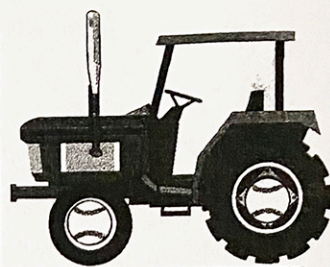


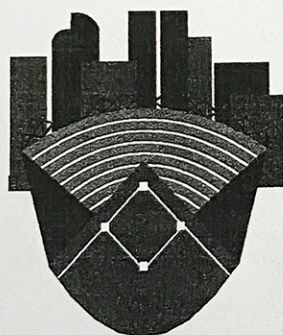
# THE FARM REPORT

A publication of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR)



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## MINOR CHANGES FOR BALLPARKS

BY ANTHONY SALAZAR

As teams get ready for the new season, minor league ballparks will be sporting new looks for fans eager to shake off the winter blues and step into the springtime ritual of baseball in America.

In the Cal League, the Modesto Nuts will be installing a \$500,000 scoreboard which will include a state-of-the-art video board. The new addition was paid for as part of a \$3 million upgrade negotiated in a recent 10-year lease agreement.

Still in the Cal, the Visalia Oaks are implementing 'Phase 1' of a two-year renovation project for Recreation Park, the league's smallest ballpark. The team will add two group hospitality suites and upgrade the stadium's

infrastructure before fans hit the ballpark in April.

Cheney Stadium, home of the PCL's Tacoma Rainiers faces a number of improvements as well. The 47-year old ballpark will get a crown façade, a wrought iron fence surrounding the stadium and over three dozen new handicapped seat assignments that complement the seats already in place. Computer graphics will also be added to the scoreboard. These improvements, totaling to up \$1.6 million, were made possible by a State of Washington grant available to minor league teams in the Evergreen State. Other minor league beneficiaries include the Everett AquaSox, Spokane Indians, TriCities DustDevils, and Yakima Bears, all teams in the Short Season A — Northwest League.

## THE AMAZING GROWTH OF INDEPENDENT BASEBALL

BY BOB WIRZ

Skeptics thought Independent Baseball wasn't likely to last when this modern day approach to the professional game was started with two leagues back in 1993.

Guess what? The 15<sup>th</sup> season of professional leagues and teams without affiliation to major league baseball is coming up in 2007. There will be at least eight leagues and more than 60 teams based in no less than 27 of the 50 states.

One fitting description: How about "robust"?

The seven leagues in business in '06 attracted another record number of fans—7,554,512, based on the figures compiled by the official statisticians, *SportsTicker*.

Eleven teams averaged 4,000 or more every time they opened their doors, led by Winnipeg of the Northern League at 6,504. Long Island, NY, which is part of the full-season

See INDY page 4



## BELOIT & OTHER MIDWEST LEAGUE STUFF

BY JOEL DINDA

On December 14, the Rock County Board voted not to approve a land swap which would have made possible building a new ballpark for the Beloit Snappers near Interstate 90. This vote apparently ends an 18 month effort to build a new stadium, and it's not clear what the impact will be on the Snappers' future. What is clear is that Minor League Ball, the major league affiliate (Minnesota), and the Beloit owners all believe that the team cannot long continue to play in their existing venue.

The really striking thing about the press coverage of the land swap rejection is the apparent discouragement of the team's board of directors. They sound like they're ready to throw in the towel.

Team president Dennis Conerton: Over the four years we've been working on this we've pretty much exhausted our known options. "It's no better than a Legion baseball field."

The current Beloit ballpark, Pohlman Field, does not meet the minor league standards and has been operating under a series of exemptions for over a decade. They've lately attracted about 1,300 fans per game, a rate they claim to be around break-even. If what I "know" about MWL finances is correct, that attendance level probably means they're actually running at a small-but-significant deficit (I think they need to average 1,550). Historically, community-owned teams in the Midwest League have been willing to run at a loss, so that's probably not a terrible obstacle.

Like most community-owned teams, the Snappers are owned by a group of small businessmen and other fans who view their efforts as a community service. The corporate advantage of this sort of ownership is that selling the team is truly difficult; such groups, though, are typically poorly capitalized, and not designed for large fund-raising efforts. If the owners get sufficiently worn, they'll stop discouraging the folks who enquire about purchasing the

team. If they listen to enough offers, there's a chance they'll take one. (Worth noting: I'm told that the team charter requires that team sale money got to community projects, not into the owners' pockets.)

This all might work out. No one really thinks the team's totally exhausted its options, and Clinton got past a similar crisis a few years back when a new leadership group emerged among the owners. But at this point, the Snappers have to be considered the MWL team most likely to move, as most of the league's teams are bound to their cities by long-term leases.

\* \* \* \* \*

There's some interesting stuff going on in Fort Wayne, too. The city's been exploring ways to revitalize the downtown area, and all versions of the plan have included a new ballpark for the Wizards. (If you follow Fort Wayne politics even slightly, you know this discussion's been going on for decades). The most recent iteration, called Harrison Square, looks more "real" than most such efforts. It's planned as a joint city/private effort with a convention hotel and a (\$30 million!) ballpark as the centerpieces. Hardball Capital, the new owners of the Wizards, want a piece of this action; they're Atlanta-based real estate developers with (apparently) some expertise and access to significant capital. They'd like to move out of Memorial Stadium when the lease expires at the end of this summer. *That*, I'll believe when I see it.

Other ballpark news: Midland (the Great Lakes Loons) expects their new stadium, The Dow Diamond, to be completed by the start of this season. Lansing and the Lugnuts are doing a thorough renovation of Oldsmobile Park; it's going to look different next spring.

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## A Real Independent League of Their Own

An Interview with David Kaval, CEO and Founder, Golden Baseball League

By Anthony Salazar

For the past few seasons, the Golden Baseball League has been quietly making new fans in communities in California and Arizona. Most recently, the league added a team in Reno and has expanded to Utah. The GBL's CEO and Founder, Dave Kaval provides "The Farm Report" with a small glimpse into the league, how it came about, and what the future holds. Current teams include:

- Chico Outlaws
- Fullerton Flyers
- Long Beach Armada
- Reno Silver Sox
- San Diego SurfDawgs
- St. George Roadrunners
- Yuma Scorpions

**How did the Golden Baseball League come about, and why did you take this project on?**

The Golden Baseball League started as a class project at the Stanford Graduate School of Business in the same class that spawned successful companies as eBay. Co-Founder Amit Patel and I were looking at placing one affiliated minor league team in the San Francisco Bay Area. When we discovered that territory rights and franchise fees made the affiliated team concept unfeasible, we shifted our focus on creating a new league for the team to play in. The GBL was born in late 2002. Five years later and after two successful seasons, I am even more optimistic about the League and our long term growth.

**What have been some of your toughest tasks they have found in trying to grow the league?**

The toughest tasks are getting new stadiums built and attract-

ing good people to run the teams. Especially at the beginning, getting communities to commit to partnering on a new stadium is tough. This is consistent with the other affiliated and independent leagues at their respective early stages. Finding people is tough because you need to find motivated professionals who share our vision for good affordable family entertainment.

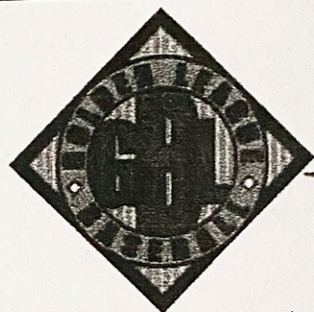
**Over the past few years, the league has faced some contraction issues and some expansion issues. Do you believe the GBL is still facing some tough growth issues in the years ahead?**

The GBL is positioned for some exciting expansion in the next three years. Our first new stadiums will be coming on line and will elevate the fan experience in these communities. As always, it takes time and patience to develop the proper relationships and secure the financing on such ventures.

**The GBL has a somewhat unique business model, where the league owns all of its teams. How has this model fared so far? Does it still work?**

Getting the League started and off on the right foot is a satisfying feeling. I always love seeing children at our games who may not have had the opportunity to grow up with their own professional baseball team without the GBL. I feel that we have filled a void in the country and provided a new generation of fans an affordable way to take in this country's past time. As an historian and author on baseball (*The Summer That Saved Baseball*, 2001 Cumberland House Press), I am happy that I have contributed to the growth and success of baseball in America.

Thanks, Dave! I appreciate your time.





## INDY, from page 1

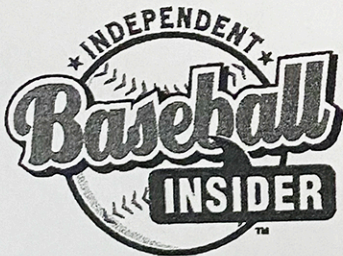
Atlantic League, was the total attendance champion at 419,150.

Independent Baseball also continued to show its strength in not only providing playing opportunities for 1,200-1,300 professional players at any given time, but also in once again being a source of talent for the major leagues

Thirty players who have experience in one or more of the Indy leagues played in the major leagues during the regular 2006 season, swelling the number who have accomplished this difficult feat since 1993 to 104. This author's annual publication, *The Independent Minor Leagues: 2006 Season in Review*, lists every one of them.

Another 185 players were in the minor league organizations of the 30 major league teams when the season ended.

Kevin Millar of the Baltimore Orioles is a prime example of a player who might never have seen the major leagues if not for the opportunity to break in through Independent Baseball. He played in his 1,000<sup>th</sup> major league game in 2006. Josh Kinney emerged as a key part of the World Champion St. Louis Cardinals bullpen five summers after being discovered at River City (O'Fallon, MO) in the Frontier League.



These are only two of many examples.

Consider these additional on-field accomplishments of last year from the Independent Baseball world:

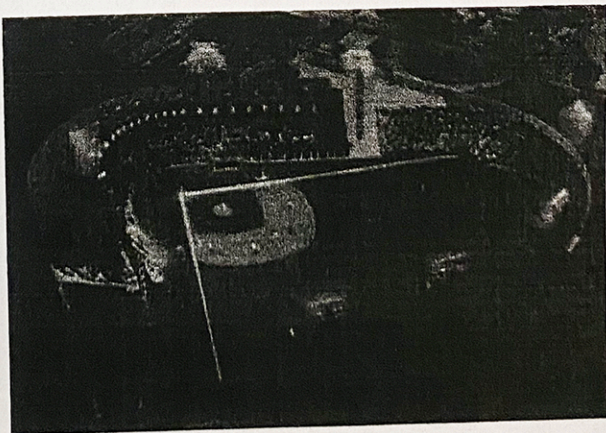
- Forty-six onetime players were in major league spring training camps

- About three dozen others took part in the first World Baseball Classic last spring, with major participation for Australia, Canada and Italy
- Onetime Atlantic League infielder Bobby Hill and pitcher Jeff Farnsworth, out of the same league, were part of Team USA when it qualified for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China.
- St. Paul, MN, frequently a leader in innovation, became what is believed to be the very first minor league team—affiliated or independent—to play in Japan.

Another factor that makes the future look solid is that Independents now thrive in the immediate suburbs of many major U.S. cities—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Dallas to name a few. There is similar success in areas isolated from the major leagues.

What added strength for the game of baseball.

(The author has 16 years of major league baseball public relations experience with Kansas City and as chief spokesman for two Commissioners and runs his own sports PR/marketing company in Stratford, CT. Subscriptions to his weekly *Independent Baseball Insider* column are available at [www.WirzandAssociates.com](http://www.WirzandAssociates.com), where fans also can order his annual book reviewing the previous season (*The Independent Minor Leagues: 2006 Season in Review*) or uniquely-created *Independent Baseball Insider* T-shirts. His blog on Independent Baseball is [www.IndyBaseballChatter.com](http://www.IndyBaseballChatter.com).)





## FINAL 2006 INDY LEAGUES ATTENDANCE

TEAM	LEAGUE	ATTEND	TEAM	LEAGUE	ATTEND
1. Long Island Ducks	(AtL)	419,150	28. River City Rascals	(FrontL)	109,816
2. Lancaster Barnstormers	(AtL)	370,176	29. Amarillo Dillas	(ULB)	106,797
3. Somerset Patriots	(AtL)	362,585	30. North Shore Spirit	(Can-Am)	102,639
4. Winnipeg Goldeyes	(NL)	312,213	31. Edinburg Coyotes	(ULB)	93,474
5. St. Paul Saints	(AA)	288,171	32. Florence Freedom	(FrontL)	89,969
6. Kansas City T-Bones	(NL)	269,205	33. New Jersey Jackals	(Can-Am)	89,385
7. Camden Riversharks	(AtL)	253,013	34. Sioux City Explorers	(AA)	88,408
8. Traverse City Beach Bums	(FrontL)	203,574	35. Chillicothe Paints	(FrontL)	86,682
9. Schaumburg Flyers	(NL)	200,591	36. Coastal Bend Aviators	(AA)	85,862
10. Joliet JackHammers	(NL)	199,356	37. Sussex Skyhawks	(Can-Am)	85,126
11. Bridgeport Bluefish	(AtL)	193,096	38. Yuma Bullfrogs	(GBL)	79,244
12. Lincoln SaltDogs	(AA)	190,873	39. Alexandria Aces	(ULB)	79,071
13. Gateway Grizzlies	(FrontL)	182,124	40. Pensacola Pelicans	(AA)	78,755
14. Newark Bears	(AtL)	178,132	41. San Angelo Colts	(ULB)	74,687
15. Fort Worth Cats	(AA)	177,894	42. Windy City ThunderBolts	(FrontL)	70,907
16. Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks	(NL)	171,877	43. Rio Grande Valley White Wings	(ULB)	66,928
17. Gary-SouthShore RailCats	(NL)	163,133	44. Edmonton Cracker Cats	(NL)	65,930
18. Brockton Rox	(Can-Am)	157,462	45. Chico Outlaws	(GBL)	64,701
19. El Paso Diablos	(AA)	155,651	46. Reno Silver Sox	(GBL)	62,903
20. Washington Wild Things	(FrontL)	152,805	47. New Haven County Cutters	(Can-Am)	62,356
21. Quebec Capitales	(Can-Am)	138,376	48. St. Joe Blacksnakes	(AA)	59,264
22. Atlantic City Surf	(AtL)	134,900	49. Fullerton Flyers	(GBL)	59,071
23. Evansville Otters	(FrontL)	130,212	50. Nashua Pride	(Can-Am)	57,975
24. Sioux Falls Canaries	(AA)	120,536	51. Long Beach Armada	(GBL)	57,141
25. Kalamazoo Kings	(FrontL)	119,530	52. Laredo Broncos	(ULB)	54,591
26. Worcester Tornadoes	(Can-Am)	116,712	53. Shreveport Sports	(AA)	53,107
27. Rockford Riverhawks	(FrontL)	115,776	54. Calgary Vipers	(NL)	50,025
			55. San Diego Surf Dawgs	(GBL)	46,282

**AtL:** Atlantic League; **NL:** Northern League; **AA:** American Association; **FrontL:** Frontier League; **Can-Am:** Can-Am League; **ULB:** United Baseball League; **GBL:** Golden Baseball League

*MWL, from page 3*

Logo changes: Burlington and Cedar Rapids will have new logos next season (as will Great Lakes, of course).

Team sales: As noted above, the Fort Wayne team's been sold. Former Indiana governor Joe Kernan's purchase of the South Bend team has been final-

ized. And the Quad City franchise sale looks like it will be approved; all the paperwork's in, the lease has been reworked, and most-everyone sounds happy, which is itself news for this franchise.

*While I am an informed observer, and a distant observer of events in Beloit, my analysis should be taken with a grain of salt. — Joel Dinda*



**The Farm Report: The Business of  
Minor League Baseball**

Anthony Salazar, Editor

This publication seeks to explore the business aspects on baseball in the minor leagues as well as the independent leagues. As such, *The Farm Report* is distributed to SABR members in the Business of Baseball and Minor League committees.

*The Farm Report: The Business of Minor League Baseball* is a newsletter published quarterly by the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR). Inquiries and submissions should be directed to Anthony Salazar at [salazar8017@yahoo.com](mailto:salazar8017@yahoo.com).

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**The Farm Report: The  
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Baseball**

2400 NW 80th St Ste 141  
Seattle, WA 98117

[www.sabr.org](http://www.sabr.org)  
[salazar8017@yahoo.com](mailto:salazar8017@yahoo.com)

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Greetings! It would seem this is the Independent League issue. I would like to thank Joel Dinda, Bob Wirz from the Independent Baseball Insider and Dave Kaval from the Golden Baseball League. They have offered fresh perspectives on the business of minor and independent league baseball.

Independent baseball, I think, always seemed to define baseball in small town America. Teams and leagues have come and gone, but the love for the game is always there. If you spend a little time on [IndyGraveYard.com](http://IndyGraveYard.com), you will find a number of interesting things to check out. Whatever happened to the Mid-American League, the Western Baseball League, the Big South League? How about the Dakota Rattlers, the Columbia Mules and the Salinas Peppers? This season we will see the South Coast League get underway in the American Southeast. Tune in for more updates on their progress, and more on Independent Baseball.

If you have something you would like to contribute the business aspects on baseball in the minors and independent leagues, please feel free to submit your story, article or interesting tidbit. To submit articles, email me at: [salazar8017@yahoo.com](mailto:salazar8017@yahoo.com). Thanks!

