

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PITTSBURGH PIRATES



Above: PNC Park, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Below: Team owner Robert Nutting '84 (at right) with Pirates manager Clint Hurdle.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

When it comes to building a winning team, Pittsburgh Pirates owner Robert Nutting '84 is opting to play small ball. And it's starting to pay off.

Once the legendary team of Roberto Clemente, Bill Mazeroski and "Pops" Willie Stargell, the Pirates in recent years have come to achieve a different sort of celebrity. In 2011 they logged their 19th consecutive losing season—more than any major professional sports team in North America. Yet Nutting believes he can restore the Pirates to their former glory.

As head of the 122-year-old Wheeling, W.Va.-based Ogden Newspapers, Nutting has always felt an affinity for the 125-year-old Pirates franchise less than 50 miles away. When he became the team's principal owner in 2007, he recalls, "They needed a tremendous amount of work. But I've always enjoyed the challenge of working with businesses that were broken and finding opportunities to fix and rebuild them."

Some of his decisions as owner haven't exactly make him a fan favorite. Heading into the 2010 season, he slashed the payroll below that of the 1992 roster—the last team to appear in the playoffs. He also declined an unsolicited offer by beloved Pittsburgh Penguins co-owner and hockey



hall-of-famer Mario Lemieux to purchase the team. The move prompted an open letter in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* stating it was time to "draw a hard line in the infield dirt on when the Nutting regime will be accountable and return this storied franchise to a modicum of respectability—or else depart the scene."

Reflecting on the public criticism he's taken (fans have heckled him when he's attended games, often accompanied by his daughter Cameron '11 and father Ogden '56), Nutting says, "It's difficult to read negative things about myself in the press or be booed by a crowd. But at the same time, I wouldn't do this if I didn't think I could build a championship team and show some success at the end of the day."

Nutting has stood firm on his decisions to focus on drafting talented amateurs over buying high-priced superstars and to redirect money to player development. In addition to nurturing promising college athletes in the U.S., he built a training academy and education facility in the Dominican Republic to attract up-and-coming Latino players and help them earn high school diplomas. The team also signed Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel—the first Indian citizens to sign a contract with an American pro sports team—after spotting the two in a "Million Dollar Arm" baseball-pitching contest in India.

After flirting with first place in the National League's Central Division in 2011 but fading down the stretch, the Pirates had a 35-32 record as of June 21 this year and were in second place in their division. The team welcomed more fans in 2011—1.94 million—than in any other year in the previous decade. And, true to his promise at the start of the 2012 season, Nutting opened his wallet to sign All-Star centerfielder Andrew McCutchen to a six-year, \$51.5 million deal and made a trade for pitcher A.J. Burnett, absorbing his two-year, \$13 million contract.

"I brought long-term, strategic goals to the Pirates," Nutting says, "and my hope is to build something my kids are proud of."

—Benjamin Gleisser