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## First, the Yankees Owe Us a Pennant

Baseball Parks are the new symbols of urban chic. Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago and Arlington, Texas have built new fan-friendly, high-amenity baseball parks to attract visitors and to refurbish their public images. The new stadiums are equipped with luxury boxes to generate revenues from the corporate elite, grass-covered playing fields for the true sports fans and comfortable seats to lure the couch potato crowd.

The new urban ballparks represent a total rejection of the concrete, multi-purpose stadia of the 1970's, whose fields were topped with injury-causing artificial turf, topped with domes to avoid interference from the heavens and surrounded by acres of asphalt parking space. In the '90s, baseball has rediscovered the city, where abandoned railroad yards and vacant industrial space have offered opportunities for public officials to build new castles for the Lords of Baseball.

Last summer, New York State officials considered a new ballpark on the West Side of Manhattan, but when New Jersey Gov. Christy Whitman rejected any use of taxpayer money to subsidize sports arenas in her state, the Yankees lost their ability to threaten that they will leave the city for the Meadowlands. Therefore, a more modest proposal to renovate Yankee Stadium - with luxury boxes, 6,000 new parking spaces and a historically correct alignment of the outfield lines - is now under consideration.

New Yorkers - unlike fans in other cities - don't attend games because the stadium is pretty, but because the team is a winner. As any professional athlete knows, New Yorkers are quick to reward great skill and ever quicker to punish the mediocre. The Yankees have a tradition of winning.

The problem with the Yankees is not their location in the Bronx or the condition of their stadium; the problem is that the Yankees are a second-place team in a city accustomed to watching the Yankees win. George Steinbrenner reignited the Yankees' winning tradition in the late 1970s, but the team hasn't won a pennant since 1981. Although the team finished in a respectable second place last season, New Yorkers aren't like Red Sox fans; anything less than first place is losing.

Before the city and state rebuild the ballpark, the team should re-examine its roster. Although the Yankees have the highest payroll in the major league - \$44,785,334 - it's not clear what they're getting for their money. For example, the Yankee's highest-paid player and top home-run hitter, Danny Tartabull, doesn't come near Chicago's Frank Thomas in home run production.

According to Standard and Poor's, the Yankees, with only 200 full-time employees and 1,200 to

1,300 seasonal workers, are the most valuable franchise in professional sports, with the best local television agreement in baseball, worth \$486 million over 12 years. However, Yankee Stadium, with just 19 luxury boxes, renting for upwards of \$90,000 a season, can't match the annual income derived for the 72 luxury boxes in Baltimore or 118 in Cleveland.

Eventually, our leaders will decide to modernize Yankee Stadium, but we should demand delivery of a pennant before the city spends more of our money there. Moreover, some of the new revenues from luxury boxes should be earmarked for the starving sports programs in the city's public schools. The City of New York spends approximately \$30 a year per student for extracurricular sports in the public high schools. By contrast, Greenwich, Conn., spends \$250 per student for afterschool sports in its high school. If Steinbrenner wants more suburbanites to attend Yankee Stadium, we can use their dollars to strengthen the athletic programs in our schools. Why should only George Steinbrenner benefit from public funds spent on Yankee Stadium?

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