



February 21, 2010

Season ticket success could lead to more seats

By Gary Fauber

Prospective fans of the West Virginia Miners have a say in the growth of Linda K. Epling Stadium.

As it stands now, premium seating capacity at the new stadium is 1,200. That only accounts for tip-up seats with arm rests and drink holders. General admission seating increases the overall capacity.

But, Miners owner Doug Epling could expand premium seating if need be.

"If season ticket sales warrant it," general manager Mike Gilligan said, "we would add more by opening day."

The Miners will make their home debut June 5 against the Slippery Rock Sliders.

Season ticket packages for premium seats are \$175. Packages for general seating are \$125.

Individual seats on days of games are \$8 for premium seats and \$5 for general seating.

Season tickets are on sale now by calling 304-252-7233 (SAFE) or in person at Upper Deck Training Center at 476 Ragland Road from noon to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. You can also visit the team Web site, www.wvminersbaseball.com.

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The Miners are still in need of host families for the players this summer.

A limited number of families within the Greater Beckley/Raleigh County area who would be interested in hosting 1-2 collegiate athletes for the summer are being sought. These "Miner Families" must provide a bed, as well as a packed lunch for most days. The Prospect League will take care of all transportation and dinner costs.

Ideally, families would live no farther than 45 minutes away from the stadium.

Gilligan said some families have already stepped up, but more are needed.

"All minor league communities do this," Gilligan said. "This would be ideal for someone who has a second home or an additional bedroom, or somebody who has kids who want a big

brother.”

Also needed is an overall host mother to look out for all the players.

“The more comfortable you can make a kid feel at home, the translation is that he will play well on the field,” Gilligan said. “Without distraction they are more comfortable and have more confidence. It’s best if they get a good meal and a good night’s sleep.”

There are benefits to being a host family, from season tickets and a parking pass, in-game and on-field recognition and souvenir discounts.

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Ryan Howard didn’t just walk into the front office of the Philadelphia Phillies and apply for a job as the team’s starting first baseman.

The left-handed former Most Valuable Player was seen by hundreds of scouts before the Phillies drafted him in 2001.

The next Ryan Howard could be here in Beckley this summer and, rest assured, he will be seen.

“That’s something that I don’t think the people have clearly grasped onto yet,” Gilligan said, “is how many Major League Baseball scouts are going to be continuously in our community all summer long to check out not only our talent, but the talent of the visiting team coming into our region.”

“Go to any Prospect League game and you will likely see 4-6 future major leaguers, two to three from each team,” Houston Astros scout Nick Vinuto said. “I look forward to visiting southern West Virginia to scout future Houston Astros.”

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