

SPORTS

The Connection, August 25, 1993, Page 13

N. Va. group at-bat to snap MLB slump



Bart Fisher

By **RICH SANDERS**
The Connection

Last February, Bart Fisher, a D.C. attorney from Great Falls and an investor in Capital Baseball, Inc., sent a letter to the San Diego Padres expressing interest in purchasing the franchise and bringing it to Northern Virginia.

June 25, Fisher sent another letter — offering \$150 million. Aug. 10, after Padres Managing General Partner Tom Werner said he didn't recall the letter, Fisher re-issued the offer. Capital Baseball, Inc. is still waiting to hear from the Padres.

Unfortunately, although this lat-

est rebuff has gained fresh headlines, the story of major league baseball rejecting the Washington, D.C., area is all too familiar to local fans. Since 1971, when the second incarnation of the Washington Senators moved to Arlington, Texas, and became the Texas Rangers, baseball in this area has been a series of unreturned calls and unopened letters.

But Fisher, whose group of Northern Virginia investors was similarly ignored in the derby for the two National League franchises which began play this year, thinks his group will be the one to bring baseball to Northern Virginia.

"Look, it's going to happen, we're going to get a team," said Fisher, a partner in the law firm Patton, Boggs & Blow. "It's a matter of when. It's a natural for Northern Virginia. ...I'm not frustrated by San Diego's non-responding."

Fisher has examined the reason: the D.C. area — and his group in particular — lost out in the 1991 bid for a franchise, and he thinks his group can overcome earlier short comings.

Part of the problem last time, say Fisher and others, such as Tor Davis III, chairman of the Fairfax

County Board of Supervisors, was that two groups — Fisher's and the D.C.-based group, Metropolitan Washington Baseball (MWB), chaired by John "Chip" Akridge — applied simultaneously. But MWB, which was among the final six groups considered by Major League Baseball for a franchise, has done nothing publicly to secure a team since losing out to Miami and Denver in 1991. Meanwhile, Fisher's group has pursued the Giants and Padres and made clear it would seek a franchise in any future baseball expansion.

Expansion may not be far off, either. Baseball owners are finalizing a plan for expanded playoffs which would have to be agreed to by the players' association. And players' association counsel Donald Fehr has indicated his group will make approval contingent on the owners promising to add two teams by 1996.

Fisher thinks Northern Virginia — not D.C. — offers the demographics and fan interest to win the next expansion battle.

"Fairfax County has the highest per-capita income in the country, and a Northern Virginia team would have a media market throughout Virginia and the Carolinas," he said. "It would be a great success."

Despite the small but vocal protest that arose when Washington Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke attempted to build a stadium near Alexandria last year, Fisher is "highly confident" Northern Virginians would support building a stadium with public funds to attract major league baseball.

Also unlike the Alexandria situation, Fisher can boast of solid political backing. Board of Supervisors chairman Davis has said he would "move heaven and earth" to bring baseball to Fairfax County, even to asking residents to approve taxes to finance a stadium.