

## Virginia groups expansion finalists

### Baseball may add two teams in '96

By Kevin Lyons  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Despite a labor impasse that canceled the season, Major League Baseball officials yesterday notified two area ownership groups that they are among five finalists that have been targeted for expansion.

Capital Baseball Inc., headed by Great Falls, Va., lawyer Bart Fisher, and the Virginia Baseball Club, headed by William Collins III, are preparing to make a formal presentation to the commissioner's office in Chicago Nov. 1 to detail their plans.

The other finalists ownership groups that will make presentations are in St. Petersburg, Fla., Orlando, Fla., and Phoenix.

The five groups were selected from among the nine potential owners who returned completed expansion applications. Originally, 27 groups had requested applications.

The league has set no timetable for expansion, yet major league owners are in favor of the idea because of the success of new teams in Miami and Denver. The price of an expansion franchise is expected to be more than the \$95 million from the last expansion.

Fisher thought the league wouldn't make a decision on expansion until after a labor agreement was reached between players and owners.

"I'm surprised at the timing," Fisher said yesterday. "We're in the middle of a strike. We'd all assumed everything was on strike, but everything is not on strike."

The Fisher group is made up of 12 members with a net worth of \$500 million. He wouldn't identify his investors, but one is believed to be J. Morton Davis of D.H. Blair Inc., an investment firm worth more than \$200 million.

Fisher, 51, has hired Robert Howsam as his director of baseball operations. Howsam was vice president of the Cincinnati Reds from 1983-85, and president and general manager of the Denver Zephyrs minor league team from 1985-91. Howsam was credited

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with helping bring the Rockies to Colorado.

Virginia Baseball Club is made up of seven investors worth more than \$650 million. Collins, 44, is vice chairman of the board of directors of Metrocall Inc., the second largest publicly traded paging company in the nation. He is also the majority owner of the Class A Greensboro Bats (Yankees) and Madison Hatters (Cardinals).

Collins' ownership group includes Baltimore CFL owner Jim Speros; cellular phone company magnate Mark Warner; investment banking president Russell Ramsey; car dealer Pat Collins; Bernie Swain, one of the founders of the Washington Speakers Bureau; and Steve Leelou, chief operating officer of Vanguard Cellular Systems, Inc.

Major League Baseball probably will add two teams to its make up of 28 clubs. St. Petersburg, because of its near-purchase of the San Francisco Giants two years ago, and Phoenix

are the favorites to land the expansion teams which could be announced as early as 1996.

"The decision to expand has not yet been made," said Boston Red Sox chief executive officer John Harrington, chairman of the owners' expansion committee. "These are preliminary interviews. We remain at the information-gathering stage."

However, the league's tabbing of two finalists from the metro area may mean it is serious about having a franchise in the nation's capital, where there has been no major league team since the Senators left to become the Texas Rangers after the 1971 season.

"I think Major League Baseball is very serious about baseball in Northern Virginia," Collins said. "This market is the seventh largest in the country. Within a 60-mile radius around Dulles Airport live 7.4 million people. I don't think we'd be too close to Baltimore. It's no different than Oakland-San Francisco, the two Chicago clubs, or the clubs in New York. Between Baltimore and Washington is like what Philadelphia is to Yankee Stadium."



Fisher