The Process of Relocating a Minor League Baseball Franchise

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

Relocating a minor league baseball team is a long and tedious process. In order to understand why an owner would choose to relocate a franchise, this paper will first examine the success minor league baseball has experienced in the past few years. The research will examine both the advantages and demographics associated with minor league baseball. The second part of this paper explores each of the various steps involved in relocating a team by focusing on the Hamilton Redbirds' move from Ontario, Canada to Frankford, New Jersey.
Introduction

Over the past few years minor league baseball has been making an incredible come back. Although there are only about half the number of teams today than there were in the 1950's, attendance records are being broken year-in and year-out. There are many reasons for the recent success of minor league baseball with the main attraction being affordable, family entertainment. Due to the recent success of the sport, more and more people are becoming interested in owning a minor league franchise. The most popular way to acquire a team is to purchase one which is suffering in one city and then move it to an area where the team can be successful. A prime example of such a move is that of the New Jersey Cardinals.
Chapter 1

The Current Status of Minor League Baseball

In order to understand how successful minor league baseball is today it is necessary to look at its past. According to a New York Times article, the minors consisted of 59 leagues with 448 teams in 1949 and attendance set an all-time high record of 39,782,717. Then, in 1952, the minors consisted of 43 leagues with 324 teams and attendance was at slightly more than 24 million. Today, there are only 17 minor leagues and 170 teams but attendance is over 26 million (Cavanaugh 23).

The two most successful teams recently are the Durham Bulls and the Buffalo Bisons. The Bulls led all Class A teams in attendance seven of the last eight years. Miles Wolfe bought the franchise for $2,417 as an expansion team for the Carolina League in 1980. Ten years later Wolfe sold the team for $4 million and the Bulls will play in a new $10 million stadium in 1994 (Curtright 6).

The Buffalo Bisons is considered the most successful franchise in the minor leagues. The Bisons have drawn over 1 million fans each of the past five seasons. Before Buffalo opened its 19,500-seat stadium in 1988, the 1 million attendance mark had been reached only once. To further illustrate how successful the organization is, the Buffalo Bisons outdrew the Atlanta Braves in 1988, 1989 and 1990. Today the Bisons franchise is estimated to be worth $15 million (Curtright 6).
Chapter 2

The Advantages of Minor League Baseball

The success of minor league baseball is a result of the various advantages it maintains over Major League Baseball. The advantages include affordability, accessibility, safety, stadium size and the essence of the game.

One of the main goals of minor league baseball is to provide affordable, family entertainment to small communities. Ticket prices in the minors average $4 for general admission and $6 for box seats. Parking is usually free and at most is only $2. Concessions cost much less than at major league ballparks with hot dogs and beverages averaging about $1-$2 each. In the majors, the price to see a ballgame rises every year. In fact, from 1991 to 1992 the total cost increased 10.4 percent and it now costs a family of four around $91 to see just one Major League Baseball game (McCann B2).

Another advantage minor league teams have over major league teams is the accessibility of the ballparks. Major league ballparks are located in large cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York. Minor league ballparks on the other hand are located in small communities such as Frederick, Maryland and Iowa City, Iowa. Travelling 30 miles to a major league game can take hours because of the traffic and the trip home can take just as long. However, traffic at minor league games is very minimal due to the small size of the ballpark towns and therefore no delays are incurred. In an article in Barnstorming, Rob Hilliard, owner of the Class-A New Jersey Cardinals, said:
People aren't going into the city as much as they once did. People ask me: 'Why build up here in the country?' You have your choice of driving an hour in traffic to New York or driving an hour into the country, into the fresh air and mountains. (Pennington 23)

Most people would rather drive to the country and avoid the traffic of a large city.

Safety is a very important advantage that minor league baseball maintains over the major leagues. Large cities have a much higher crime rate than small towns and therefore when families are interested in family entertainment they often choose minor league baseball over major league baseball. Parents who have small children feel much more comfortable attending minor league games because they are much more safe than major league games. In large cities such as New York and Los Angeles, families often do not feel safe walking to their cars after a ball game but this problem does not exist in minor league cities.

Small stadium size is an advantage to the minor leagues for two reasons. The first reason is that it is much easier to keep a safe environment at a small stadium. In an article in the Washington Post, author Bruce Adelson said:

Not only are the ballparks small, they seem safer than their big-city counterparts; you feel that you don't have to worry quite as much about who is sitting near you, how much he is drinking or how long the line is at the concession stand. I have seen no beer-induced brawls in the minors, unlike in many major league stadiums. (7)

Obviously it is much easier to control a crowd of four thousand at a minor league game than it is to control a crowd of forty thousand at a major league game.
The second reason small ballparks are an advantage for minor league teams is because fans are able to sit much closer to the field than at major league games. Most minor league ballparks only have about twenty rows whereas major league parks have seats that require binoculars in order to get a close view of the game. Commenting on seating for fans in a Barnstorming article, New Jersey Cardinal's owner Rob Hilliard said:

... at most they'll be 20 rows from the field because the park is only 20 rows deep. If I told you that you could sit 15 to 20 rows from the field at Yankee or Shea Stadium, you'd call those great seats. (Pennington 23)

Not only are the stadiums smaller in the minor leagues but the stands are also physically closer to the field than in the majors. This is due to the different guidelines that Major League Baseball requires for the amount of foul territory in its ballparks. The minors have their own guidelines for the amount of foul territory and are therefore able to build the stands closer to the field. By placing the stands closer to the field, minor league baseball allows the fans to become more a part of the game than in the majors. In a Washington Post article, a Frederick Keys fan named Mark Shantz said, "The great thing about this park is that you're so close to everything that you can yell at the umpire and he'll not only hear you but smile back" (Robbins 7). Minor league fans enjoy becoming part of the game.

The final advantage that minor league baseball maintains over the majors is the very essence of the game itself. Major league players have been spoiled by their incredibly large salaries and the way their teams pamper them. For instance, major leaguers are
flown to every game and stay in lavish hotels. Minor leaguers, on the other hand, take a bus to almost every game and their hotel accommodations are nowhere near the caliber of those in the majors.

Whereas major leaguers have very little incentive to give their best effort day-in and day-out because their multi-million dollar contracts are guaranteed, minor leaguers are playing for their future. Because of the amount of competition, minor leaguers have to give 110% every game or they will not stay in professional baseball very long. Art Skillman, a Frederick Keys fan, said in a Washington Post article, "This is what baseball is all about. ... you're watching kids actually run and hustle, rather than the prima donnas on the Orioles" (Robbins 7). In another Washington Post article, author Bruce Adelson really emphasized the point when he said:

This is baseball in its simplest form -- just balls, bats and gloves. There are no Diamond Vision scoreboards, no seven-figure salaries. No lawsuits. No trade demands. No walk-outs. No hold-outs. Here, the only "outs" are those recorded on the field. Here, there is just the game, and men working to reach the height of their profession. (6)

Although Adelson's description comes close, there really are no words that can express the advantage minor league baseball maintains over the majors by displaying the true essence of the game.

Overall, the advantages that minor league baseball maintains over Major League Baseball has resulted in attendance records being set in the minors. Baseball fans everywhere appreciate the affordability, accessibility, safety, stadium size and essence of the game exhibited in the minors.
The Economics of Minor League Baseball

When considering the economic impact minor league baseball has on a host community, it is more important to examine the indirect benefits rather than the direct benefits. When a minor league franchise relocates to a new community, contrary to popular belief, it does not generate very much money for the community or create very many new jobs.

Most minor league franchises only have a handful of full-time front office jobs such as General Manager, Ticket Manager, Promotions Director, and Advertising Director. In fact, the General Manager usually does most of the front office work for a minor league franchise. Also, most front office jobs require experience and therefore are not given to the local community residents. Seasonal or part-time jobs created are in the areas of security, parking, concessions, maintenance and ushers. Altogether, most minor league franchises have a total of 50 to 60 full and part-time employees. Most of these jobs, however, pay minimum wage and are only available during the team's season.

On the other hand, most of the people who apply for the part-time jobs at minor league ballparks are local high school students. The ballpark offers these students a great opportunity to make spending money or to save for college. Also, the ballpark atmosphere provides an ideal work-place for high school students and keeps them out of trouble.

The real economic advantage of being the host community to minor league baseball is the indirect business generated from the franchise. Surrounding businesses become the beneficiaries of the
ballpark. The thousands of fans who go to each ballgame tend to also frequent the local establishments. Restaurants and motels are two of the most obvious benefactors. For example, the average person gets off work at 5:00 p.m. If a ballgame starts at 7:30 p.m., many people will eat dinner at a local restaurant and then attend the ballgame. On weekends, many people travel several hours with their families to watch a minor league game. If a game starts at 7:30 p.m. it usually will not end until almost 10:00 p.m. The people who live several hours away require motels to sleep in so they do not have to make the long trip home late at night. Also, every visiting team needs a motel to stay at and this is usually for two or three days at a time. Over the course of just one season local establishments can benefit significantly from having minor league baseball in the community.

A minor league baseball franchise can also serve the purpose of bringing new businesses to a community in addition to benefiting the existing businesses. In *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development* author Arthur T. Johnson says:

Suburban stadiums are designed to attract people to their sites so that other development property can be sold. The stadiums give the sites visibility, glamour, and traffic they would not otherwise have. They promise to bring thousands of people past the new businesses that do locate in their developments. (213-214)

In many undeveloped suburban areas the main goal of gaining a minor league baseball franchise is to attract new businesses to the area.
Pride for the Local Community

The presence of a minor league baseball team in a community can serve as a tremendous source of pride. One reason for this is that the communities become more recognizable to people outside the community. In an Atlanta Constitution article, Columbus Mudcats general manager Joe Kremer discussed what happened when the team moved to Columbus, "Even across the country, people suddenly knew about Columbus, Ga., and wanted to get a Mudcats hat. The team improved the image of the city and the quality of life there" (Schultz 7). Communities with minor league baseball teams can go from virtual obscurity to household names across the country.

Another reason minor league baseball increases pride in a community is what it does for the local citizens. Minor league baseball brings people together within a community. The residents go to the ballgames and root for the home team. Fans become proud of their team and this pride translates into community pride. The minor league teams serve as vehicles to generate pride in communities.

Minor league franchises usually become synonymous with the cities and thus when people think of Durham, North Carolina they also think of the Durham Bulls and vice versa. In fact, in an Atlanta Constitution article, ex-Bulls owner Miles Wolfe said, "... the Bulls were the single most important thing to happen to Durham in the '80s, and them leaving will be the worst thing to happen to them in the '90s" (Schultz 7). Wolfe sold the Bulls to ownership that has moved the team to Raleigh, North Carolina for the 1994 season.
Chapter 3
Demographics of Minor League Baseball

Unlike major league baseball which is played in large, metropolitan areas, minor league baseball is played in small, suburban and rural areas. The average size of minor league baseball cities gets smaller and smaller as the level of play declines. For instance, the largest city at the AAA level is Phoenix with a population of 983,403 and the smallest city is Pawtucket with 72,000 citizens. At the next level of play, AA, San Antonio has the highest population with 935,933 and Zebulon has the smallest with only 2,000 citizens. At the A level, the largest city is San Jose with a population of 782,248 and the smallest city is Frankford with 5,114. At the lowest level of play, Rookie, Salt Lake City has the highest population with 159,936 citizens and Princeton has the smallest with 7,493 residents (Johnson 12).

In Arthur T. Johnson's Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development, he gives the results of the 1989 International City Management Association (ICMA) survey of minor league baseball host communities (26-29). Demographic features for host communities of minor league baseball are similar nationwide. First of all, 95 percent of the ICMA survey respondents said that their stadiums are publicly owned. This means that local taxpayers are financing the construction and maintenance of the ballpark and the owner of the franchise leases the stadium from the city. However, just because most stadiums are publicly owned does not mean that cities gain much revenue from the ballpark. In fact, in 1988, 76.1
percent of minor league baseball host communities reported revenues did not cover operational costs (Johnson 27).

Another significant demographic similarity in host communities of minor league baseball is that there is usually few alternative entertainment options. In a New York Times article, New Jersey Cardinals president Rob Hilliard said one of the main reasons he is relocating his team to New Jersey is because, "Sussex County has grown to 130,000 residents, but it offers only two movie theaters and one bowling alley, so it lacks entertainment" (Capezzuto 7). According to the 1989 ICMA survey, 58.9 percent of responding communities had no other professional or college sports activities and 31.6 percent did not have a theater, symphony or zoo. Of these communities with no sport or cultural options, 63.2 percent have a population of less than 50,000 (Johnson 28). Therefore, in many communities minor league baseball has a monopoly on entertainment dollars because there is virtually nothing else to do.

One final similarity between minor league baseball cities is the way they feel about being a host community. According to the ICMA survey, 83.7 percent of local government officials responded that minor league baseball is important to their communities. Also, 86.2 percent of the public felt that maintaining minor league baseball in their communities was a priority even though teams were demanding more public expenditure (Johnson 28). These numbers indicate that host communities are extremely pleased to be associated with minor league baseball and that they are willing to financially support the teams.
Chapter 4
The New Jersey Cardinals

Background

In 1990, Robert Hilliard, a former public relations consultant and marketing executive for a New York City firm moved to rural Sussex County, New Jersey. Mr. Hilliard is a native of Jersey City, New Jersey, where he grew up watching the New York Giant's top farm club, the Jersey City Giants, play at Roosevelt Stadium. However, in 1970 an Oakland A's Class AA team played the last game in historic Roosevelt Stadium and since then the state of New Jersey has been without a professional baseball team (Capezzuto 7). Rob Hilliard is a man with a dream, though, and he is currently in the final stages of bringing professional baseball back to the state where the first recorded game was played on the Elysian Fields in Hoboken on October 21, 1845 (Miller 21). However, Mr. Hilliard's dream of bringing back professional baseball to New Jersey required a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication and has taken a total of four years to become a reality.

Partners

The first step Mr. Hilliard had to take was forming a small group of investors to purchase a minor league baseball team. Through a mutual acquaintance, Mr. Hilliard met John Ertmann, a Manhattan attorney and former general counsel for the New York Yankees (Pennington 21). One of Mr. Ertmann's goals in life was to be involved in the ownership of a minor league baseball team and he
was able to realize this goal by joining Mr. Hilliard in his venture. Mr. Ertmann had doubts at first about whether a minor league team could succeed in Sussex County but Mr. Hilliard calmed his fears by producing documentation that proved the likelihood of success. In addition to showing Mr. Ertmann demographic studies on age groups and income brackets, Mr. Hilliard also explained a personal observation:

At night in the Sussex County area, I would see a lot of families out of their houses but with little or no passive entertainment to turn to. The area Dairy Queens would be open past midnight and packed. People starved for safe, affordable, family entertainment. (Pennington 21)

Facts like these easily persuaded Mr. Ertmann to join Mr. Hilliard in his pursuit of a team.

Mr. Hilliard was next able to find two local businessmen to join his venture. Fred Voight is the owner of Mohawk Lumber Company and Rick Hunsaker owns Sparta Auto Parts. In a Barnstorming article, Mr. Voight said he saw Mr. Hilliard's offer as a good opportunity because his "... family has operated a business in the area for decades and this is a chance to give something back to the community" (Pennington 22). Together, Mr. Hilliard and his partners formed Skylands Park Management with the intention of bringing professional baseball back to New Jersey for the first time in 16 years.

Mr. Hilliard now had the partners he needed in order to purchase a minor league team and they set out to do just that. Shortly after the four-man venture, headed by Mr. Hilliard, was formed, the group bought the Hamilton Redbirds in February 1991
for $746,000 (Capezzuto 7). The Redbirds is a St. Louis Cardinals' Class A affiliate in the New York Pennsylvania Professional Baseball League. The team had been playing in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, since 1988, but Mr. Hilliard's group had no intentions of keeping it there. From the beginning, the plan was to move the Redbirds to New Jersey, however, Mr. Hilliard's group first needed the approval of the New York-Penn League and of Major League Baseball.

**New York-Penn League Approval**

In order to relocate a professional baseball franchise the owners must get the approval from league officials and from the other owners in the league. The owner who wishes to relocate a franchise must convince the other owners that the move will be beneficial to the league. The league wants to be confident that the franchise will be successful in its new location because every team represents not only the league but also Major League Baseball.

In September 1992, Mr. Hilliard's group was given approval from the New York-Penn League to relocate the Hamilton Redbirds to Sussex County, New Jersey. Mr. Hilliard was also granted permission for an interim move to Glens Falls, New York in 1993 while a stadium was being built in New Jersey. In a Barnstorming article, New York-Penn League president Robert Julian explained why Mr. Hilliard's group was granted league approval to relocate:

I think everyone eventually saw New Jersey as a prime market for the league. For one, there is a lack of minor league baseball in the state. And Rob Hilliard and his partners are excited about bringing the area baseball. They're working hard and love baseball, and that's important. (Pennington 23)
Major League Baseball Approval

After New York-Penn League approval for the relocation was granted, Mr. Hilliard needed Major League Baseball to approve the move. The main concern owners and officials at the major league level have is how close minor league parks are in relation to major league parks. If the relocation of a minor league franchise threatens to take fans away from a major league ballpark then the major league club reserves the right to deny the relocation. For example, the New York Mets recently refused to allow a minor league franchise to relocate to Long Island, New York, because the organization was viewed as a threat to attendance at Shea Stadium. However, Skylands Park Management had no such problems because Frankford, New Jersey is approximately a one hour drive from New York City and a two and a half hour drive from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Therefore, Major League Baseball saw no reason to deny the Redbirds' move to New Jersey and in May 1993 the move was approved (Kaplan).

Site Location

With both minor and major league approval granted, Mr. Hilliard's next step was to find the best location in Sussex County for his ballpark. After looking at several options Mr. Hilliard found the perfect location in a cornfield in a small town named Frankford. Not only was this piece of land flat with a beautiful mountainous view in the background, but it is also located at a major crossroads in the county. The location is Ross' Corner where state routes 206 and 15 intersect. Also it is only 15 miles north of interstate 80 and 15 miles
south of interstate 84. Although only 5,114 people live in Frankford and Sussex County's population is only 130,000, 3.5 million people live within a 30-mile radius of the county (Miller 21).

Purchasing the Land and Gaining Local Approval

Even though Mr. Hilliard was interested in the land, before purchasing it he had to find out if the township of Frankford, the county of Sussex and the State of New Jersey would allow him to build a professional baseball park on the land. Most towns have zoning laws and building codes that must be followed. Some areas are specifically designated as residential areas while others are restricted to business areas.

In the case of rural Frankford, New Jersey, when the zoning laws were written the township officials never envisioned something such as a professional baseball stadium being built, so Mr. Hilliard's group had to request several amendments to the local laws. In mid-December 1992 the Frankford Township Committee granted approval for an amendment to the wastewater management plan in order to allow for the ballpark's estimated wastewater (Stevens 1). Then on December 22, the Sussex County '208' Water Quality Management Policy Advisory Committee approved the ballpark's wastewater treatment system (Kaplan 1). Shortly thereafter, the county freeholders also approved the ballpark's wastewater treatment system.

The final hurdle for the wastewater plan was the state Department of Environmental Protection and Energy (DEPE). Construction of Skylands Park was projected to take 10 months to
complete. Therefore, Skylands Park Management needed quick approval from the state DEPE in order for the ballpark to be ready to open in April 1994. However, Mr. Hilliard's group did not receive this quick approval for which they were hoping. As is normal with most government agencies of this type, applications for permits must go through a lengthy process before being approved.

Mr. Hilliard's group did not have the power to speed up the DEPE's process, however, until they were lucky enough to get the help of New Jersey State Senator Robert Littell. Senator Littell said he read an article in the New Jersey Herald which stated that the ballpark could be in jeopardy because it was running out of time to receive the necessary DEPE permits. After reading the article, Senator Littell contacted DEPE Commissioner Scott Weiner and arranged a meeting between the DEPE and Skylands Park Management to see how the permit process could be speeded up. The meeting occurred in June 1993 and afterwards both parties were confident that the ballpark would be completed on time. Jeff Cromarty, the director of the DEPE's office of Environmental Regulation, Permit Information and Assistance commented on the success of the meeting:

We in the department understand Skylands Park's time constraints and they understand our regulatory constraints and we're all going to work together to make sure this happens. (Kaplan)

Finally, early in September 1993, the DEPE approved all of the permits necessary for construction to begin on the ballpark (Kaplan) and on September 24 Skylands Park Management officially purchased the land for $1.14 million (Martins).
Approval from Frankford township came much earlier than state approvals. On January 11, 1993, Skylands Park Management submitted a formal site plan of the ballpark to the Frankford Township Zoning Board. The site plan was done by the sports architect firm of Lescher and Mahoney from Tampa, Florida. Mr. Hilliard first met the architects at baseball's winter meetings in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1990. Lescher and Mahoney is well respected in the baseball world because the firm has designed spring training facilities for the Toronto Blue Jays, Minnesota Twins, Cincinnati Reds and Oakland Athletics. Lescher and Mahoney also designed minor league facilities for the Chicago White Sox in Hickory, North Carolina, and the Sioux City Explorers in Iowa. For Mr. Hilliard's group, the sports architects not only designed Skyland's Park on paper but also built a four square foot model complete with landscaping and miniature players on the field so that the customer and the public could see exactly what the ballpark would look like.

On January 27, 1993, the first Zoning Board meeting for the ballpark's preliminary site approval was held. The format of this meeting was that Skylands Park Management presented expert witnesses to clear up any misconceptions that the board members or the public had. These expert witnesses included Skylands Park Management's architect, engineer, traffic expert, landscape architect and environmentalist. Major concerns were over traffic problems, trash and what types of events would be held in the complex.

Although the Zoning Board decided another special meeting would be necessary before Skylands Park's site plan could be approved, Skylands Park Management was granted three building
waivers that evening. The waivers were for a $3,000 per acre performance bond for the 28 acres of Skylands Park, an ordinance prohibiting the removal of topsoil from a building site, and an ordinance which does not allow more than five acres to be disturbed at one time on a site (Dodt). The second Zoning Board meeting was held on February 10, 1993, with the same format and Skylands Park's site plan was approved at that meeting.

During the same period of time that Skylands Park Management was trying to secure all of the necessary permits to build a ballpark, the group also had to concentrate on several other tasks in preparation for relocating the Redbirds to New Jersey in 1994. These other aspects included promoting the team, selling advertising, selling season tickets, hiring employees and scheduling games.

**Promoting the New Jersey Cardinals**

Since Skylands Park did not exist yet, Mr. Hilliard needed to go out into the public and promote interest in his team. Generating interest in the team would help sell season tickets and advertising. The main method Mr. Hilliard chose to promote the Cardinals was through expositions. Every spring there is an exposition show in Sussex County where all the local businesses set up a booth and hand out literature for promotional purposes. Skylands Park Management attended the Expo in 1993 and 1994. The organization's display included literature such as season ticket information and advertising rates. Mr. Hilliard's group also sold New Jersey Cardinals' merchandise and paraphernalia.
Another promotional event for the Cardinals was at the Sussex County Farm and Horse Show each August. The ten day fair served as an excellent vehicle to inform nearly one million people that professional baseball was coming back to New Jersey in 1994. The format of promotion again consisted of a booth where Skylands Park Management displayed the model of Skylands Park, gave out information and sold merchandise. At the 1993 fair, Mr. Hilliard was fortunate enough to have former New York Yankee star Sparky Lyle sign autographs for a few hours one day. This helped to catch the interest of a lot of people.

Another annual promotional event for the Cardinals was the Hot Stove League Charity Dinner. For the past three years Mr. Hilliard's group has sponsored this event with all proceeds going to the Sussex County United Way. The event consists of a silent auction, dinner and several guest speakers. At the 1993 dinner, Skylands Park Management unveiled the ballpark model to the public for the first time. Literature about the team is of course available at these dinners too. Some of the guest speakers in the past included St. Louis Cardinals President Stuart Meyer, St. Louis Cardinals Director of Player Development Mike Jorgensen, New York-Penn League President Robert Julian, WCBS-FM Sports Director Phil Pepe and former New York Yankee star Sparky Lyle.

On March 23, 1993, Mr. Hilliard brought his ballpark model and literature to another excellent promotional event. This time the event, called the Governor's Conference on Tourism was held in a neighboring county so it gave Mr. Hilliard a good chance to reach a lot of new people. This three day conference included tourist
attractions from all over New Jersey and was mainly attended by business people which was beneficial because Mr. Hilliard was able to exchange business cards with a lot of important people (Slack 23).

The final method Mr. Hilliard used to promote his ballpark was sport card shows. Beginning in February 1993, Mr. Hilliard's group began reserving tables at card shows throughout New Jersey. These shows were important for Mr. Hilliard's group to attend because the further away from Sussex County they went the less people had heard of the new ballpark. Since some of the card shows were almost an hour away such as East Rutherford where the Meadowlands is located, the model of Skylands Park was not brought most of the time. These sport shows served as an excellent means to reach a lot of baseball enthusiasts outside of Sussex County (Slack 19-20).

Selling Advertising

One of the main tasks of a minor league franchise is to sell advertising to local businesses. By establishing a solid, working relationship with local businesses and gaining their support, a minor league franchise also gains the support of the local community.

Advertising opportunities connected to a minor league baseball franchise usually include outfield fence signs, souvenir game programs, pocket schedules and limitless promotional possibilities. In addition to these basic opportunities, Mr. Hilliard's group also offered a "Name the Stadium" package where a local business could literally have the new ballpark named after itself for a fee.
In June, 1993, Mr. Hilliard began actively seeking advertisers. He had already sold several outfield fence signs because interested businesses had heard about the ballpark and contacted Skylands Park Management. However, now the franchise was contacting businesses and informing them about the advertising details such as sizes and rates. By August 1993 nearly 30 outfield fence signs had been sold so Mr. Hilliard decided to add a second tier of signs.

One problem was encountered in selling advertising for Skylands Park. Mr. Hilliard's group was seeking advertisers in June 1993 but the ballpark had not yet received all permits necessary to begin construction. In fact, groundbreaking did not occur until August 19, 1993. Until that time, many potential advertisers were hesitant to sign contracts, even though their money could be refunded, because they were not certain that Skylands Park would be built and ready for the 1994 baseball season. However, after groundbreaking ceremonies many more businesses immediately became interested in buying ballpark advertising.

**Selling Season Tickets**

Fortunately for the New Jersey Cardinals, the organization has been extremely successful in the area of season ticket sales. Although season ticket sales have more than doubled since groundbreaking ceremonies, they were also selling very well up to that point.

As previously stated, Mr. Hilliard's group bought the Hamilton Redbirds in February 1991. Only eight months later in October 1991 over 200 season tickets had already been sold (Capezzuto 7). That is
200 tickets sold before New York-Penn League or Major League Baseball approval, before any local or state approvals, before a site on which to build the ballpark had even been chosen, and before any type of promotions.

One year later in October 1992 season ticket sales had reached 531 (Pennington C1). The only official approval at that point came one month earlier when Skylands Park Management received permission from the New York-Penn League to relocate the Redbirds to Sussex County, New Jersey.

Four months later in February 1993 the season ticket sale total had reached 700 (Aun 33). This was at a point when the Frankford Township Zoning Board was in the process of reviewing Skylands Park's site plan and when season ticket literature was becoming readily available.

By September 1993, only seven months after Frankford Township approved the ballpark's site plan, over 1,500 season tickets had been sold (Kaplan). Mr. Hilliard commented on the public's interest in the Cardinals in a New Jersey Herald article by saying:

> When we first drew up our projections we thought we'd sell maybe five hundred season tickets. But we're up over 1,500 already. It has exceeded our most ambitious expectations. (Kaplan)

This was also at a point after all local and state approvals had been granted and groundbreaking ceremonies had taken place.

In January 1994 the number of season tickets sold had climbed to nearly 1,800 (Stevens A1) and the last published number as of March 1994 sets the total at 1,825 (Oren A4). Although that total
may not appear to be a great accomplishment, it truly is due to the level of play and the size of Skylands Park. It is important to realize that the New Jersey Cardinals is a Class A club and will be playing in a ballpark which holds 4,200 fans. With over 1,800 season tickets sold already that translates into nearly one-half of Skylands Park being sold out with season ticket holders.

**Hiring Employees**

At the minor league level the team owner is not responsible for hiring any on-field personnel such as coaches, trainers, or players. Those positions are filled by the major league affiliate of the minor league club. In fact, minor league owners at the Class A level usually do not even know which players are on their teams until after the college draft in June each year. The minor league owner is responsible, however, for hiring all off-field personnel and this includes both full-time and part-time positions.

The full-time positions consist of a small group of front office personnel with job titles such as general manager, ticket office manager, marketing and sales director, and group sales director.

The New Jersey Cardinals filled the general manager position on October 13, 1993 by hiring Mr. Tony Torre (*New Jersey Herald*, October 14, 1993). Torre has been working for the organization for six years and served as general manager when the team was the Hamilton Redbirds. During the 1993 season, while the team was based in Glens Falls, New York, Torre was the director of marketing and sales. Only hours after receiving the general manager position for the Cardinals, Torre commented on his new appointment in a *New
Jersey Herald article by saying, "Skylands Park is a tremendous state-of-the-art project for Class A baseball. Molding this with a major league market is a unique experience and challenge" (October 14, 1993).

The other front office positions were filled by December 1993 with several qualified individuals. Doug Stewart worked for a minor league team in Minnesota, John Levine worked for the Watertown Indians in New York, Herm Sorcher worked for a Wisconsin team in the Midwest League, and David Brooks worked group sales for the Baltimore Orioles (New Jersey Herald, October 14, 1993).

In addition to these usual full-time positions, the New Jersey Cardinals also hired Sparky Lyle as Director of Special Baseball Projects. Lyle will have many functions including goodwill ambassador, color commentator for Cardinal radio broadcasts, baseball clinic director, and occasionally will even greet patrons at the ballpark's restaurant/sport bar. Lyle got involved with the New Jersey Cardinals through his friend Phil Pepe, a New York sportswriter and senior editor of a new baseball magazine entitled Barnstorming, which Mr. Hilliard is publishing (Belock D2). When asked about introducing Lyle to Hilliard, Phil Pepe said, "He's a very personable guy and I said to him that he should get together with Rob. Rob said, "I could use him for more than that," and they worked out their own deal" (Belock D2). Lyle's new job with the Cardinals is his first affiliation with a professional baseball team since his retirement in 1982.
Scheduling Games

Minor league baseball team owners do not schedule the professional games played at their ballparks. Rather, league officials schedule the games. However, owners can have an impact on the schedule when they have a conflict with it.

Mr. Hilliard had an impact on two sets of dates for his New Jersey Cardinals inaugural season. The first was that Mr. Hilliard had previously agreed with Frankford Township officials to not have home games during the Sussex County Farm and Horse Show. The annual fair is held approximately one mile down the road from Skylands Park and officials were concerned that severe traffic problems would be created if the Cardinals were hosting games during the week of the fair. Therefore, Mr. Hilliard requested that the New York-Penn League not schedule home games for the Cardinals during the nine days of the Farm and Horse Show. Fortunately for Mr. Hilliard and Frankford Township officials the league granted the request. However, unfortunately for the New Jersey Cardinals' coaches and players, that resulted in a road trip of twelve straight games from August 4 to August 15 (Jacobs D1).

The second conflict Mr. Hilliard encountered with his team's 1994 schedule was that it originally had the Cardinals opening the season with an away game against the Hudson Valley Expos. In a New Jersey Herald article, Cardinals General Manager Tony Torre commented on why the organization was not happy with that situation:

> With the type of crowd we're going to have opening day, I thought it was important for our players to experience that right away. If we opened on the road with a couple
of losses, then came home to a packed house, it would put a lot of pressure on the players. (Jacobs D1)

In order to change the schedule, Cardinals President Rob Hilliard along with Torre simply contacted Hudson Valley General Manager Skip Weisman, persuaded him to swap dates with them, and then got the New York-Penn League to approve the swap (Jacobs D1).

Even though Mr. Hilliard did not have the responsibility of scheduling professional games at Skylands Park, it was his responsibility to schedule high school and college games. Opening day for the New York-Penn League is not until June 16, 1994, so Mr. Hilliard was able to schedule high school and college games throughout April, May and the first half of June.

On January 11, 1993, the first game ever to be played at Skylands Park was scheduled (Slack 7). Fairleigh Dickinson University-Madison will play a doubleheader against the University of Scranton on April 16, 1994. Within a few months of scheduling the first game, Mr. Hilliard had filled the 1994 schedule and had to consider a waiting list for the 1995 season (Pennington 21).

Besides Fairleigh Dickinson University, many other of New Jersey's colleges scheduled games at Skylands Park. The list includes Sussex County Community College, Burlington County Community College, Rutgers University-Newark, Drew University, Middlesex County Community College, Raritan Valley Community College, Upsala College and New Jersey Technical Institute (Barnstorming 8).

As for high school games, each school from Sussex County will play at least one game at Skylands Park in 1994 and the league tournament will be played there.
Chapter 5
Summary and Conclusion

Relocating a minor league baseball franchise is a very long and tedious process. Although this paper does not cover every detail of that process, it does provide a basic understanding of what is involved in relocating a professional baseball franchise.

The paper first examined why an entrepreneur would want to get involved in minor league baseball. Through researching the current status of minor league baseball it was found that although the number of leagues and teams has significantly decreased since the 1950's, attendance is once again booming and approaching record levels. This is due to the several advantages which the minors exhibit over Major League Baseball. The minors provide affordable, quality, family entertainment whereas the majors are becoming less and less affordable. By the time a family of four pays for tickets, parking, concessions and souvenirs it can easily spend close to one hundred dollars for a single game. Another reason minor league franchises are successful is because they bring a lot of new customers to local businesses such as hotels and restaurants. Also, due to the fact that most minor league teams are located in small towns where few other entertainment choices are available, the professional teams create a sense of pride within the communities.

The second part of this paper focused on the relocation of the Hamilton Redbirds to Frankford, New Jersey where the team became known as the New Jersey Cardinals. Background information on the owners was given to show how they went about forming a group to
purchase a minor league franchise. Next, each step involved in relocating the franchise was described. The owners' main focus was to gain all necessary approvals from the New York-Penn League, Major League Baseball, the township of Frankford, the county of Sussex and the state of New Jersey. However, throughout the process of gaining approvals, Skylands Park Management also had to concentrate on several other aspects of relocating the team. This included promotions, hiring employees, selling advertising and season tickets, and scheduling both high school and college games.

Now, after four years of complete dedication to his dream, Mr. Hilliard has nearly finished the long and tedious process of relocating a minor league baseball franchise to the state where the first recorded game was played. Although Mr. Hilliard and everyone else involved in relocating the franchise must certainly be pleased with the success they have experienced thus far, the real satisfaction will come on the evening of June 16, 1994, when the umpire says "Play ball!"


"New GM Welcomes Challenges With Sussex County Farm Team." New Jersey Herald 14 October 1993.


Pennington, Bill. "His Field of Dreams Has a Home." Record 13 October 1992: C1+C3.


