

Interview - Merritt Paulson - Owner - Portland Beavers

Written by Maury Brown
Tuesday, 14 August 2007 20:00



Merritt Paulson is anything but the norm when it comes to previous owners of the AAA Portland Beavers. He's young, energetic, and in the office at PGE Park daily since purchasing the Beavers and Portland Timbers, a United Soccer League team that shares the facility.

Paulson, the former Senior Director of Marketing and Business Development of NBA Entertainment, and Manager of HBO on Demand, [purchased the Beavers, a San Diego Padres affiliate, on May 21st of this year](#) and is already aggressively working to push the Beavers and Timbers into the spotlight.

Yesterday, less than three months after purchasing the Beavers, Paulson, Portland Mayor Tom Potter, and PCL President Branch Rickey III held a press conference to announce that the [2009 AAA All-Star Game will be held in Portland](#). It's the first sign of positive change from the new energetic owner.

"The 2009 Triple-A All-Star Game will be a national showcase for the city of Portland, our rich baseball tradition and our outstanding fans," said Paulson. "We are honored to be selected by Triple-A Baseball as the host city, and we are thrilled at the opportunity to showcase Portland and our wonderful ballpark during this prestigious event."

Paulson claims to have been a lifelong Cubs fan, and is the son of Henry Paulson, the United States Treasury Secretary and former CEO of Goldman Sachs, who is a silent partner of Merritt's Shortstop LLC.

He's also extremely passionate about community outreach. Just after purchasing the Beavers, he announced the creation of the Portland Beavers and Portland Timbers Community Fund with the vision of making the charitable fund the largest of its kind in Triple-A Baseball and United

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Soccer. To kick off the fund, he donated \$10,000 to a local baseball little league team to help them construct a field.

He takes on a market in Portland that is the largest in the Pacific Coast League, yet has lagged behind smaller markets in attendance. The Beavers and Timbers are just now climbing out of ownership controversy and debt. Until recently, neither were profitable due to an aggressive rent schedule. Added into the mix has been a stream of talk about the addition of other major league sports to Portland, all of which have their sights on PGE Park as either an interim or permanent facility. Whether it was MLB in 2003, or now talk of MLS expansion, ownership has had to juggle interest in major league sports with the entertainment value that is offered by minor league sports.

As Paulson energetically walks around the ballpark on the way to his office overlooking an on-going Beavers game, he tries to peer through any openings to see what his new team is doing on the field that night. When we sit down, he's focused on the interview, but he's also glued to the activity on the field, leaping up at one point when the crowd roars.

In the following interview, Paulson talks about how his insight into the ownership process, how his background in the NBA and HBO assisted him in preparing for ownership, the advantages and disadvantages of playing in a large, urban facility, why a name change may be on the horizon for the Beavers, how he views the possibility of MLB or MLS in Portland, and much more. -- *Maury Brown*

Maury Brown for The Biz of Baseball: You spent four years examining the marketing and researching owning a professional baseball club, when did you first start considering looking into owning a team, and what did you learn out of the research on owning a team?

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"I've got a passion for sports. And ultimately, people can talk about the business side all they want, but it all starts with a passion for the product for many of the people in the industry."

"I believe that David Stern - regardless of what you might think of the NBA versus other sports - is really one of the premiere sports executives there is."



"I think sports is such a unique vehicle in terms of being able to shine light on areas of the community that could use the help. It's something that everybody relates to. "