



Gary SouthShore RailCats

Press Release

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Tagert coaching web stretching wider and wider across MLB & MiLB

GARY, IND. — Independent baseball provides a lot of different avenues for those in the industry. Whether you're an umpire, player, coach, general manager or groundskeeper, etc. — one similarity exists, you're in a profession that doesn't really compare to any other industry.

New American Association Commissioner Joshua Schaub recently penned a letter to fans of independent baseball. In it, he lays out why the American Association is the premier independent league in North America.

"Independent baseball, including here in the American Association, is where players keep their dreams alive," said Schaub. "Many of our players have been with Major League organizations yet were let go because someone deemed them 'not a big leaguer.' Others are college players who were never drafted. But they all believe they have the talent and drive to make it to 'The Show.' Each year dozens of our players are sold to Major League organizations, and this spring eight former American Association players were on the Opening Day rosters of Major League teams. Thus, the American Association has proven, and will continue to prove, that big league talent exists in our league."

The most prominent promotions are for the players, however, they're not the only ones receiving them. Especially in the Gary SouthShore RailCats organization. In fact, it's the coaches.

The RailCats currently have three coaches in the Major Leagues (Anthony Iapoce, Chicago Cubs Hitting Coach; Andy Haines, Milwaukee Brewers Hitting Coach; Jose Yopez, Atlanta Braves Bullpen Catcher) and now have nine coaches in MiLB (Josh Conway, Development Coach, Baltimore Orioles; Jaime Del Valle, Dominican Summer League Diamondbacks Manager, Arizona Diamondbacks; Mike Habas, Dominican Summer League Brewers Hitting Coach, Milwaukee Brewers; Kyle Haines, Director of Player Development, San Francisco Giants; K.C. Judge, Missoula Osprey Hitting Coach, Arizona Diamondbacks; John Kovalik, Tri-City ValleyCats Pitching Coach, Houston Astros; Ari Ronick, Everett AquaSox Pitching Coach, Seattle Mariners; Brendan Segara, Pitching Coordinator, Chicago Cubs; Bobby Spain, Arizona League Brewers Gold Hitting Coach, Milwaukee Brewers). And each current coach either played or coached under RailCats manager Greg Tagert.

Iapoce concluded his 11-year playing career with Gary on the 2005 Northern League Championship Team before beginning his coaching career with the Jamestown Jammers (Florida Marlins Class-A Short Season Affiliate) of the New York-Penn League in 2006. Iapoce served as a hitting coach in the Marlins minor leagues system for three more seasons before becoming the Toronto Blue Jays Rover Minor League Hitting Coach in 2010. After a two-year hiatus from professional baseball, Iapoce served as a special assistant to Cubs General Manager Jed Hoyer for three years before returning to the dugout as the Texas Rangers Hitting Coach from 2016-2018.

"He's been a huge influence on me as far as being so far ahead of the game," said Iapoce. "First and foremost, he's an unbelievable evaluator of players and what it takes to win and create a culture. Being around him in 2005, things that were supposedly unconventional that are now conventional in today's game, Tags was doing back then."

Haines got his start at the pro ranks in 2005 as the RailCats hitting coach before being named the manager for the Windy City Thunderbolts of the Frontier League in 2007. Haines moved up to organizational ball in 2008, serving as the hitting coach for the Miami Marlins Gulf Coast League Affiliate (Rookie Ball) before serving as a manager in the Marlins minor league system for the next seven years. In 2016, Haines was named the Minor League Hitting Instructor for the Chicago Cubs before being promoted in 2017 to Assistant Hitting Coach. In 2018, Haines left the Cubs to join the Brewers as the team's hitting coach and has been there since.

"One of the best coaching experiences I've had in my career was my time spent with Greg Tagert and the RailCats during the 2005 and 2006 seasons," said Haines. "From the 2005 magical season culminating in a championship to a heartbreaking playoff loss in 2006, so many experiences of those seasons shaped who I am as a coach today. Working with so many front office employees and game day staff, an exceptional coaching staff and just a special group of players that we had there is a testament to Greg and the RailCats organization. My time with the RailCats and learning under a manager as special as Greg Tagert is something I cherish deeply."

Yopez played for the RailCats in 2005, had his contract purchased by the Seattle Mariners in 2006 before getting released by the Mariners during spring training. Yopez then returned to Gary in 2007 before having his contract purchased by Seattle for a second time following the 2007 campaign. Even though Yopez never played in an MLB game, he was on the Mariners 25-man active roster in 2011 from June 29-July 6. Yopez concluded his 15-year playing career in 2015 before being named the Braves Bullpen catcher in May of 2016.

In Independent Baseball, a manager's primary objective is to win. But for Tagert, it's not just about winning. He's also about helping players advance their careers, and for those interested in coaching, helping them get their start and reach the apex of the industry.

"At the end of the day, we're about the RailCats, we're about The Region, we're about being the best we can be in every aspect, but it's always nice to see the opportunities presented to the players and coaches," said Tagert. "The one thing all these guys share is not only were they outstanding at their jobs, they're great people too."

You can argue no one across Independent Baseball has been more successful than Tagert. He's been a pro manager for 25 years (15 with Gary), has won three league championships (all with Gary), is a four-time league Manager of the Year (three with Gary), has helped advance 24 former RailCats to affiliated baseball, has helped advance over 20 coaches to the affiliated ranks and currently has three former coaches managing in independent baseball (Jamie Bennett, Schaumburg Boomers of the Frontier League; Dennis Pelfrey, Florence Freedom of the Frontier League; Pascual Santiago, Old Orchard Beach Surge of the Empire League). Left-handed pitcher Tim Byrdak and outfielder Nathan Haynes even made it to "The Show".

"It's not even close, number one," said Iapoce. "He's [Greg Tagert] number one. If Tags was in an organization or if it was something he wanted to pursue, I think he'd be in the Big Leagues as a coach or manager."

Byrdak pitched for the RailCats in 2003 before having his contract purchased by the San Diego Padres later in the season, and proceeded to pitch in the Major Leagues from 2005-2013 for the Baltimore Orioles, Detroit Tigers, Houston Astros and New York Mets. Haynes played for the RailCats in 2006 before having his contract purchased by the Los Angeles Angels later in the season, and played in the MLB for the Angels and Tampa Bay Rays from 2007-2008.

But again, in a sport that's primary focus is on the players, it's the RailCats coaches catching eyes and making headlines across the American Association and all of Independent Professional Baseball.

"There's not another coaching web similar to it in independent baseball," said Tagert. "With Andy [Haines] and Anthony [Iapoce] coaching at the highest level, Jamie [Bennett] and Dennis [Pelfrey] managing clubs very successfully, and of course what the other guys are doing."

Gary opens the 2019 regular season on Friday, May 17 in Rosemont, Ill., against the Chicago Dogs at Impact Field. The RailCats home opener at U.S. Steel Yard is on Tuesday, May 21 vs. the Sioux City Explorers. Tuesday's home opener features a free magnet schedule giveaway, presented by Northwest Indiana Orthopedic and Spine Center at Methodist Hospitals, and Post-Game Fireworks. Tuesday's home opener is also Gary Community Night, presented by Fifth Third Bank, and is the first Taco Tuesday and Community HealthNet Health Centers Tuesday of the season.

Ticket packages for the 2019 Gary SouthShore RailCats season are available online at railcatsbaseball.com and can also be purchased by calling the RailCats ticket line at (219) 882-BALL. The RailCats box office is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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