

## Pro baseball comes to Texarkana

### Texas High graduate the general manager

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*Team owner Frank Snyder talks about his plans for a minor league baseball team he is moving to Texarkana, his love of the game and the importance of family-friendly activities. Texarkana is the new home of a Continental Baseball League franchise and the team's inaugural season will begin next May at George Dobson Field at Spring Lake Park.*

“Our goal is to make it about as expensive as going out to a movie,” said professor Frank Snyder, a former Washington, D.C., lawyer who now teaches at the Texas Wesleyan Law School in Fort Worth. Snyder said ticket prices averaged \$7 for adults and \$5 for children in the league last year. All games are expected to be night games. Snyder and Texarkana leaders have formed a partnership to bring professional baseball to the city. He joined city officials at the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce Wednesday morning to announce Texarkana had been granted a CBL franchise.

“We want this where families can attend on a regular basis. We’re planning a lot of promotions, like bringing in Little League teams to play a doubleheader with the pro teams. We hope this team can be a catalyst for all the amateur teams. We want to reach out and make a connection with all of those teams.” Snyder, 54, is the principal owner and president of TXAR Professional Baseball LLC. “Originally I approached Ron Baron (president and CEO of the CBL) about getting a franchise in the league,” Snyder said. “We talked about several cities, but Ron kept coming back to Texarkana. I came over for a visit to meet everyone here, and it became a no-brainer at that point as far as I was concerned.”

Texarkana native David Farren was introduced Wednesday as the team’s general manager. The 26-year-old Farren is a Texas High graduate who pitched minor league baseball for the Baltimore Orioles organization.

Farren hinted Wednesday he might pitch for the new Texarkana team. “Playing is a possibility,” Farren said. “Right now my first job is to get a team together and running. Our roster will be made up of guys who played in the CBL last year and hopefully nine or 10 local guys. “I’ve been involved with youth baseball ... and have always wanted to give something back to the community. I’ll be learning a lot as we go—I know I don’t know everything by far. The one thing I can bring is being a former player, having minor league experience, know what the fans want to see, and knowing the type of players we need to win championships.”

George Dobson Field at Spring Lake Park will be home. Texas-side Mayor James Bramlett said there would be several improvements to the park before the team's inaugural season next May. "We've been talking about doing something with Dobson Field for a few years," Bramlett said. "We're going to do what we can right now to get the field up to par for this year, and hopefully next year we'll see something under construction in regard to a new stadium. All talks are really in the preliminary stages, but we'd like to build a new facility where the Spring Lake Park pool is located and have it ready for the 2010 season. "Right now, we're working on getting some new lights for Dobson and making corrections that we need to make. The park currently seats around 600, but we'll be adding about another 1,000."

Snyder indicated the team would be on good financial ground if it could draw an average of 1,000 fans. "We have a good financial structure in the CBL and I believe we'd do just fine drawing 1,000," Snyder said. "I know Texarkana was drawing crowds of 2,000 back in 1953 when they had pro baseball, and something like 4,000 in 1947. We're hoping to see frequent sellouts." Farren pointed out Texarkana's hockey franchise averaged around 1,500 during its last season in 2005. Baron said the league is on solid financial ground. Each franchise has a \$25,000 cap for player salaries, considerably less than the \$100,000 Shreveport's franchise has in the American Association League. The CBL plans a 72-game schedule for the 2008 season.

The only other franchises in the league right now are the Bay Area Toros of Galveston County and the Tarrant County Blue Thunder in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The league is holding discussions with two South Texas markets, and Baron said there was the possibility of having a travel team in the league. "The CBL and Shreveport's league are similar, they're both independent leagues," Farren said. "They might be one level up, but we're going to have players from all over the country who have been drafted, played some minor league ball or college ball." Farren is already negotiating with local Brian Barr, who pitched for Arkansas High and Southern Arkansas University. Barr struck out 13 during a CBL exhibition held in Texarkana last summer. "There's a good possibility I'll play," Barr said. "It'll give me something to do besides playing softball. There's some great players out there to be brought in. I think this idea can really work if we gear it towards the kids. You've also got to have a competitive team. If you have a team that gets killed every night, it's not going to work."

Texarkana, Texas, City Manager Larry Sullivan noted the City Council will have to approve a contract in their meeting Monday night. "The idea of bringing professional baseball back to Texarkana has been in the works about four months," Sullivan said. "The target is to really try to re-create that hometown baseball kind of atmosphere that I think was rich up until the 1950s. Our image and size really fit the market they were looking for. We're excited, and we think it has a lot of potential."

Texarkana's rich baseball history dates to 1902 when the Twin Cities fielded a team in the original Texas League. The last professional team was the Texarkana Bears, which won the Big State League championships in 1947 and 1950, but folded in 1953.

"I've been a baseball fan since my dad started taking me to see the Dodgers play in the L.A. Coliseum when I was 6 years old," Snyder said. "I love taking my own boys. Baseball is a sport where families can shape summertime memories that last for a lifetime, and our goal is to deliver that kind of fun and excitement to the citizens of this community."

Snyder also announced a name-the-team contest for fans. Entries can be submitted on the team Website [www.texarkanaprobabaseball.com](http://www.texarkanaprobabaseball.com)