Thesis Abstract

On the evening of June 15, 2005, the sellout crowd at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, New York roared as first baseman Jason Giambi hit a two-run home run in the bottom of the tenth inning to give the Yankees a 7-5 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates. The dramatic win gave the team a 32-32 record on which they built to eventually capture first place in the American League East Division. For all the excitement that night, however, the biggest baseball news came much earlier in the day at around 4:20 pm when principal team owner George Steinbrenner and several key New York politicians held a press conference in the Stadium Club. They were there to announce the proposal for a new ballpark.

In the years leading up to this event (and the months that have followed), the new stadium plan has dominated much of the Yankees’ attention. For alarming reasons, the fate of the historic “House That Ruth Built” – the site at 161st Street and River Avenue that for eighty-three years has witnessed some of the most dramatic moments in sports history – has been largely ignored. It has been denied even a public hearing from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). As of this writing, the current Yankee Stadium will be completely demolished. While the three baseball fields replacing it eliminate the opportunity to preserve the Stadium footprint, their playing purpose will serve as the sole connection to one of America’s few remaining sports shrines.

This thesis argues that Yankee Stadium is a structure worth preserving due to its cultural, historical and architectural significance. There will be an examination of how the current Stadium can be retrofitted in order to both accommodate team programmatic
requirements such as additional luxury boxes and give fans the chance to see a game at the historic ballpark. The way the Yankees have been allowed to proceed unchecked in their plans will also be examined. As hinted at earlier, preservation agencies have not even challenged the Yankees to be clearer about the fate of their historic home. This discussion will also include the Yankees’ unwillingness to communicate with the South Bronx community which stands to lose twenty-two acres of actively-used parkland.

Furthermore, this thesis will look at three other historic ballparks that are relevant to the events occurring in the Bronx. Boston’s Fenway Park (1912) and Chicago’s Wrigley Field (1914) are the two oldest active ballparks in Major League Baseball and have had successful preservation efforts. The two parks are currently being retrofitted in a compromise to retain historic fabric while also providing teams with desired facilities. Tiger Stadium (1912) could have been retrofitted, but the team moved into a new ballpark and abandoned their historic home. The Tiger Stadium Fan Club presented the team with a detailed renovation proposal that will be discussed.

In the end, this thesis seeks to bring the events occurring in the Bronx to the fore so that Yankee Stadium is given appropriate consideration before perhaps passing into history without so much as a second thought from the Yankees and the preservation community.