

## Sports Geek Nation AMA with Tod Caflisch

Tod Caflisch from TechFoundry LLC. Tod was a Sports Geek guest in a number of episodes in our early podcasting years sharing his knowledge in sports and technology. After almost three decades of working and leading innovation in the sports and tech industry, he started his own company TechFoundry, which provides sports and entertainment technology services focused on infrastructure, operations and innovation.

Connect with Tod Caflisch on Twitter [@tcaflisch](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Slack [@Tod Caflisch](#)  
Find out more about TechFoundry LLC at <https://techfoundryllc.com>

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

**Q. [Sean Callanan](#):** I'll kick things off [@Tod Caflisch](#) I don't need to ask you about your background because I know people here have listened to our podcast chats but I wanted to ask what technology excites you for sports?

**A. [@Tod Caflisch](#):** [@seancallanan](#) This is an easy one - what technology excites me for sports? Fan experience would have to be my number one sports technology. There are a lot of factors in play with sports from the collegiate level through minor leagues to pro teams and beyond. Some of them are competition for discretionary income, reduced attendance and revenue generation. But bottom line it's all about the fan. There's been so much focus lately on enhancing the fan experience - and making it more frictionless - to drive attendance, improve revenues and boost social media. Integrating technology into this has been a logical way to solve a lot of the challenges - wayfinding through apps to reduce issues around traffic and parking, robust wifi in-venue to keep (especially the younger generations) connected via mobile and innovative new ticketing entry and digital concession and merchandise purchasing options. I'm particularly intrigued with new biometric methods being tested and deployed.

**Q. [lennygoh](#):** [@Tod Caflisch](#) What's with your obsession with Cardio? Please explain the origins.

**A. [Tod Caflisch](#):** [@lennygoh](#) Ha! Just pulled up to the gym. Guess I am obsessed. Well, being in the tech business means a lot of keyboard time so as you can imagine exercise is important. Now in my consulting role I don't get the 1,000's of steps in during event support like I did back in my team IT days. And diet doesn't cut it alone. So Cardio it is. Plus it's just good for you - like you and your hockey!

**[lennygoh](#):** Hockey is intervals. Cycling is my real cardio. Thanks [@Tod Caflisch](#)!

**[Tod Caflisch](#):** [@lennygoh](#) Even better, cyclists usually don't lose their teeth

**Q. [thebennewton](#):** @Tod Cafilisch have you had experiences with dealing with indoor mapping?

**A. Tod Cafilisch:** @thebennewton if you mean wayfinding then yes. While I was with the Vikings, beacons were deployed throughout the US Bank Stadium to allow wayfinding within the stadium - GPS doesn't work within high density venues. The beacons integrate with mobile, floor by floor, to enable accurate wayfinding within a couple meters. The system was deployed in parallel with the WiFi.

**thebennewton:** do you mind me asking which mapping service was used?

**Tod Cafilisch:** The VenueNext app integrates Aruba's Meridian platform. Meridian is a mapping and wayfinding solution.

**Conrad Caplin (prontocx):** What about Apple's indoor mapping? Big benefit: no Bluetooth or beacons

**Tod Cafilisch:** @Conrad Caplin (prontocx) I'd imagine it would work in stadiums/arenas but for now looks only to be in airports and malls. From a venue perspective it may end up competing with team/venue apps for wayfinding. As teams/venues adopt and enhance their own apps with wayfinding they will obviously steer fans to their app as a one stop shop for everything around the fan experience. Plus with wayfinding in the app the teams/venues have the data collection advantage that the Apple option doesn't offer. But for smaller/minor league venues it might be an option when there's no app/wayfinding.

**Q. [johnmccauley](#):** @Tod Cafilisch what mistake do you see teams or venues make over and over again as it relates to their technology infrastructure and fan experience #ama

**A. Tod Cafilisch:** @johnmccauley you hit my pet peeve button there. I think recycling the same old stuff is the biggest issue - the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality. Teams/venues need to be innovating all the time due to the changing nature of their team/events, fan sentiment and fan diversity. Specifically regarding infrastructure and fan experience, obviously there are challenges with budget, politics, etc. but those need to be creatively overcome. Basic things like venue wifi which have fallen into the "required amenity" category versus "nice to have" are being overlooked or not given the attention they deserve either due to shortsighted management or simple complacency. Teams/venues need to get to know their fans/patrons better and cater to their needs and (more immediately) the challenges they face to keep them coming back. We've all seen the statistics on how attendance has been steadily dropping at the 4 major leagues in the US. The fan experience needs to be made more frictionless to combat the trend toward staying at home and watching the game on a big high def TV and no \$12 beers or lines to get into the bathroom. The Atlanta Falcons enticed fans with cheaper concession prices and many venues have deployed solutions like WaitTimes to help fans avoid lines. Other technologies are being used by the more progressive organizations like digital ticketing, biometric concession/merchandise purchase options, voice assistants in suites, experiential purchasing, trip routing and wayfinding, intelligent parking and more. Much of this is rooted in the mobile experience of fans that

goes full circle back to wifi as the enabling infrastructure in-venue. Mobile has adopted ticketing, purchasing, experiential, wayfinding, gamification, stats, fantasy sports, etc. which all address the fan diversity concern. And the one thing it seems many teams/venues don't understand is through the investment in technology also comes the opportunity to collect data on fan behavior. Through analytics the fan journey can very accurately be uncovered giving the teams/venues much deeper insights into their fans/patrons. This in turn makes decisions on future technology investment, marketing and many other aspects of event management easier to decide on and justify investments in.

**Q. [Michael Brinkman](#):** @Tod Caflich We met a couple of years ago at Sports Business Week in St. Paul. I hope all is well! You have been in a couple of competitive markets in terms of new venues with the Twin Cities and Detroit. What have you learned in terms of being the first to get a new technology vs. waiting to see if something works for others/has ROI? Also, what areas of technology would you tell smaller minor league organizations with limited budgets to focus on?

**A. [Tod Caflich](#):** @Michael Brinkman I remember you from the SBW event in 2016! Great conversation that day. Great question for this forum! There are a number of factors that play into being the first to get a new technology vs. waiting to see if something works - organizational culture, budget, appropriate application of the technology, market, etc. Comparing the Twin Cities and Detroit is an apples to oranges example. In both cases the teams were replacing older outdated venues in the Metrodome and Joe Louis Arena with US Bank Stadium and Little Caesars Arena respectively. But most of the other aspects don't align other than technology would play significant roles in both new venues - mobile being the single biggest factor driving much of the technology. One thing to be aware of is that budget and timeline drive much of the technology deployed at new venues. As tech advances so rapidly, efforts are made to put off decisions as late as possible but at some point you reach a "pencils down" moment and have to move forward with the plan as it stands. This is why you also frequently see 3-5 year technology refresh plans being developed even during the construction process. So the short answer is you do the best you can in addressing patron and fan experience needs and target being the "latest and greatest" but it usually only lasts until the next new venue opens. Regarding tech for minor league organizations, I say focus on the fan experience. Again mobile probably plays a huge part of that so wifi should be a consideration. And with minor league venues usually scaled smaller it makes the cost more palatable. Plus there are opportunities to monetize wifi to reduce costs or make it cost neutral. Having wifi also is an enabler for other technologies like digital ticketing and mobile purchase which drive revenue. Other than that I'd recommend integrated point of sale, digital signage or LED.

**Q. Sean Callanan:** @Tod Cafilisch another one from me. How do you start the conversation with CEO on why tech funding is needed? As you said it's easy to "stay the course". Would love a question from a Wi-Fi testing CEO (cough @shaneharmon)

**A. Tod Cafilisch:** @seancallanan The first thing to remember is that sports organizations are basically small/medium businesses with high profile. Understanding that means you realize that staffing and budgets are lean. So bringing the value proposition is essential. I use the "rule of 3" - the project needs to satisfy one or more of the following; Reduce Cost, Increase Revenue and/or Improve Efficiency. If it doesn't do that I move on as the probability of it getting off the ground is slim at best. So, once I've determined where it falls in Rule of 3 that's where I build the value prop. I put together the justification argument and try to anticipate the logical objections and how to overcome them. I also will socialize my plan to gain consensus with peers as CEO's will generally seek counsel from other members of the organization before making a decision. Whenever possible I also try to work in a sponsorship element to try to reduce the cost of the project or make it cost neutral. This is a great way to make the sponsorship team love you as you're handing them business but also it ensures that they are also not out signing sponsorship deals involving technology on their own that doesn't align with your technology roadmap. Another piece of advice would be talk to the CEO in a way that he understands the project without a lot of technical jargon. If you're using a lot of acronyms they won't get it and your project probably won't get approved either.

## What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

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