

Paul Molitor still loves the game

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 13 January 2015 19:56 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2015 20:05



Paul Molitor fell in love with the game of baseball when he was 5 or 6 years old.

As soon as the snow would melt in St. Paul, Minn., he'd grab his bat and baseball and head outside with his dad.

And if his beloved Minnesota Twins were on TV, he'd sit glued to the set and watch all the action. This was back in the early 1960's, when the Twins had some good teams.

"Growing up in St. Paul, I liked all sports," Molitor said Tuesday before the Kernels Hot Stove Banquet and Twins Winter Caravan in Cedar Rapids. "There wasn't a lot of television back then. I think the Twins broadcast like 50 games a year.

"But it was as much as I could absorb from the Twins in the '60's, what with Harmon Killebrew and Tony Oliva and Camilo Pasqual and Zoilo Versalles. It was something I was drawn to. I was kind of consumed by the game."

Molitor's early love of the game led to a Hall of Fame career with the Milwaukee Brewers,

Paul Molitor still loves the game

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 13 January 2015 19:56 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2015 20:05

Toronto Blue Jays and finally the Twins at the end of his career that produced 3,319 hits, the 10th most in Major League history.

Molitor, 58, still loves the game and he's got a brand-new job as the new manager of the Twins, hired this past November to get the club turned around and headed in the right direction again.

"It's obviously very exciting for me," he said. "It's been just about two months. I've enjoyed the ride so far. We've been busy putting together a staff. It took the better part of a month.

"And the past few weeks or so I've really been concentrating on spring training, to get a good feel of the roster as well as the plan I want to put in place when I get down there.

"For me, managing is always something I thought about," he said. "I tried coaching, a little bit of broadcasting, player development. It just never seemed like the time was right or the situation was right (to become a manager).

"When the opportunity came around this time, I kind of felt like if I missed this one I might never get another opportunity."

Molitor said he learned a lot about the game from his managers in the big leagues. George Bamberger and Harvey Kuenn were old school "happy go lucky" guys who got their teams to play hard, have fun and show up on time.

"They let the players play," he said.

Paul Molitor still loves the game

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 13 January 2015 19:56 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2015 20:05

Tom Trebelhorn and Phil Garner stressed being aggressive on offense and base-running. Cito Gaston showed him how a manager could truly respect his players. Tom Kelly taught him some of the intricate details of the game.

"It's a combination," he said.

Molitor is only the fourth Hall of Fame player to become a Major League manager in the last 25 years, joining Tony Perez, Frank Robinson and Ryne Sandberg. There's a school of thought that star players do not become good managers, because they cannot watch players with lesser talent.

"That's not really true for me," said Molitor. "I've been able to separate whatever I did as a player from coaching. It's a totally different dynamic.

"I think people who have come through the gates of Cooperstown have found a lot of other things to do."

Molitor was a coach for the Twins last year and likes his club heading into the 2015 campaign. He thinks effective leadership can bring out the best in people, something he'll try to accomplish this year.

"I certainly believe in the game today you can dramatically turn around your wins and losses if you get things rolling in the right direction," he said. "I'm feeling it's going to be good. I like what I saw last year, I like what we've done this year.

"I can't predict any wins and losses, but I just know it will be a competitive team."

Paul Molitor still loves the game

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 13 January 2015 19:56 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2015 20:05

Molitor likes what he's seen of the Twins' minor league prospects, including former Cedar Rapids Kernels superstar Byron Buxton.

"I still smile when I hear that name," he said. "I wouldn't be surprised if he gets up there (to Minnesota) this year.

"I have my job with whatever 25 guys I'm going up north with," he said. "I'm glad we have good prospects in our system. You're excited when you have someone like that in the system."

Molitor was the third overall pick in the 1977 draft by the Milwaukee Brewers. He made his pro debut that season with Burlington in the Midwest League and remembers his first at-bat.

"My recollection is, I got drilled," he said with a grin. "Someone told me it was kind of a rite of passage. When you come into the league, you're going to be hit. They forgot to tell me beforehand, but that's what I remember about my first at-bat in Burlington."