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Monongalia County Ballpark named BaseballParks.com's Ballpark of the Year

It's not always the biggest or most expensive entry that wins a contest. Such is the case with **Monongalia County Ballpark in Granville, West Virginia, the winner of the BaseballParks.com Ballpark of the Year for 2015.** Of the finalists, the first-year home of the West Virginia Black Bears cost the least to build.

The honor is given annually to the new or remodeled pro baseball stadium with the best combination of site selection, exterior appearance, architectural design, and fan amenities. **Joe Mock of BaseballParks.com will present the plaque symbolizing the award to the Black Bears prior to their home game on August 26.**

The announcement of the award was made in the pages of the August 12th edition of *USA Today Sports Weekly*. Mock, frequent contributor to *USA Today* publications, wrote the article that announced that West Virginia's park is the winner of this year's honor. Mock is also the president of Grand Slam Enterprises which owns and operates the BaseballParks.com website.

This marks the 16th straight year that BaseballParks.com has presented such an award. Past winners include AT&T Park (San Francisco Giants, 2000), Huntington Park (Columbus Clippers, 2009), Salt River Fields (spring training home of the Diamondbacks and Rockies, 2011) and Regions Field (Birmingham Barons, 2013).

"The winning ballparks have come from all levels," Mock observed. "We've had parks from the Majors, Triple-A, Double-A, even spring training. Not since the Brooklyn Cyclones' park received the award in 2001 has the winner come from Short-Season A ball, but Monongalia County Ballpark certainly deserves this honor."

While the award always goes to the home of a pro team, this year's winning facility was actually constructed for college use. The West Virginia University Mountaineers needed an upgraded park for their baseball contests in the Big 12 Conference, and Monongalia County Ballpark filled this need perfectly. Sharing the facility with the Black Bears made the park eligible for the award.

"The award is a great honor," said Mindy Rich, president of Rich Entertainment Group and owner of the Black Bears. "From the beginning, we wanted to create a ballpark that was worthy of the community and we're thrilled this facility has been so well received. We love offering families fun, affordable entertainment—it's very rewarding to see so many fans enjoying themselves."

"We are very proud and honored to have received the best ballpark award from BaseballParks.com," added Matt Drayer, General Manager of the Black Bears. "Monongalia County Ballpark is fan-friendly and has all the modern-day fan amenities such as an open concourse, bowl seating, party deck and an amazing view of both Morgantown and the West Virginia hills. The Black Bears and their fans couldn't be any happier with the overall design and layout provided by Populous, DLA+ Architecture and Mascaro Construction. We are also very pleased to be sharing such a great facility with WVU. This project is a home run that was a collective effort from the State, County, WVU, local area leaders and Rich Baseball. The Black Bears have received positive feedback from the local community so we look forward to having Monongalia County Ballpark enjoyed by fans for years to come."

Built for \$22.5 million, the facility is indeed the result of a great deal cooperation and coordination. “I’m very proud of the people who brought the ballpark to life, because it was a true partnership of the community, the County, the developer, the Chamber of Commerce and, of course, the University,” said Tom Bloom of the Monongalia County Commission. “I’m ecstatic that our park is receiving this national recognition because it shows great things are happening in West Virginia and Monongalia County.”

“I knew when I first saw the ballpark that it was going to be special for West Virginia University and North Central West Virginia,” said WVU Director of Athletics Shane Lyons. “The reviews that I have received since the ballpark’s opening have been nothing but positive. It is proof of what teamwork can do. City, county, state, university and many other officials came together to get this project done and it has been a major victory for all involved. We’re thrilled that our home park is receiving this honor.”

There were three other finalists for this year’s award: First Tennessee Park, the \$47 million home of the Nashville Sounds of the Pacific Coast League; HoHoKam Stadium in Mesa, Arizona, which underwent a \$26 million renovation to accommodate the spring-training needs of the Oakland A’s; and the Southern League’s MGM Park in Biloxi, Mississippi, constructed for \$36 million in an area devastated by Hurricane Katrina 10 years ago this month. “The backstory of how the Biloxi Shuckers’ fine new park came to be built is as inspiring as a sports story gets,” noted Mock.

The designers of the winning ballpark include Populous, who served as the Associate Architect and Design Consultants, and DLA+ Architecture & Interior Design as the Architects of Record.

Chris Haupt, Principal at DLA+, was very pleased with the news. “On behalf of the design team and our construction partners, DLA+ Sports Architecture is sincerely honored and humbled that the Monongalia County Ballpark was selected as the Ballpark of the Year for 2015 by BaseballParks.com,” he commented. “This honor would not be possible without terrific clients such as the Black Bears, West Virginia University and Monongalia County. They provided us with a clear vision for the project. We are proud that our design team could transition their vision into a wonderful venue to watch baseball, have a fun, affordable experience with family and friends, and take in the wonder of the West Virginia landscape.”

Zach Allee, Designer and Senior Associate at Populous, was quite involved in creating the overall look of the park. “It’s an honor to see Monongalia County Ballpark awarded Ballpark of the Year,” he said. “Our project team is proud of how community-oriented the design is. When you’re in the ballpark, there is a very distinct sense of place. You know exactly where you are and feel completely immersed in the community.”

This is the ninth time Populous has been involved in the design of the winning ballpark, including last year’s honoree Southwest University Park in El Paso. “To know that Populous’ work has been recognized time and time again as the best of the best in ballpark design never stops being rewarding,” said Earl Santee, Senior Principal at Populous. “The best part is that it isn’t just the teams who are loving our ballparks. It’s the fans who have really claimed them as their own. When we design, we aim to make places people love to be together. We want the places to become the city’s, the team’s and the community’s favorite place to be. We want them to transcend the team and stand alone as an iconic experience. For our work to resonate so deeply with the industry, fans and our clients is a true accomplishment.”

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The complete list of Ballpark of the Year winners can be found here:

<http://www.baseballparks.com/BallparkOfYrLaunch.asp>

Mock’s review of Monongalia County Ballpark entitled “Gorgeous ballpark does double duty” can be found here: <http://www.baseballparks.com/WestVirginia-1.asp>

*For more information on this award or on Baseballparks.com, contact Joe Mock at
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