

New Twins farm director likes Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

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Brad Steil was a sports-minded graduate student when he joined the Minnesota Twins as an intern in their scouting department.

That was 14 years ago, and today he's the new Director of Minor League Operations for the entire organization.

"I've been a huge baseball fan my whole life," said Steil, now 36. "It's been fun so far. I feel very fortunate to be in this industry, period."

Steil is based in Minneapolis and spends about half the season visiting the Twins' minor league teams. He spent a week in Cedar Rapids for the homestand that ran from April 25 through April 30 and saw six games.

The Kernels won all six games and Steil was impressed with what he saw.

"I think off of this team, you could easily see six to eight of those guys eventually make it to the big leagues," he said.

The Twins prefer to keep players on the same team for an entire season and let them develop, but it's not a hard-and-fast rule.

Byron Buxton, the No.2 overall pick in the 2012 draft, has enjoyed a torrid start in the Class A

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Midwest League with the Kernels and could earn an in-season promotion to the Florida State League, but Steil would not tip his hand about the talented center fielder.

"A guy like Buxton, we'll continue to evaluate him as we go," he said. "He's doing well right now. There are still some things that he can learn in this league."

Steil succeeded Jim Rantz as Minnesota's farm director. Rantz did the job for 27 years and helped groom his successor.

"I worked with him for five or six years and I've been around Terry Ryan, the general manager, for a long time," said Steil. "It's made the transition a lot easier.

"I was able to learn how to evaluate players and learn more about the game."

Steil's job is to judge players and help decide whether they should be promoted or possibly included in trades.

"We want to see the kind of progress these guys are making," he said. "We set objectives for them at the beginning of the year. We're keeping an eye on those.

"We're checking their progress in general and keeping an eye on possible moves we may have to make later in the year with potential injuries up above.

"In general, I think most of our players are going to go one league at a time (per year). But each player is different, so you have to evaluate their situations."

Steil likes to evaluate players after they've faced teams a second time during the season.

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"The second time through, teams are going to make adjustments and we want to see how they're going to handle that," he said.

Steil enjoyed hanging around the Kernels and Manager Jake Mauer for a week. By coincidence, Steil and Mauer both attended St. Thomas College in Minnesota, but at different times.

"I think the one thing you can see right away is, these guys enjoy playing with each other and pull for each other," he said. "They battle to the last out and never feel like they're out of a game.

"With the lineup they have, they should feel they're in every game, because they can come back from almost any deficit."