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BaseballParks.com's 2025 Ballpark of the Year Award goes to Covenant Health Park

Covenant Health Park in Knoxville is the BaseballParks.com Ballpark of the Year, it was announced Wednesday.

This award has been presented since 2000, when San Francisco's Oracle Park (called Pac Bell Park at the time) won the initial award. The honor goes to the best new stadium in pro baseball.

The announcement of this year's award was made in the September 3rd edition of *USA TODAY Sports Weekly*. Joe Mock, founder and webmaster of the 28-year-old BaseballParks.com site and sports-facilities beat writer for *USA TODAY* publications, penned the article about this year's honor.

Through 2024, the Tennessee Smokies played at Smokies Park in Kodak, Tennessee. The team billed the facility "America's Friendliest Ballpark." For 2025, the franchise moved 20 miles to the "Old City" portion of Knoxville's downtown, and changed its team name to the Knoxville Smokies. And they brought the slogan of "America's Friendliest Ballpark" with them to new Covenant Health Park.

"We were hoping we'd win this prestigious award because so many people put so much into the creation of this special park," says Chris Allen, President of Boyd Sports, which owns the team. "We're thrilled that it's official that the friendliest ballpark is now also the best ballpark."

"For our entire community that dreamed so big and worked so hard, we are proud of this recognition and proud of our new park," notes Boyd Sports' owner Randy Boyd. "I hope it creates great memories and builds friendships and community for years to come."

When COVID slowed the number of new ballparks in the pipeline, only one new park opened in 2024 – Meritus Park in Hagerstown, Maryland. Consequently, the committee that selects the winner of the award decided to push back the competition a year. This permitted five baseball stadiums to be in the running for the 2025 award.

Early in the 2026 season, Mock will present the plaque representing the recognition to Boyd Sports officials and the architecture firms responsible for the innovative design – Populous, BMA and DIA.

"We can't wait to share this honor with our fans early next season," adds Allen.

"We're honored that Covenant Health Park has been named Ballpark of the Year," says Jason Michael Ford, the project manager at Populous, now a 12-time winner of this award. "More importantly, we're excited that the vision of our client, Boyd Sports, is being recognized. The decision to bring baseball back to Knoxville is not only forward-looking, it pays respect to the history of baseball in the area and will connect Downtown, the Old City and East Knoxville."

“I want to emphasize that this is a merit-based award,” adds Mock. “A ballpark doesn’t win this because a team was successful in getting its fans to go online and vote. A park wins because it deserves to, with exceptional design, amenities for fans and players, a first-rate gameday experience, all in a setting in which it fits perfectly. Covenant Health Park delivers on these characteristics beautifully.”

Covenant Health signed a 20-year naming-rights agreement on the ballpark. “We’re very happy that Covenant Health Park is recognized as the Ballpark of the Year,” notes President and CEO Jim VanderSteeg. “This partnership allows us to extend our mission beyond the walls of our more than 150 locations and into the heart of the community. Covenant Health Park provides a place to celebrate physical health and to come together with family and friends, uplifting mental and emotional health, and at the same time, the facility benefits the economic health of our region. It’s a win-win.”

“Covenant Health Park is not just a stadium, but a destination,” says Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon. “People of all ages are enjoying the stadium, and I love watching all the memories being made there! At the same time, it was imperative to me that the stadium provide local jobs and honor the history around its location. Covenant Health Park is doing just that, and injecting new life into an area of our city that had not seen investment in decades.”

Glenn Jacobs, the County Mayor of Knox County, is also pleased to hear of the honor. "We're thrilled that Covenant Health Park has been named the best baseball park! From a design which integrates a town-center feel to the outstanding concessions selection to not a bad seat in the house, this stadium has it all. Whether you are an avid Smokies fan, a visitor to town, or just looking for a fun evening, you don't want to miss a trip to America's Friendliest Ballpark!"

The other four parks in the running for this year’s award were: The Ballpark at America First Square (Salt Lake Bees); Synovus Park (Columbus Clingstones); Fifth Third Park (Hub City Spartanburgers); Meritus Park (Hagerstown Flying Boxcars).

The list of past winners of the new-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, Las Vegas Ballpark in 2019 and Major League Baseball’s Field of Dreams Ballpark in Dyersville, Iowa in 2021.

As in the past, the selection was made by an advisory panel utilized by BaseballParks.com. Joining Mock on the committee are Doug Greenwald, baseball broadcaster for the past 29 years, and Graham Knight, author of three books on ballparks and who operates the popular Baseball Pilgrimages website.

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Mock’s in-depth review of Covenant Health Park entitled “America's Friendliest Ballpark has a new address” can be found here: <https://baseballparks.com/indepth/covenant-health-park/>

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

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