

Alton Awarded Prospect League Baseball Franchise, Team Name Set To Be Revealed At Lloyd Hopkins Field Friday

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ALTON - A new baseball team will be calling Alton home next summer with an expansion franchise in the Prospect League, a summer league for college baseball players, begins play at Lloyd Hopkins Field at Gordon Moore Park.

The team's name will be unveiled at a ceremony at the field next Friday, beginning at 1 p.m., and will be open to the public. A name-the-team contest was conducted, and five

finalists have been named, where the winner will receive club merchandise and season tickets for the inaugural campaign.

Club owner Steve Marso, a native of Richfield, Minn., and who currently lives in Minneapolis, is very excited to help get the team started, and is glad to be coming to Alton. He had been looking at many locations for the team since having owned a PL club in Iowa in 2004.

"What it comes down to was the wow factor when i walked into the ballpark," Marso said in an interview. "It was the same feeling I had when I bought the team in Iowa, especially after meeting with city officials, from the parks department up to the mayor. It was fantastic."

The Prospect League is a summertime league that uses wood bats exclusively, giving the players a chance to experience playing with the bats, and all players must be actively been playing on a collegiate team with eligibility remaining. The league currently has 13 teams in Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. Teams normally play a 60-game season, with playoffs that end in mid-August, but the 2020 season was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The league will resume play in 2021.

In addition, teams are allowed two graduating high school seniors who have signed letters of intent to play college baseball, and up to four graduated college seniors. The league was founded in 1963, and currently has 190 alumni who have played in the major leagues. It's considered the highest level of amateur baseball in the United States.

In the 2019 season, PL games attracted 270,000 fans, as each team averaged 1,000 fans per game. Marso feels that the family-friendly atmosphere at the games will be a major attraction, and looks forward to the fan support.

"We just hope everyone comes out and supports the team," Marso said, "and has a great time at the ballpark."

Marso also hopes to have local players on the club as well. The club management is also currently taking shape, and will be announced soon as well.

"It really depends," Marso said. "We're allowed four kids, according to NCAA rules. We hope to hire a manager in the coming weeks, and it would be great to have local kids on the team. It depends on so many variants, such as who's available, who wants to play, if they signed with another team. We do support local kids, and we hope they'll be local kids on the team."

The name-the-team contest has come down to the five finalists, and Marso and other team officials are currently counting up the votes, and will announced the winner in the ceremony next Friday. For fans who can't make it to the park, the ceremony will be livestreamed on Facebook Live, and will be distributed to local media outlets shortly after.

Marso is very excited to get the team off the ground, and is looking forward to seeing the fans at both the ceremony and at games during the 2021 season.

"We're really excited," Marso said. "We have a general manager hired, and we hope he'll be starting soon. I love the business, I love the game, and there's nothing like a night at the ballpark. We're looking forward to getting started and meeting all the people."