

Thursday, March 13, 2008

Whicker column: Dodgertown will be missed

The Dodger move from Vero Beach to Glendale appeals to the brain but not to the soul. Not until they leave will they realize what they're leaving behind.



MARK WHICKER

Register columnist
mwhicker@ocregister.com

They don't yet know it, but they'll

miss it.

They'll miss it on a Monday morning in March when they're stuck on an exit ramp for 10 minutes.

They'll miss it on all those spring nights when they used to walk down Ocean Drive, and they'd hear the rolling waves and they'd feel the breeze as they entered Monte's or the Black Pearl or the Ocean Grill.

They'll miss it when they're coughing in the drive-thru lane at Chick-Fil-A, breathing fumes from six motorcycles.

The Dodgers leave Vero Beach on Monday, after 61 years. With Tom Lasorda managing – a poorly disguised attempt to cushion the blow, obviously – they'll play their final exhibition game in Holman Stadium against Houston. On Thursday they'll face the White Sox in Oakland's stadium in Phoenix.

Next year they plan to join the White Sox in a grand new complex in Glendale.

Well, probably.

The site is about two miles from the 101 Freeway and, as of two weeks ago, was an impressively barren dirtscape. The construction crews have to conjure up a

Advertisement

A bright idea in online advertising.

FormatDynamics

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

ballpark and twin clubhouses and office space for the sharing clubs. There is no hint of such construction at the moment.

The Dodgers have to inform Indian River County they're going to leave Florida by July 31, and would then have to pay a \$575,000 penalty because Vero Beach wouldn't have a team in 2009.

There are pockets of resentment in Vero, mainly because the Dodgers are skipping out for China and then Phoenix in mid-March. It is an abrupt goodbye. But the locals have dealt with this possibility since the O' Malleys sold the Dodgers to Fox in 1997.

This Dodger move is coldly logical. All four of their N.L. West competitors train in Arizona. There is the possibility that Dodger fans will come over more often. Whether they will, once they see the place, is another question.

You don't see the multitudes saddling up to visit Surprise, an outpost of Stepford homes in scorpion country, the only Surprise being that human beings actually choose to live there.

Spring training commerce has bypassed Vero Beach behind. There are luxury suites in most of these new exhibition ballparks, and the Yankees charge \$17 to \$31 to watch Derek Jeter play two innings. (The Dodgers

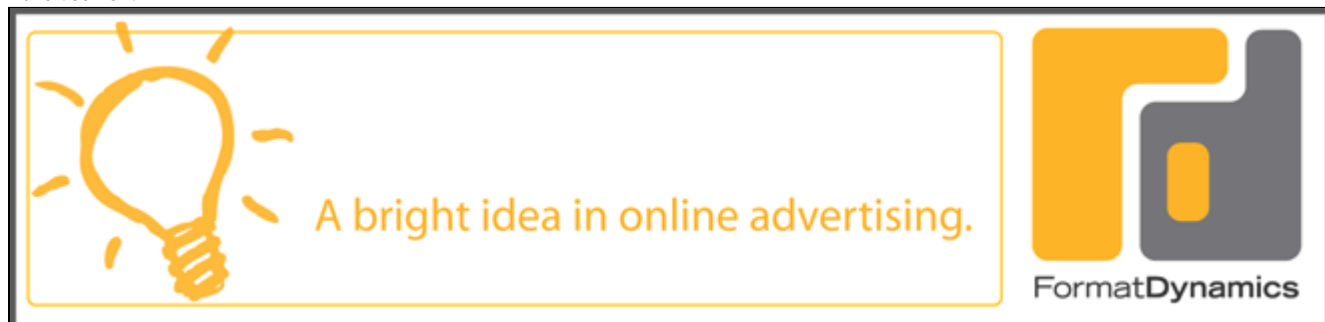
charge \$18 to \$20.) Holman Stadium has no dugout, in the traditional sense, although that doesn't stop it from housing Tampa Bay's Florida State League team.

Baseball writers who stay in Vero for seven weeks begin to get antsy. They say there is nothing to do. I assume this means the Philharmonic is not in town during the Grapefruit League season, or maybe the opera company is on strike. Vero Beach does have cable and there is no law against selling fermented beverages, so journalists really have no beef.


In the old days nobody complained about Vero. There were reports of rental cars that somehow got stuck on the beach in the moonlight. There was, and is, a place named Bobby's, with a rectangular bar that was leaned upon by various All-Stars. Every spring was a reunion with people whose parents knew Pee Wee Reese, who rented out a room to Wes Parker, who remembered Steve Garvey as a teenager.

"As a minor leaguer it was great," Mike Scioscia said recently. "You'd stay on the base in Dodgertown. All your meals were there. You'd come off the field and there you were. They took care of you. As you became an established major leaguer you got a place in the town, and you could go down to the water, and it was beautiful. I always looked forward to it."

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.



FormatDynamics

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

Sure. Vero Beach was a funny, storytelling cousin who stuck his toes in the sand and never worried. He made you feel good, and you both got a little sad when you left.

Glendale? It's sort of hard to tell where Glendale's magnetic north is. Maybe it's somewhere in the middle of the triangle formed by Best Buy, Panda Express and the QT gas-and-mini-mart. It will be interesting to see how many young Dodgers meet their future wives there. How many actually befriend a fan there. How many retire there.

The new DodgerSoxTown will be a foundry. The old Dodgertown was a vacation home with a screened-in porch and a rocking chair.

If you've never been there you don't know the difference, and there's no reason you should. But Ralph Branca and Duke Snider do. They said they won't participate in Dodger fantasy camps in Arizona. It would be like eating stone crabs in Omaha.

"Glendale means nothing to me," Branca told the Vero Beach Press Journal. "Dodgertown means something to me."

Yeah, they'll miss it. Especially when they realize the one thing you need to re-create Dodgertown.

A town.

Contact the writer: mwhicker@ocregister.com

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.
PrinterStitial® Ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™