

# Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

## WRIGLEY FIELD - (PART III) - LET THERE BE LIGHT

### Early Night Baseball

The average baseball fan knows that the first major league night game was played on May 24, 1935, at Crosley Field in Cincinnati between the Reds and the Phillies. But how many of you know that the very first night game was played 118 years ago in 1880, at Nantasket, MA, between two amateur teams? Thirty six carbon arc lamps were lit by an electric generator operated by a 30 hp engine. The lamps were attached to three 100 foot towers that were propped up around the field. It was still very hard to see and there were numerous errors. The game ended in a 16-16 tie. The first official night game was played in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1930 at Western League Park. **Trivia Question: The first game in Wrigley Field was April 28, 1961. True/False? (see answer on next page)**

### Light Finally Comes to the North Side of Chicago

Wrigley Field, the oldest National League ball park, opened in 1914 as Weeghman Park at a cost of \$250,000. After the Cubs went to the National League playoffs in 1984, work began on the planning stages of installation of lights at Wrigley Field. After much negotiation, night baseball was finally approved for the Chicago Cubs in February 1988. The task of designing the lighting system was given to the engineers at General Electric's Lighting Systems Division (E. Flat Rock, NC). They were instructed to design a lighting system that wouldn't destroy the quaintness of Wrigley Field. To further challenge the engineers, residents who lived near the park, as well as some baseball traditionalists, were opposed to

lighting at the field. The project was begun on April 7, 1988, when a helicopter arrived to begin lifting the first of the six light towers to the roof. The helicopter was used throughout the project to secure the towers and the 3,500 pound light banks. The lights were

installed by mid-July and the first night game was scheduled for August 8, 1988. The design they selected incorporates 540 fixtures with three rows of lights along the left and right field lines. As a courtesy to those residents in the

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Q: What do all of these teams have in common?

Oakland A's  
Arizona Diamondbacks  
University of Texas Longhorns  
San Diego Chargers  
University of Southern California Trojans  
California Angels  
Arizona State University Sun Devils  
San Francisco 49'ers  
San Diego State University Aztecs  
San Francisco Giants  
San Diego Padres  
Los Angeles Dodgers  
Oakland Raiders  
Arizona Cardinals

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area, no lights were placed in center field. According to GE's Chief Engineer, John Frier, "The lights look as if they were always there, they are completely integrated with the design of the building."

The hype and hoopla surrounding this first night game was overwhelming. Every radio talk show was giving away memorabilia and tickets, the print media had souvenirs and give-aways, and, of course, there were the television stations. The pre-game was chaotic for the groundscrew - 614 media credentials were issued and newsmen and dignitaries were all over the field. I (as an STMA representative) was lucky to be among that number. During the rain-shortened game, I stayed with my friends on the groundscrew who were exhausted from

days of preparation. Some call it coincidence, others called it divine providence, but whatever the cause, thunder, lightning and rain combined to spoil the debut of night baseball at Wrigley Field. The game was called at 10:25 P.M., after a 2-hour and 10 minute rain delay, with the Cubs leading the Phillies 3-1. The "official" first night game was played the next night against the Mets.

*Answer to Trivia Question: True - although it was the Wrigley Field in Los Angeles and the tenants for the first night game at this field were the Los Angeles Angels.*

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