

BRIAN SNITKER



PICTURED: AFTER OPENING THE SEASON WITH GWINNETT, SNITKER WAS PROMOTED TO MANAGE ATLANTA ON MAY 17, 2016. (LEFT: CHRIS ROUGHGARDEN / GWINNETT BRAVES, RIGHT: ISAAC GREEN / ATLANTA BRAVES)

SNITKER REFLECTS ON HIS UNLIKELY JOURNEY FROM TRIPLE-A GWINNETT TO THE MAJORS.

By Dave Lezotte

Brian Snitker entered the 2016 season as the third-year manager of the Triple-A Gwinnett Braves. On May 17, he received the call-up of a lifetime as the Atlanta Braves promoted him to interim manager.

After leading Atlanta to a 59-65 record following a 9-28 start, Snitker had his “interim” tag removed by the Braves in October. He enters his first full season as a Major League manager in 2017.

Dave Lezotte of *Tomahawk Talk* caught up with Snitker this spring to talk about his unexpected rise.

DL: When I first interviewed you in 2014, we talked about your dreams of getting back to the Majors and managing. Did you ever think, especially after 40-plus years, that you’d finally get this opportunity?

BS: No, I didn’t. And I wasn’t looking for it, it was just something that kind of happened. Now I’m glad it did. It been fun, it’s been a great challenge. It’s great to get to experience this job from my view. After all the years of coaching third and seeing what (managers) go through, then going back to manage Gwinnett, and I just figured, “Well you know, I’m pretty good where I’m at.” Then when the Braves called, it’s like, “Yeah, I’ll do it.”

DL: Prior to managing Atlanta, you’ve been a minor league player, minor league coach, minor league manager and Major League coach for four decades with the Braves organization. With a lot of teams hiring younger managers in recent seasons, is your path unique?

BS: Yeah it is. I’m proud of the fact that I’ve been with the same organization for over 40 years. I have a lot invested here. I feel blessed to have this opportunity. The trend is to go to the younger guys that are more (focused on) stats and all those numbers, a little more computer savvy. For me, this is prob-

ably a good time in my life to tackle this.

DL: After serving as Atlanta’s third base coach from 2007-13, you accepted an assignment to return to the minors and manage Gwinnett in 2014. Reflecting on that decision, what role did it play in getting you back to the Majors?

BS: I think if I had opted to go somewhere else, obviously, I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you. It’s kind of funny how things happen, they have a way of happening for the best. I assessed the situation back for the 2014 season and I had too much invested in this organization to go and leave. I’m at the back end of my career, not the front end. My family was in Atlanta. It turned out to be the best decision, and the right one. I’m very happy that I did.

DL: When the Braves promoted you on May 17, you had to leave the G-Braves only 39 games into the season. Was it difficult to leave the players behind?

BS: It was, because it was a great

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clubhouse of guys. They were going to be a fun group to be around all year. Quite honestly, those guys probably couldn't have been happier for me. That made me feel good that they were behind me. I got texts from all of them over the first three days. Everybody was pulling for me. All the well-wishes made me feel good in taking this job and leaving.

DL: G-Braves' pitching coach Marty Reed came with you to Atlanta and became the Braves bullpen coach. Was it special to be able to have him on your Major League staff?

BS: Yeah, it was. We've become very close over the years and have a great working relationship. He's been instrumental in a lot that we've done here in this organization. He came up here and did a great job. He's a great resource for our pitching coach and does a great job in the bullpen. The guys respect him; he's had the majority of them (in the minors). He's a really good baseball guy and very good pitching instructor.

DL: Hitting coach John Moses eventually took over as Gwinnett's manager last year and led the club to the playoffs. What did you think about the job he did?

BS: I thought he did a great job. I talked to him and stayed in contact with him just like I have in the past as a Triple-A manager with all the managers up here. Players would come up saying they had a great time (in Gwinnett). He did a great

job for the organization and I'm really glad that he's back.

DL: In Gwinnett, you were preparing players for the Majors. Now with Atlanta, you're receiving players from the G-Braves. What is it like being on the other side of those promotions?

BS: You know that these guys are going to be well prepared and ready to go, because of the staff that we have (in Gwinnett). Damon Berryhill and Reid Cornelius are going to take the new manager and pitching coach job there, and these guys have been around a long time. Very good baseball men. We know that when we call players up, they're going to be ready to go.

DL: What is the biggest difference between managing in the Majors vs. managing in Triple-A?

BS: It's just the routine, learning how to do it. Your days are longer, they start earlier. You're involved with everything. Bobby Cox told me, until you go around the league a few times, it'll be tough. Once you learn the league, you get a feel for how other managers are going to do things and what they're thinking. You get more familiar with the rosters of the other clubs. You just have to play the games in order for that experience to come about. Just that day-in, day-out routine is the biggest adjustment I've found I've had to make.

DL: This year, the Braves have the No. 1 farm system in baseball as rated by both *Baseball*

***America* and *MLB.com*. What does that say about the job John Hart (President of Baseball Operations), John Coppolella (General Manager) and the Baseball Operations staff has done?**

BS: They've done a spectacular job. I didn't realize until I went back to the minor leagues as a manager in Triple-A in 2014 that (the system) had been depleted, that we didn't have the players that we used to. That was always a strength of this organization, the fact that we had our players to call up when you needed some. We had kind of gotten away from it. I thought they did a remarkable job over the course of that year, through trades and acquisitions, restocking the minor leagues. Now you get Brian Bridges (Director of Scouting) and Roy Clark (Special Assistant to the GM) back in the mix, those guys are tireless workers. It's just amazing the passion and energy they have for this job, and it's showing in the drafts that we're getting. We're getting there – we're not there yet, but we're getting there.

DL: While the Braves are headed for a bright future, you have a good mix of veterans and young stars in Atlanta right now. Do you like how this club is coming together for 2017?

BS: Yeah we do. We like our club. We like where we're at, we liked how we finished last year. We think we're going to be very competitive. I think, to a man, everybody's ready to go.

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