

Was the Triple-A All-Star Game PGE Park's Last Big Dance?

Written by Maury Brown
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Wednesday's Triple-A All-Star Game at Portland's PGE Park may be the last big baseball event in the storied stadium's history

By all accounts, Weds. Triple-A All-Star Game at PGE Park in Portland, OR was a rousing success. With a game time temp of 90 degrees, and clear blue skys, it was a perfect night for baseball. The game which saw the International League beat the Pacific Coast League 6-5 in a tight battle to the end was aired on ESPN2 and drew a sellout crowd of 16,637, making it the third highest attended Triple-A All-Star Game of all-time, pacing just below the '88 game in Buffalo (19,500), and the '99 game in Louisville (20,725).

Over the course of the All-Star Game, Homerun Derby (9,275), FanFest (6,000), and luncheon (450), the event drew 32,362. With the host team retaining the revenues for a Triple-A All-Star Game event, it will no doubt bolster the Padres affiliated Portland Beavers' bottom line.

And while it wasn't the last baseball game played at PGE Park/Civic Stadium/Multnomah Stadium in its history, it may well have been its last major baseball event. Portland Beavers owner Merritt Paulson could try to get an MLB exhibition game in before the start of the PCL team's season starts, but if not, the Triple-A All-Star Game appears to be prom date before she decides to trade up.

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Paulson has been conditionally awarded an MLS expansion franchise, and with it, Commissioner Don Garber has said that the Beavers must move out, allowing for PGE Park to be converted into a soccer-only facility where bleacher seating will replace what is now a cross between the ivy covered Wrigley and the Green Monster.

The Padres' affiliation agreement with the Beavers, in effect since Portland regained the Triple-A team for the 2001 season, expires in 2010. With that, baseball history at what is now known as PGE Park will be, at the least, suspended for the time being. The facility began hosting PCL baseball in 1956, and has seen the Single-A Mavericks of the International League (1973-1977) and Single-A Northwest League Rockies (1995-2000).

While professional baseball in Portland proper will most likely be ending (plans for a new minor league stadium the Rose Quarter, and then Lents neighborhood in Portland failed), the possibility of a regional relocation is still a possibility. Vancouver, WA, just across the Columbia River from Portland, and locations in Washington Co., west of Portland have been considered.

As to how that might sit with the Pacific Coast League, the public sentiment is that keeping the team in the Portland area is better than seeing the team move out of the area entirely, according to PCL president Branch Rickey.

"It's the ballpark, it's the ballpark," Rickey said just before last night's game. "It could be rural, it could be downtown -- it just depends. When you get it right, it jumps. There is a charisma to the game of baseball played in a modern facility done right."

There's good reason the PCL would like to see a team in the Portland area as it is league's largest market.

The clock is ticking, however. With the 2009 season drifting toward its end soon, Merritt Paulson and the Pacific Coast League will have less than two years to find a new home for the Beavers before the 2011 season starts.
