
SUSTAINABILITY OF AMERICAN SPORTS STADIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE DEMISE OF THE ATLANTA FALCONS FOOTBALL STADIUM

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Synopsis:

Can you have sustainable management of sport facilities when you demolish a functional sport stadium well before its end of use life?

Abstract:

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INTRODUCTION

In this era of increased global concern for sustainability, the sustainability movement is being embraced by many. Citizens are engaging in local and personal efforts to live in a sustainable fashion and the management of select professional sports teams are adopting sustainability in their daily operations. Yet one question must be asked. Are professional sports teams truly embracing sustainability by simply recycling, reducing operational energy costs and seeking LEED status while their ownership engages in one of the worst possible failures in sustainability, i.e. prematurely demolishing a sports stadium that still has a functional life?

Stadia have a long life expectancy. In America, the Falcons football stadium was only the tenth oldest of 32 venues. Embedded in this 23 year “young” structure are 8,300 tons of steel, 110,000 cubic yards of concrete, 8.6 acres of fiber glass panels and 11.1 miles of cable (<http://gadome.com/about/Default.aspx>, 2015). Yet Falcons owner, Mr. Arthur Blank, claims that a new stadium is needed and “it’s going to be the finest sports-entertainment facility in the United States and one of the best in the world.” (McClure, 2015). Yet, very few are asking, what about sustainable, recycled architecture especially when the price tag for a new stadium is “roughly USD\$1

billion” (Inquisitr, 2012)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper will examine the stadium age and ownership structure of all 32 professional American football stadia while concentrating on the Atlanta Falcons professional football team. The Falcons do not own their current stadium, but rent their stadium for the past 23 years from the Georgia World Congress Center Authority (GWCCA) which owns and operates the current facility. The management of the GWCCA takes great pride in their daily sustainable efforts. This facility is the world’s largest LEED certified convention center. It recycles 600 tons of material from landfills and received the Georgia Recycling Coalition’s 2013 Spirit of Green Award. Yet all these operational sustainability initiatives are dwarfed by decisions to not recycle a 23 year “young” stadium (www.gwcc.com/about/See_Green.aspx , 2015).

The Georgia Dome, physically connected and part of the GWCCA convention facilities, was once the largest cable supported domed structure in the world. The Georgia Dome was completed in 1992 at a cost of USD\$214 million, which came from the Georgia General Assembly and seats 74,228 for American football and 80,000 for concerts. Yet the ownership of the Atlanta Falcons football team has threatened to move from downtown Atlanta to the suburbs unless a new stadium is constructed with direct team operational involvement and ownership, while still making annual rent payments to the GWCCA of USD\$2.5 Million/year. Thus, as individuals recycle their household trash, corporation’s recycle paper plastic and conserve energy costs, millionaire owners of professional teams jettison their older, yet useful stadiums for “the finest sport-entertainment facility in the United States...” (McClure, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This case study will utilize interviews and review of the public information sources to provide a historical perspective on the Georgia Dome and the Atlanta Falcons new stadium. This proposed Workshop F sustainability presentation will explore the Dome from design and construction as a multipurpose convention facility hosting a variety of events and athletic competitions including the Olympic Games to eventual destruction in 2017.

DISCUSSION

The management model of the Falcons stadium was always revolutionary as it was part of a state managed convention center with the resident professional sports team being a rent paying tenant. The convention center’s dome was home to concerts, family entertainment, conventions, trade shows, recreational vehicle and boat shows and collegiate and professional sports. The Georgia Dome also was home for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics and was the venue for men’s and women’s basketball, gymnastics and team handball competitions. It was designed and renovated multiple times to provide maximum revenue streams for the Falcons and included state of the art corporate sky boxes and extensive food and beverage options.

CONCLUSION

In America, for today's owner to run a profitable enterprise now requires a typical threat to relocate, followed by an ever larger investment of public taxes to pay expenses that historically have been borne by owners. It is estimated that the local hotel tax will pay for 30% of this venue's costs while the ownership will pay 70% of all construction costs including overruns while also enjoying 100% of revenues from parking and operations. Sustaining usable and functional stadia needs to be discussed in the overall context of environmental sustainability.

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