



August 27, 2007

For immediate release

Dickey-Stephens Park named BASEBALLPARKS.COM's Ballpark of the Year

When they took the field on April 12th, it had been three-quarters of a century since the Arkansas Travelers had been the home team in a brand new stadium. That evening began a magical season for the Texas League's Travs, as they smashed attendance records and provided their loyal fans with the kinds of comforts and high-tech niceties previously found only in parks in other parts of the country.

Indeed, Dickey-Stephens Park was a complete revelation to residents in Central Arkansas. After all, for decades they'd been attending games at an antique of a park called Ray Winder Field. Charming and beloved, yes. Modern and comfortable, not at all.

And the new facility wasn't a hit just in the state of Arkansas. Indeed, it has been named the **Ballpark of the Year** for 2007 by the national website BASEBALLPARKS.COM.

Each year, the award goes to the new or remodeled baseball stadium with the best combination of superior design, desirable site selection and fan amenities. In announcing the award, BASEBALLPARKS.COM Webmaster Joe Mock explained that the designation, "not only honors the governmental entities and team responsible for the new facility, it also recognizes the architectural firm. In this case, HKS of Dallas is the designer of the spectacular new park in North Little Rock."

This isn't the first HKS stadium to be honored by BASEBALLPARKS.COM. Dr Pepper Ballpark in Frisco, Texas was also named Ballpark of the Year when it made its debut in 2003. Other HKS projects in the state of Texas include Rangers Ballpark in Arlington, the Dell Diamond in Round Rock, Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi, and the massive stadium currently under construction in Arlington for the Dallas Cowboys. The firm was also behind the successful renovations of Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago and the Detroit Tigers' spring-training park in Lakeland, Florida.

Planning for Dickey-Stephens Park was certainly a collaborative effort involving HKS, the Travelers, the city of North Little Rock and Stephens, Inc., a local investment firm that had

donated the land for the park. “At our initial meeting with the city, the Travelers and the Stephens Group, we made our pitch of our vision for their ballpark,” said Dan Phillips, the Senior Designer from HKS. “Bill (Valentine, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President of the Travelers) was on board with it immediately. He saw how our design tied in with the history of the railroad industry in Central Arkansas.”

Jerry Fawcett, Senior Vice President of the Sports and Entertainment Group at HKS, was the project manager on Dickey-Stephens Park. He emphasizes the role that the City of North Little Rock played. “The City embraced our vision equally as well as the team. Mayor (Patrick) Hays really recognized the importance of the details in our plans.”

During the process of narrowing down what design elements to retain and which ones to discard, Phillips noted that Hays “wanted to keep everything in. He stressed that he expected the best ballpark possible, and he didn’t want to cut out anything that would impact the overall look of the park.”

“Let me tell you something. I doubt any city in America could’ve been better to work with than North Little Rock,” said Valentine. “Mayor Pat Hays and the City Council were great. They gave us more leeway than anyone could imagine. Everything in the park is where we wanted it to be.”

The positive attitude of the city officials was especially evident when cost overruns started to mount. Valentine noted that the cost of the masonry was quite high, plus “all of the reconstruction following Hurricane Katrina caused steel and concrete prices to skyrocket. Cost could’ve been a big concern, but throughout the process, Mayor Hays wanted the best ballpark. He and I were always on the same page.” Valentine pointed out that without the City’s generosity, the lovely brickwork, the aisle that runs horizontally through the seating sections and a lot of the areas now used for storage would have been dropped from the plans. “We really owe a debt of gratitude to the City,” he concluded.

The result of this cooperative spirit is a ballpark with a lovely, vintage railroad-station appearance. The train theme, which pays homage to North Little Rock’s noteworthy history as a vital railroad town, is carried throughout the facility. “You see the theme in the distinctive clock tower behind home plate, the look of the entryways, the lighting fixtures and even in the names of the concession stands,” observed Mock. “One of my favorite elements is a bridge that connects the concourse on the first-base side to the berms in the outfield. It is designed to look just like a structure that would carry railroad tracks across a river.”

Such a unified look, and the resulting adoration of the fans, doesn’t occur without a great deal of harmony between the parties involved. “We’ve worked in the Minors at all levels,” noted Fawcett. “When a team and a city have to work together on a project like this, they often end up at each other’s throats. That didn’t happen here. In this project, the folks from Stephens, the City and the team were all on the same page. It was a real joy and privilege to work on this park.”

Fawcett also emphasized the importance of two Arkansas firms whose contributions added greatly to the success of the park. “Both WER Architects/Planners in Little Rock and TFCG Architects in North Little Rock were great team members.”

While the design is certainly a winner, the park’s setting has also captured the hearts of the Travelers’ fans. “The land in North Little Rock that was donated by Stephens is along the

banks of the Arkansas River, making it simply perfect for a ballpark,” said Mock. “That’s because spectators can gaze across the river at the beautiful skyline of downtown Little Rock as they munch on their hot dogs and watch their team play.”

Even in adversity, North Little Rock’s park showed itself to be a first-class venue. The tragic death of Tulsa first-base coach Mike Coolbaugh occurred at Dickey-Stephens on July 22nd. “Truly, the unthinkable happened on the playing field in Arkansas on that Sunday evening, and all fans of the sport are still grieving over it,” said Mock. “Through it all, though, the game-day staff and the front office of the Travelers showed just how professional they all are, as they handled the situation as well as any team could.”

“You can never really prepare for an event like that,” Valentine added. “But I think our folks did all the right things.”

While no new Major League parks opened in 2007, there was stiff competition in the Minors for BASEBALLPARKS.COM’s annual award. “This was a year with a couple of extremely strong candidates for the honor,” Mock explained. “In addition to new facilities in the independent leagues, the affiliated Minors featured the Dow Diamond in Midland, Michigan, which is an incredibly impressive ballpark, plus the rebuilding of the facility in Idaho Falls, Idaho turned out extremely well.” HOK was the architect in both Midland and Idaho Falls, and it will be difficult to prevent an HOK park from winning next year’s award. That’s because the new parks in Washington, DC, Springdale, Arkansas and Allentown, Pennsylvania – all scheduled to open in 2008 – were designed by HOK.

Dickey-Stephens Park has joined some impressive company by winning the Ballpark of the Year award. Past winners include PNC Park (2001), home of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Hammons Field (2005) in Springfield, Missouri and San Diego’s PETCO Park (2004). Last year, the plaque went to intimate West End Field in Greenville, SC, home of the Greenville Drive of the South Atlantic League.

Mock’s complete review of Dickey-Stephens Park can be found at www.baseballparks.com/Arkansas-1.asp.

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For more information, please call Joe Mock at 512-826-0853. BASEBALLPARKS.COM is a division of Grand Slam Enterprises, Inc. of Round Rock, Texas.