

3-piece prospect

He's aiming for a front-office spot in the major leagues

By George Vukelich

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Bob Reynolds is not the first Madison youngster who grew up playing baseball and loving the game.

He's not the first kid outfielder who ever played on lumpy diamonds and dreamed of one day reaching the major leagues.

Bob Reynolds, however, may be the only one around who decided at an early age that if his hitting eye and throwing arm weren't going to get there, then possibly his attache case would.

His baseball dream is not to be down on the playing field, but up in the front office.

His baseball idols aren't named Rollie Fingers or Reggie Jackson or Robin Yount. The men he admires are Harry Dalton, Dallas Green, Bill Veeck.

"And Rolland Hemond," Reynolds said. "He worked for Veeck. I'd like to be like them. They're good baseball people. Good organizational people. They put exciting baseball teams on the field and those teams drew."

General manager

Reynolds is the general manager of the Iowa Cubs of the American Association. At 26, he is one of the youngest general managers in all professional baseball.

Reynolds met Bill Veeck when the Chicago White Sox, then Veeck's team, had a working agreement with the Iowa team, located in Des Moines. That was before the Iowa franchise hooked up with the Cubs.

"He knew how to promote better than anybody," Reynolds said.

Minor Leagues

It's fitting that Reynolds met Veeck. It's like a young actor encountering Henry Fonda.

Reynolds was born in Milwaukee, but his family moved to Madison when he was 6, and he stayed there until July of 1979, when he was hired by the then Iowa Oaks.

He had graduated from the University of Wisconsin as a history major, following in the shoes of his grandfather and father, Toby, who went on to get a law degree and has his own firm in Madison.

Reynolds said that he got his interest in baseball from his father. While he was still in college, Reynolds contacted all 26 major-league teams for a job, along with several AAA and A clubs in the Midwest.

Disappointed once

A year before he graduated, the Iowa team responded, saying they had an opening for a promotions director. Reynolds drove to Des Moines for an interview, but was shocked when he didn't get the job.

"They told me that they didn't have the heart to pull me out of college. I would have taken the job and quit college. I went back to school."

In July of 1979, after graduating, Reynolds went back to the Iowa club and was hired as promotions director, one of

three people in the front office. Besides him, there were the general manager and public relations director.

Then the team was affiliated with the White Sox. In January of this year, however, the team hooked up with the Cubs.

Reynolds believes that the affiliation with the Cubs may be the greatest thing, especially since the parent team's general manager is Dallas Green.

"I think the combination of Dallas Green and the Chicago Tribune is just great for the Cubs and I think it's great for us down on the Iowa farm, too," he said.

Better things ahead?

The farm is ready for good times. Even as Reynolds has paid his dues the last three years, "selling advertising and spreading tarp," the ballclub has likewise had learning experiences, slipping from a 69-67 record in 1979 to 52-81 last season.

"One of the problems in the past was having the major league club reaching down to our roster to bring up players," Reynolds said. For instance, last season the Oaks had a 22-man roster, but 50 players passed through.

That's one of the reasons Reynolds is excited about Green, who has dedicated himself to having a good organization and a strong farm system.

"In 1972, the year Green became head of the Philadelphia Phillies' farm system, the Phillies had the worst record in the major leagues," Reynolds said. "Four years later, the Phillies were in the playoffs against the Dodgers."

The theory is that a winning major-league club puts less pressure on its farm system than a losing one.

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Bob Reynolds: prospect in a suit

His office is up front

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"If you are connected to a winning major-league club, you get to keep players at the minor-league level longer," Reynolds said. "When the big club is struggling — as it was with us the last few years — if a guy on the minor league club hits three homers in two games, the big club might call him up right away to help out."

In the current system, the Cubs provide all the players and pay most of each salary. The farm club provides facilities, balls, equipment, small percentages of the salaries.

Reynolds said that his team had to draw 1,000 fans a game to break even. "Last year, the Oaks averaged 2,000 fans per game and made money. This year, with the Cubs, we'll spend more money on promotion, on radio, advertising. The San Diego Chicken came in for a promotion on June 13. But the economy's tough. Money's tight."

Reynolds said that the way around that was to put a strong club on the field, a team with players who will be around long enough to develop a following. The minor-league ballpark is smaller, more intimate than those in the majors. The ballplayers are more accessible and that makes for a nice, cozy feeling when the team is respectable. If the team is a real loser, who wants to identify with it?

"We have some dedicated fans who are at every game," Reynolds said. "Winning always bring out the others. If we were contenders the whole season, we wouldn't have any problem drawing 140-150,000 fans."

Despite the economy, Reynolds believes that the team is the best buy



Harry Dalton

in town. Box seats are \$3.50. Reserved grandstand seats and general admission are \$2.50 for adults, \$1 for kids 13 and under.

"That means a couple with their two kids can attend for only \$7," Reynolds said.

How much longer will he be with the Iowa Cubs? How many more seasons in the American Association?

"I could go up to a major-league front office right now," Reynolds said. "I'm ready. Not the top post, of course, but high. Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of front-office jobs in major league baseball. A year or two longer in Des Moines . . ."

"I really think I wasn't ready to go up until now. *Now*, I'm ready."

It's not cocky the way he says it. He is not bragging or arrogant, just confident.

As a baseball prospect, Reynolds may be arriving a little later than most. But chances are, he is going to stay a lot longer.

"The big leagues is where it's at," he said. "I'd love to go."