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***Sports Stadium Construction, the Ideology of
Boosterism, and the Emergence of
Professional Team Sports: An Examination of
Press Coverage from 1909-1999***

The scholarship of professional sports stadium construction tends to isolate three major periods of intense national focus on new construction in the United States. The first emerged during the Progressive Era, the second followed the Post World War II era, while the third is taking place now. This paper traces the social developments that characterize each major era of stadium construction, focusing on newspaper coverage in Pittsburgh.

The study examines similarities and differences in media content during each era of stadium construction, utilizing Pittsburgh as a case study. A key similarity in each era is the pervasive nature of civic boosterism as a rationale for advocacy of stadium construction. This paper examines the shifting nature of boosterism during each era, explaining how Pittsburgh media coverage reflects broader national trends. Pittsburgh is a good case study since the city was involved in professional sports stadium construction during each of the three previously delineated eras.

During the first era of stadium construction, Pittsburgh's construction of Forbes Field served as a basic reflection of the city's stature as a nationally significant player in the industrial revolution. Construction of Three Rivers Stadium in 1969 and 1970 helped

to assuage citizen disappointment with the decline of Pittsburgh as an industrial manufacturing force as the nation more visibly shifted to a service-oriented economy. The more recent construction of two new stadiums, both currently in progress, reflects a desire of public officials to maintain “major league” status on a national level at a time when Pittsburgh’s economy moves to diversify and counter declines in youthful population. The most recent era of stadium construction is marked by public ambivalence, and in many cases resentment, regarding the prudence of government subsidy of professional sports facilities.

The increasing importance of sport as a symbol of major league status fosters the current era of stadium construction. It is argued that the correlation of major league status and the presence of a major league sports franchise initially gained currency during the Progressive Era as a result of mass media influences. The symbolic significance of sport as a highly valued cultural commodity has accelerated the political desire to build and subsidize new stadia in subsequent eras as sports franchise owners have leveraged the cartel status of sport leagues against the diminishing power of urban authorities. Factors responsible for stadium construction decisions are too complex to fully isolate. Nevertheless, this paper concludes that aggressive commercial employment of communication technology is one of the most salient reasons for an increasing tendency to publicly fund stadium construction.



Masters of the art.