

# A TOTALLY DIFFERENT BALLGAME

It's called baseball, but the players don't wear gloves, the pitchers throw underhand, and the outfielders are allowed to let the ball bounce before making an out. Those are just some of the differences at the Copper City Classic, an exhibition baseball tournament played every spring at Bisbee's historic Warren Ballpark.

**BY NOAH AUSTIN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACQUES BARBEY**



Erik Haynes of the Phoenix Senators waits for his turn at bat during the Copper City Classic at Warren Ballpark in Bisbee. The annual tournament, played by 1860 rules, raises money to preserve and restore the ballpark.



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Pat Kelly, a Tombstone Vigilantes re-enactor who serves as the Copper City Classic's umpire, dusts off home plate. BJ Myers of the Phoenix Senators takes a swing. A member of the Colorado All-Stars holds the vintage-style ball used in the tournament.



**T**HE PAST IS A FUNNY THING. It doesn't just show up. You have to look for it. And when you find it, you have to make a choice — help to keep it alive, or let it fade.

In the Southeastern Arizona city of Bisbee, you'll find the past at an old ballfield, unknown to most and forgotten by many. The paint peels from its clubhouses' adobe walls, a casualty of too many ballplayers kicking dirt off too many cleats. Its grandstand steps are steep, worn and creaky enough to trigger horror-movie flashbacks. Its lower levels become wading pools when the monsoon brings a summer downpour to this old mining town. But Warren Ballpark, at 109, looks good for its age — like the old baseball glove a shortstop can't bear to replace. And every April, the past comes alive on its hallowed grounds.

Here, though, there are no gloves allowed.



IN 1971, A YOUNG STRINGER for the *Tucson Daily Citizen* visited Bisbee for the first time, to cover a high-school game. And when Mike Anderson went back to the Old Pueblo that night, his heart stayed at Warren Ballpark.

"It blew me away," he says. "It's frozen in time. Even back in 1971, that was pretty evident. I fell in love with it."

Anderson later learned that Warren predates even Wrigley Field and Fenway Park, the two oldest stadiums in Major League Baseball. Built in 1909 by a subsidiary of the Calumet and Arizona Mining Co., it initially featured a wooden grandstand and a dirt field. The simple setting had a simple purpose: to give Bisbee's miners a place to play

and watch games in between shifts carving copper ore out of the Mule Mountains. The first teams to compete there were sponsored by local businesses and civic organizations, and they took on teams from El Paso, Tucson and other cities.

Before long, though, Warren Ballpark became a cathedral of the game. Jim Thorpe, Christy Mathewson and other legends visited in 1913, when the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox played at Warren on what's now known as the Grand World Tour. Buck Weaver and other White Sox players banned from baseball in the Black Sox scandal joined "outlaw league" teams that played in Bisbee in the 1920s. And in 1937, after a Works Progress Administration project replaced the original wooden grandstand with an adobe structure, the White Sox faced their crosstown rivals, the Cubs, in an April exhibition. By Anderson's count, 17 members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame have taken the field at Warren.

Minor-league teams played there, too, and several

players from those teams went on to the majors. One of them, Clarence Maddern, played for the Bisbee Bees before making it to the big leagues with the Cubs in 1946. He's the only Bisbee native to become a major leaguer.

"People can't fathom that this little mining town, at the far end of the state, was in the same league as Phoenix, Tucson, Albuquerque, El Paso and Juarez," Anderson says. "It gives you a sense of the prominent role baseball played for towns like this."

In 1989, Anderson and his wife, Judy, moved to Bisbee — which, not long after his first visit, had traded copper mining for antiques shops, restaurants and B&Bs. In past lives, Anderson was a newspaper editor, a social studies teacher and a Pima County Sheriff's Department employee. He's retired now, and at age 64, he walks gingerly and sighs with relief as he settles onto a bench in one of the ballpark's clubhouses. There's no shame in saying both he and Bisbee are showing their age.

"This is a mining town without a mine," he says. "There's no major employer here to provide blue-collar jobs. This town struggles to survive. We rely on tourism. The service industry. Government jobs."

Warren Ballpark is showing its age, too, but most visitors to Bisbee wouldn't know that. It's near the town's southeast corner, far removed from the Copper Queen Hotel and the Lavender Pit. If tourists find themselves on this side of Bisbee, it's probably because they've taken a wrong turn. And until recently, some passers-by didn't even know Warren Ballpark was a ballpark. Its exterior — gray and white adobe, with high, shallow windows and a gently sloped roof — evokes an old fairground. Or, less charitably, the county jail.

Since the 1940s, the ballpark, now owned by the Bisbee Unified School District, has mostly been used for Bisbee High School athletics. And beyond its electric lights and a few other modern-day improvements, it looks as austere as it did in its early days. Its grandstand holds several hundred, tops, and its grass seems torn between color schemes of "somewhat green" and "mostly yellow." There's no W.B. Mason sign on the weathered outfield wall. No hot dog races on the Jumbotron between innings. No Jumbotron, either — just a simple scoreboard in left field. The focus is the game.

Anderson's focus is the ballpark, and he's become its advocate and biggest fan. He authored a book, *Warren Ballpark: Images of Sports*, and in 2008, he and Judy founded Friends of Warren Ballpark, which aims to raise money to do what the school district can't.

"The district has been a good steward of this park," he says. "If they didn't own it, it would have been torn down and turned into apartments, or offices, or anything other than a ballpark. But the district doesn't have the money for upgrades or restoration. That's where we come in."

It happens that Anderson has a passion for a particular vintage of baseball — one that's nearly a half-century



older than this old park. Every April, his group hosts, and Judy manages, the Copper City Classic, an exhibition tournament of baseball played by 1860 rules. Been working on a wicked slider? Sorry: You'll be pitching underhand, and slow. Excited to show off your new Rawlings? Too bad: Gloves are mostly verboten. And if your specialty is dropping a bloop single in front of the left fielder, forget it — if it's caught on a bounce, you're still out. That's ideal for fielders at Warren, where the hard outfield yields plenty of high bounces.

Anderson loves this version of the game because it honors the players of yesteryear, but also because it means a guy his age can keep taking his swings. "This allows people who would seriously hurt themselves playing regular baseball to come out and play," he says. "It's like Samuel Johnson said about a dog walking on two legs: It's not that you can do it well, but that you can do it at all."

On Anderson's team, the Bisbee Black Sox, players range in age from 13 to 70. They include an FBI agent, a National Park Service police officer, a psychotherapist,

a welder and a middle-school student. A local seamstress makes their vintage uniforms — white button-up jerseys, trimmed in black and adorned with a black "B" — in the style of the Federal League, which operated in the 1910s. The Black Sox and other vintage teams, mostly from Tucson and the Phoenix area, play in the Arizona Territories Vintage Base Ball League, one of many such leagues around the country. The April tournament at Warren concludes the league's season.

"Most of the games we play are on city recreational fields," Anderson says. "Here, we're playing on history." That's a draw, of course, but a little star power doesn't hurt. So, before the 2017 tourney, Anderson enlisted the help of a ballplayer with a little history of his own.



THE SECOND PITCH of the bottom of the 12th was a sinker, low and inside. Carlton Fisk got all of it, sent it careening into the Boston night. He bounced out of the box and waved his hands, frantically urging the ball to stay fair. It clanged off the left-field foul pole, and Fen-



way Park erupted.

Even if you didn't watch Game 6 of the 1975 World Series, it's likely that you've seen the Boston Red Sox catcher's iconic moment. It's equally likely you don't remember the tall, lanky right-hander who threw that pitch. Partly because Pat Darcy's Cincinnati Reds won Game 7, and the Series, the following night. And partly because shoulder problems ended Darcy's brief big-league career the following season.

But Darcy thinks about Game 6 a lot. Not just about Fisk, but also about the first batter he faced when he entered the game in the bottom of the 10th. "Dwight



**LEFT:** Joe Grace (left) of the Bisbee Black Sox and a sliding Bisbee Bees player have a close encounter at third base.  
**ABOVE:** A member of the Colorado All-Stars chases down a grounder.

Evans hit a ball right back to me, and it went off my glove and toward foul territory," he says. "I got to it and threw it to Tony Perez at first, and hit him right in the glove. Joe Morgan was running past me and said, 'You just made a great play in the World Series.' I remember thinking, *Did that really happen?*"

Darcy's time in the majors was short, and he was on the wrong end of a historic play, but *he won a World Series*. He played for Sparky Anderson, and with Pete Rose and Johnny Bench. And when he was done with baseball, he came back to Tucson, where he'd grown up, and found success in commercial real estate.

He's stayed involved with the game, coaching at the

Reds' fantasy camp and joining his Big Red Machine teammates for reunions in Cincinnati. And he's been an advocate for the game in Tucson: In 1992, he led the push for the expansion Colorado Rockies to play their spring training games there after the Cleveland Indians left town. It was a no-brainer for Darcy, who remembers riding his bike to Indians games as a kid. He knows what baseball can do for a community.

"It brings people together," he says. "Young people get to go to games and see different teams. You get to see the players up close, talk to them, get autographs. And it really helps the economy, too."

The Rockies did come to Tucson, staying for nearly two decades. The White Sox and Arizona Diamondbacks were there, too, but now, all 15 Cactus League teams are in the Phoenix area, and spring training games are played in relative luxury. "When I was with the Reds, we were in Tampa for spring training," Darcy says. "Our lockers in the clubhouse were chicken wire, and after practice or a game, you got a cup of soup. It's a little different now."

Darcy is a little different, too, but even at age 67 and with gray hair, he's still a tall, lanky right-hander. He looks like a ballplayer. So when Darcy takes the mound at Warren Ballpark, it feels like he's exactly where he should be.



ROBERT SCHON DOESN'T really look like a ballplayer. He looks like a fan. And that's why Warren Ballpark is where he belongs, too.

Schon is an archaeologist and an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona. Most of his research focuses on the ancient Mediterranean, but Schon also comes from a family of baseball fans. He was one of the few tourists who've stumbled upon the ballpark, and he was intrigued by the stories Warren had yet to share. We know a lot about the baseball greats who took the field there, but very little about the people who watched them play. People like him.

"Archaeology can tell us things that history can't — that the written record doesn't provide," he says. "It gives us aspects of people's lives that are more mundane, but still very meaningful. What they did. How they spent their time. We have this myth of the Wild West, and of places like Bisbee, where all everybody did was drink and gamble and shoot each other. But there were families here as well, not just rough-and-tumble folks."

Schon leads archaeological digs at the park by Bisbee High School and Cochise College students. They're looking for artifacts in places where spectators might have gathered, after a hard week in Bisbee's mines, to enjoy a ballgame with their families. That includes the foul lines in the infield, where grandstands once stood, and the outfield, where people would park and watch the action from their cars. "By looking at these artifacts, we can get an idea of what the fan experience was like," Schon says.

Many of the finds have been what you'd expect. Soda bottles, including one from Purity Soda Works, a Tucson company. Broken glass, possibly from car windows shattered by foul balls. And beer bottles, but only from the 1940s and later. That indicates, Schon says, that "this idea of drinking beer at a ballgame is a pretty late development."

But the oldest artifact was a surprise. It's a spent cartridge from a .22-caliber blank, and it dates to the ballpark's earliest years. Maybe it validates, at least a little, that Wild West myths: Schon has been told such cartridges were often used for "celebratory gunfire."

Schon hopes to conduct digs at ballpark sites in Douglas, Tombstone and Naco. For now, though, he's focused on Bisbee, where his interest in Warren Ballpark put him in touch with Mike Anderson. That led to Schon joining the Tucson Saguaros, one of the teams in the Copper City Classic. He plays because he loves the



game, but also because baseball teaches us something — and not just about itself.

"You can trace the history of America through the history of baseball," he says. "Especially as an anthropologist, I think about race relations, corporatization, the rural-urban divide, and how cities and suburbs grew. Those aspects of American culture can be viewed through the lens of baseball."



AFTER A FEW MINUTES in Warren Ballpark's grandstand during the Copper City Classic, one thing becomes clear: Baseball by 1860 rules *sounds* different. In this world, the telltale *pop* of the catcher's mitt is decades away, replaced by a *thunk* as the ball hits the dirt behind home plate. And the *thwack* when a bare-handed first baseman snares a high throw from second



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A Colorado All-Stars player prepares to head for home. James "Seamus" Clarke of the Camp Verde Excelsiors displays his vintage-style bat. Erik Haynes of the Phoenix Senators tracks the flight of the ball after his swing.

## WHEN YOU GO

The 2018 Copper City Classic is April 7 and 8 at Warren Ballpark, located at Ruppe Avenue and Arizona Street in Bisbee. Gates open at 9 a.m. each day, and games are played all day. Tickets for one day or both days are available, and food and drink vendors will be on hand. For more information, visit [www.friendsofwarrenballpark.com](http://www.friendsofwarrenballpark.com).



makes you clench your own fist out of sympathy. *That had to sting*, you think.

On this sunny Saturday, the wind is gusting, as it often does in Bisbee. It's knocking flat caps off players' heads and sending lineups skyward from the announcer's table near the first-base dugout. The smell of dirt and grass wafts into the stands, where it mixes with the scent of hot dogs and craft beer being sold from a booth near the grandstand. The result is a familiar smell. A baseball smell. Some things, it seems, are just part of the game.

Pat Darcy, pitching underhand in a special appearance for the Central Arizona All-Stars, can't turn to a hard sinker to cut through the gusts. That's by design: In this version of the game, a pitcher's job is not to get a batter out, but to give him or her a pitch to hit. The wind today, though, has other ideas.

Robert Schon is in the stands, waiting for the Saguaros' game to start. He's wearing his team's uniform: khaki pants, high socks, a plain white button-up and a flat cap. He shows off a recent find from the Warren dig: a 1930s token from the Warren-Bisbee Bus Line. "You can imagine some poor guy who took the bus down to watch a game, lost his token and had to walk home," he says.

Mike Anderson has a spring in his step as he leads a tour of the park. As he circles the infield behind home plate, he barks encouragement to those on the diamond. "That was some bully catch, there!" he shouts after the first baseman makes another cringe-inducing grab. And after a hitter swings and misses, he slips in a modern heckle: "You've been watching my batting video!"

Teams applaud their opponents' good plays. And after every game, the losing team lines up to salute the winners. "The whole thing, for us, is having fun," Anderson says.

Through donations, grants and proceeds from the annual tournament, Friends of Warren Ballpark has replaced the aging chicken wire behind the plate with professional netting, built a new restroom facility down the right-field line and installed the scoreboard. It also partnered with Cochise College to install a baseball-themed sculpture — three large, intertwined baseball bats — in front of the stadium. There's no mistaking Warren for the county jail anymore.

But there's plenty more to do for this cathedral. The steep grandstand needs railings to make it safer for spectators. The ticket booth needs to be replaced. And the monsoon flooding, which affects the clubhouses and other areas below ground, must be addressed. So the group's work continues. And while the ballpark's ultimate fate is up to the school district, Anderson dreams of a minor-league team once again calling Bisbee home — or even of having the Diamondbacks drop in for a game now and then.

"This has been such a fundamental part of the history of Bisbee that we want to make sure it stays in the best condition possible," he says, "so it can continue to be a fundamental part."

After his outing on the mound, Darcy marvels at the experience. "I was sitting down in the dugout, looking at everyone wearing the old uniforms," he says. "It was almost like going back in time." He plans to play again this year. So will Schon, Anderson and dozens of others who understand why it's important to keep this place's past alive. And they hope others will choose to help.

"There are ghosts out here," Anderson says. "The Black Sox are here. Honus Wagner is here. Jim Thorpe hit a home run here. ... They're still here. And we can connect with them. And we want the fans to connect with them, too."

He's quiet for a minute, and the wind kicks up again, sending a column of dust from Warren's infield swirling skyward. The ghosts of this old ballfield, maybe, making their case against fading away — or just taking in a game in the afternoon sun. Then, he adds: "It's not just a fundraiser. It's a religious experience." **AH**