On the day Mark Lamping became president of the Cardinals, the schedule called for baseball but Busch Stadium stood empty of fans. It was Sept. 1, 1994, with the National Pastime mired in a labor dispute that squashed the season prematurely and threatened the future of the sport. The Cardinals, as a venerable franchise with much to lose, might not have seen a bleaker hour.

Yet as the 2008 season dawns, and Lamping leaves his post as Cardinals president, the picture has changed completely. During the 12 full seasons of Lamping’s tenure (not including the lockout-shortened 1995 season), the Cardinals drew more than 3 million fans nine times, ... the postseason, a World Series championship, and the building of a new stadium to bind the experience of Cardinals baseball.

In March, Lamping accepted the job of chief executive officer for the New Meadowlands Stadium Co., to oversee the building of a stadium shared by pro football’s ... III becomes the new Cardinals president, stepping up from the position of senior vice president of business development.

No doubt that the New York football interests saw something in Lamping’s touch in St. Louis. He became Cardinals president at age 36, replacing Stuart F. Meyer, who retired at 61 after a 35-year career with Anheuser-Busch, which owned the Cardinals at ... to become group director of sports marketing in 1989, leading the way as Anheuser-Busch expanded its presence in sports.

In February 1994, the Continental Basketball Association – the development league for the National Basketball Association – lured Lamping to become ... him the position of team president, and Lamping chose baseball over basketball, setting the stage for one of the most eventful eras of Cardinals baseball.

In each of his previous executive posts, Lamping had supervised matters of sales, marketing, sponsorships, negotiations and other far-reaching details in the business of sports, all of which would serve him well as Cardinals president. Upon his hiring by the Redbirds, Lamping declared two major objectives: “First, we must provide St. Louis with a winning baseball team,” he said. “And second, we will manage the financial side of the club to protect the long-term stability of the franchise.”

The club’s baseball operations originally came under his purview, but here relinquished that authority after the group led by Bill DeWitt Jr. bought the franchise from Anheuser-Busch prior to the 1996 season. For the balance of his tenure, Lamping focused on running the business of the team – “protecting the long-term stability of the franchise.” And his legacy became the advancements in the way Cardinals baseball is enjoyed.

He presided during the extensive refurbishing of old Busch Stadium, and he became the point man in the negotiations for building the new ballpark, which opened in 2006. Under his guidance, the Cardinals twice drew honors from the United Sports Fans of America as Major League Baseball’s “Fan Friendly Team” (in 1999 and 2003).

Now it’s off for a different challenge, in a different sport and a different city. At a press conference at Busch Stadium on March 14, the Cardinals announced Lamping’s departure for the position with the Meadowlands, as well as the selection of DeWitt III as the club’s new president.

“The Cardinals and all of St. Louis will miss Mark immensely,” said Dewitt Jr., the club’s chairman. “Anyone who knows Mark will understand why this ... I am proud of Mark and am very happy that his experience with the St. Louis Cardinals prepared him for this opportunity.”

After drawing kudos from his father at the press conference as the right talent for the job, incoming president DeWitt III acknowledged the lessons he learned from Lamping. “Mark Lamping has done a terrific job of leading the Cardinals during a period of much change and progress,” DeWitt III said, “and I want to assure Cardinals fans that we will continue to commit the time, energy and resources needed to ensure the organization maintains its status as a first-class operation.”

The Cardinals’ outgoing president had a reputation as a hard worker, adept at seeing the big picture on complicated matters. Quick with a joke and glib with a comeback, Lamping had a way of handling major issues while keeping a fan’s outlook on the outcome.

A St. Louis native, Lamping will maintain a home locally, after making April 2 his last day with the Cardinals and taking off for New York.

Before his departure, Gameday stopped him for a few final questions about his time with the Cardinals, expecting he’d have lively answers.

Gameday: What do you remember about your first day as Cardinals president?

Lamping: I was pinching myself and still in a state of disbelief that I was actually Lamping leaves the Cardinals under the leadership of chairman Bill DeWitt Jr. (center) and new club president Bill DeWitt III (right). Buttoned down or business casual, Lamping rolled up his sleeves to meet each challenge in his 13-plus years at the helm.
significant thing I would work on during my career with the Cardinals would be replacing the earlier facility.

Lamping: I clearly had the most to learn in baseball operations. But the good news about that was, while I initially had supervisory responsibility in that area, once the team was sold to the current ownership my job wasn’t to focus on baseball operations.

Also, I hadn’t had a lot of experience in facility operations, and that was another area in which I had an opportunity to learn.

Gameday: Could someone conceivably run the business of a ballclub and not know much about the sport?

Lamping: I don’t think so. Because to be able to do a job like this in an effective way, you have to understand baseball fans. And to understand baseball fans, you have to understand the game. There’s no other way.

Gameday: In your childhood, was baseball your favorite sport?

Lamping: No, actually, soccer was my favorite sport to play. But baseball was my favorite sport to watch. I played soccer at Vianney High School in St. Louis, and I played at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, until a knee injury cut short my career.

Gameday: What event first turned you on to baseball?

Lamping: Going to games with my father. My dad was a huge Cardinal fan and I learned to love the Cardinals through him. I remember going to one game at the old ballpark on Grand with him. It was one of the last games there (in 1966), so I would have been about 8 years old. I may have been there another time, but I only remember going once.

Then as a high school and college student, trips to the ballpark with my friends and trips to Chicago to see the Cardinals play the Cubs were a very important part of my summers.

Gameday: Which player first caught your interest?

Lamping: When I played baseball as a young kid, I was a catcher, so I was a big Tim McCarver fan. I’ve told Tim that, and he gets mad at me for saying he was my favorite as a kid. He thinks I’m telling him he’s old.

I was also a big Lou Brock and Bob Gibson fan because of what both of them did not only in the championship years in the ’60s, but with their individual accomplishments – particularly Lou Brock’s – during the ’70s, when there wasn’t much to cheer for other than individual performances.

Gameday: How did being a native St. Louisan help you do your job?

Lamping: It was a huge advantage. It’s not a requirement, but it was a huge advantage for me because I had a great familiarity with the city and with the issues facing the metropolitan area. And I had a great appreciation for the role the Cardinals play in the community.

Gameday: What’s the biggest challenge facing a team president now, given the opportunity. At least I knew where to park my car because I had been to Busch Stadium a lot before I joined the club. But it was a whirlwind for the first few weeks, for certain.

I knew some people in the organization when I started. I knew people like Stuart Meyer (whom Lamping replaced), Marty Hendin (Cardinals vice president of community relations who died in January 2008) and Dan Farrell (now senior vice president of sales and marketing) from my years at Anheuser-Busch. So there were a few familiar faces and a lot of new, friendly faces.

Gameday: Knowing what you know now, how accurate were your expectations of what you were getting into?

Lamping: When I joined the club, I never had the idea we would be working so hard to replace the old ballpark. Like most Cardinal fans, I loved the old ballpark. As a fan I didn’t see much wrong with it. But then as I joined the club and began to see the facility from behind ... to replacing it, I saw the value of a new ballpark. In my first few weeks, I never would have predicted that the most