

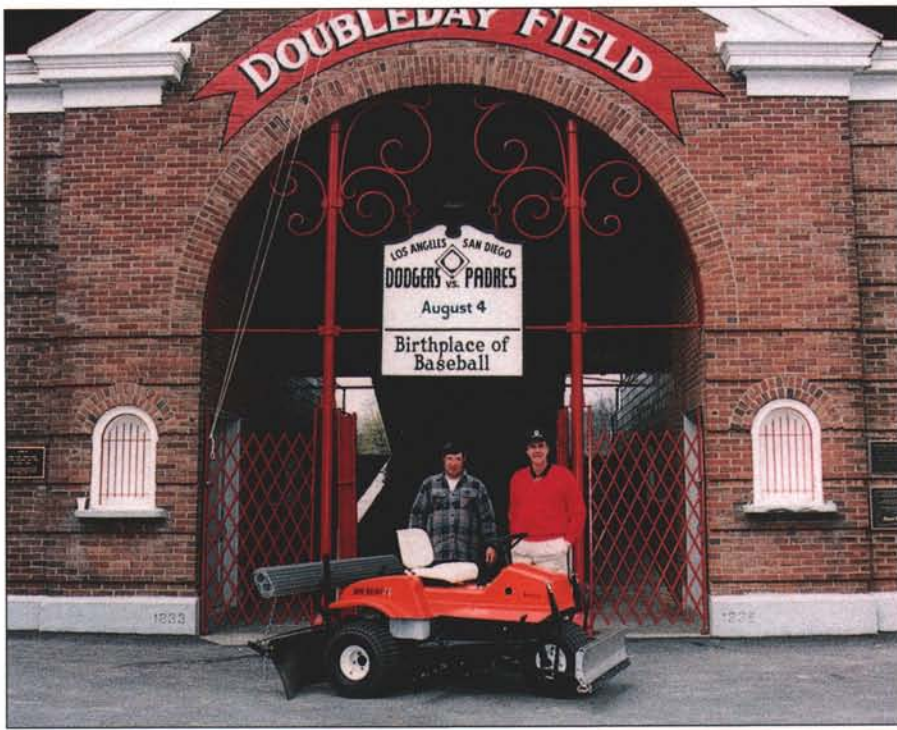
# Hall of Fame is Not Doubleday's Only Game

Several weeks ago, on August 2-4, Cooperstown was the focal point of the baseball world for the 57th consecutive year as the game's all-time greats converged on the upstate New York village to honor the four 1997 Hall of Fame inductees: knuckleballer Phil Niekro, chosen by the Baseball Writers' Association of America (BBWAA); and Tommy Lasorda, Nellie Fox and Willie Wells — chosen by the Veterans Committee.

For the 51st year, celebrations included a Hall of Fame Game — this year between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the San Diego Padres (the first Hall of Fame Game between National League clubs). As usual, the game was held at Doubleday Field, a small-town, picturesque stadium where the old appropriately meets the new and 13-year-old amateurs play on the same turf as the Major League pros. For those who haven't seen this unique ball park, now 77 years old, this page offers a quick peek.

## Part of the Boom

The field was named in honor of Abner Doubleday, the mythical father of baseball, and is owned and maintained by the village of Cooperstown. It was built during the baseball-park building boom of the 1910s and officially opened in September 1920 with a game between Cooperstown and the neighboring community of Milford. In 1938, with support from the Works Projects Administration (WPA), additional land was acquired, a new diamond was constructed, wooden grandstands were built, fencing was installed, and the entrance was landscaped.



Joe Harris (left), head groundskeeper at Doubleday Field, visits with Don Smith, of Smithco, at the baseball field's front gate. Photos courtesy: Don Smith.

Fame came a year later, in 1939, when Cooperstown, the purported site of baseball's 1839 invention, hosted season-long celebrations of the game's mythical centennial birth date. In June, at the height of the festivities, the National Baseball Hall of Fame was established. It attracted 25,000 fans that year and now hosts more than 250,000 visitors annually.

## Hard-Working Field

As befits a Hall of Fame diamond, Doubleday Field is used with great frequency. Its season typically lasts from mid-April to mid-October, and just about any team that plays with bases 90 feet apart can schedule games there. During the 1997 baseball season, 300 to 320 games will be played on the field. That's about four times the number of games played on the typical Major League field.

Responsibility for maintenance of the field falls on a single person, Joseph "Joe" Harris, who's been head groundskeeper since 1990 and handles practically all maintenance requirements, although additional, part-time help is employed during the heaviest-use months. Maintenance includes taking care of approximately 84,000 square feet of turf. In the outfield, it grows on the area's original native soil and in the infield, which was rebuilt in 1984, on a New York State Greens Mix, consisting of sand and Dakota Peat. In

addition, there is approximately 40,000 square feet of warning track and infield skinned area to groom.

During the baseball season, the field is either fully or partially conditioned every day. "We condition with the scarifier every day, and mow about three times a week," says Harris. The pitcher's mound and home plate area are conditioned after every game.

Other than the renovated infield and the modern machinery that grooms the surface, little else has changed at Doubleday Field. The original wood grandstands remain. They hold 9,800 people. The distances to the outfield fences are 296 feet to left, 390 to center and 312 to right. Together, they add up to one of the most celebrated fields of dreams. □



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