

## Front-office changes for Cubs are trickling down to the Chiefs

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The cultural change in the Chicago Cubs is starting from the bottom up, beginning in the team's farm system.

That was the mission handed down from chairman Tom Ricketts last year, when changes made at the top of the baseball operations department resulted in the hiring of Theo Epstein, Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod to remake the franchise.

"In order to have success, the foundation has to be made through scouting and player development. All three of us believe that wholeheartedly," Hoyer, the new general manager, said when he was

introduced on Nov. 1.

"There's nothing better than to watch (a player) get signed, go to Peoria, Daytona, Tennessee and Iowa and then make his debut. I look forward to building that here, that's the key to building the whole operation."

Epstein sits at the top of the executive triumvirate, over Hoyer and McLeod, the senior vice president, scouting and player development.

McLeod's department includes vice president of player personnel Oneri Fleita and director of amateur scouting Tim Wilken, both of whom were retained even before Epstein's hire.

But even with additional layers of brass, little has changed.

"I can't point at any thing different, it's just a different line of communication," Fleita said. "Other than that, it's business as usual. We're doing what we do as we would any other year."

Fleita will continue to oversee the everyday operations of the minor league system, while Wilken's focus shifts solely to the June draft as opposed to running both the amateur and pro scouting departments.

"I look at myself as seeing more of the big picture, macro-managing," McLeod said. "Then Oneri and Tim will be micro-managing, I don't mean that in the bad way, but in handling the day-to-day."

McLeod, who like Hoyer came to the Cubs from the San Diego Padres, is still settling in to his new position and learning about the players in the system.

"(It's) not really too in depth because I wasn't on the pro-scouting side (in San Diego)," McLeod said. "It's more of a general feel from reading Baseball Prospectus and Baseball America. I won't really know too much until we get to spring training."

Much of the field staff remained in the organization, although some are in different roles.

"As we're working more and more, we realize the philosophy is very similar," Fleita said. "We had the guys in place, it was just putting pieces in new spots."

The Cubs hired Brandon Hyde as the minor-league field coordinator from the Marlins organization. Dave Bialas, who previously held that position, is managing Triple-A Iowa.

Also, James Rowson was brought in as the hitting coordinator from the Yankees, with Tom Beyers shifting to the newly created position of short-season hitting coordinator.

The Cubs' new regime has created one noticeable difference for the Peoria Chiefs — there may be more of an opportunity for players to stick with the team for a full season.

In the past two seasons, the Padres' Midwest League affiliate in Fort Wayne had a combined 12 position players play 100 or more games in a season.

The Chiefs, meanwhile, had only seven.

"The players tell us when they are ready. We're certainly not going to move them until we know they can hit," McLeod said. "It's not just the performance numbers, but how they command the strike zone and how they approach at-bats."

It doesn't matter how young the players are, either.

Some organizations err on the side of caution, with the Cubs having been one of them, in regards to players drafted out of high school. The last high school player taken the previous June to play for the Chiefs at the start of the next season was Ryan Acosta

in 2008.

If 2011 draft picks like shortstop Javier Baez and first baseman Dan Vogelbach prove enough to earn a shot in the full-season Midwest League coming out of spring training, they will get it.

“We want to make sure we protect the investment (in them), but there’s a difference in protecting them and babying them.” McLeod said. “We want to put those players in a position where they can be successful.”

More importantly, because some of the changes have been subtle, is the organization’s different attitude since Epstein was hired in mid-October.

Returning Chiefs manager Casey Kopitzke was working with prospects in the fall Instructional League when Epstein was hired.

“It happened so late and everything is still sorting itself out,” Kopitzke said, “but you can sense a feeling of change.”

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