

REGINA RED SOX



TROY FLEECE/Leader-Post

Rob Cherepuschak debuts as head coach of the Regina Red Sox today.

'Leadership is his calling'

By TIM SWITZER
Leader-Post

If there was any doubt over the level of Rob Cherepuschak's excitement at being the new head coach of the Regina Red Sox, take a look at his cell phone bill.

"The amount of times we talk ball ... in this day and age, you can text at a moment's notice and talk at a moment's notice and Rob is that type of guy who is always talking baseball," said Sox general manager Bernie Eiswirth. "He's always checking on things and is in constant contact with players through the offseason. It has been pretty exciting for us to see that excitement in him."

"Rob has talked to so many kids. We got a good plan, but his phone bill is pretty high."

Cherepuschak isn't alone in his excitement. As a long-time fixture in Regina's baseball community, Cherepuschak's hiring in December was applauded by many.

"The last three years ... he has shown he has what it takes to take over the team," said Red Sox outfielder Nolan Bracken, a Regina product. "I've been with Rob for five or six years and it's awesome to see him take over."

Still, Cherepuschak may not have been the most obvious choice. He never played or coached at the college level, unlike most head coaches in the Western Major Baseball League, and doesn't have any direct involvement with the American university system, which provides several players to the league.

But Cherepuschak did serve as the head coach of the Martin Monarchs for 10 seasons, the Saskatchewan Selects from 2001 to

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— Kip Simon, assistant coach

2004 and the 2005 Canada Games team before spending three seasons as an assistant with the Red Sox.

"He has been exposed to other coaches who coach in different ways," said Eiswirth. "He's been sitting back watching the way those guys have done it and has learned a lot. But he has coached a lot of other sports so he also knows how to be the one in charge."

Cherepuschak will officially be the one in charge come today's regular-season opener against the host Moose Jaw Miller Express.

"I've had some things in the last few years that have given me the confidence to be in this position," said Cherepuschak, who will soon complete his first year as a teacher at Thom Collegiate. "Walking into the clubhouse (as the head coach), it didn't feel like my first time in that role. It maybe should have, but it didn't. That was a real comforting thing. I owe it to my staff (assistants Kip Simon, Tanner Brotzel and Justin Eiswirth). When I walk in, there's three guys there for me."

Since all three of those guys have played for Cherepuschak in the past, they know exactly what they are getting.

"Right from the start, everyone knew he was a quiet type of leader and that he was ready to go to the next level," said Simon. "Over the years of watching like he does and taking it all in, he is 100-per-cent ready to step into that role. I've never met a guy who is more organized. Leadership is his calling."

While the other three Red Sox coaches since the team's return in 2005 have come from the U.S., where they are closer to American players, Eiswirth said it was time to go local.

"People know how summer leagues work," said Cherepuschak, who has two young sons, Tyan and Kael, with wife Natasha. "When you call a player, they're not surprised like, 'What? There's summer leagues?' I trust the coaches I know down there. They know what type of person I am and they can say if a guy is the guy I need or not."

Many of those players will say Cherepuschak is the guy the Red Sox need, too.

"He takes a great deal of pride in the team on and off the field and really wants to turn these players into better men," said Simon. "There isn't a better guy for it."

LANDLORD VS. TENANT

Pats, Evraz Place mending fences

By GREG HARDER
Leader-Post

Some of the aging facilities at Evraz Place weren't the only thing on the property in desperate need of repair.

The same goes for the fractured landlord-tenant relationship between Evraz Place and the WHL's Regina Pats. However, after years of neglect, there are signs of progress on that front as well.

"Certainly in the past year I think we've been able to make big improvements in the working relationship," said Evraz Place president and CEO Mark Allan. "When the relationships are less adversarial, more collaborative, you can usually accomplish more. That's always the relationship I've been interested in having."

"The Pats have had some challenges here on the property over the years and I respect that but since I've been here (in 2003) we've worked hard at making a difference. I think they can see that now and they've been very supportive of what we've been doing."

For good reason. The Pats, who've long stated that the Brandt Centre has the potential to be a great junior hockey facility, will be one of the main beneficiaries of the renovations.

"We've had some differences in the past," Pats owner Russ Parker said this spring. "It was frustrating and I'm sure they would tell you the same from their point of view. But we have worked through a lot of issues and I would say the relationship has never been better than it is right now. I feel good about that."

"I feel the people who run the building want to work with us and they have been. They recognize improvements were necessary for the growth of the park in general. When the work is completed we will certainly have an outstanding junior hockey building. I see a lot of positives going forward."

Not long ago, the outlook wasn't so bright.

Many years of reluctant co-existence eventually degraded into a bitter feud that came to a head during lease negotiations last year. The situation deteriorated to a point where the Pats' brass openly floated the idea of selling the team — or even relocating it.

WHL commissioner Ron Robison eventually stepped in to mediate the dispute, which concluded with the sides reaching an understanding.

"It comes down, quite frankly, to a little bit more respect on both sides of the equation, an appreciation of the great work that is being done with respect to enhancing the facility by Evraz Place, combined with more attention being placed on the needs of the major tenant," said Robison.

"We feel very strongly that in order for any Western Hockey League club to be successful you need to have a very positive partnership with the facility in which you're operating. I believe we're heading in that direction. There's reason for optimism. The issues of the past, I believe, have been addressed and we need now to move on in a much more positive manner."

Allan agreed.

Regina's Changing Sporting Landscape
EVRAZplace
A Leader-Post six-part series



Parker

Allan

"For both parties, when you don't get along and you're having to live under the same roof, sure it's frustrating for both sides, but it usually boils down to a communication problem as opposed to anything else," noted Allan. "(When you communicate) the irritants get removed before they're an irritant."

"It's normal in a building like this that has multiple uses and multiple kinds of events in it that you're going to bump into scheduling issues. There's so much give and take required. The major benefit of the good relationship is there's more forward thinking and planning going into how we deliver the facility and our events and their events together in the same building."

Although the Pats, as the arena's major tenant, have expressed in the past that they didn't always feel their business was appreciated, Allan insists that's not the case.

"They've been here forever, 90 years," he noted. "Absolutely they're important. Some of our clients lately that have been long-term clients like the Pats or even Canadian Western Agribition may misinterpret what we're doing here as not viewing them as important. All our clients are important but my job is to have a full book of business, not just one happy client."

"As we become busier we've had to pay time and attention and put resources to other clients as well. In some respects we probably haven't spent as much time and attention servicing those (long-term) clients because we sometimes over time have taken them for granted. We don't take them for granted. I don't take them for granted. I think where we're at today is a pretty good place with the group."

That's not to say the train will necessarily stay on track.

"It can slip off," cautioned Allan. "It can slip off quite easily. We both have fairly large organizations, the Pats and our own. Relationships that get frayed over time take a while to heal but the best way to move forward is to make incremental progress. You don't turn the Queen Mary around with a life raft."

QUOTABLE

“ Relationships that get frayed over time take a while to heal but the best way to move forward is to make incremental progress.”

Mark Allan, Evraz Place CEO

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