

Spring Flings

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Jack Russell Stadium

In Memoriam

By Dave Nemetz

The wrecking ball has claimed another of the grand old dames of spring training. Jack Russell Stadium in Clearwater, Florida, former spring training home of the Philadelphia Phillies from 1955 to 2003, met its demise this past July. The site is still used for baseball, though, as Winning Inning, a baseball program known for helping Cincinnati's Josh Hamilton get his life back together, will use the field and clubhouse as part of their operation.

I had the opportunity to twice play at Jack Russell, as part of my Phillies Phantasy Camp experience in 2003 and 2004. I also have attended numerous games there in my treks to Florida for Spring Training. JRS is what you expect in a spring training stadium; a laid-back atmosphere, minimal amenities, and up-close action. I still remember back in the 1970's listening to the first Phillies broadcast in March, hearing Harry Kalas' voice: "Good afternoon, everyone, from Jack Russell Stadium in Clearwater, Florida, it's time for another season of Phillies baseball." For me, that was New Years Day.

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China, Japan to Host Spring Training Games in 2008

Dodgers to possibly travel extensively in Spring

Beijing, China, and Tokyo, Japan are on the radar for big league spring training and regular season games in March of 2008, according to Major League Baseball.

The stadium where baseball games in the 2008 Summer Olympics in China will be played will most likely host a 2-game series in mid-March, possibly between the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres. In Japan, The Tokyo Dome is likely to stage season-opening games between the Oakland A's and World Champion Boston Red Sox a week later.

The A's and Red Sox are also slated to play exhibition doubleheaders against Nippon Professional Baseball teams a few days before the official start of the 2008 season.

The Dodgers would be happy wanderers if the trip to China goes forward. In what will be their final season holding spring training in Vero Beach, Florida, the Boys in Blue would open camp at Dodgertown, travel to China in mid-March, possibly stop in Taiwan for additional games against Taiwanese teams, and would finish their spring training at the Oakland Athletics complex in Phoenix before heading home to Los Angeles. The A's facility would be available while Oakland plays in the series in Japan.

It was also announced in Late November that the Dodgers would play the Red Sox in an exhibition game at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on March 29, 2008, to commemorate the Dodgers 50th year in Los Angeles.

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Jack Russell Stadium will go down in the annals of rock and roll trivia, as well. It was there in 1965 that the Rolling Stones got the inspiration for their hit "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction". Hundreds of youths stormed the field and threw toilet paper at the Stones, and the concert was halted. Keith Richards, legend has it, used the incident to write the opening guitar riff for the song.

And Jack Russell also has notoriety for having the stadium organist ejected from a game. A close call in a Clearwater Phillies game in 1985 led Wilbur Snapp to play "3 Blind Mice" on his organ. The umpires didn't take to kindly to Mr. Snapp's snap judgement, and ejected the longtime keyboardist from the stadium.

There was also the (in)famous Hooters billboard in left centerfield in the late 1980's that featured a large picture of Darren Daulton's former wife, Playboy centerfold Lynne Austin, with the words, "Hit It Here, Darren".

So, it's gone now, mostly, except for the dugouts, the field, the clubhouse, and a practice diamond. The Phillies have moved across town to Bright House Networks Field. But the memories will linger at 800 Phillies Drive.

Spring Training in Maryland?

Mackmen train in Frederick

By Dave Nemetz

For those of us who live in the Mid-Atlantic states, it would be hard to fathom a major league team conducting their spring training operations in the state of Maryland in March. Nothing in the normal weather patterns indicates a regular Florida-like atmosphere. But it actually happened, albeit during the World War II era, when the Philadelphia Athletics used McCurdy Field in Frederick, MD, as their base of operations.

Connie Mack opened his 1944 training camp on March 12, and some of the individuals in camp were quite

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Ground Broken on Dodgers New Park in Arizona

ChiSox to eventually move there as well

By Kevin Saldana

On Monday, November 19th, ground breaking was held in Phoenix, AZ on a new 13,000 seat stadium where, in 2009, the Los Angeles Dodgers will move their spring training home. The land on which the \$80.7 million stadium is being built, at the corner of Camelback Road and 111th Avenue, is owned by the nearby City of Glendale. The two cities are cooperating to build the stadium.

Among those who showed up to the ground breaking ceremony were Dodgers owner Frank McCourt, longtime Dodger announcers Vin Scully and Jamie Jarrin, Dodger great Tommy Lasorda, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano and Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon.

The Chicago White Sox are also expected to move into the stadium at the same time the Dodgers arrive. The White Sox are trying to find a team to replace them at Tucson Electric Park. Maricopa County officials are hoping to have 12 teams training in the Valley of the Sun in 2009, as a second new stadium is expected to break ground shortly in nearby Goodyear.

Reds to Leave Sarasota

With the residents of Sarasota voting down a \$16 million bond referendum in November that would have helped rebuild Ed Smith Stadium, the Cincinnati Reds will now be looking for a new Spring Training complex in 2009.

Possible sites that will be interested in luring the Reds would be Vero Beach, FL (losing the Dodgers after 2008) Glendale, AZ (looking for a second team to join the Indians in 2009), and Tucson (to replace the Chicago White Sox).

notable; George Kell and Nellie Fox were 2 young players who made their debuts with the A's back then, and former A's star Al Simmons came back as a player-coach. Other coaches were future Hall-of-Famer Chief Bender and Lena Blackburne, whose name adorns the mud that is used to rub on baseballs before games.

Spring Training games back in the 40's were not as we know them today. In 1944, the A's played a team from the Curtis Bay Coast Guard base, minor league teams from Baltimore and Toronto, and a team from New York called the Yankees (the only major league team to travel to play the Athletics in Frederick). That game drew approximately 1,500 fans to McCurdy Field, and they saw the Mackmen defeat the Yanks 9-1, in a game halted in the 8th inning due to snow.

Spring training in 1944 also differed in reporting dates. The A's reporting date of March 12 was about a month later than when today's players currently report. The camp also lasted until mid-April (April 12 was the date of the A's final exhibition game in 1944). Of course, the season was also 8 games shorter and contained more doubleheaders, so the season naturally started later.

McCurdy Field, built in 1920, still stands in Frederick today. Much of the grandstand appears as it did back when the Athletics held their camp there, and the Frederick Keys of the Carolina League used McCurdy for their inaugural season while Harry Grove Stadium was under construction. McCurdy Field currently is used as an amateur field, hosting Babe Ruth league and high school games. One wonders if the young players who step to the plate there are aware that the field on which they are playing was home to Connie Mack and his Mackmen for one month 63 years ago.

Do You Have an Idea for "Spring Flings"?

We're always looking for committee members to submit articles for upcoming issues of Spring Flings. If you have an idea, submit your article by April 24, 2008 for inclusion in the May 2008 edition. Send an e-mail with your article to Newsletter Editor Dave Nemetz, davenemetz@smartneighborhood.net.

Spring Training Committee Meeting Report

From SABR 37 in St. Louis

At last summer's SABR convention in St. Louis, committee chair Kevin Saldana was unable to attend, and Zita Camo was gracious enough to chair the committee meeting. What follows is her report to Kevin.

Okay. I'm back in Tampa, got home in one piece, and I figured the first thing I would do would be to get on the computer and fill you in on the proceedings at the meeting. First, I explained to everybody that once again I was playing Mariano Rivera (smile), and then I had everyone who was there sign in. The individuals who showed up were: Dan Ouimet, Paul Wendt, Madison McEntire, Tom Wanchow, Joe Wanchow, Steve Bracio or whatever his name is, Mark Cohen, Roger Godin, Robert Spelling, Dan Cohen, R.J. Lesch, Bill Hickman and Stephen Hamm---thirteen in all. I mentioned briefly that the committee seems to be growing, and then we got to some real business, viz., namely and to wit:

The annual "Boiling Out" event in Hot Springs, Ark. will be next March 8 or so, and there ensued a lively discussion on how this connects with 19th-century spring training. Several small chapters are interested, and Madison will have more info on that as it moves along.

The outgoing chairman of the 19th Century committee has a spreadsheet which he is constantly expanding, and those who are interested should get in touch with him.

Things got really exciting when the question came up regarding spring training rosters---players who were on those rosters but who never made it to the majors---Messrs. Wendt and Lesch really got into it. There are different databases on the subject, and it might prove highly illuminating if some people would investigate this in depth; there seems to be quite a few instances of this---players who participated in spring training but were cut from the squad. WHY IS THIS?

One of the participants brought up the subject of what seems to be a migration of spring training sites from Florida to Arizona, and we were all talking

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about it at once. My feeling is that the weather is a major factor here---Arizona has a much drier, and if I may say so, warmer climate than Florida, and the players are not nearly as likely to have workouts and exhibition games rained out or frozen out. I remember how I never got to any of the Yankees' exhibition games, let alone the spring training workouts, this year because it was so bleeping cold!!!

Incidentally, I picked up an interesting book at the convention, about barnstorming and exhibition games from 1901 through 1962, and I think that some of the earlier games might have a connection to early spring training. I'll have to read it carefully when my luggage, with all the books I purchased, arrives here at home, which is supposed to be tomorrow if nobody screws up at the hotel (by the way, the hotel is nice, but the service at the restaurant is so s - l - o - w...).

When the meeting broke up, R.J. said to me, "You get the save."

From the Discussion Group Site:

Hi Everyone,
I had a recent E-Mail exchange with Gary Gillette regarding the location of the Chicago White Sox spring training sites of the 1908-10 time period. In our research we determined that the ChiSox were running two camps, one in Los Angeles and one in San Francisco. Upon arrival on the West Coast, the team was splitting into two teams an "A" team and a "B" team. At the midpoint of March the two teams were switching camp locations. In keeping my Spring Training sites database in mind, how should we be listing the White Sox spring training location for this time period. Should we be listing them as Los Angeles-San Francisco? Should we be listing them by the site the "A" club used first. Should we be listing them in a different way?
Your Thoughts, please

Thanks,
Kevin Saldana

About the Spring Training Committee

The Spring Training Committee was formed in 2002 to study the impact of professional baseball on the cities which have played host to spring training camps over the course of baseball history. The primary area of research is a comprehensive historical and geographical listing of spring training venues for major league, minor league and Negro league ballclubs. Committee members have also compiled a listing of those ballplayers who have appeared on spring training rosters for big league clubs, yet never made their debut in regulation championship play.

The committee publishes the *Spring Flings* newsletter twice annually.

The committee operates an interactive online discussion group (<http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/sabrspring/>) for members to post research requests, analysis and other items of interest.

Any SABR member can join this committee.

For more information, please feel free to follow-up with me directly.

Kevin Saldana, Chairman
sabrkev@gmail.com

