

Stay home for spring training

The Revs could build a lot of fan support

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Dec 26, 2007 — This spring, the York Revolution season will begin in Florida. The team is committed to holding spring training in Lakeland for the 2008 season.

Beyond that, though, the team hasn't made any commitments and is considering holding spring training here at home.

That's a good idea.

It's hard to believe that the team, a member of the unaffiliated Atlantic League, travels to Florida for spring training now.

The expense has to be great, and the return, at least for fans, is minuscule. Not too many fans, if any, would travel to Florida to watch the team prepare for the season. The Revolution bills itself as affordable family entertainment. Taking the family to Florida to watch spring training doesn't sound very affordable.

But having spring training here would provide a lot of opportunities for both fans and the team.

Fans would benefit from making an early connection with the team, being able to follow the Revs from the time the roster starts to take shape. The players, coaches and team staff would be accessible to fans - access that, during the heat of the season, can be fairly limited. The team gets kind of busy then.

Having spring training games open to the public - for free - could build the fan base and give fans a chance to preview the team. If they like what they see, maybe they'll buy tickets.

Team officials said weather may be a concern. But the independent league begins spring training in April, after major-league baseball has begun its regular season, and the weather in York County in April is not that bad. The players would have to adjust to it anyway when the season begins.

The team said holding spring training at home could work from a logistical standpoint, permitting the Revolution to scrimmage with other teams sharing the same ownership in Lancaster, Camden and Southern Maryland.

That's nice, but the team may also have a chance to play exhibitions or scrimmages against York College's baseball team, should NCAA rules permit that. NCAA rules, though, wouldn't stand in the way of the Revolution scrimmaging against teams made up of all-stars from the local townball leagues, the Central and Susquehanna leagues. Players in those community leagues would relish an opportunity to match their skills against pros.

Such a move would build a lot of good will and would connect the professional team to the already-existing baseball community here.

And who knows? Some of those Central and Susquehanna league players might be good enough to play for the Revolution, giving the team a homegrown feel. Consider last year. Red Lion native Travis Hake - who played Susquehanna League ball - was a fan favorite at Sovereign Bank Stadium - even after the Revs traded him to Lancaster in mid-season.

About the only argument that can be made for the Revs returning to Florida for spring training beyond this year is tradition - that's where East Coast professional baseball teams hold spring training.

Traditions die hard in baseball - some fans still can't accept the designated hitter, artificial turf and managers relying on closers to pitch the ninth inning of every game - but this is one that deserves to die.

Holding spring training at home may seem strange to baseball purists. But in the Revolution's case, it makes a lot of sense.