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History and Memory in American Culture

“Fifty-thousand fans, we probably had beers with all of them”

The working class culture of Veterans Stadium

Introduction

Since its opening in the early 1970s, Philadelphia’s Veterans Stadium has been the site of thousands of baseball games, hundreds of football games, and countless concerts. In recent months, as the demolition of the stadium approached and passed, Philadelphia witnessed an increased interest in remembering the Vet. This nostalgia towards Veterans Stadium did not embrace the entire expanse of events in the Vet’s history as worthy of remembering. Instead, certain moments in Vet history have become enshrined in the Philadelphia’s collective consciousness. In addition, the stories individuals tell about the Vet fall into particular patterns. Together, these individual and collective memories reveal a link between Veterans Stadium and Philadelphia’s civic identity. Veterans Stadium has served as a site for Philadelphians to enact a coarse, violent, and working-class identity.¹

That a physical location can serve a crucial role in the creation of identity is hardly a new idea. Recent scholarship on two Philadelphia landmarks is representative of scholarly work done in this vein. Charlene Mires has shown how Independence Hall has long served as a site for creating and maintaining American national identity. Bruce Kuklick has described how Shibe Park (the Vet’s immediate predecessor as Philadelphia’s major league baseball venue) “was the principal entity through which multitudes of people escaped solitude, and Philadelphia was the

¹ I hesitate to link rude drunken behavior with being a member of the working class. In doing so, I do not intend to imply that to be working class is to be rowdy and boorish, but rather that such behavior is typically seen as representative of the working class, at least in the United States.

unifying force at the stadium.”² Through associating particular events and behaviors with a particular building, people invest that place with meanings that are not inherent to the structure itself. Over time, those meanings can cohere into collective memory that allows a group to present and enact a particular self-image through engaging with that location.

In the case of Veterans Stadium, its recent demolition and associated feelings of nostalgia provided the perfect opportunity to explore how Philadelphians remember and interact with the Vet. A fascination with possessing physical remnants of the Vet reveals just how strongly this nostalgia runs. An analysis of the memories that Philadelphia fans have of the Vet reveals a fascination with rude, occasionally violent fan behavior. The teams that resonate most with Philadelphia fans are those that fit the identity of the Vet itself: rough and hard working.

Physical remembrance of the Vet

In a not unexpected development, Philadelphians (and fans in general) demonstrated a strong interest in obtaining physical remnants of Veterans Stadium as its last days wound down. Last September, I went to the final night game at Veterans Stadium, a rather boring affair between the Philadelphia Phillies and the Atlanta Braves. Just a few weeks before, the Phillies seemed poised to win the National League wild card and obtain their first playoff berth in ten years. But a massive collapse (all too common a story for Philadelphia sports teams) left this particular game completely meaningless, at least in terms of the standings. The uninspired Phils lost 6-0 in a game that never got exciting.

Yet even though it seemed clear from early on that the Phillies were unlikely to win the game, fans stayed on to the bitter end. Perhaps this was a sign of loyalty and appreciation

² Bruce Kuklick, *To Every Thing a Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 192, Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), xviii.

towards the team for an exciting season. But a more likely motivation was the fireworks show planned after the game. As soon as the game ended, fans started walking into the bowels of the stadium to get onto the playing field to watch the fireworks show. Within an hour, it seemed that the entire field was covered with people, some lying down, some standing, and some running around while trying to avoid collisions.

There was a considerable delay in the beginning of the fireworks display. Fans on the field found ways to occupy themselves, as disgruntled Philadelphia fans are wont to do. Many took pictures, trying to gather friends and family together in the mess of people on the field for some sort of coherent record of their presence at the Vet. Others surreptitiously broke out the beers they had stashed in their pockets.

But the most intriguing activity was one I felt compelled to participate in myself. It did not begin as soon as fans reached the field, but once one person started doing it, many followed. People wanted a piece of the Vet. Being on the playing field provided the perfect opportunity to get a piece of the Vet, with millions of strands of the grass substitute NeXturf there for the taking. Except that NeXturf was surprisingly resilient. It proved impossible to remove any pieces of the field by hand. Not to be deterred, fans broke out a variety of items to remove the “grass” from the field: nail clippers, car keys, even scissors. Most surprising of all, some fans brought small Ziploc bags in which to place their relics of the Vet. Not everyone came this prepared, of course, but some had come to the stadium that night with the plan to take home a piece of the Vet.

Collecting memorabilia from Veterans Stadium extended far beyond just that night. Throughout the 2003 baseball season, the Phillies made an effort to benefit from fans’ desires to own a physical reminder of the stadium. Commercials starring John Kruk, a member of the 1993

Phillies, offered the chance to buy two seats from the Vet. For just \$280, anyone could own a piece of the Vet. Kruk's flair for the hilarious came when he ran his finger along one of the seats, licked it, and proclaimed, "Mmm! Mustard." This performance drew a clear connection between the 1993 Phillies and purchasing a piece of the Vet. The implications of this connection will be made clear below in the discussion of the 1993 Phillies.

The Phillies provided another opportunity to purchase a piece of Veterans Stadium history at an auction held early in 2004. A wide range of items were made available for purchase, including the blueprints of the stadium, a metal sign that hung over the door of the Phillies clubhouse, a seat marking the spot where an upper-deck Mike Schmidt homerun landed, and a set of bases used during the Phillies penultimate game at the Vet. All told, fans bought over 200 items as the auction brought in over \$241,350.³ In short, Philadelphia fans seemed willing to buy anything that had some association with the Vet. Not all souvenir hunters, however, were willing to spend money to obtain relics of the Vet. At the Vet's final game, two days after the game I attended, ten people were arrested for attempting to remove "signs, seats, and other souvenirs" from the stadium.⁴ Fans at Veterans Stadium have often refused to submit to authority, and the last day at the Vet proved no exception. By obtaining (through both legal and illegal means) physical remnants of Veterans Stadium, Philadelphians demonstrated a strong interest in retaining memories of the Vet.

Curiously, some of the items procured had little direct connection to key sports moments in Vet history. The blue seats sold at the auction, for example, were installed in 1994 and were

³ Larry Eichel, "Buying a Piece of the Vet," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 February 2004, *Phillies Selling Pieces of the Vet -- Including the Seats* (Associated Press, 7 May 2003 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from <http://espn.go.com/mlb/news/2003/0507/1550581.html>.

⁴ *Ten Fans Charged with Stealing Souvenirs* (Associated Press, 28 September 2003 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=1625926>.

not present during the historic 1980 or 1993 World Series.⁵ The most important game those seats witnessed was the 2003 NFC Championship game in which the Philadelphia Eagles lost to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. It's nearly unthinkable that any Philadelphians have any interest in recalling that game. To be sure, some of the items drew interest based on their direct connection to memorable moments in Vet history (a ball used during Kevin Millwood's 2003 no-hitter, for example). But for other artifacts, fans' interest came from the items' association with Veterans Stadium itself. The strength of Philadelphia's nostalgia for the Vet was revealed in an (admittedly unscientific) online poll that showed that over 75% respondents would miss Veterans Stadium.⁶ It remains to be seen just what memories Philadelphians could be seeking to preserve and how those memories play into the creation of a particular civic identity.

Fans' memories of the Vet

Research by historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen has revealed that many Americans primarily interact with the past on a personal or familial level. Interest in history on a larger scale (key national events, for example) often exists only in how that history relates directly to them or to their families.⁷ To a certain extent, many memories of the Vet fall into this paradigm. Responding to a prompt on an online discussion board, many wrote of attending their first baseball game with their fathers or taking their own children to the Vet.⁸ Baseball historian William Kashatus's memories emphasized how the Vet and its teams "served as treasured

⁵ Munsey and Suppes, *Veterans Stadium* (Ballparks.com, January 2004 [cited 5 April 2004]); available from <http://www.ballparks.com/baseball/national/vetera.htm>.

⁶ *Will You Miss the Vet?* [Online Poll] (Philly.com, 5 April 2004 [cited 5 April 2004]).

⁷ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 16-17.

⁸ See, for example, John Gambetta, "A Fan's Diary," *Philadelphia City Paper*, 23-29 January 2003, "goatboy9876", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (19 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.8>, "swat41", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (18 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.6>.

benchmarks in my own life.”⁹ For many, Veterans Stadium, served as the setting for key moments in lives, helping to provide a framework for which cherished family memories were recalled.

Yet memories of Veterans Stadium reveal more than an American obsession with personal and family history. The words of another online correspondent offer a glimpse into collective memories of the Vet. “triman1021” recalled “raising my children there and letting them learn how to use words during Dallas games that we would never tolerate at home the other 364 days of the year.”¹⁰ In one sense, this memory can be understood in the framework of Rosenzweig and Thelen, that is as an instance of understanding the past primarily through the lens of the family. Yet there is more to “triman1021”’s memories of the Vet than simply raising his children there. Instead, he associated a particular behavior, cursing at the Dallas Cowboys, with Veterans Stadium. He also pointed out that such language would be completely unacceptable at any other time or place. For this fan, Veterans Stadium (especially during games against hated rival teams) functioned as a space where normal standards of behavior no longer applied. More specifically, Veterans Stadium was the place where everyone (even small children) could be ill mannered and crude. To put an even finer point on it, “triman1021” even seemed to expect such coarse behavior at the Vet.

Other respondents described similarly boorish activities at Vet sporting events. As suggested by the attitude towards the Cowboys hinted at above, Philadelphia fans take a special pride in their mistreatment of fans of opposing teams and other figures that lie outside of what their conception of what a Philadelphia fan is. Two representative memories follow.

⁹ William C. Kashatus, "Imploding a Lifetime of Memories," *Philadelphia Daily News*, 19 March 2004.

¹⁰ "triman1021", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (21 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.21>.

“The game was greant but the enviorment was better. The guy sitting right behind me cool. This man walked by in a peen state swet shirt and the man behind me yeled out "Yo Peen State, YOU SUCK" and I could not stop laughing but that was only the first one. When Santa Clause came around throwing out candy He did the same thing, "Yo Santa, YOU SUCK" I will never forgit that guy behind me.”¹¹

Supporting a non-Philadelphia (though still Pennsylvania) team did not, apparently, fall into acceptable fan behavior in this instance. Nor was a figure seemingly benign as “Santa Clause” exempt from rude treatment from Philadelphia fans. The key feature here is not the crowd violence. Similar rude behavior has, no doubt occurred in all major league ballparks. What matters is the poster’s obvious glee at this type of behavior. A similarly positive reaction towards violence is evident in the following anecdote:

“I remember a Mets game in 1986 or 1987. The troglodyte Mets fans were even worse than usual in those years. During a game in one of those years, one of those morons, sitting in the 500 level near the RF foul pole, was worse than usual. Security decided to throw him out. He wouldn't go. The cops arrived. He still wouldn't go. The cops surrounded him, batons drawn, and instisted that he leave. He replied by taking a swing at one of the cops. The cops replied by delivering several baton beatings at once to the hapless, drunk and stupid Mets fan. **AND THE REST OF THE FANS LOVED IT.** They cheered as the cops dragged the moron to whatever sweatbox they took Veerans Stadium arestees in thoses days.”¹²

It’s reasonable to assume that some of the fans that “LOVED” the police beating up a “troglodyte” Mets fan would typically disapprove of police officers delivering multiple baton blows to a drunk and unarmed person. Perhaps some who witnessed this particular did object to the level of violence employed by the police. Regardless of what did occur, however, the writer remembers how “**THE REST OF THE FANS LOVED IT.**” In the memories of Philadelphia fans, violence at the Vet is expected and embraced by all.

¹¹ "BrianAcker", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (21 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.18>.

¹² "pennajph", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (18 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.3>.

In addition to the individualized instances of verbal and physical abuse described above, there are a number of specific events in the same vein that are widely remembered among Philadelphians and can safely be considered as part of Philadelphia's collective memory. One such event is the infamous game in which fans moved beyond verbal abuse of Santa Claus and actually threw snowballs at him. The Santa Claus incident provides a superb example of how memories do not necessarily reflect historical fact. The infamous Santa game actually occurred at Franklin Field before the Vet had been built. Yet it is widely believed that fans at the Vet threw snowballs at Santa Claus. Disruptive crowd actions in Philadelphia are seemingly inextricably tied to Veterans Stadium. The Vet has come to stand as a sort of shorthand for violence and rude behavior at Philadelphia sporting events.

A later snowball incident did occur at the Vet. Sal Paolantonio, writing for ESPN.com about the closing of Veterans Stadium, described it.

“Up in 700 level, a very prominent attorney was taking bets that nobody could throw a snowball and hit the Cowboys bench from that distance. By the fourth quarter, the police were involved, and after the game Jimmy Johnson needed an escort through a hail of white projectiles. Of course, the snowball throwing contest became bigger news than the game itself. And, the next day, that famous attorney's name was revealed in the Philadelphia Inquirer. His name is Edward G. Rendell. Two years later, he was elected mayor of Philadelphia.”¹³

What Paolantonio left out is that Ed Rendell is now governor of Pennsylvania. It would be foolish to assume Rendell would behave similarly in an identical situation now. Nonetheless, Rendell was a prominent, well-to-do Philadelphian at the time of the snowball incident. For him to intentionally incite violent activities suggests that aggressive, vicious, and “drunken” behavior, typically associated with working-class fans, has not actually been restricted to members of the working class. In other words, the Vet provided an opportunity for

¹³ Sal Paolantonio, *Eagles Preparing to Leave Veterans Stadium* (ESPN.com, 13 December 2003 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from <http://espn.go.com/nfl/playoffs02/columnist/2003/0116/1493648.html>. For a gleeful recollection of this incident, see "LAPhillyFan", *Vet Memories* [Discussion board] (21 March 2004 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from <http://forums.prospero.com/kr-phillyopen/messages?msg=176.20>.

Philadelphians, regardless of their actual socioeconomic level, to act out working class behaviors.

Key sports memories in Vet history

Memories of raucous crowds do not, however, tell the full story of Philadelphia's collective memory of Veterans Stadium. The Vet was, first and foremost, a sports venue, home to the Philadelphia Phillies and Eagles. To discuss memories of the Vet without exploring recollections of the teams that inhabited the Vet and the games played there miss out on a crucial aspect of how Philadelphians perceive Veterans Stadium.

No single moment looms larger in the memories of Philadelphia fans than the 1980 World Series. That World Series was the sole championship won by either the Phillies or Eagles during their joint tenure at the Vet and is widely recognized as the greatest accomplishment in Philadelphia sports history (this, admittedly, is not saying all that much, given Philadelphia teams' notoriously bad performances). Tug McGraw's strikeout of Willie Wilson has assumed almost Kennedy-esque proportions, with virtually all Philadelphians capable of telling you where they were just when McGraw struck out Wilson.¹⁴

Given the 1980 World Series' special status in recent Philadelphia sports history, it is not at all surprising that it is widely remembered in Philadelphia. There is more to remembrances of the 1980 Phillies, however, than their significance as a rare Philadelphia championship team. There were aspects to the team and the World Series in particular that seemed to resonate with Philadelphia fans. Furthermore, the Phillies fans themselves contributed to the stories associated with the 1980 World Series.

¹⁴ My own favorite story is my father's. He was driving home from work, listening to the game on the radio. As McGraw wound up for the final pitch, my father drove down into a valley and lost reception. When reception returned, he heard exultant cheers.

Sociologist Donald Calhoun has suggested that a key aspect of hero making in sports is “Playing superlatively despite a handicap.”¹⁵ While it is hard to consider any team that had talent such as Mike Schmidt, Pete Rose, and Steve Carlton as an underdog, the 1980 Phillies did overcome a number of obstacles. The 1980 season was a year of comebacks. After winning the National League East in 1976, 1977, and 1978, the 1979 season was a disappointing one for the Phillies as they slipped to fourth place in the division. On August 10th of the 1980 season, the Fightin’ Phils were six games behind Pittsburgh in the NL East. From then until the end of the season, the Phillies’ record was a sparkling 36-19 and they won the division on the penultimate game of the regular season. Their uphill struggle continued in the playoffs. After winning the first game, the Phillies dropped the next two games to the Houston Astros and faced elimination. The Phillies went on to win the next two games in come from behind victories to secure the team’s World Series berth since 1950.¹⁶ The Phillies’ ability to succeed in the face of adversity resonated well with a fan base that identified as working class and had a chip on its shoulder. Dating back to the days of Shibe Park, inter-city competition engendered feelings of resignation among Philadelphia fans.¹⁷ To finally achieve a championship after decades of futility proved the ultimate salve to a city used to disappointment.

How the Phillies won the Series also helps explain Philadelphia’s fascination with the 1980 Phillies. Two plays in particular stand out, not coincidentally the final two outs of the Series. In the 8th inning, Phillies closer Tug McGraw replaced starter Steve Carlton after Carlton allowed two base runners. Going into the 9th, the Phillies held a 4-1 lead. Within a few minutes, the Royals had loaded the bases with only one out. The Phillies long-awaited World Series

¹⁵ Donald W. Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1987), 331.

¹⁶ John Devaney, Burt Goldblatt, and Barbara Devaney, *The World Series: A Complete Pictorial History* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1981), 404-05.

¹⁷ Kuklick, *To Every Thing a Season*, 192.

championship, if it was to come, would not come easy. The next two plays immediately entered Philadelphia's collective consciousness and have remained there since. Facing Frank White, McGraw induced a pop-up in foul territory that catcher Bob Boone easily settled under. What should have been a routine play, however, was nothing but, as the ball glanced off Boone's mitt and looked to be falling to the ground. Seemingly out of nowhere, first baseman Pete Rose, Charlie Hustle himself, appeared at Boone's side and prevented the ball from dropping to record the second out. The next batter was Willie Wilson, who had struck out 11 times so far in the series. McGraw, pitching for the fourth time in less than a week got ahead of Wilson 1-2 in the count. Just one pitch away from the Phillies first ever World Series championship, McGraw threw a fastball that Wilson swung at and missed. Both of McGraw's arms went skyward as the Phillies stormed the field in celebration. McGraw's words following the game give a sense of his mindset during the final inning. "There's no way I'm gonna be a dog out there,' I told myself. And I reached back and got that last strikeout with all I had left."¹⁸

The culmination of the 1980 Phillies season, then, was marked by victory obtained not through flashy, skillful play but rather through grit and hard work. Pete Rose, baseball's quintessential hard worker, renowned for going all out all the time, recorded a crucial out by hustling to make a play that typically would have been a routine catch for Bob Boone. To say that the Phillies' victory would not have occurred had Rose not made that play is pure speculation, but it's undeniable that Rose's willingness to put in that extra effort at the very end of a long season brought the Phillies one out closer to the World Series championship. The final out, Tug McGraw's strikeout of Willie Wilson showed a similar level of determination. There is little deception involved in throwing a fastball. The object is simple: overpower the batter. McGraw did just that. According to McGraw, the strength behind that pitch came from almost

¹⁸ Devaney, Goldblatt, and Devaney, *World Series*, 406-08.

sheer willpower and emotion, emotion that was crystallized in the image of McGraw jumping in the air with his arms stretched up.

At the Vet's final game in 2003, McGraw, battling brain cancer that would take his life just months re-enacted that crowning moment in Phillies history, complete with the jump and outstretched arms.¹⁹ That image has come to represent the entire 1980 Phillies season in the collective memory of Philadelphia. More than just a winning team, however, the '80 Phils were seen as a hard-working team that had to overcome adversity to achieve success. It is just this mindset that helped to create Veterans Stadium as a space with strong working class associations.

If the 1980 Phillies are remembered for their World Series championship, their 1993 counterparts are widely seen as a team that captured the attention and love of Philadelphia like no other. John Kruk, in an 2003 interview on his memories of the Vet, suggested a few reasons for why Philadelphia embraced the '93 Phillies. He hinted at the overall character of the team while responding to a question about when he knew the Phillies would be contenders that year. "The big... turn in spring training was we got into a fight with the Cardinals. And you can see that some of the guys out there kinda enjoyed the fight." Here was a team whose values perfectly mirrored those of the "ideal" Vet fan. To fight during a meaningless spring training game, and to enjoy that fight undoubtedly delighted the Philadelphia fans that so heartily heaped verbal and physical abuse on their perceived opponents in the stands, be they Mets fans or even Santa Claus.

Kruk's explanation for Philadelphia's embrace of the 1993 Phillies extended beyond their shared affinity towards violent behavior. In distinguishing the '93 Phils

¹⁹ Jayson Stark, *Final Tug of Vet Emotion* (ESPN.com, 28 September 2003 [cited 7 April 2004]); available from http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/columns/story?columnist=stark_jayson&id=1625830.

from other teams in which the players went home to their wives each night, Kruk had this to say:

“We were out. We were across the street at the bar... we were out... I think that's why the fans liked us so much... most guys come home to rest, well we said, ‘Well, shit on that.’ We got to know them all. Fifty thousand fans, we probably had beers with all of them... I think they see us, a lot of us from that team, as one of them. Especially me, because I was fat.”²⁰

To hear John Kruk tell it, the 1993 Phillies were exactly like the fans who adored them: hard drinking, hard working, and out to have a good time. To be sure, Kruk's statement should not be taken at face value, as the remembered identity of the '93 Phils had been a decade in the making at the time of the interview. But even in 1993 the team was widely perceived as embodying working class values and behaviors. The players paid little attention to their personal appearance, sporting long hair and scraggly beards. Nights were often spent in the clubhouse, drinking and smoking. In a very real sense, the 1993 Phillies were just like their fans. Or, perhaps more accurately, the 1993 Phillies embodied the lifestyle their fans associated with the Vet.

It is just this affinity between fans and players that helps to explain one of the most notable Vet phenomena: the booing of Philadelphia players by Philadelphia's own fans. Even great players, like future Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt, are booed at the Vet.²¹ In recent years, Phillies slugger Pat Burrell has become a favorite target, especially during last season when Burrell was in the first year of a six-year \$50 million contract in which he struggled to keep his batting average above .200. Tim Whitaker recalled a typical Burrell bashing, “After Burrell weakly fouled one back during his fourth unsuccessful trip to the plate, there came this from a

²⁰ John Kruk, interview by Billy Sample, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 27 September 2003.

²¹ Jeff Merron, *It's So Hard to Say Goodbye* (ESPN.com, 2003 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from <http://espn.go.com/page2/s/ballparks/veterans.html>.

fan a few rows behind us: ‘WAY TO GET SOME WOOD ON THE BALL, PAT. YOU DID YOUR JOB FOR THE NIGHT. YOU CAN GO HOME HAPPY NOW.’”²²

Fans from other cities never seem capable of grasping the assault heaped upon the teams Philadelphia allegedly loves so much. “Why would you boo your own team?” they invariably ask. The answer lies in how fans at the Vet perceive their relationship with the teams that play there. As suggested above, Philadelphia fans strongly identify with their teams, especially those that fit the mold of what a Veterans Stadium team should be. Rather than deferring to the Phillies’ or the Eagles’ privileged positions as professional athletes, Philadelphia fans view their teams as part of the working culture of Philadelphia. This relationship has allowed particular teams and players to garner the respect and admiration of Vet fans, but it has also allowed Philadelphians to criticize openly their players when performances are lacking. If a player is seen as “one of us,” that player is open to the same verbal abuse working class fans heap on each other. As time passed, the tradition of booing Philadelphia teams at the Vet became entrenched in the mythology of the Vet and played a key role in Philadelphians enactment of a working class identity at the Vet.

What about the veterans?

In analyzing the collective memory of Veterans Stadium, it is just as useful to examine what is not remembered in determining the role the Vet plays Philadelphians’ enactment of civic identity. One curious omission from nearly all reminisces of Veterans Stadium is any reference to the source of the stadium’s name. The Vet’s builders, after all, intended to commemorate Americans who had served their country in the armed forces. Yet virtually no one brings up

²² Tim Whitaker, "I Don't Care If I Never Get Back," *Philadelphia Weekly*, 24 September 2003.

veterans when discussing Veterans Stadium. Bill Robinson, a disgruntled veteran, bemoaned just this fact in a letter to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

“Having moved from the city two years ago, and as a proud veteran, I am very disappointed with the city, the Eagles and the Phillies because they have sold out every veteran that stood proud of this country and the stadium for so long. I would like to make everyone aware - especially the mayor, City Council, other politicians and the Eagles and Phillies - that 10 percent of the state's population (1.2 million people) are military veterans. It is a fact that the taxpayers of Pennsylvania and the city contributed more than the billion-dollar companies that bought the naming rights. It would have been an honor to see the new stadiums named Veterans Stadium II or Firefighters and Policemen Memorial Stadium. As a veteran, and a former season-ticket holder, I will salute ‘Veterans Stadium’ as it falls, with its name that made veterans proud for so many years.”²³

Robinson’s anger is obvious. His critique touched upon several issues, including disrespect shown towards the veterans living in Pennsylvania, misuse of taxpayer money, and the move towards corporate naming rights. Disregarding Robinson’s resentment and proposed naming alternatives, it remains clear that virtually no one retains any association between veterans and Veterans Stadium.

The cause of this “selective forgetting” calls for further examination, but it would appear reasonable that distrust of the military following the morass of the Vietnam War led Philadelphians to actively ignore any associations their city might have with the military. Another possibility is that Veterans Stadium did once have strong associations with veterans of the armed services but that that association weakened as the Vet increasingly became linked with working class behavior viewed as incompatible with the respected typically given to veterans. In either case, it is important to recognize that the emergence of a particular collective memory often excludes the remembrance of another narrative. In the case of the Vet, ideals of self-sacrifice and duty, if ever present, were replaced by expectations of rough, drunken activities.

²³ Bill Robinson, "Veterans Stadium Falls; Pride It Brought Remains," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 2004.

Conclusion

Donald Calhoun argued that “Baseball, the grand old American game, is best seen [...] as an expression of 19th-century rural Yankee individualism.”²⁴ While it’s true that the discrete nature of baseball allows for individuals to dominate games, this view on the nature of the sport ignores the potential that baseball (and, indeed, all sports) has in creating collective senses of identity. In Philadelphia, Veterans Stadium, in its 34-year lifespan, helped create a sense of unity among Philadelphia sports fans. In the words of Daryl Gale, “At the Vet on Sundays during football season, there is no rich or poor, there is no black, white or brown. There is only green. You're either an Eagles fan and therefore a beloved brother, or a fan of the other team and therefore a sworn enemy. There is no room for debate or compromise.”²⁵

Veterans Stadium did more than merely unite Philadelphians; it united them in a working class mentality that manifested itself in violence hurled upon opponents, drunken behavior, and adoration of Philadelphia teams that embodied those same values.

It is crucial to note that the Vet was far more than a place where members of the working class came to have a good time and engage in the same behavior that characterized the rest of their lives. Instead, Veterans Stadium functioned as a space where all Philadelphians (or all those who wanted to be perceived as such) enacted working class behavior and activities, regardless of their actual socioeconomic background. The Vet was the place where it was acceptable for small children to curse. The Vet was the place where famous Philadelphians with political aspirations could instigate a barrage of snowballs directed at the Dallas Cowboys coach. In short, the Vet provided freedom for Philadelphians to embrace a working class identity that they might not adopt in other contexts.

²⁴ Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 228.

²⁵ Daryl Gale, "The Vet," *Philadelphia City Paper*, 26 September-2 October 2002.

A comparison between crowd behavior at Veterans Stadium and the Eagles' new home, Lincoln Financial Field, reveals just how much liberty the Vet provided for fans. While it is too early to make definitive claims, if one season at the Linc is any indication, disorderly fan behavior dramatically less frequent at the Linc compared to the Vet.²⁶ While there are a number of possible structural explanations (e.g. enhanced security, increased ticket prices changing the composition of the fan base), it also seems plausible that the working class associations so strongly linked with Veterans Stadium simply do not exist (yet?) with Lincoln Financial Field. It remains to be seen whether typical Vet behavior will be transferred to the Phillies new home, Citizens Bank Park.

Larry Bowa, who had the first ever hit at Veterans Stadium on April 10th, 1971, was a member of the 1980 Phillies, and managed the last game there on September 28th, 2003, offered an explanation as to why Philadelphia fans are so touch. "They work for every dollar they earn. Nothing is given to these people. They're blue-collar workers. They love to see people get their uniform dirty. They love to see people put in time at their job."²⁷ To an extent, Bowa is right. Philadelphia fans do love to see dirty uniforms and hard-working players. But it is not because all Philadelphia fans are themselves working class. Instead, the mystique of Veterans Stadium allowed all fans to behave as if they were rough, rude, blue-collar workers at the ballpark to have a rollicking good time.

²⁶ *New Stadium Has Seen Sharp Dropoff in Cases* (Associated Press, 6 December 2003 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from <http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=1679763>.

²⁷ Quoted in Sal Paolantonio, *Philly Fans Starving for Title* (ESPN.com, 16 January 2004 [cited 20 March 2004]); available from http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/playoffs03/columns/story?columnist=paolantonio_sal&id=1710244.

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