

BUTLER
FIELDHOUSE

RECREATION IN THE UNITED STATES

National Historic Landmark
Theme Study

by

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National Park Service
Department of the Interior



1986

Recreation in the United States

The history of recreation in America is associated with a broad range of properties representing activities that suggest themselves for possible historic recognition. Baseball parks; college and professional football stadiums; yacht clubs; amusement parks, roller coasters, and carousels; circuses; camps; resort hotels; horse and auto racetracks; zoos; aquariums, planetariums; world's fair sites; and casinos are all recreational sites. This report examines a number of outstanding and illustrative examples of these types for potential National Historic Landmark designation.

The properties described in this study have been selected to represent places and activities that have had a major impact in American history. The properties and individuals associated with them are, in many cases, just as well known to most Americans as masterworks of architecture and political and literary figures. Those accessible to the public are visited by numbers of people that would overwhelm learned societies or scholarly institutions.

Certain properties on this list will be known to the most casual sports fan or traveler. Other sites included are relatively obscure, but treasured by enthusiasts. Overall, there is little pattern to the relatively few sites illustrating these subjects that have been recognized by local or State programs through nomination to the National Register or in the handful of properties that have been designated National Historic Landmarks in the field. It has also proved difficult to find intact sites for some sports and activities. Tastes in sports and amusement change and there may be little immediate use or reason to save their decaying remnants. Some recreational sites, such as world's fairs, in fact, were usually designed to be temporary.

The contributions of ethnics, minorities, and women to recreation and sports merit consideration. These studies have been prepared with a conscious effort to relate these contributions. Considering the early dates of some of the properties, the accomplishments noted are exceptionally worthy and demonstrate how sports and recreation have served to advance these elements of society.

A broad definition of recreation has led to the selection of a diverse collection of properties. Some categories are, however, not included because it appears best to treat them under other subjects. The most noticeable exclusion is of properties whose significance rests strongly on landscape architecture, such as golf courses, highways, trails, and most major public parks. Such properties grow and change in ways that buildings, or even tennis courts, do not. Boston Common and Boston Public Garden, on the other hand, are included because they are of fundamental importance to the Park movement and because they have notable recreational associations on other accounts.

An example may help explain the difficulty with this aspect of recreation and the decision to exclude it from this study. A number of the early automobile roads of this century were designed with touring, as well as transportation, in mind. For that reason, the Columbia River Highway, in Oregon, was closely examined, but not nominated. Historic roads and trails clearly present problems in integrity and require analysis of landscape design. Because of their enormous size and unusual shape and because the very use that makes them significant may help

destroy them, they require exhaustive study. (There are a number of such historic recreational associations, e.g., the Skyline Drive traversing Shenandoah National Park.)

The National Parks have been excluded from this study, although there are examples in many recreational fields in them. For example, the role of mountain climbing clubs in the establishment of Mount Rainier National Park suggests that some of the trails within the Park may be significant historically. Also, the National Park Service already possesses its own carousel; at Glen Echo Park near Washington, D.C. In the latter case, a decision on the level of significance of the more distinguished carousels presented in this theme study can offer guidance on how the Glen Echo carousel should be evaluated.

Exclusion of nearly all homes of individuals has also substantially narrowed the scope of the study. Thus, "Babe" Ruth's houses are not included but Wrigley Field and Fenway Park, two of the baseball parks where he played, are. In the existing National Historic Landmark list, there are exceptions to this practice. Only one major exception is proposed in this study, for John James Audubon.

Organization of the Report

In the introductory summaries that follow, the existing Landmarks important in recreation are listed topically, along with those nominated in this study and a capsule explanation of how they were selected and issues they raise. Not all properties suggested or considered for nomination will be noted, in the interest of keeping this essay brief.

Some properties in this study have significance in more than one area of recreation or in other themes that lend strength to their consideration. Only a handful of National Historic Landmarks have been specifically designated for their recreational importance. Because they are physical remains, recreational sites may represent or include accomplishments in architecture, engineering, art, or other subjects. These exceptional areas of importance are specified in the individual studies. Harvard Stadium, is, for example, significant in the history of concrete construction, as well as football.

CLASSIFIED LIST OF PROPERTIES

BASEBALL PARKS

Proposed:

Comiskey Park, Illinois
Wrigley Field, Illinois
Fenway Park, Massachusetts
Cleveland Municipal Stadium, Ohio
League Park, Ohio

Designated:

Jackie Robinson House, New York

COLLEGE ATHLETIC FACILITIES

Proposed:

✓ Butler Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Indiana
Herron Gymnasium, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Designated:

None

Notes:

Other properties might be considered under this subject. Butler represents an era in the history of basketball. Herron Gym was significant for the accomplishments of the coaches it graduated, whose lifework, it should be noted was mostly accomplished at stadiums and baseball parks, including those proposed in this study.

CRICKET, TENNIS, AND LAWN BOWLING

Proposed:

St. Petersburg Lawn Bowling Club, Florida
Germantown (Manheim) Cricket Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Merion Cricket Club, Haverford, Pennsylvania
Newport Casino, Newport, Rhode Island

Designated:

None

Notes:

Cricket, an important sport historically, was once a workingmen's game as well as one favored by aristocrats. Tennis has undergone a contrary transformation. Germantown and Merion are important in both cricket and tennis. Merion Cricket also has a highly commendable role in squash rackets play. The Newport Casino has additional importance in architecture and social history. Bowling Green in New York, which might suggest itself in light of St. Petersburg, lacks historic integrity.

RACETRACKS AND SPEEDWAYS

Proposed:

Hialeah Park Race Track, Florida
Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Indiana
Churchill Downs, Kentucky

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Butler Fieldhouse

and or common Hinkle Fieldhouse

2. Location

Butler University Campus
street & number 49th St. and Boulevard Pl.

N/A not for publication

city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code county Marion code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: recreation

4. Owner of Property

name Butler University

street & number 4600 Sunset Avenue

city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity of state Indiana 46208

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Marion County Recorder's Office

street & number 721 City-County Building

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana 46204

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date August 19, 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records National Register of Historic Places

city, town Washington state DC 20240

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Hinkle Fieldhouse is adjacent to 49th Street in the northeast portion of the campus of Butler University, between 49th and 52th Streets, Boulevard Place, and the Central Canal. It has a rectangular plan, brick walls, and a three-stage monitor roof supported by an arched steel truss system. The building lies on an east-west axis with the gable ends facing those directions.¹

The main facade is the south wall where the entry gates are located. The south wall rests upon a poured concrete, beveled foundation. The brick walls are approximately three stories high from grade to the parapet. The facade is divided vertically into 22 bays by decorative buttresses. The pointed stone buttress caps project slightly above the parapet level. The parapet has stone coping.

The south wall is pierced by eight entry gates: Gates 1, 2, and 3 occupy the three westernmost bays; Gates 4 and 5, the two center bays; and Gates 6, 7, and 8, the three easternmost bays. Above each door is a tall round-arch window with steel muntins and frame; the arches have limestone keystones and springstones. The gate bays are further accented with decorative brick panels that rise several feet above the parapet and have octagonal center tablets and accented buttresses. The bays between the gates each have a pair of ground-level windows. A stone string course encircles the building between the first and second-story levels. Every bay has a pair of metal frame windows at the third-floor level.

The north facade is generally similar to the south facade. It has the same number of bays and buttresses. The bays are identical, but with no entry gates. Because of the sloping grade, the poured concrete basement is exposed with pairs of windows in each bay. There is a pair of windows in each bay at the ground-floor level except in the two central bays, which are blind. The easternmost bay has three metal flush doors and the second bay has been altered with the addition of an overhead garage door. The seventh and eighth bays from the west end have single added doors with concrete platforms and stairs. A brick smokestack is directly behind the two central bays. The north facade also has a course of third-floor-level windows.

The east facade is a round-arch gable end approximately six stories high. It is nine bays wide. The bays are divided by buttresses. The buttress caps project above the stone coping on the parapet. On the ground floor the two southern and northernmost bays have large steel-framed windows. The next bay on each side has twin metal-flush doors with a single window above. The center bay has four windows, two above and two below. The bay south of the center is identical to the central bay. The bay north of the central bay has two lower windows and one upper. The third-floor level has rectangular steel-framed windows in each bay. The parapet line established on the north and south facades continues as a stone string course. The gable windows increase in height toward the central bay, which has a window three times the height of the smaller windows. The end gable bays are too short to accommodate windows.

The west wall is identical to the east facade above the third-floor level. A 2-story brick wing, however, is attached to its lower floors. The wing houses a small gym and a swimming pool. It is five bays deep and nine bays wide. The bays of the wing also have buttresses and large steel-frame windows. The windows on the north facade are blocked up with glazed tile blocks as are the three northern windows on the west side. The two end bays of the southern facade have single metal doors. The wing's roof is flat.

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The roof of the fieldhouse is covered with asphalt shingles. It is built in three stages with glazed monitor ribbons between each stage. The first (lower) stage is steeply pitched. The second (middle) stage is slightly pitched. The third (top) stage is the two-sided gable apex.

The central part of the interior space of the fieldhouse accommodates the 99' by 50' (NCAA regulation-size) wooden basketball court, which is surrounded on all four sides by three tiers of stands. The main floor stands (the first tier) are made of wood, and are not permanent. The floors are poured concrete, as are the ramps and upper two tiers of stands. The seats are painted wooden planks fixed to the concrete steps. The framework for the stands, ramps, and roof are all exposed painted steel girders. The corrugated metal roof sheathing is also exposed to view. The interior walls are clad with brown glazed brick.

The entryways from the south facade gates are guarded by glazed tile block ticket offices. Several painted concrete block offices and classrooms have been tucked under the main floor stands on the east end. The area under the stands on the west end is cordoned off by chain-link fencing. This enclosed section serves as an athletic practice area. Behind and under the stands is a wide open walkway which encircles the stands. Within this area are maintenance offices, drinking fountains, and trophy cases.

The fieldhouse is illuminated by natural light from the monitor roof windows and the graduated windows in the gable ends. Electrical lights suspended from the ceiling, with metal shades, provide artificial illumination.

The hardwood basketball court is removable. The end lines are on the north and south sides. The original court ran east and west. It was changed in 1933 to accommodate more seating and to eliminate the problem of sunlight from the west blinding the eyes of the players. The late afternoon sun streaming through the large west end windows created a blind spot for players moving westward on the court.

The wing may be entered from inside the fieldhouse; it contains the swimming pool, in the northern half, and the practice gymnasium, in the southern half. Subterranean areas of the wing accommodate locker facilities and mechanical rooms.

Despite minor changes, the historical integrity of this structure remains largely intact. It continues to serve as the home of the Butler University "Bulldogs," seating, by veteran coach Tony Hinkle's count, 15,062 for basketball games.

Footnote

¹This description is an edited version of that appearing in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form (prepared in 1982), as verified by on-site inspection in December 1984.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	architecture	education	military	social
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation
		invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				sports
Specific dates	1927-28	Builder Architect	Fermor Spencer Cannon	(basketball)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Butler Fieldhouse is the earliest of the major college fieldhouses, which, along with rules changes that made for a faster game, transformed college basketball in the late 1920s and 1930s. These great fieldhouses replaced the "tiny boxlike floors of the 1920s, where the players often wound up in the fans' laps."¹ The burgeoning popularity of the college game created the demand. Butler also provided a perfect forum for the finals of the Indiana State high school tournament, one of the most active in the country and nationally noted for the "Hoosier Hysteria" it annually provokes.

One of the more authoritative sources on basketball, William G. Mokray, in his Encyclopedia of Basketball, has described the game in Indiana as follows:

While many states insist that basketball in their areas is the best, it is generally said that Indiana holds that distinction. The Hoosier State's 762 high schools play to 12 million spectators every year (twice that of Pennsylvania, the next highest), while the annual Indiana state tournament attracts 1-1/2 million more fans through its district and regional eliminations, which then lead to the finals in the Butler University field house in Indianapolis.

Further evidence of Indiana's frenzied interest in the game is evidenced by several undeniable facts. In some towns, citizens cannot purchase a season ticket for home games until some fan dies or changes residence. The nation's largest high school gymnasium is located in Elkhart and it seats 8,284 spectators. Centre Grove high school, which is located in a township of 36 square miles and has no post office, has an enrollment of only 257 students but boasts a gym that seats 4,000.²

From the time of its construction until the late 1960s, the Butler Fieldhouse was well-known throughout Indiana as the largest indoor sports facility in the State. In its history, millions of Hoosiers have used the building for recreation, entertainment, civic, religious, and political functions, as well as sporting events. As late as 1981 it was the eleventh largest Division I (NCAA) basketball arena in the nation, and it is the oldest of these; it is still the largest at any private institution.

History

By the time basketball began to achieve its great popularity in the early 1920s, it had taken firm root in the Midwest. This was nowhere more the case than in Indiana. Colleges, as well as nearly every high school, had organized teams. Butler University, although a small private institution, developed an excellent team, which won the Men's Amateur Athletic Union National Championship in 1924.³

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The team's successes came just as Butler was planning its move from a crowded downtown campus to its present spacious facilities in what was then known as Fairview Park. This move was propitious for basketball's future at Butler and in Indiana, for it permitted the planning of a spacious facility for the rising sport and an ideal setting for the State's high school basketball tournaments.

Fernor Spencer Cannon, an Indianapolis architect, designed the Butler Fieldhouse. Cannon was an influential member of the community, being instrumental in forming the Indiana Society of Architects and other architectural organizations. The Butler Fieldhouse was his most notable project. Its importance was established from the beginning, primarily because its innovative construction techniques allowed 15,000 people to view events without interference from posts or pillars.

Upon completion in 1928, the fieldhouse immediately brought Statewide and national attention not only to Butler University, but to Indiana basketball. Butler's team was voted national champion that year. In the first game at the fieldhouse, Butler defeated Notre Dame, the national champion the previous year. Also, from 1928 on, the fieldhouse was the site of major Indiana high school and National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball activities. With the exception of World War II, the Indiana High School Basketball Tournament championships were held in the fieldhouse until the late 1960s. The "Hoosier Hysteria" that accompanies the State high school basketball tournament is probably unequaled outside Indiana; an understanding of this unique cultural phenomenon helps to explain why the Butler Fieldhouse is well-known outside Indianapolis.

In addition to basketball, the fieldhouse has been the site of many other important athletic and general-interest events. The Butler Indoor Relays were held here in the 1930s and 1940s. It has been the site of professional tennis tours, marathon bicycle races, and circuses. The fieldhouse also evolved into an unofficial convention center for the city, attracting an impressive array of Presidential candidates, and political, social, and civic leaders, including such prominent figures as Wendell L. Willkie, Thomas E. Dewey, Billy Graham, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Herbert C. Hoover, Gerald R. Ford, and Jesse Jackson.

Butler Fieldhouse served, to some extent, as a prototype for other large modern athletic complexes, its size alone initially setting it apart as a unique structure. During half a century it has evolved into a focal point for Indiana sports, particularly basketball. In 1965 its name was changed to Hinkle Fieldhouse, in honor of Paul D. "Tony" Hinkle, who coached at Butler University for nearly 50 years, with more than 1,100 NCAA victories to his credit, 632 of them in basketball. He coached the U.S. All-Star basketball team against the U.S.S.R. team, and is a member of the James Naismith, Helms Foundation, and Indiana Basketball halls of fame. In 1962 he received the National Collegiate Basketball Coaches Association's highest award for his contributions to the sport.

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Footnotes

¹William G. Mokray, Ronald Encyclopedia of Basketball (New York: Ronald Press, 1962), p. 1--15.

²Mokray, op. cit., p. 7--1.

³John D. McCallum, College Basketball, U.S.A., since 1892 (New York: Stein & Day, 1978), p. 43.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 3.201, approximately

Quadrangle name Indianapolis West

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	6	5	7	1	2	4	0	4	4	1	0	5	0	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

B

Zone	Easting			Northing										

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date October 1985

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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Bibliography

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McCallum, John D. College Basketball, U.S.A., since 1892. New York: Stein and Day, 1978.

Mokray, William G. Ronald Encyclopedia of Basketball. New York: Ronald Press, 1962.

Schwomeyer, Herbert F. Hoosier Hysteria: A History of Indiana High School Basketball. Greenfield, Indiana: Mitchell-Fleming Printing, Inc., 1970.

10. VERBAL BOUNDARY

Commencing at the intersection of the west right-of-way line of Boulevard Place and the north right-of-way line of West 49th Street as now located on Drawing No. 59-51, Office of the Marion County Surveyor, said point being north 30.00 feet and west 25.00 feet from the southeast corner of Lot 24, Blues Overlook Addition, an addition to the city of Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, the plat of which is recorded in Plat Book 16, page 174, in the Office of the Recorder of Marion County, Indiana; thence south 90 degrees 00 minutes 00 seconds west 630.58 feet along said north right-of-way; thence north 0 degrees 08 minutes 10 seconds west 198.15 feet to the point of beginning; thence south 89 degrees 51 minutes 50 seconds west 488.90 feet; thence north 0 degrees 08 minutes 10 seconds west 285.20 feet; thence north 89 degrees 51 minutes 50 seconds east 488.90 feet; thence south 0 degrees 08 minutes 10 seconds east 285.20 feet to the point of beginning and containing 3.201 acres, more or less.