

## Fifty Reasons The Old Ballparks Were Better

Granting their deficiencies in public restrooms and handicapped accessibility, the ballparks built between 1909 and 1923 were superior to new downtown stadiums because they were located in city neighborhoods. They manifested an urban culture, in which cities were first and foremost places to live, where even persons who were not rich could live well. Thus cities included within close proximity residences and businesses, schools and churches, recreations and entertainments; and ballparks were buildings designed in and for traditional urban neighborhoods.

America since 1945 has become a suburban culture. Suburbs (a cultural conspiracy catering to the illusion that unpleasantness in life can be avoided) have drained cities of middle class residents, and cities now are trying--foolishly, desperately, mistakenly--to remake themselves into entertainment zones. New urban stadiums are prominent in this strategy, but less as places for baseball than as expensive city-sponsored architectural devices that help teams separate suburbanites from their money.

Here are 50 reasons why the old ballparks were better than today's new stadiums:

- 1) they were part of normal neighborhood life;
- 2) it was possible to live across the street from the ballpark;
- 3) it was possible to have or patronize a business across the street from the ballpark;
- 4) ballpark-generated economic activity extended broadly through the neighborhood;
- 5) it was possible to go to school or to church within a quarter mile of second base;
- 6) if you drove from out of town and parked, you didn't have to walk to the ballpark through or past thousands of cars;
- 7) it was possible to ride your bike or take public transportation to the ballpark;
- 8) it was possible to walk to the ballpark from home;
- 9) old ballparks were physically constrained by existing urban street and block conditions;
- 10) they had smaller seating capacities and fans sat closer to the game;
- 11) there were real bleachers and more of them;
- 12) fans in the upper deck had regular opportunities to catch a foul ball;
- 13) fans could walk from one side of the ballpark to the other, in both the lower and upper decks, without ever losing sight of the playing field;
- 14) old ballpark quirks and asymmetries were site determined and dramatic;
- 15) fans could see a 300' homerun and/or a 440' out--sometimes even in the same park;
- 16) fans could see a homerun break a building window;
- 17) fans could see a homerun go into the street;
- 18) fans in the upper deck didn't need oxygen tanks;
- 19) there was no right field home run "porch" that isn't a porch;
- 20) office buildings beyond the outfield fence were outside the ballpark;
- 21) fans could sit during a rain delay under the upper deck or under a real roof;
- 22) fans could hide behind a post if their team was playing lousy;
- 23) the occupant of the upper deck seat next to you was never a mountain goat or a St. Bernard;
- 24) old ballparks were paid for by team owners rather than taxpayers;
- 25) they were physically smaller by a third, and less costly (in today's dollars) by more than half;

- 26) that \$200M in tax money for today's typical new stadium was available for education and recreation, police and fire protection, street improvements and public transportation;
- 27) that \$400M in tax money for today's typical new stadium with a retractable roof was available for twice as much education and recreation, police and fire protection, street improvements and public transportation;
- 28) every game was played outdoors on grass;
- 29) old ballparks were made to focus attention upon (rather than divert it from) the game;
- 30) fans could get away from television for three to four hours;
- 31) no electronic advertising;
- 32) no rotating advertising;
- 33) no one told fans when to clap or cheer;
- 34) no loud music after the national anthem except during the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch;
- 35) no "dot" races;
- 36) no cigar bars;
- 37) no swimming pools;
- 38) no hair salons;
- 39) real people occupied (and were visible in) the scoreboard;
- 40) old ballparks did not flaunt class differences in their architecture;
- 41) luxury suites had to be retrofitted into old ballparks--they were an afterthought, rather than the ballparks' reason for being;
- 42) business networking and political schmoozing had to be done out in the open;
- 43) food was delivered by vendors rather than waiters;
- 44) a family of four could go to a game for less than \$100;
- 45) there were doubleheaders on Sundays;
- 46) the best playing field configuration in baseball today is in Fenway Park;
- 47) the best place to see a baseball game today is Wrigley Field;
- 48) the closest upper deck seats in baseball today--where Tom Boswell learned from watching Jack Morris the meaning of changing speeds--are in Tiger Stadium;
- 49) Fred Merkle failed to touch second, Babe Ruth called his shot, Jackie Robinson stole home, and Ted Williams homered in his last at bat in old ballparks; and finally
- 50) old ballparks didn't require market analyst recommendations to be called "ballparks."

But don't take my word for it. Just come see a game at Wrigley Field.

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