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Pact signed to keep CWS in Omaha through 2035...and more

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Omaha and the College World Series have been married for 59 years, and the love affair will continue through at least 2035.



The NCAA's top official said its relationship with Omaha is based on mutual trust and support. He offered that assessment today as he signed a 60-page contract that commits the series to Omaha for an unprecedented 25 years.

"There is something special about Omaha," NCAA President Myles Brand said.

His comments came during a ceremony to mark the signing of the contract. The event was held in parking lots C and E of the Qwest Center Omaha, on the future site of the ballpark's home plate.

this is a second breakout box

breakout box

The baseball lovefest occurred under blue skies and offered no hint of the often-bitter, yearlong fight over replacing the cherished Rosenblatt Stadium with a new stadium downtown.

Six members of the City Council attended and posed for pictures. Several hours later, the council members voted to approve a series of agreements for the new stadium. Councilman Garry Gernandt, who had championed

Rosenblatt, stayed away from the ceremony and later voted against the measures.

"Building a new stadium in the heart of a great city is another example of the innovative approach we have in this relationship," Brand said. "There is nothing close to it. . . . I couldn't imagine doing something like this with another city."

Larry Templeton, the athletic director at Mississippi State University and chairman of the NCAA's baseball committee, said those involved in college baseball are enthusiastic about keeping the "Road to Omaha" open.

"College baseball coaches are unanimous about keeping the tradition and atmosphere that they've come to expect in Omaha," Templeton said. "There is no resentment. We don't want to go anywhere other than to Omaha."

This is a new breakout box

This is some test text.

It's a little bittersweet to leave Rosenblatt after the 2010 series because baseball is built on tradition, said Templeton and Dennis Poppe, the NCAA's vice president for baseball and football.

"I've put 21 years into Rosenblatt and the College World Series," Poppe said. "It feels like moving out of my first home."

Poppe also had to convince some at the NCAA's Indianapolis headquarters that a long-term CWS contract made sense for the organization.

Others who had not experienced June baseball in Omaha stopped Poppe and asked, "Do you realize what you are doing?"

Poppe responded by asking them if they knew of another city willing to spend \$140 million on a new stadium for an NCAA event.

"We moved cautiously," Poppe said. "We were careful not to make a rash decision."



Although a preliminary agreement was reached with the NCAA at the end of April, negotiations on the final contract lasted until 8 p.m. Sunday, said Jack Diesing, president of College World Series of Omaha Inc., the nonprofit local sponsor of the championship.

The agreement protects Omaha taxpayers by paying the debt service on the stadium before other expenses are paid, said Mayor Mike Fahey. It also promises the NCAA a minimum of \$1 million a year from the event after the new stadium is opened.

Amid the sounds of an organ playing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," Diesing asked the crowd to envision themselves in the new stadium. "Everywhere you look the place is filled with families and children as they cheer for their favorite collegiate team."

An Omaha Public Works cherry picker towered 25 feet above the crowd to illustrate how high the concourse of the new stadium will be. The open concourse will wrap all the way around the field and will offer open views of the baseball action below.

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David Sokol, chairman of the Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority, said his strong concerns and criticism had been allayed, and he now approves of the stadium plan on the parking lots of the convention center and arena.

this the 4th box
test

"I think we have worked out all the key elements, especially with the parking," he said. "It has turned out the way it needed to be"

Sokol said Omaha and the NCAA also are partnering on other events, including the men's basketball tournament played at the Qwest Center this spring, the women's volleyball championship coming in December and the wrestling tournament in 2010.

"We appreciate the partnership," Sokol said.

This is the 3rd breakout box
this is the third box.

But the importance of the CWS is more personal for him and many Omahans, Sokol said. He recalled going to his first CWS baseball game with his father 42 years ago as an excited 9-year-old boy with a homemade bag of buttered popcorn.

Fahey looked forward to what those 9-year-olds going to the CWS this weekend will be doing in 2035.

"I see today's children bringing their children to the College World Series," Fahey said.

By then, the stadium might have already been expanded from 24,000 to 34,000 seats, Fahey said, and a future mayor and NCAA president might be inking a deal for another 15 years that will guarantee Omaha could celebrate a century as the home of the CWS in 2050.

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