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Milam: Snappers name change is about business

Stan Milam
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Let's divert our attention for a moment from national and global events to an important local issue.

Yes, there's an ongoing deadly pandemic, the future of the Supreme Court is likely to become more conservative, hurricanes are devastating our Gulf communities and a presidential election is around the corner. But, for just a brief moment, we could look at the future of Beloit's professional baseball team.

Diane Hendricks and Quint Studer have invested considerable time and money to do everything possible to keep the team in Beloit. There's no question the team would not continue in Beloit if a new ball park was not created to replace Pohlman Field.



Hendricks and Studer have combined to build a state of the art minor league baseball stadium in downtown Beloit along the banks of the Rock River and move the team into a new era. If there are any objections to what's been done, I haven't heard them. The reaction to the changes has been close to unanimous, although there are always a few critics who will find fault with anything.

You may have noticed I have referred to the team as "the team." For years the team has been known as the Snappers with a feisty turtle as the team's mascot. Studer has announced that's about the change.

After surveying area residents, Studer reports that an overwhelming majority of respondents favored a name change. Thirty percent wanted to retain the name and 70% preferred a new name, he said.

In addition to the survey, Studer commissioned an independent professional analysis to look at how a privately owned team could become financially sustainable for the 20 years Studer has committed to operating the team. Here's what he found.

"There are four major revenue streams; corporate sponsors, ticket sales, food and beverage sales and merchandise," Studer said. "Merchandise is the only one with an opportunity to go beyond local, therefore it is important to make sure you have a brand that appeals to a larger base."

Studer predicts it will take between \$12 million and \$17 million in revenue over the 20-year period of his commitment to be financially viable.

"This is not a hobby," he said. "This is a business."

Studer reports that last season the Snappers sold \$37,000 in merchandise.

“That’s not nearly enough revenue,” he said. “We have seen that as minor league teams move to new locations or new owners, a name and logo change has boosted merchandise revenue.”

Studer noted teams in Jacksonville, Florida (Suns to Jumbo Shrimp); Huntsville, Alabama (Huntsville Stars to Rocket City Trash Pandas); and Amarillo, Texas (the owners of the San Antonio Missions moved the club to Amarillo and named them the Sod Poodles, or Soddies for short), where name changes resulted in greater merchandise revenue.

“When Jacksonville changed from the Suns to the Jumbo Shrimp, they generated the third-largest merchandising revenue in all of minor league baseball with more than \$1 million annually in sales,” he said.

The name change is essential to financial sustainability, Studer said.

“Most minor league teams play in a facility owned by the municipality, which is responsible for insurance, utilities, repairs and maintenance of the ball park,” he said. “In this case, we are on the hook. This is a privately owned team and facility and we have to make that work.”

Ben Witkins, a Beloit native now living in Minnesota, is leading an effort to retain the Snappers name. He says he has more than 3,000 names on a petition to retain the name.

“I understand some people prefer to keep the Snappers name and logo,” Studer said. “but that’s not going to happen because it is simply not financially feasible.”

The list of possible new names has been narrowed to five:

- Cheeseballs.
- Moo.

- Supper Clubbers.
- Sky Carp.
- Polka Pike.

Sky Carp strikes me as a name with great logo and mascot potential.

On the other hand, I'm not sure what the students at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign are thinking. The NCAA required Illinois to drop Chief Illiniwek as its mascot. Students would like to replace it with the Belted Kingfisher, which is a bird, I am told.

How about the Sky Carp hosting Belted Kingfisher night when U of I students get a break on a carp burger?

Let's play ball.

Stan Milam, a Janesville native, is the host of the "Stan Milam Show" on WCLO Radio.