

Lajoie's Work Helped Lead Stadium into a New Era

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In 1988, Nashua Bambino Baseball took center stage as the city hosted an event that made history and helped to pave the way for Holman Stadium as it now stands; one of New England's premier small ballparks.



Fred Lajoie was the visionary behind the Bambino Series and was instrumental in making it a signature event.

How did Lajoie decide to try to have Nashua host a national event? He went to the Bambino World Series in Oakland, Calif., and didn't think the job was done very well.

He met with then-mayor James Donchess and expressed his ideas. The city had seen its affiliated minor league team, the Pirates, bolt a year earlier, and while not actively seeking a replacement, the idea of a national event would rejuvenate the baseball atmosphere. A pledge of \$30,000 came from that meeting to get things going. The idea was sold.

There was one problem. The only organization or company willing to help sponsor the event was the city of Nashua itself, which gave Lajoie that \$30,000. Lajoie was afraid he'd be stuck with any shortfall.

"My wife was really concerned," Lajoie said. "If we didn't make it – the cost was in the area of \$130,000 – without a sponsor to back it up, the house was going. But fortunately the group we put together really brought in a lot of money."

The tournament brought in big crowds, upwards of 2,000 some nights. There was no shortfall – in fact, there was a profit, enough for the city's five Bambino leagues to split, about \$4,000-\$5,000 apiece.

Lajoie had an army of 400 volunteers working on the event.

"The program book had brought in \$25,000 alone," Lajoie said.

Ted Williams spoke to the Bambino players, a huge hit. Lajoie recalled that Williams told him if any adults showed up for the session, he was leaving.

“No adults, kids only,” Lajoie said Williams told him.

The event was so successful for Bambino Baseball that Nashua became the model for the event. Babe Ruth Baseball invited Lajoie to supervise subsequent World Series “when they would be worried about what that city was doing, to make sure it was going to be done properly.

“They evidently were very impressed with what we had done here. We set the example. Nobody had ever done it in a stadium,” he said.

And today, Holman is a far different place. His family, including grandchildren, will be in a luxury suite at the stadium on the night of July 4, a structure that no one could have envisioned in 1988.

“That’s a big, big change from what we did in that 1988 World Series,” he said. “I can take an elevator to the thing. That’s unbelievable. It’s unbelievable what they’ve done up there.

“And the Silver Knights look good. They’ve got the (Lowell) Spinners behind them, and they get a pretty good crowd.”

Lajoie thinks back to the final day of the Bambino World Series, how he felt after that last pitch when Oakland beat Jackson, Miss., for the title.

“I was major relieved,” he said. We went overboard, we probably spent more money than we had to. But I wanted everybody who was here to understand when they left they had been through an unbelievable experience.

“At the time, it was the best one Babe Ruth had ever done. They told me that, and they still tell me that.”