



Brewers Announce Stadium Naming Rights Deal

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The Brewers made a trade Tuesday for a stadium to be named later.

The ballclub and Wisconsin-based American Family Insurance announced a 15-year partnership that includes naming rights to Miller Park, as the stadium has been called since it opened in 2001. That name will remain through '20, when the Brewers' original agreement with the Miller Brewing Company (now MillerCoors) comes to an end.

After that, the stadium will get a new name.

American Family Insurance Stadium? AmFam Field?

To be determined.

"That, to me, is kind of secondary. We will get to that point, and we've got time to actually make that happen," said Jack Salzwedel, chair and chief executive officer of American Family Insurance. "It will be probably a year before we need to start thinking about what those signs actually look like and how they will be positioned in the stadium.

"This deal was inked pretty quickly. When you're looking at naming rights, there's a ton of data that we need to look at. We don't take naming rights real lightly. We're going to pull a lot of data, look at customer input. There are a lot of things we'll look at. ... Seriously, there's no handshake agreement or anything like that. Our marketing folks are in the process of doing that research."



The sides agreed not to reveal the financial terms of the new agreement, which coincides with the Brewers' stadium lease. The final five years of the lease are contingent on the Brewers picking up a series of club options through 2035, which is widely expected to happen given their recent investments in the building.

The deal with Miller was struck in 1996 when the stadium was still in the planning stages. It pays \$40 million over 20 years, and represented a critical investment in keeping the Brewers in Milwaukee.

But with that agreement nearing its end, the Brewers approached a very small group of companies last summer, including American Family, to gauge interest. Founded in 1927, the company is the largest provider of personal auto and homeowners insurance in Wisconsin.

"We pursued them early," Brewers COO Rick Schlesinger said. "They were a focal point from the get-go."

MillerCoors broke the news of the Brewers' agreement with American Family in an internal communication to employees on Tuesday morning. In it, as obtained by the website OnMilwaukee.com, MillerCoors Wisconsin GM Jim Kanter told workers, "Late last year American Family Insurance proactively pitched the Brewers an incredibly rich offer for the future naming rights to Miller Park, and we're proud to welcome American Family to the family we've been part of for generations. While the name on the stadium will change following the 2020 season, our relationship with the Brewers remains as strong as ever."

A source with knowledge of the deal's structure disputed Kanter's characterization of the new agreement, saying, "Any reports of the naming rights compensation offered by American Family being 'incredibly rich' are very exaggerated. The deal is very fair, consistent with the market size, and comparable to the amount teams are receiving in similar naming rights deals."

But to the larger ties between the Brewers and Milwaukee's most prominent brewing company, Schlesinger echoed that the relationship remains strong.

He said he understood why the initial public reaction to the pending name change was less than positive.

"Here's the thing: We love having our fans' views. The fans have passion about everything Brewers, and that includes the [stadium] name," Schlesinger said. "What I would say to fans is they have some time to get used to it. We're going to be respectful with the name and with our heritage. Miller beer is a prominent part of our experience here, and I don't see that changing."

Said Salzwedel: "I think we'll give it a day or two and let things tone down a little bit. Whenever you have an iconic brand like this and there's a switch, there's a very big emotional reaction to it. Being active on social media, I do understand that."

That doesn't dilute the fact that when we look at this, we see a lot of real positives for our organization -- and for the Brewers as well. I think our brands align really well."

Salzwedel spoke of the agreement as part of a larger effort to increase the company's footprint in Milwaukee. In 2017, American Family became a "presenting sponsor" of Summerfest and secured naming rights to the music festival's main amphitheater. The company is working with Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett to find a site for a new office structure similar to the eight-story, 150,000 square foot "Spark" building on Madison's east side.

"We think this will be a great hub for us to hire employee talent," Salzwedel said.

At Tuesday's announcement, which included Barrett and other city officials, the Brewers presented Salzwedel with a No. 21 jersey with the name "AmFam" on the back.

Was that a hint that the stadium name could be a shortened version of American Family Insurance?

"I don't think so," Salzwedel said, "but I think it could end up being like the American Family Amphitheater; everybody's calling that the 'AmFam Amp.' I think you could have something like that happen."