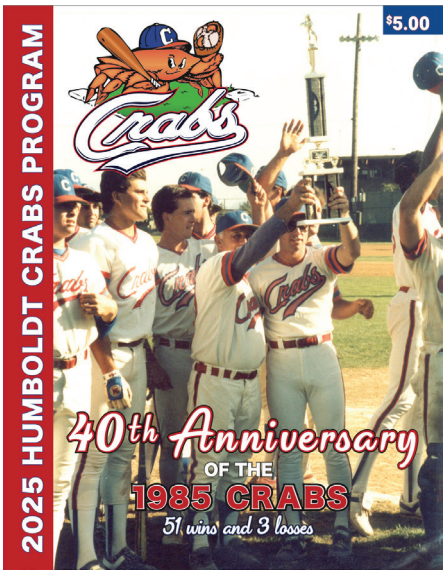
BE A PART OF HUMBOLDT CRABS BASEBALL IN 2026!

Be a part of Humboldt History by advertising in the Humboldt Crabs annual program. The Crabs have been publishing programs since 1945! Did you know that more than 34,000 fans visit the Arcata Ballpark during the summer months to watch Crabs baseball? The Crabs are the only collegiate summer baseball team that averages 600-800 fans per game. Fans from out of town as well as our local community members grab a hot dog, a frosty beverage and buy a Crabs program during more than 40 home games in Arcata. These programs are not only a record of Crabs baseball, they are also keepsakes!




Origins of Crabs Baseball

Giant wooden baseballs are hung out in left field at the Arcata Ball Park every summer on move-in day by the Crabs staff and volunteers. One of the balls honors Lou Bonomini's Humboldt Crabs uniform number #29. Bonomini is synonymous with the Humboldt Crabs. Bonomini coached and managed the team for more than 40 years. Although, ironically — the team was another man's idea.

The idea for a summer baseball team didn't come from Bonomini. "It was Don O'Kane that started the whole thing," Bonomini said describing how the team got its start. O'Kane was the publisher of the Eureka Newspaper Inc in 1944 and he wanted a team to play in Eureka at the close of World War II. Bonomini was 28 when O'Kane approached him in 1944 about the idea of starting a new team.

Putting a team together was easy enough for Bonomini as he knew all the good ballplayers in the area, but he needed a way to fund the team. He needed to find a sponsor to officially start play. He approached Charley Timmons, the owner of Paladini, a local fisheries business and asked if he'd be interested. Bonomini won Timmons over and the Paladini Humboldt Crabs were born on June 17, 1945.

Bonomini put together the classic hometown team, made up of hometown talent — lumberjacks, and deckhands with hats. Over time the team evolved into a grooming school for college players. Mixed in with the home-grown players would be recruits from across the country. The players were given day jobs and lodging in exchange for playing for the Crabs. The Crabs had compiled an impressive .759 winning percentage. Bonomini retired in 1987 from the Crabs and he had compiled more than 1,000 wins for the club.

Crabs players stand next to Crabs General Manager Ned Barsuglia, Crabs founder Lou Bonomini and Crabs Vice President, official scorer and PA announcer Don Terbush at a roast of Bonomini and Barsuglia during a luncheon in July 1985. Photo courtesy of Maria Bonomini Briggs.

Much of the Crabs' success was attributed to high-caliber player recruitment, a task performed by Lou and his friend Ned Barsuglia.

Barsuglia officially joined Lou's council of board members in 1954 as the financial manager, helping to raise money for the team so they could continue to play.

Barsuglia took over all the player recruiting duties in 1968. He was known for having a list of players in his head for the following year and the year after that.

Reminiscing about the '65 season, Barsuglia recalled "We had this great pitcher from Stanford in those days, Sandy Vance. And listen to this, he threw 92 to 94 miles an hour. In that first game he played he struck out 21 guys. But we still lost one to nothing. The problem was we had a local catcher here and he couldn't hold the heat. They scored on passed balls."

Sandy Vance went on to pitch for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1879-1871.

Barsuglia eventually took over and became the team's general manager. Barsuglia was running the whole show and did all the recruiting for the team.

By the time 1985 rolled around, Barsuglia was 75 years old and was ready to walk away from Crabs baseball after he had experienced some medical issues in 1984. This threatened the future of the team. This newspaper headline was spread across the front page in big, bold type read: "Baseball Crabs to quit." After a round of community mourning, the Crabs baseball faithful went to work. Volunteers, Barsuglia said, "came out of the woodwork."

"The people who live behind the redwood curtain," explained Larry Zerlang, a local fan, "We're a family. We've stuck together through some hard times. We've lost a lot of the fishing and timber industries and we are not going to lose the Humboldt Crabs too."

Former 1980s Crabs pitcher Matt Nutter arranged for his dad, Jerry Nutter, and Barsuglia to meet and discuss the possibility of Jerry Nutter saving the team somehow. Nutter had experience working for the YMCA as one of their top administrators and Barsuglia was impressed by him.

More meetings were held, Nutter formed a committee and a transition was negotiated. Jerry Nutter and a handful of community members formed a non-profit corporation, specifically a 501(c)(4) community organization. They assembled a

Matt and Jerry Nutter in 2014.

Nick Fuscardo and Lou Bonomini hold up their second West of the Rockies Tourney trophy for the 1985 Crabs team. Photo courtesy of Maria Bonomini Briggs and photo taken by Tim Parsons of the Union.


1950 Humboldt Crabs Team. Back Row :L to R: Jerry McIrvor, Bob Mathews, Carl Del Grande, Georg Perkensa, Gil Beck, Charles Timmons, Jerry Nelson, Gene Younger, Cal Phelps. Front Row :L to R: Bob Gillen, Roco Pastori, Garry Phillips, Bob Parnell, Evan Reilly, Lou Bonomini (Manager, Fred Papini (Coach), Bob Bonomini (Batboy). Maury Ayala. Photo courtesy of Maria Bonomini Briggs.

apartments or homes for the summer. He also finds them employment if they need a job.

Most of the new Crabs players have never been to Humboldt County before and Zerlang is one of the first people they will see wearing a blue and red Crabs hat. He welcomes them into the Crabs family with a firm handshake.

— Excerpts taken from a 2002 program article by Scott Gourley


Crabs head scout Ned Barsuglia and Crabs Board of Director Larry Zerlang at the Arcata Ball Park in 1986. Zerlang still turn 78 on November 13, 2024.

board of directors with each community member taking on a specific duty or role to take the Humboldt Crabs into the 1995 season and beyond.

That first summer in 1995, some 15,147 loyal baseball fans turned up for the season's all-home game season which saw the Crabs post a 35-win and 5-loss season to finish with a .875 record.

Attendance increased each year and the old-time/all-time attendance records began to rise about the turn of the century and the 2009 season was no exception. More than 34,110 fans showed up to root the Crabs on to the championship of the new 2009 West Coast Tri-State League. The Crabs helped to organize the new five-team league with the Southern Oregon Riverdawgs, the Redding Colt 45's, Nevada Bighorns and the Folsom Pioneers.

Larry Zerlang was a part of the original board of directors in 1995 and he still serves on the Crabs board to this day.

Zerlang is probably the second Crabs representative — other than current Crabs manager Robin Guiver — the new college recruits come into contact with when they arrive in Arcata.

Zerlang coordinates with roster players from out of town and places them in

Welcome to the Crabs family! The Humboldt Crabs 2024 team and staff



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