



An Extended Conversation With Girsch

by Brian Stull

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Finishing up his first week as Vice President/General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, Michael Girsch dialed into St. Louis Baseball Weekly to discuss a variety of topics, including his communication this week and relationships with other General Managers around the game.

“The relationships that Mo and I have with various teams, we’re not going to start from scratch just because of the title change,” said Girsch. “There are GMs that have been around a long time that Mo has had relationships for 15-20 years because they grew up in the game together, they became GMs together—we’re not all of sudden going to be like, now I have to develop my own relationship with Brian Cashman because Mo’s not allowed to talk to him anymore. That’d be silly, right? For the most part, the teams that Mo’s had long-standing relationships with, he’s going to still be the contact for, at least in the short term.

“In the past, the teams that neither one of us had a good relationship, Mo would just do it because he was the GM. And now, where neither of us have a particularly great relationship, I’ll probably be the one who takes point on it. It means we go from 2/3-1/3 Mo to 2/3-1/3 Girsch, it’s not a dramatic difference.”

Noting that teams are gaining definition in terms of becoming buyers or sellers, Girsch said that teams are still in no hurry to make a trade before they have to. The Cardinals will obviously have their own decisions to make—some before the trade deadline as players return from the disabled list.

For example, when Kolten Wong returns where and how do the Cardinals find a balance to keep Luke Voit in the lineup?

“The cliché answer is, these things have a way of working themselves out,” said Girsch. “We’ll sort of see how it plays out over the next few days as Wong finishes his rehab and we head into the All-Star break. But yeah, if you’re going to have a problem, the problem of having too many players that you want in the lineup is far better than the alternative.

“Mike will keep doing what he does to move guys around—it’ll frustrate people who say we don’t play the same lineup enough. Then we’ll play the same lineup two days in a row and it will frustrate people that we are not playing the hot hand enough. There is no particular formula. Mike and his staff, with help from our analyst guys, try to figure out what the optimal lineup is each day and try our best to get the guys in a position to succeed.”

From an analytical standpoint, where do the Cardinals see the optimal defensive fit for Matt Carpenter?

“I think in all those sorts of situations, those sorts of questions—the key is, what’s your alternative?,” said Girsch, who used the last few games as an example. “The math is, organizationally, we believe that Voit’s bat is more valuable than Mejia’s. Or organizationally, we believe Mejia’s glove is more valuable than Voit’s. How much more valuable are each of those than each other? And that depends on the particulars of the situation. I don’t think saying, ‘Carp fits perfectly at this spot’, well, it depends on who else can play that spot? Who can play the one he’s leaving? We’re lucky that Carp’s willing to bounce around if he needs to and that adds some flexibility for us to try and get the ideal mix of offense and defense out there each game.

“Look, we’re never going to be perfect. We might believe the defensive downgrade is worth it in this case, and if that missed play or that just pass a diving guy who’s not playing a position he normally plays ends up costing us a bunch of runs, then we look silly. If the guy—if Voit keeps hitting home runs, then we say yeah, we can live with an extra out here or there every now and again. That’s the trade off we’re trying to make.”

The decision will be similar with Dexter Fowler and the outfield when he returns—will it be in centerfield?

“It’s one of those things, I think all the players will be mildly frustrated,” said Girsch. “They’re all going to want to play everyday and we’re probably going to be playing the hot hand and trying to play matchups and trying to adjust.”

And how much impact could this bone spur have had on Fowler’s defensive coverage?

“I think we hope and expect that we’ll see a little bit more bounce in Dexter’s step all the way around,” said Girsch. “Whether it’s on the bases, in the field, or to a lesser extent at the plate. This was a chronic thing that had been bothering him for a little while and hopefully getting it taken care of will help.”

It was pointed out that with the amount of outfielders at both the Major and minor league level, a log jam of sorts amongst the infield, and with a number of pitchers at both levels—the Cardinals appear to have the necessary assets to make a blockbuster trade if available.

“I’ll answer a slightly different question, I think we have a deep organization at the moment,” answered Girsch. “As some of our guys come back, including Wong, and Fowler, and eventually Siegrist—and even Zach Duke, we have a lot of Major League quality players. How that plays out sort of depends on what opportunities are out there. But we do have a lot of players who deserve to be in the big leagues, a lot of prospects who are on the doorstep of the big leagues and we’ll see what we can make out of that.”

The Cardinals will play 17 games after the All-Star break before MLB’s non-waiver trade deadline of July 31st.

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