

RAIN OR SHINE: HOW HOUSTON DEVELOPED SPACE CITY BASEBALL

by Mike Acosta

Rain forces fans at Colt Stadium to run for cover a year before the opening of the Astrodome.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Astros.



On a typical Houston summer evening about five decades ago, a girl named Dene and her father headed home after the Houston Buffs baseball game they had planned to attend was rained out. Houstonians know the scenario--hot sunny days with temperatures in the mid-nineties give way to beautiful evenings that spawn sporadic downpours as the area cools at sunset. Dene, disappointed that she would miss out on an outdoor evening with her dad eating hot dogs and enjoying strawberry snow cones, sat still without saying much on the ride home. Then she had a thought. She quickly asked, "Daddy, why can't they play baseball indoors?" The car came to a halt along the side of a westbound Houston city road. The startled little girl looked up at her father as he smiled and said, "When did you start taking my smart pills?" That marked the dawn of a grand future for sports in Houston. Dene's father, Roy Hofheinz, would go on to become the driving force in building the Houston Astrodome and the father of indoor baseball.¹

Dene's disappointment reached beyond missing out on watching the hometown Texas League team edge out another victory. She also looked forward to the experience, enjoying her surroundings and seeing the sights at the ballpark. For all the time that it takes to play a baseball game, the main action occupies very little time. The grand crack of a bat and the home run ball soaring out of the park only take seconds. The big play

approximately thirty runs. The Texas League played off and on for a number of years, and in 1905, the Houston club came under new ownership and a new name – The Buffaloes or "Buffs."²

The Houston City League formed around 1912, bringing together many semi-pro teams from around the area. Games were played in Alvin, Bay City, College Station, Dayton, Galveston, Humble, Huntsville, Liberty, Richmond, Sugar Land and Trinity. League leader and organizer Fred Ankenman served as captain or manager of most of these teams that local businesses sponsored. The fields featured very basic designs with grandstand seating for about 200 fans. Some of the better known fields included Marmion Park in Fifth Ward, North Main Street Park, and Humble Field near the old Downtown YMCA. Less formal fields southeast of downtown had fans simply line up along the baselines to watch the games. By 1920, the Houston Buffs moved their games to West End Park, located in the shadows of today's downtown. A wooden structure, like many major league ballparks in those days, it had a covered grandstand between the bases with separate risers down the base lines.³

On April 11, 1928, the new Buff Stadium opened east of downtown under the direction of Ankenman, now the club president. The ballpark welcomed approximately 15,000 fans (the largest in Houston history at the time) and saw Texas



By January 1, 1964, the outline of the Astrodome was clearly visible to families who drove to the outskirts of Houston to see the steel skeleton rising on the prairie.

on the field quickly sparks the roar of the crowd, but the spectators spend the rest of the game anticipating these exciting moments. A record-breaking home run. A milestone strikeout. A 3,000th career hit. So many things can occur during a baseball game! No matter how much times change, the sight of a baseball diamond remains timeless. The players hanging out near the batting cage chatting, the numbers on the backs of their jerseys, and the shadows across the field remind us of the game's romance. In no other sport has the venue become so important in upholding the game's traditions.

Houston's first baseball game on record was played in 1867 near the spot where General Sam Houston and the Texas Army won independence from Mexico. Although the exact score has been debated over the years, the general consensus holds that the Houston Stonewalls beat the Galveston Robert E. Lees by

Governor Dan Moody toss the ceremonial first pitch to Mayor Oscar Holcombe behind the plate. The pitch sailed high over Holcombe's head, but Houston businessman Jesse H. Jones, who served as umpire, still called Moody's pitch a strike. The team welcomed Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Commissioner of Major League Baseball, as the day's speaker. The Buffs beat the Waco Cubs 7-5 and went on to win the Dixie Series Championship. Buff Stadium, which had two large buffalo cut-outs on both sides of the center field scoreboard, featured large cooling fans that helped keep mosquitoes away; the aroma of fresh baked goods wafted in from a nearby bakery; and soft drinks were five cents. Trains whistled a few blocks away on their way to downtown's Union Station, the eventual home of Houston baseball.⁴

Ankenman worked to develop today's minor league system,

since the St. Louis Cardinals owned part of the Buffs, but even with that excitement, a desire for major league action remained. After a concerted effort in the 1950's to persuade Major League Baseball to come to Houston, the owners finally agreed to expand the league to include the Bayou City on October 17, 1960. Roy Hofheinz was brought into the Houston Sports Association (HSA) by friend and business partner R. E. "Bob" Smith, a rancher and oil tycoon, who owned much of the city's land. Hofheinz, a former Texas state legislator, Harris County judge, and Houston mayor, had the civic and political know-how to produce large projects and led a masterful presentation on a sports paradise--completely climate controlled. "We're not just big time sports and entertainment, but we're the BIGGEST time entertainment," stated Hofheinz. He knew a Major League team needed insurance against Houston's sub-tropical climate, so he took the knowledge he gained researching development of a large shopping center and applied it to the sports complex.⁵

The 1961 baseball season marked Houston's last with a minor league club, making a dream come true for HSA executive George Kirksey, who along with Craig Cullinan, first seriously pursued a Major League franchise for Houston. The HSA purchased the Buffs and soon decided their name would not transcend entry into the National League. They conducted a name-the-team contest and received over 12,000 entries. Two students from the University of Houston worked an estimated 150 hours narrowing the list down to thirty names including the fan's top choice, the "Rebels." The winning submission came from Houston salesman William T. Neder who wrote, "The Colt .45 won the west and will win the National League." Immediately the HSA had to explain that the name was for the gun and not a horse. The Houston Buffs played their last game on August 28, 1961.⁶

While in no way would Colt Stadium be mistaken for a classic ballpark like Fenway Park, Wrigley Field or Yankee Stadium, it nonetheless ushered Major League Baseball into Houston and the southern United States. Major League Baseball's first temporary venue, Colt Stadium had to be built after



HSA Chairman Bob Smith, HSA Executive Committee Chairman Roy Hofheinz, County Commissioner V. V. Ramsey, City Councilman Johnny Goyen, County Judge Bill Elliott, HSA Executive Vice President George Kirksey, and HSA President George Cullinan celebrate MLB coming to Houston.

organizers determined that the new domed stadium would not be ready for the 1962 season. Hofheinz claimed the temporary stadium would seat more fans than stadiums in at least six major league cities, and construction began on August 9, 1961, in the northwest corner of the Astrodome site. Thousands of excited fans came to watch the workers until the HSA made a public plea for them to stay away so work could be complete by Opening Day 1962. The Colt .45's played their first regular season game at Colt Stadium defeating the Chicago Cubs 11-2 in front of 25,271 fans on April 10, 1962, Hofheinz's fiftieth birthday. Harris County Judge Bill Elliot tossed the ceremonial first pitch to Mayor Lewis Cutrer with Congressman Bob Casey at bat. Roman Mejias hit the first Houston home run, Bob Aspromonte scored the team's first run, and Bobby Shantz got the win.

Across from Colt Stadium, excavation for the domed stadium began with a 710-foot wide and twenty-five-foot deep hole. The land had many underground streams, and water began to fill the giant opening, turning the future sports palace into one of the world's largest homes for Texas mosquitoes. Many of those flying Bayou City pests found their way across the property just in time for the first pitch at Colt Stadium. Okay, maybe it just seemed that way, but the mosquito infestation prompted team executives to have Colt Stadium sprayed regularly before games. Los Angeles pitcher Sandy Koufax once quipped the mosquitoes were so big they were "twin engine jobs."⁸

All the seats at Colt Stadium were in the blaze of the Texas sun, and a strong wind blew in from right field. Unlike its minor league predecessor, Colt Stadium lacked a canopy over the stands. During the first doubleheader on June 10, 1962, the stadium medical staff treated more than eighty overheated fans. Shortly after, the Colt .45's announced they would move all 1:30 p.m. Sunday start times to 4:30 p.m. after the National League granted them special permission to play the first ever Sunday night games in 1963.

Seating colors at Colt Stadium ranged from flamingo red, to burnt orange, chartreuse, and turquoise. Female ushers, called "Triggerettes," wore uniforms made of the same flannel material used for the players, and parking attendants wore orange Stetson hats as they directed cars into sections named "Wyatt Earp Territory" and "Matt Dillon Territory." Behind the stands between home plate and first base, stood the Fast Draw Club



The Houston Colt .45s played their first game in franchise history on April 12, 1962, against the Chicago Cubs.

where season ticket holders with a paid membership could enjoy a pre-game meal in this Wild West-style saloon. While the team never had a winning season at Colt Stadium, it ushered in Houston baseball greats such as Aspromonte, Larry Dierker, Joe Morgan, Rusty Staub and Jimmy Wynn.

On September 27, 1964, the Colt .45's played their last game at the temporary stadium with a 1-0 victory in 12 innings against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Less than one week later, Hofheinz announced that the "Colt .45's" name would be retired. Never a fan of the name, he wanted something more futuristic to coincide with the opening of the domed stadium. The fact that the Colt Firearm Company expected the team to share revenues from the sale of merchandise bearing the Colts' logo also played a huge part in the decision. On December 1, 1964, Hofheinz announced the team's new name, the "Astros," in honor of Houston-based NASA. Their logo featured the new stadium, which Hofheinz now called the Astrodome, and the team became the first to feature their ballpark on the official team insignia.⁹

Colt Stadium met a slow death as all attention focused on the Astrodome. With stadium banners and seats removed, Hofheinz had the stadium painted a solid gray. Union Laguna in Mexico eventually bought the remaining stadium structure after it became a county tax liability. They dismantled the stadium in 1970 and reconstructed it in Torreon, Mexico. The locals referred to it as "El Mecano" because it reminded them of an erector set.

Eventually that hole in the ground next to Colt Stadium saw concrete and steel walls rising along with thirty-eight false work towers used to construct the sprawling web-like network of beams that formed the massive dome. Even when the Colt .45s had away games, families drove to the outskirts of Houston to marvel at this massive steel skeleton sitting on a prairie. The Harris County Domed Stadium became one of the most important structures built in Houston's history and put the Bayou



The brightly colored rows of seats at Colt Stadium offered a glimpse of the new stadium rising next door.

Six-shooters in hand, officials broke ground for the Harris County Domed Stadium in January 1962.



City on the international map. People from all over the world traveled just to get a glimpse of this new air-conditioned paradise tall enough to contain the nearby eighteen-story Shamrock Hilton Hotel. When the Astrodome opened its doors for the first time on April 9, 1965, it represented more than baseball's first domed stadium--it changed the way fans viewed the game and created a new tradition that was uniquely Houston's.¹⁰



Hofheinz selected the "Astros" as the team's new name, honoring NASA and in keeping with the futuristic image of its new ballpark. The team's insignia was the first to feature its stadium in the design.

Casey Stengel, the long-respected manager of the New York Yankees and Mets, once quipped, "This is the type of stadium that from the outside you can't tell where first base is." The Astrodome's exterior design sported a gleaming white dome crowning a pattern of concrete screens and long, diamond shaped columns. The perfectly circular structure gave no sense of what could be seen on the inside. The playing field sat twenty-five feet below street level to limit the vertical travel required by fans. Four main entrances sloped up to the doors simply labeled North, South, East or West. Colorful flags waved gracefully in the Gulf breeze. More than 10,000 multi-colored directional signs strategically placed around the stadium, and color-coordinated with the tickets, directed fans to the proper seating level. Glass doors lined the entrances to the various levels and were intentionally installed to open out to the customer so one could feel the rush of 6,600 tons of air-conditioning inside the arena. The transition from the Texas heat to the cool interior created a true sense of comfort.¹¹

A fan on the Field Box or upper Gold Levels could walk around the concourses and peek into the main arena through the passage ways lining those levels. Candy-striped concession stands were sprinkled along the concourses and pre-game music played through the sound systems. A friendly "Spacette," in a gold and blue dress with a small hat and boots, showed the ticket holders to their seats. In that day and age, whether seated in General Admission on the lower level or the Skyboxes, the first sight of the Astrodome's interior would never be forgotten. Lipstick red, burnt orange, coral, black, purple, gold, bronze and royal blue splashed across the stadium's seating levels like a rainbow from the ground level to the top. The outfield Pavilion seats were terracotta. Here, tradition met comfort with all of the Astrodome's 45,000 theater-style seats completely padded and upholstered. On the baseball field, "Earthmen" manicured the playing surface in orange astronaut outfits and matching space helmets.¹²

Sure, the Astrodome sounded outlandish to many folks



Ray Hofheinz maintained a private office in the Dome's upper reaches.

outside Texas and made some baseball purists cringe at the very thought of this edifice.

Cushioned seats? Check.

Air-conditioning? Check.

The amenities did not stop there. At Field Level behind the outfield wall, sat the Domeskeller, a German-style beer garden with structural columns surrounded by faux trees and walls decorated in wood paneling with Bavarian-style crests.

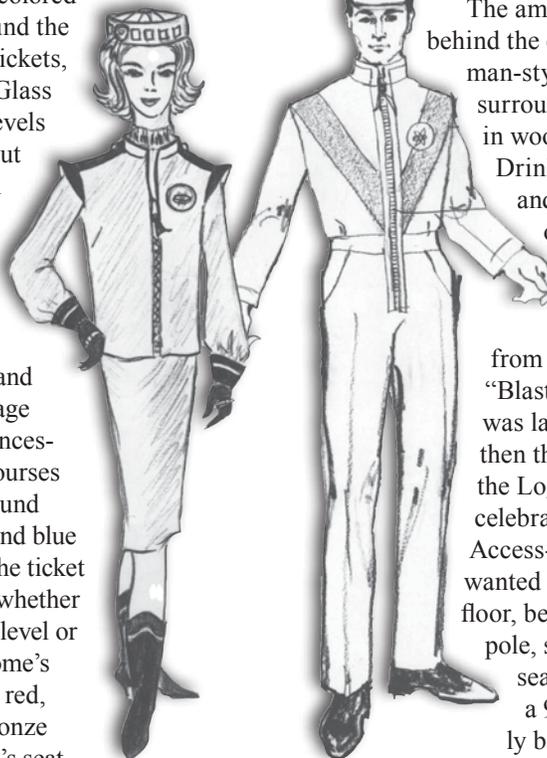
Drinks could be ordered in Astrodome steins and fans could enjoy meals with a glimpse of the field through mesh wire windows.

On the third level, behind home plate, the Countdown Cafeteria featured a historical progression of athletes from Rome's gladiators to the modern day.

"Blast-off" girls served the patrons, and china was labeled with the numbers one to ten and then the word "Blast-Off." Three floors up on the Loge Level, the Trailblazer Restaurant, celebrated man's greatest accomplishments.

Access-controlled areas served those fans who wanted a more exclusive experience. On the fifth floor, between home plate and the left field foul pole, sat the extravagant Astrodome Club. Here season ticket holders enjoyed a 100-foot bar, a 90-foot perimeter bar, a private men's-only bar (in a true sign of the times), and dining rooms serving a full five course meal.¹³

The list of "firsts" from the Astrodome includes the fifty-three luxury Skyboxes located along the upper rim of the stadium. Hofheinz successfully relied on corporate expense accounts to sell the Skyboxes. Each suite came with a different design motif named after Hofheinz's world travels. No two were alike, making it even more attractive to corporations. All of the twenty-four-seat Skyboxes sold



Employee uniforms were designed with the space theme in mind.



The grounds crew dressed as “earthmen” used vacuums once AstroTurf was installed.

out before the 1965 inaugural season. Each Skybox featured a club room, closed circuit TV, ice maker, bar and furniture with wait service available. Patrons had access to the Sky Dome Club, a private members-only dining area on the ninth floor. Decorated in a space theme and illuminated by black lights, the Japanese-themed steakhouse featured “invisible” chairs and a panoramic view of southwest Houston. Skybox owners had their own engraved gold spatula for serving from the gourmet tray, and the china had a special Astrodome insignia. For all its amenities, however, the Skybox menu did not originally include the hot dog. If Skybox holders wanted hot dogs, they asked their server to go to a lower level to buy them. Astronaut Alan Shepard installed his own hot dog machine, and word soon spread to other Skybox patrons about the “Shepard Special” hot dogs, which quickly became popular. High-rolling glitz and glamour ruled the Astrodome in those days. For astronauts, cowboys, and oilmen, the luxurious Skyboxes were the place to be, and the innovation spread to every major stadium built after the Astrodome.¹⁴

One major innovation came about by sheer necessity: AstroTurf. It took just one daytime workout to notice the tremendous glare from sunshine through the Astrodome’s 4,596 translucent Lucite skylights that were designed to diffuse daylight and avoid shadows from the roof’s steelwork. Hofheinz and General Manager Paul Richards met with the makers of the dome skylights, the DuPont Company, to discuss possible solutions to the problem. Several shades of sunglasses were also delivered to the Astrodome. With approval of National League President Warren Giles, officials decided that the next day’s exhibition game against the Baltimore Orioles, scheduled at 1:30 p.m., would be played with color-dyed baseballs: yellow, orange, and cerise. Giles also gave approval for the 21 scheduled day games that season to be played with the color ball that worked the best. The team experimented with orange baseballs in an early afternoon batting practice before opening the gates that night

for the stadium’s first game on April 9, 1965, against the New York Yankees. In the end, the baseball’s color did not matter. Four baseballs were lost in the sunlight during the April 10th afternoon game with Baltimore. The scene was beyond comedic for fans and frustrating for players—even dangerous if struck by a ball lost in the glare.¹⁵



The glare during day games created a comedy of errors before the roof was painted.

The eventual remedy involved painting the skylights, which reduced but did not eliminate the glare. About a month later, Astros outfielder Jimmy Wynn lost a routine fly ball in the glare during an afternoon game against the San Francisco Giants, who took advantage of the miscue by launching a three-run homer to beat the Astros 5–2. Another coat of paint was added to the dome, preventing anyone misplaying a fly ball from pointing to the Astros heavens above.¹⁶

One problem solved, one bigger one created. The reduced sunlight created a new battle in keeping the two-acre field of Tifway 419 Bermuda grass growing. The grass dried out so badly that the infield needed replacement by mid-June. Eventually, they spray painted the field green and spread sawdust to fill in gaps where the outfield grass had died; it became increasingly difficult to play on the field. Hofheinz heard that the Monsanto Company had experimented with an artificial turf for use in sports, and by late 1965, he struck a deal to have the turf-maker install their product in the Astrodome as a free test site. On the night of January 17, 1966, a quiet yet historic meeting took place at the stadium. The lights came on, and members of the Astros along with front office executives walked out onto the floor to find a perfect green carpet configured in the form of a baseball infield. Hofheinz had already taken strips of the artificial turf over to Colt Stadium where cars drove over it and an elephant trampled it to test its durability. Bringing his Astros onto the field that night was the final test. As the players practiced taking ground balls off the turf, Hofheinz quickly decided that they would play their first home exhibition game on it.¹⁷

Representatives from Monsanto dubbed the surface “AstroTurf” — one of the very few times Hofheinz got beat to the punch with branding. The initial AstroTurf installation began on March 30, 1966, for the infield and foul territories. Hofheinz arranged for approximately 140 reporters covering spring training to fly to Houston and cover that night’s game with the Los



Hofheinz worked with Monsanto to install the first artificial playing surface for professional sports—Astroturf.

Angeles Dodgers. In true Hofheinz flair, the Dome maestro had the original Astroturf field sliced into small swaths and stamped “Astroturf from the Astrodome, Houston, Texas” on the padded underside. Each reporter received a sample, and the remainder was sold at the stadium’s Galaxy Gift Shop.¹⁸

Despite all the fanfare and millions of people who flocked to see the Astrodome, it still had its detractors. Chicago Cubs Manager Leo Durocher ranked as one of the most vocal critics, especially in 1966 when Astroturf was introduced. On June 12th Durocher ripped the telephone off the wall of the visiting dugout and slammed it to the floor during an 8-4 loss to the Astros. Three weeks later, the Astros grounds crew began removing the sod from the outfield as they transitioned to a full Astroturf field. The Astros sent the last piece of sod along with a pair of sneakers in a box to Durocher. Durocher returned the package to Astros Publicity Director Bill Giles with the same contents, plus a pound of fertilizer. He tore the phone off the wall again in August. Ironically, Leo Durocher later became manager of the Astros and led the team to a 98-95 record from late 1972 through 1973.¹⁹

By 1975 and 1976 home attendance dipped below the one million mark for the first time since before the Astrodome opened. The initial honeymoon with the Dome was over, and Houston fans had become resigned to never finishing on top. Along the way numerous promotions sought to boost attendance, but the 1970s Foamer Nights stand as one of the most popular. A special light on the scoreboard lit up at a particular point of the game, and if an Astros batter hit a home run while the light was on, fans received free beer until the end of that inning. In a game that does not utilize a clock, this could have turned into a long party on the concourses, but home runs numbered few for the Astros in those years. So an adjustment to Foamer Night dictated free beer until the end of an inning in which an Astros pitcher struck out an opposing batter while the light was on. The most famous Foamer Night occurred on July 9, 1976, when Larry Dierker, who had become the club’s first twenty-game winner in 1969, took the mound against the

Montreal Expos. The big right-hander had good stuff on the mound that night and, in the seventh inning, Dierker struck out Pete MacKannin while that oh-so-important light was lit on the scoreboard. Many of the 12,511 fans in attendance immediately headed to the aisles and the concession stands for free beer. Dierker wound up tossing the fifth no-hitter in franchise history as the Astros won 6-0.²⁰

The Astrodome scoreboard that displayed the foamer light was not just any scoreboard. The designers built it, as the front office said, “to put the Aurora Borealis to shame.” How could a scoreboard that stood over four stories tall, 474-feet wide, with 50,000 light bulbs and over 1,200 miles of wiring be anything but spectacular? The original Astrodome scoreboard reflected the personality of the stadium. It gave the lineups, important stats, scores and all the other pertinent information one would expect at a baseball game. In addition, it served as a cheerleader. An 1,800 square foot “Astrolite” screen in centerfield played various cartoons and promotional spots. Some of the more popular Astrolite displays included Chester Charge, who led the crowd to cheer “CHARGE!” while blowing a bugle and riding everything from a rocket, to a train, a car, and even a giraffe. The full length of the Astrodome scoreboard erupted when the Astros hit a home run or notched a victory. A lighted depiction of the Astrodome would appear near left-center field and a ball would blast from its roof soaring across to the other side of the board near right-center where it would explode with “HOME RUN” in red light bulbs. Two six-shooter cowboys then appeared blasting pistols with rounds ricocheting off the various points of the scoreboard. Next came two large, fire-blazing Texas bulls with the state flag and American flag waving from their horns. A cowboy would race across roping a steer. The final stage featured skyrocketing fireworks in various hues of red, yellow, blue and green. This entire production, conceived by Hofheinz, lasted forty-five seconds.²¹

The big scoreboard did have its controversial and funny moments. In May 1965 the scoreboard mocked umpire John Kibler by displaying “Kibler did it again” after Astros third baseman Bob Aspromonte’s ejection made him the third Houston player ejected in two games. The message, intended in jest by scoreboard director Bill Giles, outraged umpires. National League President Warren Giles, Bill’s father, ordered an apology from his son and General Manager Richards. Milwaukee’s Gene Oliver once lit sparklers in retaliation to the scoreboard’s home run spectacular after a team mate knocked a long ball.

The 1972 season brought the first winning record for the team with an 84-69 mark, and by the late 1970’s, the Astros became serious contenders. They won the National League Western Division in 1980 after bringing home Alvin native Nolan Ryan and returning Joe Morgan to Houston. The team again won the NL West in 1986 and three consecutive NL Central Division titles in 1997, 1998 and 1999. Over the years the Astrodome experience changed, and the stadium ceased to be a novelty as other domes rose in New Orleans and Seattle. Hofheinz experienced financial troubles, and creditors operated the club until new owner John McMullen arrived from New Jersey in 1979.²²

In the 1980’s many renovations greeted Astrodome visitors. The biggest change, however, came in 1988 when the massive scoreboard was taken down for a 10,000 seat expansion to accommodate the National Football League’s Houston Oilers.



The scoreboard gave fans a 45-second show when an Astro hit a home run. A portion of that display has been incorporated into the new scoreboard at Minute Maid Park.

The scoreboard still featured many of the original bulbs that had entertained Astrodome patrons for twenty-three years. It became somewhat of a landmark within a landmark, and the Astros faithful mourned its loss.²³

In 1989, the Astrodome had 360-degree seating on the upper half of its structure and a new, albeit smaller, scoreboard system. The Astros began rebuilding and signed future franchise icons Craig Biggio and Jeff Bagwell. When Drayton McLane from Temple, Texas, purchased the club in 1992, he brought a renewed spirit of winning, and the Astros emerged as one of baseball's most winning franchises. He returned the traditional baseball experience to one of the game's grandest stadiums, but despite his efforts, two things could not change: baseball in the Astrodome still had to be played on artificial turf and away from the natural elements.²⁴

In the 1990's Major League Baseball had returned to its roots with new ballparks in Baltimore, Cleveland, and Denver featuring baseball-only designs that brought fans closer to the game with traditional sightlines. In 1996 Harris County voters approved a referendum to build new sports facilities in Houston with the purpose of keeping existing teams from moving. In 2000, Minute Maid Park (then Enron Field) opened as the new crown jewel for Major League Baseball in Houston. It had a dome and air-conditioning, but this new 9,000-ton steel and glass roof could slide open or close within thirteen minutes. Unlike the Astrodome complex, the new home for the Astros was designed to bring urban renewal to the east side of Houston's downtown with the old Union Station building serving as the main entrance. Minute Maid Park, sitting at the corner of Texas Avenue and Crawford Street, opened its doors on March 30, 2000, hosting an exhibition game between the Astros and the New York Yankees, just as the Astrodome had done. On that

spring night 40,624 fans packed Houston's new convertible, and for the first time in over thirty-five years witnessed baseball on real grass with the stars shining bright overhead. Within the first ten years of existence, Minute Maid Park hosted the 2004 Major League All-Star Game, 2005 World Series, and three playoffs series.²⁵

An 1860's style train locomotive and coal car sits along an 800-foot track in left centerfield and celebrates Astros runs and victories. Modern restaurant facilities grace the interior concourses and luxury executive suites sit mid level instead of nine stories up as they did in the Astrodome. Now fans enter the park and can look up to the massive scoreboard which displays digitized remnants of the old Astrodome home run spectacular. Tradition has meshed with modern amenities that have become common place at baseball games today. We stand and cheer the home team as did fans of yesteryear for the Stonewalls, Buffs, Colt .45s, and for thirty-five seasons in the Astrodome. The rain still cannot be stopped or wins guaranteed, but at Minute Maid Park--where the game continues to transcend the generations--the tradition of Houston baseball lives on.

Mike Acosta is a native Houstonian who is now in his eleventh season with the Houston Astros. As Authentication Manager, he directs and manages the Astros Authentication and Archives Program and serves as team historian. He manages a new brand called "Astros Authentics" that enhances the ballpark experience by making game-used memorabilia available to fans. He also has done broadcast play-by-play of Houston area high school and collegiate baseball and football since 2001.