



BASEBALLPARKS.COM™

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BaseballParks.com's 21st Annual Ballpark of the Year Award goes to MLB at Field of Dream

Partly due to the cancellation of the 2020 Minor League season, 2021 has been a banner year for new baseball stadiums. No fewer than nine pro ballparks welcomed fans for the first time this year, but only one could win the award as the best new park.

And the winning facility had the smallest construction budget of the nine (\$6 million), hosted the fewest fans (8,000) and was the site of the fewest games (one).

When Major League Baseball brought the Chicago White Sox and New York Yankees to Dyersville, Iowa on August 12, nothing short of a phenomenon took place. Tickets were in such high demand that prices on the secondary market set records for a regular-season baseball game. More viewers tuned in to watch the game on Fox than for any regular-season game on any network since 2005. And the game was one for the ages, with the White Sox winning 9-8 on a walk-off homer by Tim Anderson in the bottom of the 9th inning.

All of this occurred at a ballpark constructed with temporary structures in the middle of a cornfield. That plot of land is adjacent to arguably the most famous patch of corn in America, where farmer Ray Kinsella built a baseball field in the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams*. MLB refers to both the August 12 event and the ballpark as MLB at Field of Dreams.

And for the ingenuity and hard work that went into that temporary ballpark – and the exceptionally special event played in it -- it has been named the **2021 BaseballParks.com Ballpark of the Year**.

Since 2000, *BaseballParks.com* has presented this honor to the new or remodeled baseball stadium that best delivers what fans want in a ballpark. The selection is made by an advisory panel utilized by the 24-year-old website.

“MLB at Field of Dreams was a special night for everyone who experienced the event in-person, the millions of fans who watched at home, and for the entire sport,” Commissioner Rob Manfred said when informed of the award. “Our ballpark in Dyersville demonstrated an attention to detail that reflected the look and feel of the movie, making it a spectacular setting for a game. I want to thank the White Sox, the Yankees, Murray Cook of BrightView, BaAM Productions, Populous, FOX Sports, and our staff at Major League Baseball for creating an event that we will never forget.”

The announcement of the award was made at *BaseballParks.com*, and is featured in the September 8th edition of *USA TODAY Sports Weekly*. Joe Mock, founder and webmaster of the website and a frequent contributor to *USA TODAY* publications, penned the article about this year's honor.

The idea of playing a game near the site where the movie was filmed originated at MLB headquarters six years ago. They invested \$6 million in the construction of the facility, relying principally on three firms to carry out the vision of creating a ballpark in a cornfield: Populous for the design; BaAM Productions for the project and construction management; and BrightView for the big-league playing surface and team areas. This team of professionals also worked its magic to create Fort Bragg Ballpark for the 2016 game at the military base in North Carolina. That park also won the Ballpark of the Year Award.

“Populous was privileged to design the Field of Dreams Ballpark and bring the magic and poetry of the iconic film to life,” said the firm’s Senior Event Architect Todd Barnes. “Between five years of planning, two attempts to build the ballpark during the pandemic and the unmatched innovation, creativity and thought required from the entire ‘Dream Team,’ we are grateful to MLB for the opportunity, and honored to earn Ballpark of the Year for the 11th time in our firm’s history.”

Indeed, Populous is no stranger to this award, having won it 11 times, starting with the San Francisco Giants’ ballpark (now called Oracle Park) in 2000.

“BaAM was honored to be tasked with project management, construction, and operations for MLB at Field of Dreams,” said BaAM’s President Annemarie Roe. “Our inspiration was to take the passion for the project – and what the sport means for people on a personal level – and factor it into the entire fan experience.”

“It’s been an honor working with MLB as their field and ballpark consultant for the past 30 years, but there was definitely something extra-special about this project in the Iowa cornfield,” said Murray Cook, President of the Sports Turf Division of BrightView. “I’ve heard from hundreds of people about the field and they all tend to share an emotional attachment to the movie or even their own Field of Dreams story. Even if it was just for a few hours, I think what we – and that’s a big *we* -- did to design and build that field gave a lot of folks a sense of hope and a renewed love for the game. And to win this coveted ballpark award is icing on the cake.”

Mick Michel has served as Dyersville’s City Administrator since 2004. His parents operated a nightclub and restaurant in Dubuque in the 1980s, and he clearly remembers Kevin Costner and the cast from *Field of Dreams* coming into the establishment during the evenings while the movie was being filmed. “After working on this project for six years, it is great to win this award,” Michel said. “We took great care in carrying forward the vision of Populous, BaAM and BrightView. We really felt the love and passion for the game on August 12th, because it was a reflection of our community.”

The list of past winners of the ballpark award reads like a Who’s Who of standout baseball facilities. Honorees include Pittsburgh’s PNC Park in 2001, San Diego’s Petco Park in 2004, spring-training facility Salt River Fields in 2011 and Las Vegas Ballpark in 2019.

Unlike other ballpark awards, the honor presented by *BaseballParks.com* is based on merit, not on a vote by fans. Mock, who has visited all ballparks used by the Majors, spring training and the affiliated Minor Leagues, consulted with two other experts in the field to determine the winner. Joining Mock on the selection panel are Doug Greenwald, baseball broadcaster for the past 26 years, and Graham Knight, author of three books on ballparks and who operates the popular Baseball Pilgrimages website.

“It was really cool that MLB made the central prophecy of a fictional movie become true in real life – as people most definitely came to Dyersville, Iowa, and so many people everywhere else got to see that happen on their small screens,” noted Knight.

Fellow panelist Greenwald added, “The *Field of Dreams* site was long overdue to host a regular-season Major League game. It’s a dream of every kid to play in the Majors, and we got to see players experience that on a field which bears the name ‘Dreams.’ It’s exciting that MLB will keep that dream alive on that field next season.”

MLB has already announced that the Chicago Cubs and Cincinnati Reds will meet at this park on August 11, 2022.

The other ballparks in the running for this year’s award were: Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas; Polar Park in Worcester, Massachusetts; Atrium Health Ballpark in Kannapolis, North Carolina; Toyota Field in Madison, Alabama; Riverfront Stadium in Wichita, Kansas; FredNats Ballpark in Fredericksburg, Virginia; CaroMont Health Park in Gastonia, North Carolina; and ABC Supply Stadium in Beloit, Wisconsin.

“Not since 2009 have there been so many new ballparks in a single year,” Mock explained. “There are some truly special parks that opened this year, but after visiting all nine, I’m confident that we’ve chosen the one that had the greatest impact on the sport and its fans.”

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Mock’s in-depth review of MLB at Field of Dreams entitled “Iowa’s night to shine” can be found here: <https://baseballparks.com/indepth/mlb-at-field-of-dreams/>

For more information on this award or on BaseballParks.com, contact Joe Mock at 512-826-0853.

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