



BRAD CLIFT / THE HARTFORD COURANT

THE HARTFORD SENATORS take their Vintage Base Ball on the road Saturday, playing in Pittsfield, Mass.

Vintage Weekend

Any event that brings **Jim Bouton** and **Bill Lee** together is worth televising. Throw in some national exposure for a piece of Hartford history and Saturday night's vintage baseball game in Pittsfield, Mass., becomes an important Fourth of July event.

The Hartford Senators, who host this weekend's annual Vintage Base Ball Invitational, will play the Pittsfield Hillies at Wahconah Park Saturday at 7 p.m. The game — billed as the first meeting between the teams in 74 years — will be televised by ESPN Classic. Bouton, who lives in the Pittsfield area, brought the game together and got ESPN involved. And the network is using Lee for commentary.

"It's exciting for us," said **Chris Moran**, the Senators' captain and catcher.

It will be part of the Invitational, based at Bushnell Park. There

also will be a game Saturday at Dodd Stadium in Norwich.

Bouton's involvement began when tournament founder **Greg Martin** read the book "Foul Ball: My Life and Hard Times Trying to Save an Old Ballpark." Bouton's book chronicles his struggle to save Wahconah Park, which was established in 1892.

Martin contacted Bouton, who then helped organize the game.

"It's good exposure for Vintage Base Ball," Moran said. "And it will be fun to be on TV."

The Pittsfield team was gathered by Bouton, drawing players from all over Western Massachusetts. Of course, these players aren't accustomed to the 1886 rules that the game will be played under.

"This will be baseball at its purest," Martin said.

The Senators and Hillies were Eastern League opponents in 1919-30, when **Lou Gehrig**, **Hank Greenberg**, **Leo Durocher** and **Jim**

Thorpe passed through Hartford.

Pittsfield's baseball history got a recent boost when a document was uncovered that made the earliest reference to baseball in the country. The document showed that baseball was played in Pittsfield in 1791, giving the city the claim as the game's birthplace.

Which is why Waconah Park is the perfect setting as Vintage Base Ball goes national. Bouton is expecting 4,000 for the game, and organizers in Hartford expect big crowds at Bushnell Park.

The growing interest in turn-back-the-clock baseball has already spawned a new team in the area. The Simsbury Taverners will make their Hartford Invitational debut this weekend.

The tournament opens at Bushnell Park today at noon. A non-televised Hillies-Senators rematch is scheduled Sunday at 4 p.m. at Bushnell Park. More information is available at www.vbbf.com.