

# Take Me Out to The Museum

No hot dogs at these outings, but baseball's history comes alive. **BY MARK HYMAN**

**A** TICKET TO OPENING day for your favorite team is a prize some fans wouldn't trade for 20 Roger Clemens autographed baseballs. Still, it isn't the only way for a baseball diehard to celebrate the start of the season. If you can't secure a seat at the game, you can always visit a museum.

Baseball museums can't compete with the ballpark for the excitement of a squeeze bunt or the taste of a hot dog slathered with sauerkraut. But what they lack in ambiance they make up in their evocation of the rich history of the game. Baseball is a natural subject for museum treatment given its inextricable links to American culture, says Jeffrey Idelson, vice-president of the National Baseball Hall

of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

When it opens on May 14, Baltimore's Sports Legends at Camden Yards—housed in a 19th century former train depot adjacent to the ballpark—will become the newest shrine ([www.sportslegendsatcamdenyards.com](http://www.sportslegendsatcamdenyards.com)). Although it celebrates many sports, its baseball exhibits are especially impressive. They include tributes to icons Babe Ruth and Cal Ripken, both Maryland natives. The Ruth collection features a Louisville Slugger bat from 1927, when Ruth hit 60 home runs, and a scorecard from his first big-league game in 1914. In the Ripken section are the four banners with numerals 2131 that hung from the Camden Yards warehouse when he broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive-game record in 1995.

About a dozen baseball-themed museums beckon visitors to big-league cities and out-of-the-way burgs. The roster is divided into two categories: halls celebrating the lives of legendary players and those telling the story of cherished institutions or an essential piece of gear.

Legends with museums to call their own include Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller (Van Meter, Iowa), home-run slugger Roger Maris (Far-

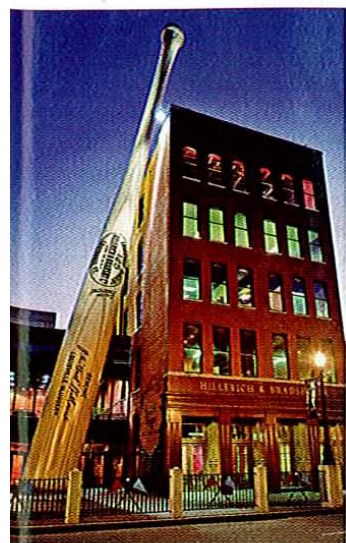
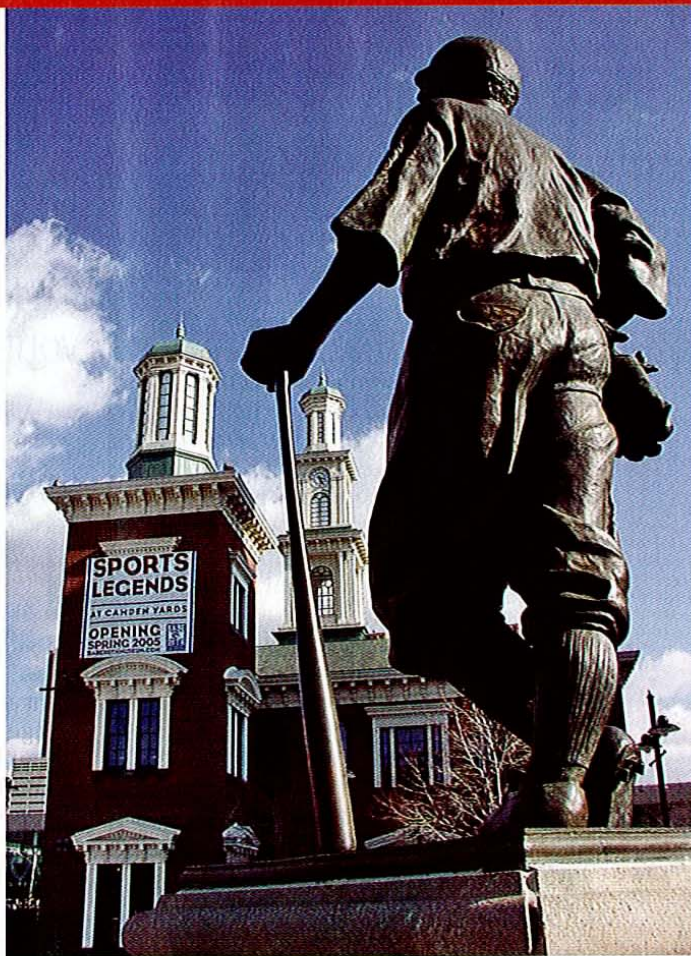
go, N.D.), Yankees catcher and malaprop artist Yogi Berra (Montclair, N.J.), and hitting icons Ted Williams (Hernando, Fla.), Ty Cobb (Royston, Ga.), and Babe Ruth (in the Baltimore rowhouse where he was born). Coming on Apr. 30: a museum honoring Honus Wagner, a stellar Pittsburgh Pirates infielder and hitter of the early 1900s, in the Flying Dutchman's hometown of Carnegie, Pa.

## NOTES FOR YOGI

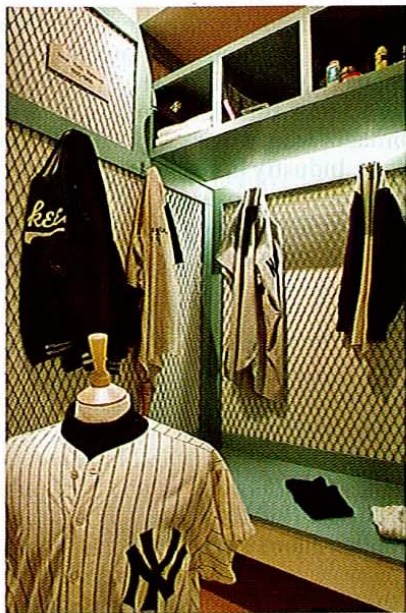
THE BERRA MUSEUM is on the Montclair State University campus, and of its 40,000 visitors each year, half are kids in school groups ([yogiberramuseum.org](http://yogiberramuseum.org)). "We have a little box where kids can drop notes to Yogi. More than once we've taken out a note that said: 'Are you dead yet?'" says Executive Director Beth Sztuk.

Feller's shrine is situated near his boyhood home ([bobfellermuseum.org](http://bobfellermuseum.org)). "Being immortalized while you're still alive, it is interesting," notes Feller, 86, baseball's dominant pitcher in the 1940s. Similarly, former Yankees slugger Roger Maris, who died in 1985, lived long enough to see the first visitors stream into a museum in his honor in

**BALTIMORE**  
Babe Ruth greets visitors to the sports legends museum



**LOUISVILLE AND FARGO, N.D.**  
Free mini bats—and entry to the Maris museum is free, too



(BOTTOM, L-R) THE LOUISVILLE SLUGGER MUSEUM; BILL KLOUBEC

Fargo ([rogermarismuseum.com](http://rogermarismuseum.com)). The displays are set up in a corridor of a shopping mall, and visitors can mill around without paying an admission charge. "He decided it would be nice to display things people wanted to see, but he didn't want anyone to have to pay to see them," says Pat Maris, Roger's widow.

The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Mo., is one of the institutions focused on an aspect of baseball's history ([nlbm.com](http://nlbm.com)). In its 75-seat theater, with bleachers, you can view films that tell of the hardships endured by black stars barred from playing on the same diamonds as their white counterparts. The museum also boasts a "Field of Legends" exhibit featuring life-size bronze sculptures of 10 Negro Leaguers inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. In Kentucky, Louisville Slugger, which has been turning out wooden bats for big-leaguers since 1905, offers tours of its factory. After watching wood chips fly, visitors get a complimentary mini bat, and, for \$48 to \$65, they can take home the real item emblazoned with their printed names or signatures ([sluggermuseum.org](http://sluggermuseum.org)).

The Little League Museum in Williamsport, Pa., sits on a hilltop a mere pop up from Howard J. Lamade Stadium, the field that hosts the Little League World Series each August ([littleleague.org/museum](http://littleleague.org/museum)). It traces Little League to its roots in 1939 and offers lots of photos and displays of uniforms and caps worn by tyke players over the years. Surprisingly, given its subject, the museum's sober, straightforward telling of the youth league story seems targeted at adults as much as kids.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame remains the gold standard. It houses an unmatched collection of historic items, including the ball Maris socked into the stands for home run No. 61 in 1961, then a big-league record ([baseballhalloffame.org](http://baseballhalloffame.org)). It just completed a \$20 million renovation that added 10,000 square feet of space. Among the new exhibits: "Taking the Field: The 19th Century," an in-depth exploration of baseball's beginnings. Cooperstown's Hall of Fame still ranks as the most-visited baseball museum, drawing nearly 350,000 visitors each year. Not a bad turnout for a look at some scuffed balls and worn-out mitts. ■■

**BusinessWeek** [online](http://online) For a slideshow on baseball museums, go to [businessweek.com/extras](http://businessweek.com/extras)