamentally a deeply Catholic guy," O'Brien said. "If you understand what a Catholic is supposed to be, you can understand his behavior. He obviously has personality gifts that are unique, but he is who he is because he really believes his mission in life is to build God's kingdom. You build that kingdom by reaching out to whoever is in need in front of you today. And today those people include the people of Lawrence."

Casey has helped them by spreading the word about Labels are for Jars ([www.labelsareforjars.org](http://www.labelsareforjars.org)) among his teammates. In addition to wearing the shirts — which attempt to undermine societal labels like "addict," "homeless," "prisoner" and even "jock" — Casey has given each teammate a jar to fill as they see fit.

"You go out for lunch, come to the park, put your change in there," Griffey said. "At the end of the year, you've got something substantial. We play baseball three hours a day. For the other 21, we have a chance to make a difference in people's lives."

Casey makes it happen.

"Obviously, something has happened in your city that has touched his heart," said Reds third baseman Joe Randa. "He's the kind of guy who's going to act on it. He knows he's on a platform and tries to take advantage of it to help people."

The Red Sox have struggled for much of the season to find a steady first baseman. Casey's name has surfaced more than once in trade rumors. From Fenway, he could truly help Lawrence.

"Too many things have happened in my life not to think that God has a hand in everything," Casey said. "Whatever happens down the road, I'm sure it's all part of His plan."

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