

SABR BALLPARKS COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

January-February, 1990

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I CITY BASEBALL MAGIC report. Our committee's publication continues to sell well, attract attention, and, possibly have some positive influence in the baseball community. We have now sold over 160 copies and pending arriving payments, will soon pay off the loan! Then, we'll be taking in funds that could be returned in the way of "dividends" to those brave souls who gave us funds back last fall.

Among the people and institutions requesting copies:

P. M. Hirshorn, Dept. of Architecture, Drexel Univ., Phila, PA  
Paul Hirzel, School of Architecture, Univ. of WA, Pullam, WA  
Office of the Mayor, Milwaukee, WI  
Tom Fernandez, Schuster Associates, Cincinnati, OH  
Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill, architects, Chicago, IL  
Claybour Architects, St. Louis, MO  
Dodger Town, Vero Beach, FL  
Dept. of Stadium Planning, Baltimore Orioles, Baltimore, MD  
Osborn Engineering, Cleveland, OH

Steve Lehman also sent a copy to James Rodewald, a reporter with Sports Illustrated, who had called and asked for a copy.

Several architecture graduate students have requested copies, and we attracted the attention of a San Antonio consulting firm that is exploring the possibility of a downtown ballpark for the AA level San Antonio franchise.

Our thanks to all who have ordered copies, spread the word, and lent their kind comments. We now have about 150 copies left. I will bring all extra copies to the Cleveland convention to sell to interested members. So, if you want yours now, just send me a note and \$7.00 for postage and the booklet.

II THANK YOU MRB We print the summary of City Baseball Magic that the Minneapolis Review of Baseball printed in their renewal letter for their subscribers.

Vol. 8 No. 4 will be out in just a few short weeks, and I guarantee you won't want to miss this very special edition. In it we will feature a piece entitled City Baseball Magic that is absolutely must reading for everyone who is passionate about the National Pastime. It's the report of the Society of American Baseball Research Ballparks Committee on the aesthetics and values of building a ballpark. Thoroughly researched, meticulously documented, lavishly illustrated and powerfully argued, City Baseball Magic not only will provide the standard by which future discussion of ballpark architecture will be measured, it goes so far as to present a complete design plan for a hypothetical alternative -- based on the values propounded in the essay -- to the New Comiskey Park now under construction. It demonstrates with complete architectural renderings, models, photographs, and parking and cost analyses just what cities could and should be building and contrasts this with the anti-fan designs which are currently in vogue. If you care about baseball, you simply must read this issue.

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III OOPS Our apologies to SABR Norbert Kraich whose name was mysteriously changed to Norman in the last committee newsletter. Our thanks to sharp-eyed committee member Barry Evans of Chicago for that correction.

IV MINOR LEAGUE PARKS are the interest of recent member Dick Kaufman. We omitted that from his profile in a recent newsletter. Our thanks too as Dick has kept us supplied with various ballparks clippings.

V EBBETS FIELD as a morgue? No, not housing the Dodgers of the 1920s and 1930s, but a temporary morgue after the tragic Malbone Street subway crash of November 1, 1918. Undertrained people were pressed into service by the then Brooklyn Rapid Transit Co. (later the BMT) and one fellow lost control of a crowded train and the crash near the station killed 97 people. Many of the regular transit personnel were on strike. Bodies were taken to the rotunda of the new park, Ebbets Field. A copy of the NY Times article with all the info for a 25¢ SASE.

VI BALLPARKS OF NORTH AMERICA by Michael Benson. Charles Wilson answered the call in our last newsletter for a review, and I have included it in its entirety. I'm withholding judgement as I have recently received mine and am reading it bit by bit, Benson does seem to have an alphabet fetish as everything is in order by the letters. It does have a good bibliography.

VII NEWS FROM BALTIMORE includes the announcement that the new park will house the 1993 All-Star Game. Also, archaeology work on the site is delving into the city's past back to the late 1700s.

VIII RESEARCH REQUESTS We have a bunch this issue. Please drop these folks a letter or material if you have something to contribute. Thanks to what all of you send for our files, we have assisted from the committee files.

1. Dick Miller, 2770 Observatory Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45208

A committee member, Dick is seeking info on the following:

- a) what was on the site of Boston's South End Grounds before the park in 1871
- b) same for Huntington Ave. Grounds, Boston, before 1901
- c) what MA town would have a long baseball history and the resources for study

2. Bill Purdom, 780 Madison Avenue, NYC, NY 10021

He is painting a color picture of Sportsman's Park, St. Louis, 1946. Who knows the design and colors of the ads for these beers on the OF fence: Hyde Park, Alpen Brau, and Griesebieck?

3. Hank Fisher, 1303 Ocala, Tallahassee, FL, 32304 Apt. 141

A grad. student in architecture, Hank is looking for material on the designing of ballparks. His thesis involves designing an actual baseball facility in West Palm Beach, FL.

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4. John Curran, N2580 Woodland Circle, Waupaca, WI 54981

Another architecture grad. student, John hopes to specialize in sports facility architecture. His thesis is a proposed new facility for the Milwaukee Brewers. If you have any advice or materials to send his way, I am sure he would appreciate it.

5. Walt Winkelman, 230 Beach Street, Alameda, CA 94501

Walt has purchased a dozen copies of City Baseball Magic and has distributed them to various people in his group that is looking to buy a Class A franchise. He is also looking toward constructing a A or AA level ballpark in the future. He is looking for info on minor league ball, its strength in various communities, and the various types of minor league level stadia.

6. Bob Farrington, 1485 No. Ellison, San Antonio, TX 78251

Bob is assisting the San Antonio Missions of the Texas League (AA ball) and is looking at their options for a downtown AA type park, with a possibility of moving to AAA level. Now, the team plays in a small local university setting that is not fully suited to their future plans. San Antonio will be building a dome in the future and it will not accommodate baseball, so the Missions hope to go their own way. Send him any advice you have on minor league parks and their physical relationship to the urban landscape.

IX ANNUAL MEETING There are several possibilities for ballpark-related presentations at the July meeting in Cleveland:

- a) Short history of Cleveland parks (League and Municipal mostly) and playing sites. I am still in need of slides of any and all Cleveland sites. I'll be happy to pay for copying or trade.
- b) Future of ballpark design by John Pastier, drawing upon his experience as architecture critic and lecturer.
- c) Presentation by several people from Osborn Engineering, the creators, builders, and "fixers" of so many of the classic ballparks. John Pastier's initial inquiry to Osborn caused some interest and I intend to follow up with a formal request.
- d) Report by Tiger Stadium Fan Club. Much has been happening in Detroit regarding Tiger Stadium and this group's attempt to save it from either needless replacement or thoughtless/excessive renovation. I have made some contacts with the Fan Club and hope that someone can address our meeting.
- e) Update by Phil Bess on City Baseball Magic and its effect upon the baseball and architectural community.

REMEMBER: the deadline for proposals is March 1, 1990!

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X CHANGES OF ADDRESS Please keep us posted if you move! The following committee members have changed locations:

David Pietrusza	Marty O'Connor	Christine Fry
611 Sanders Ave.	37 Cypress St.	54 Tremont St. #2
Scotia, NY 12302	Floral Park, NY 11001	Brighton, MA 02135

- XI NEW YANKEE STADIUM? Keith Danish sent us a clipping from the 1-25-90 NY Times outlining the Bronx Borough President's proposal to build a new park for the Yankees at Ferry Point Park, a 441-acre site at the north end of the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. "That's the first I've heard about it." said principal owner George Steinbrenner.
- XII MORE STADIA BUILDING TALK Mike Dempsey sent a clipping of plans for a new football stadium/convention center for St. Louis. Gordon Thomas sent clips of football stadium talk in the D.C. area. Noted baseball writer Tom Boswell has urged D.C. to give Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke what he wants for a city football facility while proposing that Northern VA get on the ball to establish a facility for baseball and a possible expansion franchise. He feels that a D.C. park for baseball (or the use of RFK again) would be tough because the Orioles would be able to cite their new park's proximity as an objection. Virginia, says Boswell, is a different market.
- XIII SUNCOAST DOME in St. Petersburg lacks a baseball team, but it is being considered for arena football, and, maybe hockey? So says the 1-20-90 St. Petersburg Times. Thanks to Joe Favano for his recent batch of clippings.
- XIV BALTIMORE'S CAMDEN YARDS park is under construction with a 45-minute ceremony at what will be home plate. Gordon Thomas sent a batch of clippings that give the new park's dimensions at RF 323, LF 331, CF 400 and a deep LF/CF point of 410. The RF wall will be 25 feet high. The "first pitch" ceremony took place on 2-6-90, the 95th anniversary of Babe Ruth's birth.
- XV PALACE OF THE FANS park research by Eliot Knispel. This pre-Crosley Field park in Cincinnati has been Eliot's subject for quite some time and he is looking for help in the way of photos. He lives at 50 Grant Street; Farmingdale, NY 11735. He is also trying to locate the company that took the photos for the 1902 opening day program. All that he has is the notation "Manns Co. of Cn, OH."
- XVI A NOTE OF THANKS and overdue recognition to my wife, Valerie, who reads each newsletter, points out most of the typos and bits of muddled prose, and serves as a good natured clerk for all the calls that come while I am away.

Keep those cards, letters, and clippings coming! Let me know if you plan on attending the 1990 Cleveland meeting. Next newsletter goes out in early April, so get your news notes to me by late March.

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New clippings for the files:

- a) Review of Toronto Skydome by Paul Goldberger, NY Times, 7-16-89
- b) Best Little Ballpark in Texas, SI, 8-31-89
- c) Architects Play Ball, John Pastier, Metropolitan Home, Oct-89
- d) Take Me Out to the Old Ballpark, Pastier, Boston Globe, 10-8-89
- e) Orioles Ballpark Takes Shape, Wash. Post, 12-29-89
- f) Build a Better Ballpark, and the World, NY Times, 8-20-89
- g) Field Days, New Ballpark Designs, Boston Globe, 7-14-89
- h) Stadium Plans for Durham, NC, Raleigh News/Observer, 7-9-89
- i) Osborn Engineering Company brochure
- j) Boschem to the Diamond: Locating Richmond, VA old parks
- k) New Old Downtown Stadium for Baltimore, Lancaster, PA News,

Thanks to all contributors. Items b, h, & i take extra postage (45¢).  
All others are 25¢ for one, 45¢ for four or more.

BALLPARKS OF NORTH AMERICA

Author: Michael Benson  
Research Consultants: Rick Erickson and David Pietrusza

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
Box 511, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640  
475 pages with photographs, bibliography, index.

During my first attempt to write a "review" of this book, it occurred to me that I had not attempted anything of this nature since about 1964. As I recall, old Mrs. Harriman didn't have much nice to say about my effort then and likely wouldn't approve a quarter-century later. So, I'll leave serious literary analysis to someone more qualified and be content to offer a few lines about the book from a baseball perspective as if discussing it between innings at your local ballyard. After all, isn't that why we convene in this manner in the first place?

BALLPARKS OF NORTH AMERICA is a collection rather than a compendium. It is certain that with so much material to sort through, author Benson had some decisions to make about what to include, what to downplay, what to ignore. I don't agree with all of his decisions (some of which were apparently made for him in the nature of the information available); like Bill Klem, I can see that he "never called one wrong in his heart"...nor have I.

The book is arranged in alphabetical-geographical-chronological order (is that akin to lining up in alphabetical order by height?). So we are ushered from Aberdeen to Zanesville, given the name(s) of the ballpark, leagues involved, teams to occupy the facility. This is followed by exact location if known, dimensions of the playing field, seating capacity, and attendance records. This latter feature sometimes extends to a full column and might provide more than one wants to know. The statistical information is followed by an "essay" section designed to fill out the description by outlining personalities who operated there, oddities about the ballpark, and the like.

It is certain that research for this effort was a daunting process; judging from the acknowledgements, much of Benson's information was derived from responses by PR types in major and minor league cities, from librarians, local historical societies, chambers of commerce, etc. As a result, sections of the commentary read like press releases or back-page entries in your local team's souvenir program. Whether this style adds authenticity or detracts, I'm still unable to decide.

I would have to question the author about some of his decisions regarding what to include. Am sure the addition of ballparks in Mexico, Cuba, and Latin America adds legitimacy to the title but little else. A number of college and university facilities are included; probably a greater number are left out. Whether this indicates any sort of selectivity by the author or whether the inclusions are merely a function of which college SID's chose to respond to requests for information is unclear. Benson really must go to the woodshed for the mention of Zaragoza Amateur Baseball Field in Austin, Texas (complete with photograph); similarly, the section on Stanley Coveleski Regional Stadium in South Bend, Indiana nets more ink than Royals Stadium and Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum combined.

On a more positive note, it seems that the author took great pains to see that ballparks from antiquity got as much space as possible at the expense of the more current facilities with which we should be more familiar.

I have reached the conclusion that either ballparks do not photograph well or the photographs do not convert to book size adequately. The photographs, many from the collection of collaborator David Pietrusza, are almost without exception too small or without adequate contrast to convey a sense of the ballpark's dimensions or interaction with its surroundings. If the photo editor chose to include Soldier Field or Mile High Stadium at all, shouldn't the choice have shown them as configured for baseball rather than, here comes the F word, football? And here's a vote for another trip out back with a switch for the full page devoted to the broken-down Little League scoreboard in Louisiana.

So what do we have here? It's a book about ballparks, obviously constructed from a lot of effort and care, unlikely in any case to make its author wealthy or a talk-show guest. I found too many errors and omissions just from limited personal knowledge to consider it an indisputable reference. I'll rate it this way; it seems a bad-hop single, somewhat flawed in its execution but it goes in the scorebook as a base hit nonetheless. Are there pebbles in the infield of BALLPARKS OF NORTH AMERICA? Bet your seat cushion there are. Who among us could have done better? Likely not many and certainly not I. Want to borrow my copy? Well, OK, but have it back in a week and no mustard stains please because I intend to keep looking in it for a long time and if Mr. Benson and I ever meet, I'll thank him and ask that he sign my copy.

C. P. Wilson III