

# Brad 'Town Ball' Finstad to toss first pitch

*Twins exhibition game Saturday at new stadium*

By Kevin Sweeney Journal Editor

NEW ULM - As an amateur ball player himself, Brad Finstad isn't too worried about getting the ball to the plate when he and some other legislators throw out the first pitch at the Minnesota Twins new home, Target Field, at an exhibition game this Saturday. But there will be a little intimidation factor.

"I'm a little worried about throwing to a catcher that's making 184 million dollars," he joked.



Fans watch a baseball game at Target Field between University of Minnesota and Louisiana Tech as part of an open house, Saturday, March 27 in Minneapolis. Brad Finstad and other 2006 legislators who were instrumental in passing the field legislation will be throwing out the ceremonial first pitch on Saturday when the Twins play an exhibition game. (AP Photo/Paul Battaglia)

Finstad is being recognized by the Twins for his work in the Legislature in 2006. As the state representative for New Ulm, Finstad, who lives in rural Comfrey, championed the bill that led to the building of Target Field. He spoke at committee hearings and spent a lot of time talking one-on-one with fellow legislators during the season, giving them an understanding of plan for the stadium and the financing.

By the end of the session, the bill to build Target Field and the TCF football stadium on the University of Minnesota campus passed, at a time when Minnesotans in general were wary about spending state money on a ball park where a team of millionaires owned by millionaires could play.

Finstad reflected this week on what made him decide to be the ramrod on this bill when he could have let someone else do it.

"I'm not the kind of guy who says, 'Let someone else do it,'" Finstad said. "This was an issue that was being debated back when I was in high school, and I was sick of the debate. I wanted to get it done. And it was one of the top five issues people brought up when I was campaigning. They'd ask, 'What's going to happen with the Twins?'"

It helped that the Twins came in with a good package. They had a vision of what the park would look like. They had a partnership with a local government - Hennepin County - worked out that would provide the public funding. They had a substantial private investment from the owners. It was ready to sell.

As the field is about to open, Finstad is being recognized as one of key players in getting the job done.

The March issue of "Twin Cities Business" includes Brad "Town Ball" Finstad as one of the starting nine, along with the likes of Jim "The Boss" Pohlad and Allan H. "Bud" Selig, Mike "Chairman of the Board" Opat from Hennepin County and Jerry "The Rock" Bell, president of Twins Sports, Inc.

"It's humbling to see it come to be," said Finstad. "It's humbling that the Twins see me as a key player."

Finstad thinks the stadium is a beauty.

"It's a state-of-the-art, first class facility," said Finstad. "The Pohlads can be very proud. They invested another \$60 million, above what was promised at the time the bill passed, into the stadium. The things they put their money into are the Minnesota touches, like the Kasota stone on the outside from Mankato, and the dugouts are going to be covered in that same stone, inlaid and engraved with Twins logos."

Some of the special touches might not be so obvious. "The canopy over the upper deck, most ball parks leave them unfinished and with an outdoor facility birds nests and whatnot can be troublesome, or just creates an industrial look. So they had the actual underside finished. It's probably not going to be the big wow factor, but it's the little things that will make that stand out."

Finstad, who retired from the Legislature in 2008 and is now executive director of the Center for Rural Policy in St. Peter, said he and his wife Jackie will attend the home opener later in the month. He could probably wangle a lifetime invitation to the owners' suite if he wanted to, but Finstad said his goal is to "try a different seat every game. I can't wait to see people's reactions. From what I hear there's not a bad seat in the house, and each area has a special feel. You'll have one kind of experience sitting behind the plate, and a completely different one sitting out in the outfield."

As for throwing the ceremonial first pitch to Joe Mauer on Saturday, Finstad reflected on the idea that without the ballpark, Mauer might not be playing for the Twins beyond this year.

"With this new facility and new revenue opportunities, the Twins control the stadium. They're not going to be that small-money, small-market ball club. They're going to have some money to expand their payroll," said Finstad. "That was one of the concerns when the bill passed, that the Twins were going to make all of this new money, more than they've ever made, and they weren't going to stick it into a better team or keeping their good players. This (Mauer's contract) is, hopefully, a first big sign that they are going to take some of that money and build a better team."

Asked about the Minnesota Vikings efforts to get a new stadium built, Finstad said he remembered the Vikings wanting to piggyback onto the bill he championed in 2006, but "the Vikings weren't ready at the time. They didn't have a definite plan. They talked about a retractable roof, then said they didn't need it. That's a \$200 million difference. They didn't have a local partner lined up. They were talking with Anoka County, but that wasn't definite.

"I hope they can do it, come up with a solid design and find a local partner, and realize the state can't do much for them at this time. They are going to have to come up with some creative financing," said Finstad. "I think their best shot might be next year when they have a new governor and a new legislature."