A Happy Marriage? The Honeymoon Effect and the New Wave of Sport Facility Construction

Colin Cork, Mississippi State University
Adam Pfleegor (Advisor), Mississippi State University
Alan Morse (Advisor), Mississippi State University

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Recently, the city of Atlanta, GA and the Atlanta Falcons organization released the design elements, renderings, and funding plan for the futuristic proposed downtown stadium. Designed by 360 Architects, the $1.2 billion facility plans to incorporate futuristic and technologically advanced features that will significantly differentiate the facility from other newly constructed National Football League (NFL) facilities (“New Atlanta Stadium,” 2013). For example, the facility design features a star-shaped circular retractable roof, a 100-yard long bar, and a 360 degree scoreboard circling high above the field (“New…”, 2013). These technological facility inclusions, primarily centered around creating a high level of consumer comfort and satisfaction, follow the predicted trends in sport facility construction (Seifried, 2010). Interestingly, Architecture 360 leadership and Falcons President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) stated that the completed facility will be much more than a physical structure that houses Atlanta Falcon home football contests, but a representation of Falcon fans, constituents of Atlanta, and the city as a whole (“New…, 2013).

Several scholars have discussed the concept of synecdoche (Maennig & du Plessis, 2009; Pfleegor, Seifried, & Soebbing, 2013; Smith, 2005a,b). According to Maennig and du Plessis (2009), synecdoche “refers to cases where an element of a larger set (such as one building in a city) comes to represent the set” (p. 67). For example, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France has come to represent more than simple a physical structure, but is noted as a synecdochical image of Paris. Pfleegor, et al. (2013) extended this notion to include sport facilities. Famous sport facilities such as Fenway Park in Boston, MA are a unique feature of many of their home city skylines, and are recognized as representing the city as a whole. Interestingly, as sport facilities continue to become more architecturally and technologically advanced, the opportunity to create a lasting image for a city, state, or even country exists.

In addition to building a lasting organizational or city identity, new sport facilities can present financial benefits to a multitude of stakeholders. Specifically, new facilities temporarily increase ticket sales and attendance figures during what has become known as the honeymoon effect (Brown, et al., 2004; Clapp & Hakes, 2005; Hamilton & Kahn, 1997; McEvoy, et al., 2005; Zygmont & Leadley, 2005). The fascination with the new physical structure and renewed interest in the organization stimulates an increase in attendance for between three and eight seasons (Hamilton & Kahn, 1997). However, the winning percentage of franchises plays a significant role in the intensity and length of the honeymoon period.

Noting the scholarly sport literature on identity, synecdoche, and the honeymoon effect, the primary purpose of this poster presentation is to first examine the unique physical and technological features of the proposed downtown Atlanta, GA football stadium. Within this investigation, the features will be compared to sport facility trends commonly seen across the major professional sports in North America. Ultimately, this examination stimulated two interrelated research questions. First, to what extent will the unique physical features of the proposed stadium effect the identity of Atlanta constituents and the city as a whole? Specifically, this research employs Heere and James (2007) team identity scale and Maennig and du Plessis’ (2009) and Pfleegor, et al.’s (2013) discussion on synecdochical images. Second, after controlling for winning percentage, what effect do the unique physical features of the proposed structure have on ticket sales and the strength and longevity of the honeymoon effect? Ultimately, the case study and corresponding research questions contains the potential to more appropriately inform future facility design and construction efforts to maximize the emotional connection constituents form to the physical structure as well as the maximization of revenue from increased ticket sales and contest attendance.