

SPORTS

St. Paul Saints add free baseball museum to their lineup

By Jim Paulsen (<http://www.startribune.com/jim-paulsen/10645611/>) Star Tribune

MAY 9, 2019 — 6:07PM

First, the stuff we know about the St. Paul Saints:

They are a remarkably successful independent minor league baseball team that, after disbanding in 1961, was reformed in 1993.

Actor Bill Murray has a stake in the franchise, alongside co-owners Mike Veeck and Marv Goldklang.

It's known for bold promotions, a festive ballpark atmosphere and high-profile player signings such as former Major League All-Stars Darryl Strawberry and Jack Morris, and Ilya Borders, the first female pitcher to start a men's professional game.

But did you know baseball legends Roy Campanella, Duke Snider and Lefty Gomez all donned its white-and-blue woolens before going on to major league success? Or that the first black pitcher outside of the Negro Leagues, Dan Bankhead, pitched two seasons for the Saints (1948 and '49) before making his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1950? How about that NFL founder George Halas and Boston Celtics star Bill Sharman played for the Saints?

These nuggets, best known by baseball historians and collectors, are heralded at a newly created City of Baseball Museum, which the Saints developed as a way to recognize the history of baseball in the capitol city.

The free museum, featuring displays, artifacts, memorabilia and an interactive "tech table," is housed in a 2,000-square-foot addition on the main concourse down the left field line at CHS Field. The Saints held a media preview Thursday, with the official grand opening of the museum to take place May 16 in conjunction with the team's 2019 season opener.

Saints Executive Vice President/General Manager Derek Sharrer said the museum is part of the team's commitment to being an integral part of the cultural environment in St. Paul.

"We'll always be known for fun, and it will always be that way, but this is a passion project," Sharrer said. "It's important for us to take the next step and show the rich history of baseball here in St. Paul."

The space was designed by Split Rock Studios of Arden Hills, a firm with expertise in creating displays and exhibits. Much of the vintage uniforms, gloves, bats and photographs were loaned to the museum by Taylor Simons, a Minneapolis real estate asset manager and avid collector of St. Paul baseball memorabilia.

Simons said his original goal was to one day have his collection displayed at the Minnesota Historical Society. Making it available to the public at CHS Field is even better.

"This is like a dream come true," he said. "This is where it should be."

It's not just Saints history that will be housed at the museum. Michael Goldklang, son of Marv Goldklang, said the goal is to reflect the overall history of baseball in St. Paul.

Prominent are displays devoted to the St. Paul Colored Gophers, a barnstorming black club team based in St. Paul that was created in 1907, and to Toni Stone, who was raised in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood and became the first woman to play professionally in the Negro Leagues.



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Saints ushers Tom Mattson left, and John Wenzel looked over an interactive display at the the City of Baseball Museum at CHS Field

“We wanted to reflect the cultural importance and significance of baseball in St. Paul,” Goldklang said. “There’s so much baseball history here.”

Said Sharrer: “If Minnesota is the State of Hockey, we want St. Paul to be the City of Baseball.”

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