





It's officially springtime, and in Pomona, New York, fans are ready to cheer on their Rockland Boulders. Looking to repeat as Can-Am Champions, the Rockland Boulders are a shining example of the resurgence of independent baseball across America and internationally.

At one point, independent baseball leagues

such as the Canadian-American Association of Professional Baseball used to be known as outlaw leagues because of their operation outside of affiliated baseball. Affiliated baseball, of course, encompasses the 30 MLB teams and their Triple-A, Double-A and Single A affiliates which are used to source and develop new talent. In the golden age of baseball, there used to be many more affli-



CHAMPIONS

ated minor leagues and teams, but economic constraints began limiting that number. However, as Boulders President Ken Lehner explained, the benefits of independent baseball have become more apparent over the last two decades.

“What happened about 20 years ago is that there are all kinds of communities across not

only the United States, but Canada and other parts of the world who want to have a hometown team,” he said. “They have the financial wherewithal to build a facility, they have a local market who will support the team, and there’s players out there who can compete at a level that might have been overlooked by an affiliated situation.”



“There’s upwards of 65 independent baseball teams that are playing now in the United States and Canada, as well as overseas in countries like South Korea and Japan,” Lehner added. “Independent baseball is becoming a new resource for MLB teams to potentially procure talent.”

First founded in 2005, the Can-Am League has grown steadily, and now includes six teams across the northeastern United States and Canada. Officially introduced in 2011, the Rockland Boulders were crowned league champs just four seasons later. Their rise to the top of Can-Am, however, started long before their championship run.

“We joined the Can-Am League as an expansion team in 2011,” said Lehner. “Although we won our first championship last year, we’ve actually led the league in attendance in each of our four years of existence.”

Lehner attributes this impressive statistic to the baseball-rich community the Boulders call home. Pomona is located about 25 miles north of New York City, which is home to both the Yankees and the Mets.

“It’s just a very large, passionate baseball market here,” he continued. “We have a million people who reside within 30 minutes of the ballpark, so that’s one of the reasons we’ve been able to accomplish our attendance



goals. We're in a great facility in a great market; those are really the foundations for success in any professional sport."

PROVIDENT BANK PARK

From the iconic arches of Yankee Stadium, The Green Monster of Fenway Park, to the ivy-clad outfield of Wrigley Field and AT&T Park on the San Francisco Bay, it's indisputable that each ballpark brings its own unique charm and character. It's a quality which permeates the entire sport of baseball, not just the Majors. So when the Rockland Boulders began designing what is now known as Provident Bank Park, it was imperative that the ballpark delivered an unforgettable experience for fans game-in and game-out.

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“We had a very experienced architectural group called the DLR Group out of Kansas City that did the design, and in particular a gentleman named Bob Carlson.” Lehner explained.

With a proven track record for designing top quality stadiums and arenas for both minor league teams and universities across the US, the DLR Group was the clear choice for both Lehner and the Rockies along with Town of Ramapo officials who built the ballpark.

“Both major and minor league stadiums have to have a lot of personality and they have to have a lot of entertainment that goes on off

the field,” he continued. “And we really liked what Bob and his group came forward with.”

“It was designed in the sense of neighborhoods, we wanted to create different spaces for all ages,” said Lehner. “We have a very popular kids’ zone in right field, right next to the batting cages. As you work your way around the ballpark, when you get into center field, we put a train into the park which has been a huge hit for us.”

In addition to the train, which offers rides around the park to both kids and adults during games, the Boulders offer the unique experience they call the Dugout of Dreams. It’s a complete package which allows fans the opportunity to watch the game from an extension to the home dugout, where fans can interact with the players first-hand. Provident Bank Park also has a place for beer and music lovers. Overall, there’s never a dull moment before, during or after a Boulders game.

“Further down the concourse you get to our craft beer room which features our two craft beers being Bottom 9 Beer and 2nd Base Blonde,” Lehner said. “Then there’s the Home Plate Plaza, where there’s a lot of activities with DJs and bands and things like

that. There’s always entertainment beyond what’s going on in the game, and we designed the ballpark intentionally that way.”

CREATING LASTING MEMORIES

Though as grand and full of entertainment as a ballpark can be, the experience the fans leave with is based more on the service and atmosphere which employees provide. Lehner has a tremendous wealth of experience in marketing and branding sports franchises from the MLB, NFL and the NHL, and he understands that people truly do make the difference.

“A ballpark is, at the end of the day, concrete and steel, and in our case, boulders,” he said. “But the fact of the matter is that the park gets brought to life by the way the staff interacts with the customers and fans. We want to make sure that the fans leave smiling.”

“It’s about having family-affordable fun,” Lehner continued. “It’s about helping those fans create memories, and it starts with the staff. You have to have a good first impression in the parking lot, to a good last impression when that last run gets scored and the Boulders win or the last firework goes off and ev-

everyone goes home with a smile on their face even if the home team lost. “

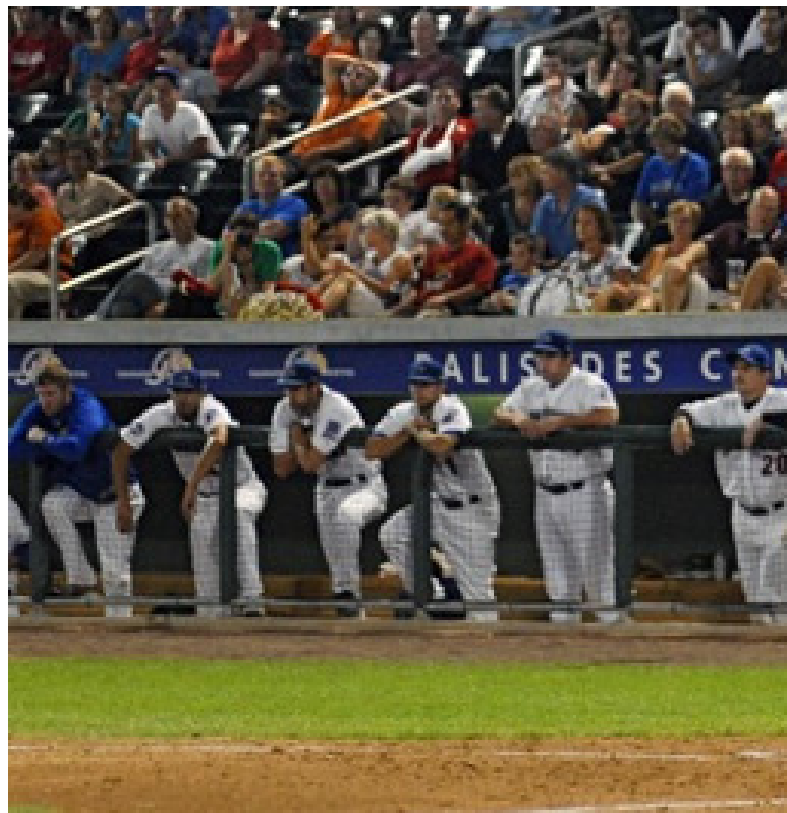
With 20 full-time employees, and another 100 or so on game days, it takes a lot to run a ballpark. As a result, each employee can be expected to wear many hats. From parking lot duties to concessions, to selling tickets and even lending a hand when unrolling the tarp in rainy weather, the staff is well-equipped to handle any situation.

“It’s a lot of responsibility,” Lehner added. “But it’s a fun responsibility, it’s not mundane. Every day is different in a good way when you work in minor league baseball.”

DEFENDING THE TITLE

Next on deck for the Rockland Boulders is a trip to the historic Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, New York. On July 17th, 2015, the Boulders will play ‘host’ to the New Jersey Jackals, which is the first time in more than six years that professional baseball will be played at the iconic stadium. In addition to the game day festivities, fans, players and staff will also be given tickets to visit the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

“We’re relocating one of our home games at



Provident Bank Park to Cooperstown, New York,” Lehner explained. “We want to make it a memorable experience, all of our season ticketholders get to go at no extra cost, as well as our corporate partners.”



“The Yankees are not going to play a game at Cooperstown this year,” he continued. “But the Rockland Boulders are, and we’re going to use that to thank corporate partners and find new ones too.”

The anticipation of the first-ever Can-Am Classic has led to excitement from around the league according to Lehner.

“This is just such a thrilling opportunity,” he said. “The excitement surrounding this game has already led to talks with the Quebec City Les Capitales about returning to Cooperstown in 2016 in what is sure to be another ‘Can-Am Classic.’”

As independent baseball continues to move forward, the Rockland Boulders are excited to continue growing and improving along with the Can-Am League. The 2015 season is officially underway, and with the Boulders off to a 8-3 start, the team is ready for the challenge of defending the title.

“I think that we, as the Rockland Boulders organization, came into independent baseball as it continues to grow, mature and get better quality players,” Lehner explained. “We’re really excited about where we sit, when you’re on top everyone wants to knock you off, so we’re getting ready to defend our title. We know that everybody is going to be gunning for us, and that’s okay, we’re up for that challenge.”

