



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

May 23, 2023

2022-2023 Board Members

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DAN'S THE MAN

**Dan Rajkowski,
COO, Charlotte Knights**

by **Marilynn Bowler**

For the best view of uptown Charlotte, Truist Field is the place to see it. And, for the fun of being in crowded outdoor stands cheering wildly and enjoying the best, juicy hot dogs, ice cold beer and the antics of HOMER, a Charlotte Knights game is for you.

When we think about top management within the realm of professional sports we sometimes think of adjectives like aloof, stern, or out-of-touch with fans. But today's Charlotte Rotary speaker was engaging, informative, interesting, and connected immediately with our Rotary audience.

Dan Rajkowski is the Chief Operating Officer for the Charlotte Knights and has actually been employed by Knights owner, Don Beaver, for over three decades as a manager and a guru of how to draw fans to Charlotte's superb minor league baseball team at Truist Field in uptown Charlotte. There is, however, nothing "minor league" about Dan. With his dry wit, Dan began his remarks citing a story that happened to him at the Toronto All-Star Game in 1991 during his early baseball-managing career and --- spoiler alert --- he was amidst star players who were fan favorites. With all the hoopla and fanfare with fans who were celebrating by calling out to well-known players with whom he was running, Dan was identified by one bystander (who pointed him out but didn't recognize him) as "He's nobody" ... which has been a source of laughter ever since. In Dan's words, "That was humbling."

His follow-up story involved his days as General Manager of the Knoxville Smokies (a Class AA team for the Blue Jays) when a visiting player ran onto the field during a rain delay and slid over the tarp which could have had serious physical and financial repercussions. When Dan strode to the

visitors' dugout to ask why the player would do such a thing, the player confided that someone had paid him \$100 to do it. And that someone, it turned out, was Michael Jordan. Dan's quote to us: "So I had the best player ever in the NBA and now a billionaire owner pay an opposing player to slide on my expensive and hard-to-replace tarp. I don't know if Michael remembers that but I sure do."

Dan then segued into the business and the fun of building the Charlotte Knights and its impact in our city. Dan and his staff have presented amazing special attractions at Knights games and at Truist Field, itself. In addition to baseball games, things like college games and festivals; a skating rink and the LIGHT THE NIGHTS CHRISTMAS VILLAGE. They've had wedding receptions and graduations and even dance recitals at Truist Field. Now they've introduced us to the exciting new Paper Mill Pub which salutes the heritage of the old Virginia paper mill of yore and the team has a new, updated logo and colors. All of which have come under Dan's tutelage.

Last year there were 198 special events at the home of the Charlotte Knights. Dan shared some amazing stats: the Knights have drawn over 4.6 million visitors over the past eight seasons ... and this season isn't even over yet! If you attend a Knights game you won't be alone. Average attendance is 7,000 per game. That number puts our minor league baseball team within the top five in the country. Quite an accomplishment.

There's more to come at Truist Field including the Charlotte Checkers Hockey Game to be played at Knights Castle and the "Pitch Clock" which will speed up the game.

Great job, Dan! Don Beaver knew what he was doing when he put you in charge. Now let's see how many of our Charlotte Rotary members will gather to cheer on the Charlotte Knights at Truist Field on August 10th. Sign up now!

Among his accolades, Dan has been named International League's Executive Of The Year, and Executive Of The Year by Ballpark Digest along with numerous other awards. He also shares his experience and knowledge with our community by serving on a number of Boards and committees.

Dan, you're clearly no longer a "Nobody."

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/829890317>
The program introduction begins at 18:00 minutes.