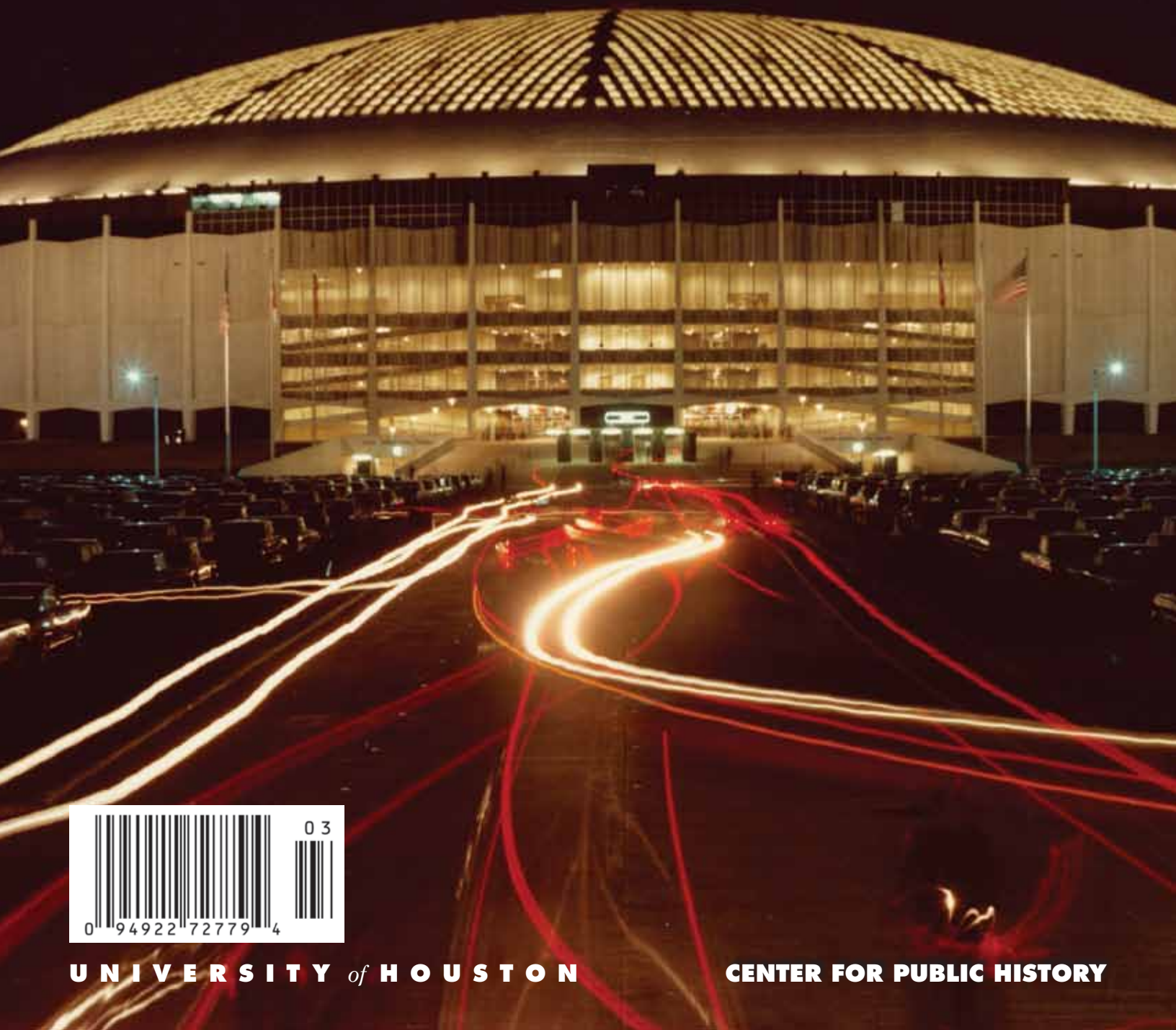


# Houston HISTORY

Volume 6 • Number 3 • Summer 2009

## SUMMER SPORTS



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



My dad raised me to pitch for the St. Louis Cardinals, the overwhelming favorite of all of our country boy/dads who had grown up during the Great Depression listening to the Cardinals' "gas house" gang on the radio. I seemed well on my way to the big leagues at age 12, when I pitched a one-hit shut out in a Little League All-Star game with much of my town in attendance. Unfortunately, that marked the

peak of my baseball career; when I finally made it to St. Louis years later, it was as a graduate student, not a pitcher.

But I always remained a baseball fan. Growing up in a world without much chance to travel, I embraced baseball as a window on the world. I came to enjoy reading in part by following the major leagues in our local newspapers and by reading biographies of baseball players. Baseball taught me geography, giving me a reason to locate on a map New York City, home of the mighty Yankees, and then to move on to the location of both the Bronx (site of Yankee Stadium) and Brooklyn (home of the Dodgers). Photos of the amazing baseball stadiums of the 1950s introduced me to the basics of architecture and even of urban planning. Math was much more fun once I learned how to figure batting averages and earned run averages. History was everywhere in baseball, from the great names in the Hall of Fame to the records of such mythic figures as Babe Ruth.

More than anything, baseball gave me a cast of larger-than-life characters with exotic names and unfamiliar backgrounds. Mickey Mantle, country boy from Oklahoma whose dad had raised him to be a switch-hitter for the Yankees, was recognizable to me. But my world had to be expanded to include other players such as Willie Mays, Ted Kluszewski, "Big Chief" Allie Reynolds, Minnie Minoso, or Yogi Berra. These baseball heroes gave me a parallel universe somewhat like later generations had with the Star Wars movies or video games or the

Harry Potter books. The universe of major league baseball had the great advantage, however, of being populated by real people succeeding and failing at a game I played and knew.

Unfortunately, few of us had the chance to see these players in a real live major league baseball game, since St. Louis, the closest major league city, might as well have been in a galaxy far, far away. We knew, however, that the major leaguers were real because we had seen a few of them pass through the minor league team in nearby Beaumont, and a few of us had even been privileged to take the hundred mile trip to see the Houston Buffs play. Those of us with access to televisions could also watch the game of the week and then the World Series, an event so important in my family that my parents at times allowed me to skip school when a series game was played on my birthday.

So it was an amazing development when we learned that major league baseball was coming to Houston. On several memorable occasions my dad and I drove to Houston to games at the team's temporary stadium. Sitting out in the sun without a roof for a July Fourth doubleheader at Colt .45s Stadium, I learned the true meaning of hot. Later, at a somewhat cooler night game, I experienced one of my favorite baseball moments, when Stan Musial unwound on a fastball and drove a high line drive far, far out into the darkness of the parking lot beyond the right field fence. The ball curved foul, but that did not change the thrill of seeing it jump off of the bat of Stan the (Old) Man, who retired the next year.

Despite the temperature and bugs at the temporary stadium, I was one of the few people disappointed in the move to the new Astrodome. As is clear from the article in this issue by Mike Acosta, it was an amazing structure. But I have to agree with much of Larry McMurtry's reprinted essay. The Dome was a strange, disorienting place, as well as a bad place for a traditional fan to watch baseball. Astroturf had an evil impact on the game I loved. Although major leaguers played there, the Dome never seemed to me like a proper field for major league baseball.

This did not keep me from going to games. In my years at Rice in the late 1960s, I discovered the right field pavilion bargain seats, and I made it a habit to go watch the great pitchers of that era—Drysdale and Koufax, Juan Marichal, and my favorite, Bob Gibson of the St. Louis Cardinals. I also began to go out and watch the Astros' young star pitcher, Larry Dierker. During my freshman year, I would go over and catch a game when I needed to escape the agony of trying to pass calculus and German. There on the mound would be Dierker, only two years older than me and already in his third year in the majors. Forty years later, it was a cheap thrill to interview him for this "Summer Sports" issue of *Houston History*. Once a fan, always a kid.

**JOEL DRAUT** has found his dream job. Having spent thirty-five years as a newspaper photographer, he now combines his passion for photography and history as the senior communications specialist responsible for maintaining the collection of over four million images housed at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) in the Julia Ideson Building at the Houston Public Library. Every day reveals new treasures—from the oldest photo taken of Main Street in 1856, to a panoramic shot of the Goose Creek oil fields, to pictures of notable Houstonians like Howard Hughes and visitors such as the Beatles.

Draut is overseeing preparations to move the collection into the building's new wing. This facility will control temperature, humidity, pollution, and light to maximize the life of the originals, which include glass plates, negatives, prints, and film. He is also working to scan images, making them more accessible to the public while maintaining the integrity of the artifacts. To access the collection you can request assistance at the information desk in the HMRC or browse the catalogs and bound copies of the more popular images, but don't forget to ask for Joel—he will probably be your most valuable resource!

*Joel contributed the Spring 2009 Houston History cover photo of the Julia Ideson building.*



*Holding a panoramic camera circa 1915, Joel Draut shares his office with a collection of photographic equipment spanning 100 years of technology.*

# Houston History

Volume 6 • Number 3 • Summer 2009

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*Houston History* is published three times a year by the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, and photographic essays on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined. All correspondence should be sent to *Houston History*, University of Houston, Department of History, 547 Agnes Arnold Hall, Houston, TX 77204-3007 (713-743-3123). The web site is [www.history.uh.edu/houstonhistory](http://www.history.uh.edu/houstonhistory). We also welcome ideas for topical issues; these can be sent to the above address or to [HoustonHistory@uh.edu](mailto:HoustonHistory@uh.edu).

Subscriptions are \$10 per year for students, \$15 per year for individuals, and \$25 per year for institutions. Single issues and back issues are available for \$10.

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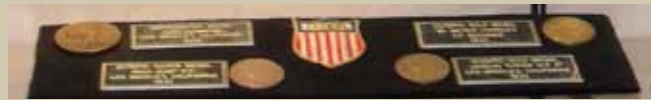
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# READERS' FORUM

What are your memories of the Astrodome? What are your suggestions for its future?

*Houston History* invites you to send us your reminiscences and to weigh in on the preservation of the building. We will include your comments in a future issue.

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**People from around the world knew the Astrodome in Houston as they knew the Empire State Building in New York, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, or the Pyramids in Egypt.**

The Astrodome was an instant international symbol built during a time when Houston's rapid growth led to its becoming the fourth largest city in America. While the engineering and sports impact of the Astrodome is significant, many consider it as important as the Alamo in terms of what it represents about the city and state.

The last major public event in the Astrodome

was a 2002 concert by country star George Strait, ending a thirty-six-year run for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in the domed stadium. National attention was brought to the Astrodome in 2005 when it served as a temporary shelter for thousands of evacuees from New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Since then it has remained mostly dormant, waiting for its new incarnation.

Ideas have surfaced to turn the historic stadium into a large hotel and entertainment complex. Another plan has the Astrodome



reconfigured into a large sound stage for film productions in Texas. Obtaining funding for these projects has been a difficult task, especially in today's economic climate. There were plans earlier this decade to convert the Astrodome into a world class track and field stadium in efforts to bring the 2012 Olympics to Houston.

While time continues to pass, another generation of Houston children is growing up with no memories of going to the Astrodome. Instead they see it as a relic of time passed as they walk past the aging stadium along the way

to a Texans football game or Rodeo Houston performance in Reliant Stadium. The massive steel dome still glitters on a sunny day but the inside of the Astrodome remains in shadow housing echoes of a million memories. One could wonder what the late Judge Roy Hofheinz would think of his creation and its current state of uncertainty. The Astrodome once again needs the original can-do spirit brought on so proudly by Hofheinz in the early 1960s. It is up to Houston and its current leaders to reclaim the "Eighth Wonder of the World."

– Mike Acosta, Houston Astros

A Conversation with...

# MR. ASTRO, LARRY DIERKER and Joe Pratt

**L**arry Dierker has been associated with the Houston Astros baseball franchise since 1964, when he pitched his first game at old Colt .45 Stadium. He pitched thirteen seasons for the Astros and one with the St. Louis Cardinals before he retired from baseball in 1977. He finished with 139 wins and a 3.31 earned run average. In 1979 he became a color commentator, broadcasting Astros games until 1997, when he left the booth and returned to the bench as the team's manager. For five seasons he was the most successful manager in Astros' history, taking four of his five teams to the playoffs and leading the team to 102 wins in 1999.

In November of 2007, we met at his home in Jersey Village and talked about his career with the Astros, baseball, and Houston.



*Larry Dierker began his career in an instructional league and pitched in his first major league game for the Houston Colt .45s on his eighteenth birthday.*

All photos courtesy of Houston Astros, unless otherwise noted.

**LD:** I started out in Little League when I was seven years old. You were supposed to be eight to get in the League, but I was at the forefront of the Baby Boomer generation, and we moved into some track home neighborhoods in the suburbs of Los Angeles, and the fathers were all excited and energetic, coming back from the war...They built a big complex of fields and held tryouts at a public park, and I went down there with my dad just to watch because it said you had to be eight years old. But then, it turned out that they needed a couple more kids to fill out all the teams, and so I got in one year early. And then, I continued through Little League, Pony League, Colt League, high school, American Legion, and was generally one of the better players throughout that whole time. By the time I got in high school, it was evident that I could throw pretty hard and so I started getting scouted. There were twenty teams back then and I ended up filling out some sort of a questionnaire and sending it in for the office for seventeen of them, not the Dodgers. That was the team I followed. They were not interested. But when it came down to it, it was the Twins, the Cubs, and the Colt .45s. . . . I signed out of high school, got a pretty big bonus, and a college scholarship where they would pay me \$1,000 a semester.

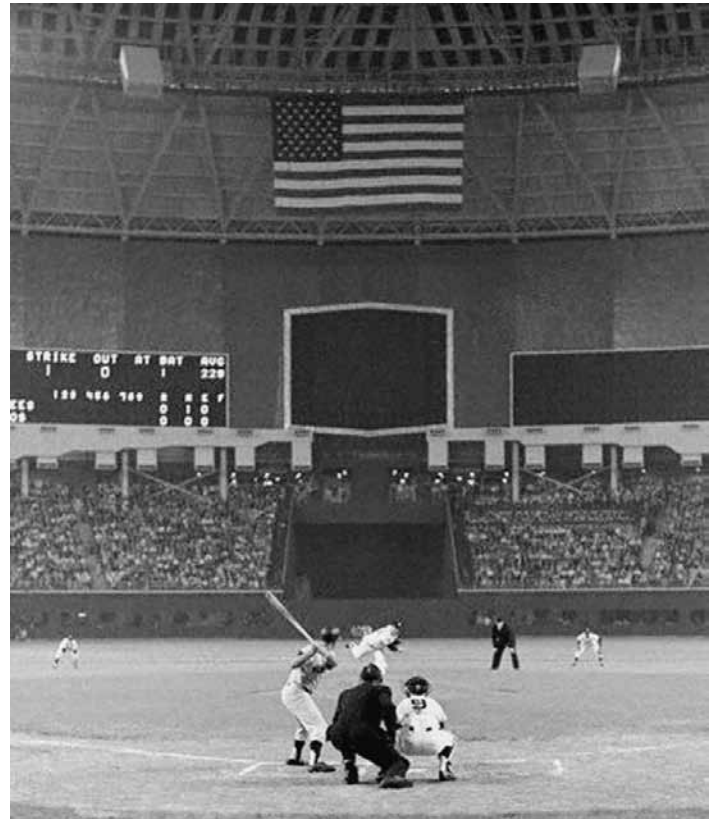
So I started my career when I was seventeen in an instructional league and went to school during the off seasons. I came up [to Houston] in September that very first year, pitching three games for the Colt .45s. The first one was on my eighteenth birthday. I pitched against Willie Mays, and he hit one foul off me about 450 feet. And then, I ended up striking him out. So, that was kind of a career bullet point. I never went back down.

I was so excited about playing baseball in the major leagues that . . . I did not notice that Houston was so hot or that the mosquitoes were so big, they could carry you off and all the things that people said about old Colt stadium . . . I went back to California to go to college the first couple of off-seasons and at that time, I thought, well, this will be a great place to have a baseball career. The Astrodome was fabulous. I was happy with Houston but I sort of thought that in the end, I would end up in California. But the longer I stayed here, the more friends we made and the deeper our roots grew.

[The opening of the Astrodome the next year] was terrific. I can remember at the end of spring training, we came back here, and we played those exhibition games with the Yankees. And when we came up to the Dome, it was dark outside and the lights were on inside. So, when we got off the team bus, we walked into the Astrodome, went in the locker room, and walked out and looked at the stadium. And walking out through the tunnel and looking at the expanse of the field and scoreboard, it was breathtaking. I can even remember at the time saying I felt like I walked into the next century. It was almost like it had a flying saucer quality to it or something, futuristic.



*The expansive interior of the Astrodome, as it appeared before the gondola was raised to the roof, "had a flying saucer quality to it."*



*The Astros played their first exhibition game against the New York Yankees on April 9, 1965.*

It was really hard to hit a home run [in the Dome]. The only thing that was somewhat helpful to the hitters was the original version of Astroturf was a really fast track. So, the infielders did not have quite as much range as they had in other ballparks, and the balls that were hit into the gaps or down the lines generally made it to the fence. And so, it was probably a better than average park for doubles and triples, but certainly way below the average park for home runs. I think, at first, it was just intriguing, and I think the infielders kind of liked it because they did not get any bad hops. But then, you know, after a while, you know, with diving for balls and slamming down on it and getting abrasions and hitting down hard and everything, after a few years, players did not really like the Astroturf that much. The original Astroturf in the Dome did not have any padding under it . . . just concrete.

**JP:** Do you think that pitching in the majors at such an early age helps explain your relatively early retirement?

**LD:** I think it [starting so young in the majors] was probably not the best thing for me, in retrospect, because I was finished when I was thirty-one. I had arm trouble for three or four years leading up to that. But, philosophically, I am not opposed to pushing a



*Larry Dierker at spring training in 1965.*

young player, you know, to try to maybe challenge him to perform at a higher level than he might be ready for, just to see what will happen. There are two schools of thought on that. Some people feel like the young prospect should move up one step at a time and that you should not put them into an overwhelming situation because they might lose their confidence. My feeling has been that if you put them into that kind of a situation and they fail, they will probably learn why they failed and then they will go back down. If they are the kind of competitor that you want, they will go back down there and work on that and fix it and come back up again. And if they are somebody that once defeated, they are going to be defeated forever, they are probably not the person you want anyway.

The trend has been to take longer and longer [to bring pitchers to the majors]. What happened with me is not going to happen again. [I was] a starting pitcher's manager—if you are a starting pitcher that likes to get the decision. What I would tell them is when you go out there to start the game, you want the decision — win or loss. If you are afraid to lose, you know, you are going to always be one to bail out of a tied game in the fifth or sixth inning; that way, you cannot lose. The proper mental attitude is to go for the win even at the expense of a possible loss and pitch as far into the game as you can so you do not need as much help from the bullpen. And mostly guys responded well to that. We were on a four-man rotation and pitching lots of complete games [when I was coaching the Astros]. We used to pitch the whole season on the fourth day.

I did not know that much about pitching when I signed [as a rookie]. I signed because I could throw the ball hard, and I could throw it over the plate. And I had a pretty good breaking ball. But I did not really have the best idea of what to do with that. The process of learning how to pitch was expedited by pitching in more games and more innings and being coached by professionals.... Once I signed, the process really moved forward quickly, especially, you know, having to try to compete in the major leagues. I could not only see what was happening to me when I was on the mound and talked to the catcher about it and the pitching coach or the manager. But I could also watch what Juan Marichal was doing, or what Warren Spahn was doing, and Don Drysdale, or Bob Gibson. I mean, you are right there where you can watch and see the best pitchers doing it, you know, and that really helped me learn what to do, too. So, it was a combination of pitching more innings and watching better pitchers and getting better coaching.

Jim Owens was a team mate. He pitched the first year or two that I played. He was on the staff, then he became pitching coach. And I probably learned most of the early lessons from him. And after him, the guy that was really good was Roger Craig. He came through as pitching coach for two or three years here during the middle of my career.... It is sort of an interesting dynamic because when young guys come up, they obviously take another guy's place. And so, a lot of times, the guy's place you take might be a popular guy among the other pitchers and they might be a little disgruntled at first but everybody knows



*As a young player who had just joined the majors, Larry Dierker enjoyed the first class treatment, which he said would be "minor league" by today's standards.*

that that is the nature of the sport. So, after the guy is gone and you are there for a while, then you are on the team trying to help and they start trying to help you.

One of the things that really helped me was there was not much pressure because we knew we were not a contending team.... It was no pressure, you are in the major leagues, getting first class treatment, riding around in chartered planes, having people give you money for your meals and stuff. It was glamorous to me. By today's standards, it would be minor league, but for me at that time and that age, I was thrilled.

Every I time I went back to college, I started after the baseball season, so I was usually two weeks to a month late coming into classes. I could catch up just fine in classes like English or history or anything where you read a book and then you have to write about what you read, but when it came to things that were more technical, I was in trouble. About my third or fourth year,

I thought I should major in business because I had some money, and I thought that would be a prudent thing to do. But when I came back to calculus and accounting and computer science one month late, I was lost. Within a couple of weeks, I dropped all those classes, and I ended up with political science and economics. And the next year, I switched over to majoring in English.

One thing that helped me a lot — we got Johnny Edwards over from the Cardinals and he was a good catcher. In 1969 (at the age of twenty-two) in spring training, I actually went 5-0, and he was just adamant that if I was going to pitch in the major leagues, I needed to learn how to throw pitches other than my fast ball behind [in] the count 3-2. I worked on that a lot in spring training, and I found that I could get the ball over the plate, or if I did not, they would swing at it if it was out of the strike zone because they were all looking for fast balls. And that was one of the last pieces in the puzzle—you know, of putting together all the things I had to offer on the mound—to have enough confidence to do those sorts of things. And he was instrumental in that.

I feel like you could imagine how I would feel, or how any twenty-two-year-old would feel, in that position. I think I was pretty full of myself, you know. It was a good feeling. I knew I was one of the best and I knew it was not an accident. I was happy about it, and I was a big shot. I knew I was going to make a bunch more money. I think everybody has to work that out for themselves because one thing that I felt several times is when I was in





Larry Dierker received an award for pitching his first no-hitter in a game on July 9, 1976, against the Montreal Expos.

Dierker, shown here in 1975, continued to be an effective pitcher despite battling shoulder and elbow problems.



my prime and my arm was healthy, and I was warming up for a game, and I felt good, and we were playing a weak team, and I would look over and they would have a lesser pitcher warming up to pitch against me, and I thought we are going to win this game. This is going to be fun. And I asked Nolan [Ryan] if he ever felt that way one time. He said, "Not once." His attitude, it was going to be a war no matter what the team was with the opposing pitcher, and he was never going to let up. Of course, he won more than twice as many games than I did, so he probably had a better philosophy.

**JP:** You make the All-Star team in 1969 and 1971. Did you pitch in the 1969 game?

**LD:** Yes, I pitched in that game in Washington. I only faced two hitters. There were two outs in the inning. Boog Powell got a single, Reggie Smith popped up and that was it. In 1971, I was hurt. I was really off to the best start I had ever been. I was 10-1, I think at one point, and my ERA was below 2. My elbow was burning every start. But I was having so much success that I was just putting hot stuff on it and going out there. It got worse in the game at Candlestick Park, my last start before the All-Star game, to the point where I had to go on the disabled list. Don Wilson took my place, and he pitched an inning in that game in Detroit. I was there, and I was chosen for the team, but I did not pitch. . . .

I think the tendency now is to just shut a guy down until it gets to where it does not hurt. . . . I think they are a little more cautious now than they used to be. It used to be, you know, just get a cortisone shot, put hot stuff on it, take pain killers, and go out there and pitch.

In 1970, my arm was fine but that was 300 innings in 1969 and 270 more in 1970. [In] 1971, when I made the All-Star team, my elbow bothered me mid-season, and I missed the whole second half of that season. And the next year, my shoulder started giving me some trouble. I got over the elbow problem and it probably changed my delivery or something a little bit to protect my elbow. I am not sure what happened but the next year, it was the beginning of the shoulder. I was not too hurt for a few years there — I just had occasional shoulder discomfort, but the last two or three years were basically not knowing from one start to the next if I was going to be able to go out there and make my next start.

What tests they did, they never really diagnosed anything. I think if I had been pitching in a later era, in this era, there is no way that I would have retired at thirty-one. Somebody would have said, "You have got to get that shoulder fixed and keep pitching," because it is too hard to find good pitchers and, you know, when a guy is that young, it is obvious the rest of your body is fine, so I think they would have found a way to fix my shoulder. But back then, if they did not have something they knew they had to operate on, they did not operate, and they could not find anything they knew they had to operate on.



*Astros owners R. E. "Bob" Smith and Judge Roy Hofheinz.*

**JP:** Despite your sore arm, late in your career, you pitched a no hitter.

**LD:** I just went into that game thinking I was going to mix it up and move it around like I had been and by the seventh inning, I got the adrenaline, and I did not know my arm was sore anymore. Actually, I had lost two no-hitters on infield hits late in the game, one in the ninth inning. We were in the Dome and the last two innings, I decided I was not going to give up a ground ball that might be a hit. It was either going to be a fly ball or a strikeout. I think I struck out four guys in the last two innings, and I was basically just throwing high fast balls. I did not throw anything but fast balls the last two innings and here I was, going into the game with my arm a little fragile thinking I am just going to not overdo it, just mix it up and move it around. It was almost like two games: the first part of the game pitching and the last couple of innings just throwing. It was like old times.

In 1969, we were close in the beginning of September, and then we caved in, much like the 1996 team did, which led to me getting the manager's job — being close and then falling out in the end. I think that all of us would have liked to have had a shot at playing when it really counts at the end of September and the pennant race and in the post season. I think there was a realization during most of those years in the 1970s that we just were not as talented as the Dodgers and Reds. They were great teams. At some point, you just have to look at the other team and say, "they've got more talent than we do."

I think we felt that we possibly could have won the eastern division a couple of those years but it was just like playing in the American League East now; you know, Toronto may have a great team, but they are not going to beat Boston or New York.

There were some good trades. We got Jose Cruz for Claude Osteen. I am not sure if there was anything quite that good until Bagwell came along but that was certainly a good deal. But, you know, the Morgan deal and the Cuellar deal really hurt, and

the Rusty Staub deal, too. So, we lost a lot of talent. Paul Richards was the general manager until the judge [Roy Hofheinz] prevailed in the ownership situation with R. E. "Bob" Smith. The judge did not like Paul so he let him go and then hired Spec Richardson, and he made most of the dumb deals. But I do not think Paul Richards would have made those trades, and I think we probably would have been an even better team in the late 1960s and early 1970s if we had not made those deals. And, to me, it was really a defining moment for the franchise because my understanding is that the judge and Bob Smith were not getting along, seeing eye-to-eye, and Bob Smith gave him a buyout price and a date, and he thought he probably would not be able to come up with the money, but the judge was such a charmer and such a dreamer and an eloquent speaker and everything else, that he did manage to scrape up the money, and he bought Bob Smith out. And had Bob Smith become the sole owner instead of Roy Hofheinz, I think that the franchise would have been better.

We might not have had the Astrodome. I mean, the judge was certainly a major figure in Houston history and an innovator in terms of the Dome. And obviously, that has led to other domes and retractable roof stadiums. He was probably a genius. I think he was one of the youngest mayors any major city has ever had. But from the baseball standpoint and player personnel, I think we would have been better off with Bob Smith because I think he would have kept Paul Richards and let Paul do the baseball work, whereas, I think the judge got Spec in there and started trying to be part of it and I think that was a mistake.

**JP:** How did the players react to what turned out to be a series of bad trades in these years?

**LD:** There is not anything you [as a player] can do about it, and even when we made that trade with Cincinnati [Joe Morgan trade], I thought it was an O.K. trade. Tommy Helms was a good second baseman, so we still had a good second baseman. We had power with Lee May and Jimmy Stewart was a switch hitting, utility type player. I did not think it was going to turn out to be such a horrible trade.

If he [Joe Morgan had] stayed here, he probably would not have achieved what he did achieve... because, you know, if you are a pitcher and you have good fielders behind you and good hitters in your lineup, you are going to have a better record than if you are pitching for a lesser team. And if you are a hitter and you have good hitters in front of you and good hitters behind you, you are going to have better numbers than if you are hitting on a team where you do not have good other hitters around you. So, it helped him to be in that lineup, but he would have been a great player no matter what. He had that intensity of focus and spirit for competition that was off the charts, as most of the Hall of Fame guys do.

Craig Biggio will be the first to be a lifetime Astro to make it [into the Hall of Fame], and I think Jeff Bagwell will make it, too. Sentimentally, I hope that Bagwell makes it on the third ballot so he will go in at the same time that Biggio does. And

that could happen, you know, because his career was shortened. And so, even though his numbers are extraordinary, the total RBIs and total runs scored are a little low because he does not have as many at bats because of his injury, but his averages — on base, slugging, RBIs per year, runs scored per year—are all better than many first basemen who are already in there and I think that the voters will realize that.

**JP:** When were you first aware of the possibility of steroid use?

**LD:** I do not think that I picked up on that before it started becoming news. You know, once you read about it or heard somebody, a commentator speak about it, and then you looked around at some of the guys. I thought about the guys I played with. You know, when I was playing, there weren't many guys lifting weights, so it was possible just to assume that we all would have looked like that if we had lifted weights because we did not.

I think the effect of it is really overblown because just for one particular reason, that certainly guys hit more home runs, there was a higher quantity of home runs, but in terms of distance of the long home runs, you would think that if the steroids was making a guy that much stronger, that he would hit the ball that much farther. But there were balls that Frank Howard hit and balls that Willie Stargell hit and balls that Mickey Mantle hit in different stadiums, and these guys in this era who have played in those same stadiums, nobody has hit the ball any farther. And

*“When you are young, you are invulnerable  
...the last thing you are thinking about is how  
you are going to feel when you are sixty.”*

we know those guys were not taking any steroids. So, you know, I think it maybe has had an effect but I think that because of the quantity of home runs, which I think is partially due to poor pitching depth, that it is assumed that cheating is so bad that anybody could do it if you took steroids, anybody could pitch a no-hitter through spit balls or scuffing the ball. I think there is a suspicion among fans that all these things that have happened in the game would be categorized as cheating, have a major effect on the game, and I think they probably have a more subtle effect on the game, and it is really not the impact—and this is just my opinion—I think these things have not had the impact that the fans think they have.

If you have guys like Sosa and McGwire and Bonds who were already established stars, it is hard to understand why they would succumb to that temptation, but if you look at a guy that is twenty-eight years old who is in AAA making \$50,000, and major league minimum is \$325,000, he has got a wife and a couple of kids, he has been in the minor leagues for five years and he is thinking if I could just get a little better and get a couple of years in the big leagues, at least I would have a start on my next life. I can understand that.

At one of our alumni events a couple of years ago, it was the 1980 team. It was before anybody knew about steroids, and guys were sitting around having a beer, and somebody said, “Well, if I was playing now, I would take steroids. I would not want to go against all those guys if we're not going to be on the same playing field.” And just about every single guy said the same thing, you know. If everyone else is doing it, I would do it.

We will never know [who took steroids and who did not] and the other thing is what we do know, I think, is that when you are in your twenties, you do not care what effect it will have on you when you are sixty. I mean, the people were saying, “You are going to pay the price for this down the line with your health.” When you are young, you are invulnerable, you know, I mean, the last thing you are thinking about is how you are going to feel when you are sixty.

They [Major League Baseball] probably could have started [testing] sooner than they did. I think in baseball, they were probably pleased with the Sosa/McGuire thing, and probably attendance was going up, and they may have been dragging their feet almost semi-intentionally because the game was very popular, and there were a lot of home runs; and it was almost like when Babe Ruth started hitting them and other guys started hitting them, and the game became popular that the people that owned the teams and run the game were thinking, well, let's don't rock the boat. Things are going pretty good. And so, it kind of leaked out and became known, and they almost got to the point where they had to do something. And now, they have finally done something. But they still have a problem with the human growth hormones. They need a blood test, I guess. I think you can get that with a blood test.

There was a Hall of Fame player that said baseball must be the greatest game on earth to survive the fools that run it. Can you imagine when that was said? It was said in 1941 by Bill Terry. So, you know, you could say at this point in time that the players and the union run it, just as easily as you could say the owners run it. But the statement is still basically true. We have come through strikes, and we have come through steroids, and we have come through World War II, and we have come through drug trials in Pittsburgh in the early 1980s, and it seems like the game is able to survive all sorts of scandals and unseemly behavior. And now with the steroids, if a bunch of guys are implicated in January, and they say, “But we've got this stuff cleaned up now,” I think all it is going to do is make it more popular.

**JP:** How hard was your transition from being a player to being an announcer?

**LD:** It was not that hard. I think that when you do something like that, you do not really know how to do it, but your knowledge of the game can make the presentation reasonably informative even if you are not a professional broadcaster, and then after a few years, you become a professional broadcaster. It takes everybody a couple of years to learn the timing of things. It is especially difficult on TV. I mean, it is a nightmare on TV right now because they throw so many charts and graphs up there, special effects and sponsored elements, that you cannot really tell a story anymore. You cannot speak more than a couple of sentences because they are liable to put something up there on the screen, and you have to stop and talk about what is on the screen. And so, it makes it difficult to be anecdotal and to present the game the way I like to have it presented, in a friendly and informative way, because it just seems like they want that *People Magazine* flash, flash, flash, cut, flash, cut, cut — that they are trying to make the game seem like it is really fast moving and exciting when it is really just baseball. It is a pastime. And I prefer it as a pastime. On radio, you can still broadcast it that way but on TV, you cannot.

I was pretty lucky to grow up in L.A. and hear Vince Scully

all the time. And then, I spent my last year with St. Louis and I heard Jack Buck quite a bit because I was damaged goods when I went, and I only pitched thirty some innings for them, and I did not go on all the trips because I was on the disabled list. So, I got to hear Jack Buck a lot. I think those two guys were probably, in terms of just baseball announcers, the best that the National League had to offer.

I worked with Dewayne Staats and Gene Elston about the first half and then Milo Hamilton and Bill Brown the second half, roughly. I probably had a little closer relationship with the players when I first started announcing because I was just in my thirties. I was the same age as a lot of the players, and I had played with or against them. And so, it was almost like I was still a player, but then as I grew older and the players got younger, and there was nobody that I had played against or with, you know, then I had a separate relationship, which was more just a professional thing, you know — talked to them, interviewed them, say hello on the bus or around the batting cage but not go out and have a beer or go play golf or anything. It separated as I got older.

I got to get in the race as an announcer and then I got to get in the race as a manager. I was never in it as a player. That Philadelphia series [in 1980] was probably more exciting than the Mets series [in 1986]. I got to do both of those. I had Nolan's 4,000<sup>th</sup> strikeout. I was doing play-by-play on radio at that time.

[While announcing] I did a lot more statistical analysis, and I read more books from people like Bill James and others that kind of broke the game down analytically in ways that I had not thought about before. So by the time I went down to manage, I think I had a better idea of what creates runs scored, more than the fielding. The pitching was something I knew from experience, and I knew from experience that the better fielders you have, the better pitcher you are going to be. So, that was the prevent-runs standpoint and that was mostly from experience. But the offensive part was less familiar to me—slugging average, on base average, the percentage of

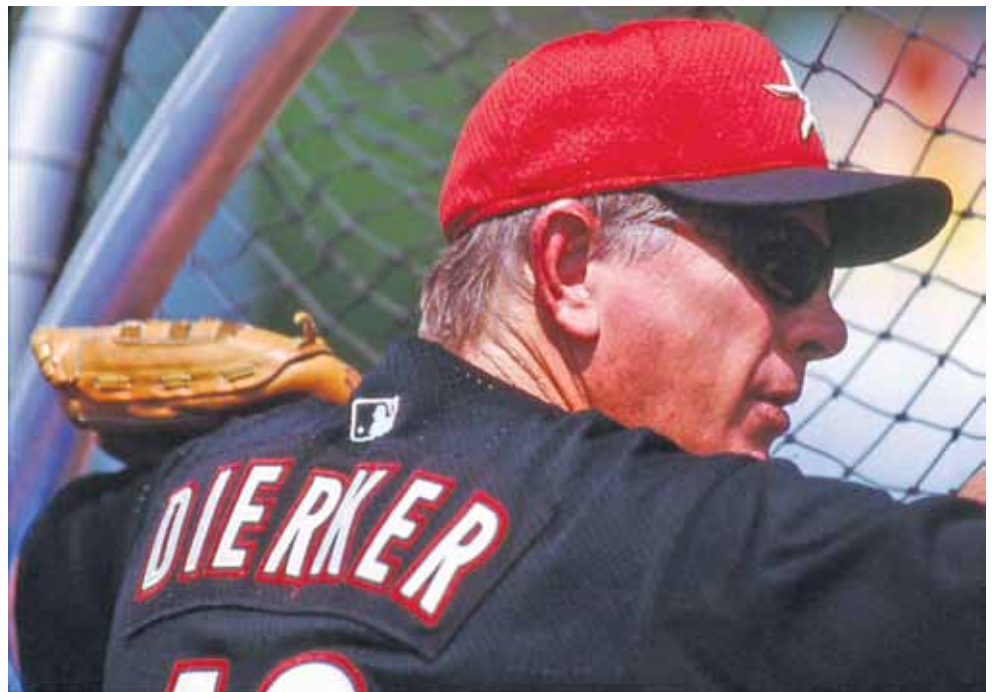
steals and what percentage you have to do to gain an advantage, and the number of the percentage of games where the big inning wins the game. And then, I went through my scorebook to see if that was true; so I went through a whole year, and about 50% of the time, you know, the winning team scored more in one inning. Even if it was a 2-1 game, they scored the two runs in one inning. And then, I took it a step farther and said, well, how many times does a team score as many runs in one inning as the other team does in a whole game, and it was 70%. So, when I went down to manage, I was armed with those ideas, and a lot of managers are not. You know, a lot of managers still think about the team that scores first wins 60% or 70% of the time. But, you know, the team that scores first could score five runs in the first inning and still score more than the other team does in the whole game. So, both of those things could happen in the

same game. But a lot of managers bunt and play little ball in the early part of the game to try to get the first run because they have heard that the team that scores first wins. I never did that when I managed. I tried to play for the big inning until the end of the game when we only needed one run.

Managing the game was fun, but managing the situation was not fun. It was probably the job that I least enjoyed of all the things I have done in baseball, just because of the combination of having to get there so early because the players get there so early and have nothing to do until the game starts except talk to the media. And then, the media kind of pressure in the season where we had a bad year and even in the seasons where we lost in the playoffs. By the time it was over at first, you know, it [being removed as manager] kind of hurt my feelings because we had won the division that year; but after about one month, I felt like I had had a big burden taken off of me, and I realized that I could be a lot happier person if I did not have to be responsible for what happened out on the field. But actual tactics, from the first pitch to the last pitch, I enjoyed that.

I had great players. Oh, I mean, that is critical. You can screw up a good team if you make everybody mad and you are a bad manager, but you cannot possibly take a team of middling talent and win a championship through the shrewdness of your tactics.

I probably emphasized defense, pitching, and fielding more than most managers for that reason. I think in the Big Bang era, most managers, coming from playing positions rather than from pitching, they think a little more about how are we going to outscore the other team, and I would probably think how are we going to allow fewer runs than the other team? And I probably was less reluctant to go into extra innings to shoot for the moon, change pitchers in the fifth inning to try to have a big inning. I was kind of a save-your-ammunition type manager, not really reacting too much to what was going on early in the game unless you just absolutely had to. But if it was a close game, even if we were a little behind, I would say, "Let's save our best pinch



*The Astros made the playoffs four of the five seasons Dierker managed the team, and he was elected Manager of the Year in 1998.*



*Larry Dierker was honored in a ceremony naming the All-Astrodome team at the final regular season game played at the Astrodome on October 3, 1999.*

hitter. Let's save our right and left pinch hitter. Let's save this relief pitcher. Let's let this pitcher pitch another inning," and just kind of let the game go a little further before I started trying to use my reserves in my bullpen.

[In the play offs,] it was three times the Braves and one time the Padres. And in all of those series, we faced some sensational pitching. I mean, not only were these guys good pitchers during the year but, I mean, we caught Kevin Millwood when he struck out fifteen guys. You just could not hit him that day. It was probably the best his arm ever felt in his whole career. And his control was great too! Kevin Brown had a similar game against us. And, of course, Maddox and Glavine and Smoltz. I felt like there were times during the year that we could have scored runs off those guys throwing the way they did. But most of the time you don't hit guys who are throwing that well. . . . we just could not get past that first round, mostly because we could not score.

1998: That was the Kevin Brown year, and that was when we had our best team and won 102 games. That was the year I thought we had the best talent in the league, and the Padres beat us. I think [Randy Johnson] was 10-1. He was good in that first game against Kevin Brown, too. We lost 2-1, I think, but we only scored a run in the ninth off Trevor Hoffman because they took Kevin Brown out. But I think he pitched eight innings and struck out fifteen guys in that game. Guys were just walking back to the dugout going . . . what are you supposed to do?

In 1999, we won again — I thought that I did a better job that year, and that was the year I had the seizure. So, I missed about one month of that season. But that year, we won 97 games. And we were decimated by injuries. I had Biggio and Spiers in the outfield during most of September. We lost Moises Alou for the whole year and Richard Hidalgo for about half of the year,

and had other injuries as well. Plus, the Reds were just putting relentless pressure. . . . At one point, we won eleven or twelve games in a row and we only picked up one game on them.

It got down to the very last day of the year, and we won [against the Dodgers] in the Dome, and it was the last regular season game in the history of the Dome, and the confetti, and the Astros team of honor, and the champagne, and Harleys, and cigars. There were players from different generations, and everybody was going around hugging each other and everything. It was a really special time, that particular part of it, and that was only a part of it. To me, it was one of the most memorable days of my whole career and we had to win that game to win the division. So, I felt like, you know, 97 games in that year was probably more difficult to obtain than the 102 the year before.

And then, in 2000, the first year at Minute Maid, we had a lousy year, 70-92. The pitchers freaked out. Bagwell and all those guys were not hitting until the second half. It was just an inexplicable bad year for a team that had quite a bit of talent. And then the next year, we won again and lost in the playoffs to the Braves.

I thought [Minute Maid Park] was great. I mean, I was concerned about the home run and the effect it was having on the mentality of the pitching staff but I thought it was a beautiful park. I was ready to leave the Dome. I loved the Dome, but when they took the scoreboard down and put up more seats, it just looked like any other multipurpose stadium . . . the Dome just seemed passé at that point, and I was ready for a new one [ballpark]. And then, when I saw the new one, I loved it, and I still love it.

**JP:** You were fortunate to have a chance to play in some of the great old ballparks in your early years in the big leagues.

**LD:** Yes, I did. Sportsman's Park in St. Louis, Crosley Field, Forbes Field, Connie Mack Stadium, County Stadium — all of them.

**JP:** And then watched them all get replaced by multipurpose stadiums.

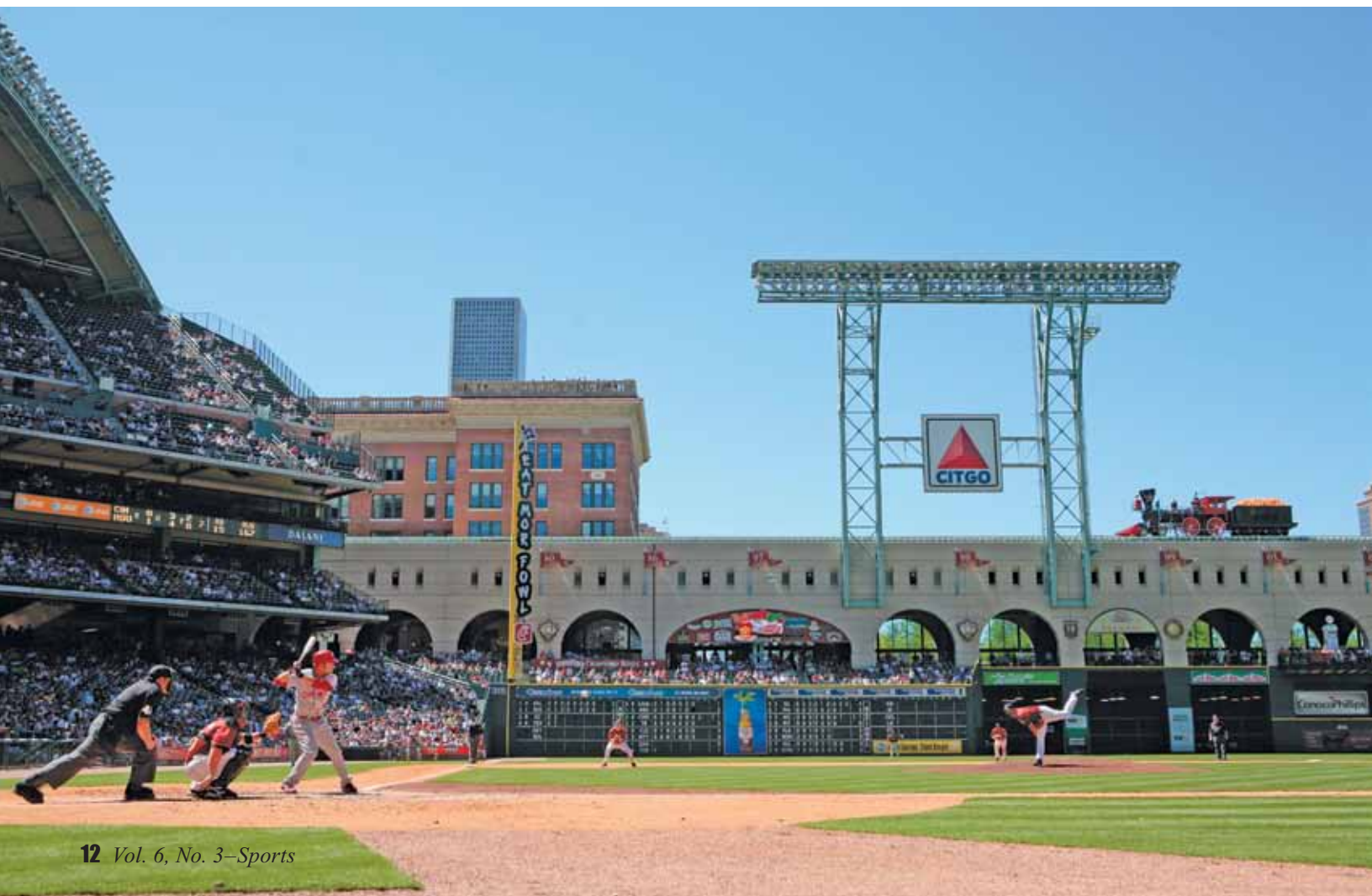
**LD:** Well, the Dome was . . . we kind of led everybody down the primrose path because they thought, boy, isn't this great? You can have one stadium — football and baseball, put down AstroTurf and you do not have to take care of the grass. I mean, this is the way of the future. Everybody followed and now, they have all said, "This is a terrible idea. It is not ideal for baseball or football. We need separate stadiums. The AstroTurf is no good." But all that started because of the Astrodome.

The thing about baseball that is so charming is that, you know, people collect ball parks. . . . Thomas Boswell once said — their sounds, their sights, their smells, their neighborhoods — they are unique and people go around and want to see a game in every park, or people will go around if they are golfers and they will want to play the great golf courses because every golf course is different. . . . And, to me, those two sports are unique for that reason, and I think really that for that reason, a great deal of the best sports writing has been golf writing and baseball writing.

When I got here, we had a very high percentage of Cardinals fans because the Houston Buffs were here, and all the players that came through Houston and went to St. Louis, among them,

Dizzie Dean and others, Joe Medwick and others, so people liked the Cardinals. And a lot of people watched the Yankees on the game of the week. And they were always on, and Houston did not have a major league team, so a lot of them became Yankee fans or Cardinal fans. And then, over time, you know, it seemed like the novelty of the Astrodome wore off and we really did not have a very good core of baseball fans in Houston at all. And then, when I first got into broadcasting and take it in the late 1970s, early 1980s, we had a combination of a lot of things that were good for major league sports. We had a good team. We were contending each year. The Oilers and Rockets also did. And the oil business was booming, and we were able to sell a lot of tickets and build a bigger core of baseball, football, and basketball fans. And then, the teams, all of them sort of faded. 1986 was a great team but it was just one team in the middle of a fairly long run of not too good teams. But the last ten or twelve years in baseball in Houston, with the combination of the new ballpark and the contending teams year after year, has built a core of baseball fans in Houston that I think is liable to last. But in 2007, to be drawing 35,000 and 40,000 a crowd, you know, all through the midweek in September when you are already eliminated, you know, to me, that said this is becoming a pretty good baseball town. . . . I think we are getting pretty close to getting in that group of cities where people are going to come and support the team no matter what the team does because they think, well, we may be down for a few years but we will come back, because they have the expectation that we have

*The Houston Astros take on the Cincinnati Reds at Minute Maid Park.*





*On May 19, 2002, Larry Dierker and Astros owner Drayton McLane, Jr. unveiled the framed jersey given to Dierker to commemorate the Astros retiring his number 49.*

done enough winning, been in the playoffs enough that I think the mentality is that, well, we may be down now but we will get back. . . . And I think that is the way Cardinal fans have always felt. You know, their winning teams have come and gone. They won a lot in the 1960s and 1980s but not in the 1970s. And they have won a little bit lately but, you know, I think Cardinal fans just say, well, we like the Cardinals — win or lose and we will get our share of championships.

We have a good stadium, we have had a lot of success on the field, and we have a big city that is growing. And, you know, even if you are new to Houston, if some guy comes to U of H, and he is a new professor from somewhere else, and you become friends, and you say, “Let’s go out to the ballgame,” you know, we might have another fan! He might not need you to take him the next time.

**Joe Pratt** is the editor of *Houston History*.

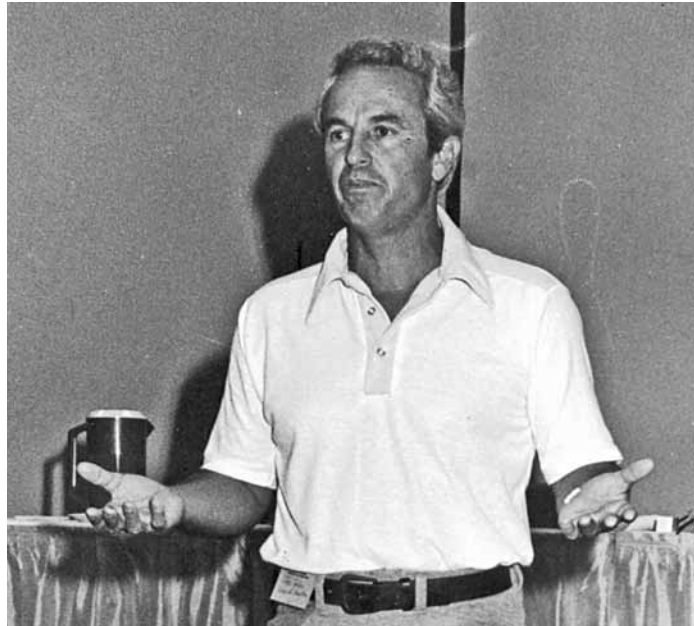
# That You May Win: Tom Tellez Teaches UH Athletes to Go for the Gold

By Ernesto Valdés

Trying to instill an appreciation of sports in some people is akin to instilling an appreciation of opera in others. Yet athletes and artists often wander into each other's sphere with abandon. Two of the famous Three Tenors dreamed of being professional soccer players: the late Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo. Moreover, the 1990 World Cup Playoffs in Rome featured the trio's celebrated performance viewed by a television audience estimated at 800 million. Another little known performance mixing sports and culture took place January 30, 2009, with the Super Bowl Gospel Celebration sung by the NFL Players' All-Star Choir that included more than thirty-two active and retired football players with inspirational messages from the likes of John Elway, Tony Dungy, Jerry Rice, Chris Carter, Kurt Warner, and Dion Sanders.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, on closer inspection, sports and the performing arts share striking similarities: dedication to the discipline and development of innate talent, stamina to practice and endure repetitious routines, and an irrepressible desire to achieve perfection. The legendary choreographer George Balanchine, noted, "I don't want people who want to dance, I want people who *have* to dance."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in both endeavors, talent constitutes only one dimension of greatness; it must be molded long before the encores or the medals are won. Rarely do athletes stand in the winner's circle alone – somewhere in the wings stands the coach who saw a diamond in the raw stone. This story concerns one of those coaches, Tom Tellez of the University of Houston.

In many other countries, fans closely follow track and field, but in the United States, high school and collegiate track meets draw only half-filled stadiums. But every four years, American track and field athletes join those of other countries in the Olympic Games, which thousands of spectators watch on site, and millions more around the world view on television. During his tenure at the University of Houston, Tom Tellez coached several Cougar athletes in national and international competitions. Many reached the Olympic Games where they left their marks on the record books. Names such as Kirk Batiste, Joe DeLoach, and LeRoy Burrell are still remembered for their



*Tom Tellez explaining track and field fundamentals at the International Track and Field Symposium at the Hilton University of Houston Hotel and Conference Center.*

All photos courtesy of UH Athletics, unless otherwise noted.

accomplishments performed in national and international venues. Without listing conference and preliminary competitions during the interim of the Olympic Games, Tellez's athletes achieved an impressive array of victories. Batiste took the silver medal in the 200 meters in 1984; Joe DeLoach ran in the 1988 Summer Olympics and took the gold medal in the 200 meters; LeRoy Burrell held the world's record twice for the 100-meter dash, with one of the records coming in his gold medal performance in the 1992 Olympics. By far, though, Carl Lewis stands as Tellez's best known athlete. He won four gold medals in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, a feat that equaled Jesse Owens' record set in 1936 for the highest number of gold medals won by

a track and field athlete in a single Olympics. In his career, Lewis won nine gold medals and one silver while competing in four Olympic Games: Los Angeles, Seoul, Barcelona, and Atlanta.<sup>3</sup>

The Tellez coaching philosophy that guided these gifted athletes began when he came to understand the esoteric world of "biomechanics," a philosophy that emerged in the 1960's and 1970's. According to Tellez, that philosophy taps into the knowledge of the human body and incorporates the works of



*Joe DeLoach, Coach Tellez, and Carl Lewis at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. DeLoach won the gold medal in the 200 meters, and Lewis won silver in the 200 meters and gold in the 100 meters and long jump.*

Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Applying their ideas to the established knowledge of human anatomy constitutes “biomechanics,” a technique developed to optimize performance based on physics of motion, gravity, and structure.<sup>4</sup> According to Tellez:

*There has to be a biomedical reason why you do everything — I had to give a reason to athletes as to why I wanted them to do things in the way I was telling them to do it. When you do that the kids get better faster and they don't develop any psychological problems. You don't invent a great athlete, great athletes are geniuses. They achieve greatness because they are geniuses and a coach teaches them how to use the body correctly. There are not ten different ways to run fast, there is only one way, and the coach has to teach the athlete what that way is.*<sup>5</sup>

To appreciate how biomechanics became central to Tellez's coaching philosophy, one must first know something of the man, his education, training, and development as an individual and as a coach. Coach Tellez nurtures great respect for his philosophy, which he firmly delivers with a Zen-like approach that mind, body, and soul are one and that each is an aspect of the other; it teaches the athlete how to “turn the eye inward.”

Tellez was born in Los Angeles, California, on October 17, 1933. His mother, born in Chihuahua, Mexico, came to Los Angeles in the early 1900's when her family fled the violence of the Mexican Revolution. His father was born in El Paso, Texas, and moved to Los Angeles seeking better employment. Eventually, the family settled in Montebello, where Tellez and his siblings attended the public schools and where he was introduced to organized sports. As a youngster, his favorite pastime was going to western movies. In that era, Hollywood studios released all manner of westerns and Saturday matinees starring Gene Autry, Hoot Gibson, Red Ryder, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash LaRue, Lone Ranger, Cisco Kid, and memorable sidekicks like Andy Devine, Sons of the Pioneers, Gabby Hayes, Pancho, Little Beaver, and Tonto.<sup>6</sup>

In high school, Tellez began playing team sports. In an era before the “platoon system” or “specialists,” he played halfback on offense and defense during football season; and in spring, during track season, he ran hurdles and the quarter mile. He lettered in both sports, but points out, “I was a better football player than I was a track athlete at the time . . . but I wasn't very big so the question of going to college and playing football was borderline.” As it turned out, he attended Fullerton Junior College where he made the football team and played for two years. Whittier College then offered him a partial scholarship, but his motive for going there was to play under “Chief Newman,” a very popular coach at that time. Unfortunately, Chief Newman opted to retire just before Tellez arrived. However, the new coach, George Allen, was no greenhorn. He took the team to its first conference championship, an accomplishment he would replicate in the future with some of the greatest professional teams in National Football League history: the Los Angeles Rams, Chicago Bears, and Washington Redskins. Ultimately,

the NFL inducted Allen into the Hall of Fame on August 3, 2002.<sup>7</sup>

Although Tellez had a good athletic career in college, his initial goal did not include pursuing a career in athletics. His love of animals coupled with a love for biology caused him to flirt with the idea of becoming a veterinarian. Aware of his limitations as well as his strengths, Tellez had made up his mind about his future by the end of his senior year:

*I wanted to be a coach. There was no doubt in my mind. I had a pretty good athletic career but . . . My main goal was to get a degree and start coaching. . . . I had to study very hard to make the grades. I didn't take tests very well, a lot of minority kids can't take tests well — I'd just get emotionally uptight and I just couldn't take them, but I got my degree in biology and physical education. Once I graduated, I signed a letter, a teaching contract to coach in high school.*<sup>8</sup>

At Whittier Tellez met and eventually married Kay H. Brownsberger, who became a music teacher at Bonita High School. She brought a balance to his life that he did not have before, and she opened cultural doors that he would otherwise have never known. Tellez described Kay:

*She was very smart. Her mother was a teacher and her father became superintendent of the schools. I had never been exposed to such academic things. She read more books in grammar school than I read in my whole life. Everyone in her family were teachers — going into that family*

*was a totally different background than I was used to but it was very good. She brought a lot into my life.*<sup>9</sup>

Married and with a coaching job in the offing at Buena Vista High School, Tellez prepared to start his life. Unfortunately, Uncle Sam had other plans for him, and the U.S. Army drafted him in 1956. He completed basic training at Ft. Ord, California, and then received further training as a medic before being assigned to the 85<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stationed in Bremerhaven, Germany. During the Cold War, saber-rattling became the norm between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Tellez's unit participated in military maneuvers, war games, alerts, and mock face-offs against the Soviets along the East and West German border. The military organized activities in every sport; Tellez joined in, and this eventually led to his coaching track.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that the Army preferred that spouses remain back home, Kay joined Tellez in Germany—the one bright spot in his military service. Instead of living in military barracks, they lived off post in a small apartment. Tellez said, “A lot of the GI's at that time did the same thing. We borrowed some money and bought a VW and traveled all over Europe.” At that time, the cost of living in Europe was low; and as skimpy as his GI pay was, they were able to tour and enjoy the Continent with another couple. Tellez described how his Army experience impacted his future career:

*The army ended up being a good experience and I was especially glad to get a little bit more experience coaching*

*“You don't invent a great athlete, great athletes are geniuses.”*

*because I wasn't very old and . . . I had matured a little bit in the service which really helped. So when I came back I thought I was better prepared to coach and teach.<sup>11</sup>*

The job offer as an assistant coach that he received before his induction was still waiting for him at Buena Vista High School. In retrospect, Tellez's post-military career consisted of a series of what some may label "lucky breaks" with regard to his mentors and the venues where he developed his coaching style. It verified what the erudite Tiki Barber, a former All-Pro running back for the New York Giants, said in a television interview, "Luck is where preparation meets opportunity." In 1961, Tellez became head coach at Fullerton when his predecessor took a position at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Eight years later, he offered Tellez the job of assistant coach, which Tellez accepted and held for nine years from 1968 to 1976. In the last year, he assisted another legendary head coach, Dick Vermeil. That year was particularly memorable because UCLA went to the Rose Bowl and beat the highly-favored Ohio State Buckeyes—a team that had come through the season undefeated—by a score of 23-10. It also expanded Tellez's experience to be working under Vermeil, who became one of the NFL's most respected and outstanding coaches.<sup>12</sup>

Soon thereafter, Tellez dreamed of becoming a head coach because he wanted to apply his own philosophies to athletic training. The idea of "biomechanical" techniques had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and Tellez became a disciple, eager to incorporate it into his coaching style. This interactive technique requires that the athlete, schooled in the traditional mechanics of sports, becomes a knowledgeable part of its application. Tellez detailed the importance of his technique:

*There has to be biomechanical reasons why you do everything [in sports]....you don't just put the kids into blocks and tell them 'go'.... I had to give a reason to those athletes...why I wanted them to do things [in the manner I was telling them to do it]. . . If you explain that to kids, they learn quicker and they get better faster. They understand why and that is what you practice and that is what you do at the meet. . . . To me that's the big challenge – practice this way because it's correct, now go to the meet and do the same thing.*

*Gravity works on all bodies in the same way but we try to overcome gravity in different ways in different events. In the throwing events like the javelin, the shot put, and even throwing a baseball, all share a surprisingly similar biomechanics. It is the same thing in running — there are not ten ways to sprint, there is only one way to run fast.<sup>13</sup>*

As laymen most of us imagine that sprinters line up in front of some wooden blocks pre-positioned along a white line; then at the sound of the starter gun, they run as fast as they can toward the tape (the finish line) 100 meters away, and the first one to the tape wins. That captures, to be sure, the essence of the event, but biomechanical techniques elevate the sprinter's

natural ability by allowing him or her to run at peak efficiency. Working on his master's degree at Chapman College, Tellez meticulously studied the movements of an athlete as he or she performed his or her respective event. The point was to isolate each significant motion from the moment the sprinter pushed off the blocks until he or she crossed the finish line. To do so, Tellez set up three cameras—back, side, and top—and simultaneously filmed an athlete throwing the hammer. He then did a segmental analysis of the film that had recorded the movements at the rate of sixty-four frames per second. This scrupulous study allowed him to note the interplay of the athlete's velocities of movements, the angles of release, and rotational movements.

*You could see exactly what the foot was doing, what the arms were doing, and what the body was doing relative to itself. . . . you have three different views so you can find*

*out very quickly how the human body works. . . . I did my own analysis using this same technique I used in my master's thesis at every event during my career at UCLA and UH building models of different events and how they should be coached; what they look like, the biomechanics of*

*each, what they feel like, and a vocabulary for each, which I used in order to properly teach them.*

*Later, a friend had an airplane camera that could shoot 600 frames per second, which we used by developing strips of film with fifteen frames and after looking slowly at these strips you can observe even more detail of how the human body works. If you don't do segmental analysis and watch films frame by frame, you are going to miss a lot.<sup>14</sup>*

What did Tellez discover in this segmental analysis that contributed to his philosophy of coaching track? In his essay, *Sprinting: a Biomechanical Approach*, he writes:

*World class male sprinters stride approximately forty-three times during a 100 meter race. If a mechanical error costs one-one thousandth of a second per stride, the total cost is .043 seconds at the finish line. How can one be an efficient sprinter; the answer lies in scientific principles. . . . Kinesiology, the study of movement, dictates how a sprinter should move. Contributing to the study of movement is the discipline of biomechanics, which refers to the engineering of the body and laws of physics governing it. While referencing laws of physics, kinesiology and biomechanics view the body as a unified system of interdependent parts, an approach necessary for proper analysis.<sup>15</sup>*

This seemingly trivial bit of knowledge appears to be of little importance; however, in a sport where hundredths of a second mean the difference between victory and defeat this represents a treasure trove of knowledge and a major contribution to the science of coaching.

In 1975, Tellez arrived at a crossroads in his coaching career when two interesting positions opened up: training coach with

*"...there are not ten ways to sprint, there is only one way to run fast."*

the Dallas Cowboys, and head coach for the track and field team at the University of Houston. Although recruited heavily by the legendary Gil Brandt and Tom Landry of the Cowboys, Tellez wanted a head coaching position where he could apply his knowledge of biomechanics to track and field and, therefore, opted for the job at the University of Houston.

Coach Tellez arrived at UH in 1976 ready to begin his career as a head coach. (UH sport's history buffs will note that Guy



*Coach Tellez at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 with athletes Mike Marsh, LeRoy Burrell, Frank Rutherford, Lamont Smith and Carl Lewis, (left to right).*

Lewis coached the basketball team at the time, and that same year Bill Yeoman became the football coach; Bum Phillips and “Luv Ya Blue” were just around the corner at the Astrodome – making it a heady time for Houston sports fans.) Three years later, Tellez and his coaching staff, as well as those of several other major universities, wanted to recruit a recent high school graduate from New Jersey named Carl Lewis. Tellez, to say the least, did not feel optimistic about their chances of getting Lewis:

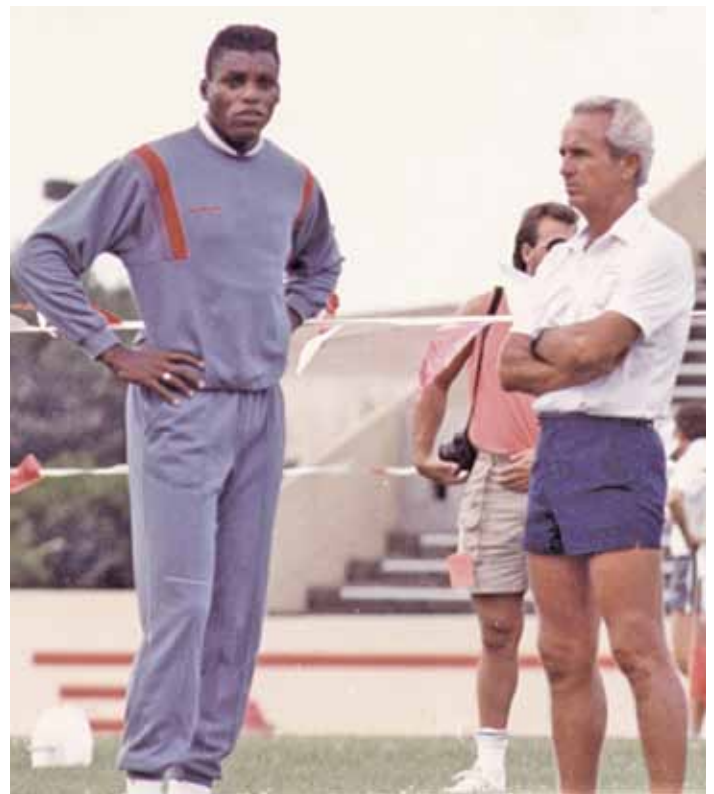
*I told my assistant coach, ‘We can’t get that guy. There’s no sense in me recruiting him, he’s too good, he won’t come down here.’ . . . My assistant kept telling me, ‘Why don’t you just give him a call?’ He finally talked me into it so I called him and just told him about [our program] and he was interested! However, he had taken all his visits [to recruiting colleges] that the NCAA rules would allow. . . . So he said, ‘I’m going to Puerto Rico and on my way back I’ll go through Houston, and I’ll stop there.’ The rules allowed that he could stop here if he paid his own way.*

*So he visited the university and talked about track and field and then he left. . . . Then lo and behold he called me and said, “I’m coming.” I could not believe it. . . . I have no idea why he chose UH except that we had developed a good relationship during his visit. I told him I didn’t care if he sprinted or not. I wanted him for the broad jump and I told him, ‘I want you to be a long jumper. I think you can break the world record.’<sup>16</sup>*

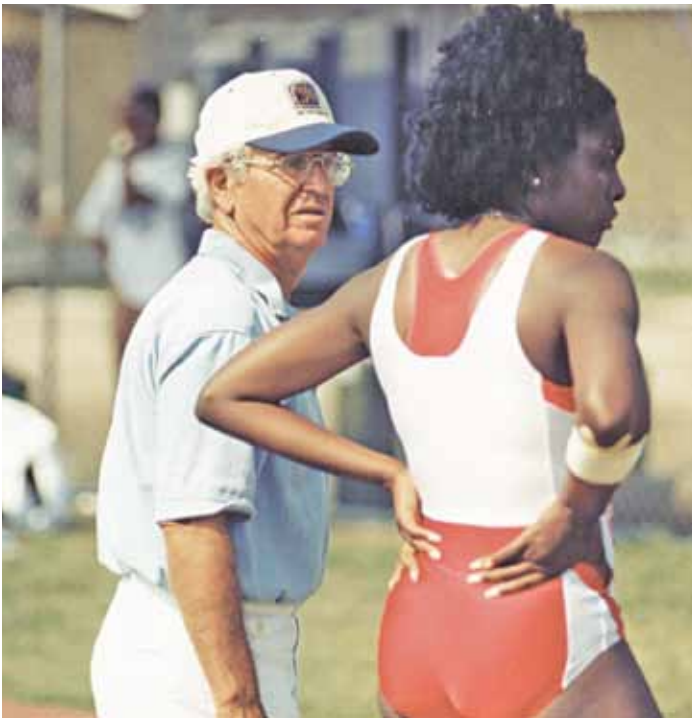
That bit of prognostication became an understatement. Tellez and Carl Lewis reached legendary status as the latter broke several records in individual sports while piling up medals in

collegiate, regional, and Olympic competitions. Tellez referred to Lewis as the perfect student athlete because he was intelligent, decisive, and gifted with physical talents of a superb athlete. Lewis’ sports career remains well documented, but suffice it to say that he set a world record in the long jump and finished first in that event for sixty-five consecutive meets. In spite of the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, Lewis amassed ten Olympic medals including nine golds, and ten World Championship medals, eight of them golds. He won accolades from writers and sports magazines from around the world. Some named him the greatest Olympian ever. Writing for Sport Web, Francesco Stefanon said of Lewis, “He defined track and field for over a decade. What about naming him the Olympian of all time?” In 1996, at age thirty-five, Lewis competed in his last Olympics in Atlanta and won a gold medal in the long jump. In the latter venue, Larry Schwartz, a contributing writer for ESPN.com, quoted Rick Reilly of *Sports Illustrated*, “Lewis beat age, gravity, history, logic and the world at a rocking Olympic Stadium in Atlanta to win the gold medal in the long jump. It was probably his most impossible moment in an impossibly brilliant career.”<sup>17</sup>

Lewis arrived on UH campus in 1979, and the work began with enough intensity that he qualified for the 1980 Olympics. “My job,” Tellez asserted, “was to coach him and that’s what I did. He got ready for every Olympic game and that was our objective, it wasn’t anything else except to get ready for the games.” Unfortunately, in light of international political conflicts, the United States boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Coach and athlete then set their goal for Carl to win four gold medals in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, a feat that would tie Jessie Owens’ record. For the next four years that goal became their focus. In the World Games, they tried to set their pace by winning four gold medals: 100 meters, long jump, 200 meters,



*Carl Lewis and Coach Tellez at a track meet held at the UH stadium.*



*Coach Tellez giving pointers to Patsy Walker, a national champion in the collegiate heptathlon.*

*Tom Tellez observes the competition with triple jumper Michelle Newman at a track meet.*

and the 400 x 100 meter relay. Although they failed to meet that objective, they learned an important lesson that impacted their future approach.

The Olympic rules for the long jump allow each athlete six attempts at getting his or her longest jump. That many attempts, however, tax the body's endurance and stamina. Carl took all six of his allotted jumps, but the effort left him so spent that the next day he lost the 200 meter and the chance to take home four golds in the World Games. Obviously, the strategy for the 1984 Olympics had to change. They ultimately settled upon a gutsy strategy that would take peak performance and concentration. Tellez decided that Lewis would practice the long jump so that the first attempt would be the winning jump, allowing him to forego his remaining jumps. When the 1984 Olympics arrived, Lewis won the 100 meter and then faced the long jump. As decided, Carl made only one jump in the event that day. The fans booed him, but as Tellez says, "It was my call, my decision, not Carl's. I wanted him rested for the 200 meter race the following day." As it turned out, the strategy worked, and Lewis achieved his dream of matching Jessie Owens' record.<sup>18</sup>

Tellez also coached several women athletes in NCAA competitions who left their marks as champions: Jolanda Jones, Carol Lewis (Carl's sister), Jackie Washington, and Michelle Collins. The difference between coaching women and men was obviously not an area easily discussed or explained by Coach Tellez. Picking his words carefully and pausing frequently, he stated that coaching women is "basically" the same as coaching men but pointed out that, "They are focused, they are really focused. Women can do amazing things—they can do everything the guys can, but, you know—they are—I think—a coach has to have certain skills to really coach women." Without any elucidation or interpretation of what constitutes those "certain skills," Tellez continued, in a tone that suggested he felt he was walking on egg shells, "I coached them like I coached the guys, I just coached them—I *may* have raised my voice a little bit and *maybe* got on them a little bit like I would a guy. A guy

would never think two seconds about the way I raised my voice but a girl may. She may interpret that as being mad at her or not—or whatever." In the movie *A League of Their Own* Tom Hanks made it clear there was no crying in baseball; Tom Tellez suggested that there was no crying in track either. "Maybe," he noted ruefully, "I'm not skilled in coaching women, I'd rather coach men. I think there is a knack to doing that . . . to getting the most out of women."<sup>19</sup> With that, the issue of coaching women ended. The record, on the other hand, suggests that he did know how to coach women. According to his profile on the Official Site of The University of Houston Athletics online:

*[Tellez] began the Lady Cougar program and led them to three Top 10 finishes at the NCAA Indoor Championships and eight Top 20 finishes at the NCAA Outdoor meet. Houston also won the 1983, 1984 and 1987 SWC indoor titles and the 1984 and 1990 SWC outdoor championships under his direction.<sup>20</sup>*

Tellez's coaching skills became widely appreciated internationally, and he received invitations from several countries to hold clinics and train their athletes. Conversely, many foreign athletes traveled to Houston in order to train with him. He made it clear, however, that he did not recruit heavily among foreign athletes:

*Though we have had foreign athletes, I didn't go out and actively recruit them, first because we did not have the money, and secondly, I felt I wanted to give whatever scholarships we had to Americans. I wanted to develop American athletes in college because developing athletes is where I get my greatest satisfaction. However, foreign athletes spoil you because they are so good, they are very "coachable," they listen, and you never have to worry about their grades.<sup>21</sup>*

After twenty-two years as track and field coach at UH, Tellez felt he needed a change. Kay had passed away, and her death had a profound effect on him, as did demands for paper work



*Tom Tellez applied his techniques to help athletes that other coaches might have written off before they ever got started.*

and the advancement of technology. Ironically, new technology offers athletes instruction from Tellez on YouTube, where the viewer can access videos of some of his clinics and track meets, including the Olympics, showing many of his student-athletes competing. Tellez has received an extensive list of honors and accolades, with some writers declaring him the greatest track coach ever. Tellez, however, claims that receiving the 1990 Hispanic Heritage Award Honoree for Sports stands, in his words, as his most cherished award.<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between Tellez and Lewis remains close. Tellez continues to coach individuals including athletes that Lewis, now living in New Jersey, sends to him in an effort to help them develop their talent. In addition, sports federations from different countries also send youngsters to Tellez to coach.

Tellez now directs his abiding love of animals towards a pair of Arabian horses he keeps on his acreage north of Houston. His oldest son has a Ph.D. in education and teaches Mexican-American studies at the University of California

Santa Cruz. His daughter attended the University of Texas, where she majored in chemical engineering before earning her M.B.A. at Southern Methodist University. His youngest son followed in his father's footsteps, working as associate head coach in track and field at the University of Houston under LeRoy Burrell, one of his father's Olympians.

Probably no other college or university in the nation has an on-campus sport center named after a coach and his star student. In light of Tellez's and Lewis' stunning accomplishments, the University of Houston honored the pair by naming the new athletic center after them: the Tom Tellez Track at the Carl Lewis International Complex. A glass encased room to the right just inside the foyer houses the University of Houston's Hall of Fame. One cannot escape the air of spiritual-like nostalgia where a visitor can capture the shared giddiness of victory, recalling memories of incredible athletic feats. An impressive bronze statue of Carl Lewis dominates the space, while his coach of sixteen years, Tom Tellez, stands in the wings with the insistent message of discipline and perseverance – an echo that emerges from antiquity.

Sometime between 54 and 55 A.D., the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthian congregation in hopes of raising their morale to do bigger and better works. To make his point, he used the metaphor of a competitive foot race. In that letter, preserved as 1 Corinthians verse 9:24, Paul wrote: "Don't you know that those who run in a race all run but [only] one receives the prize? Run like that, that you may win."<sup>23</sup>

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*Tom Tellez was joined by his wife, Kay, and brother, Don, in Washington, DC when he received the 1990 Hispanic Heritage Award for Sports.*

Photo courtesy of Tom Tellez.

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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."<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>



*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.<sup>11</sup>

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 terra cotta. 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.

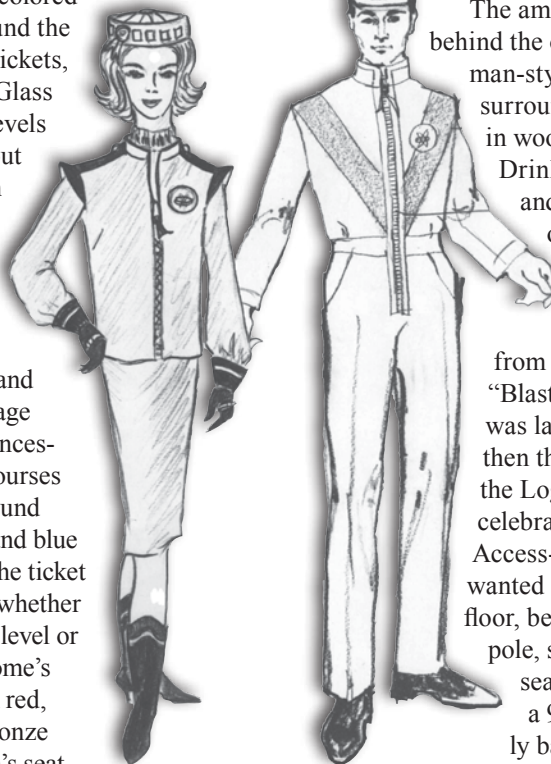
Drinks could be ordered in Astrodome steins and fans could enjoy meals with a glimpse of the field through mesh wire windows.

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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>



*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.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>

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.

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Houston, Texas Main at Franklin 1928



# Love, Death, & the Astrodome

by Larry McMurtry

The following essay is an excerpt from *In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* published in 1968 by Pulitzer Prize winner Larry McMurtry and reprinted in its entirety with his permission.<sup>1</sup>

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**A VERSION of the previous chapter was published some years ago in *The Texas Quarterly*, a publication edited in Austin by the ghost of William Lyon Phelps. A number of correspondents suggested that I was no fit appreciator of East Texas pastoralism, and probably they were right. A version of this chapter was published some years ago in *The Texas Observer*, a publication also edited in Austin, I assume by wraiths and elves. A number of correspondents suggested that I had been frivolous and presumptuous to speak so disparagingly of the Dome, and probably they too are right. As it happens, frivolity and presumptuousness are qualities the Texas literary scene has always lacked. I merely thought to remedy that lack, and the Dome provided a compelling occasion.**

*Photo courtesy of Houston Astros*

*Vol. 6, No. 3—Sports* **29**

THE FIRST PROMISING RUMOUR I heard about the Harris County Domed Stadium was that it was going to be large enough that the Shamrock Hotel could be put inside it. Great, I thought—assuming, naturally, that the powers that be would take advantage of such an opportunity. At last a real solution to the Shamrock problem seemed to lie at hand. Forty-five million dollars is a respectable sum, but who would cavil if it got that hotel out of sight?

A year or so later, with sinking heart, I realized that the Dome-builders had somehow missed the mark. The Shamrock continued to blot out a considerable portion of Houston's southern horizon, while a short distance away the huge white dome poked soothingly above the summer heat haze like the working end of a gigantic roll-on deodorant. Form, I supposed, was following function. We needed a Dome so Houston's sports fans wouldn't get so damp and sweaty.

It seemed neither wise nor fair. The weather in Houston is certainly oppressive, but then sports fans probably deserve and perhaps even require the bad weather they get. Braving frostbite and sunstroke helps keep their sadistic and masochistic tendencies in balance. Increasing their comfort might only make them meaner.

Besides, pallid though the argument may appear, it seemed a bit conscienceless for a city with leprous slums, an inadequate charity hospital, wretched public transportation and numerous other cultural and humanitarian deficiencies to sink more than thirty-one million dollars in public funds into a ball-park. (It was not, however, surprising: Houston is the kind of boom town that will endorse any amount of municipal vulgarity so long as it has a chance of making money. Building, hereabouts, has traditionally been a form of stealing, and however questionable the motive it does insure that all sorts of public marvels get built.)

AT ANY RATE, though the world may by now have forgotten the occasion, the Astrodome did open in the spring of 1965. The President attended the opening game, as did a constellation of lesser celebrities, and one could make a wicked little anthology of the things famous people had to say about the place. For a time, in Houston, the Astrodome was not just news, it was the only news. Texas was generally agog, and Dallas was feverish with civic envy. The letters columns of the Dallas Morning News were soon clogged with plaintive little epistles telling the editors how much better life would be if only Dallas had a dome. For a time there was even a move afoot to dome the Cottonbowl.

I was somewhat slow in getting to the Dome, myself. Summer rolled around and the fact that I still hadn't been was leaving me more and more disadvantaged in conversations. It was like not having read McLuhan. "You simply have to see it to believe it," I was frequently told.

Finally I went, and five minutes after I walked inside I knew I could have believed it perfectly well without ever going near it. From the parking-lot on it was *echt*-Texas. By the time I came to this realization, however, I was four levels above the field, on a fast escalator, surrounded by a convention of National Press Photographers, their Rolles, and their wives. Our tour guide, a pleasant, intelligent young lady, shepherded us out into what is called the Upper Stands and allowed us to sit down a few minutes and adjust to the altitude. By sitting us down until we had sort of come to terms with the size of the Dome most of us escaped the brief, sometimes unpleasant sense of disorientation that often afflicts visitors when they first enter.

Even sitting down I felt a little bit uncomfortable, and my trouble was not vertigo (though vertigo did cause one lady in the party to hurry back to the ramps). Far below us the Astros were taking batting practice, and while I could see the balls being hit I

was too high up to hear the crack of the bat. The cause of my first discomfort, I think, was that the vast amount of physical space in the Dome is somehow out of proportion with the amount of psychological space. In that sense it is indeed *echt*-Texas. Some levels of the stadium are about as psychologically roomy as a sardine can. Fortunately the Dome itself is a clean, impressive piece of engineering, and does much to alleviate the sense of suffocation that can come on one in the clubs and restaurants.

AT THIS TIME the Dome still had its original grass, though much of it had already died and been painted a strange ungrassy green. There was a stretch in deep center field that looked as arid as the range along the Pecos, and a week before my visit the circus had trampled the infield into a green-tinted dirt. I am told it was an odd feeling to watch a circus in which the aerialists were a hundred feet below one.

When I had seen the Skyblazer Restaurant, the Countdown Cafeteria, and the Astrodome Club I quit the tour and drifted down five or six levels to the Domeskellar, where I refreshed myself with a poor-boy sandwich. The Domeskellar was like something in a baseball stadium—a place where one could buy a hot dog and a beer and sit and watch the game. The management so clearly regarded it as a plebian eatery that they hadn't bothered to fix it up much, whereas the other places are so fixed up they leave one gasping for breath.

The one great disadvantage to the Domeskellar is that you can't see the scoreboard from it. You can see the game fine, for what that's worth, but if someone should hit a homerun while you were down there you would miss the moment of supreme electronic ecstasy for which everyone waits. There you would be, stuck with a poorboy sandwich, while thirty or forty thousand people were experiencing a neon orgasm. Little wonder the place is empty most of the time.

My ticket entitled me to a red seat, the best that commoners can aspire to. I found the seat and whiled away the hour until game time by perusing a compendium called *Inside the Astrodome*. Reading it made me feel a little like Jonah probably felt when he was inside the whale. The book contained a letter from the President, another from the governor, a quote from Coleridge (guess which), a detailed comparison of the Astrodome and the Roman Colosseum, and page after page of staggering statistics. The stadium's iceplant, for example, can produce 36,000 pounds of ice a day—no one in this climate can fail to be impressed with such a huge figure.

The handbook also had a list of the fifty-three individually styled skyboxes which rim the top of the dome and which cost between \$18,000 and \$32,000 a season. There was the "River Shannon," the "Ramayana," and so on around the globe. After the game got under way, I counted the boxes with people in them and found that only twenty of the fifty-three were occupied. The man sitting next to me, a hearty, bearish fellow, didn't allow me to get any wrong ideas about the skyboxes, though. According to him the people who owned the other thirty-three were inside in the private apartments that go with each box, disporting themselves on the astrocouches (or astrobeds) and watching the game on closed-circuit TV.

"Yeah, that's where they are," the man said, yanking at his tie. He seemed like the sort of man who didn't wear a tie to work, but had put one on especially to come to the Astrodome. The thought that some wealthy lady might be copulating in a skybox clearly preyed on his mind.

I took his comment with a large grain of salt. The Texas middle-class has always overestimated the sexuality of the Texas rich. Not many of the local rich would be inclined to make love at a ball

game, even if they could manage it at that altitude. Later I learned that what they really do in the skyboxes is watch *Peyton Place*.

THE GAME THAT EVENING was between the Astros and the Mets, and it was obvious from the first pitch that most of the fans would not have bothered to sit through such a limp contest had it been taking place anywhere else. Even in the Dome, many of them might have left the game had it not been for the big electronic screen in centerfield. The game's true function was to provide material for the man who operated the screen. Whenever the Mets got a runner as far as second base the screen showed a foolhardy Met being smashed into the dust by a plummeting Astro, after which the word WHOA! appeared and the fans yelled WHOA! Usually this was sufficient to stop the Mets cold.

Later in the game, when the Astros unleashed the full fury of their normally inconspicuous attack, the screen assisted them on practically every pitch. When an Astro got on base there was a blast of heraldic trumpets and a little cavalryman (Teddy Roosevelt?) thundered across the screen, sabre raised. The word CHARGE! appeared, and the fans yelled CHARGE! Sometimes, instead of the cavalryman, a fierce little black bull came on and dashed about. When an Astro performed some particularly daring feat of base-running (like not quite getting picked off) the screen flashed OLE! and the fans yelled OLE! If the Astros push across two or three runs in one inning the trumpets and the charges and the bull and the cavalryman have the crowd in such a state of frenzy that the one thing they want to do is yell CHARGE! again.

It is fascinating to ponder the possible uses to which screen and scoreboard might be put. Billy Graham, for instance, finds the Dome a good place to crusade—but would a conversion be the equivalent of a homerun or a single? When would one yell CHARGE? Or if the Dome were to be used for some social sport, like a political convention, wouldn't the man who controlled the screen control the convention?

On reflection, the comparison between the Dome and the Colosseum became a little disturbing. What but blood sport could ever be really violent enough for the Dome? When a gladiator fell, a huge thumb—turned down of course—could be flashed on the screen, followed by the words HOOK 'EM, HORNS! Texas fans could yell that with real enthusiasm.

After awhile I got up and wandered back into the Upper Stands, to see how the game looked from there. Two old ladies sat just below me, one of them so armored with diamonds that she looked like some kind of eccentric crustacean. She ignored the game and kept her fieldglasses trained on one of the skyboxes. I gathered from the conversation that she owned the skybox, but had gone into temporary exile in the Upper Stands because her family had insisted on inviting guests she couldn't stand. She watched indignantly as the obnoxious someone made free with her liquor, and now and again, when the trumpets blared their command, she and her companion turned dutifully around and yelled CHARGE!

BY THE SEVENTH INNING the screen had practically destroyed my will. Everytime the trumpets sounded I felt the word "charge" forming on my lips. I got up and left, but after three hours in the Dome my sense of direction was in no better shape than my will, and I exited on the north side of the stadium, almost a mile from my car. At night, from the outside, the Dome looks very good, with the lights glowing through the roof and the white, serrated walls. I walked through the parking lot, down rows and rows of cars, and after awhile it dawned on me that all the cars were new—or nearly so. The parking lot was like a factory-yard in Detroit. There was not a jalopy anywhere, just hundreds and hundreds of bright, rectangular rear-ends, with now and then a fish-tail

for variety. An affluent society indeed.

There were no kids outside the park, just cops and parking attendants, and I had a moment of nostalgia for the baseball I had watched as an adolescent, in good old Spudder Park, when Wichita Falls had a Class B franchise. If one got tired of seeing the Spudgers get walloped it was only necessary to step outside the park to find some action. The grounds were alive with kids: Mexican, Negro, city kids, farm kids, all waiting hopefully for home-run balls or out-of-the-park foul tips. When one came over there was a scramble, and one grand night when the Spudgers got walloped 30 to 1 our local nine garnered no less than seventeen practice balls. If no balls came over, the kids stood around under the liquid North Texas sky and swapped dirty jokes and bits of sexual folklore, a form of cultural exchange that benefitted us all.

I FOUND MY CAR WITH DIFFICULTY and drove away. It was clear then and is clearer now that the Astrodome would be an immense success, if for no other reason than that it itself is immense. Though it is a very pleasant place to watch a sports event, it is much more the product of a love of money and ostentation than of a love of sport. It caters quite successfully to what is least imaginative in the national character. Judge Roy Hofheinz, who masterminded the Dome, now intends to surround it with an eighteen million dollar amusement park and fourteen or fifteen million worth of motels, and these too, I imagine, will be immense successes, for his customers have more appetite for circuses than they now have for bread. (The Judge, by the way, is also *echt*-Texas. Those desiring elaboration are referred to page 57 of *You Be The Judge*, written by his daughter, Dene Hofheinz Mann. That page is a touchstone of a sort.)

A day or two after my visit to the Dome I heard that Boston was going to build one bigger than Houston's, and with a retractable roof besides. Atlanta has one in the offering, and no doubt others will follow; yet the prospect of being one-upped seems not to have agitated our civic bosom. Why should it? In Texas there is always room for something bigger. Soon some enterprising native will think of something new and even more extraordinary that Houston needs. Perhaps it will be a glassed-in aerial roadway from River Oaks to the Petroleum Club, or a mink Beetle wig to put over the Dome on cold days. Whatever it is will be bigger, better, sexier, more violent, and, above all, *costlier*, than anything we've had before. Houston is that kind of town.



The scoreboard led the crowd in a resounding "Charge!"



*Never one to hold back, an animated Babe coaxes the ball into the hole on the 18<sup>th</sup> green at Chicago's Tom O'Shanter Country Club in the Women's All-Pro Golf Tour on May 4, 1950.*

Photo: AP Images (AP Photo/Ed Maloney)

## Long before the “Battle of the Sexes,” there was Babe... The Babe Dirikson Zaharias Museum by Debbie Z. Harwell

**I**n 1973 when Billie Jean King was carried into the Astrodome on a litter reminiscent of Cleopatra to take on Bobby Riggs in a tennis match billed as the “Battle of the Sexes,” she grabbed the attention of a nation excited to test the ideals of Second Wave feminism. While the match generated tremendous hype, in reality, the greatest female athlete in modern times had stopped competing two decades earlier. Only one woman ranks in the top ten of the 100 greatest athletes of the twentieth century—“Babe” Didrikson Zaharias—a woman who rewrote the record books in a time when gender expectations limited the opportunities of women athletes and questioned their femininity.

Babe was born Mildred Ella Didrikson in Port Arthur, Texas, on June 26, 1911. She moved to Beaumont three years later and received her nickname at an early age while playing with boys in the neighborhood who said she could throw and hit homeruns like baseball great Babe Ruth. As a student at Beaumont High School, Didrikson competed in every sport open to women. While playing in a basketball game against Heights High School in Houston, she caught the eye of Colonel M. J. McCombs, a scout for the Employers Casualty Company of Dallas. Like many businesses in that era, the firm maintained athletic teams that competed as part of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). McCombs recruited Babe to work as a secretary for Employers to maintain her amateur status while playing on the company's basketball team. This opportunity appealed not only to her desire to compete at a higher level, but also provided a source of income for her family during the Depression. Babe received approval to take a brief leave from high school to complete the season with Employers' Golden Cyclones and, in the process, began one of the most illustrious careers in sports history.<sup>1</sup>

As a high school and amateur athlete, Babe won competitions in swimming, diving, bowling, track and field, tennis, billiards, basketball, softball, and baseball. While playing for the Golden Cyclones, she was a three-time All-American in basketball from 1930-1932. Nothing up to that time, however, matched her accomplishments in track and field. Representing



*Shown here practicing her winning form on the hurdles, Babe competed for the Employer's Casualty Company of Dallas in AAU track and field events.*

Photo courtesy of the Mary and John Gray Library Special Collections and Lamar University Archives, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas.



*Babe, on the far left, was a three-time All-American in basketball from 1930-1932 while playing on the Golden Cyclones sponsored by Employers Casualty Company of Dallas.*



*Babe demonstrates her form in the javelin, in a pose reminiscent of ancient Olympians.*



*Babe won several swimming and diving competitions.*



*The Western roll style of jumping caused Babe to receive the silver rather than gold medal despite having tied for the highest jump.*

Employers Casualty at the women's AAU and qualifying tryouts for the 1932 Olympic Games, Babe competed in eight of the ten possible track and field events. She won six of them—all within a three-hour time span—and set world records in four, with one of those being a tie. Babe single-handedly won the tryouts with a total of thirty points; the entire twenty-two member Illinois Women's Athletic Club finished second with twenty-two points. This ranks as one of the greatest individual achievements of all time in a series of athletic events.<sup>2</sup>

When Babe attended the 1932 Olympics, the rules restricted women athletes to competing in no more than three events, leaving to speculation the question of how many medals Babe might have won based upon the pace she set at the qualifiers. She won gold and set world records in the javelin with a throw

**Babe's Winning Results:  
1932 AAU and Olympic Qualifier**  
(The latter four were world records)

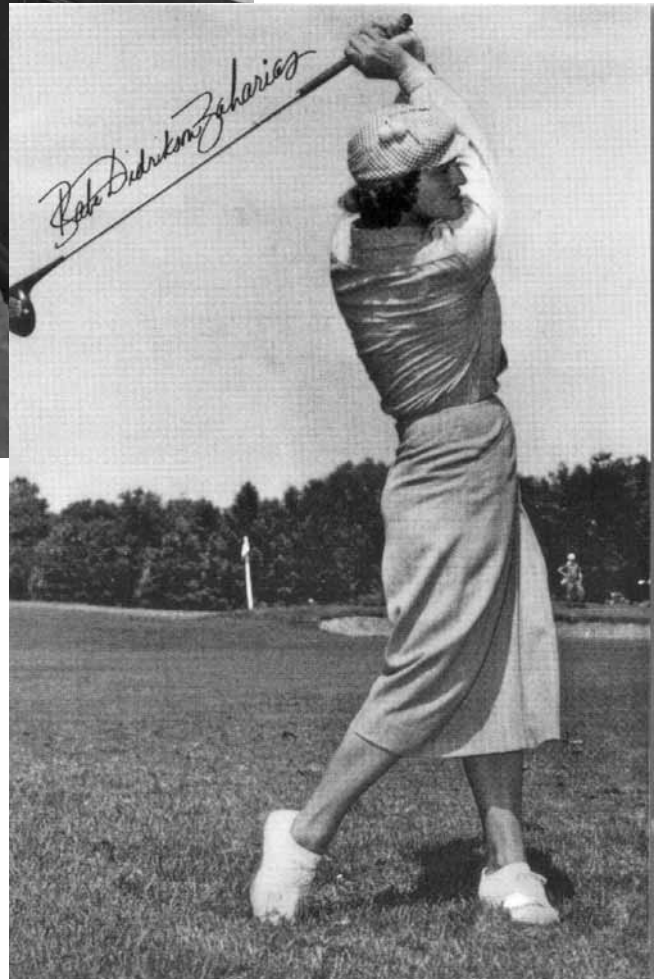
Shot put: 39' 6 1/4"; Long jump: 17' 6";  
Baseball throw: 272' 2"; Javelin: 139' 3";  
80-meter hurdles: 12.1 seconds;  
High jump: 5' 3 3/16" (tie)

All photos courtesy of Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum, unless otherwise noted.

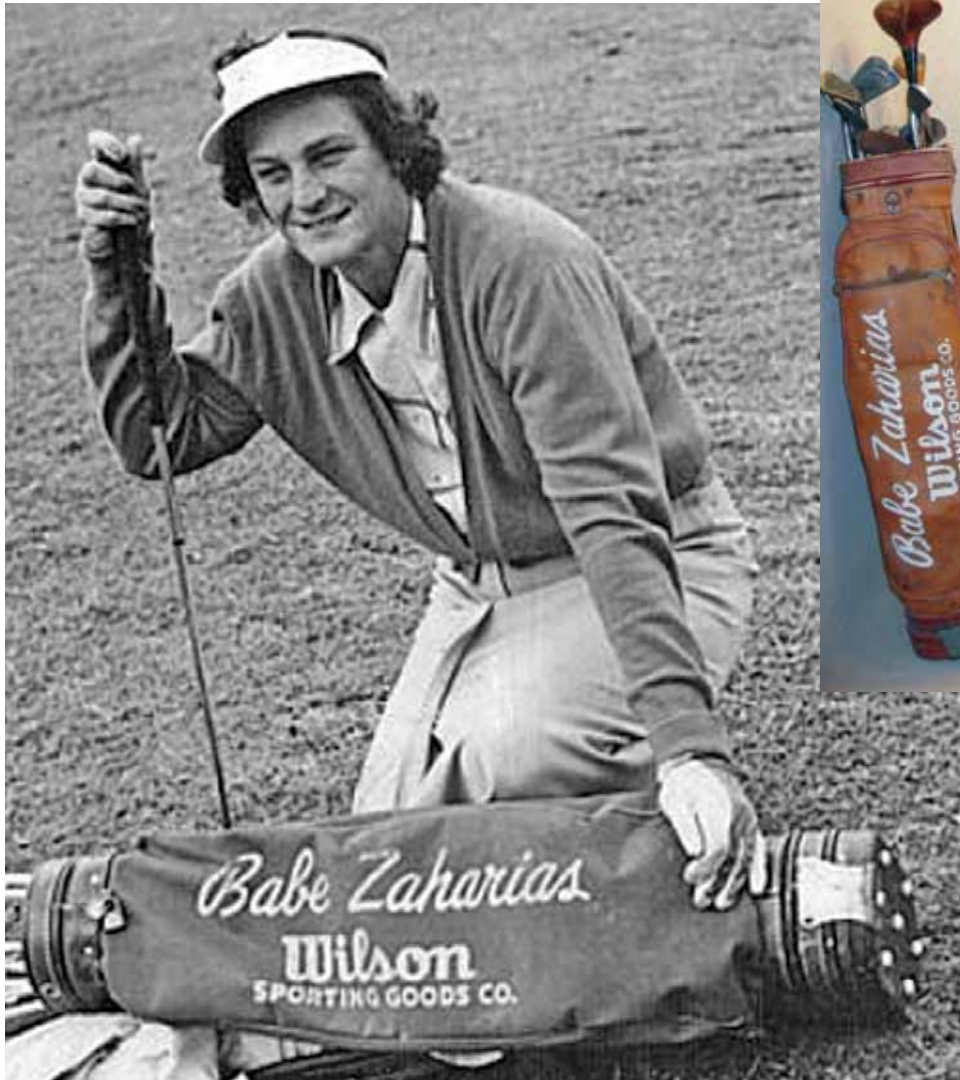


*Babe Didrikson Zaharias demonstrates her throwing technique for her namesake, baseball great, Babe Ruth. She competed in the baseball throw from 1930-1932, and continues to hold the record for the longest throw by a female athlete at 272' 2". The AAU dropped the event from competition in 1958.*

Photo: © Bettmann/CORBIS



*Although she excelled in many sports, golf became the one that defined Babe.*



*The Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum in Beaumont, Texas, houses artifacts such as Babe's Olympic medals, golf clubs, numerous trophies, and pictures.*

*Babe received an endorsement from Wilson sporting goods. The Wilson bag is one of many artifacts displayed in the museum.*

of 143' 4" and in the 80-meter hurdles finishing in 11.7 seconds. Babe tied teammate Jean Shiley for a world record high jump of 5' 5 3/4". Both women were credited with the world record, but Babe received the silver medal instead of gold based on her questionable "Western roll" jumping style. The actual medal composed of half-gold, half-silver is the only one of its kind. Babe later received credit for a first-place tie and an Olympic record that stood for sixteen years.<sup>3</sup>

In 1933 Babe decided to make a career in golf, a game she had previously played only intermittently, because golf offered women greater opportunities for competition. Additionally, golf was considered more appropriate feminine behavior. Just two years later, Babe entered the Women's Texas Amateur Tournament at the River Oaks Country Club in Houston. Even though golf provided a friendlier venue for women athletes, class discrimination emerged as a new obstacle for Babe. When she entered a driving competition, several others withdrew to

show their distaste for her working-class background. Zaharias biographers indicate that the championship round pitted Babe against a socialite from Dallas, Peggy Chandler, who made it clear she did not want lower-class women like Babe in the tournament when she said, "We don't need any truck driver's daughters in our tournament." The crowd, however, loved the animated Babe and cheered her to a win over Chandler. It was a hollow victory, however. Following receipt of complaints from the upper-class competitors, the United States Golf Association rescinded Babe's amateur status — despite having reviewed and granted it before the tournament — in the "best interest of the game." As a result, Babe sat out three years to regain her amateur status.<sup>4</sup>

Despite her many achievements in a variety of sports, Babe is most noted for her accomplishments in golf. She met her husband, professional wrestler George Zaharias, when the two were paired together in a Los Angeles tournament, and he helped to



*Babe sets up a putt at the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Open held at the Beaumont Country Club in April 1953. She won the tournament just days before being diagnosed with colon cancer.*

Photo courtesy of the Mary and John Gray Library Special Collections and Lamar University Archives, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas.



*In 1981, the U.S. Postal Service honored Babe's memory with an 18¢ stamp.*

manage her career after they wed in 1938. She won seventeen consecutive amateur tournaments and every major professional tournament at least one time, several more than once. She was the first American to win the Ladies British Open Amateur, and the first to win both the British and U.S. Opens. In total, she won eighty-two tournaments, thirty-one as a professional, and reigned as the leading money winner from 1948 through 1951. She qualified for and competed in three PGA tournaments, making the three-day cut. When asked the secret of her success she said, "You've got to loosen your girdle and let it rip."<sup>5</sup>

In April 1953, just a few days after winning the Babe Zaharias tournament in front of the hometown crowd in Beaumont, doctors diagnosed Babe with stage IV colon cancer. She had a colostomy, but sadly, the cancer had already spread to her lymph nodes. Undeterred, Babe began taking practice swings with her clubs before the doctors released her from the hospital. Just fourteen weeks later, she entered the All-American tournament where, despite difficulties, she placed fifteenth; a few

days later she took third at the World Golf Championship. After struggling early in 1954, she took second at the St. Petersburg Open, and then won five major tournaments that year, including a twelve stroke victory in the prestigious U.S. Women's Open at the Salem Country Club in Peabody, Massachusetts. Her scores, 72-71-73-75, for a total of 291, came within three strokes of the best performance by a man in the U.S. or British Open up to that time.<sup>6</sup>

Babe died on September 27, 1956, at the age of forty-five in John Sealy Hospital in Galveston, Texas, and was buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Beaumont.

Over the course of her career, Babe received recognition as the Best Female Athlete of the First Half of the Twentieth Century and was named Woman Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press six times, in 1931, 1945-1947, 1950, and 1954. No other athlete, male or female, has been named Athlete of the Year that many times. One of the founders of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in the 1950s, Babe is a member of the Ladies Golf Hall of Fame, the Helms Athletic Foundation Golf Hall of Fame, and the World Golf Hall of Fame. Additionally, she was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame, U.S. Track and Field Hall of Fame, National Women's Hall of Fame, World Sport Humanitarian Hall of Fame, and International

Women's Sports Hall of Fame. Babe is the only woman ranked in the top ten of the twentieth century's 100 best athletes as listed by the Associated Press (AP) and ESPN; she placed ninth and tenth respectively. On the AP list, she is not only the highest rated woman, but also the highest ranked golfer. Without any media fanfare about a "Battle of Sexes," she excelled and let her actions do the talking.<sup>7</sup>

The Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum in Beaumont, Texas, opened in 1976 and is operated by the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Foundation. It sits amid soccer fields in Babe Zaharias Park and displays artifacts such as Babe's Olympic medals, golf clubs, trophies, and pictures that chronicle her career. The foundation, which has no paid staff, is a driving force behind Lamar University's Women's Athletic programs in honor of Babe. It provides five endowed scholarships for women and has set a goal to provide scholarships to unfunded and fifth year female athletes, as well as for those planning to attend summer school. Their annual golf tournament, in its thirty-second year, provides the major source of funding for the scholarships.<sup>8</sup>

The Babe Didrikson Zaharias museum is located at 1750 East IH-10 in Beaumont; it has no admission fee and is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily except Christmas, (409) 833-4642. The Mary and John Gray Library Special Collections and Lamar University Archives, at Lamar University in Beaumont is the repository for several hundred items in the Babe Didrikson Zaharias collection, many of which can be viewed online.

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The marble book over Babe's grave marker reads:  
*"It's not whether you win or lose, but how you played the game." "Babe"*

### AP TOP 100 ATHLETES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1. Babe Ruth
2. Michael Jordan
3. Jim Thorpe
4. Muhammad Ali
5. Wayne Gretzky
6. Jim Brown
7. Joe Lewis
8. Jesse Owens
- 9. Babe Didrikson Zaharias**
10. Wilt Chamberlain







# Urban Village or *'Burb of the Future?:* The Racial and Economic Politics of a Houston Neighborhood

by Jordan Bauer

At a 1985 community meeting in Sharpstown, a suburb in southwest Houston, an irritated white homeowner complained, “I can walk up and down the streets of my neighborhood and tell you which yards are the Chinese.” A Chinese resident in the crowd stood up and replied that he knew “which ones belong to Mexicans.” In the nearby community of Alief, a white property owner was taken aback to notice his Vietnamese neighbor mowing his lawn wearing only his undershorts. Another resident was puzzled to see his Asian neighbor come out of his house several times a day to ring bells in a shrine in his front yard. Such observations illustrate some of the anxieties that longtime homeowners felt concerning the changing demographics of their community. For nearly thirty years, Sharpstown and many of its surrounding areas had been predominately white suburbs.<sup>1</sup>

Built by developer Frank Sharp in 1955, the master-planned suburb, Sharpstown, earned the title of “the largest project of its kind in the world.” Like many communities along the metropolitan fringe, Sharpstown’s success as a booming suburb owed much to the automobile and a freeway that linked it to the central city. Highway 59 South, the Southwest Freeway, allowed city residents quick access to and from Sharpstown’s many attractions, including Houston’s first enclosed, air-conditioned shopping mall, a prosperous business center, desirable schools and churches, and a country club, complete with an eighteen-hole golf course and three Olympic-sized swimming pools. Not all Houstonians, however, enjoyed Sharpstown’s suburban atmosphere; like many postwar American suburbs, it developed as a predominately white, middle-class community.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1955, Sharpstown has undergone remarkable demographic change. The neighborhood once exalted for its “wholesome American living,” for a time became synonymous with crime and known for its aging homes, unsafe apartment complexes, and undesirable schools.<sup>3</sup> The Sharpstown shopping mall, described by contemporaries in the 1960s as the “jewel in [the suburb’s] crown,” became associated with murder, crime,

*An aerial view of the Sharpstown neighborhood in 1959 shows the Southwest Freeway under construction and the land cleared for future development of Sharpstown Mall.*

Photo courtesy of The Positive Image.



Today, multilingual signage of businesses in the Sharpstown area reflects the neighborhood's diversity. Photo by author.

and increased gang activity by the 1980s and 1990s. Today, Bellaire Boulevard, formerly lined with predominately Anglo-owned stores and businesses, now boasts minority-owned establishments with multilingual signage, reflecting the area's status as one of the most socially diverse communities in the United States.

The history of Sharpstown calls into question some of our monolithic notions of "white flight" because as the community's demographics shifted, many longtime white residents did not flee to racially-homogeneous suburbs. Longtime residents responded to the changes taking place around them in a variety of ways, and homeowners devised several, often contentious, strategies of combating Sharpstown's growing reputation as a suburb "fallen from grace." Likewise, Sharpstown's new residents remade the landscape and contributed to its changing definition over time from suburban to urban.

In 1954, developer Frank Sharp sold not only modern homes, but a planned lifestyle outside of the central city. "Too often we find children living in congested areas which have grown up without planning," Sharp claimed. "Life in Sharpstown is secure, satisfying, happy and friendly-because it was planned that way," he continued. By painting a picture of the suburb as safe and appealing, he implicitly labeled the city as dangerous and unattractive. In the mid-fifties, Sharpstown embodied what Americans have come to know as suburban culture. The commissioner of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) predicted in 1955 that it would become a model for American residential housing. Sharp marketed the FHA-funded enterprise as "a new experiment in our way of life."<sup>5</sup>

The opening in 1961 of Houston's first enclosed, air-

conditioned shopping center changed the neighborhood from a residential enclave to a regional hub of strip commercial developments, fast-food chains, and high-rise office complexes. The \$30 million shopping complex heralded in an extensive array of mixed-use areas, often centered on retail markets and commercial activity.

Between 1960 and 1970, land-use practices broke the continuity of the "planned" community. With Houston's non-existent zoning laws, large-scale apartment structures sprang up all over the neighborhood, attracting younger, single newcomers to the area.<sup>6</sup> Although Sharpstown continued to remain predominantly white and middle-class, by 1960, a number of nonwhite families settled in Sharpstown. Largely affluent, these newcomers were mostly Cuban. A medical doctor and his wife for instance, emigrated from Cuba in 1960 and bought a house in Sharpstown, after renting an apartment close to downtown. The couple remembers that neighbors welcomed them and their four children. They picked Sharpstown because they believed, at the time, that it was the nicest community in Houston. Others often facing political persecution, such as Luis Gonzalez, also fled Cuba in the 1960s. He and his wife Georgina (also from Cuba), who had lived and worked on Wall Street since the late 1940s, made their home in Sharpstown and began a family insurance business. Although the all-white community witnessed the beginnings of some diversity in the 1960s, social diversification on a massive scale would not appear for nearly twenty years.<sup>7</sup>

The Texas oil bust and subsequent collapse of the real estate market in the 1980s completely changed the demographic char-

This ad appeared in the Houston Post on March 13, 1955, announcing the grand opening of the subdivision.



*Many ranch-style homes, popular in the 1950s, were built in the Sharpstown area.*

Photo by author.

acter of Sharpstown, along with several other southwest Houston communities, and helped redefine the neighborhood from suburban to urban. Worldwide overproduction plunged the price of Texas crude oil from a high of nearly \$40 a barrel in 1982 to \$10 a barrel by 1986. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, with 70 percent of Texas jobs depending directly or indirectly on the oil industry, the oil bust crushed the Texas labor force and “the state’s economy collapsed with it.” Betty Townes, a longtime Sharpstown resident and real estate agent remembers that “many Sharpstown residents had to move to Boston or Georgia or other areas to get work.” Thousands of apartments stood vacant, and thus, rent prices dropped.<sup>8</sup> Before 1970, Sharpstown had only about 3,000 apartment units, but by the early 1990s, the neighborhood had a surplus of over 25,000 units. Along with massive real estate and apartment overbuilding in the 1970s, the oil bust and the housing depression sparked the movement of minorities from the city’s core to communities in Houston’s urban fringe, particularly in the metropolitan southwest. Houston home prices at the end of 1986 had dropped by twenty-five percent; in an eighteen-month period, Sharpstown registered a fourteen percent drop.<sup>9</sup>

Government instability in parts of Central America caused many to flee the region during the 1980s, and Houston’s affordable housing drew them to the city creating a significant change in the overall demographics. Sinking home and rent prices attracted lower income and minority Houstonians to Sharpstown. Jerry Wood, a city planning official, stated that “The best housing program this country has ever seen was the oil bust. Where else but in Texas can someone from a Third World country like El Salvador or Thailand walk into an apartment with a dishwasher and cable TV for three hundred dollars a month or less?” Just as developers had marketed white suburbanization in the postwar years, apartment owners and landlords fueled the outward migration of minorities with their own marketing techniques. Apartment complexes advertised “vigorously” for minority tenants with low rents, no deposits, and offers such as free English classes. By 1980, the non-white population reached over twenty percent.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Sharpstown’s minority economic presence paralleled, and in some cases may have preceded, residential settlement patterns. Beginning with Houston’s first Fiesta grocery store as a Hispanic “economic anchor,” numerous retail



*The oil bust brought new residents to the area making it one of the most culturally diverse communities in the country.*

Photo by author.



*A large crowd gathered for the much-anticipated opening of Sharpstown Mall on September 14, 1961.*

Photo Courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.



*The area around the intersection of Bellaire Boulevard and Gessner Road became the city's suburban Chinatown.*

Photo by author.

centers and service-sector businesses owned by Central Americans sprang up in the area. In addition, Asian-owned mini-malls and strip commercial developments and redevelopments dominated certain neighborhoods. The area around Bellaire Boulevard and Gessner quickly became the city's "suburban" Chinatown. In most cases, the newcomers recycled "Anglo" buildings left vacant during the oil bust. Many of the entrance signs at grocery stores, local markets, shopping centers, and businesses began to appear in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Korean. By repurposing these

structures, minorities actively reshaped their environment, the market, and community within Sharpstown.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1955 and 1990, the population of Sharpstown increased from a few hundred to close to sixty thousand. During this period, Hispanics made up the fastest-growing segment of the population in Sharpstown and other demographically-similar neighborhoods of southwest Houston, including Alief, Gulfton, and Westwood. Significant numbers of blacks and recent immigrants from Asia flooded the once racially-uniform neighborhood and mixed with Anglos and Hispanics.<sup>12</sup> The community continued to diversify, and by 2000, the total population reached over 77,000. While the community saw significant gains in the number of minorities between 1990 and 2000, the percent of non-Hispanic whites in the neighborhood markedly decreased. By 2000, Anglos comprised just twenty percent of the population, African Americans made up seventeen percent, and Sharpstown's largest ethnic community, Hispanics, comprised nearly half of the population at forty-six percent. Sharpstown's Asian community witnessed significant gains in population and, according to the Sharpstown Civic Association, "economic strength," resulting in the formation of the Asian Chamber of Commerce, "a vibrant and growing force for business in Sharpstown and Southwest Houston." In fact, Houston's Department of Planning and Development recorded that at 16.3 percent, Asians comprised the fastest-growing segment of Sharpstown's population since 2000, nearly exceeding the community's black population.<sup>13</sup>

Homeowners responded to these changes in a variety of ways. An outward movement of Anglos definitely occurred in



*Yards reflect residents' culture alongside their concerns for safety.*  
Photo by author.

the neighborhood, yet, thousands of longtime residents stayed. Anglos continued to represent the second largest ethnic group. One homeowner explained that “Minorities moving here never bothered us. . . . We love the cultural diversions in the neighborhood.” Former resident Darrell Gerdes recalled that in his neighborhood, “A lot of folks put up burglar bars on their houses and installed alarm system[s].” Other residents simply fled the neighborhood. Archie Wilcox, a member of the Sharpstown Rotary Club, noticed that many homeowners welcomed new residents by “moving to more desirable locations.”<sup>14</sup>

Since the 1990s, high crime rates have characterized the community. Some residents blamed its tarnished image on the surrounding apartment complexes which, they believed, bred criminal activity. Homeowners explained that apartment dwellers, who “do not take care of [the] property,” caused the deterioration of the neighborhood. Sue Ann Perry, a former Sharpstown resident, argued that a rise in crime “made the

neighborhood lose its appeal as a perfect place to raise a family.” Other property owners claimed that Sharpstown had no more crime than any other area in Houston, or any other large city. Darrell Gerdes disagreed and described trepidation at the thought of entering his parent’s neighborhood after dark. He noted no fear at the thought of being out at night in cities such as Chicago or New York. “But I refuse to venture into the Sharpstown area after dark,” he stressed. “I plan my evening shopping trips to completely avoid even driving through that area.”<sup>15</sup>

Examining the community’s youth population, particularly the local high school, which represented a microcosm of the larger district in the mid-1980s and 1990s, illustrates Sharpstown’s multicultural problems. The late eighties witnessed several instances of interracial violence that on occasion turned deadly. At the end of the school year in 1988, a fight at Sharpstown High School between four students (three black, one white) escalated to an interracial brawl of more than 100 that required calling in sixteen police units to control the situation. A few months later, an exchange of racial epithets between black and Asian teenagers led to the fatal shooting of a Vietnamese youth at the Sharpstown Mall. Two years later, a group of whites beat to death another Vietnamese teenager.<sup>16</sup> Such incidents were highly publicized in the media, giving Sharpstown its “new image.” The media did not, however, give such publicity to violence within racial and ethnic groups.

A look at day-to-day activities at Sharpstown High School deepens our understanding of the community’s racial tensions. According to *Texas Monthly* in 1993, none of the high school’s ethnic groups attempted to get along with one another. “Segregation has ended,” the periodical reported, “but the end of separatism is nowhere in sight.” The ethnic clans demanded their equality, while also flaunting their difference. At Sharpstown High, the black students, who made up thirty-two percent of the student body, “dominate[d]” the middle of the hall. The whites (twenty-four percent) and Hispanics (twenty-eight percent) occupied their own respective sides of the hallways, while the Asian students (sixteen percent) tried to “get through as best they can.” Moreover, tensions existed within groups. Although Koreans, Chinese, and Vietnamese students were a part of the Asian group, their separate cultures often clashed. Many students attempted to transfer to another Houston school “to es-



*Sharpstown High School is located on Bissonet west of Fondren.*

Photo by author.



*The neighborhood welcome sign indicates Sharpstown is a deed restricted community.*  
Photo by author.

cape the racial edge at Sharpstown.” Because of a few incidents of violence, Sharpstown schools, Townes remembered, became schools to avoid. Rumors about the perceived lack of safety at Sharpstown exacerbated the negative public image of both the schools and the community in general.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1990s area property owners, civic associations, and businesses began to address what they saw as problems associated with their community’s dramatic demographic change. In place of zoning, the community had enforced deed restrictions, but more, they believed, needed to be done. To improve Sharpstown’s image, they proposed such plans as the creation of a Public Improvement District (PID) and mandatory civic associa-

tion dues. The district, financed by homeowners, intended to fund increased public safety and beautification projects. While many championed the idea as a way to clean up the area, others opposed it as government control.<sup>18</sup>

Homeowners and businesses formed several organizations to improve the area’s image and property values. Along with the Sharpstown Area Economic Development Council, the Sharpstown Civic Association (SCA), founded in 1977, proposed a plan to create a PID, in which the groups hoped that “landscaped esplanades” and “uniform signage,” among other things, would enhance the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup> Plans for the PID, which would tax property owners, also included constable patrol, mosquito control, and deed restriction enforcement. The plan called for expanding the PID to include neighboring areas that would be known as the “Village of Sharpstown.” Advocates believed that neighborhoods needed new home constructions that included and promoted modern amenities, such as central heat and air conditioning, walk-in closets, and two-car garages, to attract buyers. Concerned residents hoped the “village” idea would combat the community’s label as “blighted.”<sup>20</sup>

The proposal quickly drew opposition from a number of Sharpstown property owners who did not wish to be taxed. At a public hearing at City Hall in September 1996, some forty residents voiced criticism of the plan to create “two special taxing districts,” the PID and related tax increment reinvestment zones (TIRZ). Proponents, such as Ray Driscoll, a city councilman



*Today, homes in the neighborhood range from those that have been updated and immaculately maintained...*



*...to others that are showing their age.*

Photos by author.

who represented Sharpstown, pushed the tax districts as the appropriate plan to fund public safety and beautification projects, among other revitalization ventures. Under the PID, the owner of a home valued at \$60,000 would pay \$28.80 a year in taxes. The median price of homes in Sharpstown during the 1990s was \$55,600.<sup>21</sup> Supporters expected that the district would generate about one million dollars a year for improvement projects that would be overseen by a board appointed by the city council. Not only did opponents take issue with the additional tax burden, they denounced the concept of the Village of Sharpstown as a “template that will be used around the city to bring in more bureaucracy, higher taxes, neighborhood zoning, and a lot of disharmony.” Years later Betty Townes, a booster of the districts, still could not understand why homeowners objected to paying “the tiny extra tax” to revitalize the community. Nevertheless, the neighborhood remained divided on the issue.<sup>22</sup> The districts never passed the planning stage in the 1990s, and a second attempt failed in 2000. Townes blamed the “very vocal” homeowners who opposed the districts for their defeat.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Sharpstown’s violent image and infighting among some longtime residents, other residents embraced Sharpstown’s multiculturalism and tried to ease antagonisms. In the 1980s, students at Sharpstown High School created an inter-school group called the Network for Social Awareness to break down cultural barriers. The organization sponsored discussions about world conflicts, participated in food drives, fasted for World Hunger Day, and marched outside department stores to protest the sale of animal fur. Some residents at a local community center distributed groceries every Saturday to needy newcomers. When an apartment complex lacked the funds to maintain its grounds, a multiethnic group of renters used their own money to clean up the courtyards and plant flower and vegetable gardens. The “blooming idiots,” as they called themselves, represented a “microcosm of the United Nations,” including a Jewish woman from New York, an Arab from Jordan, an Italian, a woman from Mexico, a family from India, an American Indian, and an African-American couple. A number of multiracial churches in the community stressed their diversity as a strength and advertised their multilingual services. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, then, residents sought not only to improve the physical appearance and safety of the neighborhood, but also social relations between one another.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, many examples of community-based groups, particularly among Asian residents, have focused on improving conditions for lower-income and minority populations in southwest Houston. Michael CaoMy Nguyen, for instance, began VN Teamwork in 1996, a nonprofit organization, that has sought to improve the social wellbeing of Houston’s “underserved” people. By working with other community-based organizations such as Boat People SOS, the Chinese Community Center, and Asian American Health Coalition, VN Teamwork has promoted quality health care, developed affordable housing for low-income residents, and built a senior housing project.<sup>25</sup>

More recently, a diverse group in Sharpstown protested the city council’s decision to close a heavily-used street to build a community center in the nearby Gulfton neighborhood. Although the council claimed the center served Sharpstown as well, protesters made up of Latinos, Asians, blacks, and Anglos contended that it benefited only the Gulfton community, not Sharpstown. They argued, moreover, that closing Rookin Street

cut residents off from their local post office, four or five condominium and apartment complexes, businesses, and a church and mosque. Although the street eventually closed, James Nguyen, one of the leaders of the protest, believed the protestors nonetheless benefited from the effort because it brought diverse neighbors together around an issue and fostered a sense of community where they lacked one previously. Such examples illustrate a vibrant community in which a diverse populace sought to learn about, collaborate with, and help one another.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning in the early nineties, Sharpstown no longer held its once sleepy suburban status as Houstonians, living inside and outside the community, began referring to it as “the city.” Sprawl had pushed the fringe boundaries of the city far beyond Sharpstown. Gloria Scheel and her husband John have lived in Sharpstown for eighteen years. Scheel admitted liking the “hustle and bustle of being right in the middle of it [the city].” She revealed that she enjoyed meeting a variety of people and having an assortment of options for shopping and dining a place such as Sharpstown afforded. “The things that suburbanites don’t like about the city,” detailed the *Houston Chronicle*, “are exactly what appeal [to] some who live close-in,” a relative term used to indicate whether one’s home is “close to” some destination, such as downtown.<sup>27</sup> Although Betty Townes described Sharpstown as a suburb when she moved to the area in 1971, she now considers it “close-in,” referring to anything located inside Beltway 8.<sup>28</sup>

Sharpstown’s changing racial and ethnic character also helped redefine its status as a former suburb. Despite Houston’s vast sprawl, only when the neighborhood’s social composition began to change in the 1980s did residents and non-residents alike shift their perceptions of the area as a suburban haven. Perceptions of place, from inner city neighborhoods to gated communities, have always been linked to social and economic status, race and ethnicity struggles over property values, the role of civic associations and neighborhood groups, and tensions between owners and renters.<sup>29</sup>

Some believe that because Sharpstown has lost its once important label as “a pacesetter” for Houston, and instead become characteristic of the heterogeneous city, it makes the community less significant. Urban planning and design professor Peter Rowe contended in 1991 that “The Sharpstown that had boldly attempted to chart the course of Houston’s future some twenty-five years earlier had become just another piece of the general landscape.” Others such as City Councilman M.J. Khan, a Pakistani-American and Muslim who has represented Sharpstown since 2003, have argued the contrary. Khan predicts that “District F [which is currently home to Sharpstown] today is what Houston will be in a couple of decades....It is what America will be in about seventy years or so.” Like Khan, others such as longtime resident Keith Thayer have explained that Sharpstown’s diversity “needs to be stressed as a strength.” Many residents believe that just as Sharpstown was the future of cities across the nation some sixty years ago, it continues to represent a harbinger of future U.S. metropolitan growth.<sup>30</sup>

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# PRESERVATION CAN WORK IN HOUSTON: THE HUMBLE OIL & REFINING COMPANY BUILDING

by Victoria J. Myers



*Today, the Humble Building is home to two Marriott Hotels and the Humble Tower Apartments.*

*Photo courtesy of Ben Giannantonio*

The headlines involving historic preservation usually focus on the most visible structures. What should be done with the Astrodome? What effect will the restoration and expansion of the Julia Ideson Building have on future preservation projects? In an earlier time in Houston, could the Shamrock Hilton be saved? More often, however, preservation moves forward outside the public spotlight. Often done by private investors with the support of incentives from government, this work usually seeks to adapt sturdy, well-constructed older buildings to new uses. The social benefits can be numerous, including less disruption of city life than projects that first demolish an existing building and then construct a new one in its place. More significantly in the long-term, preservation efforts create a city whose tone and feel reflect an evolving community with a sense of its own past.

The modern petroleum industry shaped Houston's past, and few companies had a greater impact on the city's history than the Humble Oil & Refining Company. In 1999, *Texas Monthly* magazine named Humble Oil the "Company of the Century" because it "shaped the reality and perception of Texas oil around the globe."<sup>1</sup> The success of Humble Oil influenced the city, the state, and the nation, while making its leaders wealthy members of Houston's social elite. The construction of Humble's original headquarters at 1212 Main Street was an important part of Houston's early development. Likewise, the later efforts to remodel and preserve the building revitalized an area of down-

town suffering from urban decay. The company completed construction on the original building in 1921. With the additions of Humble Tower in 1936 and another wing on the Travis side of the block in 1940, the structure served the company's needs until the early 1960s, when Humble Oil moved into its new building on Bell.

Oil built the city of Houston. While Texas' commercial oil industry began in Corsicana in 1894, the discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont in 1901 established Texas, and specifically the Gulf Coast with Houston at its hub, as a new and important center for the nation's oil production. Of the nine founders of Humble Oil, seven started their oil careers either just before the discovery of Spindletop or soon after. They each had success in the Gulf Coast with smaller oil companies before pooling their resources in 1917 to form the Humble Oil & Refining Company. In 1919, Standard Oil of New Jersey (now ExxonMobil) purchased fifty percent of Humble's stock, making them the largest individual shareholder of the company, and Humble an important part of the largest petroleum company in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Reaping the financial rewards of Humble Oil, its owners left their mark on Houston via the company's economic impact and their own philanthropic endeavors. One of the company's premiere founders, Texas native Ross S. Sterling, opened a feed store close to Beaumont that supplied grain and hay for the animals hauling supplies to a local oil field. He established

or purchased additional feed stores and, eventually, banks near other Gulf Coast oilfield towns before investing directly in the oil industry. Around 1910, he purchased two wells near Humble, Texas, as did other individual investors speculating in the young, competitive Texas oil industry. In 1911, Sterling and several of his fellow investors pooled their resources to establish the Humble Oil Company, and Sterling became the company's first president.<sup>3</sup> Six years later, Ross Sterling and his brother Frank collaborated with seven fellow Humble-area oil investors—Walter Fondren, Robert Blaffer, William Farish, Harry Wiess, Charles Goddard, Lobel Carlton, and Jesse Jones—to merge their six small oil companies into Humble Oil & Refining Company with the nine men serving as the company's first Board of Directors.<sup>4</sup>

In 1917, the Humble Oil & Refining Company purchased the Albert A. Van Alstyne house at 1216 Main Street. Erected in 1877, the Van Alstyne house was the earliest known of several Victorian-style houses built in Houston, and one of several on Main Street. The Main Street homes gradually disappeared, however, as the growth of the city created a need for downtown commercial property. Houstonians in the early twentieth century established the city's reputation for an "out with the old, in with the new" mentality when it came to development opportunities. Owners of the Main Street residences began to sell the houses, and many used the profits from the sale of their properties to establish the new, elite, residential community of River Oaks. This gave downtown room to grow on the south side. Soon after Humble Oil acquired the Van Alstyne property, the company had the house demolished to make way for the company's first headquarters, the nine-story Humble Building on the corner of Main and Dallas.<sup>5</sup>

A New York architecture firm, Clinton & Russell, designed the original Humble Building. Completed in 1921, the million-dollar, neo-classical structure was constructed primarily of brick and limestone. A few years later, Art Deco designs spread across the nation, and Houston's business and civic leaders embraced the new architectural style in a conscious effort to modernize the look of the city. Modernistic buildings represented the city's future, and Art Deco architecture represented modern design. Some owners of neo-classical buildings, like Humble Oil & Refining, added Art Deco-inspired features to their structures in order to look contemporary and progressive. Renovations done to the Humble Building in 1932 added ornamental detailing between the windows of the top floors, and two-story,



*The Humble Tower, completed in 1936, was the first city building constructed with air conditioning. Architects hid the cooling tower in the penthouse.*

Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas

limestone faux columns with an ornate finial on top. While not as ornate as the 1929 Gulf Building and other Art Deco designs in the city, these additions represented a more subtle, but still modern, approach to building design of the era.<sup>6</sup>

A year after the completion of these renovations, company officials realized that the nine-story building lacked adequate office space. They asked architects Kenneth Franzheim and John F. Staub to design an addition to the building, and their collaboration produced the seventeen-story Humble Tower, completed in 1936.<sup>7</sup> In their comprehensive history of the company published in 1959, Henrietta Larson and Kenneth Porter described the building, "with the United States flag at its mast," as "a striking feature of the Houston skyline and a symbol to the general public of the company's importance."<sup>8</sup>

During the Humble Building's 1932 renovations, the addition of a central air-conditioner to the older building made it the first office in Houston with

this modern amenity. The Humble Tower addition became the first office building in the city originally constructed with a central air-conditioning system. Franzheim's Humble Tower design cleverly hid the unit's cooling tower with a neo-classical penthouse. Humble Oil's addition of air-conditioning to its office buildings set a trend for Houston's post-World War II development.<sup>9</sup> The Depression and World War II had slowed the spread of air-conditioning in Houston, but its popularity picked up again after the 1940s. The affordability and increased use of air-conditioning encouraged businesses, and thus people, to relocate to the region, setting the stage for Houston's post-war boom.

From its modern building complex on Main Street, Humble Oil & Refining Company managed its regional operations. In the early 1920s, the company's interests spread to southern Oklahoma and Arkansas, western Louisiana, northern Mexico, and throughout Texas.<sup>10</sup> By 1960, Humble Oil's interests reached into Florida, Georgia, Alabama, West Texas, New Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>11</sup> Forty years and two additions after establishing its headquarters on Main Street, Humble Oil relocated to a new forty-four-story building several blocks to the south on Bell in the early 1960s. In 1973, Humble Oil & Refining Company changed its name to Exxon Company U.S.A. as a part of the broader process of Standard Oil New Jersey's consolidation under the Exxon name. The building on Bell, now the Exxon Building, stands as an iconic Houston skyscraper, but what happened to the company's "humble" first office? Instead

of falling to the wrecking ball, as many of Houston's buildings have done, a joint effort of multiple entities restored the building, giving it new life. While the practical and financial benefits of saving the property made good business sense, this preservation project carried the added importance of keeping a part of Houston's history alive.

Tracing the story of the original Humble Building through the 1960s and 1970s from the available sources presented a challenge. Although the structure continued to serve as an office building, the records remain unclear as to when the first post-Humble/Exxon owner purchased the building. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, more and more companies relocated to business districts outside of downtown, and the realty market at the city's center suffered. By the time a group of Houston area developers led by Sam Lutfak purchased the building from GWL Realty in 1995, ninety-five percent of the offices stood vacant. At that time, most knew it either by its address, 1212 Main, or as the "Main Building." The same group purchased the Texaco Building a few months later, giving it more than one-million square-feet of mostly vacant office space between the two buildings. Hoping to capitalize on a new trend toward the development of urban residential space, the Lutfak group began plans to turn both the 526,000 square-foot Main Building and the 640,000 square-foot Texaco Building into loft apartments.<sup>12</sup>

The practice of turning office buildings into loft apartments reached Houston in the early 1990s when Randall Davis developed the seventy-nine-unit Hogg Palace Lofts at Louisiana and Preston. Davis had seen the success of loft apartments in downtown Portland and thought the trend would work in Houston. He was right. After his early success with smaller projects, Davis pushed the loft apartment market boom to a new level with the conversion of the vacant Rice Hotel into a 312-unit luxury apartment building that opened in 1998. Many of the other early developments created spaces in Market Square on the north side of downtown, but activity soon spread to central sections of the city. Several renovations included restaurants and bars on the lower levels, and as downtown residential units increased, the city saw entertainment venues move to the area as well. By 2000, the Houston Astros relocated to the team's new home at Enron Field (now Minute Maid Park) adjoining historic Union Station.<sup>13</sup>

The new downtown development drew the attention of one of the nation's biggest developers, Gerald D. Hines, who had established himself in Houston before moving into other major markets in the United States and around the world. In 1996, Hines considered purchasing the old Humble Building from Lutfak's group, which had focused its attention on the conversion of the Texaco Building, thus, making the Main Street property expendable. Hines saw the potential in residential development and estimated that the property could yield 300 apartments, but he questioned whether the demand would remain high enough to turn a profit. Ultimately, Hines found renovating the Humble Building too risky and chose not to purchase it. Due to Hines' decision and the Lutfak group's attention centered on its lofty plans for the Texaco Building, the old Humble Building's future remained uncertain.<sup>14</sup>

Neither the Lutfak group nor Hines revealed how their plans for the Main Street property would incorporate the building's historic value. Both companies saw a vacant commercial space convenient for urban professionals looking to live closer to their

workplaces. The developers either ignored or dismissed the property's historic value as the headquarters of one of the most important oil companies based in Texas. In late 1997, a New Orleans firm, Historic Restoration Inc. (HRI) expressed interest in the building and brought forth a new plan for the property that took historic preservation seriously.

When HRI bought the Humble Building in 1998, the company already had experience renovating buildings in New Orleans, Detroit, St. Louis, and Baltimore. Its mission, according to the company's Humble Building Project Manager, Hal Fairbanks, was "to revitalize cities through the adaptive reuse of historic buildings." The company thought the original building and two additions appeared ideal for creating a multi-use space. It entered into the purchase agreement with a letter of intent from Marriott's corporate headquarters to convert the original 1921 building and the 1940 addition into two hotels, and the 1936 Humble Tower into loft apartments. This plan made better business sense than turning the entire space into residential units. Downtown apartments remained in high demand and renovations continued on other properties, such as the former Rice Hotel, but the city also needed hotel rooms to appeal to business travelers and tourists. HRI's plan met both needs. Furthermore, the company announced that the conversion would follow federal historic preservation guidelines in order to qualify for federal tax credits.<sup>15</sup>

HRI turned to the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (GHPA) for assistance in preparing its proposals for local, state, and federal tax credits. This organization exists to raise aware-



*The preservation project pays tribute to the building's heritage with an "oil derrick" fountain at the entrance to the hotel.* Photo by author.

ness about preservation in the city and offer guidance and assistance to individuals and organizations undertaking restoration or renovation projects. Involved almost from the project's beginning, GHPA aided the developers by providing them with the information necessary to apply for the tax credits.<sup>16</sup>

Federal tax credits for rehabilitation projects appeal to developers because the credits ease their financial burden. Restoration of a building either individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places or located within a designated historic district entitles investors to a credit equal to twenty percent of the rehabilitation project's costs. Buildings built before 1936, but not on the National Register, can receive a ten percent tax credit. State and local tax authorities also have tax benefits for historic places, and the combination of these credits often means the difference between a project that is too expensive to undertake and a project that is fiscally viable. Property owners must have their plans approved at each level in order to receive the credits, and their plans must meet the standards of state and federal regulators.

With support from local preservation and history groups, HRI submitted its design plans to the Texas Historical Commission for review. Texas officials quickly endorsed the project and recommended it to federal officials for final approval. Only the plan to add a parking garage to the building gave them cause for concern in seeking federal approval. HRI recognized the need to adapt the building to modern dependency on automobiles but worried that federal regulators might reject the structural changes, even though HRI planned to make it as unobtrusive as possible with blinds hiding the view of parked cars from outside the building. Fortunately, HRI sent its proposal to the state and federal regulators within a few months of purchasing the property, which allowed time to make the necessary adjustments to combine modern amenities with historic character.

The joint-venture also sought tax relief from local authorities, something that paved the way for the city to improve its incentives for future restoration projects. The City of Houston and Harris County both approved tax exemptions for the historic property; however, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) refused to abate the property taxes on the building.



*The copper cornice and finial design were added to the building in 1932. The preservation work that was done in 2003 included replacing a damaged section of the cornice with copper aged to match the original.*

Photo by author.

historic preservation.<sup>17</sup>

Even with local support, HRI still required financing for the project. Since GHPA does not offer financial assistance, HRI turned to other resources. By the end of 1999, the Kimberly-Clark Corporation and its subsidiary Housing Horizons, L.L.C. joined HRI on the project. A year later, the companies, assisted



*The brass elevator doors with intricate detail were refurbished to their original condition.*

by Marriott International, Inc., received \$43 million from two of GMAC Commercial Mortgage's Hospitality Industry and Construction Lending divisions to cover construction costs. Marriott's interest stemmed from its plans to establish two hotels in the finished building. After the announcement of the GMAC loan, HRI no longer appeared in conjunction with the Humble Building renovation. Offering vital support, Kimberly-Clark, through Housing Horizons, continued to finance costs beyond the \$43 million loan. By 2002, another partner joined the project – Leddy Ventures, LTD. When completed in 2003, the total renovation had cost \$70 million.<sup>18</sup>

As HRI promised when it originally purchased the building in 1998, the conversion of the Humble Building met federal preservation guidelines. Amid the complexities of financing, ownership, and tax credit issues, the National Park Service (NPS) added 1212 Main Street to the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. NPS also approved the renovation plans for the building as a "certified historic rehabilitation" project that made efficient use of the property without changing the historic character of the building, qualifying it for a twenty percent tax credit.<sup>19</sup>

SpawGlass Construction managed the restoration, which began with asbestos removal at an estimated cost of \$1 million. The company cleaned the exterior façade and repaired a damaged section of the building's copper cornice, which included installation of new copper chemically aged to match the original. Inside, the company refurbished many of the building's original features. The renovation incorporated the existing rose-marble wainscot, plaster embellishments, crown molding, original steel accordion windows, mail slots, and polished brass elevator doors and level indicators. The designers converted the original boardroom of the 1921 building, with a vaulted ceiling and travertine fireplace, into a hotel conference suite appropriately named the Humble Room, complete with the original conference table. Additional work produced amenities for the apartments and hotel. The project used the existing roof terraces in the Humble Tower as private patios for the apartments, installed swimming pools for all three facilities, created street level commercial retail space, and added a garage to service the property. To make the building more energy efficient, the project incorporated a new chilled water and district cooling service provided by Northwind Houston L.P., a Reliant Energy affiliate.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, the preservation of the original Humble Building succeeded because the organizations involved did not sacrifice the historic value of the building in order to capitalize on a modern need. Mayor Lee P. Brown, whose administration encouraged the development of the Metro light rail line through the Main Street corridor, delivered the keynote address at the grand opening of the restored Humble Building in September 2003.

He credited the effort with moving the city forward while demonstrating a healthy respect for the past.<sup>21</sup> Texas Construction magazine named the Humble Building Project the Best Private Renovation/Restoration Project of 2003. The GHPA followed in 2004 by presenting it with a Good Brick Award. In describing the undertaking, GHPA said that “[t]he cooperative effort that made [the Humble Building] project possible provides an important example for developers, preservationists and [Houston’s] elected officials.”<sup>22</sup>

To the average person, the 1200 block of Main Street may not appear special. The building complex with two hotels and loft apartments lacks the memorable façade of some other downtown Houston skyscrapers, such as the Esperson or Gulf Building. Yet a closer examination shows that the old Humble Building boasts an attractive, substantial structure with a certain air of historic significance. The vintage photographs on the lobby walls provide glimpses of the building's history and of the company that built it. The Humble Building/Marriott Hotel project played a role in more recent Houston history as a symbol of the benefits of adaptive reuse, and it makes an important statement: preservation can work in Houston.

**Victoria J. Myers** is a native Houstonian who received a B.A. in History from Millsaps College (2002). She is currently working towards an M.A. in Public History at the University of Houston. Myers served as co-president of the history department's Graduate Student Mentoring Association and secretary of Phi Alpha Theta.

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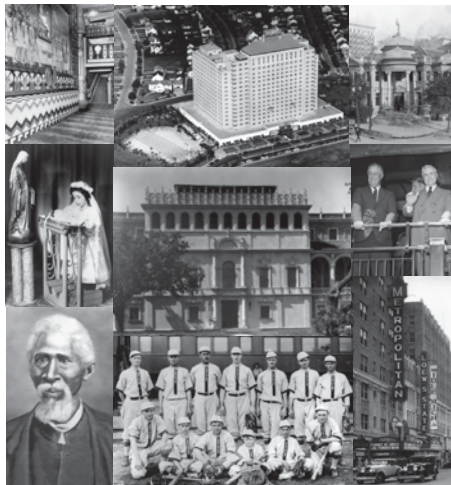
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# NEWS BRIEFS *by Barbara Eaves*

## SAN JACINTO MUSEUM OF HISTORY

The museum's November fundraiser, "An Elegant Evening with History," will be in the San Jacinto Monument. Also coming this fall will be an exhibition about the U.S.-Mexican War, beautifully illustrated with Samuel Chamberlain's watercolors from the museum's own large collection. Watch the website for details about both events: [www.sanjacinto-museum.org](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org) The museum bookstore has a limited number of first-edition, hard-to-find books about Chamberlain published by the Texas State Historical Association: *Sam Chamberlain's Mexican War* by Wm. H. Goetzmann (\$49.95); and *My Confessions: Recollections of a Rogue* by Chamberlain with preface by Goetzmann (\$60).

## GREATER HOUSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

Nominations for the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance's 30th annual Good Brick Awards are due at 4 p.m., September 18, 2009. Rules and nomination forms are online at [www.gpha.org/awards](http://www.gpha.org/awards). These will be presented during the Cornerstone Dinner in February.

TOURS? You bet! GHPA monthly tours of Houston neighborhoods are scheduled on Sundays, through November. The July-through-September treks start at 6 p.m.; October's and November's begin at 2 p.m. They usually last about 90 minutes and cost \$10 for adults; \$7 for GHPA members and students with valid IDs. Children 11 and under are free. Check the website for the schedule and to register. [www.gpha.org/tours](http://www.gpha.org/tours).

**THE HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY** – The downtown Julia Ideson Building is being restored and a new wing – part of the original plans drawn by Ralph Adams Cram 80 years ago – is under construction. The \$32 million project should be completed by spring of 2010.

The present building will serve as a multi-purpose public library with meeting rooms, exhibition space, reading rooms, a new photo lab, a conservation lab, and more. The new wing will house the bulk of the city's archival collection and include a first-floor reading room much like today's Texas Room. Please see *Houston History*, Spring 2009, pages 7-9, for architect Barry Moore's article.

Meanwhile, the city kicked off Phoebe Tudor's \$32 million fund raising effort with \$10 million. More than half of the rest is now in the bank, but there's \$9.5 million to go. Every dime helps. To contribute, contact Margaret Lawler, executive director, Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners, 2726 Bissonnet, #240-203, Houston, TX 77005.

Kemo Curry, manager of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, is looking for volunteers who know their history. She has two jobs:

1. Transcribing oral history interviews. Some of these conversations have already been posted on the Web. Take a look at <http://digital.houstonlibrary.org>.
2. Re-housing and indexing some of the library's most heavily used files.

Finally, the HMRC will have different hours of operation during construction. The schedule:

JULY 1 THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2009 – open Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 1 THROUGH OCTOBER 31, 2009 – Open Mondays through Fridays, by appointment only.

To make an appointment, call the Telephone Reference Service at 832-393-1313.

## WHENCE HOUSTON'S WARDS?

Have you ever wondered about Houston's wards – what and where they were, how each was unique, what they are like today? If so, plan to attend "Houston's Original Six Wards: Then and Now," a course co-sponsored by the Houston History Association and Rice University. Six historians will explore the wards, taking a look at each one's residents, architecture, workplaces, community institutions and neighborhoods as they existed in the past and as they are today.

Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings beginning September 22. For more information or to register, contact Rice University's Susanne M. Glasscock School of Continuing Studies at 713-348-4803 or [gscs@rice.edu](mailto:gscs@rice.edu).

## SAN JACINTO SYMPOSIUM: DID ARCHEOLOGISTS NAIL THE SURRENDER SPOT?

Archeologists said they believe they have found the spot where hundreds of defeated Mexican soldiers disarmed before surrendering to Texas Gen. Sam Houston in April 1836. It's about a mile southeast of the San Jacinto Battleground on property belonging to NRG Energy.

Unfired musket balls, bayonets and cavalry ornaments were unearthed there last fall, lined up in rows in a space twenty yards wide by 200 yards long. "It was as if they'd been dropped," said archeologist Roger Moore, who leads the San Jacinto field work. Indeed, this may be what happened, because the placement of the artifacts agrees with many historical records and memoirs.

These findings—plus more than 1,000 other archeological discoveries since the Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground began its systematic study in 2003—gave a six-man panel plenty to talk about at the 2009 San Jacinto Symposium last April.

NRG provided access to its land in 2006 after the Friends received an American Battlefield Protection Program Grant from the National Park Service. NRG also funded half the cost of the 2009 research with a grant of more than \$20,000 then transferred title to all artifacts to the State of Texas where they will be kept in a certified archeological repository. From there, they can be borrowed for museum exhibition.

## TEXAS HISTORY MAKES NEWS

Old news is making good news these days, as KUHF joins the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Houston Business Journal*, KTBU-TV (Channel 55) and KRPC-TV with regular Texas history news features.

“KUHF’s ‘Texas Originals’ will be weekly two-minute biographical profiles about famous Texans who are no longer alive,” said Paul Pendergraft, senior producer. “We’ll begin airing in the fall as part of morning and evening news programs.”

KUHF’s partner for this project is Humanities Texas. The plan is to make these features available to all public radio stations in Texas. All of the programs will be archived online at [www.kuhf.org](http://www.kuhf.org).

Elsewhere, the *Houston Chronicle* has a wonderful blogster in J. R. Gonzales; Betty Chapman writes her weekly column for *The Houston Business Journal*; KTBV-TV (Channel 55) hosts Mike Vance’s “Post Cards from Texas” on Sundays at 4 p.m.; and, of course, KPRC-TV airs “The Eyes of Texas.”

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## A FEW DATES TO SAVE

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SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 2010 – 10th annual San Jacinto Symposium, Hilton University of Houston Hotel & Conference Center, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Watch [www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org) for details.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010 - San Jacinto Commemoration at the monument, 10 a.m.

APRIL 22 - APRIL 24, 2010 – Texas Historical Commission’s State Preservation Conference at the Westin Galleria. For details as they evolve, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us), click on “about us,” then “annual conference.”

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2010 – San Jacinto Festival, all day at the San Jacinto Battleground. Battle reenactment is at 3 p.m.

## Recent Texas Books *by Barbara Eaves*

**MAKING CANCER HISTORY: DISEASE AND DISCOVERY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS M.D. ANDERSON CANCER CENTER** (Johns Hopkins University Press), by **JAMES S. OLSON**, Pulitzer nominee, author, co-author, editor and co-editor of more than thirty books, Distinguished Professor of History at Sam Houston State University, and cancer survivor since 1981.

“I had cancer. I have cancer. I will always have cancer.” So begins Olson’s chronicle of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center from birth to international eminence. At every step, Olson weaves history with personal journeys. Among the most compelling is his own experience with two difficult forms of cancer that required treatment ten times for primary tumors or recurrences, including the amputation of his left forearm.

Olson presents an excellent description of the disease in its many forms, its treatments and their increasing effectiveness over time, and the people and politics involved in building one of the world’s major cancer centers. List price is \$35.00. Order from [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) or pick up at either M.D. Anderson gift shop (1515 Holcombe or 1200 Holcombe).



*James S. Olson*

**THE PAPER REPUBLIC: THE STRUGGLE FOR MONEY, CREDIT AND INDEPENDENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS** (Bright Sky Press), by **JAMES P. BEVILL**, past president of the Texas Numismatic Association and first vice president-investments in the River Oaks office of UBS.

*The Paper Republic* tells the true story of the epic struggle for money, credit and independence in the Republic of Texas. Through these paper promissory notes, Bevill explores the personalities involved, clarifies their roles in the new government, nails down dates, and reveals the inner workings of a precarious financial system.

An engaging read and visually stunning, *The Paper Republic* is the story of a debt crisis eerily similar to today’s headlines. List price is \$49.95. Order from [www.brightskypress.com](http://www.brightskypress.com) or call 713.533.9300.

**JOURNEY TO GOLIAD** (Texas Tech University Press) by **MELODIE A. CUATE**. In the fourth book of this award-winning time-travel series for middle school readers, Hannah and her older brother Nick (age thirteen) and best friend Jackie are transported back in time to events leading right up to the Goliad Massacre. They travel via a magic trunk owned by their teacher, Mr. Barrington.

This book follows earlier trips to the Alamo, San Jacinto and Gonzales. Cuate’s *Journey to San Jacinto* is the 2008 Western Heritage Award Winner for Outstanding Juvenile Book from the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. These Mr. Barrington books are as gripping as the Nancy Drew murder mysteries were, as I recall. List price is \$17.95.

[www.ttup.ttu.edu](http://www.ttup.ttu.edu)

**HOUSTON IN THE 1920S AND 1930S** (Arcadia Publishing) by **STORY JONES SLOANE III**, photographer and gallery owner. These 200 captioned images come from hundreds of negatives Sloane’s father rescued, in the 1990s, from a private collection that was to be burned for its silver content! They were taken by Houston professional photographers during the good times and bad of the 1920s and 1930s. Since the negatives have remained in private hands, they have rarely been seen by the public. List price is \$21.99. Available at Story Sloane’s Gallery ([storyart@sloanegallery.com](mailto:storyart@sloanegallery.com)) and at major bookstores.

# ENDNOTES

## THAT YOU MAY WIN: TOM TELLEZ TEACHES UH ATHLETES TO GO FOR THE GOLD

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