

'Dreams' game returns with much fanfare

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DYERSVILLE, Iowa – To many baseball fans, the most beloved movie is “Field Of Dreams.” The 1989 film starred Kevin Costner and a very special cornfield.

There’s never been a sequel to the Oscar-nominated classic, but Major League Baseball is staging its version of a sequel.

Following last year’s highly successful regular-season game played in a temporary ballpark just a few rows of corn away from where the movie was filmed, big-league baseball is coming back to the quaint town of Dyersville. On Aug. 11 (7:15 ET, Fox), the Chicago Cubs and Cincinnati Reds will battle on the same field where the Chicago White Sox topped the New York Yankees 9-8 a year earlier.

By any measurement, the first MLB at Field of Dreams game was a monumental success. The demand for tickets in the 8,000-seat pop-up ballpark prompted prices on the secondary market never seen for a non-postseason game. TV viewership was the highest for any regular-season contest since 2005.

In the game itself, the lead changed hands four times, as eight home runs flew out of the park. The contest was decided on Tim Anderson’s walk-off homer that landed in the sixth row of corn beyond the right-field fence.

“We gave the people a show tonight,” Anderson remarked after the game.

The event provided “the connection to the roots of the game, the future of the game, and to the way that the game permeates other societal aspects of our lives, like a movie,” Jeremiah Yolcut, MLB’s vice president of global events, tells USA TODAY Sports.

After arguably the most popular jewel event ever presented by MLB, how do you top it?

Yolcut feels this year’s event isn’t competing against last year’s. In focusing on the fans in the stands or watching on TV, the emphasis will be on creating



Players enter the field through the corn before last year’s “Field of Dreams” game between the Yankees and White Sox. ZACH BOYDEN-HOLMES/THE DES MOINES REGISTER

a memory “that can sit on the mantel side by side with what happened in 2021. It doesn’t have to replace it. It doesn’t have to live up to it. It just has to be its own piece of magic.”

Picking contestants

The White Sox were an obvious choice to play in the inaugural game in 2021, since Shoeless Joe Jackson was a pivotal character in the movie. The two Midwestern franchises selected this year were the result of an intense process conducted by MLB officials. After assessing interest from all 30 teams and consulting with the schedule makers, “we wanted to make sure we had clubs that really have a fan base that would want to be connected to the game,” says Yolcut.

The players for the Reds and Cubs are happy their clubs were selected.

Cincinnati infielder Kyle Farmer says that he and his teammates watched last year’s

game closely: “Watching homers go out into the corn, it’s just something special. Everybody is excited.”

“It’s going to be awesome,” adds Frank Schwindel, the Cubs first baseman. “Having played in Iowa a couple of times, the fans are passionate. It’s going to be a great time having them come out to watch big-league baseball.”

A minor addition

A major new event is actually a regular-season minor league game.

With all of the seating, playing surface, concessions, clubhouses and media areas complete, it only makes sense to utilize the facility for an additional game. On Aug. 9 (the day after Sports Weekly goes to press), the Quad Cities (Davenport) River Bandits were scheduled to take on the Cedar Rapids Kernels in a Midwest League contest. Both franchises call Iowa home.

MLB Network will televise the game.

“I think it’s a great opportunity for some fans who truly love minor league baseball to see a game in one of the best venues that you could imagine,” says Woodfork, senior vice president of Minor League operations and development.

The minor league game is \$85 for regular seats, \$65 for bleachers, while the major league game is \$475 and \$375.

“It’s an experience,” Woodfork says. “You can spend five or six hours at the (movie) site and watching the game, and take it all in. There’s great value in that.”

Woodfork says fans accustomed to watching big-league games will find the rules of this contest familiar, as there will be no pitch clock and the “human” umpire will call balls and strikes.

Corn as main actor

Todd Barnes, Populous’ sen-

ior event architect, says there are several minor enhancements to the complex – such as an expanded fan plaza, nicer bleachers, better signage and improved stairwells – but for the most part, “nothing massively significant” will be different.

There are two important changes, but fans on hand won’t notice. First, the land incorporating the movie site and the big-league park is now controlled by a different entity. Second, a different strain of corn is growing around the stadium.

In September last year, Hall of Famer Frank Thomas and developer Rick Heidner purchased a controlling interest in Go The Distance Baseball LLC, owners of the property. In April, the firm announced plans to construct nine new youth ballfields, dorms, a hotel and an amphitheater in what are now cornfields at the site.

There’s certainly demand for youth tournaments to be played here. Partly due to the popularity of last year’s big-league game, 367 teams representing 23 states have come to the Dyersville area to play in tournaments this summer – a 240% increase over 2021.

A nonprofit entity has been formed to develop plans for a permanent 3,000-seat stadium where the temporary structures exist. Since the facility could be expanded to 8,000 seats, MLB could continue playing contests here for years to come.

As for the corn, the seed used this year produces plants with more stable roots – critically important when a massive storm roars through the site two days before an MLB ballgame, as happened a year ago.

This year’s weather – plus consistent irrigation using water from wells – has produced corn stalks at least as tall as last year’s, if not taller.

“We always refer to the corn as one of the main actors in our show,” Yolcut quips. “So far, the actors are delivering a command performance.”

Mock covers sports facilities for USA TODAY Sports