



# Major League

***Michael Boettcher uses skills learned on the family Hereford operation for a successful career in field management.***

by **Sara Gugelmeyer**

**H**ereford cattle and baseball fields might have more in common than you think. Just ask Michael Boettcher. He grew up on a Hereford farm and now, at only 27 years old, is the grounds manager for one of the top teams in major league baseball.

Raised on a farm in west-central Wisconsin, Michael Boettcher developed a passion for the outdoors. The Boettcher family's Brookview Acres has been raising Hereford and Shorthorn seedstock for more than 40 years. The Boettchers run about 100 cows, the majority of which are Herefords, and grow cash crops as well.

Michael grew up active in the Wisconsin Junior Hereford Association, of which he served as president.

After high school graduation, Michael was most interested in studying animal science, naturally, as he was seeking skills related to the cattle industry he loved. As he headed off to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, he says, "I was going to go into animal science because that was the only thing I knew before I went to college."

## **Change of plans**

However, an exploratory horticulture class changed his plans. "I realized that I liked

working with plants and being outside," Michael says. "I liked the challenge of plants. I liked the cattle from the farm, but never realized how much I enjoyed the cropping end of it, until I went to college."

After his freshman year, he changed his major to horticulture and saw a posting for an internship with the Milwaukee Brewers. Michael was chosen for the internship, mostly dealing with the landscaping at the Brewers' Miller Park.

The summer of 2004 would change his life forever. "It was the greatest internship experience at that time in my life," he says. "I liked working on the farm in the summer, and I kind of missed that, but at that point in time, if there was anything I wanted to do besides farming, it was working here at the park."

Although his main responsibilities were caring for the 250-acre park around the stadium, he did get to help with the playing field as well. "It was a very hands-on internship; we were expected to be workers on the crew and do everything and anything that the managers were doing at the time," Michael says. "That helped allow me to discover another aspect of the horticulture industry that I never knew existed."

That internship gave him a view outside the traditional horticultural industry, and he enjoyed it. However, he knew that opportunities to work on sports fields were rare. "I knew I definitely wanted to be in horticulture, and I knew if I had a chance to keep sports fields involved in that career path, I would really enjoy that. The opportunities to be involved in a high-profile sports facility are very limited, so I didn't want to get my hopes up too high and be disappointed in the end."

Seeking to continue in that field, Michael landed a similar internship with the Boston Red Sox the following summer. Although, this time his main responsibilities were on the actual sports field. "It gave me a good taste of what it would be



like to work on a big time playing field,” Michael says.

Still, more jobs are available in the ornamental area of the horticulture industry, so that’s what Michael did after graduating in 2006. “Right out of college, I thought working for a landscape company was good for me,” Michael says.

And he adds that he enjoyed it through the growing season. “I really enjoyed updating a lot of homeowner and commercial landscapes. But, once we hit the winter time of that job, I was in the warehouse sorting plants, and then I really began to question if that’s what I wanted to do. I ended up going back home to the farm and helping out that winter.”

### Chasing the dream

Still not sure of what path to choose, Michael went to work for an Angus breeder. He did that for a year, but the dream of working for a ball field lingered. “That was an experience that I am glad I had, definitely. At that point in time, it made me realize that I missed horticulture, and I did really want to get into the sports end of the horticulture industry. Looking back at my two internships, I realized that those were the two summers that, besides growing up on the farm, I enjoyed the most. I told myself I wanted to get back into the sports industry, preferably baseball.”

So, he used his connections from that first internship with the Milwaukee Brewers to look for a job. Michael explains that most people starting out in the field management industry must begin in the minor leagues or on a practice field. That’s the type of job he was expecting to find.

However, Michael says, “It just so happened that they were looking for a landscape manager second assistant. (My former boss) remembered the work I did for her when I was here as an intern, and she thought I could be an asset to the team. So a few interviews and a lot of background checks later, I started working here in March 2009.”

Michael’s strong work ethic and passion for the job earned him a promotion when the first assistant position became available. The first assistant’s title is grounds manager and the main responsibility is the actual field or playing surface inside Miller Park.

That new position put Michael second in command behind Gary VandenBerg, the park’s longtime chief groundskeeper. Unfortunately, Gary lost a long battle with cancer this season, and during such a difficult time, Michael was in charge of much of the day-to-day decisions.

Michael explains that as grounds manager, his responsibility is to make sure the playing surface is never a factor in the game. “What that means is keeping the grass cut and healthy, keeping the infield dirt level and playable so the ball is taking a true hop when it comes off the bat.”

This year Michael’s job has been especially important, as the Brewers were in the final four teams in the national league championship. Although it’s meant more work for Michael, he says it is an exciting time to be a part of the Brewers.

He stresses that he doesn’t do it alone. “We have a crew every day that joins us on the field and landscape. They help us get everything done day in and day out.”

It may seem like Michael’s Hereford roots have little to do with his career on the baseball field. But that’s not the case. “The Hereford industry taught me a lot of leadership when I served as president of the (Wisconsin) junior association, and to be able to bring that leadership to my job now where I have to be a leader to several crew members has been a huge benefit.”

Also, working with cattle is similar to caring for the field, Michael says, in that there’s a lot out of his control. “Working with cattle day in and day out, nothing’s ever exactly the way you want it, in regards of working with Mother Nature. We try to balance and try to eliminate the harmful aspects as much as possible to be successful.



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Farming, I always found a way to get the cattle fed and when calving, get the cows in the barn, get calves on the ground and going even if it was midnight in a blizzard. Similar to my job now, we have to find a way to always get it done. The Hereford industry was a huge benefit to get me prepared for several aspects and challenges we face daily in our industry and our understanding we must have of Mother Nature.”

Although Michael now has a successful career on a major league ball field, he hasn’t forgotten his Hereford roots. He still helps his parents as much as he can with the cattle and when he can’t be there, handles all Brookview Acres’ advertising, including the website, photos and ads. **HW**