



BASEBALLPARKS.COM™

For release at 3:00 p.m., August 6, 2014

El Paso's Southwest University Park named BaseballParks.com's Ballpark of the Year

It's always a sad situation when a city loses a Minor League baseball team. El Paso saw its beloved Diablos move away following the 2004 season. When the City realized that it would take a new ballpark to lure an affiliated Minor League franchise back to that market, they didn't just build a new park. No, they constructed one of the great facilities in the sport.

The sadness of 2004 has given way to rejoicing as the Pacific Coast League's El Paso Chihuahuas now play in the City's new ballpark. No doubt the rejoicing will turn to euphoria with this announcement: the El Paso Chihuahuas' **Southwest University Park is the BaseballParks.com Ballpark of the Year for 2014.**

The announcement of the award was made in the pages of the August 6th edition of *USA Today Sports Weekly*. Joe Mock, frequent contributor to *USA Today* publications, wrote the article that announced that El Paso's park is the winner of this year's honor. Mock is also the president of Grand Slam Enterprises which owns and operates the BaseballParks.com website.

The honor is given annually to the new or remodeled baseball stadium with the best combination of aesthetics, architectural design, attractive site selection and fan amenities. The plaque representing the award will be presented by Mock at the Chihuahuas' home game on August 28. This marks the 15th straight year that BaseballParks.com has presented such an award.

"Prior to this year, the fans and media in Birmingham exhibited the greatest response to their park winning the award," Mock noted about last year's winner, Regions Field, home of the Birmingham Barons. "This year, though, the level of excitement over my in-depth review by fans in the El Paso area has even topped what I saw last year. When they learn that their park has won this national honor, I expect the interest to be off the charts."

Josh Hunt, Managing Partner of MountainStar Sports Group, which owns and operates the Chihuahuas, was thrilled with the news. "This is truly an honor for us as well as for the entire community of El Paso. I believe our City can be very proud that the El Paso Chihuahuas play in a venue that is recognized as being the best new ballpark in the country. From the outset, ownership's objective was to build a first-class facility."

Hunt added, "The unique design was a key factor, as well. The project team started with a small, tight amount of land in the heart of our city, and turned it into a ballpark with distinct 'neighborhoods' that make up the total venue. And to top it off, we have incredibly supportive fans that create the best environment in Minor League Baseball. Populous, the construction team and consultants, and the City of El Paso should be very proud of this honor. It's really very special."

El Paso's Project Engineer for the ballpark, Alan Shubert, was equally happy when informed about the award. "This is fantastic news. Everyone involved in this worked diligently to have the very highest quality ballpark, and it's nice to know that this quality is being recognized with this award. Beyond that, El Paso deserves the best. It's a great town and it deserves this honor. I hope this ballpark is the first of more great venues to come for the City."

Pat O'Conner, the President and CEO of Minor League Baseball, released a statement that said in part, "We commend the Chihuahuas organization, MountainStar Sports Group and the city of El Paso for their dedication to creating a first-class environment for their players and fans." [O'Conner's complete statement is at the end of this release.]

Nationally known architecture firm Populous was behind the design of the park. Their job was particularly challenging because of the small size of the chosen site. "The ballpark is situated on one of the tightest sites in Minor League Baseball," said Mike Sabatini, Principal at Populous and designer of Southwest University Park, "but the constraints of the site became opportunities for us. This allowed us to create a unique, asymmetrical ballpark that is authentically El Paso. As an architect, there is nothing more gratifying than seeing a community enjoy and appreciate a ballpark and its design, which is exactly what has happened in El Paso. Here at Populous, we share in the pride El Pasoans feel in their new park, and in winning this award."

Populous is no stranger to this honor. This is the eighth time one of their ballparks has won, including PNC Park in 2001, Petco Park in 2004 and Pensacola Bayfront Stadium in 2012.

"Our design philosophy is rooted in creating incredible experiences and designing solutions that are authentic to the place, capturing the best attributes of a community, a city and a region through design," said David Bower, Principal at Populous. "In El Paso, we are incredibly proud of the way this philosophy manifested itself – we captured the city's prominent architectural style, from the classic brick to the influence of public art – on a site that allows for complete connectivity to the city and has become a spot for baseball to thrive in El Paso for decades to come."

The other finalists for the 2014 award were Cubs Park, the new home of Cubs spring training in Mesa, Arizona, and BB&T BallPark in Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte, like El Paso, has a Triple-A franchise.

"This year's new parks are all outstanding," observed Mock. "In particular, the Charlotte Knights' new facility is gorgeous and offers fans one of the very best views in the sport. In the end, though, the setting, exterior and miraculous design job by Populous carried the day for Southwest University Park. The fact that such an exemplary ballpark could be built on a site of less than six acres is astonishing."

The complete list of Ballpark of the Year winners can be found here:

<http://www.baseballparks.com/BallparkOfYrLaunch.asp>

Mock's review of El Paso's ballpark entitled "Artistic Ballpark Is a Masterpiece" can be found here:

<http://www.baseballparks.com/ElPaso-1.asp>

For more information on this award or on Baseballparks.com, contact Joe Mock at 512-826-0853.

BASEBALLPARKS.COM is a division of Grand Slam Enterprises, Inc. of Round Rock, Texas.
The address is P.O. Box 2530, Round Rock, TX 78680

Complete statement by Minor League Baseball President/CEO Pat O’Conner regarding El Paso’s park winning BaseballParks.com’s 2014 Ballpark of the Year:

“Since 2000, Minor League Baseball has built an impressive 58 new ballparks and Southwest University Park is yet another shining example of the immense popularity, growth and stability of Minor League Baseball in the sports landscape. Many of our stadiums feature the same amenities as Major League Baseball stadiums, and allow players to hone their skills from the early stages of their professional careers in our state-of-the-art facilities.

“We commend the Chihuahuas organization, MountainStar Sports Group and the city of El Paso for their dedication to creating a first-class environment for their players and fans. It is an honor for an MiLB stadium to be recognized as Baseballparks.com’s Ballpark of the Year for 2014.”