



Milwaukee Brewers Alumni Association
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Promising rebuild leads to contract extension for Manager Craig Counsell

By Mario Ziino

One thing was certain in 2016, the Brewers were quite an entertaining team to watch – one that adopted their manager’s character and attitude of never quitting.

With a modest five game improvement over the previous season, the promised rebuild is well on its way. However, instead of playing like a team retooling, Milwaukee challenged all-comers from the opening pitch right through the stretch run. That was the kind of progress that not only satisfied both General Manager David Stearns and Manager Craig Counsell in the end, but led to a contract extension.

“We’ve had some players emerge last season and that’s a promising sign for the organization,” Stearns said. “No one is satisfied with 73 wins, it’s certainly not our end goal. We have a lot of work to do to where we ultimately want to be.”

Counsell concurred that the process was just beginning and the team certainly has made strides.



“I’m hopeful and optimistic that we’re on the way to making it happen,” Counsell added. “We have to be together to develop into great. We have to have continuity. We are heading in the right direction and we need more time together to continue to do that. It’s a good start. And there is reason to be excited about it.”

The excitement began soon after the season ended when Stearns announced a three-year contract extension for the skipper.

“Over the year, I have observed Craig’s leadership first-hand and I am confident that he is the right man for the job,” Stearns said. “Craig has been a Brewer in the truest sense and is as much a Brewer here as anyone. Craig understands the passion of this fan base.”

“Craig possesses the skillset, intelligence and determination to lead our team back to consistent competitiveness.”

continued

INTERVIEW WITH INTERVIEW WITH TOM FLANAGAN, FARM DIRECTOR

1 ON 1 With DAVEY NELSON

DAVEY



D: Tom, you've been in the organization for 27 years and have had different roles, your current title being farm director. You first started in 1990 as bat boy and later as clubhouse attendant. During that time, what are some of your memories and what ballplayers stood out to you?

T: I have so many good memories of my years with the Brewers as a bat boy. Initially, I worked in the visiting clubhouse and several players stood out. George Brett – as he was by far the most talkative player while he was on deck and (as a bat boy) I was nearby kneeling on a towel. He would have some good conversation going while he waited to hit.

From my years as a Brewers bat boy, there were too many good memories, and it's tough to single individual players out. But the daily interactions with players, coaches and staff were different each day and made it an incredible time

and opportunity. Growing up in Milwaukee, and then being able to be around players you grew up admiring was a treat. And the players couldn't have been any nicer over the years. The legends like Robin Yount, Paul Molitor, and Bob Uecker certainly stand out.

D: What are your duties as farm director?

T: My main function is to oversee the Player Development Department. The department includes seven teams with numerous staff members, ranging from Triple-A Colorado Springs to Rookie Arizona Brewers, and also includes our academy in the Dominican Republic.

At the peak time of the year, when all teams are in-season, we have approximately 200 players in the Minor Leagues. It's the job of the department to ensure that each player is getting their work in and following the plan to maximize their abilities.

This is a big task, but I have a great staff that does an excellent job of making things

run efficiently across our system.

D: We had a look at the Brewers' top prospect in Orlando Arcia when he was brought up August 2nd. What do you like about him?

T: Orlando is a very exciting player, but the parts of his game that really stand out are his instincts as well as how much he loves to play the game. He has superior instincts for the game and he always seems to be a step or two ahead. He's only 22 years old and he will continue to get better.

D: Now that Arcia is in the Major Leagues, the number one prospect in the organization is outfielder Lewis Brinson. Tell us about him and what do you think his time table is?

T: Lewis is an extremely athletic center fielder. He's capable of impacting the game in multiple ways – with his legs on the bases, in center field, and certainly at the plate. For some of our staff, he reminds them of Mike Cameron. We don't

necessarily put time tables on our young players. Instead we let them dictate to us when they are ready by their play and by their development. But with respect to Lewis, he is an exciting player that our fans will really enjoy seeing play once he does make it to Miller Park.

D: Tell us about the number one pick by the Brewers in the June draft this year, Corey Ray.

T: Corey put together a great start to his pro career. He's a 5-tool player that began his career at the class-A advanced level. This was a challenge for Corey, but he did a fine job and held his own. He played the bulk of his innings in center field and he showed great range.

D: Tell us about some of the other prospects.

T: Isan Diaz was our Minor League Player of the Year. He was an All-Star shortstop at Wisconsin who helped lead them to the playoffs this year. He came over from the

Arizona Diamondbacks via an offseason trade.

He made great strides this year both offensively and defensively. He is getting a chance to participate in the Arizona Fall League this year.

Brandon Woodruff was our Minor League Pitcher of the Year. Brandon really put together a fantastic season. He's a right-handed starter that has a plus fastball and solid secondary pitches. He led all of Minor League Baseball in strikeouts. He's very athletic and can handle the bat very well.

D: Tell Brewers are one of the top teams in MLB as far as prospects in their Minor Leagues. How have the Brewers been able to acquire so many prospects?

T: This is really a credit to the organization; the front office and the scouts. Some excellent trades over the past year and a half, culminating with a few deals at this year's trade deadline, have added a very nice influx of top young

players to our system. When you combine those additions with the high-impact players that have been acquired through the last few drafts, you have the makings of a really solid group of young, high-ceiling players.

D: Is there a certain philosophy the organization has when it comes to developing players in the Minor Leagues?

T: Our goal is to maximize the ability of each player in our Minor League Department. Each player is different, and it is dependent on our staff to determine the best process for each player to help develop them to their fullest potential.

MATT ARNOLD

PASSION FOR THE GAME

Matt Arnold has spent his life trying to figure out baseball.

Growing up in the Bay Area, he and his family were Oakland A's fans and regulars in the left-field bleachers at what was then called Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, where generations of Arnolds carved their initials in the wooden bleacher seats.

"I grew up going to A's games," Arnold said. "My dad said that I even came to games 'in utero' (in the womb). I always loved the game. I just had a huge passion for it."

In addition to attending games, Arnold also developed an early appreciation for the statistical side of the game, reading box scores in the newspaper each morning and studying the numbers on the backs of his baseball cards.

"I was trying to get in on the early phases of how players work and what makes them good," he said. "That was always fascinating to me. I'm still trying to figure that out."

These days Arnold is trying to figure that out for the Brewers in his role as vice president and assistant general manager, working in concert with first-year General Manager David Stearns.

As essentially Stearns' right-hand man, Arnold, 37, is involved in just about every aspect of the baseball operation. His official list of duties includes player evaluations, contract negotiations, player development, medical issues, foreign and domestic scouting and the continually evolving world of analytics.

"My job is pretty broad and it's pretty fun," Arnold said. "It's the chance to interact with and oversee every department here, and at the same time work with David and Craig (Counsell) to build the foundation of the organization."

While the stakes are considerably higher, it's a continuation of the mission he commenced as a youngster. At the



Assistant GM Matt Arnold and Brewers Manager Craig Counsell shared some thoughts on the field early this season.

center of that mission is the pursuit of the perfect combination of the observational aspects of scouting with the quantitative information derived from the sabermetrics revolution.

The "Moneyball" debate has been raging in baseball for more than a decade. Each organization has had to figure out how to incorporate the new wave with the old-school approach.

"I spend hours and hours and hours just thinking about that exact thing," Arnold said. "How do we blend all of this together? I don't think I have an answer for it. I'm trying to find out."

"I think it comes down to the ability to understand where everybody's coming from in their different perspectives. We'll sit there and you want to listen to every scout and what they have to say and you want to listen to every analyst and try to systematically blend this stuff together."

"I think the debate can be healthy but I think it's not productive unless there's a healthy respect for one another. I feel like we've got analysts who are willing to go to games and scout and we have scouts and coaches that are very interested in new forms of information."

Arnold brings a broad range of experience in just about all phases of the

game as he's worked his way up through the ranks.

Arnold's introduction into baseball's front office came while he was still a student at the University of California-Santa Barbara when he got an internship with the Los Angeles Dodgers. At the time he wasn't so sure he was on a career track to becoming a Major League executive.

"I was driving 100 miles each way from Santa Barbara to LA, which is a long commute and very challenging in a 1977 Cheyenne truck that gets 8 miles a gallon," Arnold said. "It was a great experience but I don't know if I could do it again, to be honest. It was really grueling to get up at 4 a.m. to beat the traffic in and get back at midnight after games. Those were long days."

That experience led to another internship with the Texas Rangers, where his mentors would include John Hart, Jon Daniels, Dan O'Brien and Orel Hershiser, who sought out Arnold's help after becoming pitching coach in mid-season.

Arnold then landed his first full-time job with the Cincinnati Reds, working with General Manager Jim Bowden. Over the course of four seasons he would work under two more GMs, O'Brien and Wayne Krivsky.

Passion for the Game – continued

Next up was a move to the Tampa Bay Rays under GM Andrew Friedman, where he left the office and worked in the field as a pro scout covering prospects in the Midwest League. That was the first of several roles he would play over nine seasons, including pro scouting director and director of player personnel.

The Rays would become known for being on the forefront of the analytics revolution as they crafted teams that could consistently compete with the American League East powers against all odds.

“We were faced with so many challenges playing in the same division with the Red Sox and Yankees,” he said. “We were forced to be hyper-creative and hyper-competitive because their payrolls were literally five times what ours was. You’re dealing with these juggernauts and you can’t just curl up in a ball, you have to compete against them.

“It creates a drive for everybody in that office to say, ‘How can we turn over every rock to win this division?’ And we did all right. We had some fun times in October and I was fortunate enough to get a World Series ring. It was a great experience.”

When Stearns was named Brewers GM last September, he turned to Arnold to become his top aide. To that point they had been professional acquaintances but had never worked together.

“We’ve always gotten along well,” Stearns said. “As I began to seriously think about what I was seeking in an assistant general manager and the skillset I wanted to bring to the organization, Matt’s name kept coming up in a variety of different conversations, from a variety of different people that I trust and respect around the game.”

Arnold said it was a tough decision to leave Tampa Bay, but he was won over by his respect for Stearns and Counsell, who he had gotten to know as a candidate for the manager’s job with the Rays.

“In this game you really have to believe in people and I felt really strongly about those two guys being really great leaders,” Arnold said. “I’m all in and I think that we’re committed to winning here and I think we can do it. We have the support, we have the resources, and we have very progressive, intelligent people in the office and out in the field. I think we have the ingredients here to do some really amazing things.”

Craig Counsell – continued

Counsell is grateful for the opportunity to see the franchise through the development phase and a return to a contending level in the years to come.

“This is really the only place I want to be part of October baseball,” Counsell said. “In 2015 we knew there was going to be some pain going through this. We’re taking the right steps, good steps, and now I feel like I will see it for sure.”

Counsell said that there were more surprises than disappointments last season, giving the organization something to feel optimistic about moving forward.

“I love working with the people I’m working with and I’m inspired by the challenge we have in front of us,” he pointed out. “We have a big challenge in front of us and I feel like I get to see this through and that’s important.

“The learning that goes on never stops. You feel like you’re changing every day because you’re learning every day.”

Counsell’s contract extension keeps him at the helm through the 2020 season.

“I don’t think you’re going to see Craig or I say we had a successful season until we’re in the playoffs,” Stearns said. “That’s a successful season. That’s what we’re aiming for and more than that.

“When we complete this phase in the cycle we’ll be able to look back and determine where we were at each step of the way. But it’s not productive for us internally to spend a whole lot of effort trying to figure out exactly where we are while we’re still going through it.

“We’re proud of meeting some of our goals but we certainly recognize that we have a lot of work to do to get to the ultimate stage of being consistently competitive and competing for a divisional championship every single year. The goals remain the same going forward.”

Craig grew up in the Milwaukee area. His father, John, played Minor League baseball in the Twins organization and was the Brewers community relations director back in the 1980s.

The former infielder played 16 years in the Major Leagues, including six seasons over two different stints with the Brewers. He was a key member of the 1997 Marlins and 2001 Diamondbacks world championship teams.

Counsell retired following the Brewers’ only National League Central Division championship season back in 2011 and joined Milwaukee’s front office as a special assistant to the general manager.

On May 4, 2015, Counsell replaced Ron Roenicke as the 19th manager in franchise history.

“I am grateful to be in a leadership role with the franchise for years to come,” Counsell said. “I think I am good at looking forward and trying to figure out how to make the next good decision. That’s what we’ll try to do.

“That’s where I think this (the contract extension) takes it. It’s not going to change the next decision that I have to make but I know that we’re going to go through some peaks and valleys, and we’re going to come out the other side and be in the right place.”

IN MEMORIUM

Bryan Clutterbuck – (1986, 1989) – August 23, 2016 (56)

Juan Bell – (1993) – August 24, 2016 (48)