

COURT APP

The *Good Wife*'s Matt Czuchry on the show's second season and coming alive in New York. *By Rachel Bowie*

The rain has barely let up when I meet *The Good Wife*'s Matt Czuchry for an afternoon cup of coffee and snack at Le Pain Quotidien in the West Village. He arrives nearly 15 minutes early, a rare and notable thing for an actor with a busy schedule, not to mention a role on one of TV's hottest shows. We take a seat and start chatting. Czuchry is instantly humble and polite, and with my very first mention of *The Good Wife*, his eyes light up.

On the show, Czuchry stars as Cary Agos, a junior associate at law firm Stern, Lockhart and Gardner, with an unflinching ambition to get to the top. The new — and critically acclaimed — series arrived on CBS last fall, a story about Alicia Florrick (played by Julianna Margulies), a woman whose life is turned upside down when her husband Peter (played by Chris

Noth) gets caught in a very public sex and political scandal that lands him in jail. Throughout the first season of *The Good Wife*, Cary is in direct competition with Alicia for a position on staff at the firm, but in one of last season's most gut-wrenching moments, Cary finds out — he lost. Now, in season two, he's going to work for the other side: the State's Attorney's office, and the prosecution for the case against Peter.


No stranger to a hit TV series (he appeared as Logan on *Gilmore Girls* for three seasons of the show), Czuchry feels incredibly lucky to have found another great role. Here, he discusses what's in store for Cary in season two, and why his move to New York was one of the biggest risks he's ever had to take.

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Photo Credit: Jason Goodrich



In a season one episode, Alicia (Julianna Margulies, left) discovers evidence of possible jury tampering while working with Cary (Matt Czuchry, right) on her firm's class action lawsuit against a major pharmaceutical company.

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Tell me about your role on *The Good Wife*. How would you describe the character you play?

At the end of last season, the big story line for Cary was that he lost the competition to Alicia Florrick and went over to work for the State's Attorney's side. As a result, in season two we're seeing Cary have kind of a personal vendetta against Alicia. But at the same time, he's also vulnerable. The lowest point of his entire life was getting fired and he misses his old co-workers. It's a combination that's a lot of fun to play and it's really humanized Cary quite a bit.

How much did you know about the competition? Did you expect that it would play out the way it did?

About three or four episodes before it, they mentioned that I was going to lose. We had talked about several different scenarios, but I think the one that they ultimately went with was the best for the audience and the show. When Cary goes over to the State's Attorney's side, it opens up that whole world. When we talked about the first six to 13 episodes of season two, it was really exciting to hear what that will be.

The scene where you lost was pretty intense...

You never really know what you're going to get when you do a pilot. The whole cast has really become a family because we started this from the beginning. Each little step, we've been in it together. The premiere did well, Julianna started getting some acclaim with a Golden Globe and a SAG Award, and then we got nominated as a cast. Ratings started doing well. You believe in a project so much and you work so hard and want it to do well. Then, when it does, you feel bonded with your castmates.

For that particular scene when Cary lost the competition, it

was very real. It was me, Christine [Baranski], Josh [Charles] and Julianna and we knew that, just with the storyline changing, I would be spending less time with them and things were going to change with the show. The whole mood on the set was pretty sad. But the writers do a great job of having these payoffs and then coming back to it — it will be great for viewers to see how the characters all tie together in season two.

What was your reaction when you initially read the script for the pilot?

I thought it was a really well written show. I think that the writers, Robert and Michelle King, in a short period of time, have been able to create interesting storylines that are believable and, at the same time, include full characters. I also knew that Julianna was attached to the project, as were Josh and Christine. The director was Charles McDougall — he did the pilot for *Desperate Housewives* — and the producers were Ridley Scott, Tony Scott and David Zucker. It was really a combination of the scripts, the character, the actors and the people associated with it. It's a hard combination to find, so when you do, you kind of just have to go for it.

On the heels of the case with Eliot Spitzer and several others of its kind, the show has incredible timing. Do you think that current events have an impact on its ratings?

Whether it's with the cases or with the character's personal lives, what the show does well is that it grabs from current events. You see the additional elements of the family behind the scenes, which you don't see [in real life]. You add to that the inter-office politics, which everyone has experienced, and you have a combination of elements that are very timely. To have all those things come together in one show, I think it made people tune in for the first time. Then, I think the show found its way and got better and better.

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Between Julianna Margulies, Chris Noth, Alan Cumming, Josh Charles and Christine Baranski, this show has quite a cast. Do you pinch yourself every time you go into work?

I've been an actor for 11 years now and I've steadily tried to get to that place where I can be selective and surround myself with actors that I respect and love. For me, the biggest thing is to be on set and learn from these fantastic actors. It makes you up your game and it makes you better at your job. I think in any job that you do, you want to be surrounded by the best people in your profession. This was a case where, in the beginning, I felt like there was a lot of potential to be able to do that and it's turned out that way.

The series is set in Chicago, but films in New York. Is that a tough thing to pull off?

For me personally, I lived in LA for 10 years and moved here for the show so that was a bit of a challenge. I had to create a whole new life here.

Had you ever lived in New York before?

No. I grew up in Tennessee and then went to school at the College of Charlestown in South Carolina before living in LA for 10 years. I moved here last year for the first season of the show, so that first six to eight months of just trying to create a new life was a big challenge. As far as shooting in New York for Chicago, the city lends itself to that very well. When we're on stages and we have the backdrops, it's beautiful. When we're on the streets, you just have to avoid certain moments.

It must have been major culture shock when you first arrived.

The biggest thing was that I showed up at 2 a.m. to an apartment I had only seen on the Internet. And of course, after living in LA for 10 years, I had to say goodbye to a lot of friends and my place that I had there. That's part of the investment that doesn't necessarily get seen from the outside. For me, that was a big challenge to start a new job and move at the

same time. But it was for an opportunity that I believed in so I knew I had to do it.

Do you like New York so far?

The first six to eight months were really difficult in creating that new life, but now I absolutely love it. It was just really a case of having to reinvent yourself. When you initially reinvent yourself it's very scary because you don't know what's going to come next. But once you do it, you feel more alive than you did before. And to live in this city... When I first got here, I found a lot of answers on the subway or in Central Park. I have this city to thank for reinvigorating my life. I think that New York has that feel to it where there's so much culture here. There are so many people from around the world and so many different things you can do. It really allows you to embrace your life all over again. Now, I'm just having a great time.

So, the apartment was okay when you showed up?

[*He laughs*] It was. I'm grateful for how that worked out. I knew we had nine episodes so I came in July and I knew we were going to be there until Christmas. I didn't know how long the show was going to go, but yeah, I'm grateful for that apartment. It was perfect.

When did you first realize that you wanted to go into acting?

I majored in history and political science and then my junior and senior year, I started taking some acting classes outside of school and really fell in love with it. I was encouraged by my parents and my two brothers and my sister to pursue it.

At one point, you thought about pursuing a law degree. Does it feel strange to now be playing a lawyer on TV?

I think everybody has their own path and, often times, different people and places and jobs come back into your life at different times for the right reasons. For me, doing this show has a lot of overlap with the direction that I was planning to go. It was very funny for my parents to see that. I also think of it as a sign that this particular path that I chose was the right one.

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Alicia (Julianna Margulies, right) faces off in court against one-time colleague Cary (Matt Czuchy, left), who now works for the State's Attorney's office

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Following the success of *Gilmore Girls*, it must be amazing to find your stride in yet another series.

So much of it is what you make of it. *The Good Wife*'s casting director, Mark Saks, brought me in. He had cast me in something else about eight years ago, and then he saw me in a play in LA, so these things do build on one another. You have the opportunity, and great people and great scripts, but after that, so much of it is luck. The famous quote is "When preparation meets opportunity, it equals good luck." I feel like, having done this for as long as I have, I've been prepared and the right opportunity came along and we got lucky, too. *Gilmore Girls* was very successful in a different way so, to now have this kind of success, it's not lost on me. I know that it's very rare.

I think the same can be said for the reason that the set of *The Good Wife* is so professional and that the show is doing so well. Julianna was on *ER* and had a huge amount of success. Christine Baranski, Chris Noth, Josh Charles — all of these actors have been through a certain period of their career and this represents another period of their career. I don't think that anybody on set takes that for granted.

You mentioned you did a play in LA. Any thoughts on doing theater in New York?

I did a Wendy Wasserstein play in LA called *Third*. It was my first job after *Gilmore Girls* and it was in New York first. I did the LA portion, and it was an incredible experience.

So doing theater here could be a lot of fun...

Yeah, it would be! I've seen a lot of incredible theater since I've been here. Something I love about going to movies or watching television or going to the theater is that it's an event. You spend your time and dedicate it towards this piece of entertainment. When you walk down Broadway and you go to a musical or a play there, it's just unbelievable. It's a very special thing in New York.

So I have to ask — what was Mr. College of Charlestown?

When I was a senior in college, I got nominated through a sorority to participate in a charity event and I ended up winning it. It's funny because everybody was making light of it, but you had certain things that you won and one of the things was acting classes. I had been thinking about what I wanted to do after college, and acting had kind of been in my brain, but I was planning to go to law school. I saw those acting classes, and thought, this is an opportunity. So everybody was joking and making light of it around me and it just kind of slowed down for me and I said, regardless of what this may appear like from the outside to others, for me, this is a chance to get to the future place I want to go.

Now that the fall season is starting and *The Good Wife* is back, tell me — what did you do on your summer vacation?

I did a movie in June called *The 19th Wife*. It's comes out in September on Lifetime. I went to Canada to work on that and it was beautiful. We were just outside of Calgary in a place called Banff in the Rocky Mountains. It was fun just being a part of nature and working with a director that I had worked with three times before on *The Good Wife*. It was a great summer.

The Good Wife premieres September 28 on CBS.

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