

[ABOVE] Sunshine, hot dogs and a leisurely afternoon at the ballpark — like this scene from last year's game at Tucson Electric Park between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Anaheim Angels — mean spring training is back for another season. KERRICK JAMES BASEBALL BY JIM MARSHALL

PLAY BALL!

By Jeb J. Rosebrook

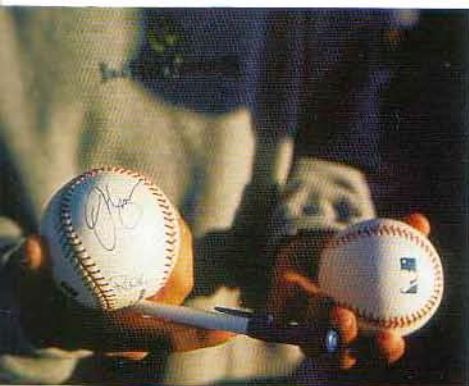
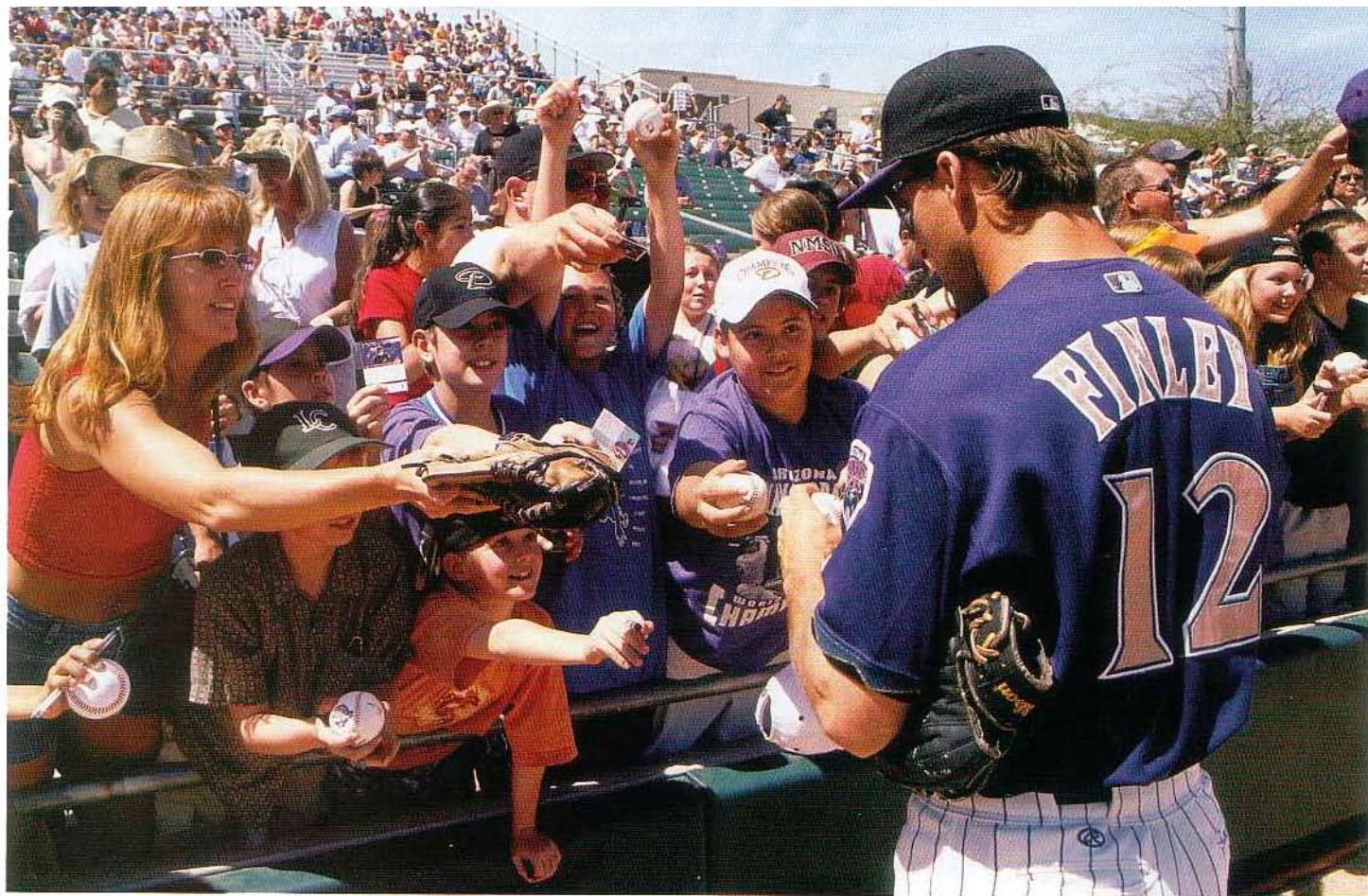
FANS WHO LOVE SPRING TRAINING FIND BLISS IN ARIZONA

AH, SPRINGTIME — TIME FOR BASEBALL IN ARIZONA.

Hot dogs, peanuts, cold drinks and emerald-green grass. Sunshine on a cloudless, warm Arizona afternoon, a lucky-day bargain outfield seat for \$1. Bustling shops stocked with team ball caps, T-shirts and autographed bats, jewelry vendors and automobile raffles, then silence and reverence as our national anthem is played, and the joy of young and old voices singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

Friends are with friends and strangers become friends, a time when we discover and





rediscover baseball in Arizona. It's spring 2002, and the Boys of Spring are trying to become the Boys of Summer.

"Spring training in Florida is fine," writes political columnist and baseball author George Will in *Newsweek* magazine, "but in Arizona it is bliss." Springtime fans dream that this will be the year their team will win a division, win a pennant, reach the World Series, clinch the championship.

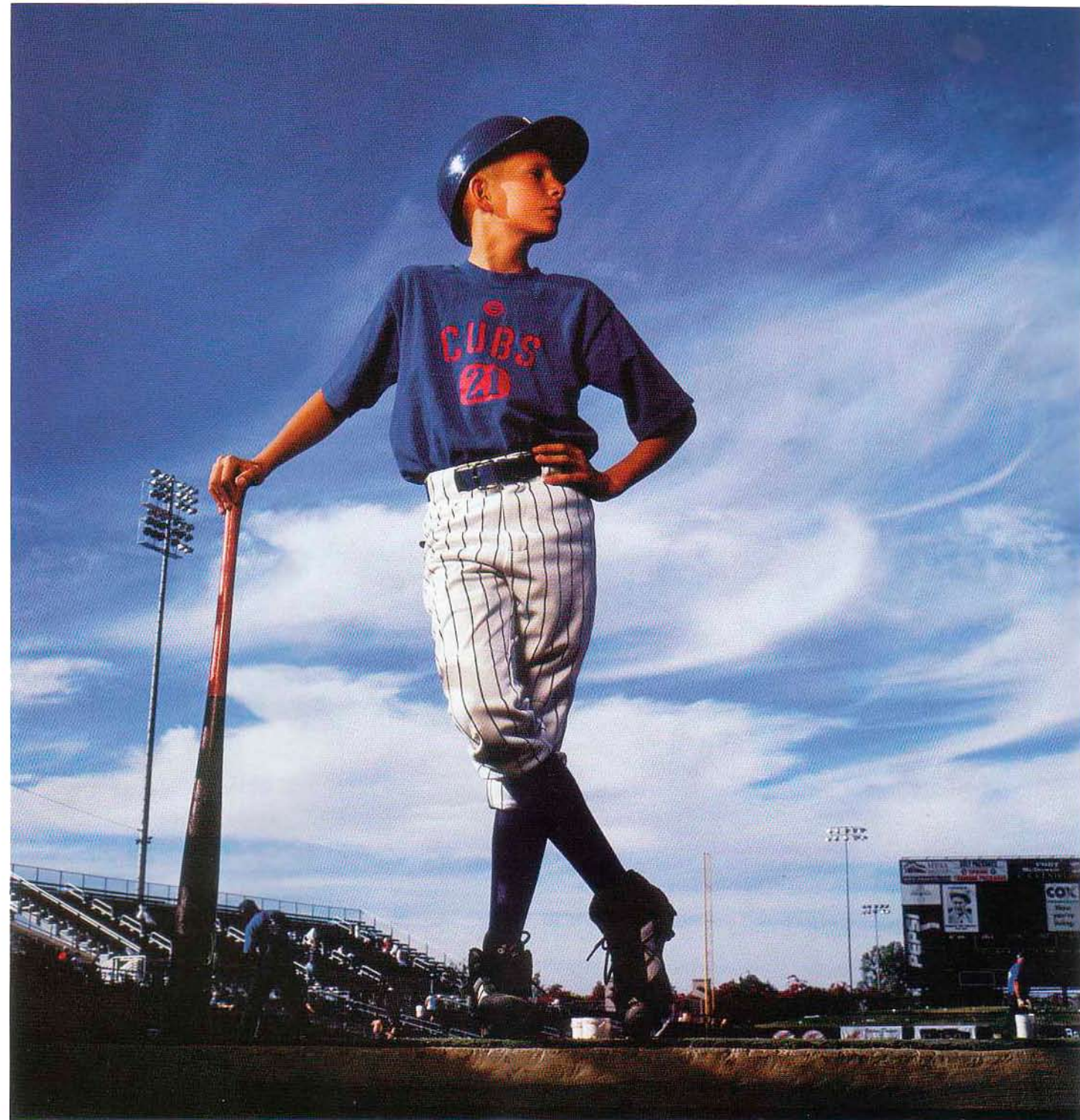
"Which way to the ballpark?" a young couple in tank tops and shorts, driving a rented top-down convertible, ask a passerby on a Scottsdale street. They have pale northern California skin — but not for long.

Under brilliant sunshine, they're about to share their excitement and anticipation of baseball like the nearly 1 million fans who will watch spring training in Arizona's Cactus League, the 10 major league teams holding spring training in the Grand Canyon State. Northern California fans, like the couple asking directions, come to see Barry Bonds and the San Francisco Giants, who will open their spring training season before a capacity crowd of more than 11,000 fans at Scottsdale Stadium.

Enthusiastic crowds will greet the Anaheim Angels in Tempe Diablo Stadium, the Milwaukee Brewers at Maryvale Baseball Park, the Oakland Athletics at Phoenix's Municipal Stadium, and the Seattle Mariners and San Diego Padres at the Peoria Sports Complex. The Chicago Cubs, whose seasonal return to Arizona has been a baseball ritual for more than 50 years, will bring sellout crowds of more than 12,000 to HoHoKam Park in Mesa.

In Tucson, the Colorado Rockies train and play at the Old Pueblo's venerable Hi Corbett Field, while the Chicago White Sox and Arizona Diamondbacks occupy the more modern confines of 5-year-old Tucson Electric Park.

"This is our first year for spring training," retirees from Santa Rosa, California, tell those who share their picnic table prior to a Giants-Diamondbacks game in Scottsdale. They choose burritos over hot dogs. "A friend buys up the entire home schedule, then sells off

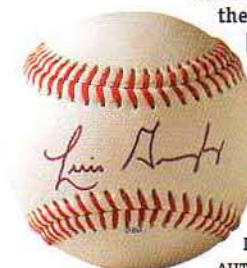


[OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE] Steve Finley, center fielder for the 2001 world champion Diamondbacks, takes time to build rapport with the fans. KERRICK JAMES

[OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW] For a baseball fan, what's better than an autographed ball? KEN ROSS

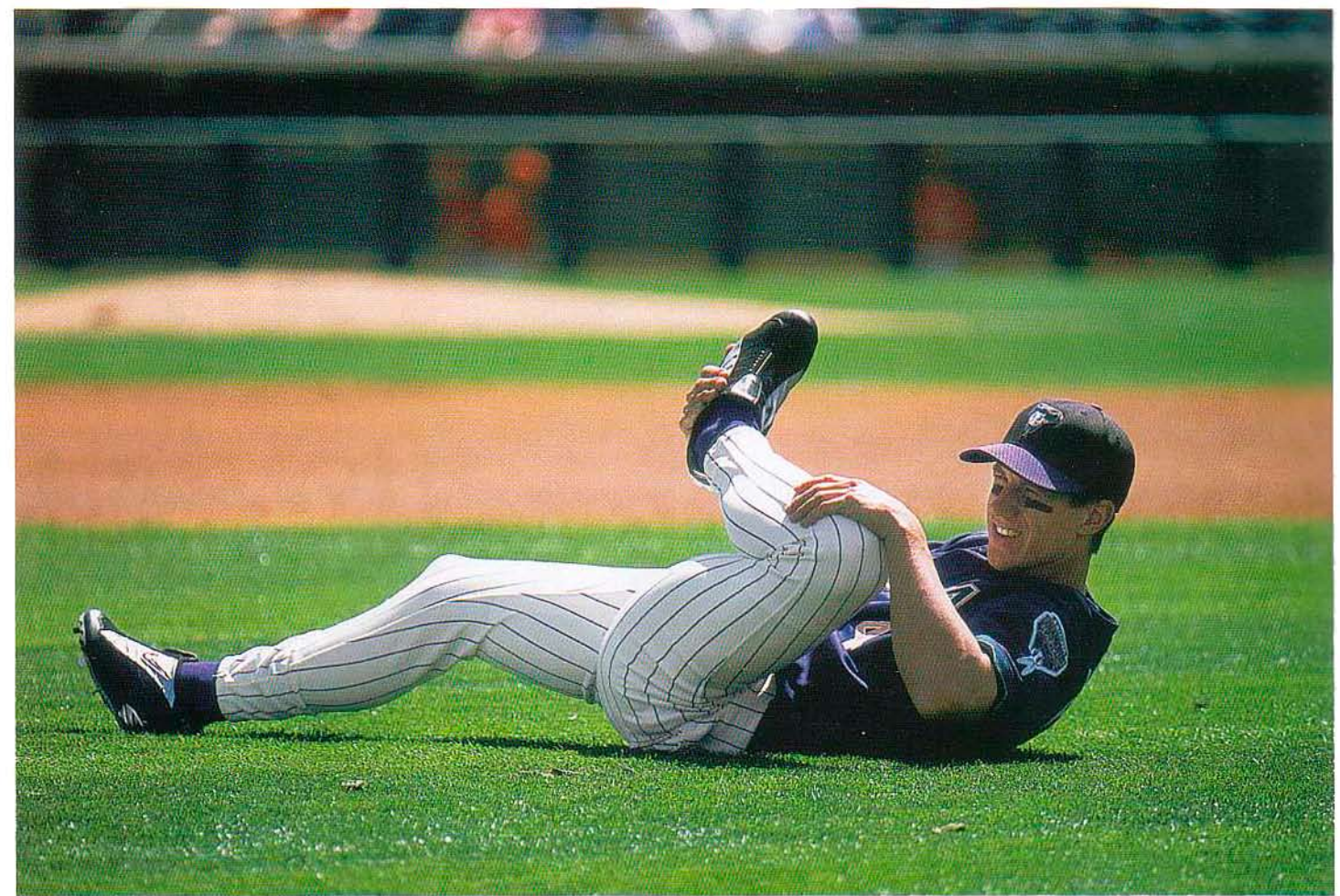
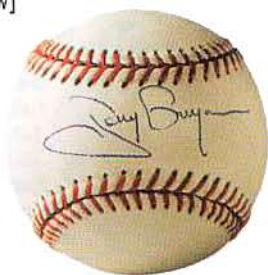
[ABOVE] Chicago Cubs 2002 batboy Ryan Baughman plays major leaguer for the camera. DAVID ZICKL

AUTOGRAPHED BASEBALLS BY





[ABOVE] Delino DeShields of the Chicago Cubs awaits his turn in the batting cage. DAVID ZICKL
[OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE] The Diamondbacks' Craig Counsell limbers up before a spring game. KERRICK JAMES
[OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW] National League batting champion Barry Bonds of the San Francisco Giants emerges from a slide after stealing second base. KERRICK JAMES



a week of games to friends, keeping one for himself. That way, we all get a week here."

Neither has been to a game at the Giants' new Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco, but as for spring training in Arizona, they're sold on it. "We love it. We'll be back next year."

"We're originally from Portland," a Seattle Mariners fan chimes in. "We retired here." He hopes this is the year the Mariners will take themselves to the World Series.

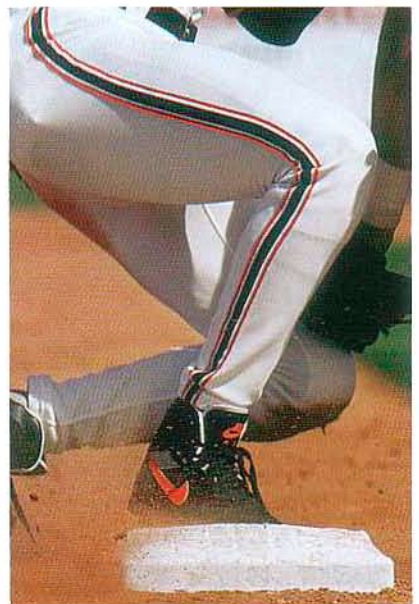
Over at Phoenix's Municipal Stadium, the Oakland A's have their minds on the same goal. On a warm, sunny day, as the A's take on the Milwaukee Brewers, a family's three generations sit together. A mother holds her youngest, a protective blanket shielding the baby from the sun. By the third inning, a young man and woman take the seats next to them, introducing themselves as visiting from Denver and Cleveland. They've made Arizona their spring baseball destination, not to follow one team but to enjoy all the teams. "We wanted to go to the Cubs game in Mesa, but it was sold out, so we came here," they say.

Nearby, a fan drops an easy catch of a foul ball. "Error!" kids someone from the crowd.

In Scottsdale, four young men, who plan their annual reunion around baseball spring training, talk up two attractive women. "He's from Atlanta, they're from Charlotte. I'm from Pittsburgh," one says. "We usually go to Florida. This year we decided to come to Arizona." At the moment, it seems incidental that the Giants are playing the Arizona Diamondbacks.

During spring training games, fans exchange their stories and dreams of their youth. In Tucson, a man, shirtless in the sun, watches his White Sox struggle against the Angels, recalling, "I danced on top of the dugout with the Sox mascot at the old Comiskey Park."

A week earlier, in Maryvale, a retired banker recounted his dream of becoming a big leaguer. "One day when I was 12, my sister asked me if I still had that dream. I said, 'Yes. Why do you ask?' 'Because,' she told me, 'you aren't any good.'" In the background, the public address announcer takes time between innings to inform 7,081 spectators. "We're due for a sunny high of 71 today. In Milwaukee, the temperature is 41."





ball as a keepsake. Gloves on small hands poise hopefully to catch a foul ball. When the umpire behind third base at Tucson's Electric Park scoops up a foul, young fans plead for him to throw the ball in their direction. The ump smiles and tells them to "Sit!" They do. He walks to the stands and gently hands the ball to the youngest child.

When it comes to the Chicago Cubs, the fans' love and loyalty have no limits. On a day when the temperature unseasonably rises into the low 90s, the Cubs take on the San Diego Padres at HoHoKam Park. About 12,500 fans chant "Sammmmyyyy" each time Sammy Sosa comes to the plate. Perennial fan Ronnie "Woo Woo" Wickers, in his Cubs uniform, walks around the park as he has done every spring since 1969, cheering on Cubs fans. In unison, they chant back, "Woo Woo!"

When Sosa flies out, a fan remarks, "His [long] fly ball outs are better to watch than most guys' hits." When the Padres stage a four-run rally to come within one run of the Cubs, the crowd becomes quiet. Is this the way it will be — again — this year? Perhaps. Yet the Cubs hang on to win 10-9.

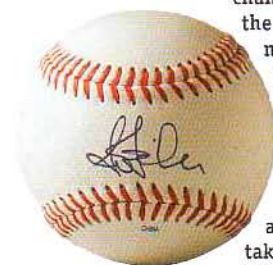
Ballpark scenes become baseball memories forever, as if in a Norman Rockwell painting. In Tucson, groundskeepers carefully water down the infield. During pregame warm-up, a catcher pauses to chat with a friend in the stands. Players stretch and run in the outfield, while others patiently sign autographs. Coaches, who never run, saunter among their stretching players as a recorded Garth Brooks sings "The Dream" over the public address system. After the national anthem, a youngster throws out the first pitch.

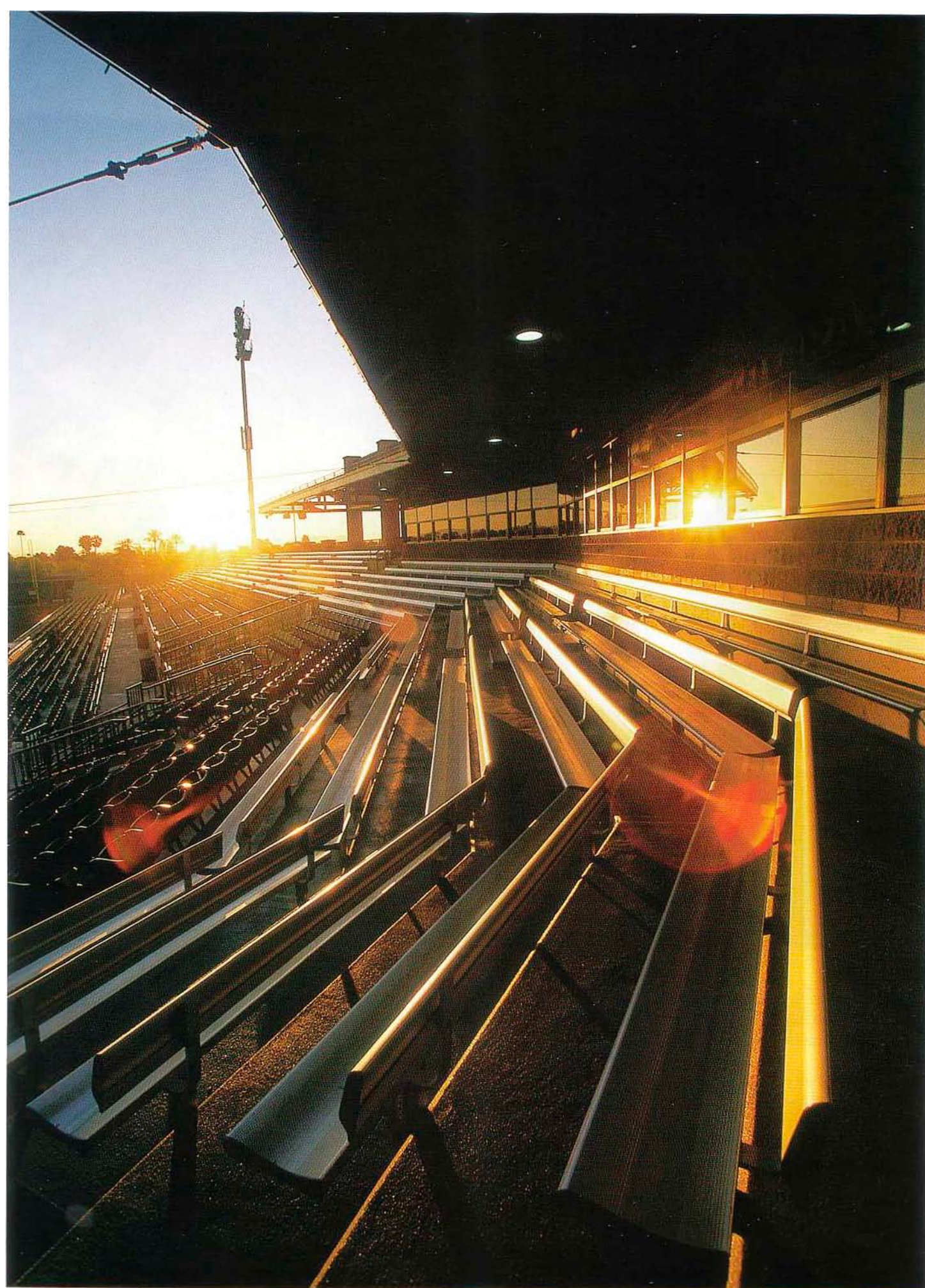
There is the unmistakable crack of the bat, the home-run swing. One by Sosa, over the 400-foot mark in Maryvale's right-center field, lands far up into the hillside lawn among sunbathing spectators. Marveling, one man tells another, "That may be the longest home run I've ever seen."

Close by, a mother holds her daughter on her lap, clasping and waving their hands



[OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE] Fans applaud a base hit in a Seattle Mariners and Milwaukee Brewers game at Maryvale Park in west Phoenix. JIM MARSHALL [OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW] The improved chance of catching a foul ball is one of the advantages of the smaller-than-major-league spring training ballparks, as Jard Jackson hopes to find out. CHRIS HOLFORD [ABOVE] Beer vendor Mark Carlson's job at HoHoKam Park in Mesa takes him out to the ball game on a sunny weekday afternoon, while most fans must take a day off from work. DAVID ZICKL





together. "Home run!" the mother tells the small girl, creating her first baseball memory. "Home run! Circle the bases! Circle the bases!"

A boy, perhaps 9 or 10, wearing a Giants T-shirt and cap and with glove in hand, chases morning shadows outside Scottsdale Stadium, where men and boys play catch, and parking lots fill while fans gather to barbecue beside a motor home. It's not quite 10:30 on a Saturday morning — still two and a half hours before game time.

No one wants to miss anything in this annual Arizona springtime baseball celebration. No fan wants it to end. **AH**

[OPPOSITE PAGE] The morning sun begins to awaken Scottsdale Stadium. **KEN ROSS** [ABOVE] HoHoKam Park groundskeepers Dick Vaske (left) and Samuel

Eatman make sure the playing field is carpetlike. **DAVID ZICKL**

