



Image courtesy of One Bad Son

COLUMN

“To hell with our month off”: Instead of taking a break, Saskatoon rockers One Bad Son went on tour with Def Leppard

by Alex J. MacPherson | Posted on April 30, 2015

Earlier this month, One Bad Son wrapped up a lengthy tour of western Canada. After playing more than 20 raucous shows, all four members of the Saskatoon-based rock band were looking forward to some time off. But it didn't quite work out.

“We were all super bagged, overtired,” drummer Kurt Dahl said in a recent telephone interview. “We were looking forward to a month off to catch up on sleep. But then we got a phone call from our manager and she says, ‘Hey, do you guys want to tour arenas?’”

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Unbeknownst to them, One Bad Son had attracted the attention of the iconic British glam metal band Def Leppard, who needed an opening act for a 10-show run across western Canada. According to Dahl, it was an easy decision: "We were like, 'Let's do it and to hell with our month off!'"

Formed in Saskatoon in 2004, One Bad Son have spent the last decade establishing themselves as one of Canada's finest guitar rock outfits. It hasn't always been easy. Dahl will never forget playing for tiny audiences at home or a disastrous trip to Regina that ended when a venue cancelled the group's remaining shows.

"At the beginning we were all so naïve that we really did think we'd be playing arenas within a year — and that was in 2004," he said. "Looking back, had I known in 2004 that it would take us 10-plus years and all the ups and downs to get here, who knows if I would have done it."

But Dahl and his bandmates — guitarist Adam Hicks, bassist Adam Grant, and lead vocalist Shane Volk — persevered. Even as their dreams of massive overnight success faded, they kept writing and recording. One Bad Son worked through what Dahl calls "the lean years" one show at a time.

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Over the last several years, One Bad Son's profile has grown dramatically. Their last two albums, 2012's *One Bad Son* and 2014's *Black Buffalo*, generated airplay on mainstream rock radio and helped them sell out larger venues, like O'Brians Event Centre in Saskatoon. But the band had never played an arena before.

That changed on April 15, when One Bad Son walked onstage at the South Okanagan Events Centre in Penticton, BC for the first show of the tour. According to Dahl, he quickly realized that everything from the sound of his kick drum to the roar of the crowd was different in a sold-out arena.

"You don't feel as close with the crowd, especially during the set, but once you finish, you hear that crowd cheer and you

can see why guys get hooked on that feeling," he said with a laugh. "It's hard to come down from. It's a natural high."

Over the next few days, One Bad Son opened for Def Leppard in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and several smaller cities, often playing for crowds numbering more than 10,000. The tour wrapped up this week with shows in Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg.

"It's kind of surreal," Dahl said. "This is the kind of opportunity we spent all of our lives working toward, and it's an amazing feeling to have that come to fruition."

But if blasting anthems like "Scarecrows," "Retribution Blues," and "Satellite Hotel" into the rafters of a packed hockey rink

fulfilled a decade-old dream, spending time with the members of Def Leppard showed Dahl and his bandmates just how difficult the music industry can be.

Over the last four decades, the venerable British band has experienced numerous calamities, including the overdose death of guitarist Steve Clark and a catastrophic road accident that resulted in drummer Rick Allen losing an arm. And in the 1990s, Dahl explained, the rise of bands like Pearl Jam and Nirvana made Def Leppard "the least hip band in the world, probably."

The lesson wasn't lost on the members of One Bad Son, who have experienced setbacks and disasters of their own. "As a band, you've got to keep doing what you do," Dahl explained. "Trying to chase some other sound or scene, it's not going to get you anywhere. You've got to be true to yourself and true to your sound."

The members of One Bad Son know they still have plenty of work to do, but going on tour with Def Leppard offered a glimpse of what hard work and perseverance can achieve. They are eager to see more.

"We've got a long way to go before we can fill arenas like these guys can," Dahl said with a laugh. "But once you play on [that] stage a few times, it makes you realize we need to be here." **V**

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