

Giants Coach Wotus Relishes Visit To Islanders Field

Popular 'Wo' and Bay Area media celebrity Marty Lurie ambassadors for new ballpark in River Islands master-planned community

Matt Schwab, Community Contributor

San Francisco Giants third base coach Ron Wotus stopped by the River Islands community this week to renew acquaintances and get another look at Islanders Field, next to the San Joaquin River.

The ballpark, which resembles a "Field of Dreams" when illuminated in a scenic tapestry, has quickly become a hotspot for amateur baseball showcases since opening in May 2019. The setting taps into Wotus' love of the game.

"It brings you back to your youth when a game was a game and you played it for fun," Wotus says.

The highly respected Wotus recently announced he will be returning for his 34th season in the Giants organization, and the 24th season at the major league level. The franchise celebrated three World Series championships with 'Wo' on board.

"I'm grateful and honored to be back again," Wotus said of the news. "I appreciate the fact that I have experience that I can offer to the other coaches and obviously to the players that I've been around, the (Brandon) Crawford and the (Brandon) Belts, and we've won World Series together."

Clearly, Islanders Field site director Don Johns has some heavy hitters in his lineup. Wotus and Marty Lurie, the popular host of Giants' talk shows on KNBR, are River Islands ambassadors.

"He has a terrific personality with fans," Johns said of Wotus. "There are a lot of Giants fans in our office at River Islands, so he and Marty, when they have time, they always come out. Ron has been to all our Christmas parties. They wear those championship rings. Everybody comes up: They want to see the rings, right?"

Wotus, a Connecticut native, is the longest-tenured coach in San Francisco Giants history. Last season he was credited with playing a vital role on new Giants manager Gabe Kapler's staff. Wotus remains the last coaching conduit to the team's storied Bruce Bochy era.

"I've been very fortunate," Wotus said of the big picture. "I was fortunate in a lot of ways, not only to work with Dusty (Baker) and Bochy and Felipe (Alou), but it started before that having coaches and working with people that made me better. You learn from everybody around ... The players make you successful. I've been working under three Hall of Fame (caliber) managers, but

the players have to perform for everybody to maintain their jobs and be Hall of Famers, so there's a lot of people that have helped my good fortune along the way."

His current goal, of course, is to start winning championships under Kapler.

"I'm hoping that Kap's going to be a Hall of Fame manager too," Wotus said in his upbeat tone. "I hope he has that in the cards for him because that means we're gonna have some real success here coming up and that's what we all want. Kapler wants it, the coaching staff, myself, the fans, the organization, and that's what it's all about. It's all about winning in professional sports."

AMATEUR BASEBALL ROOTS

On the developmental side, Wotus and former pro players Erik Johnson and Joe Millette once teamed on clinics for Little League coaches with All Pro Baseball. This connected them with Johns, former president of San Ramon Valley Little League who heads of the highly regarded Danville HOOTS baseball club, founded in 1991. The 2017 HOOTS team was the Connie Mack World Series national runner-up.

Consider Johns and Wotus kindred baseball spirits.

"The one thing about Ron is he's not been just a big league coach," Johns said. "He's been heavily engaged in amateur baseball going back a long time when I first met him in Danville. He's a Major League Baseball guy, but he's a baseball guy. That's really important and why it's a terrific relationship for Islanders Field and the River Islands community. ... I know players that have played for him, like (former San Ramon Valley High star) Nate Schierholtz who played for me, and they love the guy."

Clearly, Wotus enjoys talking baseball and working with young players, helping them move toward their goals.

"In professional sports sometimes you get jaded or disgruntled about the business side of baseball," he says. "It's still the same game but there's a lot of differences. When you go back and you work with Little Leaguers or high school players that have their whole baseball future ahead of them and they want to play in college or they want to play in pro ball, it reinvigorates you because that's what it's all about. I coach because I love baseball and I see that passion in the players when they're younger, and sometimes we lose that perspective.

"It's always a joy for me to relive my past and remember just who I am and where I came from and why I do what I do," he continued. "Being around youth sports shows us a lot of values that we need to keep in our professional careers."

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

Lurie's deep connection with baseball also shows through on the air.

"He is different than most talk-show hosts you hear on the air," Wotus says of Lurie. "It's not about stirring it up or sensationalism to get listeners; it's truly about baseball and the human interest stories of the players and the people in the game and the history of the game. I think he brings that to the Bay Area better than anybody."

Lurie also brings a sense of baseball purity with his interest in Islanders Field.

"He's not going to get involved in something unless he really cares about it," Wotus says. "So it's genuine. That's what you love to see."

A BASEBALL HOTSPOT

Johns' calendar is quickly filling up for 2021 at Islanders Field.

"I'm working with national programs that are now affiliated with Major League Baseball," Johns says proudly. "One of them is Prep Baseball Report, so when they do their model testing on players' abilities at PBR, they've used our facility consistently since we've opened. ... Everybody wants to play at a great venue that's managed professionally, and that's what we've done and I think you'll hear that from everybody."

"It's an investment on the part of The Cambay Group and the River Islands community, and the reason they come back is because it is a good experience, and to me that's what we're doing, we're providing a great experience."