

# Anthonsen retires from dream career

By Scott Beatty



Anthonsen played 373 games in Sioux Falls, second most all-time.

It's one of the toughest decisions a ballplayer has to make. Sometimes your body tells you. Sometimes life circumstances tell you. Sometimes, it's a choice you simply have to make on your own.

Earlier this month, former Canaries infielder Joe Anthonsen decided to walk away from the only thing he ever wanted to do and retire after eight years as a professional baseball player. He had played briefly for 14 games with the Amarillo Sox this year following four consecutive seasons with Sioux Falls Canaries.

"I didn't have the same feeling I had toward baseball that I did my first seven years. Mentally, I wasn't in it," Anthonsen said while visiting former teammates and friends in Sioux Falls last week. "Somebody was telling me that I need to retire, it's time to move on. I finally came to peace with it, and it was actually a calm, good feeling."

Fueled by naysayers who said he was too small, the 5-foot, 9-inch Twin Cities native knew at young age he wanted to be a professional ballplayer despite teachers who thought the idea was "insane." After playing collegiately at Campbell University (S.C.), he signed on in 2006 with the Rockford RiverHawks of the independent Frontier League, largely known as a developmental circuit for young, undrafted talent.

Anthonsen hit below .300 in his first two seasons before batting a blistering .352 to win the league batting title in 2008, something he counts as one of his best memories. But he couldn't fully appreciate it then.

"When I was younger, I didn't enjoy my career the way I should have," Anthonsen said. "You want to get (signed by a major league team) so badly, so you think about that constantly. But you don't have any control over it. I realize that now."

Though he wasn't picked up, he caught the attention of Canaries manager Steve Shirley, who brought Anthonsen to Sioux Falls in 2009. Anthonsen put together one of the most successful stints in Sioux Falls over four consecutive seasons. His name is peppered throughout the team record book, where he is tied for second all-time in hits (413) and first in runs (238). He owns nearly every defensive record at second base. In his second season with the Canaries (then Pheasants), he batted leadoff for a club that posted a dominating 63-33 record, won the North Division pennant and went to the championship series.

While chasing their dreams of the big leagues, ballplayers endure endless bus rides, miniscule salaries and life out of a suitcase. But in Sioux Falls, especially in 2010, Anthonsen experienced something at a new level that he hadn't before.

"It was the most fun as I had as a player," Anthonsen said. "Winning obviously helps, but that group of guys was really pulling for each other. We only had one transaction that summer. When you can keep a team together, it makes it a lot more fun."

One moment sticks out more than any other, perhaps because you can count on one hand the number of times it has happened for Anthonsen. In the opening game of the 2010 playoffs against the Lincoln Saltdogs, he drove a ball that landed the right field porch of the Birdcage. He had only hit two professional home runs previously in his career. Returning to the dugout, Anthonsen realized his teammates and coaches were "even more excited for me than I was."

Without the flashy power numbers, players like Anthonsen can go unacknowledged. But his propensity to be a sparkplug at the top of the lineup while gobbling up everything hit his way in the field endeared him to Canaries fans, who voted him as the second baseman on the 20th-Anniversary Team last season.

Reflecting on his time in Sioux Falls and manager Steve Shirley, the word "awesome" is used by Anthonsen several times. It's high praise from a player who was hoping to be long past the independent leagues by the time he reached his late 20s. But with age has come a changed perspective.

"I look back at my career, and I cherish every moment, because I know I've experienced a lot of things that other people haven't," he said. "You don't make a lot of money playing baseball; that's not the reason I played it. I played it because I loved it."

## LINCOLN ROSTER

- 3 - Daniel Carroll, OF
- 4 - Brad Payne, IF
- 6 - Yasel Gomez, IF
- 7 - David Espinosa, IF
- 9 - Conor Spink, LHP
- 10 - Pete Parise, RHP
- 12 - Alejandro Gonzales, IF
- 13 - Stephen Douglas, OF
- 14 - Sean O'Connell, C
- 15 - Mike Provencher, IF
- 16 - Slayton Thomas, RHP
- 17 - Jeremy Mayo, C
- 18 - Matt Bywater, LHP
- 19 - Ben Henry, RHP
- 20 - Travis Parker, RHP
- 21 - Eddie McKiernan, RHP
- 22 - R.J. Rodriguez, RHP
- 23 - Joe Bisenius, RHP
- 24 - Matt Forgatch, OF
- 26 - Tyler Goodro, IF
- 27 - P.J. Zocchi, RHP
- 32 - Ryan Scoma, OF
- 39 - Ian Gac, IF
- 40 - Moises Melendez, LHP
- 44 - Mike Burns, RHP

Ken Oberkfell, Manager  
Dan Reichert, Pitching Coach  
John Harris, Hitting Coach  
Kyle Younklin, Trainer

## CANARIES ROSTER

- 2 - Anthony Trajano, IF
- 5 - Cory Morales, IF
- 6 - J.P. Ramirez, OF
- 8 - Jake Taylor, IF
- 9 - Jack Van Leur, LHP
- 10 - Nick Van Stratten, OF
- 13 - Nate Baumann, OF
- 14 - Steve Domecus, C
- 15 - Jared Clark, IF
- 17 - Matt Daly, RHP
- 20 - Jordan Whatcott, RHP
- 21 - Kevin Dultz, C
- 22 - Adam Champion, LHP
- 23 - John Alonso, IF
- 24 - Kirk Clark, RHP
- 25 - Ben Moore, RHP
- 26 - Mitchell Clegg, LHP
- 27 - Austin Brough, LHP
- 29 - Kyle Vazquez, RHP
- 30 - Kyle Ruwe, RHP
- 35 - Alan DeRatt, RHP
- 44 - Tim Pahuta, IF

Steve Shirley, Manager  
Mike Meyer, Pitching Coach  
Andy Juday, Hitting Coach  
Matt Tramp, Bullpen Catcher  
Derek West, Trainer