

# It is time for Montreal to get a minor league professional baseball team



Mike Cohen

The dream of Montreal once again serving as the home of a professional baseball team is dead. It has been 19 years since the Expos left town and while businessmen Stephen Bronfman and Mitch Garber did their best to try and bring a time sharing arrangement with the Tampa Bay Rays to our city, Major League Baseball shut them out. It is time to move on.

I just returned from the nation's capital where I attended a game of the independent Frontier League's Ottawa Titans. The city has a state of the art baseball stadium, built in 1993 to house the AAA Lynx. They served as an Expos farm team. The Frontier League also has the Quebec City Capitales, in business since 1999. They regularly sell out their 4,000 seat venue. Then there are the Trois-Rivières Aigles, which started up in 2012. Now that our Expos dream is behind us, could a Bronfman, Garber or Peladeau step up and get us a team too?

"Personally, I'd be thrilled to see a team in Montreal," Titans co-owner Jacques Shore told me. "Having Quebec City and Trois-Rivières is already exciting. But

Montreal...what a rivalry that would be! And we are so close."

Shore, a prominent Ottawa lawyer and partner at Gowling WLG, grew up in Westmount and was a huge Expos fan. "Why wouldn't someone want to put a team there?" he asked. "They can look at a team like ours to see how it is done."

This is the Titans' second season in operation. The stadium is immaculate, notably the playing surface, and when you arrive there you see a well-oiled machine. There is a store selling team swag, a mascot named Cappy, great background music (including the old Expos theme song) and some very interesting theme nights. The league has 16 teams.

For the game I attended last week, the Titans hosted the New York Boulders and won 8-5. New York scored three runs in the ninth and loaded the bases before the second relief pitcher of the game for Ottawa struck out the final batter. There was so much to cheer for: stolen bases, dives into third base and home plate, the Ottawa manager arguing with the umpire over a balk call and some terrific defensive efforts. Sitting in an open air stadium on a nice summer night is not something Montreal baseball fans have experienced since Olympic Stadium had no roof (and that was hardly the intimate



LINDA GRUSSANI PHOTO

Jacques Shore with mascot Cappy,

ambience the old Jarry Park offered). I absolutely loved the product on the field and in the stadium and it really did not matter who the players were. A Montreal

team in this league would draw fans and make money!

I suggested to Shore that he communicate with Perry Gee of Expos Fest for next season. Let the Titans organize an Expos Night; get TSN 690 involved. One look at this stadium and the quality of play and I think Perry would become a great advocate for a Frontier League squad in Montreal.

The big question, of course, is where would a Montreal team play? Could Claude Robilliard Stadium be retrofitted? Would the owners build a new complex? The cost of such a stadium could cost about \$30 million. Too bad Jarry Park was converted for tennis. NDC's Noah Sidel brought his Red Lynx team of nine year olds to Ottawa Stadium recently and they all loved the experience. Sidel hears whispers of a team being established in Laval. He notes that Trois-Rivières played a game at Gary Carter Park next to Parc Jarry in June and drew 1,000 fans. "Frontier League baseball is really terrific for families," he said.

Let the Expos rest in peace. Bring on the Frontier League.

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