

Freedom Park renovation features 6 historic ballpark replicas

Story by Don Cameron  
Photos by Tom Smedes

**B**ig League Dreams complexes are awe-inspiring for their re-creations of outfield walls. Historical grandstands. Superior playing surfaces. Spectator amenities.

Jeff Odekirk's favorite part is the parking lot. "I like to hang out by the front gate and see their reactions.

Whether they're T-ballers or adult softball players, they all get a little giddy when they see it for the first time," said Odekirk, the managing director of Big League Dreams USA.

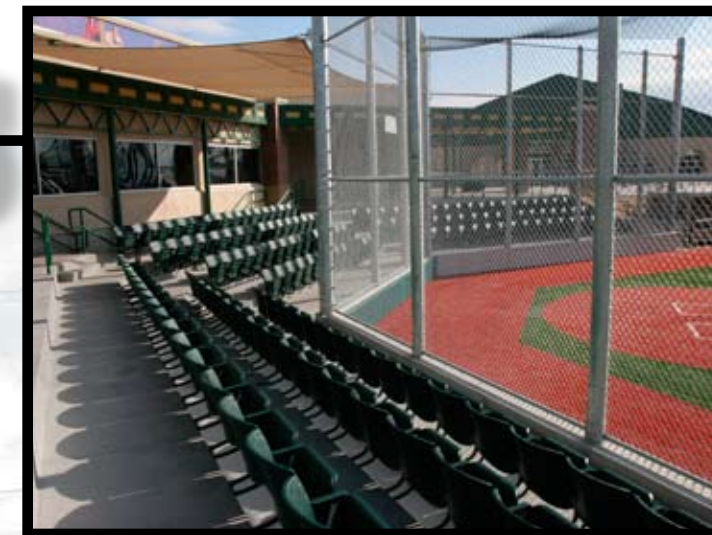
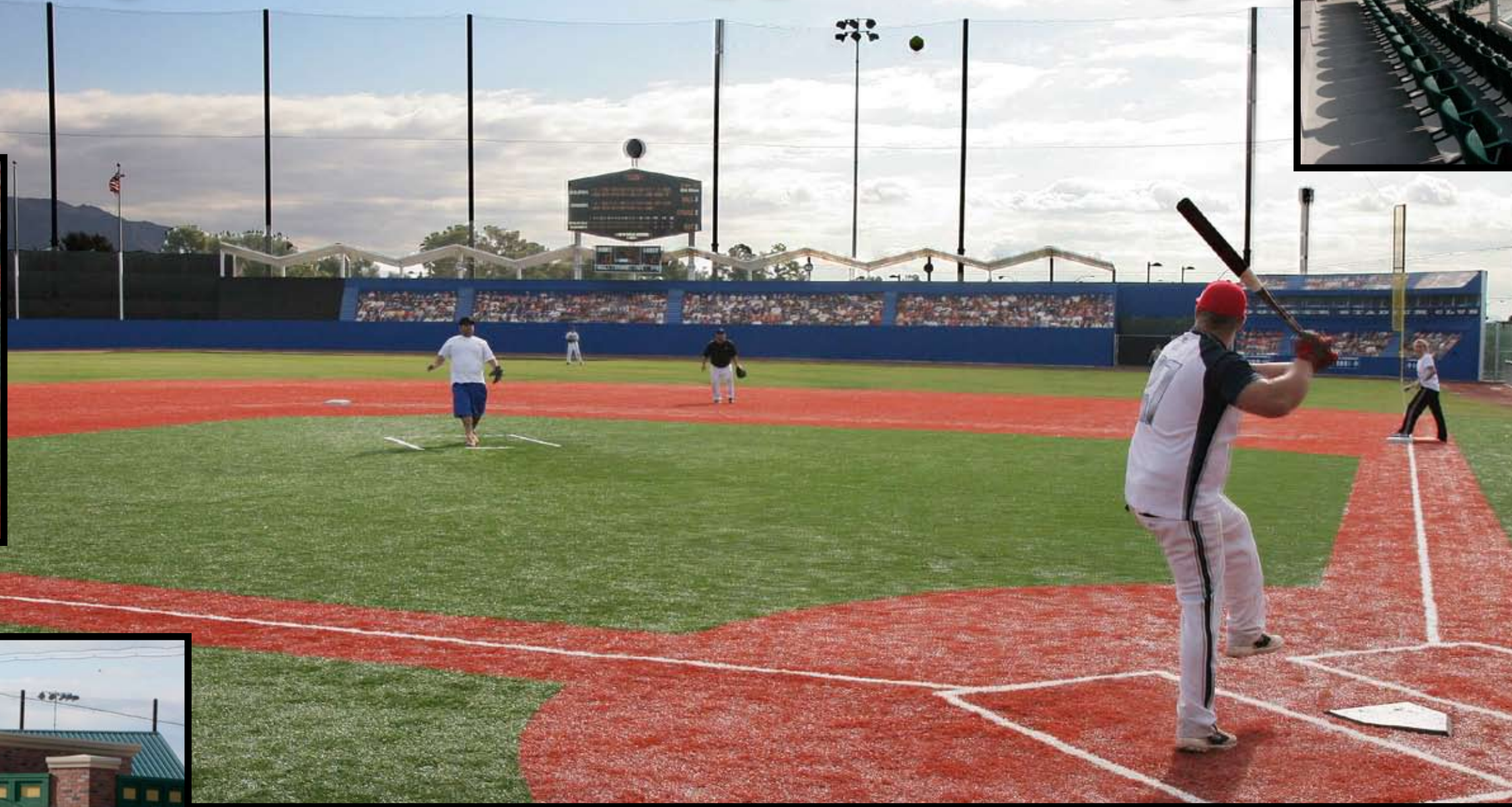
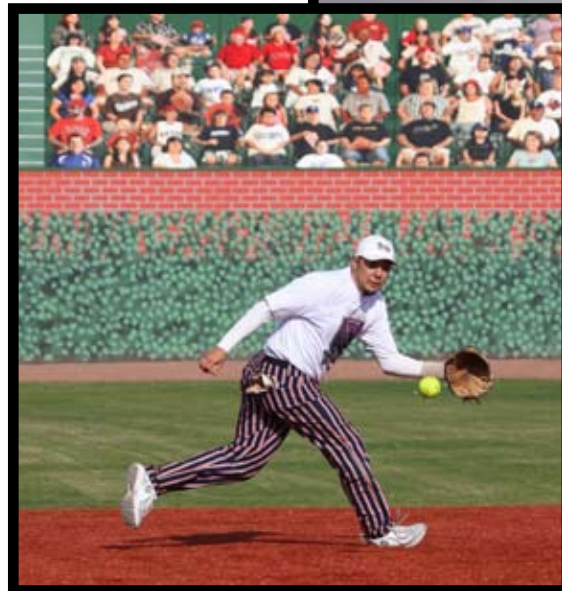
The company opened its 10th sports park in January, in what seems like the perfect location — Las Vegas.

"So far, so good," Odekirk said. "We've had a really nice response to the complex. It is a beautiful complex, and one of our nicer Big League Dreams parks."

The 35-acre Big League Dreams is part of the city's upgrade of the 68-acre Freedom Park, which includes a new pool, soccer fields and improved walking trails. The Big League Dreams Sports Park in Las Vegas features six fields replicating famous

Major League Baseball stadiums — Fenway Park, Yankee Stadium, Dodger Stadium, Angels Stadium, Wrigley Field

# Big League Dreams happen in Vegas



Above: Stadium style seating are at all six fields at the new Big League Dreams Complex in Las Vegas.

Left: The batter takes a swing during an ASA tournament on the replica Dodger Stadium Field in Las Vegas.

Far left: Las Vegas' Z-Squad shortstop Trever Codie makes a play on the replica Wrigley Field.

Far left below: The entrance to the new Big League Dreams Complex in Las Vegas.

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and Crosley Field. The facility also includes two sports-themed restaurants, an indoor field house for soccer and other activities, batting cages and an area for picnics and private parties.

"In my 12 years of doing this, the best response I ever heard was at a youth tournament, in the parking lot, when a group of kids ages 11 or 12 were walking in, and as they got close to the entrance and saw it for the first time, one of them said, 'Mother of god, this place is awesome!' That brought a big smile to my face," Odekirk said.

Six nights a week, the park hosts adult softball leagues for women's, men's and coed play, with action for all skill levels. Tournaments are booked for every weekend of the year, for adult softball, boys baseball

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and girls fastpitch. Big League Dreams is operating and maintaining the sports park in a public-private partnership with the city of Las Vegas.

"I can't wait to see kids shagging flies and hitting home runs in our very own versions of Fenway Park, Dodger Stadium and these other historic replica fields," said Mayor Pro Tem Gary Reese, whose district includes the park. "The renovation of Freedom Park, including the Big League Dreams complex, has really made this a special place for the community to come together to enjoy themselves."

The Jan. 25 park opening featured baseball players Jason Giambi, Jeremy Giambi, Bobby Grich, Wally Joyner and

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Bill Russell, as well as Las Vegas Mayor Oscar B. Goodman and Clark County Commissioner Larry Brown, a former pro ballplayer who helped forge the public-private partnership between the city and Big League Dreams.

Big League Dreams has a 30-year maintenance and operations agreement with the city, covering all expenses related to the sports park at no cost to the city, which shares the gross revenue from the complex.

The major attractions of the \$28.5 million facility are the replica ballparks.

"With the majority of players, their favorite is Fenway Park," Odekirk said. "That's the field where everybody wants to play left field, whether they're an out-

fielder or an infielder. They all want to get a chance to play left field and field a ball off the Monster."

Other touches enhance the experience.

"One of the unique things is sunken dugouts, just like the big leaguers," Odekirk said. "That adds to the atmosphere and contributes to the experience of feeling like you're playing in the big leagues."

Big League Dreams, headquartered in Chino Hills, Calif., now features 10 complexes across the West, with five more in the design stage. California will soon boast 10 Big League Dream centers, with the others in Texas, Nevada and Arizona. Odekirk said the company is aiming for a Florida destination in the near future.

Check out [www.BigLeagueDreams.com](http://www.BigLeagueDreams.com) for more information.

The Vegas facility is a natural fit. Sin City has long been a haven for sports tournaments, with top-notch facilities, outstanding ballplaying weather and, of course, entertainment options for all ages and lifestyles. Still, nothing like Big League Dreams had found its niche in the shadow of The Strip. Until now.

"Las Vegas is the most unique city probably in the world," Odekirk said. "To be able to come and spend the weekend in Vegas and spend it at one of the most unique complexes in the world at Big League Dreams is something any softball player would want to experience at least once."