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Truth in Advertising: “If you build it, they will come”

CEDARVILLE, OHIO – One of the most popular sports movies of all time is “Field of Dreams,” where one man’s passion for baseball was transformed into a baseball field for legends of his day.

In the movie, Ray, an Iowa farmer, hears a mysterious voice one night in his cornfield saying, “If you build it, they will come.” The voice was so compelling that Ray acted upon the words and built a baseball field on his land.

For Mark D. Weinstein, Cedarville University’s executive director of public relations, this voice rings true. He’s been attending major league baseball games for all of his life, and when Weinstein sits through an official game in Toronto later in July, he will have seen all 30 major league teams play a game in their home ballparks.

Unlike in the movie, in today’s modern-day baseball, building stadiums has become a regular occurrence. As new stadiums are constructed, fulfilling the desire of baseball fans from coast to coast, professional baseball has never been more popular. Record attendance at minor and major league baseball venues proves that baseball remains “America’s favorite pastime.” As a result, owners, players and communities have never seen higher revenue from the sport in its history.

Nevertheless, that is not how it has always been for diehard baseball fans.

“We used to go to the games for ‘the love of the sport,’ to see our favorite players compete on a warm summer afternoon, with the hope of snatching a baseball or an autograph from our favorite player. It’s a different game today,” said Weinstein. Because of the rapid construction of new stadiums, Weinstein has even seen teams play in multiple home venues. “Now, baseball is much more commercialized, and ticket prices are ridiculously high, so the love of the game has lost some of its luster.”

During his quest to see a major league game in every city, Weinstein has been part of some baseball milestones. While living in Pittsburgh, he was attended one of the Detroit Tigers’ final games in historic Tiger Stadium (“The Corner”). During the last series ever at “The Corner,” Weinstein and friends saw the Tigers lose 7-3 to Kansas City. Two years later--August 9, 2001--he joined colleagues from Robert Morris University at the first game played in Pittsburgh’s PNC Park—an 8-2 loss to the Cincinnati Reds.

“It was a special day in Pittsburgh with a great amount of pageantry,” said Weinstein. “I still have the ticket from that historic game in Pittsburgh.” Weinstein recalls Sean Casey of the Reds hitting the first home run in the stadium, and Pirates losing. “Still, it was a memorable day.”

The first opportunity to see his first major league game, as best as he recalls, was in the 1960s, on the north side of Chicago. One of his favorite childhood memories was attending a Cubs game—just a two-hour drive from his southern Michigan home—on “camera day.” This special event allowed fans on the Wrigley Field outfield to take photos of Cubs players. Taking pictures of players like Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, and Ron Santo were memorable for him.

Allowing fans on stadium fields today is a rarity. The financial risk to professional organizations is too high to allow fans on the playing field.

“That was an amazing day for a young baseball fan,” said Weinstein. “It started a great interest in a sport that I still enjoy watching to this day. But it was just the beginning of a journey that took approximately 50 years to complete.”

He has been able to achieve his goal of seeing a game in all major league stadiums with assistance of personal vacations, his career, and professional conferences. As a sports journalist, it was easy to see games; later as a public relations director in higher education, he benefited from summer conferences in major league cities.

As a journalist in northern Indiana, Weinstein secured media credentials for games at both of Chicago’s professional stadiums. Two memories remain vividly etched in his memory. At old Comiskey Park, while waiting for a pitcher from the Detroit Tigers to join him for a pre-game interview in the Tigers’ dugout, an overthrow by a White Sox infielder squarely hit Weinstein in his stomach. The seam marks from the baseball remained for weeks.

Then there was the potential trip in 1984 to Wrigley Field for the Cubs’ first World Series in decades. Knowing its likely opponent in the Series would be the Detroit Tigers—his childhood favorite team—Weinstein secured media credentials for each of the Cubs’ potential home World Series games.

With the Tigers awaiting the winner from the national league, and the Cubs leading three games to one in the best-of-seven series against the San Diego Padres, it looked promising that Weinstein would see the Tigers play in a World Series game. Not even the “Curse of the Goat” could prevent the inevitable series between the Cubs and Tigers.

Wrong.

The Padres stunned Chicago fans by winning the series in seven games. A World Series at Wrigley Field would have to wait for another 32 years (2016) for the Cubs to play (and win) a World Series game and championship. It took Weinstein 22 more years (2006) before he attended his first World Series game—in St. Louis—where the Cardinals defeated the Tigers in five games.

In the late 1980s, Weinstein moved into higher education public relations. This career has taken him to positions at universities in two major league cities, Pittsburgh and St. Louis. And, it afforded him opportunities to see more baseball stadiums while attending national conferences.

“Whenever I had the opportunity to see a major league baseball game while I was attending a public relations conference, I took it,” said Weinstein.

He also stayed an extra day following a job interview in St. Louis to see a game in the old Busch Stadium.

The extra day proved to be beneficial. Not only was Weinstein able to cross off another stadium, but he was offered the public relations and marketing position at Maryville University of Saint Louis. After accepting the position, he traveled to Milwaukee (with his brother) to see the Brewers—and cross off another stadium.

It was also exciting for me to see a game in the old Busch Stadium in St. Louis while the current structure was under construction.

When visiting baseball stadiums, Weinstein doesn’t just take in a game, he evaluates each facility based on factors that he believes are important to fans. They include having a good view of the stadium and playing surface, cleanliness, the width of concourses, game atmosphere, food, and the overall view (including views around each stadium).

“It’s hard to beat sitting in Busch Stadium, looking at the Gateway Arch and the old courthouse, or in Fenway Park, Wrigley Field or even in old Tiger Stadium in Detroit, and not get caught up in the history of baseball and the growth of our country,” said Weinstein. “They’re all fabulous places to watch a baseball game, but even with all of their history and spectacular views, there are even better stadiums in major league baseball.”

Selecting stadiums other than Fenway Park and Wrigley Field seem counterintuitive. They are the oldest standing stadiums in the country, and bring with them the most history of all fields.

But for Weinstein, one of the newer stadiums, one with spectacular views of the city, is his favorite.

“The best two stadiums, from my perspective, are in Baltimore and Pittsburgh,” said Weinstein. “The clear leader, though, is PNC Park in Pittsburgh because it gives the fans a great view of the game, a spectacular glimpse of the city’s skyline and traditions of Pittsburgh, and it is very fan-friendly.”

The seats face slightly toward the center of the playing field, allowing spectators to be more comfortable when watching the game. Weinstein also believes the cleanliness and spaciousness of the concourses make it easy to walk throughout the stadium and get food from concessions—even on a date when the stadium is at capacity.

The clinching element, however, is the view of downtown Pittsburgh. Regardless of where fans sit, they can see the Clemente Bridge, the Gateway Clipper trolling up and down the Monongahela River and the historic buildings in Pittsburgh. It is most spectacular during evening games when the bridge and buildings are illuminated.

With his enjoyment of baseball, Weinstein has experienced many memorable days at the ballpark. And with the game in Toronto in July, Weinstein can say that he’s seen every major league team play in its home ballpark. He’s living proof that if professional baseball teams build a stadium, he will come.

Mark D. Weinstein’s Ranking of Major League Baseball Stadiums

1. Pittsburgh
 2. Baltimore
 3. Texas
 4. St. Louis
 5. Houston
 6. San Francisco
 7. Seattle
 8. Detroit
 9. Kansas City
 10. Boston
 11. Colorado
 12. Chicago Cubs
 13. Philadelphia
 14. San Diego
 15. Washington
 16. Cincinnati
 17. Cleveland
 18. Arizona
 19. Minnesota
 20. New York Yankees
 21. Milwaukee
 22. New York Mets
 23. Miami
 24. Los Angeles Angels
 25. Los Angeles Dodgers
 26. Atlanta
 27. Chicago White Sox
 28. Oakland
 29. Tampa Bay
- (Toronto to be decided in July)*

Best Game Day Experience

1. Boston

Stadiums Attended but no longer in operation

1. Tiger Stadium
2. Cleveland Municipal Stadium
3. Comiskey Park

4. H.H. Humphrey Metrodome
5. Three Rivers Stadium
6. Riverfront Stadium
7. Yankee Stadium
8. Shea Stadium
9. Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium
10. Busch Stadium