

Alaska's *Field of Dreams* Proposal

America**250**Alaska

The Office of History & Archaeology

Alaska Historical Commission

2024

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The Pitch: 49th Star's Field of Dreams

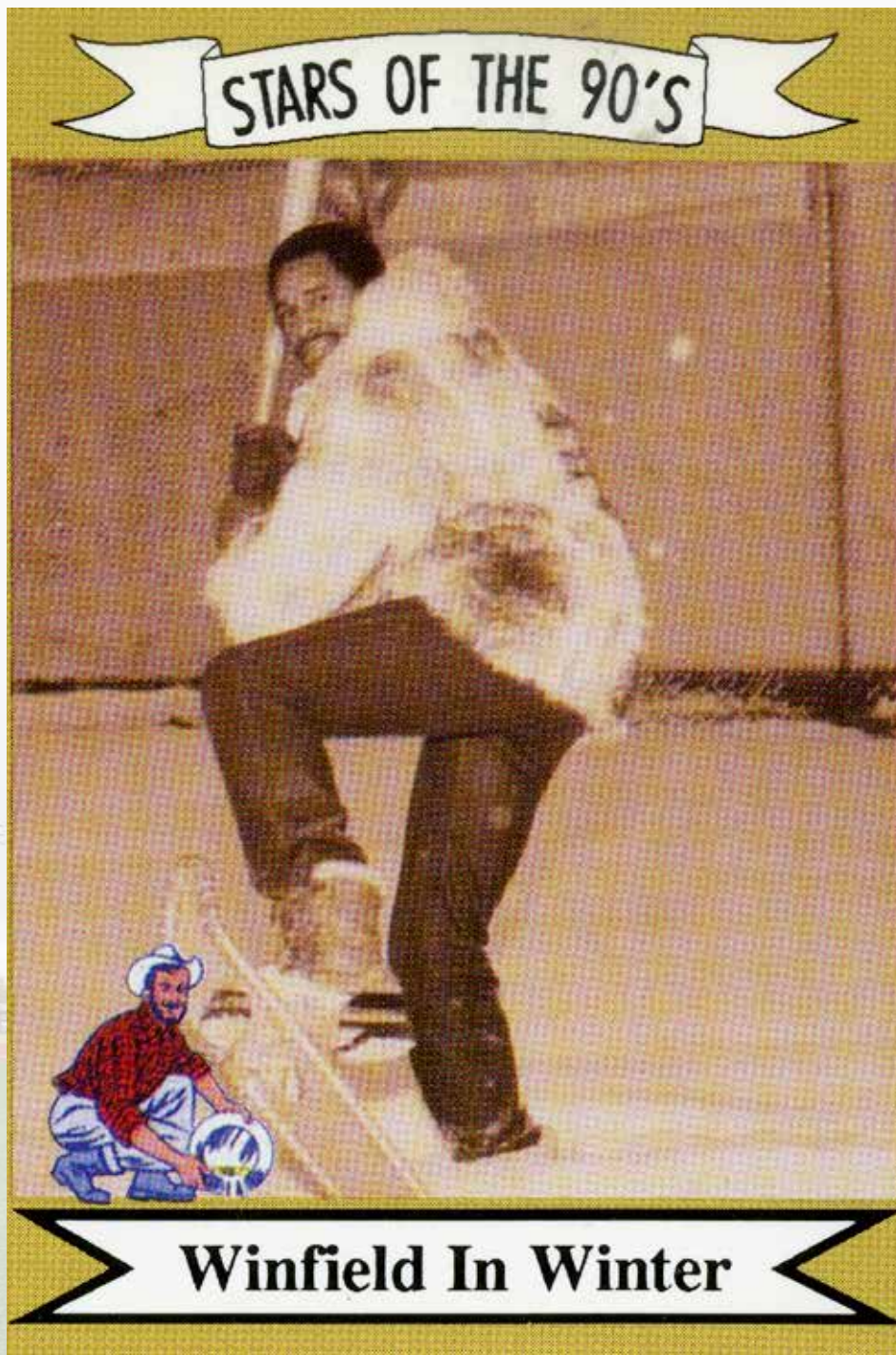
In 2026, the nation will come together to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. On November 6, 2024, Governor Mike Dunleavy designated the Alaska Historical Commission (AHC), chaired by Lt. Governor Nancy Dahlstrom, to coordinate the observance, events, and activities statewide and work with the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission at the national level.

The AHC Task Force is planning numerous ways for Alaskans to participate in the national celebration. However, the centerpiece of the America250Alaska plan is a proposed Field of Dreams Charity Softball Game to be played on or near July 4, 2026.

To mark the national celebration, AHC proposes the following:

1. Collaborate with Major League Baseball (MLB), an America250 partner, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the Alaska Goldpanners of Fairbanks to play a Field of Dreams Charity game with former Alaska Baseball League players on or near July 4, 2026, in Fairbanks, Alaska.
2. Invite players with fond memories of Alaska to return to the roots of their baseball careers, help spotlight Alaska's need for sports and recreational facilities, and enjoy the state's scenic wonders with their families.
3. Salute Alaska's significant baseball story and encourage simultaneous Fourth of July games in communities statewide.
4. Inform Americans and Alaskans about baseball's little-known yet compelling history in Alaska and how the Last Frontier contributes to the epic saga of America's Game through historic preservation and public education programming.
5. Develop legacy programs that stimulate economic growth, engage local communities, and benefit Alaska youth.

Fairbanks is home to the Goldpanners, the founding team of the Alaska Baseball League (ABL), a collegiate summer league, which currently comprises the Anchorage Glacier Pilots, Anchorage Bucs, Chugiak-Eagle River Chinooks, Mat-Su Miners, the Peninsula Oilers, and former teams such as the Valley Green Giants and the North Pole Nicks.



Courtesy of the Alaska Goldpanners, Fairbanks, Alaska

Dave Winfield tries snowshoe baseball during a return visit to Fairbanks in 1984. Winfield was a 12 time All-Star, received the Golden Glove seven times and Silver Slugger award 6 times. He won the World Series with the New York Yankees in 1992. He was inducted into Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001.

Why Fairbanks, Alaska?

Two beloved American narratives come together in the heart of Alaska and set the stage for powerful storytelling: The American Pastime and The Last Frontier.

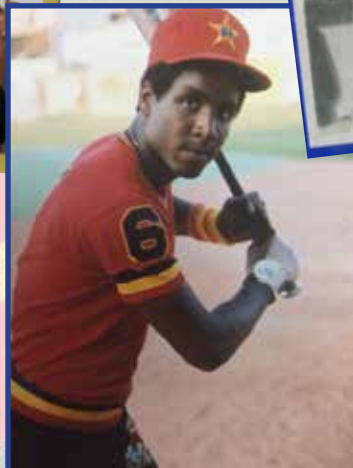
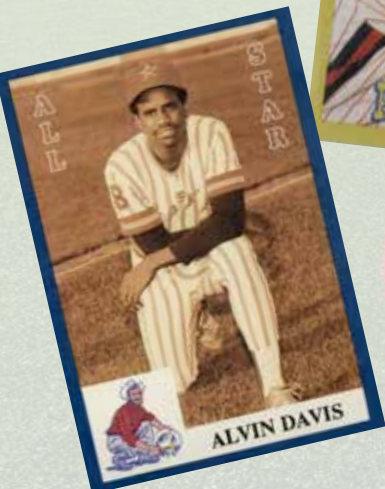
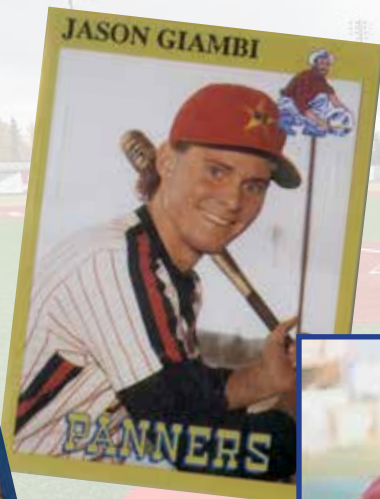
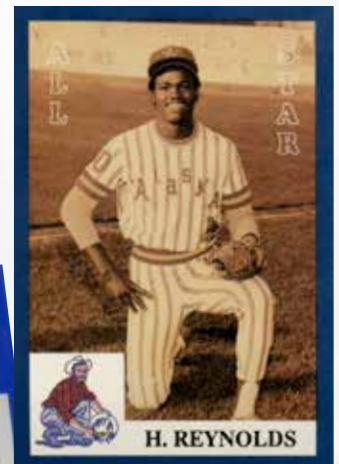
The proposed Field of Dreams Charity Game will be played at Fairbanks's Growden Memorial Field, home of the world-famous Midnight Sun Game and spawning ground for over 500 MLB players, coaches, and umpires.

Built in 1961, the storied ballpark is where generational talents—such as Harold Reynolds, Bill Bean, Jason Giambi, Tony Francona, Alvin Davis, Dave Kingman, Bill “Spaceman” Lee, Barry Bonds, Bob and Brett Boone, and Hall of Famers (Terrific) Tom Seaver and Dave Winfield—donned Alaska Goldpanners jerseys.

Alaska Baseball League competition also cultivated the careers of other MLB icons, including Graig Nettles, Mark McGwire, Jacoby Ellsbury, Hall of Famer Randy Johnson, and future Hall of Famer Aaron Judge.

Alaska Baseball's story offers MLB intriguing and novel origin stories of the game's most beloved and even embattled heroes, which could supply fresh content for documentaries, print media, museum exhibitions, and sports tourism.

Alaska's emphasis on economic growth, community involvement, and youth development will promote statewide programs and inspire 21st-century enthusiasm for Alaska's unique, diverse, and more rugged version of baseball.



TOM SEAVER
(1964-1965)

ALASKA GOLDPANNERS
OF FAIRBANKS

“To me, the Cy Young Award is the most important award a pitcher can attain, and I realize that my success is due to hard work, concentration, hard work, the right attitude, hard work, and, of course, opportunity. And your program, Red, was a vital step in my progress toward reaching a world championship, especially the Cy Young Award of 1969.”

—Tom Seaver to Alaska Baseball League
Founder Red Boucher, October 31, 1969

Tom Seaver photo in a Goldpanners game program. Receiving Rookie of the Year Award in 1967 with the Mets and three National League Cy young Awards, “Terrific” Tom Seaver was one of the most honored players to play in the Alaska Baseball League.

Preserve It, and They Will Come

Growden Memorial Ballpark is Alaska's most historically valuable sports venue because of its association with numerous MLB all-stars and significant aspects of baseball history.

In support of America250Alaska, the Office of History & Archaeology (OHA) will:

1. Produce a pop-up traveling exhibit and companion booklet spotlighting the history of Alaska Baseball in libraries, schools, local businesses, small museums, government offices, and ballparks across the state and nation.
2. Nominate Growden Memorial Ballpark to the National Register of Historic Places. Once listed, the ballpark will be eligible for Certified Local Government grants, Historic Preservation Fund grants, Tax Credits, and other funding sources to restore the field to its 1960s-era minor league glory.
3. Encourage collaboration with private businesses, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to develop a heritage tourism sports program that will expand the ballpark's use beyond the short summer season and serve as a potential site for local, statewide, national, and international sports tournaments, concerts, and exhibition halls and other venues to immerse heritage-seeking visitors in Alaska's history and culture while benefiting businesses, communities, and youth programs.



Courtesy of the Alaska Goldpanners, Fairbanks, Alaska

Growden Memorial Field schematics

Home Field Advantage: A Brief History of Baseball in Alaska

“Baseball served as a beacon, revealing a path through the wilderness.”

—John Thorn, Sports Historian

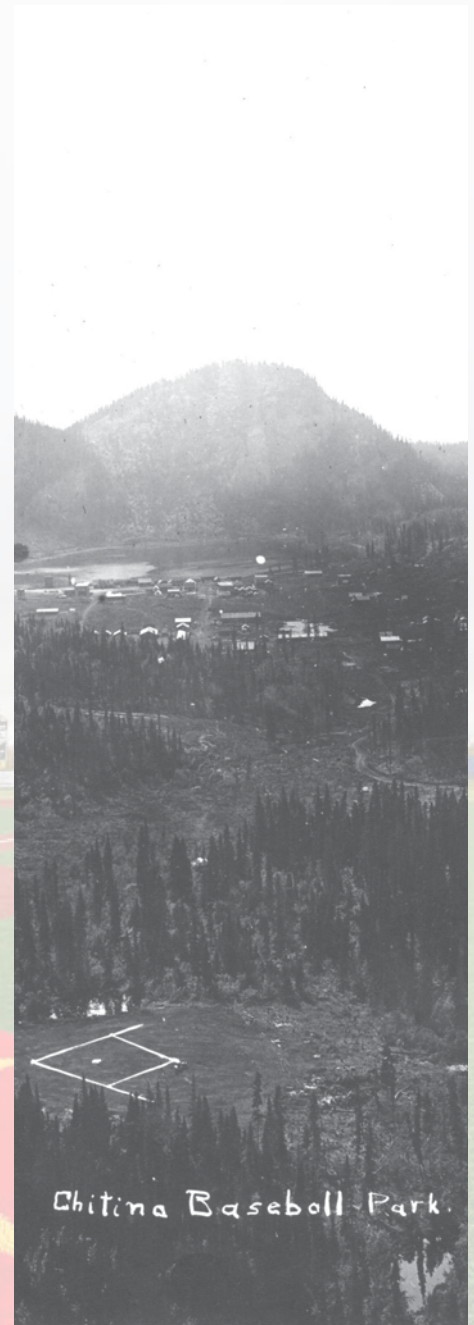
Alaskans have always played a more rugged brand of baseball. Freshly cut evergreen fields and youthful ‘boys of summer’ rarely spark reminiscences of the national pastime in the polar region. Few Alaskans wax nostalgic for a bygone age. We carved diamonds from the wilderness. We play ball at midnight and transform fields from ice and snow.

But they encountered a unique northern landscape within those familiar diamonds, changing the game into something distinctively Alaskan. These stories tell us that Americans might have introduced the national pastime to Alaska, but we Alaskans, as Walt Whitman wrote, made it our game.



Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum

Rolling the Anchorage ballfield Alaska style, ca. 1920



Courtesy of Geoffrey Bleakley, Makawao, Hawaii

Chitina Baseball Park, ca. 1914

Indigenous Baseball

Before Americans brought baseball north, Alaska Natives played Anauligatuk or Anau, described as a mix of cricket, dodgeball, and baseball. Alaska Natives from the southern areas of the state call the game Laptuuk. The game is generally known as “Eskimo Ball” and “Aleut Ball.”

The Indigenous version of baseball likely came to Alaska through two different routes: The Russians introduced to the Unangan and Alutiiq people of coastal Alaska an ancient batting game called “Lapta,” which dates to the 14th century. By the late 19th century, Sami reindeer herders from northern Scandinavia introduced to Inupiat, Inuit, and Yupik people a game they call “Lapp Ball.” The two versions likely came from the same Siberian source.

Historically, indigenous baseball is tied to colonization, but generations of Alaskans passed down this game and shaped it into a cultural expression of their own. The game continues to have a presence in rural Alaska. Indigenous Baseball instills among residents what one observer described as “a feeling of togetherness, which participants—players and spectators alike—share.”



James Barker, courtesy of the Anchorage Museum

Simeon Tulik watches Sam Anthony play “Lappball,” a game introduced by Sami herders from Scandinavia in 1976.

A Whale of a Game

The first known competition comes from Hershel Island, on the Arctic Ocean, where Icebound whalers spread ashes on the sea ice to form a baseball diamond, where they played at 40 below to pass the time. Seven clubs were organized and formed into a league called the “Arctic Whalers’ Pennant.” “These games continued all winter until the ships left for summer whaling in July.



Whale Pennant illustration, “Spalding’s Baseball in Alaska,” American Sports Publishing Co., 1911

Albert G. Spalding, the founder of the sporting goods and manufacturing company, reproduced Funston’s Harper’s article in his game-changing 1911 classic, Base Ball: America’s National Game. Funston highlighted the spectators — those he called “typical Base Ball cranks.”

Eyewitness to the games was Brig Gen. Frederick Funston, who arrived at Hershel Island after a snowshoeing trip across northern Alaska in 1894. In 1899, Gen. Funston penned an article about the Whaler’s Baseball League for Harper’s Round Table.

“I saw [a] crowd of several hundred people watching our national sport, at this far away corner of the earth, only twenty degrees from the pole, and thousands of miles from railroads or steamship lines... And this crowd was more widely cosmopolitan than could have been found at any other place on the globe.”

Americanization

Baseball accompanied settlers who came to Alaska to explore, mine, fish, or work on the railroad. In turn, baseball helped transform isolated work camps into integrated American towns. Residents turned out for games with enthusiasm—particularly the 4th of July tournament, the celebration’s centerpiece. As town identities emerged, rivalries formed among communities, linking Alaskans across the Territory.

From Nome to Anchorage, baseball helped to “Americanize” Alaska. During the Gold Rush, Nome miners scraped away soggy vegetation from the surface of the ancient beach ridges, placed hundreds of burlap bags atop the permafrost, and then piled dirt atop the bags to craft a playable ball field that overlooked Dry Creek. Historian Terrence Cole described the Nome field as “one of the most unique parks in the world.”

Likewise, in Anchorage, renowned Artist Sydney Lawrence photographed a baseball game on July 4,



4th of July game in Anchorage, 1915

1915, the railroad town's founding. Over one hundred spectators lined up from first base to third. Behind the perfect diamond and the spacious outfield stood a tent city, and behind that, the seemingly impenetrable Alaska wilderness.

Home Fields

While baseball helped to Americanize Alaska, the extreme northern environment set Alaska baseball apart from America's Game. In Ketchikan, teams competed on tidal flats until the rising Pacific Ocean ended the game. Though fans were accustomed to the game's unhurried rhythms and timeless pace, the mighty Pacific Ocean was not. Matches that went too long were often called on account of the rising tide rather than nine innings, and each time, the baseball field was made new. At Kennecott, copper miners played atop a glacier. In Fairbanks, teams played under the midnight sun. Writers trumpeted Alaska baseball's uniqueness to promote the territory in the Lower 48.

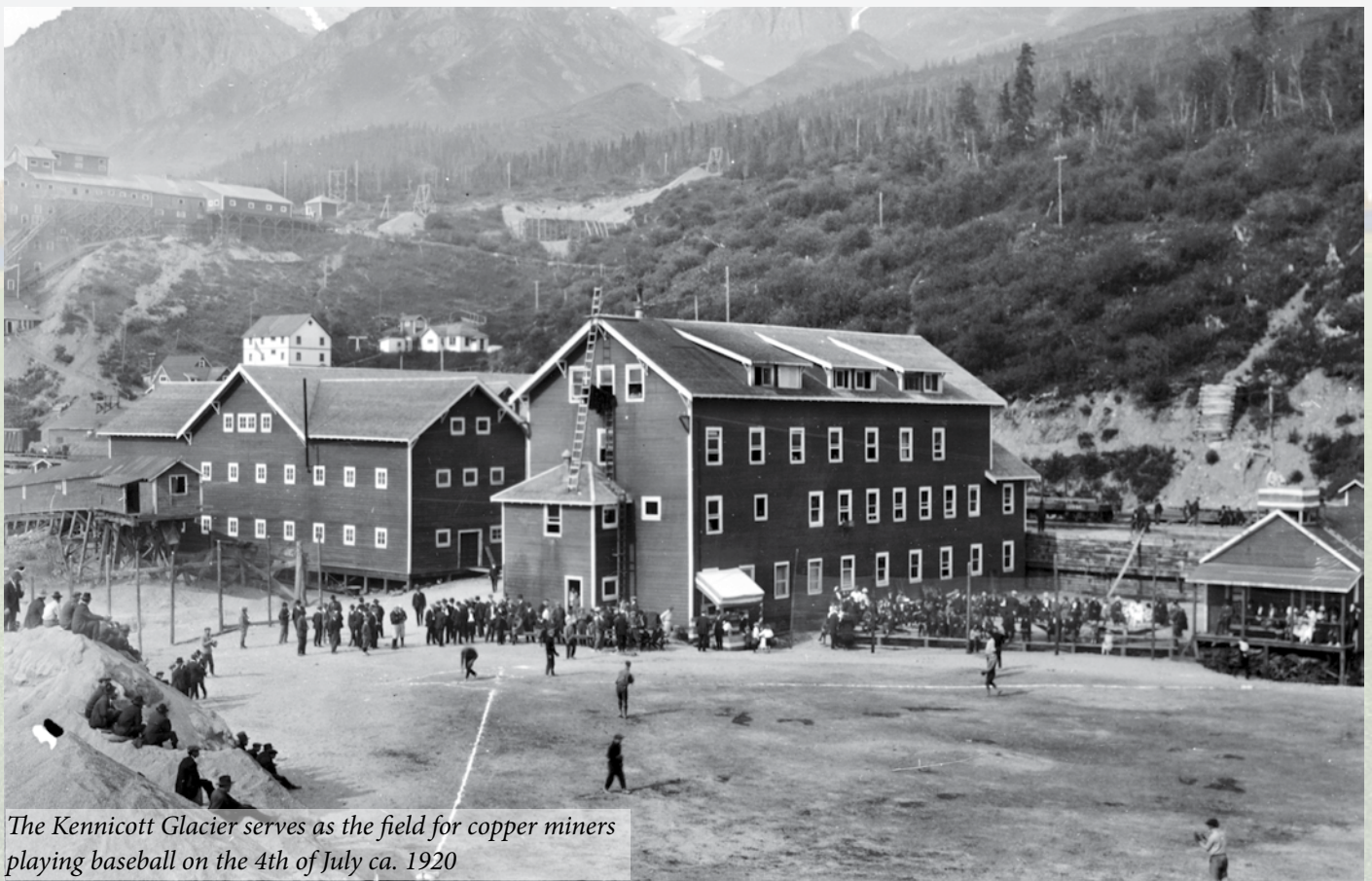
Witnessing the unusual, late-evening start time was considered an Alaskan rite of passage, as journalist H.C. Jackson explained in a 1913 article for *Sunset Magazine*:

"Here in this camp, we hold that besides seeing a freeze-up and watching the ice go out in the spring, a cheechako must sit through a midnight ball game before he can class as a sourdough."



Game on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, 1953

Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame



The Kennicott Glacier serves as the field for copper miners playing baseball on the 4th of July ca. 1920

Courtesy of the Alaska State Library, Juneau

World Wars

The U.S. military transported baseball to the farthest reaches of Alaska. Forts and bases often built fields and supported teams. During World War I, The Anchorage Daily Times asked readers to send baseball paraphernalia to troops in France. Baseball, according to the paper, gave idle soldiers a modicum of amusement and kept them out of trouble. More importantly, baseball ensured the American soldier did not forget his country's customs and traditions. The 1917 article went so far as to predict that "sports will win the war."

During World War II, baseball brought a modicum of normalcy to soldiers on the Aleutian Islands, stationed far from familiar hometowns. Along with weapons, artillery, and other necessary armaments for battle, enlisted men considered baseball gear a priority. Playing baseball helped soldiers cope with the pressure of war.



U.S. Navy photo from ACME

*"The Ingredients are Just Right," Attu, Alaska
Sept. 9, 1943*

Welcome Satch!

As Alaska's residents took to baseball, they rejected social and racial barriers that permeated parts of America in the first part of the 20th century. The Alaska Railroad, mining camps, and salmon canneries gave women, African Americans, Asians, and Alaska Natives opportunities to work and play. Alaska baseball afforded Emmett Ashford, the first Black umpire in MLB, a stage to hone his famous style.



Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum

Men and women's Railroad Teams. When they competed, the men batted left-handed.

Welcome Satch!



Think First of First National Bank of Anchorage
and Support Anchorage Baseball

Welcome Satch! Anchorage Tournament Program. August 27-29, 1965

"I watched from the third base fence. Batter after batter went down swinging. After the game we paid our respects. He stood in the infield signing autographs. He smiled when he autographed my ball and program. An Anchorage boy's dream fulfilled." —Pat Osborne, on how he met Satchel Paige in 1965

Race and baseball also combined to create one of the great moments in Alaska sports—when Anchorage welcomed the legendary pitcher Satchel Paige to play in a four-game exhibition in 1965, just one year after the great Alaska earthquake. Rumor had it that the legendary pitcher might manage a team named for the natural disaster.

“I loved Anchorage at first sight,” Paige told the Daily News-Miner, “and I’m the man who can build this team up. I’m the man who knows the baseball players and can get them to come up here to play.”

Paige’s promise to start building the new Anchorage Earthquakers “the minute he left Alaska” never panned out. Still, his presence in Alaska helped to draw interest in the new Alaska Baseball League.

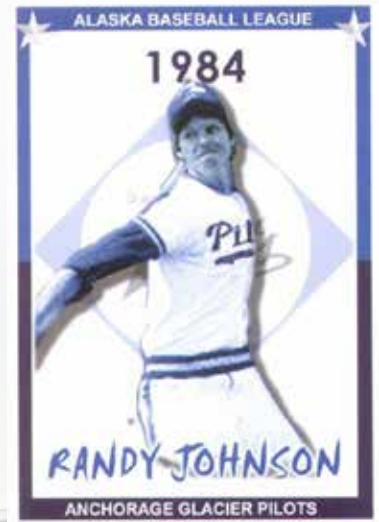


Anchorage Daily News, August 27, 1965

A League of Our Own

A formal Alaska Baseball League started with the Alaska Goldpanners, founded in Fairbanks by Henry Aristide “Red” Boucher and Don Dennis in 1960. After adding the Anchorage Glacier Pilots in 1969, the league expanded to include the Peninsula Oilers, the Mat-Su Miners, the Anchorage Bucs, and, most recently, the Chugiak Chinooks.

The Alaska teams assembled some of the best collegiate talent in the country. Alaska teams competed for numerous National Baseball Congress World Series titles at Wichita, Kansas, with the first championship won by the Anchorage Glacier Pilots in 1969. Since then, many players and coaches have gone on to successful careers in the Major League. Those who found fame playing baseball under the midnight sun include Hall of Famer Randy Johnson and 2024 MLB MVP Aaron Judge.



Anchorage Glacier Pilots game program

Henry “Red” Boucher and Don Dennis started the Alaska Goldpanners in Fairbanks in 1960. Anchorage Glacier Pilots, named for famed aviator Bob Reeve, expanded the Alaska Baseball League in 1969.

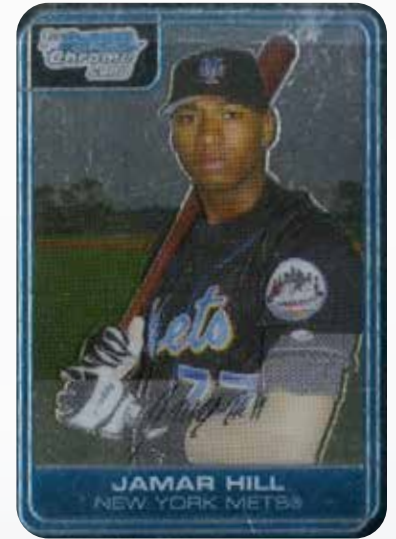


Surprising Demographics

Today, Alaska boasts some of the most diverse areas in the country, with over 100 languages spoken in several Anchorage neighborhoods. In addition to Yupik, Dena'ina, Unangax, and Inupiat, languages in Alaska classrooms include Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, and Hmong. Notably, Alaska's diversity and the origins of our immigrant population are often represented on our playing fields.

Sports and recreation like baseball cultivate unity. Former player Bob Feller once described baseball as a new opportunity: "You can build on yesterday's success or put its failure behind you and start over again." Such optimism also underlies the story of Alaska: a place where disconnected people sought second chances and found in common the ability to overcome barriers and dream big. Perhaps the game is beloved by Alaskans because baseball, like the Last Frontier itself, is about heroes, renewal, and second chances. While surprising to some, Alaska has always been a gathering place for diverse individuals filled with similar hopes and dreams.

Drafted by the New York Mets, Anchorage resident Jamar Hill spearheads a project to build a \$1.5 million community center in the Mountain View neighborhood of Anchorage, Alaska, to give local kids the opportunity to practice baseball year-round. Mountain View is considered the most diverse neighborhood in the United States. Hill runs Nike RBI Alaska, which promotes youth baseball and softball.



Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum

From an early age, baseball shows there is hope right up to the last pitch and reminds the young and the young at heart to believe in miracles.

History for Tomorrow

Today, young people make up 25 percent of Alaska's population and 100 percent of our future. We believe that teaching young people to see themselves in Alaska's history will make them more inclined to help build a prosperous Alaska future.

Thus, America250Alaska's guiding theme is History for Tomorrow, which underpins the value of Alaska's next generation. The theme was inspired by the Alaska Constitution Convention members, who, in a resolution passed on February 5, 1956, bequeathed the state constitution they had just forged to Alaska's youth. "You are our future," states the resolution. "We ask you to take tomorrow and dream."

Pageantry and public interest in a Field of Dreams Charity Softball Game will elevate the history of Alaska baseball and allow for ancillary programming that will meet the America250Alaska criteria by establishing the following goals:

1. Educate visitors about Alaska's rich heritage and unite experts in the tourism industry, historic and cultural preservation, and economic development with a common purpose.
2. Bring awareness of Alaska's need for recreational and sports facilities while generating local investment in historic, cultural, and educational resources.
3. Leverage national studies demonstrating links between sports participation, academic achievement, leadership and teamwork, and healthy living that improve quality of life and spark community vitality and pride.
4. Consider heritage preservation, management, and tourism planning to achieve long-term results.
5. Enliven historical and cultural places with authentic stories that engage and empower Alaska youth.



Courtesy of Steve Jordan

By the 1960s, baseball allowed Alaska's youth to live up to their promise of statehood and make history. The Babe Ruth program for boys sent a little league squad to the Northwest Regional Tournament in 1968. Coach Lee Jordan led the first sports team to represent the state of Alaska on the national stage to the championship game.



*“You are our future. We ask you
to take tomorrow and dream.”*

— Resolution of the Alaska Constitutional Convention

Courtesy of the Alaska State Library

Juneau “Minor Leaguer,” ca. 1920s

