

LEGENDARY

BALLPARKS:

Fenway Park &

Wrigley Field



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Fenway Park inside boxes

Baseball players can become free agents, but ballparks never do.

That is why two historic fields have become beloved icons not only to locals who live nearby, but also to out-of-towners who come to set foot on the storied turf.

Fenway Park, the oldest of the 30 active major-league stadiums, and Wrigley Field, just two years younger, are synonymous with Old School baseball.

Both look like they were shoe-horned into populated neighborhoods, with dimensions dictated by existing streets. And both are palaces with personality, places where records are broken with surprising frequency.

Hitters love both.

At Wrigley, the winds can blow in from Lake Michigan one day but out the next. Greg Maddux, the Hall of Fame pitcher who began and ended his career with the

Chicago Cubs, said he didn't mind pitching there because the prevailing winds helped him as often as they hurt him.

Still, the North Side landmark holds major-league records for most runs scored in a game (49) and the second-most (45).

On August 25, 1922, the Cubs beat the Phillies, 26-23. But the Phils returned the favor more than a half-century later, outlasting the home team, 23-22 in 10 innings.



Wrigley Field outside sign



Fenway is a fearsome place for pitchers too. The Red Sox hold records for most runs scored in an inning, plating 17 against

Detroit in the seventh inning of a game in 1953, and most runs scored in the first inning by an American League team, with 14 against the Miami Marlins during a 25-8 rout on June 27, 2003. In that same game, the Sox also dented the record book by scoring 10 runs before recording their first out of the game – and Johnny Damon had three hits in the inning, tying a mark previously held by Gene Stephens, an earlier Red Sox outfielder.

Thanks to the Green Monster, a wall that towers 37 feet over left field in Fenway, Boston once battered St. Louis Browns pitchers for 49 runs in two days. No wonder the Browns turned tail and ran, becoming the Baltimore Orioles.

Both parks have their own beauty marks.

While Fenway features the Green Monster in left and the Pesky pole, marking the end of the shortest

right-field foul line in the major leagues, Wrigley is known for ivy-covered brick walls in the outfield and bleacher-like seating on apartment rooftops across the street.

Both are on the National Register of Historic Places but pitchers often find them hysterical. For years, the Red Sox refused to rely on left-handed pitching because they felt right-handed hitters would feast on their offerings (Mel Parnell and Bill Lee were notable exception).



Green Monster scoreboard



Championship Flags

Originally called Weeghman Park when built for Chicago's Federal League team in 1914, Wrigley took on its present name in 1927 after the team was purchased by chewing gum czar William Wrigley. It was actually the third Wrigley Field, since Wrigley also lent his name to the team's spring training field in Catalina Island, CA and its minor-league stadium in Los Angeles. The 1950s TV show Home Run Derby was filmed in the L.A. stadium, which later housed the expansion Los Angeles Angels before the team decided to share the new Dodger Stadium.

For a young radio sportscaster nicknamed Dutch Reagan, the sojourn on Catalina was a godsend. An actress named Joy Hodges heard his Cubs broadcasts for Des Moines radio station WHO, arranged a screen test, and Ronald Reagan went on to become president of the Screen Actors Guild, governor of California, and president of the United States.

Eventually, the Cubs closed their Catalina camp, moving spring training to Arizona, and sold its Los Angeles territorial rights to the Dodgers. But Chicago's Wrigley Field prevailed.

Nicknamed "the Friendly Confines" by Hall of Fame slugger Ernie Banks, Wrigley became the most colorful park in the National League in more ways than one.

It has a red sign in the front, green ivy fronting a brick wall that poses a danger to outfielders, and an enormous, hand-operated, olive-colored scoreboard topped by flagpoles flying pennants in the various colors of the 15 National League teams. In addition, the team hoists a white flag with a blue W when the Cubs win or a blue flag with a white L when it loses.

Lovable losers for years, the Cubs ended a futility streak of 108 years in 2016 when they won the World Series against the Cleveland Indians.

The Red Sox had a long drought too: they went 86 years without a world championship between 1918 and 2004.

Both teams lure fans the old-fashioned way: by train.

Chicago's Red Line train, which is partially elevated and partially subway, is the only one in the majors that links two big-league parks: Wrigley on the North Side and U.S. Cellular Field, known to traditionalists as Comiskey Park, 9.5 miles away on the South Side. When the Cubs and White Sox meet in interleague games, Chicagoans show their true colors, though the rivalry between the Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals seems more intense because that tradition has lasted longer.

In Boston, fans from the six New England states converge on Boston's T, a network of old-time trolley lines that extends deep into the city's suburbs. The Kenmore stop in front of the Hotel Commonwealth is just a quarter-mile from the gates of Fenway.



Wrigley Field scoreboard



Wrigley Ballparks Welcome

The best part of going to either ballpark is the pre-game party in the surrounding streets. That's especially true on Jersey Street, adjacent to Fenway. Part baseball bazaar and country fair, it features souvenir shops selling hats, jerseys, T-shirts, yearbooks, baseball cards, and assorted trinkets while competing for tourist dollars with various food vendors, cooking everything from hot dogs to sausage and peppers. Prices are often better on the street – especially for programs published by independent sports journalists.

After games, the pubs take over, not only providing beer on hot nights but also venues that allow fans to second-guess home team managers after home team losses.

Parking is hard to find in both cities, with the few spaces accompanied by astronomical price-tags, not to mention the difficulty of navigating through surging post-game crowds that are not necessarily sober. Capacity at Wrigley Field is 41,649, while Fenway holds 37,755 – one of the smallest in the majors.

Until 1988, Wrigley Field lacked lights, forcing the Cubs to play home games only in daylight. But the Wrigleys relented when Major League Baseball threatened to move potential Cubs playoff games to other cities in order to accommodate television interests.

The first night game, deliberately scheduled for 8-8-88, was rained out before it reached the required five innings to make it official. It was replayed the next night.

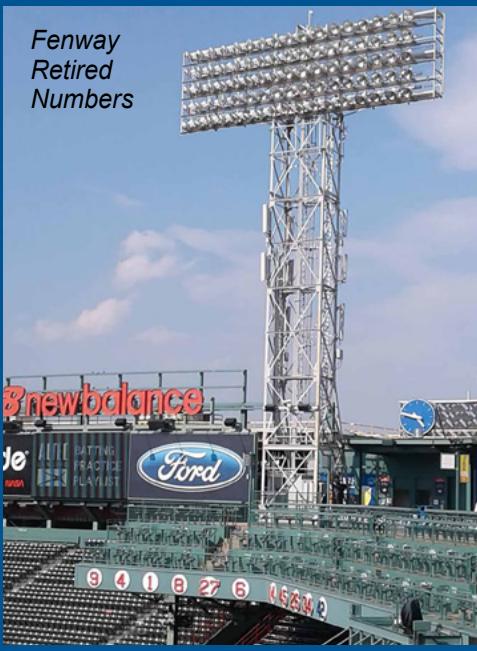
Both ballparks are surrounded by statues of team greats: Ted Williams, Carl Yastrzemski, Bobby Doerr, Johnny Pesky, and Dom DiMaggio at Fenway and Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Ron Santo, Ferguson Jenkins, and broadcaster Harry Caray at Wrigley. The Cubs also fly a banner honoring broadcaster Jack Brickhouse.

To make way for a new sportsbook at Wrigley Field, the Cubs announced earlier this year they would soon be moving their four player statues to a new "Statue Row" at Gallagher Way, outside the park but still in the Wrigleyville neighborhood.

The Cubs were the first team to install an organist, in 1941, and still rely on its symphony of sounds, while Red Sox fans sing Neil Diamond's Sweet Caroline and devour red-hots – frankfurters plunked into buns that open on the top.

Wrigley Field fans sing in unison too. In a tradition started by the late broadcaster Harry Caray, a guest announcer leans out of the booth during each of Wrigley's 81 home games to lead *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*, the 1908 Jack Norworth ditty-turned-hit, during the seventh-inning stretch.

Beyond the cacophony of sound in both ballparks, the eye candy is spectacular – even for fans unlucky enough to sit behind poles that support the upper decks. The vast mass of outfield grass suggests an urban oasis occupied by hometown heroes in bright white uniforms (visitors traditionally wear gray). Retired numbers of earlier legends – 11 of them at Fenway – adorn upper-deck rims in Boston but fly from flagpoles in Chicago.



The Prudential building and other skyscrapers twinkle in the twilight near the Boston ballpark but somehow seem less conspicuous than an enormous CITGO sign that was an endangered landmark before locals rallied to protest its planned removal. Fans behind home plate in Wrigley can look up to see the ancient press box, complete with catwalk, or look straight out to see mini-bleachers sitting on top of narrow apartment buildings across the street.

Owners charge for seating and pay the team a percentage of their profits. Ballclubs also make money by staging concerts and other special events when the baseball team goes on the road. Bruce Springsteen and Paul McCartney are among those who've played Fenway, for example, while Billy Joel has sung to crowds at Wrigley on multiple occasions.

Both parks are beloved icons in their respective cities. In fact, the Red Sox favor Fenway so much that

they built a scaled-down replica of their ancient park in Fort Myers, FL, where they spend six weeks in pre-season training every spring. Even a scaled-down version of the Green Monster exists in jetBlue Park.

The Cubs train in Mesa, AZ but obviously have fans everywhere; a group called Cubs World has monthly meetings at The Villages, an enormous Central Florida complex for folks 55 and up.

Not surprisingly, there's a Red Sox fan club there too.

Wrigley and Fenway have hosted World Series a combined 16 times but have never appeared at the same time. The odds are stacked against that happening today because baseball's postseason has morphed into a labyrinth of playoffs. But sellouts are common because there's nothing quite like enjoying baseball in its most historic settings. The Red Sox hold the major-league mark of 794, including both regular-season games and playoffs.

Fenway fans haven't always been fortunate. In 1947, wet paint that failed to dry in time forced the Sox to pay cleaning bills for thousands of spectators who found green paint on their Opening Day outfits. The event became known in heavily-Irish Boston as "the wearing of the green."

Three decades later, however, Boston pitcher Bill Lee called Fenway Park "a shrine." Newspaper coverage of the ballpark's opening on April 20, 1912 didn't use such language. Even though Mayor John F. Fitzgerald – grandfather of future President John F. Kennedy – threw out the first pitch, the papers hardly noted the event; they were filled with continuing coverage of the Titanic disaster in maritime Canada.

The Boston Braves (now denizens of Atlanta) used Fenway for the 1914 World Series and 1915 regular season before opening Braves Field a mile away. Then the Red Sox used the larger National League park for their own World Series games in 1915 and 1916.

After trading Babe Ruth to the Yankees in 1920, however, the Bosox began their long drought, finding solace in producing a parade of batting champions aided not only by the proximity of The Green Monster to home plate but by the smallest foul territory in the majors.

Ted Williams, who once hit an astonishing .406, was a huge beneficiary. The lone red seat in the right-field bleachers at Fenway marks the spot where Williams hit a 502-foot home run on June 9, 1946. Six years earlier, when the Sox relocated their bullpen enclosure in front of those same bleachers, writers dubbed it "Williamsburg" because it shortened the home run distance by 23 feet.

At Wrigley, sluggers also made short work of the short

dimensions. Sammy Sosa, the only man to produce three 60-homer seasons, smacked souvenir baseballs onto apartment rooftops and sometimes through closed windows. So did all-or-nothing slugger Dave Kingman, who once hit a ball 550 feet.

Visiting players thrived too, with future Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt tying a record with four consecutive home runs in an 18-16 game at Wrigley on April 17, 1976. Perhaps the most famous Wrigley homer of all was the alleged "called shot" by Babe Ruth of the Yankees in the 1932 World Series.

It's hard to believe Wrigley has the longest foul lines in the majors (353 feet from home to right and 355 feet to left) but it compensates with cozy power alleys. No batter has dented the scoreboard, as Robert Redford did in *The Natural*, but that may change.

The clock atop the scoreboard has kept perfect time since its installation in 1941. It has seen many of the 5,687 consecutive day games played at Wrigley before lights were added – to the consternation of citizens concerned about nighttime noise in their working-class neighborhood. A compromise solution struck at the time still limits the number of night games.

Even during the baseball off-season, the venerated ballparks are often active. Both, for example, have hosted the National Hockey League's Winter Classic, an outdoor game, on New Year's Day. Both have also starred in movies, with the Jimmy Fallon comedy *Fever Pitch* one of the best baseball films of recent vintage.

As Hall of Fame team owner Bill Veeck once said, "Baseball is a game to be savored and not gulped." He should know: he's the guy who planted the ivy at Wrigley Field.

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