

Camelback Ranch opens

Dodgers, White Sox play 1st game at West Valley's 2nd new MLB ballpark

Casey Pritchard

assistant sports editor

Fifty years ago, the Los Angeles Dodgers and Chicago White Sox met in the World Series. On Sunday, they hooked up for a game that meant much less, but nevertheless, it's a day that will forever be remembered.

The Dodgers and White Sox opened their brand new facility, the Ballpark at Camelback Ranch, to 11,280 fans. Unlike the '59 Fall Classic, in which the Dodgers won, the White Sox prevailed on Sunday, 3-2. However, fans and players of both sides are winners with a gorgeous new stadium in the West Valley.

"It's been great. It's awesome," White Sox catcher A.J. Pierzynski said. "They did a great job of building it and putting everything in it and getting it ready so quickly. You can't ask for much more out of an organization and out of a community and what they did and the way they did it, it's been great."

The Dodgers and White Sox are sharing the new 272-acre facility, which is at the northwest corner of 107th Avenue and Camelback Road. For the White Sox, their move took them just up Interstate 10 from Tucson, while the Dodgers moved across the country from Vero Beach, Fla.

There are also differences between the teams in regards to what they're used to. The Sox were moving from Tucson Electric, which is just 11 years old, while the Dodgers are getting a taste of what state-of-the-art ballparks are like in Arizona. The Dodgers had been in Vero Beach since 1949, and playing at Holman Stadium since 1953.

"There's nothing else to really say - proximity is closer, the facility is of course going to be better," Dodgers outfielder and former Arizona State University standout Andre Ethier said. "We're talking about we're working out of a 50-year-old facility to a two-month-old facility, it's a lot different."

"Things are nice, no offense to what we had in Florida. I guess it's just a sign of the times, a positive change and one that's been a little overdue for the Dodgers moving west."

Impact move

The move certainly brought out Dodgers fans who had never seen the club in spring training. Charles Avila, a Los Angeles resident, made a day trip with his wife, Fern, to see the opening game. Both are die-hard fans but never went to Florida because of the expense.

"I like it, especially my seats," said Avila, who was about eight rows up from the field, right behind home plate.



CHICAGO WHITE SOX FAN KAREN YOUNG of Peoria dances to the song YMCA during the seventh-inning stretch as the Los Angeles Dodgers take on the Chicago White Sox opening day of spring training at Camelback Ranch Stadium in Glendale Sunday.

Leora Lund is another fan who is glad the Dodgers came out west. The Glendale resident is a Diamondbacks season-ticket holder during the regular season, and now a Dodgers spring training season-ticket holder. Her allegiances are split though, as she'll root for the Dodgers during the spring and the D-backs in the regular season. What would happen if the two met in the playoffs?

"That would be a problem," Lund said. "I'd probably have to go with the Dodgers because I was there when they first moved to L.A., so I remember all that."

Lund thinks Camelback Ranch is the nicest Cactus League facility, she said.

"The only other one that comes close to this one is Surprise," Lund said. "It's a much better facility, much better looking."

Another Dodgers fan was not so pleased with the ballpark. Gary Kruse, a Los Angeles native who now lives in Colorado, didn't like how much seating there was. He enjoys the more confined atmosphere like that of the Mariners and Padres stadium in Peoria.

"There's more people and you're not close to the field like in the other stadiums," he said. "Regular season, you're going to deal with all the crowds. When you go to spring training you expect less crowds and a more intimate feeling about the baseball."

White Sox fan Bob Cann didn't have any qualms with the park. He was alongside the first-base railing before the game, waiting for players to sign autographs on their way from the clubhouse to the dugout. The Chicagoan, who has made the trip to Arizona the last two years, had nothing but positive things to say about the White Sox's new home.

"This is awesome, it's beautiful, a great facility," Cann said. "Even the weather is good, you know."

Mike and Vince Sclafani, White Sox fans who also made the trip from Chicago to take in a few games, took their sons out. Their names are also Mike and Vince.

"This is a lot nicer [than Tucson Electric]," Mike Sr. said.

"There's a lot of parking, we like the area [behind home plate] where the skyboxes are," Vince Sr. added.

There are 5,500 parking spaces to accommodate the 13,000-fan seating capacity (10,000 seats, 3,000 lawn).

Pre-game festivities included a Native American dance on the infield, roster introductions and the national anthem sung by Glendale hometown hero Jordin Sparks. As the American Idol season-six winner finished her rendition, F-16s from Luke Air Force Base flew overhead.

During the eighth inning, fans started doing the "wave," serenading the ballpark with a traditional Dodgers' stadium custom. The White Sox got the last laugh though, staging a 3-run rally in the ninth to win.

Casey Pritchard can be reached by e-mail at cpritchard@westvalleyview.com.