

## Huntington Park Exceeds Expectations

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, April 20 2009 7:00 PM -

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This past Saturday was a day of celebration in Columbus, Ohio. It was the home opener for the Cleveland Indians new Triple-A affiliate the Columbus Clippers, and the city and fans were welcoming Indians baseball to the town for the first time in decades. In a marriage that was long past overdue, the Indians now have their Triple-A level farm team in their home state's capital. Tony was there, and he writes about it for our readers this morning.



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Not many teams, if any, can say that.

Many of the Indians top brass were in attendance. Paul Dolan was up in the club area directly behind home plate taking part in a special VIP party before the game.

Farm Director Ross Atkins and Special Assistant Tim Belcher were in attendance, but with their families and looked more "off the clock"; just soaking in the events of the opener.

The Clippers pulled out all the stops for the pre-game festivities with Super Joe Charboneau, Lenny Barker, and Bob Feller in attendance, and even John Adams and his drum were in the left field bleachers.

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That said, something even greater was happening for the first time as not only was it a day of celebration of the new Indians affiliation, but a day full of expectations with the christening of a new ballpark.

Video: [360 interior view of Huntington Park](#)

The Clippers and all those from the public and private sector involved with bringing the brand new baseball paradise known as Huntington Park were unveiling it to the fans and community for the first time. As Clippers GM Ken Schnacke said to the crowd in the pre-game ceremonies, &quot;Now we are turning it over to you&quot;.

Turn it over they did.

I was at the opening of Huntington Park this past weekend, attending both the Saturday and Sunday games. You couldn't ask for a greater setting on Saturday as the weather was near perfect with a sun filled sky and temperatures in the low 70s with barely a cloud in the sky.

The Clippers lost on Saturday 3-1 to their in-state rivals the Toledo Mud Hens, and won their first game at the new ballpark on Sunday 7-5. Wins and losses almost seemed immaterial over the weekend as most of the focus by the fans was soaking in the new Taj Mahal of Triple-A ballparks and checking out and observing every sight line and nook and cranny in the ballpark to see what other goodies it offered.

They may have lost the home opener, but the real winners were the Indians, the city, and especially the fans. Not only has the Indians affiliation re-energized the fanbase, but this ballpark is absolutely breathtaking. What a gem they have given the baseball fans in Columbus, a jewel that has exceeded everyone's expectations from Indians personnel, Clippers staffers, the players and even the fans.

The ballpark is almost half the size as far as capacity goes from the Indians old stomping grounds at Dunn Tire Park in Buffalo, NY, which actually was renamed to Coca-Cola Field this year. Also, Columbus' old ballpark they closed down last year Cooper Stadium seated about 15,000, so Huntington Park's 11,000 or so capacity is smaller than both parks.

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But you would never know it when you walk up to the field or once you get inside. The reduced capacity allows for more intimacy with the seating where every fan is almost right on top of the action. Ther

e is no second deck other than the club and press level, which is an amazing area unto itself, but the way the lower level stands sprawl from foul pole to foul pole makes every seat in the house a great seat (and very affordable).

There is an open air club bar on the suite level right behind home plate. There is also an enormous Hall of Fame bar in the left field building (more on that in a minute) as well as a rooftop bar in the same building.

The home run terraces on the right field wall are another popular viewing area.

The highlight of the place, to me, is the design of the park. It has a Camden Yards feel with the buildings in the background and a retro-style often found in ballparks today. The two things that jump out to me as the best features of the ballpark would be the left field and right field areas.

Just beyond the outfield wall in left field you have your standard bleacher area which runs from the left field foul pole to the edge of the power alley in left center. It looks a lot like the outfield area at Progressive Field which stretches from the right field foul pole to just the right of center.

But what makes this feature unique is the three story building right behind the left field bleachers.

In this building is a team shop on the first floor, the aforementioned Hall of Fame and Museum area (and bar) on the second floor, and an open air rooftop on the third floor.

The second floor area has large balconies which people can hang out on and the roof on the third floor has risers people can sit in to view the game.

This is very reminiscent of Wrigley Field in Chicago where several buildings provide rooftop seating.

I ventured up to the second and third floor to take in the view, and wow, what a sight.

Don't believe me,  
[check the video out for yourself](#)

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The other area which is a must see is right field. It is a lot like McCovey Cove in San Francisco's ballpark where the right field wall has large square see through sections where fans on the sidewalk on the other side of the wall (Nationwide Blvd runs parallel to the right field wall) can see all the game action. The wall is about 20 feet high (maybe higher) and about the same as the left field wall at Progressive Field. A really neat two story viewing porch on the wall will make for some great views of home run balls.

Another one of the unique features of the ballpark is the upper area where the press box would normally be is completely open with the huge club bar and party area up there. The TV booths are off to the first base side, and the print media box is off to the third base side.

But the most interesting aspect is the radio booth is right in the bar area and in the open air.

You have a live radio broadcast going on with fans sitting around the booth eating, drinking, cheering, yelling, and doing everything else that fans do.

The players themselves got the big league treatment as well with the new ballpark. The new clubhouse is near big league quality, in fact some of the players on the Clippers roster who have experience in many big league ballparks said it is better than several of them.

When I got to the park earlier in the day on Saturday and ventured down to the clubhouse to say hi to a few of the guys and do a few interviews, catcher Chris Gimenez grabbed me and took me on a personal tour of the clubhouse.

From everything I saw, these guys are living like kings compared to where they were last year, whether it was Buffalo or any level lower in the Indians farm system.

They have a big kitchen area with many tables that is separate from their locker area. The locker area is a big square, and a big giant LCD TV is mounted right in the middle of the room (one is mounted in the kitchen as well).

On the TV they can play almost any movie (The Rookie was on Sunday morning before the game), and according to Gimenez they have any game for any gaming system available to play on the TV as well.

In addition to the TVs, they also have a pool table, ping pong table, foosball table, and a shuffleboard table.

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Through the clubhouse is the training areas and showers, and then it leads into a state of the art weight room. From the weight room two interior batting cages are accessible. Both cages have all the latest equipment including the tennis ball machine called I-Trac.

A small tunnel leads from the batting cage area into the spacious first base dugout where the Clippers reside during the game.

On the field, the pitcher's mound has a pitching machine that comes up out of the ground!

If you have any chance whatsoever to get to Huntington Park this year, you have to go. You won't be disappointed. Along the way you'll remember why baseball is such a treasure and why the experience of watching games at the ballpark can be so special.

Huntington Park has certainly set a new standard by which every minor league baseball field will be compared to going forward. I can't do the new park justice writing about it, so see for yourself with photos I took during my visit.

Video: [National Anthem, lineup announcements, and jet fly over on Opening Day](#)

Video: [The ceremonial first pitch on Opening Day](#)

Video: [Players take the field for the first time on Opening Day](#)

*(I just want to take this time to give a special thanks to Clippers manager Torey Lovullo as well as Director of Media Relations Joe Santry and his crew for the warm welcome and hospitality.)*

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