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The Independent Leagues are constantly changing, always evolving, trying to discover the right formula to put the best product on the field, while making it conveniently affordable for its fans. In what looks like another exceptional move for the Northern League, it has been announced that the Rockford RiverHawks will be joining them for the 2010 season.

The Northern League was formed in 1993, with a 72-game schedule. When the Northern League consisted of between eight and twelve teams, the schedule was 96-games with two divisions, beginning in late May and ends in August around Labor Day. The Division leaders in each half qualify for the post-season, but when the league dropped to six teams in 2008, a 96-game schedule was still being played but the season was not split and did not have divisions. They did implement a new system where the top four teams qualified for the playoffs; the first place team plays the fourth, the second and third place team's play and the winners battle it out in a best of five championship series. The Northern League is widely known as the dominant or most well known Independent League in baseball and with two new teams likely to arrive in 2010, it appears they are ahead of the curve yet again. RiverHawks Director of Baseball Operations, Dave Ciarrachi, commented on the situation, "This will broaden our marketing base as well as our media exposure, "we feel that this is a tremendous upgrade for our franchise." Currently the Northern League consists of six teams, the Kansas City T-Bones , located in Kansas City, Kansas, the Fargo-Moorehead RedHawks

and the
Winnipeg Goldeyes
. The league also consists of three Chicago based teams; the
Schaumburg Flyers
, the
Joliet Jackhammers
and the
Gary Southshore RailCats
.

An apparent merger between the Northern League and the Frontier League was in the works, it did not evolve, but apparently the move was agreed upon by all parties. "We're going to try to upgrade our on-field product," Ciarrachi said. In a recent article by the Rockford Register Star , Josh Olerud
, general manager and vice president of sales for the RiverHawks, explains the thinking behind the switch, “It’s a big step for us on the field, player-wise and talent wise, and also just with the exposure the big Northern League has”. If you look at the specifics between leagues, you might see another reason. The Frontier League is more of a developmental league with an age limit of 26. The Northern League has no age restrictions and a higher team salary; $105,000 compared to $72,000. This is a very exciting opportunity for Rockford and the Northern League. On one hand, you have Rockford who has a very successful organization, winning the Frontier League Championship in 2004 and winning the West Division in 2004 and 2006 and for the Northern League, this is another chance for them to expand its marketing and ticketing opportunities. The RiverHawks
Road Ranger Stadium
is within 100 miles of 4 teams in the league, something Ciarrachi is thrilled about, “We have the opportunity for players to interact with our community for a longer period of time, it gives us the chance to put the best professional baseball product on the field.”

Previously discussed was the mention of a second team arriving in 2010. That team is the Lake County Fielders
, based out of Lake County Illinois, owned and operated by long-time baseball enthusiast
Kevin Costner
. According to the teams website additional ownership is involved; Schaumburg Flyers owner and founder
Rich Ehrenreich
and
Grand Slam Sports & Entertainment, LLC of Deerfield
.

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