

Baseball Man

Gulfport, Mississippi



For several years, Baseball Man stood at the entrance to the Gulfport Sportsplex where he inspired young athletes to be strong, work hard, and never give up. Little did he know what tragedies his hot-dip galvanized (HDG) frame would help him overcome and endure. The artist lived on the coastal region for most of his life and had built several topiaries prior to Baseball Man. Hot-dip galvanizing had always been his choice for corrosion protection, but he did consider stainless steel for this one.

The initial cost and the life-cycle cost proved hot-dip galvanizing was the wise choice for the 12-foot tall structure. The harsh humidity of the Gulf Coast was tough enough on any steel product, but being stuffed with sphagnum moss and equipped with a drip irrigation system meant Baseball Man would need all the help he could get for a long life.

Corrosion control trumped design life, but still gave the artist the ability to work his magic creating a lifelike sculpture. Baseball Man became the symbol for the Sports Complex along I-10 where he was viewed by travelers and regional teams competing for baseball honors. He was photographed thousands of times as the background for team pictures or for a proud parent whose child had hit his first homerun. He became the sports symbol for the entire region, he was strong and proud.

In 2005, tragedy struck. Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. Gulfport was just short of a direct hit that left the area in ruins. Baseball Man was devastated. All of his beautiful leaves were blown away and 80% of his sphagnum moss eroded from the heavy rains. Thankfully, his galvanized frame stood strong and tall, still holding him in place with his famous bat ready for the next pitch. Priorities for rebuilding the area did not include restoring of a topiary, so Baseball Man had to wait his turn and try to be patient.

Sadly, baseball man was struck again by misfortune when vandals set him on fire, burning the remainder of his leaves and leaving smoldering sphagnum moss until firemen could put it out. Baseball Man was taken to an offsite storage yard to await his fate.

The Chief Groundskeeper for the Sportsplex, who had cared for Baseball Man, refused to give up on him and just scrap the frame as some had suggested. The original galvanizer came by, asking about the topiary and suggested a thickness test be performed, since the structure had been through such violent fire and rain!

The test revealed an average coating thickness of 7.8 mils on the frame and 6.8 on his rebar shaping. The coating was intact with normal brown staining from the patina growth. The base frame had a few areas of rust which were easily repaired.

Restoration began at once with local contributions, including the original galvanizer. The topiary was replanted and seeded for growth. There were a few setbacks with heavy rain during the growing season, but Baseball Man is returning to his normal self. He has regained his place as the proud symbol of baseball at the Gulf Port Sports Complex. Thanks to the tenacious hot-dip galvanized frame, Baseball Man is BACK! ■



Sample Area	Reading (mils)					Average
Channel Frame Legs	9.60	9.10	8.60	9.50	8.90	9.10
Mid-Frame Channel	8.80	9.30	9.10	8.90	9.00	9.00
Rebar Shaping	6.20	5.90	6.30	6.20	5.80	6.80
Base	6.20	5.90	6.30	6.20	5.80	6.80

Galvanizer
AZZ Galvanizing - Moss Point

Fabricator
Steve Skermetta

Owner
Ken Edwards, City of Gulfport

Lifetime Achievement