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Competitive Boosterism: How Milwaukee Lost the Braves

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Glen Gendzel

Competitive Boosterism: How Milwaukee Lost the Braves

By any measure, major-league baseball in North America surely qualifies as big business. The national pastime is a vital component of today's urban political economy, and baseball teams resemble other high-prestige businesses in that cities must compete for the privilege of hosting them—whatever their true worth. This article analyzes the transfer of the Milwaukee Braves baseball franchise to Atlanta in 1965 as the outcome of "competitive boosterism," or the active participation of local elites in luring trade, industry, and investment from other cities for the purpose of economic development.

Baseball seasons of the mid-1990s, with a full lineup of striking players, rapacious owners, and disaffected fans, surely set records for most repetitions of the familiar refrain: "Baseball is a business, not a sport." The contemporary sports page came to resemble the financial page, lavishing attention once reserved for pitching and pennants onto the minutiae of labor relations and anti-trust law. Each year sportswriters and fans seemed to rediscover that big money had turned all big-league sports into big business. What still went unnoticed by baseball writers, however, was that while the national pastime mutated from sport into business, a much larger sector of the U.S. political economy shifted in the opposite direction. What used to be the *business* of urban economic development

GLEN GENDZEL is a doctoral candidate in U.S. History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. For their helpful comments the author would like to thank Prof. Stanley Schultz, Prof. John Milton Cooper, Jr., Prof. Stanley Kutler, and Prof. Ralph Andriano of the University of Wisconsin; Harry Miller of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; the editor of this journal; and an anonymous referee. An earlier version of this article was presented to the North American Society for Sport History meeting at California State University-Long Beach, 29 May 1995.

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became the *sport* of competitive boosterism—and major-league baseball was one of the most coveted trophies to be won.¹

Cities themselves played a cutthroat game in which competition for baseball franchises might be considered the ultimate World Series. That game was competitive boosterism: the active participation of local elites in luring trade, industry and investment to their own cities from elsewhere, in a zero-sum Darwinian contest. Cities of the “lean-and-mean” 1990s coped with fiscal austerity and slow growth by seeking regional redistribution of jobs and capital, offering to private investors tax breaks, revenue bonds, speculative buildings, research parks, redevelopment aid, and other inducements. On the payrolls of states and cities across North America were specialists in “economic development”—players in the game of competitive boosterism, the “last entrepreneurs” fighting a “new civil war.”²

Competition for economic development is systemic to the political economy of U.S. cities. Likewise, boosterism, or “the promotion of economic enterprise by organized public and private groups within urban communities,” as the historian Charles Glaab defined it, runs deep in the American grain. James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, and Sinclair Lewis created booster archetypes in their novels, and dozens of historians have chronicled the activities of land speculators, railroad boomers, and town promoters. Nor has the competitive side of boosterism suffered from historical neglect: Daniel Boorstin, Richard Wade, and Paul Wallace Gates described lively nineteenth-century contests among frontier towns for rail depots, posh hotels, county seats, and state capitals. Over the last thirty years, however, not even a Japanese automobile factory could match

¹ Growing cynicism toward the baseball business can be glimpsed in William Oscar Johnson, “For Sale: The National Pastime,” *Sports Illustrated* (17 May 1993): 32–39; John Underwood, “From Baseball and Apple Pie to Greed and Sky Boxes,” *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1993, Sec. 8, 11; Jack Sands and Peter Gammons, *Coming Apart at the Seams: How Baseball Owners, Players, and Television Executives Have Led Our National Pastime to the Brink of Disaster* (New York, 1993); John Helyar, *Lords of the Realm: The Real History of Baseball* (New York, 1994); and Claire Smith, “Game Is in Dire Need of Positive Spin,” *New York Times*, 8 June 1995, B15.

² Robert Goodman, *The Last Entrepreneurs: America's Regional Wars for Jobs and Dollars* (New York, 1979); Douglas J. Watson, *The New Civil War: Government Competition for Economic Development* (Westport, Conn., 1995). For introductions to the voluminous economic development literature, see Clarence N. Stone and Heywood T. Sanders, eds., *The Politics of Urban Development* (Lawrence, Ks., 1987); Peter Eisenger, *The Rise of the Entrepreneurial State: State and Local Economic Development Policy in the United States* (Madison, Wisc., 1988); and Richard D. Bingham and Robert Mier, eds., *Theories of Local Economic Development: Perspectives from Across the Disciplines* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1993).

a major-league baseball franchise in prestige for the home community—and in the lengths to which boosters would go to procure it.³

Civic leaders indifferent to shuttered factories, jobless workers, and fleeing firms often spared no effort to retain a major-league baseball franchise. “Major League City” is the arch-cachet of American cityhood, which presumably brings “civic pride” and “economic growth,” according to the historian James Edward Miller. But the baseball economist Andrew Zimbalist found that while “a city reaps unquantifiable benefits from having a team,” it is also true that “cities that have teams and lose them are likely to encounter an image problem.” Politicians faced tremendous pressure to hold onto the hometown favorites, regardless of their true economic worth. “Big league owners know that by threatening to move, they can extort any concessions they want from their cities,” sports columnist Allen Barra noted recently. “I’ll bleed and I’ll die,” vowed Governor Jim Thompson of Illinois in 1988, “before I let the [White] Sox leave Chicago.” Owners have successfully exploited that sort of leverage to obtain magnificent new stadiums and generous leases from anxious communities, not least in Chicago.⁴

In a 1995 interview, American League president Gene Budig underscored the power of major-league baseball to force cities to play competitive boosterism, and he reminded them of the stakes:

³ Charles N. Glaab, “Historical Perspective on Urban Development Schemes,” in Leo F. Schreier and Henry Fagin, eds., *Urban Research and Policy Planning* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1967), 197; James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found; a Sequel to Homeward Bound* (New York, 1900; orig. pub. 1838); Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (Hartford, Conn., 1873); Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (New York, 1922); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965); Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790–1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Paul Wallace Gates, “The Role of the Land Speculator in Western Development,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 66 (1942): 330. For examples of the growing boosterism literature, see Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, Conn., 1981), and William Cronon, “Booster Dreams,” in *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991), 31–41.

⁴ William Fulton, “Desperately Seeking Sports Teams,” *Governing* 1 (1988): 34–40; James Edward Miller, *The Baseball Business: Pursuing Pennants and Profits in Baltimore* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990), 297; Andrew Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions: A Probing Look Inside the Big Business of Our National Pastime* (New York, 1992), 138; Allen Barra, “How to Save Yankee Stadium,” *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 1993, A27; Thompson quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1988; Richard Corliss, “Build It, and They Might Come,” *TIME* (24 Aug. 1992): 50–52; Randall Lane, “Bread and Circuses,” *Forbes* (6 June 1994): 62–64.

I believe the general public realizes the importance of major league baseball to their communities. It is clearly in the best interests of those communities to protect those franchises. They are important to economic development as well as quality of life . . . To lose a major league baseball franchise would send an unfortunate message to business and industry that would have interest in possible location [in those cities].

Faced with this kind of threat, elected officials were highly vulnerable to what *Forbes* called “big-league blackmail,” and what *Sports Illustrated* denounced as the “recurring scam” by which “plutocratic extortioners” who happen to own teams “blackmail communities into meeting their demands—or else.”⁵

Cities struggling with “the sports franchise relocation issue” found themselves trapped in an urban arms race which forced them to defend their major-league status with plush stadiums and subsidies. Economic development specialists doubted the wisdom of investing “tax dollars and emotions” in sports as a development strategy, especially when compared to alternative investments in infrastructure, education, or manufacturing employment. Charles Euchner’s indictment of the “cannibalistic struggles for sports franchises” called for federal intervention, and Kenneth Shropshire suggested that sports-minded cities caught in this “surrogate warfare” should question “whether the huge expenditures needed to be perceived as ‘big-league’ are worthwhile.” Indeed, economists find little rational basis for the half-billion dollars in annual net tax transfers to professional sport entities. Yet baseball bidding wars escalated in the 1990s—even though, as economist Benjamin Okner found decades ago, precious public dollars flow into the pockets of some of the nation’s wealthiest private individuals. Dean Baim confirmed that sports subsidies constitute highly regressive income transfers from poor urban taxpayers to a few millionaire owners and players. How did American cities get mired in this expensive and unproductive game?⁶

⁵ Gene Budig quoted in Bob Nightengale, “Baseball Must Get Basic Before Anything Else,” *The Sporting News* (15 June 1995): 17; Marcia Berss, “Big League Blackmail,” *Forbes* (11 May 1992): 45; Tim Crothers, “The Shakedown,” *Sports Illustrated* (19 June 1995): 78.

⁶ Arthur T. Johnson, “Municipal Administration and the Sports Franchise Relocation Issue,” *Public Administration Review* 43 (1983): 519–523; John Pelissero, Beth Henschen, and Edward Sidlow, “Community Development or Business Promotion? A Look at Sports-Led Economic Development,” in David Fasenfest, ed., *Community Economic*

Opening Day of baseball's competitive boosterism season came on 21 October 1964—the day the Milwaukee Braves baseball team announced their move to Atlanta. The importance of this episode over other traumatic sports team movements was emphasized by the broadcaster Howard Cosell, who testified before Congress that transferring the Braves franchise was the first and worst example of what he called “the rape of the cities,” or the abuse of monopoly power by baseball owners exempt from antitrust law. Bill Veeck, another noted baseball expert, complained at the time that “the Milwaukee situation has disgusted the entire nation.” Of course, other cities lost baseball teams before Milwaukee; but forsaken fans of the Boston Braves, the St. Louis Browns, the Brooklyn Dodgers, the New York Giants, and the Washington Senators could always transfer their allegiance to another major-league team in town. That may have been paltry consolation, but Milwaukee fans were left with no major-league team in any sport. For the first time in modern history, a city was stripped altogether of its major-league status.⁷

I

The Boston Braves were a charter member of baseball's National League, organized in 1876, but the franchise enjoyed only sporadic success. Attendance topped one million only three times in Boston, and in 1952 it fell to 282,000. Owner Lou Perini, a millionaire construction tycoon, took pride in his “sound business approach” to baseball. “Lou did not become a successful contractor by letting the grass grow under his feet,” admired John Gilly of the *Boston Record*, with unwitting prescience. The Braves lost over \$1 million

Development (New York, 1993), 172; Charles C. Euchner, *Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them* (Baltimore, Md., 1993), 184; Kenneth L. Shropshire, *The Sports Franchise Game: Cities in Pursuit of Sports Franchises, Events, Stadiums, and Arenas* (Philadelphia, Penn., 1995), 21, 61; Robert A. Baade and Richard F. Dye, “Sports Stadiums and Area Development: A Critical Review,” *Economic Development Quarterly* 2 (1988): 265–275; Benjamin A. Okner, “Subsidies of Stadiums and Arenas,” in Roger G. Noll, ed. *Government and the Sports Business* (Washington, D.C., 1974); Dean V. Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 163.

⁷ Howard Cosell testimony in 97th Cong., 1st and 2d Sess., House of Reps., *Antitrust Policy and Professional Sports* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 139; Bill Veeck with Ed Linn, *The Hustler's Handbook* (New York, 1965), 332. For a more cursory treatment of the Braves episode, see S. Prakash Sethi, *Up Against the Corporate Wall: Modern Corporations and Social Issues of the Seventies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), 267–280.

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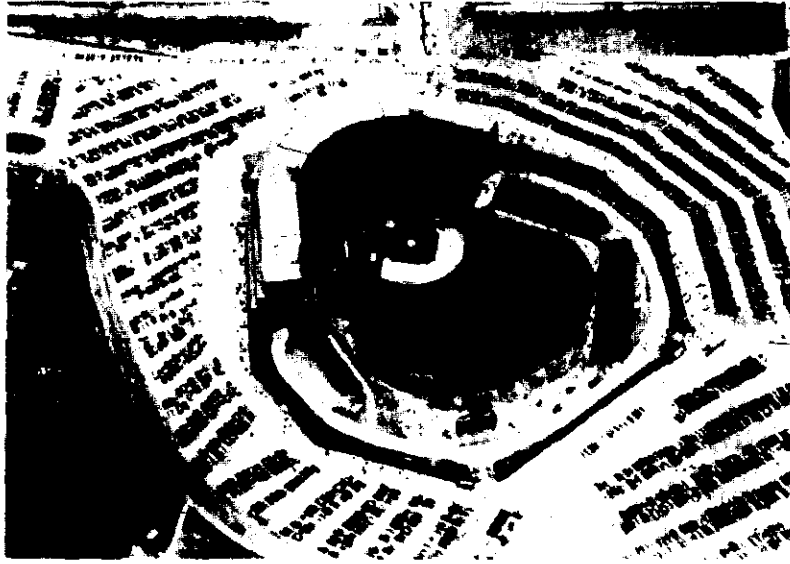
in 1950–52, and even Bostonians admitted that the “the worst franchise in the history of baseball” deserved a better fate. “One of these days the Braves may go on the road,” warned a local reporter, “and never come back.” But no team had moved in half a century, so leaving Boston would take an audacious act.⁸

As owner of the minor-league Milwaukee franchise, Perini had the exclusive territorial rights to that city under baseball’s monopolistic operating agreement. In 1952, boosters led by Clifford Randall of the Greater Milwaukee Committee and Alvin Monroe of the Milwaukee Association of Commerce pressured Perini to permit a transfer of the struggling St. Louis Browns franchise to their city. Russ Lynch of the *Milwaukee Journal* kept up a steady barrage of columns imploring Perini to let Milwaukee join the major leagues, and he testified before Congress for legislation to force baseball expansion. Meanwhile, Milwaukee County Stadium, built to host a minor-league team but expandable to major-league size, was reaching completion in 1953 after years of delay, thanks to the intercession of boosters William McGovern of the Wisconsin Telephone Company and brewery magnate Frederick Miller.⁹

Milwaukee boosters demanded that Perini let their city join the major leagues, flaying him in the press for blocking their aspirations. “You don’t know all the letters, telegrams, and telephone calls I’ve been getting on this thing,” Perini complained to fellow owners. After negotiating with Miller personally, Perini finally decided to head off other teams and move his own Boston Braves into Milwaukee’s new stadium. *Business Week* called it “a desperation move” by a “floundering” franchise, but the *Milwaukee Journal* praised the “citizen initiative” of city boosters who “went out and got a big league team” for their city. The Association of Commerce gave “the greatest credit” to Frederick Miller and his businessmen-boosters.

⁸ Harold Kaese and R. C. Lynch, *The Milwaukee Braves* (New York, 1954), 283; Perini quoted in *ibid.*, 235; Tom Meany and Others, *Milwaukee’s Miracle Braves* (New York, 1954), 7; Cilloly quoted in Bob Buege, *The Milwaukee Braves: A Baseball Eulogy* (Milwaukee, 1985) 16; sportswriter quoted in Kaese and Lynch, *Milwaukee Braves*, 283.

⁹ R. C. Lynch, “The Miracle,” in Meany, *Milwaukee’s Miracle Braves*, 19–38; Bill Veeck, *Veeck—As in Wreck* (New York, 1962), 279; Lynch testimony in 82nd Cong., 1st Sess., House of Reps., *Study of Monopoly Power* (Washington, D.C., 1952), 798–823; *Milwaukee Journal*, “Stadium Edition,” 8 April 1953; Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America* (Jefferson, N.C., 1989), 233–234; Harry H. Anderson, “Recreation, Entertainment, and Open Space: Park Traditions of Milwaukee County,” in Ralph M. Aderman, ed., *Trading Post to Metropolis: Milwaukee County’s First 150 Years* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1987); Robert L. Dishon, *The Silent Partners* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1965), 11; Tim Cohane, “None But the Braves,” *LOOK* (25 Aug. 1953): 87.



Home of the Braves • Milwaukee County Stadium around the time that the Boston Braves moved there in 1953. Fans of the Milwaukee Braves celebrated their new-found major-league status with season after season of record-setting attendance in the 1950s. Milwaukee was proclaimed "Baseball Capital of the World" after the Braves drew 2.2 million fans and won the World Series in 1957. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

"My ambition is to make Milwaukee a sports center," vowed Miller, "and keep it that way." Randall predicted that the Braves would be "the greatest psychological lift Milwaukee ever had," proving "that the community can be as great as its citizens want it to be."¹⁰

Sportswriters marveled at the "adulation and acclaim" heaped on the Braves from the moment they reached Milwaukee. The strangers from Boston were greeted by 12,000 ecstatic fans at the train station, and 60,000 more cheered during a welcome parade through downtown. "I don't think any city has ever gone as crazy over a baseball team," recalled third baseman Eddie Mathews, and teammate Warren Spahn agreed that the Braves attracted "the biggest and most worshipful following in the majors." Perini's gamble

¹⁰ Sam Levy, "Milwaukee, with Brand New Park, Willing and Waiting for Big League Berth," *The Sporting News* (26 Nov. 1952); Perini quoted in Kaese and Lynch, *Milwaukee Braves*, 284–285; "Braves Ride Again," *Business Week* (3 Oct. 1953): 122; *Milwaukee Journal*, 8 April, 19 March 1953; "Major League Baseball Comes to Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Commerce* (26 March 1953); Miller quoted in Cobane, "None But the Braves," 87; Randall quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 March, 8 April 1953.

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paid off handsomely: the Milwaukee Braves drew over 1.8 million fans in their first season, setting league records in attendance and profits. Braves fans showered the players with \$100,000 in free cars, televisions, clothing, sausage, and fine Wisconsin cheese. Sportswriters dubbed County Stadium "an insane asylum with bases," where fans behaved like "children attending their first circus." Perhaps the highest compliment anyone could bestow came from a Braves fan who told *LIFE* magazine: "This is the greatest thing that has happened to Milwaukee since beer."¹¹

The Association of Commerce estimated that the Braves attracted nearly \$5 million in new business to Milwaukee in 1953. The intangible benefits of major-league status were far greater: the Braves imparted "a new spirit of civic enthusiasm," and the team "brought success to civic enterprise far removed from baseball," according to one study. *American City* reported that "the Braves have infused an electric vitality into this city," and Milwaukee boosters exulted in their new-found urban competitiveness. "Milwaukee is big-league in every respect, not only in sports, but in the much bigger league of industry and commerce," beamed local manufacturer Tom Emerson. The Association of Commerce started a "Team Up With Big League Milwaukee" membership drive, and the Greater Milwaukee Committee adopted a new slogan: "Let's be big league *all* the way." A prominent brewery executive considered the Braves to be "the symbol that we've become a big city," and a Wisconsin bank president commented: "I can't think of one business or industry which hasn't been directly or indirectly helped by the coming of major-league baseball." Local post offices proudly stamped outgoing mail "Home of the Braves," proclaiming Milwaukee's new major-league status.¹²

Sports Illustrated put the "Milwaukee Miracle" on the cover of

¹¹ Arthur Daley in *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 July 1964; Buege, *Milwaukee Braves*, 15; Eddie Mathews, "Foreword," in *ibid.*, 5; Warren Spahn, "I Say Milwaukee Will Win The Pennant," *Saturday Evening Post* (20 April 1957): 100; Gilbert Millstein, "More Brooklyn Than Brooklyn," *New York Times Magazine* (5 July 1953): 28; Robert W. Wells, *This is Milwaukee* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), 239-240; unidentified merchant quoted in "Sausages, Sauerbraten, and Sympathy," *LIFE* (6 July 1953): 39.

¹² *Milwaukee Commerce*, 30 Oct. 1953; Patricia C. Hansbury, "Miracle in Milwaukee: A Study of the Impact of Major League Baseball on a City" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1972), 84; Douglas S. Powell, "Is Big League Baseball Good Municipal Business?" *American City* 72 (1957): 113; Emerson quoted in *Milwaukee Commerce*, 20 Oct. 1953; *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 Nov. 1953; brewer and banker quoted in William Barry Furlong, "That 'Big League' Yearning," *New York Times Magazine* (16 June 1957): 14, 16; Heinz, "Baseball Players' Dream Town," 90.



Booster Politicians • Milwaukee County supervisors re-dedicate the improved and expanded stadium before the start of another successful major-league baseball season, April 1955. The supervisors told reporters that they were “bombarded by constituents” with ticket requests for perpetually sold-out Braves games. *Milwaukee Journal*, 7 April 1955. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

its inaugural issue in 1954, and the Braves kept setting higher attendance records, peaking at 2.2 million in the championship season of 1957. Braves slugger Henry Aaron would play some 22 seasons in the major leagues, but he considered 1957 to be “the best year of baseball that any city ever had.” Capping it all was a World Series victory over the New York Yankees. The ensuing civic euphoria seemed like “fantasia mit sauerbraten und genuetlichkeit.” Milwaukeeans rejoiced in triumph over New Yorkers who called their town “bush league.” The victory “cured a civic inferiority complex,” according to *TIME*. Milwaukee erupted in “pandemonium,” “bedlam,” and “a wild baseball bender,” a bigger party than V-E Day and V-J Day combined—bigger even than the night in the midst of the Great Depression when beer became legal again. Mayor Frank Zeidler proclaimed Milwaukee “the baseball capital of the world.”¹³

¹³ *Sports Illustrated* (16 Aug. 1954); Henry Aaron, with Lonnie Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story* (New York, 1991), 130; Arthur Dailey in *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 July 1964; “Strangers in Paradise,” *Sports Illustrated* (14 Oct. 1957): 31; “Big

"Will Milwaukee become just another baseball town," mused *Cosmopolitan* at the height of Braves mania, "... when the newness wears off?" Many teams of that era suffered post-championship drops in attendance, and the Milwaukee Braves proved no different. Despite another first-place finish in 1958, attendance fell below two million. As the team's won-loss record slumped in following years, attendance declined to 1.7 million in 1959, 1.5 million in 1960, and 1.1 million in 1961. When the Braves finished fifteen and a half games out of first place in 1962, they sold only 766,921 tickets. Perini had reaped \$7.5 million in profits from Milwaukee, but after posting his first losses in 1962, he sold the Braves to a group of Chicago investors for \$6.2 million, another baseball record. The new owners denied any intention of moving the team. "We never had anything in mind but making the most of what we had in Milwaukee," insisted team president John McHale. But the "Rover Boys," as Oliver Kuechle of the *Milwaukee Journal* dubbed them, had come to town, and they made their first overtures to Atlanta just nine months later.¹⁴

II

Who were the Rover Boys? Perini misleadingly introduced the new owners as "young sportsmen who are more interested in winning a pennant than in financial returns." A wealthy insurance broker and self-proclaimed "sports nut," William Bartholomay, age 34, led this group of affluent Chicago-area baseball fans, who used borrowed or inherited riches to buy into the exclusive major-league fraternity. Bartholomay's associates included heirs to the family fortunes of Johnson's Floor Wax, Searle Pharmaceuticals, the Miller Brewing

Leaguers at Last," *TIME* (7 Oct. 1957): 54; "October's Hero," *TIME* (21 Oct. 1957): 82; "The Series Sends Milwaukee on a Wild Baseball Bender," *LIFE* (14 Oct. 1957): 38-40; Wells, *This is Milwaukee*, 241; Zeidler quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 1 Oct. 1958.

¹⁴ Heinz, "Baseball Players' Dream Town," 93; McHale quoted in Furman Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta: The Atlanta Braves Story* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1966), 25; Barbara Greenwood, "Majors Return to Milwaukee," *Wisconsin Then and Now* 16 (July 1970): 8; *Milwaukee Journal*, 16 Nov. 1962. Attendance and profit figures in Arthur Anderson & Co., "Audit Report on Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves, Inc.," 12 Dec. 1965, Exhibit #436, *State of Wisconsin v. Milwaukee Braves, et al.*, Milwaukee County Circuit Court, Civil Division, Branch 9, Case No. 332-626, copy in the Records of Stafford, Rosenbaum, Rieser, and Hansen, 1953-1966, Milwaukee Records Center, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter "SRRH Records").



The "Rover Boys" - William C. Bartholomay, head of the group of Chicago investors who purchased the ailing Milwaukee Braves for \$6.2 million in November 1962. After numerous denials, Bartholomay and his associates announced in October 1964, that the team would move to Atlanta. The franchise transfer triggered an uproar in Milwaukee and provoked an antitrust lawsuit from the state of Wisconsin. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Atlanta Braves.)

Company, and Chicago's Palmer House. Bill Veeck, who at various times owned several teams himself, scoffed that "the sum of their total knowledge of baseball is zero." He predicted that these opulent sportsmen would never be welcome in Milwaukee, which already smarted from Chicago's regional dominance. "To the folks of

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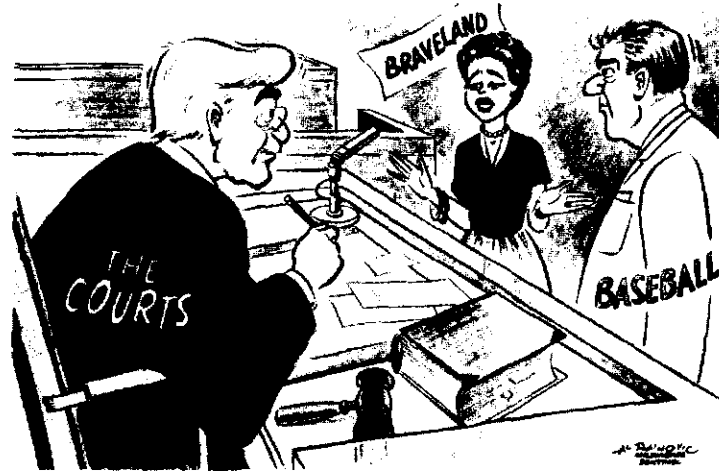
Milwaukee," sympathized Veeck, "the whole deal had the uncomfortable smell of city slickers coming in to take over."¹⁵

The Rover Boys quickly ran afoul of local skepticism. Before the start of the 1963 season, the newcomers offered 115,000 shares of Braves stock for sale to Wisconsin residents. They hoped to promote fan interest and allay fears of absentee ownership, while retaining a majority interest for themselves. Few Wisconsin investors doubted that the real intent of the stock offering was to pay debts incurred in buying the team; the prospectus even admitted that the offering was for "liquidation of interim financing." Not surprisingly, only 11% of the shares were sold. Few local investors cared to help young, inexperienced, out-of-town financiers discharge their personal debts. But thereafter the owners could claim that Milwaukee no longer wanted the Braves. Bartholomay later informed his Board of Directors that because of the failed offering, "there is now no obligation whatever on the part of investors to sell to local residents," and they were free to seek a more hospitable venue.¹⁶

What must have prodded the Rover Boys to seek greener pastures was the \$3 million short-term loan they obtained to buy the Braves in 1962. Interest expense was considerable, with a \$2 million balloon payment due in 1968. Rather than spend more money to revive attendance, the Rover Boys sought a quick fix. By the start of the 1964 season, Bartholomay and his partners had committed the Braves to play in Atlanta in 1965. Naturally, the Rover Boys hoped to conceal their intentions and avoid a "lame duck" season in which heartbroken fans would shun a fleeing team. "The Braves will be in Milwaukee today, tomorrow, next year and as long as we are welcome," team president McHale told the media when rumors of a move first appeared. "We are positively not moving," asserted Bartholomay just days after secretly finalizing the deal with Atlanta. "We're playing in Milwaukee, whether you're talking 1964, 1965 or

¹⁵ Perini quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 17 Nov. 1962; Bartholomay quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 Jan. 1970; "Brief Biographical Sketch of Interim Buying Group," Milwaukee Braves Press Release, 16 Nov. 1962, copy in SRRH Records; *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1962, 19; Bill Veeck with Ed Linn, "Another Gone With the Wind," *Sports Illustrated* (7 June 1965): 34, 39.

¹⁶ Milwaukee Braves, Inc., "Preliminary Prospectus, 115,000 Shares Common Stock," 11 Feb. 1963, copy in SRRH Records; Veeck, "Another Gone With the Wind," 34, 39; Thomas O'Hanlon, "The Business of Baseball," *Dun's Review and Modern Industry* 83 (May 1964): 45, 87; Bartholomay in "Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of Milwaukee Braves, Inc.," 21 Oct. 1964, copy in Papers of Ralph L. Andreano, 1963-1971, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison [hereafter "Andreano Papers"].



"But, Your Honor, I Don't Want a Divorce!" - Milwaukee Sentinel cartoonist Al Rainovic's comment on the *State of Wisconsin v Milwaukee Braves, Inc., et al.* trial in 1966. A victory for Wisconsin might well have revolutionized the relationship between professional sports teams and their host communities. Jilted "Braveland" won the first round but lost on appeal to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case. (Original cartoon reproduced courtesy of Milwaukee Urban Archives, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.)

1975." Denials grew even murkier after July, 1964, when *The Sporting News* and the *New York Times* confirmed that the Braves would indeed play the next year in Atlanta. "This rumor . . . has gone full circle," waffled McHale. "How many times do we have to keep answering?" A month later, Bartholomay still dismissed the rumors as "wildest of the wild."¹⁷

Braves fans who yearned to believe the Rover Boys must have been startled in September 1964, when Bartholomay turned down a three-year sponsorship offer from the Schlitz Brewing Company. The deal represented a 33% increase over the team's existing broadcast contract. A few weeks later, just ten days after telling the press that leaving Milwaukee would be a "personal disappointment,"

¹⁷ Loan Agreement between the Milwaukee Braves, Inc., and the First Wisconsin National Bank of Milwaukee, 20 Dec. 1962, Exhibit #422, *Wisconsin v Braves*, copy in SRRH Records; McHale telegram to National League owners, 23 Sept. 1963, copy in SRRH Records; McHale and Bartholomay quoted in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 Oct. 1964; "Braves Shift Needs Only O.K. by N.L.," *The Sporting News* (11 July 1964); *New York Times*, 3 July 1964, 15.

Bartholomay made the official announcement (from Chicago) that the Braves would move to Atlanta in 1965, pending league approval. Milwaukee boosters now lashed the owners as much for their deceit as for their desertion. "If they had gone about it above board, Milwaukee would have been sore, but that's all," complained a local businessman. Speaking for many piqued fans was a third-grader who sent Bartholomay a crayoned note: "YOU ARE A LIAR." More to the point, Milwaukee County attorney George Rice informed the press: "We are prepared to file legal action any time, any day within an hour." The county board authorized counsel to incur any expense necessary to keep the Braves in town.¹⁸

Milwaukee still had a trump card to play. Bartholomay knew that the Braves' stadium lease ran through 1965, but apparently he assumed that the county would accept a cash settlement. The team paid about \$200,000 in rent in 1964, and Bartholomay offered to buy out the contract's final year for \$500,000. But the county board voted 24-0 to reject this offer—in effect, forfeiting taxpayers' money by forcing the Braves to stay after they had already announced their departure. Angered fans would surely disdain a team destined for some other city, and since rent was based on ticket and concession sales, poor attendance would mean lost revenue for the county as well as for the team. Indeed, fan boycotts in 1965 pared attendance down to an all-time low of 555,584, barely one-third of the team's 12-year average in Milwaukee. "Why should I give my money to some other city?" grouched a typical ex-fan that year. Stadium income did not even begin to cover costs—only 812 tickets were sold for one game—and the Rover Boys lost nearly \$1 million playing out a season that no one wanted. *Sports Illustrated* sympathized that the Braves had become "enemies in the city that once loved them," but Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* rightly blamed the owners, who had "bungled the operation" in their "greedy haste" to leave town.¹⁹

McHale expressed astonishment that "Milwaukee does not, after

¹⁸ "Decision Made Not to Sponsor Braves Broadcasts." Schlitz Brewing Company press release, 9 Dec. 1964. Exhibit #461. copy in SRRH Records. Bartholomay quoted in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 Oct. 1964; Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 92; Edmund Fitzgerald quoted in Astor, "Home Are the Braves," 65; letter quoted in Huston Horn, "Bravura Battle for the Braves," *Sports Illustrated* (2 Nov. 1964): 66; Rice quoted in Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 96-97; *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Milwaukee County* (21 Oct. 1964): 1325.

¹⁹ *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Milwaukee County* (16 June 1965): 1119-1121; *New York Times*, 17 June 1965, 38; Anderson Audit Report; fan quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Aug. 1965; Buege, *The Milwaukee Braves*, 392; "Milwaukee Braves," *Sports Illustrated* (19 April 1965): 63; Daley in *New York Times*, 10 June 1965, 25.

all, want us to leave on the next train." Indeed, the Rover Boys had not reckoned with their Wisconsin hosts. Before the lame-duck season was over, state Attorney General Bronson La Follette—grandson of the famous U.S. Senator Robert M. La Follette—slapped an anti-trust suit on the National League. The suit charged that by approving the Braves transfer without providing a replacement team, the National League conspired to restrain trade and damage the state's economy. Baseball owners advised Milwaukee to "become reconciled to losing the Braves," especially if the city desired a future expansion team. But these boosters would not quit; Milwaukee was "in this fight for keeps," vowed defiant Congressman Clement Zablocki: "The baseball bullies have picked on someone big enough and tough enough to fight back this time." Rather than sue in federal court, where baseball's well-established antitrust exemption would prevail, La Follette brought the action in state court under Wisconsin's antitrust law. If victorious, the state could seek injunctions in other states forbidding teams to play Braves' home games anywhere but in Milwaukee.²⁰

Never before had major-league baseball faced a state-level anti-trust challenge. Legal experts recognized that baseball's federal exemption, dating back to 1922, might be undone by an adverse ruling that other states would have to respect under the U.S. Constitution's "full faith and credit" clause. "Professional baseball has finally been forced to come to bat for itself," the *Wall Street Journal* realized, "and against the pitcher it's tried mightily to avoid for 44 years—the law." If Wisconsin won, other states could bring similar suits forcing major league baseball to grant franchises to their cities or else pay treble damages for concerted refusal to deal, an antitrust violation. It would have ended what legal scholars term "the baseball anomaly," the nation's only federally-protected legal monopoly. Aware of the threat, the National League scrambled to defend itself, retaining veteran antitrust attorney and future baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn. Privately, Kuhn himself confessed opposition to moving the Braves because he felt "it gave baseball an irresponsible, gypsy look." Indeed, the ensuing trial in the Milwaukee courtroom

²⁰ John McHale telegram to Ford Frick, Commissioner of Baseball, 10 Feb. 1965. Exhibit #90, copy in SRRH Records: "Homes of the Braves." *The Economist* (12 March 1966): 1007; Horace Stoneham, San Francisco Giants owner, quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 25 July 1966; Zablocki in 89th Cong., 1st Sess., *Cong. Record*, Appendix, 111 (5 Aug. 1965): A4363; *New York Times*, 4 Aug. 1965, 27; Sethi, *Up Against the Corporate Wall*, 274–275.

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of Judge Elmer Roller cast a pall over the national pastime. It also revealed much about the Rover Boys.²¹

III

Why did Bartholomay and his associates claim they had to leave Milwaukee? "The sharp decline in the city's interest in baseball is obvious," the owners asserted, pointing to flagging attendance. They told the *Wall Street Journal* that they lost \$3.5 million in Milwaukee, though at the trial they claimed more modest losses of \$50,000 to \$250,000 a year. They blamed the "anti-baseball climate" of local press and politicians for driving them away. McHale complained that "the team and ownership were continually being knocked down, besmirched and vilified." He asserted that "taking a crack at the Braves became a political pastime in Milwaukee, which, together with the unfriendly press, set the stage for killing baseball" in that city. Bartholomay agreed that Milwaukee's "antagonistic attitude" made for a most "unwelcome" atmosphere. Baseball attorneys introduced in evidence a thick sheaf of columns and speeches as proof of local antipathy. At least one National League owner explained his vote in favor of moving the Braves by referring to unsupportive press.²²

Had Milwaukee become a "bad baseball town"? Certainly fans had turned out to cheer past winners. But the sixth-place Braves of 1963 were a far cry from the World Champions of 1957. *Business Week* advised baseball owners at the time that "you'll never get rich digging in any league's cellar," and a Braves official admitted on the

²¹ *Federal Baseball Club v National League*, 259 U.S. 200 (1922); "Wail of Two Cities," *TIME* (4 Feb. 1966): 81-82; Steven M. Lovelady, "Baseball at Bat: Antitrust Suits May Profoundly Change Game," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 March 1966, 18; Bowie Kuhn, *Hardball: The Education of a Baseball Commissioner* (New York, 1987), 21. On the origin of baseball's anti-trust exemption, see Gary R. Roberts, "Professional Sports and the Anti-trust Laws," in Paul D. Staudohar and James A. Mangan, eds., *The Business of Professional Sports* (Urbana, Ill., 1991).

²² Defendant's opening statement in *Wisconsin v Braves*, Transcript of Proceedings, 1 March 1966, 330, copy in SRRH Records; Milwaukee Braves, Inc., "Presentation to National League," 22 Oct. 1964, Exhibit # 110, 3-4, copy in Andreano Papers; Braves officials quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, 22 March 1966; "Minutes of Special Meeting," copy in Andreano Papers; McHale quoted in Memorandum from Joseph W. Simpson, Jr., Vice President of First Wisconsin National Bank of Milwaukee, to William G. Brunder, Chairman of the Board, 23 Oct. 1964, copy in SRRH Records; "Presentation to National League," 10; Judge Roy Hofheinz, owner of the Houston Astros, quoted in Buege, *The Milwaukee Braves*, 393.

stand: "If you don't have a good ball club, you're not going to get the attendance." Baseball economists have identified the "honeymoon effect," which buoys a new team's attendance, and the "performance effect," which ties attendance to winning percentage. Both effects had run out in Milwaukee. Nor did it help that Braves management traded popular players, shuffled the lineup continually, and made scant efforts at promotion; or that the county in 1961 banned carry-in beverages from the stadium, alienating consumers of Milwaukee's signature beverage. "Eight years I buy tickets," grumped an ex-fan, "and then they want me to buy their beer—at their prices."²³

As for Milwaukee's alleged "hostility" to the Braves, not until the owners confirmed that they would indeed move the team did the local press turn against them. Most of the vituperative clippings submitted in court were dated after the team's departure became apparent. Oliver Kuechle's savage columns in the *Milwaukee Journal* ran only when he came to believe rumors that the Braves were folding their tents. On the other hand, Lloyd Larsen of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* continued to praise the team. He even co-chaired the "Fill 'Er Up" campaign that sold out County Stadium for Opening Day in 1964. Both newspapers routinely covered Braves games and published special baseball supplements. Judge Roller reviewed the file of Braves clippings and pronounced the local press to be downright friendly. Milwaukee journalists may have ripped the Rover Boys with columns of calumny, but the worst came after the move was threatened.²⁴

The same was true of Wisconsin politicians who criticized the Rover Boys. Aggrieved indignation seemed the proper official response after so many two-faced denials by the Rover Boys. Eugene Grobschmidt, county board chairman, went too far when he charged that the Braves were losing on purpose so that disgusted fans would

²³ "Baseball Tries to Keep Its Bounce," *Business Week* (20 April 1963): 148; Leary testimony quoted in *State of Wisconsin v Milwaukee Braves, Inc.*, 1966 Trade Cas. (CCH) 71,738 at 82,391; fan quoted in Jack Mann, "Meanwhile, Consider Poor Milwaukee," *Sports Illustrated* (6 Sept. 1965): 18. On attendance effects, see Philip K. Porter, "The Role of the Fan in Professional Baseball," in Paul M. Sommers, ed., *Diamonds Are Forever: The Business of Baseball* (Washington, D.C., 1992); Gerald W. Scully, *The Business of Major League Baseball* (Chicago, Ill., 1989), 101-116; Hal Hanson and Roger Gauthier, "Factors Affecting Attendance at Professional Sports Events," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 3 (1989): 15-19. On the team's personnel shifts, see Buege, *The Milwaukee Braves*, 340, 395. On declining attendance for all teams in the early 1960s, see "Baseball: Another Business Facing Change," *U.S. News & World Report* (12 Aug. 1963): 57.

²⁴ *Wisconsin v Braves*, 1966 Trade Cas. (CCH) 71,738 at 82,390-82,391.

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wish them good riddance. Other officials were more temperate in their pronouncements, amazingly so considering that the Rover Boys had misled them for over a year. More substantively, local officials also tried accommodating the team's needs. A month before the move was announced, county officials offered to renegotiate the Braves' stadium lease. They suggested that the county charge only \$1 annual rent up to the first million admissions and offer a new deal on concessions and maintenance that would save the Braves an additional \$120,000 a year. The county board approved this proposal by a vote of 22-1, but the Rover Boys claimed to be fully satisfied with the existing lease. In fact, they were already secretly committed to Atlanta.²⁵

More decisive than fans, press, or politicians was the vastly richer broadcast market that Atlanta could offer. Today's media millions had not yet materialized for baseball owners in the 1960s, but selling television and radio rights could still be lucrative because alone among professional sports, baseball did not (and still does not) pool local broadcast income for league-wide distribution. Each owner was free to squeeze his domain dry without sharing a drop among his fellows. Proposals for pooling this revenue, which would have removed much of the incentive for franchise transfers, were denounced as "socialistic, un-American, even communistic" by the owners. New York and Los Angeles teams had broadcast contracts worth \$1 million a year in 1964, more than double what most other teams could command. But even owners with modest contracts cherished their broadcast revenue, which entailed no additional operating expense. Philip Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, told *Newsweek* in 1965: "We would be out of business if we didn't have TV revenue, believe me."²⁶

In 1964, the Milwaukee Braves received \$400,000 for their local broadcasts, slightly below league average. At season's end, as mentioned above, the Schlitz Brewing Company offered the Braves

²⁵ Groschmidt quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 10 July 1964; *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Milwaukee County* (24 Sept. 1964): 1312-1318; "Proposed Financial Baseball Package for Milwaukee County," memorandum from John L. Doyne to James E. Held, 30 June 1965, Exhibit # 161, *Wisconsin v. Braves*, copy in SRRH Records; *Wisconsin v. Braves*, 1966 Trade Cas. (CCH) 71,738 at 82,390.

²⁶ *Television Age* (2 March 1964): 24-25; Bill Veck, "To Survive, Baseball Must Win New Fans," *Publisher's Newspaper Syndicate* press release, 7 March 1964, copy in SRRH Records; Wrigley quoted in "The Business of Baseball," *Newsweek* (26 April 1965): 69. On baseball's continued opposition to revenue sharing, see Zimbalist, *Baseball Business*, 163-164, 173; and Harris Collingwood, "The NFL Saw the Light. Will Baseball?" *Business Week* (11 Jan. 1993): 39.

\$535,000 a year for three years, above league average. "We feel it's vital that the Braves continue in Milwaukee," declared Schlitz chairman Robert Uiblein, Jr. No act of corporate boosterism, however, could compete with Atlanta's broadcast appeal. Milwaukee's advertising market of 2.5 million TV households halted at Chicago to the south, Minneapolis to the west, Canada to the north, and Lake Michigan to the east. Around Atlanta sprawled a seven-state empire of six million baseball-deprived households between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River. The nearest rival franchises were in Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Houston. Baseball had long ignored the southeast. Milwaukee paid the price of that neglect, and the Rover Boys simply cashed in on it. The Braves received \$2.5 million for their first broadcast contract in Atlanta. Milwaukee officials surmised that this was "the main reason, if not the only reason" for the move. "Television money is clearly at the bottom of everything," grouched Kuechle, concluding that his city had been "Immolated on the Altar of the Antenna." Indeed, sports historians often cite the Braves' relocation as "a classic example of the attraction of television revenue."²⁷

IV

If the Rover Boys felt compelled to disparage Milwaukee's "baseball climate," Milwaukee boosters also felt compelled to refute their insults. A local reporter feared that if the Braves left town, the rest of the country might well conclude: "All those krauts want to do is sit around and drink beer." Bartholomay had already convinced other owners that Milwaukee was no longer a viable venue. One owner testified that whereas Chicago was a "wonderful baseball town," Milwaukee was "not a good baseball town." In fact, the Mil-

²⁷ Joe Clark, "Analysis of Economic and Business Factors Relating to the Decision to Move the Braves From Milwaukee to Atlanta," unpublished report prepared for the Milwaukee Braves and the National League by Arthur D. Little, Inc., Consulting Economists, 1966, 37-39, copy in SRRH Records; "Baseball's Tab Up \$2 Million," *Broadcasting* (20 Feb. 1967): 38; Uiblein quoted in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 April 1965; Doyne to Held memo; *Milwaukee Journal*, 3 July 1964; Donald E. Parente, "A History of Television and Sports" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1974), 102. Other such references to the Braves case include Ira Horowitz, "Sports Broadcasting," in Roger C. Noll, ed., *Government and the Sports Business* (Washington, D.C., 1974), 298; David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans* (New York, 1988), 124; Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *Winning Is the Only Thing: Sports in America Since 1945* (Baltimore, Md., 1989), 140.

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waukee Braves outdrew the Chicago Cubs ten out of twelve years, despite a much smaller fan base. The small-market Milwaukee Braves averaged a phenomenal 94.4 tickets sold per 100 residents each year in Milwaukee. Over the same period, the average was 22.2 for other National League cities, and 20.7 for American League cities. "Milwaukee has done a marvelous job of supporting its team," Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin affirmed.²⁸

To salvage its image, Milwaukee launched a competitive booster counterattack. Wisconsin's lead counsel in the antitrust suit privately blamed "the Milwaukee Brahmins . . . for the flight of their beloved team," because civic leaders had taken the Braves for granted. Now faced with abandonment, boosters organized a campaign to keep Milwaukee in the major leagues. Led by 29-year-old Allan H. "Bud" Selig, son of Wisconsin's biggest Ford dealer, and by Edmund Fitzgerald, president of Cutler-Hammer Company, prominent local businessmen formed Teams, Inc., a month after the Braves announced their intention to depart. They bought out the stadium for Opening Day and resold tickets so that fans could attend without paying the hated Rover Boys. Proceeds went to a booster fund to keep Milwaukee in the major leagues. "Stand Up for Milwaukee Day" was the best-attended game of the entire lame-duck season. It so embarrassed the Rover Boys that they did not allow Teams, Inc. to buy out any more games. Selig appeared before other owners to reassure them that Milwaukee was still "a Major League City in all respects," but he found himself "bucking a previously successful sales campaign" in baseball circles.²⁹

Milwaukee howled in the teamless wilderness for the rest of the 1960s. Wisconsin had proved it could support major-league sports, and the successful Green Bay Packers dominated the National Football League at the time. But baseball owners were immune to Milwaukee's appeals. "We were treated like we had leprosy," Selig recalled. His co-investors incorporated as the Milwaukee Brewers

²⁸ Wells, *This is Milwaukee*, 236; M. Donald Grant, digest of deposition, 21 Jan. 1966, 5, 15, copy in SRRH Records; Jacobson, "Analysis of Milwaukee Market," 50, 15, 19; Proxmire testimony in 89th Cong., 1st Sess., U.S. Senate, *Professional Sports Antitrust Bill—1965* (Washington, D.C., 1965), 104.

²⁹ Willard Stafford, unpublished manuscript in possession of Kathy Stafford Schneyer, 296; "Teams, Inc., Report," press release, 25 Jan. 1966, copy in SRRH Records; Hansbury, "Miracle in Milwaukee," 57-58; Allan H. Selig, "Presentation to the National League," undated, copy in SRRH Records; "Major League Baseball in Wisconsin," speech by Allan H. "Bud" Selig, President of the Milwaukee Brewers, delivered at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Founder's Day Celebration, Marc Plaza Hotel, Milwaukee, 19 Feb. 1967.

Baseball Club, with financing in place to start up an expansion team at any time. "In view of our displeasure at the stealing of our own franchise," demurred Fitzgerald, "we're not in a good position to steal someone else's." But his city came up empty as baseball bestowed expansion teams on San Diego, Montreal, Seattle, and Kansas City in 1968–69. Only when the Seattle Pilots franchise went bankrupt, leaving other teams to assume its liabilities, did American League owners acquiesce in a court-ordered sale to Selig's group, just days before the 1970 season. The question remains why baseball owners deprived Milwaukee of a new franchise until they had practically no choice. The answer lay in the public half of Milwaukee's public-private booster offensive. While Selig's private boosters drew up their slick brochures, La Follette's state attorneys drew up their antitrust suit.³⁰

When state attorneys offered, in open court, to drop the suit in exchange for a new franchise, the owners protested that Wisconsin was "trying to force the National League to put an expansion team in Milwaukee and they're trying to hold us hostage until they do it." This unabashed strategy seemed to work when Judge Roller ruled against the National League on 13 April 1966. He granted two remedies: leave the Braves in place, or give Milwaukee a new team. But Wisconsin lost the case on appeal because of baseball's "unique exemption" from federal antitrust law. When the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the decision, Milwaukee was left with nothing. Rudolph Shoenecker, executive director of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, had warned that a spiteful lawsuit "would only serve to antagonize the very people who can give us a franchise in the first place." Indeed, baseball commissioner Ford Frick hinted that suing the owners was "the world's worst way of going about getting major-league representation in the future." In 1968, Kansas City lost a team to Oakland and won an expansion team ahead of Milwaukee because, as baseball executives solemnly declared, "there must be no more Milwaukees." It was their turn to be spiteful.³¹

³⁰ Selig, "Major League Baseball in Wisconsin," *New York Times*, 8 March, 3 Dec. 1965; Fitzgerald quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Aug. 1965; *New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1967; *Milwaukee Journal*, 22 March 1970; Pat Jordan, "Buddy's Boys and Their \$100 Million Toys," *New York Times Magazine* (18 Sept. 1994): 49–50; Peter Carry, "Milwaukee is Falling in Love Quietly This Time," *Sports Illustrated* (27 April 1970): 50–52.

³¹ Thomas Reynolds testimony in *Wisconsin v. Braves*, Transcript, 24 March 1966, 4650; *State of Wisconsin Milwaukee Braves*, 31 Wis. (2d) 699, cert. denied 385 U.S. 990 (1966), pet. for rehearing denied 385 U.S. 1044 (1967); Rudolph A. Shoenecker to Edmund Fitzgerald, et al., 16 March 1965, Exhibit #497, *Wisconsin v. Braves*, copy in

V

"Milwaukee's reluctance to give up the Braves is understandable," observed the *Wall Street Journal*, "and so is Atlanta's eagerness to grab them." The enthusiasm of Atlanta's competitive boosters was already legendary at the time. Georgia Governor Ernest Vandiver sounded like a coach at halftime when he told a roomful of Atlanta businessmen in 1961 that "we are in the middle of a spirited bidding for industrial plants," and "we are going to be found pushing every honorable and effective technique" to attract business. However honorable, Atlanta's techniques did prove quite effective. "There is no adequate word to describe Atlanta's physical and economic growth during the sixties," crowed Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., who presided over the boom years. Boosterism lifted Atlanta to regional supremacy as the New South's urban showpiece in the 1960s, when magnolia trees along Peachtree Street gave way to gleaming skyscrapers and snarled freeways. Atlanta had been the home of Henry Grady, the original New South booster. The city's vigorous tradition of competitive boosterism even had a name: the "Atlanta Spirit." Scarlett O'Hara had sniffed that Atlanta was full of "mighty pushy people." Many historians have confirmed her impression of Atlanta's "growth syndrome," "growth mania," "all-out drive," and "intense civic patriotism." Indeed, the city's "relentless boosterism" eventually garnered the 1996 Olympiad.³²

Atlantans enshrined boosterism in office in 1961, when they elected millionaire businessman and chamber of commerce president Ivan Allen, Jr. as their mayor. Allen's "Forward Atlanta" platform was borrowed from his father, a leading New South booster who had publicized Atlanta's commercial advantages to meet the competition from Florida's land boom back in 1925. Mayor Allen

SRRH Records; Frick quoted in Ed Rumill, "World's Worst Way," *Christian Science Monitor* (5 Aug. 1965): 12; Selig, "Major League Baseball in Wisconsin."

³² *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Aug. 1965; "Address of Honorable S. Ernest Vandiver, Governor of Georgia," *Minutes of the Governor's Conference on Trade and Commerce* (Atlanta, 1961): 2; Ivan Allen, Jr., with Paul Hemphill, *MAYOR: Notes on the Sixties* (New York, 1971), 145; Charles Garofalo, "The Atlanta Spirit: A Study in Urban Ideology," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 74 (1975): 34-44; Scarlett O'Hara quoted in Celestine Sibley, *Peachtree Street, U.S.A.* (Garden City, NY, 1963), 10; Truman A. Hartshorn, et al., *Metropolis in Georgia: Atlanta's Rise as a Major Transaction Center* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 5, 10; Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge, La., 1975), 137; Earl Zwingle, "Atlanta: Energy and Optimism in the New South," *National Geographic* 174 (1988): 7; Peter Applebome, "Boosterism Isn't Gone with the Wind," *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1994, A8.

never doubted that "the secret to Atlanta's success" was competitive boosterism. He lauded his fellow businessmen "who were totally dedicated—*albeit*, pragmatically, benevolently, and paternalistically—to the welfare of *their* city." Allen recruited "a phalanx of businessmen" to serve as "cheerleaders" for Atlanta. Private boosters spent \$1.6 million of their own money advertising the city in national trade magazines during Allen's administration. "Greater love hath no man than he give his gold to his community," approved the *Atlanta Constitution*.³³

Urban historian Carl Abbott has likened New South businessmen-boosters to Old South planter aristocrats who presumed that "their stake in the economy entitled them to control public decisions." More charitably, Allen's longtime predecessor William Hartsfield believed that "Atlanta has always been fortunate in having its leading and influential citizens participate in the government." Jimmy Carter, as Governor of Georgia, appreciated businessmen who were "willing to take part in politics . . . without any selfish motive." Boosterism is never wholly selfless, but, as Mayor Allen explained, Atlanta boosters simply believed that "whatever was good for Atlanta was good for them." Of course, not all Atlantans shared equally in what was "good" for Atlanta—especially not the black half of the population. By decade's end, the Voting Rights Act and racial discontent stirred by urban renewal would place African-Americans in charge of their city. Acquiring the Braves, according to Atlanta historians Norman Shavin and Bruce Galphin, was "the last time such a major decision could be made by the benevolent oligarchs of the business leadership without broader community input."³⁴

Major-league baseball was the booster trophy Mayor Allen

³³ Jacob C. Baas, "The Southeastern Fair and the 'Chamber of Commerce Movement' in Atlanta, 1915 to 1929," *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 21 (1977): 38; Allen, *MAYOR*, 239; *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 Jan. 1970; "Atlanta: Great Market in the Heart of the Southland," *Printer's Ink* (30 March 1962): 25–35; "Promoting a City's Spirit with Facts," *Printer's Ink* (17 July 1964): 37–38. On Allen's booster regime, see Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988* (Lawrence, Kans., 1989), 55–76.

³⁴ Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), 247; William B. Hartsfield, "The End of An Era—1961," in George J. Lankevich, ed., *Atlanta: A Chronological and Documentary History, 1813–1976* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1978), 127; Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (Nashville, 1975), 115; Allen, *MAYOR*, 148; Virginia H. Hein, "The Image of 'A City Too Busy to Hate': Atlanta in the 1960s," *Phylon* 33 (1972): 205–221; Stephen Burman, "The Illusion of Progress: Race and Politics in Atlanta, Georgia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (1979): 441–454; Norman Shavin and Bruce Galphin, *Atlanta: Triumph of a People* (Atlanta, 1982; 2d rev. ed., 1985), 282.

wanted desperately for Atlanta's mantelpiece. His campaign platform in 1961 promised a team, even if he had to lure one from elsewhere. His inaugural address in 1962 called for "an auditorium-coliseum complex that will . . . meet the competition of other progressive cities." After all, the same strategy had worked for Milwaukee. For years Allen boasted that he built Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium "on ground we didn't own with money we didn't have for clubs we had not yet signed." First he persuaded Charles O. Finley, owner of the struggling Kansas City Athletics, to transfer his team if Atlanta built a downtown stadium. Then Allen put his most trusted booster allies in charge of the stadium authority. For treasurer he picked Mills Lane, his own principal campaign donor, who personally lent the city \$400,000 for plans and estimates. Soon politicians joined the game and backed Allen's project: "People say we need a sports stadium," said one alderman, "and I guess they know what they're talking about." Allen's booster allies considered the stadium "a personal monument" to the mayor, while he portrayed it as "the greatest investment Atlanta ever made." Certainly it was one of the largest: Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium cost \$42.4 million, compared (in constant 1977 dollars) to Milwaukee County Stadium's \$15.2 million price tag.³⁵

The journalist Calvin Trillin has noted "the tendency in sunbelt glamor cities to focus civic pride on a single project of pharaonic scale," and Allen envisioned a Cheops of the New South. "Our stadium is a Southern project, built on Southern soil, by Southern architects and contractors," he proclaimed. Allen often linked Atlanta's aspirations to regional identity, a booster tactic pioneered by Henry Grady. Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium symbolized more than the New South's rebirth, however; it also trumpeted the arrival of a Sunbelt metropolis demanding admission to the major-league club. Local boosters appreciated that Allen's ambitious project "brought the nation's attention to what was going on here." Not everyone approved, of course. Pat Watters grumbled that Allen's stadium

³⁵ Bradley R. Rice, "If Dixie Were Atlanta," in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II* (Austin, Tex., 1983), 38; Ivan Allen, Jr., "A New Mayor for Atlanta," in George J. Lankevich, ed., *Atlanta: A Chronological and Documentary History, 1813-1976* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1978), 133; Allen deposition in *Wisconsin v. Braves*, Transcript, 14 March 1966, 2387; "Atlanta Pitches for the Big Leagues," *Atlanta Magazine* 3 (Nov. 1963): 55-56; Alderman John White quoted in Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 53; Rawson Heaverty, "The Atlanta Story," *Atlanta Economic Review* 17 (June 1967): 15; Allen deposition, *Wisconsin v. Braves*, Transcript, 14 March 1966, 2397; Baim, *Sports Stadium as Municipal Investment*, 204-206.



Booster Triumph • Atlanta's Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr. puts the finishing touch on the rushed construction of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium in 1965. An exuberant Atlanta booster and millionaire businessman, Allen considered his pet project "the greatest investment Atlanta ever made" and "Atlanta's greatest accomplishment of this century." The stadium has been slated for demolition following the 1996 Olympic Games. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Atlanta History Center.)

placed "the fun of the well-off" ahead of "the plight of the poor and the education of the children." It was built "at public expense," the historian David Goldfield observed, "while the city's abundant poor required special appeals to secure what was left over." Costs were inflated by completion bonuses awarded to contractors so that the stadium would be ready for the 1965 season. But when American League owners vetoed Finley's transfer, Atlantans had no team for their crash-built showpiece.³⁶

Atlanta and the Braves conveniently came to each others' rescue in July, 1963, when Allen led a booster expedition to Cleveland for

³⁶ Trillin quoted in Abbott, *The New Urban America*, 143; Allen quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 Oct. 1964; Furman Bisher in *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 Jan. 1970; Pat Watters, *The South and the Nation* (New York, 1969), 195; David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge, Louis., 1982), 196; Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 31-32.

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the All-Star Game. His group of local officials and Chamber of Commerce businessmen met with American League officials about Finley's stalled transfer, but they also had lunch with some of the Rover Boys who were in town for the game. Even though Allen's deal with Finley was technically still in effect, the mayor followed his booster instincts and pitched Atlanta to the Braves owners as he would have to any potential investors. Later he testified at the Braves trial that he gave the Rover Boys what he considered the "usual, I would say, Chamber of Commerce approach . . . to try to obtain a franchise for this city." Negotiations between Atlanta, desperate for a stadium tenant, and the Braves, eager for a new home, began at that fateful luncheon in Cleveland.³⁷

In addition to the siren call of broadcasting revenue, a generous stadium contract drew the Braves marching to Georgia. Arthur Montgomery, chairman of Allen's stadium authority, may have entertained doubts about the low-rent deal, but at a critical juncture in the negotiations, he received an urgent call. "Forget the pocket change," Allen shouted at him over the phone. "Sign the contract." The terms were less than favorable to Atlanta, granting the Braves generous prerogatives and even requiring the city to indemnify the National League for legal costs in the antitrust suit. This costly competitive booster victory foreshadowed the sort of profitless stadium deals many cities now accept under pain of losing a franchise. Dean Baim's 1990 study concluded that Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium lost nearly \$20 million in its first 25 years, and "it is unlikely this facility will earn a positive return." Considered "the worst playing surface in professional sports" by many athletes, Allen's prized stadium was slated for demolition in 1996.³⁸

When the Braves finally reached Atlanta in 1966, Mayor Allen declared Opening Day a holiday and 150,000 people thronged Magnolia Street for a welcome parade. Civil War allusions ran rampant. The mayor pointed out that the Braves had announced their move one hundred years after Atlanta was left "an ash-strewn ruin," and he predicted that the team's arrival would be "the happiest occasion

³⁷ Allen deposition, *Wisconsin v. Braves*, Transcript, 14 March 1966, 2369-2374, quote from 2369, copy in SRRH Records; Reynolds deposition, *Wisconsin v. Braves*, Transcript, 14 March 1966, 2398, copy in SRRH Records; Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 32, 67.

³⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 April 1966; *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 April 1966; *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1964, 38; Allen quoted in Astor, "Home Are the Braves," 67; Dean V. Baim, "Sports Stadiums as Wise Investments: An Evaluation," *Heartland Policy Study No. 32* (26 Nov. 1990): 20, 9; Kimberly Blass, "From Grassy Field to Classy Dome: A Pictorial History of Atlanta Sports Arenas," *Atlanta History* 35 (1991): 44.

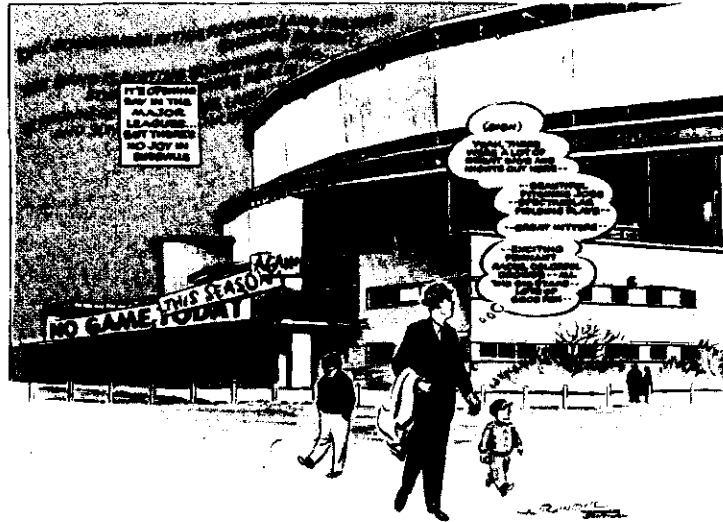
since we got General Sherman to head south back in 1864." As the sold-out crowd filed into their sparkling new ballpark, the electronic scoreboard asked them: "What Happened on April 12, 1861? They Fired on Ft. Sumter. What Happened on April 12, 1966? The South Rose Again." Not all of Atlanta's rejoicing invoked the past: Mayor Allen considered procuring the Braves to be "Atlanta's greatest accomplishment of this century." He expected that with baseball, Georgia would "become a symbol of Southern zest and drive, a major league state, in a major league region." Meanwhile, sullen Milwaukee boosters considered erecting a statue honoring General Sherman.³⁹

Winning the Braves also marked a victory for the Sunbelt over the Frostbelt. The journalist Kirkpatrick Sale, who drew attention to this inter-regional "power shift," recognized that sport was integral to the "growth culture" of the Sunbelt. "During the period that professional sports have changed from a happy pastime to a bountiful business," major-league franchises "moved steadily into the nether reaches of the country." Expansion to the "booming cowboy cities" helped revitalize professional sport while transferring these coveted signifiers of regional success. Urban historian Gene Burd concurred that in the Sunbelt, "the winning team symbolizes the 'big league' status for emerging cities which use sports imagery as a vehicle for civic rivalry and in the competition for tourists, new industry, and the piracy of old industry." Given Atlanta's acknowledged status as "archetype of the Sunbelt South," media coverage of the Braves episode helped accentuate "the second war between the states" in the 1960s.⁴⁰

Conversely, losing the Braves awakened Milwaukee boosters to the threat of Sunbelt competition. "Presumably, if we can't support a baseball team and our economy is going downhill," worried Lester

³⁹ "Cold Wind from Wisconsin," *TIME* (22 April 1966): 66; "Like 'Gone With the Wind,' Braves Take Atlanta," *LIFE* (22 April 1966): 77; Allen quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 Oct. 1964; Allen quoted in William Leggett, "Atlanta You Can Have the Rest, Leave Us Eddie Mattress," *Sports Illustrated* (26 April 1965): 143; Allen quoted in *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1964; Allen quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 Oct. 1964; *Milwaukee Journal*, 13 April 1966. See also William A. Schaffer, George D. Houser, and Robert A. Weinberg, *The Economic Impact of the Braves on Atlanta: 1966* (Atlanta, 1967).

⁴⁰ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York, 1975): 47; Gene Burd, "The Selling of the Sunbelt: Civic Boosterism in the Media," in David C. Perry and Alfred J. Watkins, eds., *The Rise of the Sunbelt Cities* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1977): 145; Ronald H. Bayor, "The Twentieth-Century Urban South and the Atlanta Experience," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 565; "The Second War Between the States," *Business Week* (17 May 1976): 92-114.



"No Joy in Sudsville" - Al Rainovic's sorrowful depiction of vacant Milwaukee County Stadium on baseball's Opening Day, one year after the Braves began playing in Atlanta. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 10 April 1967. (Original cartoon reproduced courtesy of Milwaukee Urban Archives, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.)

Brann of the Association of Commerce in 1964, "no one would want to expand or locate an industrial facility in this area." He hoped that the Braves' departure would remove "the last of any complacent attitude," because more was at stake than just baseball. "In future months and years it may not be Atlanta seeking a baseball team," he prophesied. "It might be some other city seeking one of our manufacturing facilities." University of Wisconsin economists reported a growing consensus among local businessmen that Milwaukee's "business climate" left much to be desired in the 1960s. Investment dollars flowed out of state, eroding a once-strong manufacturing base and enriching low-wage, low-tax, low-regulation Southern states such as Georgia. Meanwhile, booster organizations like the Greater Milwaukee Committee suffered from neglect.⁴¹

Milwaukee had a reputation for "complacent shabbiness" when

⁴¹ LWB [Lester W. Brann, Jr.], "The Laughing Indian," *Milwaukee Commerce* (Nov. 1964), 7; Jon G. Udell, *Wisconsin's Economic Development: An Analysis of the Growth, Problems and Potentials of the State of Wisconsin*, Wisconsin Commerce Studies, Vol. III, No. 2 (Madison, Wisc., 1965); Peter E. Marchetti, "Runaways and Takeovers: Their Effect on Milwaukee's Economy," *Urbanism Past & Present*, No. 10, 5 (1980): 1-11; Dishon, *Silent Partners*, 15-18.

Henry Maier was elected mayor in 1960. He created the Division of Economic Development to make his city more competitive in the booster game. "Every large city in the country is crowding us," he admonished, "and the fight is getting tougher than ever." Ahead of other Milwaukeeans, Maier realized that "we had to find ways and means of attracting and stimulating more private investment." As president of the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Maier called for "reordering our national priorities," drawing attention to urban blight. In 1964, he warned: "The high-gear race for industry compels us to run very, very fast just to keep even—let alone to surge ahead." Maier exhorted Milwaukee boosters to "go on a 'war footing' in the nation-wide battle for plants," adding: "We must step up our defenses to stop or at least reduce the pillaging of our existing industries." Maier understood the importance of the Braves battle: "The eyes of the nation will be upon Milwaukee to examine our credentials as a major league city not only in the matter of baseball, but in all phases of community life."⁴²

During the Milwaukee Braves' final season, the city council approved an aggressive campaign to "boost economic development," adopting the slogan: "Milwaukee, great for business, great for living, and growing greater." This message appeared on bumperstickers, billboards, and crates of goods headed out of town. A local reporter predicted that future historians would identify 1965 as the year when Milwaukee's businessmen, "once reluctant to participate in city affairs, became more highly organized than ever to push for progress." Nine days after the Braves played their first game in Atlanta, leading Milwaukee boosters conducted a "Forum for Progress" sponsored by the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. The first panel discussion raised the competitive booster alarm: "Wisconsin's Industrial Future: Does It Have One?" Governor Warren Knowles used the occasion to tout his "We Like It Here" economic development campaign. It seemed that losing the Braves had finally stirred Milwaukeeans out of their complacency.⁴³

⁴² Richard S. Davis, "Milwaukee: Old Lady Thrift," in Robert S. Allen, *Our Fair City* (New York, 1947), 189; Henry W. Maier, *Challenge to the Cities: An Approach to a Theory of Urban Leadership* (New York, 1966), 90; Henry W. Maier, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography* (Lanham, Md., 1993), x; Henry W. Maier, "Mayor Henry Maier Preaches the 'Milwaukee Idea' 1964," in George J. Lankevich, ed., *Milwaukee: A Chronological and Documentary History* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1977), 134; Maier quoted in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 12 April 1965.

⁴³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 8 July, 22 July, 1 Sept. 1965; Lawrence C. Lohmann in *Milwaukee Journal*, 26 July 1965; Knowles quoted in *1966 Milwaukee Sentinel Third Annual*



Booster Prophet - Milwaukee's Mayor Henry W. Maier in 1981. Maier presciently warned his constituents that their city faced rising competition for jobs and investment in the 1960s. He understood the Braves' fight as part of the larger struggle between Frostbelt and Sunbelt cities over jobs and investment. Maier was outspoken in defense of older U.S. cities plagued by riots, decay, and federal neglect. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Milwaukee Urban Archives, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.)

VI

The irony of Milwaukee losing the very team it had lured a dozen years earlier was not lost on Boston baseball fans of long memory. Many of them had never touched a drop of Milwaukee beer after 1953. "The Braves are going to leave Burptown in the lurch," snickered John Gilloly of the *Boston Record*, and he suggested that now Milwaukee would "realize how Boston felt at the time." Also ironically, Atlanta appropriated Milwaukee's own booster game plan by building a teamless stadium to attract a willing franchise. "If ever a city lifted its skirts and crooked its finger and winked its eye at a susceptible, fan-rejected, unloved baseball franchise," quipped Furman Bisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*, somewhat defensively, "Milwaukee is the guilty party." Milwaukee boosters had to admit that Atlan-

Forum for Progress (Milwaukee, 1966); *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 22 April 1966. On Milwaukee's booster revival, see Doug Moe, "Putting the Brakes on Corporate Flight," *Milwaukee* 5 (Oct. 1980): 38-42.



Booster Counterattack • Just days after the Braves played their last baseball game in Milwaukee, local businessmen and politicians erected privately-funded billboards promoting their city's economic competitiveness. Loss of major-league status goaded Milwaukee boosters into action, shedding their reputation for "complacent shabbiness." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 9 October 1965. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

ta's "vulgar seduction" of their team had a familiar ring. But they could not have predicted the "gypsy era" of leapfrogging franchises that would ensue once they showed rival boosters how to lure teams.⁴⁴

Nor could Milwaukeeans have guessed the consequences of demonstrating to baseball owners that moving was profitable. In 1953, National League president Warren Giles advised owners that Perini's success in Milwaukee proved that "there are new fields of operation which are fertile." Four years later, the *Wall Street Journal* advised "tapping new markets like the West Coast and repeating the 'Milwaukee Miracle.'" Brooklyn Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley promptly moved his team to Los Angeles, citing the need

⁴⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, 20 March 1953; Gilloly quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 July 1964; Bisher, *Miracle in Atlanta*, 131; Shirley Povitch in *Milwaukee Journal*, 9 July 1964; Lee Elihu Lowenfish, "A Tale of Many Cities: The Westward Expansion of Major League Baseball in the 1950s," *Journal of the West* 17 (1978): 71-82.

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to compete with Perini. In the nineteen years after the Braves left Boston, nine cities lost major-league teams; it happened twice to Washington, D.C. Sportswriters sympathized with Milwaukee's loss of the Braves because it underscored the rising greed of professional sport at the time. "Baseball subscribed to the hit and run tactics of the medicine show," complained Red Smith about the 1960s, and Roger Angell lambasted owners for purveying "fly-by-night tent-show entertainment," treating their customers like "dimwitted louts" who would root for anybody in a home uniform. Marauding teams "ravished the land," wrote Dick Young, then moved on "to other parts where money is fresher and the suckers riper."⁴⁵

Not unlike the players' strike of the 1990s, the Braves battle of 1960s reminded fans that the national pastime was, after all, a business. The trial made baseball look "less like a game and more like a money machine," editorialized the *Wall Street Journal*. "The Braves have proved that baseball is motivated by one thing only," wrote a disillusioned ex-fan to the *Milwaukee Journal*. "The almighty buck." Baseball writer Leonard Koppett knew this realization would hurt the game, because "it's pretty hard to root for a business—especially a business that may move away when a better offer comes along." Then as later, sportswriters fretted over game's waning popularity. By 1971, *Forbes* announced that baseball "no longer seems to fit the national mood." In another parallel to the 1990s, Congress in the 1960s was sufficiently roused by the Braves episode to reconsider baseball's antitrust exemption. Congressman Henry Reuss of Milwaukee complained that monopoly power allowed baseball owners to "enter a new community, catch all the fish, cut down all the trees, mine all the minerals and then leave it high and dry." Congressman Zablocki censured owners for "claiming an exemption from antitrust laws as a sport and then using that privilege for strictly business purposes which flaunt the public interest." Wisconsin legislators introduced bills to regulate baseball and to require pooling of local broadcast revenues.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Warren Giles, "National League President's Report," 13 May 1953, copy in SRRH Records; *Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 1957; Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York, 1987), 43–44; Smith in *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 June 1964; Roger Angell, "Two Strikes on the Image," *New Yorker* (24 Oct. 1964): 225–226; Young quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, 22 March 1966.

⁴⁶ Editorial in *Wall Street Journal*, 1 April 1966; Letter to *Milwaukee Journal*, 23 July 1965; Leonard Koppett, "The Ex-National Sport Looks at Its Image," *New York Times Magazine* (20 Dec. 1964): 48; "Who Says Baseball is Like Ballet?" *Forbes* (1 April 1971): 24; Henry S. Reuss telegram to Warren C. Giles, 10 July 1964, *Wisconsin v Braves*, Exhibit #88.

Baseball survived hearings, bills, and lawsuits in the 1960s. But the "comic opera war" between Milwaukee and Atlanta over the Braves franchise posed baseball's gravest challenge until the Curt Flood case and the onset of player free agency revolutionized the business a decade later. Had Wisconsin's antitrust suit succeeded, the owners might have lost their power to restrict the nation's supply of franchises and to blackmail cities into competing for the privilege of hosting them. "The sport has got itself into a frightful mess through its greed and arrogance," scolded Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* after the National League lost the first round of the suit. The Braves trial temporarily lifted the veil of sport from the national pastime, laying bare its ugly visage of monopoly. "The *business* of baseball has thrived," according to sports analyst David Whitford, "... by drawing on a vast reservoir of goodwill toward the *game* of baseball." Controversial franchise transfers drained that goodwill reservoir, forcing owners to restock it lest they lose their antitrust exemption. In the three decades after the Braves left Milwaukee, baseball owners agreed to add ten expansion teams; no franchise relocations occurred after 1972. Meanwhile, baseball owners, executives, and their families contributed over \$600,000 to political campaigns between 1988 and 1993, and there is some evidence that expansion teams were doled out selectively to placate key federal legislators.⁴⁷

Business Week reminded owners in 1991 that moving teams is "a risky step for an image-conscious sport," because "relocation fosters controversy and revives discussions of baseball's antitrust exemption." Baseball commissioners laid down strict franchise-

copy in SRRH Records; Clement J. Zablocki, "Should Professional Baseball Be Put Under Antitrust Laws?" *American Legion Magazine* 80 (March 1966): 22. On baseball's decline in the 1960s, see Ralph Andreano, *No Joy in Mudville: The Dilemma of Major League Baseball* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

⁴⁷ *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Aug. 1965; *Flood v Kuhn*, 407 U.S. 258 (1972); Marvin Miller, *A Whole Different Ball Game: The Sport and Business of Baseball* (New York, 1991); Daley in *New York Times*, 15 April 1966, 24; David Whitford, *Playing Hardball: The High-Stakes Battle for Baseball's New Franchises* (New York, 1993), 74; Arthur T. Johnson, "Congress and Professional Sports, 1951-1978," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 445 (1979): 102-115; "A League of Their Own," *Common Cause Magazine* 19 (1993): 10. On the politics of expansion, see Steven V. Roberts, "Baseball's Free Pass," *U.S. News & World Report*, 24 June 1991, 28; Matthew Cooper, "Squeeze Play: How Congress Got Baseball to Cough Up Two More Teams," *Washington Monthly* 25 (June 1993): 50-53; Murray Chass, "Halls of Congress Fill With New Lobbyists," *New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1995, 24; Eric Lipton and Mark Maske, "Aide Says Warner Cut Deal for Baseball Team," *Washington Post*, 23 Feb. 1995, B1.

transfer guidelines in the 1980s to preclude any emulation of the Rover Boys, but competition among cities aspiring to major-league status continued. Baseball economist Gerald Scully theorized that franchise shifts abated in the 1970s only because national television surpassed local television as a source of revenue. In the 1990s, that balance shifted back, and the possibility loomed that baseball owners might bestow their precious trophies on new winners in future rounds of competitive boosterism—especially as pressure increased on them from unstable labor costs and low TV ratings. Rather than relent to sharing local broadcast income, baseball owners demanded a team cap on player salaries, better lease terms from their home cities, and exorbitant franchise fees from new owners. By threatening to move—usually to St. Petersburg, where desperate boosters proffered the tenantless Suncoast Dome—several owners forced cities to contemplate the loss of major-league status, resurrecting the Milwaukee specter.⁴⁸

The Braves episode offers some final ironies. After leaving Milwaukee in 1965 the Atlanta Braves compiled the worst 25-year record in the history of U.S. professional sports. In 1975, the Rover Boys sold out to media entrepreneur Ted Turner, who began to broadcast games nationwide on his cable television network. Hence the team that moved for the sake of TV revenue threatened the revenues of all teams by undercutting their home markets. Most ironically of all, Bud Selig—the only hero of the Braves tragedy in the 1960s—attained national villainy in the 1990s as the hard-line acting commissioner of baseball who precipitated the players' strike by imposing a salary cap in the name of protecting small-market franchises. Despite the league's lowest player payroll, the Milwaukee Brewers still had to cope with the same small-market pressures that had troubled the Milwaukee Braves. "There's just no way for teams in markets like ours to compete financially with the teams in the big markets," Selig regularly emphasized. By 1995, his team was \$35 to \$50 million in debt, according to financial experts.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "Have Team, May Travel." *Business Week* (1 July 1991): 36; Scully, *Business of Major League Baseball*, 193; Richard Sandomir, "Networks Back Out of TV Deal with Baseball." *New York Times*, 23 June 1995, B3; Bob Nightengale, "Pay Millions for a Chance to Go Broke? Yeah, Right." *The Sporting News* (20 March 1995): 14; Andrew Osterland, "Field of Nightmares." *Financial World* 164 (14 Feb. 1995): 105-107; Crothers, "The Shakedown."

⁴⁹ Bob Hope, *We Could've Finished Last Without You: An Irreverent Look at the Atlanta Braves* (Atlanta, 1991), 1; Scully, *Business of Baseball*, 108-109; Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions*, 50; Selig quoted in John Feinstein, *Play Ball: The Life and Troubled*

In the 1990s, the Milwaukee Brewers joined the poor-mouth chorus of baseball teams demanding a new public-funded ballpark, though Selig also offered to contribute substantially. A local reporter of long memory observed that Selig was "making Bill Bartholomay-like statements about his team's finances." Yet ironically, given his pivotal role in the Braves-Brewers saga, Selig was in a weaker position to make a credible threat to leave Milwaukee. Brewers vice-president Laurel Prieb explained the need for a subsidized stadium to attract more fans: "It's not a matter of just wanting to stay. It's a matter of economic survival." In case local politicians missed the point, David Hackett, another Brewers vice-president, underscored it: "Nobody wants to lose a ballclub on their watch." Selig himself abstained from threats, admitting that "you don't threaten unless you want to go," but he added plaintively: "Are we supposed to pay a price for that?" As in the mid-1960s, Milwaukee struggled in the mid-1990s to retain its major-league status. "We got stung once, when the Braves left," sighed a local legislator, "and a lot of us just don't want to see that happen to our city again." After Wisconsin voters in 1995 rejected a sports lottery to fund Selig's stadium, Governor Tommy Thompson proposed new taxes to fund the \$250 million project. "Without the stadium, the Brewers leave," he cautioned, stirring up Braves memories. "That's the bottom line."⁵⁰

Ironies aside, Milwaukee's loss of the Braves has relevance beyond the realm of sport. Ex-baseball commissioner Ford Frick once observed that Americans "react violently to any questionable actions affecting sports," but they overlook "equally questionable maneuvering on the part of politicians and big business." The Braves tragedy was an object lesson in competitive boosterism—a painful warning of the fate that befalls cities when they fall behind in the economic development race. The political scientist Paul Kantor perceived that the "competitive urban economic environment" of recent decades "has reversed the historical relationship between business and cities." Competition is waged by cities against each other much

Times of Major League Baseball (New York, 1993), 177; *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, 21 Aug. 1995, 6A. See also Selig's remarks before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on 13 July 1994, and on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley" on 31 July 1994, defending the salary cap as the only way to preserve small-market franchises.

⁵⁰ "Brewers Press Plans for New Stadium," *Sports Industry News* (21 Aug. 1992): 261; Bruce Murphy, "Trade Secrets," *Milwaukee Magazine* (April 1994): 21; Prieb quoted in *Boston Globe*, 16 June 1995; Hackett quoted in *Milwaukee Journal*, 3 Nov. 1991; Selig quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, 4 Nov. 1991; Assemblyman Peter Brock quoted in Murphy, "Trade Secrets," 26; Thompson quoted in *Wisconsin State Journal*, 20 Aug. 1995, 1A.



Milwaukee's Baseball Booster • Allan H. "Bud" Selig, co-founder of Teams, Inc., president of the Milwaukee Brewers, and the acting commissioner of baseball. An ardent Braves fan in his youth, Selig labored for five years to bring major-league baseball back to Milwaukee before finally succeeding in 1970. In 1995, he convinced Wisconsin legislators that a new \$250 million stadium was necessary to avoid a repetition of the Braves tragedy. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Milwaukee Brewers.)

as among firms in a free marketplace, but without any gains in productivity or national income. High visibility and lack of regulation have made sport only the most blatant form of this destructive phe-

nomenon, which should concern others besides sports fans. In 1993, the National Governors' Association called for a ceasefire in the business incentive war.⁵¹

Meanwhile, though economists have found that tax money is better spent elsewhere, cities still bleed themselves white to build ever-more glorious stadiums for footloose franchises. States, cities, and local boosters spent freely in the 1990s to bring major league baseball to Denver, Miami, Tampa Bay, and Phoenix, and to keep it in many other places, seemingly at any cost. "Sports today is deals, always deals," lamented Howard Cosell when he left the broadcast booth in disgust. "Tax abatements, luxury boxes, a bigger slice of the concessions pie . . . Cross an owner, deny him these goodies, and he'll skip town." Baseball's competitive boosterism produced winners and losers such as Atlanta and Milwaukee in the 1960s, but the game goes on. Indeed, *Business Week* reported in 1992 that "there's no shortage of cities desperate for a major league team." Cosell wanted sports fans to realize that the "real action" was in the boardrooms, not the playing fields. For admirers of tough competition, perhaps the franchise race has surpassed the pennant race; it is the real sport behind the baseball business.⁵²

⁵¹ Ford C. Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People: Memoirs of a Lucky Fan* (New York, 1973), 123; Paul Kantor, "The Political Economy of Business Politics in U.S. Cities: A Developmental Perspective," *Studies in American Political Development*, Vol. IV (New Haven, 1990), 261; Watson, *New Civil War*, 59. For a summary critique, see Roger Wilson, *State Business Incentives and Economic Growth: Are They Effective? A Review of the Literature* (Lexington, Kent., 1989).

⁵² Robert A. Baade, "Stadiums, Professional Sports, and Economic Development: Assessing the Reality," *Heartland Policy Study*, No. 62 (28 Mar. 1994); "Is Buying a Ball Club a Fool's Game?" *Business Week* (17 Aug. 1992): 106; Lane, "Bread and Circuses," 62-64; Howard Cosell, with Peter Bonventre, *I Never Played the Game* (New York, 1985), 59-60; "Bottom of the Ninth in the City by the Bay?" *Business Week* (24 Aug. 1992): 69.