

DOUBLE HEADER



Louisville's Slugger Field, home of the Bats

New Yorker carries on Kentucky's rich pro baseball tradition

BY GARY P. WEST

Does anyone know who Jack Norworth is? Is there anyone who has not heard of the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game?"

Well, Norworth wrote it. Not only have you likely heard it, but there's a good chance you have tried to sing it.

There aren't many baseball parks anywhere in America that don't play some rendition of the song. It's one of those feel-good songs that, regardless of the listener's age, gets a positive reaction.

Stuart Katzoff is glad fans do indeed come out to the ball game. He and his father, Jerry, have made a sizable investment in two of Kentucky's premier minor league baseball teams.

In late 2013, the Katzoffs, who call Manhattan in New York City home, purchased the Class A Bowling Green Hot Rods. In early 2015, they assumed majority ownership of the Class AAA Louisville Bats.

"We enjoy coming to Kentucky and the people here," says Stuart Katzoff. "Bowling Green and Louisville fit in

with what we wanted to invest in with their demographics, facilities and friendliness. Bowling Green had all of the makeup we were looking for, and Louisville the same, only larger."

In Bowling Green, the Katzoffs want to create what they have in Reno, Nevada, where they own the AAA Aces.

"We're entrepreneurs," Stuart says. "We are creating affordable family entertainment. That's what we have done in Reno, where we have a 30,000-square-foot entertainment district with a stage, four restaurants and businesses that complement baseball."

"We want people to come out before the game, and then stay afterward. It's about having fun. Fifty percent of the fans don't know who won or lost. They just remember they had fun."

Katzoff sees the 4,500-seat Bowling Green Ballpark, which opened in 2009, in a similar situation.

"With everything going on in the downtown area, we're right in the middle of it," he says.

While the Bowling Green team is the new kid on the block compared with the Louisville Bats and the Lexington Legends, Louisville has one of the most storied minor league franchises in America, and it seems like it's had baseball forever.

The first team of record in the River City was the Louisville Grays in 1876, but it was the Louisville Colonels that began playing in 1901, in what was then the American Association, that achieved the greatest notoriety. That league closed its doors in 1962, and for the next six years, Louisville was without professional baseball. The Colonels returned in 1968 as part of the International League, playing in Cardinal Stadium at the Kentucky Exposition Center. But when the facility was converted to a strictly football stadium, the team left town. In 1982, however, baseball was back, and so was the team we now know as the Louisville Bats.

"Louisville has been so successful for a long time," says Katzoff. "And what a great facility Louisville Slugger Field is. The stadium is spotless, and the team is such a large part of the community."

It was important to Katzoff that the minority owners stay involved with the team.

"They felt comfortable with selling to us," he says. "They know we will take care of what they have built. We're not

in this for the short term, but the long haul. We're glad Gary Ulmer has stayed on as president in continuing the great tradition of the team in Louisville."

Stuart says they would eventually like to own the Lexington team as well.

The Katzoffs' purchases have come under the umbrella of MC Sports Acquisition, LLC and include Herb Simon, owner of the NBA Indiana Pacers, among their business partners.

Raised in New Jersey, the 45-year-old Katzoff obtained his undergraduate and law degrees from Tulane University in New Orleans. He says he has always had a passion for sports.

"My first love was hockey, but I was injured and fell back on golf," he says. "I played at Tulane and then helped coach a little while in law school."

Later, he worked in F. Lee Bailey's law firm and then for Lehman Brothers in equity sales before deciding to do some things on his own.

"Eventually, we want to own six to eight teams," Katzoff adds. "And I've always envisioned owning a team in

the National Hockey League."

Oh, by the way, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" was penned by Norworth in 1908, but amazingly, he didn't see his first baseball game until 1940. There are only two songs in America that have been sung more: "Happy Birthday," written by Patty and Mildred J. Hill of Louisville in 1893, and "The Star-Spangled Banner." 🇺🇸



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