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For release at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, August 8, 2017

Dunkin' Donuts Park proves it was worth the wait, wins BaseballParks.com's Ballpark of the Year

Even in baseball, good things come to those who wait.

Fans in Hartford had to wait an extra year for the home team to play its first game in the city. But when Dunkin' Donuts Park finally opened its gates in downtown Hartford on April 13, local residents fully embraced the facility, filling it to capacity 25 times so far this season. In fact, every game of their most recent homestand was a sellout.

Now those fans have another reason to cheer: Dunkin' Donuts Park, the first-year home of the Hartford Yard Goats, has been named the **2017 BaseballParks.com Ballpark of the Year**.

For 18 straight years, the honor has been awarded to the new or remodeled baseball stadium with the best combination of site selection, exterior appearance, architectural design, and fan amenities. The selection is made by an advisory panel utilized by BaseballParks.com, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this month.

The announcement of the award is being made in the pages of the August 9th edition of *USA TODAY Sports Weekly*. Joe Mock, founder and webmaster of *BaseballParks.com* and a frequent contributor to *USA TODAY* publications, penned the article that announced that Hartford's new showplace is the winner of this year's honor.

"When I was writing my in-depth review of Dunkin' Donuts Park back in April, I was intrigued by its backstory," Mock said. "What the team, architects and city went through to get the park opened was unimaginable. The construction delays and legal issues made for a messy situation. Thankfully, the finished product is as nice as there is in the Minors. Not only that, once the legal matters are straightened out, the area around the park should see significant economic development."

Mock, who has visited all 203 ballparks used by the Majors, spring training and the affiliated Minor Leagues, added that "the amenities for the fans are second to none. The concessions, including Bear's BBQ and a BLT sandwich served between two Dunkin' Donuts glazed donuts, are exceptional."

"We are incredibly proud and honored to be named 2017 Ballpark of the Year," said Josh Solomon, the Yard Goats' principal owner. "Dunkin' Donuts Park has quickly become a wonderful source of pride for the City of Hartford, the State of Connecticut, our sponsors and our fans. The Stadium has created a vitality and energy that will help promote additional economic development and further Hartford's revitalization."

Reaction from City Hall in Hartford was equally positive. "Dunkin' Donuts Park is a spectacular ballpark that combines the intimate, family-friendly feel of Minor League ball with the architectural quality of a big-league park," observed Hartford's Mayor Luke Bronin. "That's one of the reasons Yard Goats games are selling out week after week and bringing thousands of fans and families to the downtown, which really adds to the City's energy. In the first year of my administration, we had to spend a lot of time and energy getting the project back on track and done right, and it's an honor to have *BaseballParks.com* recognize that the result truly stands out among parks across the country, including several major league facilities."

The other finalists for the 2017 award were: The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches, spring-training home for the Houston Astros and Washington Nationals; the Atlanta Braves' SunTrust Park and The Depot, the home of the Cleburne Railroaders of the independent American Association.

“Being named Ballpark of the Year when your main competition for the award is a brand new Major League park and a state-of-the-art Spring Training facility is truly a remarkable honor and a feather in the cap for Minor League Baseball,” said Minor League Baseball President & CEO Pat O’Conner. “After everything the ballclub, the Colorado Rockies organization, the Eastern League and city went through to get the ballpark completed, it is great to see that it was worth the wait and I couldn’t be happier for owner Josh Solomon, General Manager Tim Restall and the citizens of Hartford as they have certainly earned this distinction.”

The Yard Goats are indeed the Double-A affiliate of the Colorado Rockies. The parent club showed remarkable patience during the delays of 2016. They are also quite pleased that their prospects are now playing in such a first-class facility. Zach Wilson, the Rockies’ Senior Director for Player Development, noted that “Dunkin’ Donuts Park has quickly become a beautiful landmark for the City of Hartford and we are grateful that our Double-A team can call it home. The fans that flock to the stadium paired with the amenities for our players makes it a perfect development situation for the Colorado Rockies to continue to move our players towards the Major League level.”

“On behalf of the design team that includes Pendulum, Newman and SLAM, I want first and foremost to express how honored we are to share this award with the City of Hartford and the Yard Goats,” said Pendulum’s Jonathan Cole, chief architect on the park. “To be recognized by *BaseballParks.com* and *USA TODAY* for such an exclusive merit-based award is extremely meaningful and humbling. This is especially true because the judging panel includes Joe Mock, who has a keen eye for what is relevant in ballpark design.

“This award carries a lot of weight and has been something I’ve strived for my entire career,” Cole added. “And despite the well-documented adversity we faced in completing the park, our team pulled together and fought hard to do the right thing. Yes, it was worth it.”

As Cole mentioned, this award is merit-based, not voted on by fans. “Our panel discussed the merits of each of the finalists,” Mock explained. “In the end, it was clear that the remarkable story behind the completion of this park and its ground-breaking design made it a clear choice.”

Participating on the Advisory Panel with Mock are Doug Greenwald, who’s been doing play-by-play in pro baseball for the past 22 seasons, and Graham Knight, author of three books on ballparks and who operates the popular Baseball Pilgrimages website. Greenwald and Knight have each visited over 200 pro ballparks.

Winners of the award over the past 17 years include such noteworthy facilities as PNC Park (Pittsburgh Pirates, 2001), Petco Park (San Diego Padres, 2004), Huntington Park (Columbus Clippers, 2009), Salt River Fields (spring training home of the Diamondbacks and Rockies, 2011) and Southwest University Park (El Paso Chihuahuas, 2014).

Last year’s honor went to Fort Bragg Field, the facility built to host only one game. Major League Baseball and the Players Association partnered to erect the temporary park so members of the military at Fort Bragg could attend a big-league contest.

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Mock’s in-depth review of Dunkin’ Donuts Park entitled “Ending Hartford’s Losing Streak” can be found here: <http://www.baseballparks.com/indepth/dunkin-donuts-park/>

For more information on this award or on BaseballParks.com, contact Joe Mock at 512-826-0853.

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