

The Devil Advocates:



Dr. Seth C. Hawkins is an evil rhetorician who came to St. Paul to live in a Victorian theme park and to be able to reach MLB games by public transit. In addition to having coached nationally-ranked intercollegiate public speaking teams, he has paid his considerable champagne tab by charging politicians huge fees to tell them why they're wrong, except in Minnesota, where they're cheapskates. Pay attention: he knows what he's talking about.

As an escaped New Yorker whose childhood was ruined by the loss of two major league baseball teams at once, I am dismayed by the ignorance of the voting public in Minnesota of the *absolute necessity* of a retractable-roof ballpark funded by public money, the spinelessness of legislators, and the complacency of hard-core fans. Wake up, people. You have a difficult job of persuasion ahead, or you are going to lose MLB. This is not a joke. You need to research and evidence every possible argument in favor of the stadium proposal, and strong-arm those in government to force it on the citizenry for their own good.

Of course those in Outstate are going to oppose a ballpark. Anyone who has the misfortune to live in Thief River Falls or Pipestone and hasn't the common sense to get out is hopelessly clueless and has no right to influence public policy. The notion that taxation is a cafeteria at which voters pay for only the items they wish is contrary to the way government is run. Baseball fans, grudgingly as everyone else, pay taxes for all sorts of mindless social engineering and other ill-conceived programs. But when we seek something that will correct bad economics and worse architecture, and which (properly marketed) will, like the Mall of the Cosmos, take a vacuum cleaner to the wallets of fans in nearby states and provinces, there is an outcry.

Never have I seen such a hutch of frightened rabbits as your state legislators. One would imagine that a state that put Dr. Wellstone into national office would have legislators expert at standing up to the public and telling them that it's not their money anymore: we know what's good economic and social policy, and we'll enact it. Leading the hand-wringing is that sissy-boy son of a theologian, Marty Mouse, the one who went through five campaign managers in ten weeks and still set the all-time record for the worst trouncing in state history. He who imagines that it is a moral dilemma for someone to treat a legislator to a confounded cup of tea has no business telling anyone that we can't have a publicly financed ballpark.

You SABR members are the army against these ninnies, and the sooner you get to work, the better. Get out those economic studies and show how much money will be brought in from out of state by an attractive domed stadium. For example, during those two short series with the Blue Jays, most of Manitoba and Saskatchewan climbs on tour buses. Whole towns empty: no one is left behind to break into homes, but there is nothing of taste worth stealing anyway. They drop at least \$1.4 million into the Twin Cities' economy yearly, with no promotion cost to the Twins. With sensible marketing, similar sums can be gained from fans in several other AL cities.

Yes, there are "millionaire owners": who the hell else could take the economic risk? Yes, players are overpaid, but not in comparison to major entertainment figures. Only 750 people qualify to perform this difficult skill. In many prestigious professions, the 750th best practitioner will earn *more* than an NL or AL rookie, and be far less interesting.

You need to explain to everyone (much more patiently than I can) about all of those little people (ushers, concession workers, ticket takers, parking attendants, waitresses, motel maids, scalpers) who will *lose existing jobs* when (not if) the Twins leave. You need to get out the statistics on ballparks' role in revitalizing downtowns. Refute the distortions already printed in the papers. Egad, if *Cleveland* could come back from the dead, any new ballpark is a miraculous charm. Prove, over and over, that over four times as many ordinary folk can experience MLB than hockey, given arena size and number of home games. Prove to those who cannot balance a checkbook that the most expensive MLB ticket is less than half of the "cheapest" NFL or NBA admission. Re-educate Larry Millett and other architectural experts to the fact that the Metrodome is a disaster that should never have been built, and that one responsibility of public policy is to correct the errors of other eras. Point out that the tour buses from Canada need the guarantee of a roof. Explain, the Doubleday myth aside, how baseball was born in

The devil, continued

America's Gilded Age, a period of hope and prosperity, when economic expansion, immigration, and optimism pulled us out of the post-Civil War doldrums, and how baseball ever since has been a social and cultural engine for the American spirit, one that two world wars and a depression could not stop.

So quit whining, and act upon the real and imminent danger of our losing MLB to some place that doesn't deserve it. I can't do all of the work by myself.

[Next month: the Saints are bad for baseball and for the dignity of St. Paul. Disband them.]