

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Pillbox Bat Company hits a home run with Major League Baseball deal**  
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**CATHY** You could say one Minnesota baseball bat company hit a home run this week, signing a licensing deal with the  
**WURZER:** Major League Baseball Association. It's Pillbox Bat Company based out of Winona. When founders Zak Fellman and Dan Watson first started the company a few years ago, they never imagined how fast it would grow. And now, they've achieved their dream of officially designing bats, and pennants, and other art for all 30 MLB teams.

Dan Watson is Co-founder of Pillbox Bat Company. He's on the line right now. Hey, Dan, welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. Thank you, Cathy.

**CATHY** And congratulations on the new deal.

**WURZER:**

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah, thank you very much. It's quite exciting.

**CATHY** So what did you say when you first heard the news?

**WURZER:**

**DAN WATSON:** Honestly, I don't know if I said too much. I was in so much shock. It was a whirlwind of emotions and the realization of a lot of hard work come to a point where we finally achieved what we were after.

**CATHY** Tell me about the agreement if you can. What kinds of projects are you going to be working on?

**WURZER:**

**DAN WATSON:** Well, right now, we are fulfilling orders for the teams and getting our products into their stores in the stadiums and things like that. But a lot of the things that we are hoping to work on in the future really celebrate the game and a lot of the stories around the game with the individual players, whether they be from the Hall of Fame or current players.

We've got tons of ideas and ways that we want to go. But right now, we're focused on team logos on our products and fulfilling the orders that we've just received.

**CATHY** Now, you're a bat company, right? You make bats, obviously?

**WURZER:**

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. We make decorative art bats. We also make other products as well. We make wood pennants, hand-painted baseballs. And we do some other coasters as well. Kind of our thing is we like to take what's familiar with baseball fans or sports fans and then make it premium and handcrafted.

**CATHY** I see. You and your co-founder Zak, I understand, are childhood best friends. So has this been a dream of yours?

**WURZER:**

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. Yes. I would say, yes. We started doing this kind of thing when we were 12 years old. As a matter of fact, we've got a couple of the bats that we made when we were 12 in our shop in Winona.

But I think as we got older and got into our careers, both going the entrepreneur route, we always said to each other, wouldn't it be great if we could just work together doing this stuff? And so yeah, five, six years ago, we finally accomplished that and have grown Pillbox to what it is today.

**CATHY WURZER:** When you two were kids, how did you-- I'm trying to get a mental picture here of an art bat or whatever you're doing at that point-- what did you do? Take a bat and draw on it?

**DAN WATSON:** Kind of. Well, it was a little bit more than that-- actually, more of what it looks like today, which is we went out to the woods and we found a tree branch that was fairly straight, sat down on the porch with our pocket knives, would spend hours whittling it into a shape that looked like a bat, and then we'd just paint them. And typically, they ended up in home derbies in the backyard. So that's kind of how Pillbox got started.

**CATHY WURZER:** I love that. You're based out of Winona. Is there a reason for that? Are you from Winona?

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah, we're both from the Winona area, grew up there. I'm currently located in St. Cloud, Minnesota. But the shop and our business is located in Winona.

**CATHY WURZER:** And what have you heard from the community and other local business owners after this big deal?

**DAN WATSON:** Oh, it's just been really great. I think there's just been a lot of inquiries about projects. Certain companies want to do some custom stuff with us, which we do a lot of custom work for companies-- putting their logos on things and just trying to be involved in what we're doing, which is really awesome support and really fun to do.

**CATHY WURZER:** Now, you've done work, if I'm not mistaken, with the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Negro League Baseball Museum, is that right?

**DAN WATSON:** Yes. We have, yeah. Some really fun projects there.

**CATHY WURZER:** Magic wand time, or I guess maybe when you look into your crystal ball-- so you say you have a lot of other cool ideas that are on the table. Can you give me an idea of where you might want to take this?

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. So I think within the next couple of years, I think we really want to develop our product line-- finding more of those products that are familiar, but then making them premium, putting the Pillbox spin on it. We want to expand that product line.

But we also have our eyes on other sports as well. We've done projects with the Utah Jazz already and have had some really fun conversations with teams in the NHL and the NFL. So we'd like to expand our product offering, not just to Major League Baseball but to the rest of the sports. And just really, I don't know, kind of upgrade what fans are used to seeing as far as memorabilia goes.

**CATHY WURZER:** I'm presuming that you both are huge sports fans.

**DAN WATSON:** Oh yeah. Baseball is our first love. But Zak and I both played multiple sports year round, that kind of thing, and just enjoyed watching our Minnesota teams and things like that. So yeah.

**CATHY** Would this mean that you would expand Pillbox maybe to other locations? If you're based in Winona, obviously,  
**WURZER:** your production facility's in Winona-- would you be able to expand, perhaps?

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. I think we could, we will. I definitely see that happening. To other locations-- we like the idea of being a small town company and being located in Winona. Both of us grew up there, so it's kind of fun to kind of, in a way, give back and create jobs in the town that we grew up in.

So yeah, I see us expanding to other places. I think we probably stay in Minnesota. At least that's my answer right now.

**CATHY** Good. I'm glad to hear that. I'm sure everyone else is as well. So have you heard from any of the players who  
**WURZER:** might have some of your stuff? Have you had any feedback from some big name players?

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. That's funny that you asked. We had just done a little swap with the Minnesota Twins and Joe Ryan. He saw one of our bats. And we swapped him for an autographed ball and got a picture of him holding one of our bats.

And then Jonathan India from the Cincinnati Reds is also looking to do the same thing. And we're hopeful that that kind of spreads, because we love that kind of stuff. Having Major League Baseball players interested in what you do, it's pretty cool.

**CATHY** Say, when you were growing up, who was your favorite baseball player? And is there something you can do with  
**WURZER:** maybe getting the rights to some of the older baseball players, maybe do some throwback stuff?

**DAN WATSON:** Oh, yeah. Oh, amongst the list of things that we really want to do, you just nailed it. Set me up perfectly-- Kirby Puckett, for sure, was my favorite player. I feel like every Minnesotan for a few generations would say Kirby.

Kent Herbeck I know is one too. Obviously, anyone who played for the '91, '87 Twins, they're all in our shortlist of players to do things with.

**CATHY** So there you go. You do have some pretty big plans, my friend. All right, well, we wish you well. Congratulations  
**WURZER:** again and thanks for taking time to talk with us.

**DAN WATSON:** Yeah. Thank you so much, Cathy.

**CATHY** Absolutely. Best of luck. Dan Watson is the co-founder of the Pillbox Bat Company based in Winona.  
**WURZER:**