

Interview With Shawn Smith, General Manager of the Lowell Spinners

Patrick McAvoy and Taesoo Ahn

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Shawn H. Smith is the General Manager of the Lowell Spinners, the only Minor League Baseball team in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Shawn joined the Spinners in the spring of 2016. Before the Lowell Spinners, he served 7 years as the vice president and chief marketing officer of the National Basketball Association (NBA) Development League, the official minor league system of the NBA. He also spent 2 years with the NBA as a vice president in its lauded Team Marketing and Business Operations (TMBO) division, advising NBA, WNBA, and NBA Development League teams on how to grow all business aspects of their operations. Shawn earned his master's degree from Syracuse University's prestigious Newhouse School and received his undergraduate degree from Purdue University.

Taesoo Ahn: Can you explain your daily routine, differentiating between the regular season and the off-season?

Shawn Smith: My role as the general manager of the organization features two different jobs within the job, that is, the in-season role and the out-of-season role. So the in-season role is when the games actually start, which is roughly a 3-and-a-half-month job. And the rest of the calendar year is doing what we need to do to prepare for the season, so we're always working, just sometimes longer hours. In the out-of-season role, we're selling tickets, group tickets, packages, catering events, season tickets, planning promotions for the upcoming year, a lot of administrative responsibilities, always revamping how we can be a little smarter with our money, always evaluating the vendors we work with and the insurances we have. In-season we have a lot of those same responsibilities, just a different level of activation. The activation is really bringing it all to life for our fans and bringing it all to life for the Boston Red Sox. My role is not to determine who plays or gets promoted—I look at my role as a father. These players are young enough to be my kids and I try to treat them as such in a fatherly way to make sure that they are well fed, in good health and good spirits to be able to do their jobs. We believe in serving the Boston Red Sox from an administrative and developmental standpoint and we've had well over 100 players go on and play for different Major League Baseball organizations.

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Shawn Smith — General manager of the Lowell Spinners.

Patrick McAvoy: You've been the president and general manager since 2016, but also served in the same role at different organizations from 1996 to 2006. How did you get started in the position, and what has been the biggest challenge?

Shawn Smith: I've been working in professional sports for over 26 years. I started working in athletics as an academic tutor for the football team at Purdue when I finish playing baseball there. I also volunteered time in the athletic department when I was in graduate school at the Newhouse School at Syracuse University. The big takeaway from that is that if you think you want to get involved in the sport industry as a career, you have the opportunity while you're in college to get engaged with the resources you have available to you. I was introduced to someone in the Houston Astros organization and had the opportunity to work in Minor League Baseball. I started as a general manager at 23 years old, and that started a long career from Auburn, NY, that led me here to the Lowell Spinners and over the years was a part of five stadium projects, four new stadiums, and one reconstruction. Then I got a chance to work for the NBA in New York City for 9 years. I ran the business side of what was then called the NBA Development League and is now called the NBA Gatorade League. It was like a traditional Minor League Baseball model where the teams were owned by independent owners and they partnered with an NBA parent club who handled all basketball operations. And then when the NBA changed its structure in 2016, I had the opportunity to do some of my own consulting working with a few restaurant organizations and Minor League Baseball teams. When the Spinners were being sold in 2016, I took a consulting job overseeing the merger and acquisition by Dave Heller of Mainstreet