



# SPRING FLINGS



Newsletter of the SABR Spring Training Committee

Volume 7, #2

December 2008

## SPRING TRAINING MEMORIES

By Dan McCourt

My better half and I were not enthusiastic when the Yankees shifted their Spring Training facility from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa on Florida's West Coast in March 1996. We both had been attending this rite of March with separate sets of friends for years even before we met, and neither one of us was eager to give up our room right on the beach, the alligator-tail appetizers, or the aging stadium, buried as it was in an industrial park off Route 95.

But initially it was I who received most of the benefits of the switch, because I was able to break away and fly down there one day before her. We selected a Hilton Hotel on the Gulf in Redington Beach, about 25 miles due west of newly constructed Legends Field, across the Bay in the finger of Pinellas County that aligns with Clearwater to the north and contains St. Petersburg to the south. I awoke facing a 200-mile-plus drive south to Ft. Myers for a battle with the Red Sox in Isle of Palms Park on March 7. The Boston/New York rivalry was hot even then, but mostly through the haze of 18 years back to the days of Bucky Dent and the Green Monster.

As I headed south, the sun baked and the temperature rose, and less than 24 hours removed from the chilly northeast, I was cooking in 90-degree temps watching Boston eke out a small lead. In his final season with the Sox, Roger Clemens was up on Andy Pettitte 4-2 through four, but it was all Yanks from there on in, highlighted by a 13-run seventh in a 20-6 win. Lefties Eric Gunderson (five runs) and Brian Bark (two) got the first and third outs of the seventh around righty Joe Hudson, who allowed six scores while retiring one Yankee as well. I was scoring everything, a formidable pursuit in early March, made even worse by trying to squeeze the big inning's notations into the scorecard provided in the \$2 program. During the 13-run uprising I noted one highlight I haven't seen since: multiple hits out of the same position from different players, twice. Both Gerald Perry (DH) and Ivan Cruz doubled in the fifth hole. And non-roster invitee Jose DeJesus homered in the seventh spot hitting for rookie Derek Jeter, who had already singled earlier in the frame.

My better half arrived that night, unfortunately accompanied by the cloud cover, intermittent rain, and cool temps that would dog us the rest of the trip. The drive to Osceola County Stadium in Kissimmee for a Yankees/Astros tilt March 8 covered half the distance but took almost as



long. Ordering these tickets Day One paid off big time, as we were seated in the first row behind the visiting dugout. The game was played under partly sunny skies, but in 50-degree temps, and the Yankee braintrust, as often happens in the spring, was seated outside the dugout on folding chairs to eke out as much warmth as the intermittent sun would allow. The 13-3 romp might lead you to believe that the Yankee offense picked up where it had left off the day before, but the outcome was not much in doubt once veteran righty Donne Wall had a forgettable fifth inning. After two quick outs, he walked four straight, then George Bell threw away Andy Fox's double and Craig Biggio booted a Mark Ronan (non-roster catcher) grounder, for five runs.

But the highlight of our day happened earlier, as the Yanks were warming in this field just a few miles from Orlando before the bottom of the first. Outfield (and first base) coach Jose Cardenal was trying to signal left fielder Matt Luke to play in a little closer, but could not get his attention, which provoked the following comment from Joe Torre: "Tell him to watch you, huh? He might as well be at Disney World!"

We don't vacation in Florida so we can rise early every day and drive multiple miles through traffic. The theme is R&R, which makes me proud that we actually managed the March 9 trip to Legends Field early enough to breakfast at Mom's Place, just east of Legends on Dale Mabry. The autographed pictures of Yankee stars that adorn the checkout corner do not lie, as we would discover several times in subsequent trips where we spied the likes of Mel Stottlemyre and Joe Torre catching a bite before a long day at the ballpark. And it's great, basic, affordable diner food too, served with little fuss and a smile.

It was downright frigid this day, and the temps extended to the bats, at least once Kenny Rogers surrendered hits to the first three visiting Reds ballplayers. Cincinnati rode a three-run first inning to a 6-1 win. Little more than a prospect at the time, Jorge Posada drove in the only Yankee runs by singling in Jim Leyritz as Pete Schourek held the Yanks to two hits over five innings. Barry Larkin doubled and tripled, scored once, and drove in two runs in two at bats.

The conditions and the offense(s) were worse the next day, as Yankee Melido Perez and Brian Williams of the Tigers threw blanks through four. A leadoff walk to DH Tim Hyers in the fifth turned the game as catcher Mark Parent drove him in with a two-out double in a 1-0 Detroit win. Each team scratched three hits, two by Tony Fernandez of the Yanks, two by Parent.

March 11 was worse, with early word that the night game vs. St. Louis was called, and a driving rain kept us away from the beach. It was our last day, and Sue had barely seen a drop of sun. Despondent, we ventured north on Gulf Boulevard, but with virtually no visibility, we stopped just up the road at the first restaurant we came to. Voila, we hit a goldmine, as the Lobster Pot made her vacation. Warmed by a serving of conch chowder with a hint of sherry, I chose a Dover Sole, while she went for the lobster/crabmeat special. Two hours later, her vacation had been made.

Packing for the return trip, I took a moment to scan my scorecards, when I noticed that I had only had time to scrawl the number of the fourth Yankee pitcher I had seen vs. Boston the first day. Number 47 had allowed a run after a leadoff Mike Greenwell triple, but he threw hard, and



closed the frame with a swinging strike out of one-time Indians speedster Alex Cole. A look at the rosters showed that I had just seen one of the very few appearances with the big club of bonus baby Brien Taylor, the 1991 first-round choice that gave Yankee fans hope, then broke their hearts when he ruined his shoulder in a bar fight. Seven months later with the first Yanks' Championship in two decades secured, I realized how cool a moment I had witnessed that hot sunny day.

---

## EVERYONE'S AFTER THE O'S

By Dave Nemetz

They haven't appeared in the post season since 1997. They finished last this past season in the very competitive American League East. They're unveiling new uniforms next season that harken back to their glory years from the mid-'60's to the early '70's. But they are a very valuable commodity when it comes to locales looking for a spring training tenant.

According to reports on [www.TCPalm.com](http://www.TCPalm.com), in late October the city of Vero Beach, FL, along with officials from Indian Beach County, has presented the Baltimore Orioles an offer to move their spring training operations in the recently deserted Dodgertown. Details of the deal call for the Orioles to move to Vero Beach as early as next year, but more likely in 2010. The team named in the offer was not named, but all indications pointed to the Orioles, who refused to comment.

Meanwhile, Lee County, FL, has also contacted the Orioles about relocating their spring training to City of Palms Park in Fort Myers. As reported on November 6 on [www.naplesnews.com](http://www.naplesnews.com), contact with the Orioles has been informal, but they think that there's an outside shot of luring the Birds, due to the fact that Baltimore GM Andy MacPhail is familiar with Fort Myers from his time with the Minnesota Twins.

Sarasota has also been reported to be in talks with Orioles officials. The website for the Sarasota Herald Tribune had a story on November 13 detailing the "basics of a deal to bring Baltimore Orioles spring training to Ed Smith Stadium". The current tenants, the Cincinnati Reds, leave Sarasota for Arizona for the 2010 season, and there is hope that the new or renovated stadium would be a great bargaining chip. On December 17, if the Sarasota County commissioners vote to increase the sales tax by 1% to pay for a \$65 million complex to house the Orioles, that could clear the way for the Orioles.

And there is also Fort Lauderdale, the current spring training home of the Orioles. Baltimore is under contract to Fort Lauderdale through 2009, but they must exercise their "out clause" by June 2009. There is a dispute between the FAA and the city of Fort Lauderdale regarding rent for stadium occupants that, if not resolved, could make it financially imprudent for the Orioles to remain in that south Florida city.

At the least, the competition for where to house the Orioles in the spring may be more exciting than the product Baltimore puts on the field in 2009.

---

## **CACTUS LEAGUE CAROUSEL**

By Dave Nemetz

On November 18, officials from Pima County, AZ, voted to allow the Chicago White Sox to terminate their lease at Tucson Electric Park, paving the way for the ChiSox move to Glendale in time for 2009 spring training. The Sox will share a facility with the Los Angeles Dodgers, who are moving west after 61 years at Dodgertown in Vero Beach, FL.

There was a \$5 million payment made by the Sox to the city of Tucson to break the lease, which originally ran through 2012. The White Sox departure leaves the Arizona Diamondbacks as the sole tenant at Tucson Electric Park.

With the Sox leaving town, the Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies, the other team playing in Tucson (at Hi Corbett Park) are both considering moving operations north to the metro Phoenix area after their respective leases expire. Since the majority of teams train in the Phoenix area, it may not make financial sense for the 2 teams to remain in Pima County. The Rockies and Diamondbacks could potentially share a facility in Maricopa County should they both leave Tucson, according to reports on [www.azcentral.com](http://www.azcentral.com).

Colorado is contractually obligated to play at Hi Corbett through 2011, while the D-Backs are tied to TEP through 2012.

---

## **FROM THE CHAIR:**

I would like to apologize to every member of the committee for failing to set up a person responsible for running the meeting at last summer's convention. Since my move to Arizona last year I have been very busy getting my family settled in. After changing jobs in early May, I have been busy learning a new job. This should not be accepted as an excuse for not appointing someone to run the meeting. For some reason I thought the meeting was later than it was, it was only when someone posted a note on the SABR-L did I realize my error.

Again I apologize to every member of the committee.

Thank You for your understanding,

Kevin Saldana, Chair

---



## REQUESTS FOR HELP

**Go to the Committee's Yahoo Groups site to respond to these requests**

<http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/sabrspring/>

1) As you know, SABR's Biography Committee has produced several books related to specific teams for specific years, e.g. the 1967 and 1975 Red Sox. The primary purpose of these books is to collect bios for each player on that team, plus managers, coaches, owners, etc. I had the idea to do one for the 1947 Dodgers, the team I rooted for as a boy. I would like to expand the project to include interesting side articles. One might be about the experiences the team had during spring training in Havana that year. Do you think anyone on your committee would be interested in contributing such an article. If so, please have him get in touch with me.

Lyle Spatz

2) Hi! I am a new member of the group and am hoping that one of the other members can assist me.

I wish to obtain a copy of the Red Sox 1951 spring training roster so that I can identify who, if anyone, wore # 34 that Spring. If one of you has that information, I would greatly appreciate your sharing it with me.

Thanks very much.

Howard Goldstein

---

## REMINDER

Save the date!

SABR 39 will be at the JW Marriott Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC

**July 30 to August 2, 2009.**

Hope to see you there!

### Hotel Reservations

For the convention, SABR has negotiated a rate of \$179/night plus tax (currently 14.5%) at the JW Marriott Pennsylvania Avenue, one of Marriott's finest hotels. The SABR rate will be in effect between July 27 and August 5.

Please make your reservations online at: <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/sabr2009>

To make reservations by phone, call 800-266-9432 or 506-474-2009. Tell them that you are making your reservations at the [JW Marriott Pennsylvania Avenue](#) for the Society for American Baseball Research -- SABR 2009 Annual convention.

All reservations must be accompanied by a first night room deposit or guaranteed with a major credit card. **Deadline for reservations by attendees is Monday, June 29, 2009.**

Members can now make early bird registration and save at least \$30. Head to <http://store.sabr.org> and register today! (Offer ends December 31, 2008).

---

Newsletter Editor: Dave Nemetz

Please submit stories or ideas to [davenemetz@yahoo.com](mailto:davenemetz@yahoo.com)

**Deadline for entries for the June 2009 issue is May 25, 2009**