

History

1980s

After Tampa was awarded the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Tampa Bay Rowdies in the 1970s, St. Petersburg decided it wanted a share of the professional sports scene in Tampa Bay. It was decided early on that they would attempt to attract Major League Baseball. Possible designs for a baseball park or multi-purpose stadium were proposed as early as 1983. One such design, in the same location where Tropicana Field would ultimately be built, called for an open-air stadium with a circus tent-like covering. It took several design cues from Kauffman Stadium, including fountains beyond the outfield wall.^[6]

Ultimately, it was decided that a stadium with a fixed permanent dome was necessary for a prospective major league team to be viable in the area, due to its hot, humid summers and frequent thunderstorms. The ballpark began construction in 1986 in the hope that it would lure a Major League Baseball team to the Tampa Bay area.

The stadium, built originally as the **Florida Suncoast Dome**, was first used in an attempt to

entice the Chicago White Sox to relocate if a new ballpark were not built to replace the aging Comiskey Park. The governments of Chicago and Illinois eventually agreed to build a New Comiskey Park (now known as U.S. Cellular Field) in 1989.

1990s

The stadium was finished in 1990, but still had no tenants. The venue made St. Petersburg a finalist in the MLB expansion for 1993, but they lost out to Miami and Denver. There were rumors of the Seattle Mariners moving in the early part of the 1990s, and the San Francisco Giants came close to moving to the area, with Tampa Bay investors even announcing they were in a press conference in 1992. However, the sale was blocked by National League owners who voted against the sale and move in November 1992^[7] under pressure from San Francisco officials and the then-owner of the Florida Marlins, Blockbuster Video Chairman H. Wayne Huizenga^[8]. A local boycott of Blockbuster Video stores occurred for several years thereafter.

The Suncoast Dome did manage to gain a tenant in 1993 when the National Hockey League's Tampa Bay Lightning made the stadium its home for three seasons. In the process, the Suncoast Dome was renamed the **Thunderdome**. Because of the large capacity of what was basically a park built for baseball, several NHL attendance records were set during their time there^[9]. The Tampa Bay Storm of the AFL also played there during the Thunderdome era, and set attendance records for that league as well^[10].

	Sports (Tampa); Criswell, Blizzard & Blouin Architects (St. Petersburg)
Capacity	45,369 (1998) ^[1] 38,437 (2007) 36,048 (2008) ^[2] 35,041 (ALDS) / (ALCS) ^[3] 40,473 (ALCS) / (WS) ^[4] 36,973 (2009) ^[5] 43,772 (without tarp covered seats)
Field dimensions	Left Field - 315 ft (96 m) Left-Center - 370 ft (110 m) Center Field - 404 ft (123 m) Right-Center - 370 ft (110 m) Right Field - 322 ft (98 m) Backstop - 50 ft (15 m)
	Tenants
	Tampa Bay Rays (MLB) (1998–present) St. Petersburg Bowl (NCAA) (2008–present) Tampa Bay Storm (AFL) (1991–1996) Tampa Bay Lightning (NHL) (1993–1996) NCAA Men's Final Four (1999) Florida Tuskers (UFL) (2009)

Finally, in 1995, the dome received a baseball team when MLB expanded to the Tampa Bay area. Changes were made to the stadium and the name, which was changed due to the sale of naming rights to Tropicana Products, thus renaming it Tropicana Field in 1996. The completion of the Ice Palace in downtown Tampa permitted "The Trop" to be vacated for preparation for its intended purpose, as the Lightning and Storm moved into the facility that was built for them. A \$70 million renovation then took place — to upgrade a stadium that had cost \$130 million to complete only 8 years earlier. Ebbets Field was the model for the renovations, which included a replica of the famous rotunda that greeted Dodger fans for many years. The first regular season baseball game took place at the park on March 31, 1998, when the Devil Rays faced the Detroit Tigers, losing 11–6.

An SCCA Trans-Am Series race was held from 1996-1997 on a temporary course encompassing the parking lot and surrounding streets.

Although Tropicana was purchased by PepsiCo in 1998, PepsiCo did not elect to make any changes to Tropicana's naming rights.

Tropicana Field played host to the 1999 NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four which saw the Connecticut Huskies beat the Duke Blue Devils 77–74 for the championship. Since then, there has been no NCAA basketball game played at Tropicana Field.

2000s

The park was initially built with an AstroTurf surface, but it was replaced in 2000 by softer FieldTurf, becoming the first major professional facility to use it. A new version of FieldTurf, FieldTurf Duo, was installed prior to the 2007 season. Unlike other artificial turf fields used in baseball, the field at Tropicana has full dirt basepaths and pitching mound as opposed to having only dirt "sliding pits" around the bases. Since Tropicana Field does not need to convert between baseball and football, sliding pits, designed to save re-configuration time, were unnecessary. On August 6, 2007, the astro turf warning track was replaced by brown-colored stone filled FieldTurf Duo.



Tropicana Field from the air.

Tropicana Field underwent a further \$25-million facelift prior to the 2006 season. Another \$10 million in improvements was added during the season. In 2006, the Devil Rays added a live Cownose ray tank to Tropicana Field. The tank is located just behind the center field wall, in clear view of the play on the field. People can go up to the tank to touch the creatures. Further improvements prior to the 2007 offseason, in addition to the new FieldTurf, include additional family features in the right field area, the creation of a new premium club, and several new video boards including a new 35 ft (11 m) x 64 ft. (10.5 m x 19.4m) Daktronics LED main video board that is four times larger than the original video board. The 2007 renovation also added built-in high-definition television capabilities to the ballpark, with Fox Sports Florida and WXPX airing at least a quarter of the schedule in HD in 2007 and accommodating the new video board's 16x9 aspect ratio.

On September 3, 2008, in a game between the Rays and the New York Yankees, Tropicana Field saw the first official use of instant replay in the history of Major League Baseball. The disputed play involved a home run hit above the left field foul pole by Yankee Alex Rodriguez. The ball was called a home run on the field, but was close enough that the umpires opted to view the replay to verify the call.

^[1] Later, the Trop saw the first case of a call being overturned by instant replay, when a fly ball by Carlos Peña originally ruled a ground-rule double due to fan interference, was overturned and made a

home run on September 19. The umpires determined that the fan in question, originally believed to have reached over the right field wall, did not reach over the wall.^[12]

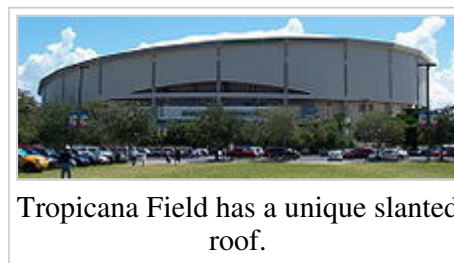
In October 2008, Tropicana Field hosted its first ever baseball postseason games as the Rays met the Chicago White Sox in the American League Division Series, the Boston Red Sox in the American League Championship Series, and the Philadelphia Phillies in the World Series. It hosted the on-field trophy presentations for the Rays when they became the American League Champions on October 19, following Game 7 of the ALCS. Chase Utley hit the first ever World Series home run at Tropicana Field during the first inning of Game 1 of the 2008 World Series. The Rays ended up losing the game 3-2 and eventually the World Series to the Phillies 4 games to 1.

On December 20, 2008, Tropicana Field was converted into a football stadium for the day to host the St. Petersburg Bowl, a college football bowl game sanctioned by the NCAA.^[13] ^[14] This makes Tropicana Field one of the few venues to host the "big four" major North American sports: baseball, basketball, football and hockey (and arena football, as well). The Trop returned to a football configuration on October 30, 2009, to host one of the three home games of the Florida Tuskers of the United Football League, which the Rays had invested in.^[15]

Features

Architectural

The most recognizable exterior feature of Tropicana Field is the slanted roof. It was designed at an angle to reduce the interior volume in order to reduce cooling costs, and to better protect the stadium from hurricanes. The dome is supported by a tensegrity structure and is lit up with orange lights after the Rays win a home game. With the Minnesota Twins vacating the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome following the 2009 season, Tropicana Field is the only active Major League Baseball stadium with a fixed (i.e., not retractable) roof.



Tropicana Field has a unique slanted roof.

The main rotunda, on the east end of the stadium, resembles the Ebbets Field rotunda on the interior. The walkway to the main entrance of the park features a 900 ft.-long (272 m) ceramic tile mosaic, made of 1,849,091 one-inch-square tiles. It is the largest outdoor tile mosaic in Florida, and the fifth-largest in the United States. It was sponsored by Florida Power Corporation, which is now a part of Progress Energy.^[16]

The primary 100-level concourse is at street level, with elevators, escalators and stairs separating the outfield and infield sections, since the ground is at different grades on either side. The 200-level loge box concourse is further separated, and is carpeted, as it includes the entrances to most of the luxury suites. The 300-level concourse is the highest of the concourses.

Seating and amenities

The seating is arranged with odd sections on the left field side, and even sections on the right field side. 100-level seating wraps around the entire field, broken at center field by the Batter's Eye Restaurant, with loge boxes along the infield from foul pole to foul pole. 200-level seating is the press boxes along the foul lines, broken by the press box behind home plate, with the luxury boxes directly behind and

above them. 300-level seating wraps around the infield along the lines, and also features the "tbt* Party Deck," a small-capacity seating area above the left field outfield seats with separate concessions inside. Rows are lettered starting closest to home plate and rise as you move further away.

There are a total of 63 luxury suites. 48 are accessible from the 200-level, while the other 15 are located on the 100-level.

The Home Plate Club, sponsored by Kane's Furniture until 2007, features its own entrance, recliner seats and a premium buffet with in-seat service. The second club section, the Whitney Bank Club, is along the first-base side in the 100 section, at the Loge Box level. It features its own premium buffet and premium seating.

Field-level party sections were installed in the corners in 2006. The left field party section is the "Corona Beach Bar", while the right field party section is the "Checkers Bullpen Cafe." Before 2008, tickets to the Checkers Bullpen Cafe included a free meal at the Checkers kiosk immediately adjacent to the section. As of 2008, both the Corona and Checkers party sections feature all-you-can-eat buffets.

In 2008, the Rays also set aside a section of the Press Boxes on the right field side as an all-you-can-eat buffet section with typical ballpark fare. It is usually available for group parties, but it is available for individual ticketing on select dates.

Currently, the top 1/3 of the upper deck seating is tarped over, artificially reducing the stadium's capacity to 36,048 for the 2008 regular season. It was further reduced to 35,041 for the 2008 postseason since the tbt* Party Deck has been reserved by Major League Baseball as an auxiliary press area. On October 14, 2008, the Rays announced that the upper deck tarps would be removed for the remainder of the postseason, starting with a Game 6 of the 2008 American League Championship Series. This increased the capacity of the stadium to nearly 41,000, depending on standing-room-only tickets sold.^[17]

Concessions

There are two sit-down restaurants at Tropicana Field: the Center Field Brewhouse (located on the outfield 100-level concourse; formerly sponsored by Budweiser) and the Batter's Eye Restaurant (accessible via escalator/elevator from the main rotunda). The Center Field Brewhouse has typical restaurant fare, while the Batter's Eye has a premium buffet. The Batter's Eye is also available for group parties.

The Cuesta-Rey Cigar Bar is located across from the Batter's Eye, and offers a large selection of cigars, many produced by a company founded in Tampa. It is the only indoor location at Tropicana Field where smoking is permitted.

In addition to various generic vendors and Checkers, there are also concession stands for Outback Steakhouse (including their famous "Bloomin' Onion" appetizer) and Papa John's Pizza. Both Checkers and Outback are Tampa Bay-based establishments. To compete with established stadiums' hot dog traditions, the Trop introduced the "Sting 'Em" Dog in 2007. This consists of a regular hot dog topped with chili and cheese.^[1] (http://www.sptimes.com/2007/04/11/Taste/Hot_diggity_dogs.shtml) It was renamed "The Heater" in 2008.

Ted Williams Museum/Hitters Hall of Fame

In 2006, the **Ted Williams Museum/Hitters Hall of Fame** was moved to the facility after its original facility in Hernando, Florida, went bankrupt. A new 7,000-square-foot (650 m²) upstairs wing was

opened in 2007, which now houses the exhibits on Ted Williams' careers both with the Boston Red Sox and the United States Marine Corps during World War II and the Korean War, and the monuments to the members of the Hitters Hall of Fame complete with memorabilia, with donated authentic memorabilia wherever possible and many of Williams' own personal mementos from his career and post-playing life. Williams did not induct himself into his own Hitters Hall of Fame, and was inducted in 2003 only after he died.

The museum is open during game days, opening at the same time as the park and closing after the seventh inning with the concession stands. Admission is free, and the museum is open to all ticketholders.

Criticisms



The catwalks at Tropicana Field.

Catwalks

Among the most cited criticisms about the stadium are the four catwalks that hang from the ceiling. The catwalks are part of the dome's support structure. It was built with cable-stayed technology similar to that of the Georgia Dome. It also supports the lighting and speaker systems. Because the dome is tilted toward the outfield, the catwalks are lower in the outfield.

The catwalks are lettered, with the highest inner ring being the A Ring, out to the furthest and lowest, the D Ring. The A Ring is entirely in play, while the B, C and D Rings have yellow posts bolted to them to delineate the relative position of the foul lines.

Any ball touching the A Ring, or the in-play portion of the B Ring, can drop for a hit or be caught for an out. The C and D Rings are out of play; if they are struck between the foul poles, then the ball is ruled a home run.

A few hits have been lost as a result of the catwalks. For example, Devil Ray Jonny Gomes was called out during a game against the Toronto Blue Jays on May 12, 2006, when a ball he hit landed in the B Ring and rolled off to be caught by Toronto shortstop John McDonald. By the time it was caught, Gomes was already headed for home plate. Although Rays manager Joe Maddon tried to argue that it should have been at least a ground rule double since it stayed in the B Ring for a while before coming loose, umpires eventually ruled against the Rays and called Gomes out.

On May 26, 2008, Carlos Peña hit a pop-fly to center field that likely would have been caught by Texas Rangers center fielder Josh Hamilton. The ball instead hit the B ring catwalk and did not come down. Peña was mistakenly given a home run, but after deliberation the umpires awarded him a ground rule double. This was the second time this had happened, as José Canseco hit a ball that stuck in the same catwalk on May 2, 1999.^[18]

Many players have hit the C and D rings for home runs. The first player to ever hit the rings for a home run was Edgar Martinez of the Seattle Mariners on May 29, 1998. Martinez's home run went off the D ring. Three players before him hit balls that went into the C ring, however at the time, balls hitting the C ring were not ruled a home run. Two days prior to Martinez's home run, the ground rules were changed so that a if ball hit the C ring, it would be called a home run.^[19] The first player to hit the rings for a home run in postseason play was Rays third baseman Evan Longoria, who hit the C ring off Javier

Vázquez of the Chicago White Sox on 10-02-2008, in the third inning of Game 1 of the 2008 American League Division Series.

Bullpens exposed and in play

The bullpens are located along (and close to) the left and right field foul lines and there are no barriers that separate them from the field of play. In fact, fly balls hit into the bullpens are in play. The bullpen players and the pitching mounds are obstacles for fielders chasing fly balls into the pen. Teams have to station a batboy behind the catchers in the bullpens to prevent them from being hit by foul balls from behind.

Drab interior environment

Another criticism of the stadium is the drab interior environment, especially early in the (Devil) Rays existence, when the interior was compared to a large warehouse. However, since it was designed specifically with baseball in mind, it is somewhat smaller and the atmosphere is somewhat more intimate than in other domed stadiums, which often are built to also accommodate football games.

The current Rays' Stuart Sternberg-led ownership group has invested several million dollars in recent years to add various amenities and decorations including a larger scoreboard, video wall, catwalk sleeves, an outfield touch-tank featuring cownose rays, the Mountain Dew Extreme Zone featuring a massive sound system and numerous baseball video games, and other miscellaneous improvements to make the facility more attractive and "fan friendly".^[20]

Dome location

The dome was built on the former site of a coal gasification plant and in 1987, hazardous chemicals were found in the soil around the construction site. The city spent millions of dollars to remove the chemicals from the area.^[21]

It is also widely criticized as being located quite far away from the center of the Tampa Bay area's population base in Tampa.^{[22][23][24]}

See also

- St. Pete Times Forum, home of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Tampa Bay Storm
- Raymond James Stadium, home of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers
- Rays Ballpark, proposed new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays that is currently delayed indefinitely.

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External links

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- Official website of Tropicana Field (<http://tampabay.devilrays.mlb.com/tb/ballpark/index.jsp>)
- Tropicana Field Review and Photos (<http://www.baseballstadiumreviews.com/Stadium%20Home%20Pages/Major%20League%20Home%20Pages/Tropicana%20Field-Rays/Tropicana%20Field.html>)

Events and Tenants		
Preceded by first ballpark	Home of the Tampa Bay Rays 1998–present	Succeeded by current
Preceded by first venue	Home of the St. Petersburg Bowl 2008–present	Succeeded by current
Preceded by Expo Hall	Home of the Tampa Bay Lightning 1993–1996	Succeeded by Ice Palace
Preceded by Pittsburgh Civic Arena	Home of the Tampa Bay Storm 1991–1996	Succeeded by Ice Palace
Preceded by Schleyerhalle Stuttgart	Davis Cup Final Venue 1990	Succeeded by Palais des Sports de Gerland Lyon
Preceded by Alamodome	NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Tournament Finals Venue 1999	Succeeded by RCA Dome

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