

Written By *Matt Tuhill*

In *Black Sails*, the new Starz original series debuting this month, Zach McGowan plays a ruthless, uncompromising pirate captain who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. His muscular, shredded physique came by way of the same mindset.

Photographs By *Per Bernal*

CAPTAIN

JACKED

X When the *Black Sails* cast members arrived in Cape Town last year to begin filming the first season of the new Starz pirate drama, each of them had a mandatory meeting with a personal trainer. The producers wanted most of the cast to exhibit the lean, hard look that might have been common to pirates and sailors of the early 1700s—a point in history when manual labor, especially on ships, ruled the day, and big meals for common folk were few and far between.

Zach McGovern, who plays Captain Claret on *Vane*, attended one of the sessions, then never went back. “To that point, his preparation for the role had involved everything from studying the true history of piracy and the oral given of Chialo in Vano, to sailing given right English accent and reading *Treasure Island*, to getting the new show takes place 40 years before the events of the Rob-ertson/Jaharhema era. So when he went to his first personal training session on a new lot of modern-day equipment, he had read it was suboptimal to his goals as a

“It wasn’t an argument, but it was about the inch-and-a-half weight loss and the producer,” McGovern says. “To me, the idea that the guys had weight on their bodies kind of seemed. But did they pull in the body? We got up a lot? You know that they had to climb up into the rigging? This was before the advent of French island seen off the ethanop

that makes a living so much easier. Everything had to be located by hand, so I basically went by the ship’s log. It wasn’t getting me calipers then, it wasn’t the right way to do it. I tried to email the writer they were doing.”

For McGovern, emulating meant a training regimen that was almost entirely of distance running, pull-ups, and pushups, performed at a daily volume more than 400 sets each even without five days a week. McGovern ran for 13 miles, did 400 pullups—all from a dead hang, with no kipping—200 push-ups in two sets of 100, 25 handstand pushups, and 20 inverted sit-ups. That’s not including heavy bag and stout work added

at random intervals. “To be perfectly accurate about the distance run, McGovern says four times during his morning half-marathon, but confessing those brief sprints only exist so he can grab a tree branch or the frame of a high-wire power line pole to stop off a set of 50 straight pullups, they probably shouldn’t be categorized as breaks.

It is an absolutely staggering workload that would make most gym rats reflexively call bullshit. We’re inclined to be kind because we’ve all known the scruffy—the guy who says he can bench 450 but has a shoulder problem or the moment that when he had more than 225 on the bar. But while the 34-year-old McGovern might make his life in film fiction, his training regimen is anything but. He’s been an athlete his whole life, playing running back at Philadelphia Upper Merion in the Bronx, then at Carleton College in Northfield, MN. Back then, he weighed 230 thanks to a training regimen that was heavy on the beach, aqua, and clean, and a nutritional philosophy that saw him eating as much as he could to better absorb the fish he’d take during gym. He ate a lot now, too, only for different reasons: his training is so demanding it’s almost impossible to keep the meat on his bones. Now weighing in at a svelte 175—the dipped figure in 167 at one point during filming—he has the perspective of having been in both worlds. “It wasn’t like I was an overweight 230,” McGovern says. “But the

funniest thing” that I don’t feel like I was any stronger back then than I am right now. It was fun to eat that way, but I don’t think I, especially not for what I’m doing now.”

Since McGovern has 200 pullups during his morning run, he pounds out another 200 throughout the course of the day, sometimes in between takes. In fact, 800 sets of things pullups isn’t even close to his max reps—the heaviest single set is 75. The fact that audiences probably can’t tell the difference between his developed in a gym and the ones carved out over months is beside the point; since McGovern credited training to be a part of the character prep, he wanted to stay as fit as long as he could—personal trainers—as possible.

“It’s always been hard for me to work with personal trainers,” says McGovern, who lives in L.A. with his wife, Emily, and daughter, Elise, and Mattie, when he’s not filming in South Africa. “There was a point in my life where I almost went into personal training—I have my own gym, and I have a lot of these things that don’t necessarily see eye to eye with other public gyms. I think I got really good results doing what I was doing and a lot of other people get good results doing what they were doing. But I think that’s also the key to fitness. The other thing doesn’t work for everyone.

“I’m happy to take that responsibility on myself because I really feel that people own fitness is their own responsibility. That’s what I like about my workout—it doesn’t put the responsibility on having some machine. On the machine’s broken, can’t do the workout. Someone’s on the machine, I have to do something else. It’s all on me. It’s all here for me to do at any moment. You going to do it, or I’m not, and I’m just an I’ve got-to-do-it-type person.”

It’s an outlook to be expected for the son of a Marine. His father, Vincent McGovern, served in Vietnam, then raised three sons in New York City who all embody the traditional spirit of grinding life by the boot camp. The eldest, Doug, is also a Marine and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The youngest, Matt, is a successful marketing guru.

“Growing up, I only wanted to do one of three things,” McGovern says. “I wanted to either be a professional actor, a professional athlete, or a professional soldier. After high school, I knew I didn’t want to be a professional athlete, so that left two remaining.”

“That’s how I don’t take anything for granted. I’ve been in Africa with a lot of beautiful things, and I’ve got to get into whatever I’m in the moment.”

“I really feel that people’s own fitness is their own responsibility.”



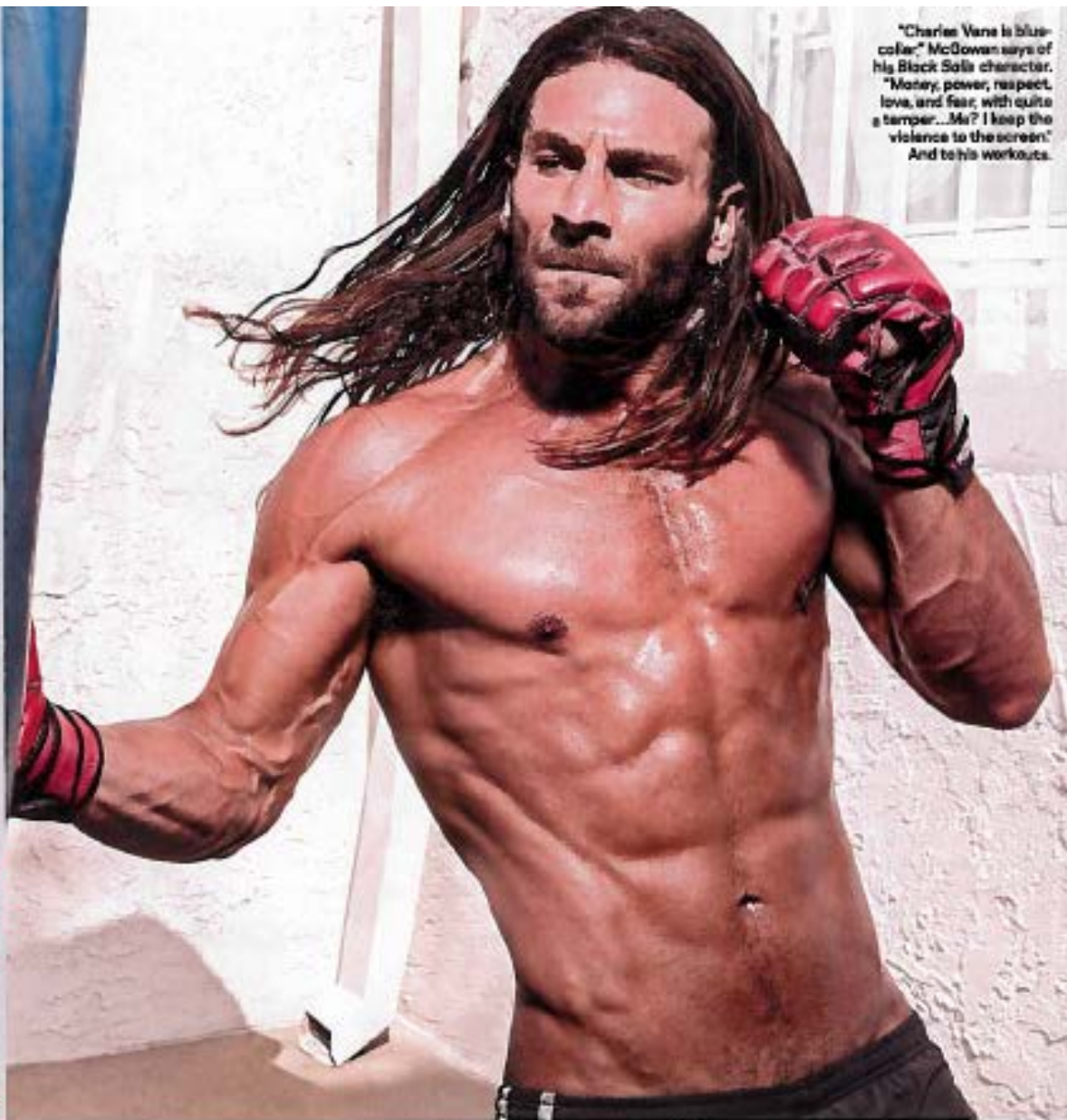
PAINT IT BLACK

Black Sails is poised to join TV's new pantheon of great shows

"We're lucky. We're in this golden age of television," McGowan says. "I know people say it all the time, but it's true. When have you been able to watch this many good shows?"

McGowan hopes *Black Sails* is held in a similarly high regard as some of his favorite shows of the new golden age: *Breaking Bad*, *Homeland*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Boardwalk Empire*. From the looks of the first two episodes, *Black Sails* appears to be on its way (Season 2 is already filming), with strong characters thrown into a seamless blend of drama, action, adventure and **SPOILER ALERT** girl-on-girl sex. Members of the *MSF* staff screened the first two episodes of *Black Sails* and give it a unanimous thumbs-up.

Don't miss the Season 1 premiere on Saturday, Jan. 25, at 9 p.m. on Starz.



"Charlie Vane is blue-collar," McGowan says of his *Black Sails* character. "Money, power, respect, love, and fear, with quite a temper...Me? I keep the violence to the screen." And to his workouts.

With Doug already serving in a war zone by the time Zach was done with college, parents Vincent and Brenda pushed Zach not to join the military. With one option remaining, he leaped headlong into acting, and since 2004 he's racked up 39 professional credits, including parts in *Terminator Salvation*, *CSI: Miami*, *Cold Case*, and the role of Jody Silverman in the Showtime series *Shameless*.

In the years since college, his training evolved; he didn't need the bulk to play football anymore, so he started to add more body-weight movements to his routine—replacing much of his barbell work with pullups and pushups. In time, the 6' McGowan transformed from a clean-cut,

wide-bodied, and square-jawed all-American type to a wild, long-haired, shredded-to-the-bone surfer type. Whenever Doug came home from deployment, Zach would train with him. During one of their runs, Zach marveled at the ease with which his older brother covered the miles.

"I said, 'Man, how can you run so far? Why do you do this?'" McGowan recalls. "And he was just like, 'I just feel it's better for me if no one in the world can catch me if I needed to run away.' I wanted to take a little bit of that philosophy with me. That idea that if I needed

to get somewhere by foot in L.A., I could. There's nowhere in this city that I couldn't get to in about an hour and a half...It really all started with our dad, I think—the whole idea that people are just capable of doing so much more than their brains give them credit for."

McGowan's training volume suggests that if he hasn't pushed the absolute limit of his capabilities, then he's very close to it. He says he allowed his body fat to fall low enough where it could be considered dangerous, though he admits he's never kept track of the actual number. To combat muscle loss while filming, he drank a half gallon of full-fat chocolate milk every day, slamming a tall glass at the completion of his run and another right before bed. This one indulgence aside, he keeps his meals fairly clean, taking a pseudo-Paleo approach and eating mostly fish, meat, and vegetables. "I like a nice salty steak...and raw milk," he says. "I go to the farmers' market as much as I can."

Even so, the constant eating hasn't prevented him from hitting the wall while running unfamiliar paths. Many of his runs are totally random, with no sure way back home—and with no cell phone, even for that just-in-case moment.

"People always ask, 'Don't you get scared you're not going to be able to get back?'" he says with a laugh. "I'm like, 'That's what I try to do.' I try to get lost, to go farther than I thought I was going to go. And I have gotten lost. I've gotten very lost. Because of that, one time I wound up running 20 miles...But I let go. I'm not trying to save something for the way back. I'm just trying to get as far away from where I am as possible.

"Then when I get back—it's because I have to get back."



ZACH MCGOWAN'S BLACK SAILS WORKOUT

1 13-mile run—starting with 50 pullups and stopping four times to perform 50 more.

2 50 pullups upon completion of the run; 100 more later in the day. **400 total**—McGowan varies hand and torso positions to prevent his muscles from growing accustomed to the stimulation.

3 200 pushups in two sets of 100 reps—end each set with a two-minute hold at the top.

4 Handstand pushups—one set of 25, then hold the top for two minutes, using the wall to spot as

needed. McGowan sometimes adds extra sets throughout the day.

5 Inverted sit-ups—McGowan wears a pair of gravity boots and does one set of 50 situps while hanging upside down, varying his torso position with each rep.

6 Heavy bag training—McGowan ends each workout with a five-minute round of punching the heavy bag. During production, most days include 45 minutes of general fight and stunt training and choreography.

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