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## Snappers look to bright future

By JOSH FLICKINGER Co-Sports Editor

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Concrete is poured into a form at the site of ABC Supply Stadium, the new Beloit Snapper stadium that is scheduled to open in 2022. Photo by Anthony Wahl/Adams Publishing Group

BELOIT — Virtually everything you know about the Beloit Snappers got flipped upside down as the calendar turns to 2021.

No longer is the club a barely-surviving outfit with a barebones front office staff, plying its trade out of an outdated ballpark with next to little in the way of amenities.

The team is set to move into its brilliant new home, ABC Supply Stadium, in downtown Beloit, this summer.

Instead of a being a low-class A affiliate of the Oakland Athletics, they are now an advanced-A affiliate of the Florida Marlins.

And that barebones staff? It now includes a team president with over 25 years of professional experience, who plans on hiring a team of energetic professionals to carry out the mission of Gateway Professional Baseball, led by Quint Studer.

The immediate future of the Snappers—including their new yet-to-be-unveiled nickname—is uncertain.

While the new ballpark is set to be completed by mid-June, it's not known if any fans will be let into the ballpark, if there will be a season that has a traditional April beginning, or, well, much of anything at this point.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many questions regarding the 2021 season are in place.

But that's nothing compared to the questions that surrounded the Snappers a year ago. First, there was the matter of getting a new stadium built.

As Dennis Conerton sought new ownership that was interested in keeping the team local, the candidates were few and far between. Enter Studer, a Janesville native who already was in the baseball ownership business, having purchased the Pensacola Blue

Wahoos and turned the franchise into one of the top AA teams in the country.

When ABC Supply magnate Diane Hendricks stepped in and agreed to fund the construction of the new stadium. Within a few weeks, the deal was done, and Beloit's baseball future was secured.

Even before the ownership transfer was complete, Studer's team took over the operations for the team's 2020 season. Of course, as it turns out, there wasn't a season.

When the pandemic hit in mid-March last year, spring training operations were shut down. While the Major Leagues eventually were able to complete a 60-game regular season and an expanded playoff schedule, the entirety of Minor League Baseball was shut down, depriving the club of a final full season at Pohlman Field, their home since 1982.

The upcoming season will be shepherded by Jeff Jurgella, a Wisconsin native with over 25 years of experience in sports business in the Upper Midwest.

"I'm excited to join Gateway Professional Baseball as Beloit baseball enters a new era," said Jurgella, who is the new team president. "We will work hard to ensure that the Stateline region enjoys a first-class experience at the ballpark while looking for new ways to positively impact the community outside of the game. It's a privilege to join a culture that will put a significant emphasis on improving the quality of life in our community well beyond the walls of the field."

Jurgella's hiring was announced by Studer.

"We performed an exhaustive nationwide search through the acclaimed sports talent search firm Marquee and we're very excited not just to have found a local leader for our team, but to have found the best candidate," Studer said. "Jeff brings 25 years of

experience from the highest levels of sports business to Beloit and shares our vision of using the new downtown stadium year-round to help improve the quality of life for all in our community.”

Marquee Search president Jeff Yocom said the position received a great deal of interest.

“We conducted a national search and once potential candidates learned about the caliber of opportunity and ownership’s commitment to the community, their interest skyrocketed,” Yocom said. “The hiring team chose from a very large and strong group of candidates and ultimately landed on a Wisconsin son that we’re excited to follow as he leads the organization into 2021 and beyond.”

The Snappers expect to at least begin the season at Pohlman Field, even if the start of the campaign is delayed. Beloit is also expected to announce its new nickname before they move into the new ballpark.

Whenever the new ballpark does open its doors to paying customers for the first time, it will be the end of a grueling journey, and the beginning of something beautiful.

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Josh Flickinger