



# STADIUM JOURNEY

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# STADIUM JOURNEY



## Highlight Clips

By Zac Richardson, *Stadium Journey Special Correspondent*

Photo by Paul Swaney

Columbus, Ohio has the reputation of being a football town – and with good reason, given the rabid Ohio State Buckeye fan base. Not to be overlooked is an admirably loyal baseball following. The community has been rewarded in recent years with a pair of Triple-A National Championships, an affiliation with the Cleveland Indians, and a wonderful new home in Huntington Park.

The Columbus Clippers previous field was the somewhat charming, if antiquated, Cooper Stadium. “The Coop” hosted baseball in Columbus for nearly 70 years, going by three other names (Red Bird Stadium, Jets Stadium, Franklin County Stadium) and serving as an affiliate to five different MLB teams and one Negro League club, as well as seeing professional football and soccer action. Distinguished history aside, the facility itself, and especially its location-- southwest of downtown Columbus, bordered by interstate highways and cemeteries – ultimately left much to be desired.

So it came as a welcome development when plans for a new ballpark were announced, particularly appealing given its setting in the lively, downtown-adjacent Arena District (anchored by the NHL Blue Jackets’ Nationwide Arena, and surrounded by bars and restaurants). Designed by 360 Architecture, the firm whose work will be on full display in the form of MetLife Stadium during Super Bowl XLVIII in February, Huntington Park opened in 2009 to rave reviews, earning numerous Ballpark of the Year honors (among other commendations). The stadium

quickly became a fan favorite, as well. After finishing no higher than sixth in attendance in recent years, the Clippers led the league in Huntington Park’s maiden voyage, and haven’t finished lower than third in the seasons since.

This success has been aided by generally strong showings on the field, including back-to-back International League Governors’ Cups and Triple-A Championships in 2010 and 2011. Additionally, there is the added bonus of affiliation with one of Ohio’s MLB teams – an exciting first for Columbus, following past associations with the St. Louis Cardinals, Kansas City Athletics, Pittsburgh Pirates, New York Yankees, and Washington Nationals. But the best draw remains the game day experience, and the ballpark itself. It is perfectly designed with modern amenities, while at the same time blending into its surroundings as if it had been there all along (with passers-by watching the game from beyond the right field wall, for example, where home runs are often hit onto the street in this direction, as well).

Inside, Huntington Park has a host of familiar specialty seating options – ranging from the creature comforts that accompany suites and loge boxes, to more laidback center field lawn seating that is situated near a fountain in which kids may play. There is also a sizable picnic table area down the left field line, which sits across a concourse from one of the ballpark’s especially unique features: a three-story structure that has concessions on the main level, a Hall of Fame

Bar with field-view patios on the second floor, and Wrigleyville-esque rooftop bleachers up above. This is semi-counterbalanced down the right field line with a two-tier home run balcony that sits in fair territory atop a 22-foot wall, creating something of a mini-Green Monster – with a short porch for hitters, and a unique vantage point for spectators.

Huntington Park's official capacity is 10,100, but the concourses are spacious and concessions are plentiful, so even during sellouts things generally do not feel very congested. Unless you have your passes in-hand, the ticketing line can get a bit lengthy, with will call and walk-up purchases all in the same place (at the center field entrance). Such is the cost of doing business with a popular product in an appealing setting, though. Allowing a few extra minutes (or practicing a modicum of patience) makes this essentially a non-issue, and the Clippers have made a concerted effort to keep the wait less than 15 minutes when things are at their busiest.

Parking in any high-traffic area always requires some forethought, as well – but the Clippers website helps navigate potential obstacles, and unless a game night is co-headlined by a teenybopper concert at Nationwide Arena (last summer included shared dates with Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, and One Direction, to name a few), finding reasonably priced and accessible options should not be much of a problem.

Allowing time to arrive early is part of the fun anyway, especially with an atmosphere that is as family-friendly as Clippers games at Huntington Park. For instance, many games come with a first-come first-served giveaway (such as t-shirts, hats, sunglasses,

etc.), kids can test their arm speed at the radar-gun station or jump around in the bounce house, and for adults there are frequent drink specials, live music acts, and trivia contests to be enjoyed.

Once the action on the field starts, there is the game itself to follow, of course, as well as between-inning freebies and competitions, like the ever-popular hot dog race. Kids also look forward to the antics of the Clippers beloved mascots, Krash and LouSeal (who last year won a fan vote as Minor League Baseball's favorite), and there's always great food for everyone to enjoy – like buck-a-bone barbeque, 50 cent wings, and the famous Monday dime-a-dog nights.

The Clippers can boast a rare stadium-going experience that is both new and familiar, relaxing and exciting; in the words of President and General Manager Ken Schnacke, the team strives for the feel of “an outdoor park where baseball is played,” and they hit their target on the screws. Soon to enter its sixth campaign, Huntington's charm is still going strong, and promises to be a fixture in downtown Columbus for many years to come. It is a summertime gift that keeps on giving for Central Ohioans, and is worth the special trip.



## Wrigley Field

Home of the Chicago Cubs  
Chicago, IL

It will be interesting to watch as Wrigley Field evolves under new owner Tom Ricketts. There have already been some substantial (and necessary) changes made to the Friendly Confines, and more is to come. The neighborhood alone helps to elevate this experience, but Wrigley Field will always be a special place inside.



Photo by Michael Rusignuolo