

Drillers Stadium appeals to producer

By **BARRY LEWIS**
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During his travels through the minor leagues, Iowa City resident Steve Holmes has been to more than 100 ballparks.

Drillers Stadium has a special appeal to Holmes, who co-produced with Iowa Public Television an award-winning 2001 documentary on minor league baseball, "The New Ball Game."

Last week, Holmes drove the round trip from his summer office in Joplin, Mo., to Drillers Stadium for games on four consecutive nights. Holmes ranks Drillers Stadium among the top 10 ballparks in the minors.

"I think the sightlines are great here in Tulsa," Holmes

said. "I like to watch a part of the game from the concourse behind home plate, just above the box seats. You're about as close there as you're going to get in baseball to what's happening on the field.

"And late in the game here, I go down the right-field line. I like to watch from there the sunset behind the ballpark.

"The stadium also has a neat name. So many teams have weird nicknames or corporate names. Tulsa Drillers and Drillers Stadium just fits the area. There's a lot to like about this organization and ballpark."

Holmes, who runs his own production company, has been coming to games in Tulsa since 1982.

"Tulsa has sentimental value for me," Holmes said. "I kind of, in a sense, measure my life by coming to this ballpark. That's kind of a way of saying I've been a fan for a long time.

"That year ('82) was the first I was really interested in minor league baseball. I remember being here in Tulsa and seeing Darryl Strawberry hit a home run into what was the Safeway parking lot as a Jackson Met."

Holmes' documentary won a CINE Golden Eagle award for documentary excellence.

"The New Ball Game" features interviews with Bob Uecker and Paul Molitor. It also has a brief shot of Sammy Sosa in a Drillers uniform in 1989.

"It's really a fan's love letter to

minor league baseball," Holmes said.

And Holmes is quite a fan. Early in the documentary, he mentions driving 437 miles on a whim to see a game.

"I'm an addict for minor league baseball, there's no way around that," said Holmes, while wearing a Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Kernels tarp crew shirt. "I'm obsessed, or an addict, sick or eccentric, however you want to put it, when it comes to minor league baseball."

Holmes' documentary includes light-hearted glimpses of minor league life including a base-running toilet, a giant taco and a pig that takes baseballs to home plate. But the documentary also takes a serious look at how mi-

nor league baseball impacts several towns in the Midwest, along with Texas and Mexico.

"For years, the building boom and franchise changes bypassed the Texas League," Holmes said. "But now in the last few years the Texas League is starting to see what the rest of the minors have seen — a divide between the haves and the have nots. Between those towns with brand spanking new ballparks and those who don't. Will there come a time when Little Rock, Wichita and Tulsa start to feel the pressure without a new ballpark?"

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EXTRA:

Drillers catcher Dan Conway hit a leadoff homer in the seventh.

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with a line-drive double that appeared to fool rehabbing Kansas City Royals left fielder Aaron Guiel.

Sandoval followed with a bunt hit that advanced Salazar to third. Jorge Vasquez relieved J.J. Trujillo (5-6) and issued an intentional walk to hot-hitting Ryan Shealy to load the bases for Nix, who was in a 3-for-27 tailspin.

Vasquez's first two pitches to Nix were in the dirt. On a 2-1 count, Nix's excuse-me swing resulted in a slow bouncer to second baseman Ruben Gotay.

The speedy Salazar got a good jump toward the plate and scored without a play as Gotay booted the ball for an error that sent home the paid crowd of 4,088.

"Jeff came up big in the 10th and atoned for a little baserunning mistake earlier in the game," Drillers manager Tom Runnells said. "Danny is one of the best at getting the job done when you need to advance a runner as he did in the 10th. He's just having a sensational year offensively and defensively."

Until the last play, it had been a good night for Gotay, who played in the Futures Game last Sunday.

Gotay drove in both Wichita runs. His uncle, Julio, is a former major leaguer and was an infielder for the Tulsa Oilers in 1960 and '71.

Drillers catcher Dan Conway, who raised his batting average to .308, had a strong game. He scored after a single in the third and belted a tying leadoff homer in the seventh. Conway's liner into the left-field screen came off reliever Billy Keppinger.

Conway nearly delivered the winning blow in the ninth. After Corey Slavik's one-out single, Conway pulled a liner that cleared the left-field wall, but hooked foul by five feet.

Despite the loss, Wichita has the TL's best record in one-run decisions, 15-9, while Tulsa is 15-17.

Wichita, which had won five in a row entering the series,



Drillers second baseman Jayson Nix leaps to complete a double play in Tulsa's game against Wichita on Friday night.

'We've worked hard all year on a set of philosophies — getting a lot of ground balls, getting ahead on counts, being able to throw more than one pitch for a strike and it's starting to pay off.'

Bo McLaughlin

Drillers pitching coach, on substantial improvements on the mound.

has been limited to four runs in the last three games. 4½ shutout innings.

Wilkin Ruan had three of Wichita's five hits. Tulsa relievers Emmanuel Ramirez, Steve Kent and Speier held the Wranglers to one hit over

ing to pay off," Drillers pitching coach Bo McLaughlin said. "They are situational pitching better."

For the third time this season, good friends and former teammates Kyle Middleton and Zach McClellan were mound opponents.

Each allowed four hits over 5½ innings in this matchup. Each gave up a third-inning run.

Wichita's came with the help of a rare wild streak by McClellan. After one-out singles by Ruan and Guiel, walks to OU-ex Corey Hart and Gotay

Drillers 3, Wranglers 2

Wichita					Tulsa				
	ab	r	h	bi		ab	r	h	bi
Guil, lf ...	4	0	1	0	Miller, cf.....	4	0	1	0
Hart, ss ...	4	0	0	0	Salazar, lf.....	5	1	2	0
Gotay, 2b	4	0	1	2	Sandoval, ss.....	4	0	1	0
Brgr, dh	4	0	0	0	Shealy, 1b.....	4	0	2	1
Aldridge, rf	4	0	0	0	Nix, 2b.....	4	0	0	1
Walter, c	5	0	0	0	Harrison, dh.....	3	0	0	0
Sants, 1b	3	0	0	0	Piniella, rf.....	1	0	0	0
Gmoll, 3b	3	1	0	0	Garrett, pr/rr.....	2	0	0	0
Ruan, cf	4	1	3	0	Slavik, 3b.....	4	0	1	0
					Conway, c.....	3	2	2	1
Totals ...	35	2	5	2	Totals	35	3	9	3

Wichita	001	010	000	0	—	2
Tulsa	001	000	100	1	—	3

E: Gotay (13), Santos (9), Shealy (3). DP: Wichita 2, Tulsa 1. LOB: Wichita 10, Tulsa 11. 2B: Salazar 2 (4). HR: Conway (3). S: Miller (3).

Wichita	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Middleton	5½	4	1	1	3	3
Keppinger	½	2	1	1	0	0
Trujillo L, 5-6	2½	3	1	0	0	3
Vasquez	0	0	0	0	1	0

Tulsa	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
McClellan	5½	4	2	2	2	4
Ramirez	2½	0	0	0	1	3
Kent	1	1	0	0	1	2
Speier W, 3-0	1	0	0	0	1	1

HBP: by Middleton (Piniella), by McClellan (Gemoll), by Ramirez (Aldridge). WP: Middleton (7), McClellan (4), Kent (3).

T: 3:33. A: 4,088.

forced in a run. McClellan, however, escaped major damage by inducing Brandon Berger to ground into a double play.

In the bottom of the third, Conway led off with a single and was bunted to second by Tony Miller.

Middleton struck out Salazar but walked Sandoval. Shealy's single into left field drove in Conway. That was Shealy's 28th RBI in 20 second-half games.

Wichita snapped the 1-1 tie in the fifth. Justin Gemoll was hit by a pitch and Ruan bounced a single into right field. Two outs later, Gotay singled home Gemoll.

Tulsa right fielder Juan Piniella left the game after being struck on the head by a fourth-inning fastball.

After laying on the ground for several minutes, Piniella walked off the field. He sustained a cut that required several stitches near his left eye.

Albuquerque 9, Oklahoma 5: Chris Aguila had five RBIs, including a game-tying homer that turned the tide for Albuquerque, as the Isotopes beat host Oklahoma in a Pacific Coast League game.

Matt Blank (3-2) picked up the victory, allowing seven hits and five runs in five innings. Billy Sylvester (1-2) took the loss, allowing six hits and five runs while striking out two in 1½ innings.

PARK:

Oldest TL ballparks — Little Rock and Wichita — were built in the early 1930s.

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road. It's entirely possible within the next few years there may be an effort to fund a new facility without us putting anything into it. We would certainly be open to considering it."

In 1999, the Drillers led the Texas League with a season attendance of 351,929. But that total this year would rank a distant third. Texas-based teams located in suburbs Round Rock and Frisco, each with new ballparks, have each attracted more than 660,000 annually since opening in 2000 and 2003, respectively.

"We're happy here, but we recognize there are new facilities out there with other amenities," Drillers executive vice president / general manager Chuck Lamson said. "We're pleased fans like our facility, but a new ballpark would offer amenities that would further business opportunities and enhance fan enjoyment."

Tulsa's pro baseball teams have played at the Fairgrounds since 1932.

"If there is a group that would approach us with an opportunity, we sure would listen to see if it was the right thing for Drillers baseball and our fans," Lamson said. "But there are a lot

of things to consider, like our relationship with the county and where the ballpark would be located. We also feel pretty strongly that we would need to have quite a bit of input into the project."

The Drillers' need for a new ballpark isn't close to being as urgent as in the late 1970s when the franchise would have left Tulsa if their current home, known initially as Sutton Stadium, had not opened in '81.

"And for a comparison point, it isn't like it was in Oklahoma City several years ago, where their ballpark was in bad disrepair and they had to have a new park," Lamson said. "Whether it's a public or private group that would come to us, we would leave it up to those individuals."

"But I think in this current climate, that until we see some results of Vision 2025 and the downtown arena that we're glad is being built, I would doubt there would be public interest in funding a new ballpark at this point."

The two oldest TL ballparks — Little Rock and Wichita — were built in the early 1930s. Drillers Stadium could have that type of longevity, if necessary.

"If everything is maintained properly, the infrastructure itself should be all right for 30 to 40 more years," Hubbard said.

But other factors would probably necessitate a new ballpark sooner than then.

"At some point during that time, there would be continual maintenance problems that would become more and more of a drag on the operating bud-

get," Lamson said. "At some time there would be a point where you would say, 'We can't keep putting a Band-Aid on it.'"

"And there are types of things you can't really overcome without physical plant changes. We do get a lot of positive comments about our facility, but a lot of times you don't know about the fans who didn't say anything after waiting in long concession lines and don't come back. We want people to tell us if they see a problem that needs fixing. Some people don't say anything, they just go away."

Hubbard added, "When we get crowds of more than 6,000 or 7,000, we feel the pinch on our concourse and concession lines."

Just as McCombs does, Lamson also remembers well when Drillers Stadium opened. Lamson was a pitcher for the Drillers from 1979-81. He joined the Drillers' staff in 1982.

"Being a ballplayer, I probably didn't have as much appreciation then for the new ballpark as I would now, but I thought it was nice," Lamson said. "But with the way stadiums have evolved, players' and fans' expectations are higher now than they used to be."

"I think that to have input at designing a facility that may carry Tulsa through the rest of this century would be a unique opportunity."

"It does seem unusual that we may soon need a new ballpark because the current one isn't very old," McCombs said. "But that's the way it is in this modern baseball world."

TRIALS:

Tyson Gay, the NCAA champion from Arkansas, had a personal-best 20.07.

FROM B-1

years. She took last year off for the birth of her son.

LaTasha Colander, the trials' 100-meter champion, and Chryste Gaines were among those who withdrew.

The lone sprinter who ran but failed to advance was Amandi Rhett of Georgia Tech, who timed 24.03.

Gaines, who failed to make the finals in the 100 last weekend, is one of four athletes accused of doping violations based on evidence gathered in the BALCO probe. She and the other three are contesting those charges.

Torri Edwards, who acknowledged this week that she had a positive test for a banned stimulant this year, was the fastest of the qualifiers at 22.60. Edwards said she took the stimulant inadvertently because it was an additive to the glucose she ingested while not feeling well at a meet in Martinique. A hearing on her case is to be held Monday, and she could be banned from the sport for two years, knocking her off the Olympic team.

Shawn Crawford, Justin Gatlin and Tyson Gay ran three of the four fastest times in the world this year in the

qualifying heats of the men's 200.

Crawford ran a world's best 19.88, the fastest qualifying heat in trials' history. Gatlin ran 20.06 and Gay, the NCAA champion from Arkansas, had a personal-best 20.07.

Gatlin and Crawford already are on the U.S. Olympic team with second- and third-place finishes, respectively, in last weekend's 100 behind winner Maurice Greene. Greene was entered in the 200 but, as expected, didn't show up for his heat.

The competition resumed as more reports of positive drug tests dribbled out through the media leaks.

Hurdler Larry Wade tested positive for a steroid in an out-of-competition sampling, an anonymous source told The Associated Press.

Wade, the third-fastest in the world this year in the 110-meter hurdles, withdrew from the trials on Friday after injuring his left arm in a fall while working out on Thursday, his agent Emanuel Lewis told meet officials.

Meanwhile, the Chicago Tribune reported Friday that sprinter Mickey Grimes also had a positive result for a steroid in an out-of-competition test this year. Grimes, who failed to make the finals in the 100 last weekend, won his qualifying heat in the 200 at 20.39 — the second-slowest of the five heats.

Grimes was stripped of his gold medal in the 100 at last year's Pan American Games after testing positive for the stimulant ephedrine.