

# McDonald Stadium- "The Baseball Plant"

*July 12, 2017 | Sharon Guthrie, El Dorado Main Street*



The El Dorado Broncos collegiate baseball team has started their season with all the exciting, familiar features: free admission, the national anthem, the crack of the bat, the shouts from the crowd, tempting concessions, and nail-biting ninth innings. Summer baseball has begun at the historic McDonald Stadium. Gazing about between innings, one begins to ponder: How did El Dorado come to possess such an historic baseball park?

Flashback to 1938. Manuel "Babe" Goff, the manager of Stephen's Auto Supply, was a baseball enthusiast who envisioned a baseball stadium for El Dorado's local teams. He formed a committee to work toward that end, and at their first meeting showed them the perfect place to build. Exactly where McDonald Stadium stands today. The only problem was the land belonged to the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Undaunted, Babe Goff went to work. He persuaded the railroad to transfer the land to the city, and it became Central Park. He persuaded the Work Projects Administration (WPA) in Wichita to support construction of a concrete stadium in El Dorado. He even persuaded Cities Service Company (now Citgo Petroleum) to donate steel oil derricks for light poles, and Kansas Gas and Electric (KG&E, now Westar Energy) to furnish the lights and bulbs at cost.

The building of the stadium became a community project, with financial support coming from local oil companies, banks, and donation cans placed around town. Employees worked on their days off; townspeople gave of their spare time. Retailers provided lumber and materials at cost. Local carpenters oversaw the building of the locker rooms, benches, restrooms, and fences. When construction was complete, costs for El Dorado's first baseball

diamond were just over \$26,000. The grandstand, roof, and supports were all of concrete - unusual for Kansas baseball parks of that era. The stadium seated well over 900 spectators, and came to be known across the state as one of the most modern sports centers in Kansas.

On May 23, 1940, the stadium was not yet complete, but the field was ready for the dedication ceremonies of "The Baseball Plant". The El Dorado Municipal Band performed, speeches were given, and spectators enjoyed a doubleheader, with local businesses sponsoring teams to play against those from Augusta and Wichita. Though the stadium was dedicated as "The Baseball Plant", locals referred to it as Central Park Stadium, since it was the stadium built in Central Park. When a postcard of the stadium was issued, Central Park Stadium was the only name given.



In 1942, James W. McDonald moved to El Dorado, and immediately saw a need for youth recreational programs. Starting with three baseball teams in 1943, over the next 20 years his programs grew to more than a thousand Little Leaguers and nearly 1700 softball girls. Each night of the week in El Dorado (except Sunday) there were ten baseball games and four softball games being played. In 1962, Ray Dumont, President of the National Baseball Congress, saluted El Dorado Youth Baseball, stating that, per population of the city, the program was "the largest, not only in Kansas, but in the nation."

Jim McDonald brought changes to El Dorado High School as well. As head coach (1944-1969), he resurrected the baseball program, which apparently had not fielded a team since 1935. He persuaded the Kansas High School Activities Association to reinstate the baseball tournament, and even convinced them to hold the tournament in El Dorado. Central Park Stadium would host the State Tournament 34 times between 1949 and 1995.

On July 27, 1972, Central Park Stadium was renamed to McDonald Stadium, in dedication to Mr. McDonald's "unsurpassed contribution to the youth of El Dorado." In May 2012, the name "Brad Long Field" was added to McDonald Stadium in recognition of Mr. Long's highly distinguished career as head baseball coach at El Dorado High School.

McDonald Stadium has been home for the El Dorado High School Wildcats since 1944, Butler Community College Grizzlies since 1978, and the El Dorado Broncos since 1996. For decades, it has provided enjoyment for countless players and fans—and all thanks to the vision of one man, and the labor and sacrifices of a supportive community. So, the next time you're over at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Griffith Street, take a moment to look around and delight in the history that surrounds you.

Article by Sharon Guthrie

Photos from <http://www.eldoradobroncos.org/>