



Cubs' ID can't be torn to suburbs from 1060 W. Addison St.

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Just the facts, ma'am.

I'll steal from Jack Webb's old spare, simple question on "Dragnet." A blizzard of information has been flowing in every direction in the last week about a proposal to junk the Wrigley Field scoreboard amid supposed bids from Rosemont and DuPage County for the Cubs to move out of the city. The only way to sort everything out is to boil things down to the factual bottom line as follows:

*The Cubs' identity is firmly tied up with Wrigleyville. Despite idle talk of suburban moves that dated back to the mid-1980s and Tribune Co.-owned property south of the Woodfield mall, the team is entrenched on the Clark-and-Addison property. Period.

The Cubs' marketing appeal and fans' orientation is so entwined with its mid-North Side location that any attempt to move to the suburbs would be akin to the proverbial ocean liner turning around in the bathtub. It would be just too hard. A business and psychological re-set would be more challenging than the rebuilding program now overseen by supposed baseball shaman Theo Epstein.

Besides, the trend has been for teams to locate in the middle of cities, if not downtown itself. Check out Al Yellon's blog, <http://www.bleedcubbieblue.com/2013/3/19/4123132/wrigley-field-rosemont-proposal-cubs>, at BleedCubbieBlue.com. Yellon shows the pattern of teams moving in or near their cities' downtowns as new stadiums have been constructed.

Many of those stadium planners have visited Wrigley Field to see how the ballpark and surrounding cityscape have blended for an attractive presentation. If Wrigley and the neighborhood are considered the role model, why would ownership want to give that all up?

*Mayor Rahm Emanuel will not only block any move to the suburbs, but he'll impose a settlement between the Cubs and the surrounding neighborhood and obstinate 44th Ward Ald. Tom Tunney.

Emanuel is used to bare-knuckles strategies dealing with Congress from his days as White House chief of staff. The Cubs-Tunney-neighborhood squabble should be child's play for Hizzoner. Besides, Emanuel is a Cubs fan. So is his old running mate, former Obama Administration counsel David Axelrod. There's an emotional element to deal-making that would have been absent if Sox fan Rich Daley was still mayor. The Cubs situation affects Emanuel directly – he lives a fitness walk northwest of Wrigley Field.

Too much economic benefit to an already-affluent neighborhood is at stake in the Wrigley renovation, at little cost to the city given Cubs Chairman Tom Ricketts' vow to fund the construction himself. At some point Emanuel will put his foot down. In Solomon-esque fashion he will divide the spoils among all interested parties. Likely included will be a considerable increase in night games.

Grandstand's gotta go – all of it

*If Cubs boss Tom Ricketts really wants to do it right, the Wrigley renovation must be more extensive than the organization has projected. Basically, Ricketts needs to tear down the grandstand structure and start over. The bleachers, ivy and scoreboard are perfectly fine as is, especially after their 2006 re-construction. Only change needs to be the re-location of the stygian batting cage under the right-field bleachers.

Hampering the necessary do-over would be the requirement the Cubs play elsewhere for a couple of seasons during construction, and the limited footprint on which Wrigley Field stands.

The concept of the Cubs playing at U.S. Cellular Field is regarded the same as Superman eyeing kryptonite. North Side shouldn't be intertwined with South Side. Nonsense. The Cell was built with public funds and is supervised by the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority. Any team in the city should be eligible to play there, given an agreeable lease and schedule. Why should Cubs fans drive to Miller Park to watch their team in the interim when a stadium in good condition exists eight miles away?



Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, a Cubs fan who lives about a mile from Wrigley Field, will eventually broker a settlement to satisfy both the Cubs and the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, as mentioned here previously, the outside right-field wall is only a few feet from the Addison Street curb at one juncture. Fixing up parts of the building while letting other features stand via modernization just won't do. The structure simply is cramped, old and tired – and in summer holds the heat well, to paraphrase Casey Stengel circa 1966 at the All-Star Game at old Busch Stadium. In essence, the Cubs need ¾ of a new ballpark right on the same site. Somehow, it will have to be designed in asymmetrical fashion due to land limitations—bigger in left field than in right. The fact Ricketts and Co. said the posts and thus obstructed seats would remain to keep the upper deck in the same location is not an adequate feature for a 21st Century structure.

And when will management confirm whether the water table underneath the ballpark will be a factor in construction? Due to Wrigley Field's proximity to nearby Lake Michigan, striking the water table was cited by a Cubs official five years ago when the

concept of digging down to accommodate new construction was brought up.



Putting a Jumbotron on a building behind the left-field bleachers would be the best way to construct such a feature without grafting it onto Wrigley Field's traditional layout. Photo credit [Gary Elrod](#)

*A revenue-rich Jumbotron, now favored by the majority of fans, will not work attached to the ballpark structure itself. A giant, 21st Century video screen will totally look out of place with the pastoral bleacher-scape and ivy. Best location is atop the apartment building – one of the few surrounding the ballpark not already converted into a rooftop club -- at the northeast corner of Waveland and Kenmore avenues.

Big signs, be they touting WGN, a beer or most recently

a casino, have been a staple of the building's roof for decades. Might as well put up the ultimate ad carrier there. All eyes in the ballpark or via TV look in that direction regularly. Cubs ownership should have purchased these properties anyway over the years, so they might as well gain control of the structure and put up the video board in a way that doesn't clumsily graft it onto a traditional-looking part of the ballpark.

*There are just two advantages to the Rosemont stadium plan touted by Mayor Brad Stephens: location by a confluence of highways and association with the ultimate pro-business community in the Chicago area.

Even here are there severe drawbacks. The intersection of the Kennedy Expressway and the Jane Addams and Tri-State tollways is a semi-confusing maze of exit and en-

trance ramps. Though convenient for car-bound fans from Cubs' strongholds in the north and northwest suburbs, and further away in Illinois and Iowa, the spaghetti-like junction will require fans to make a bevy of interchange navigations to access a ballpark via River or Mannheim roads. It's questionable whether Rosemont can get the Illinois Dept. of Transportation (IDOT) to add a couple of off- and on-ramps to untangle the maze. Also, the CTA's Blue Line stop at River Road is on the other side of the River Road underpass beneath the Kennedy. You could walk the distance to the ballpark. But the heavy traffic coursing through the on and off ramps probably will require shuttle-bus service from the L station to ensure the safety of fans.

Meanwhile, Rosemont is hardly the model democracy of a municipality. The Stephens family has even firmer control of the community than the Daleys of yore in Chicago. They are pro-business to the 10th power, but there's an inevitable cost in such dealings.

At least the local cops are as disciplined as possible as part of the deal. After interviewing former players for years without incident at an annual sports collectors' show at the Donald Stephens Convention Center, the show's promoter suddenly got a bug where the sun didn't shine about me. He ordered me out. To emphasize his point, he called on one of Rosemont's finest. There was no mediation or negotiation. I was immediately escorted by the man in blue (or was it black?) to the nearest exit.

Waving 'hi' to airliner pilots from the upper deck

*The flight path and runway's end are too close to the proposed Rosemont Stadium. It's that simple. If players and fans were discomfited by planes flying overhead into nearby LaGuardia Airport at Shea Stadium in New York, they'd be similarly aggravated (if not outright nervous) by the sight of airliners flying low and not-so-slow right by the stadium on a final approach to O'Hare Airport.

A frequently-used landing path literally follows the Kennedy, two blocks north of the stadium property. The end of the runway is a mile away, just beyond Mannheim Road. Local hotels and other commercial buildings can try to soundproof themselves, but the stadium is open-air. Aircraft bearing in for a landing, directly overhead the Allstate Arena on the other side of Rosemont, were a nervous sight. A baseball stadium is much taller than the arena. Would you want to be in the top of the upper deck, waving at the pilot as he goes by?



Rosemont is full of hotels and highways, but there are big drawbacks to locating a major-league ballpark amid that development. Photo credit Aneekr at English Wikipedia.

*DuPage County's wishful thinking for the Cubs faded as quickly as it appeared. That time has passed – nothing to do with the developers or business climate in the booming western suburbs. See the above when the concept of a stadium located centrally in a metro area is mentioned.

Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf had the right idea in proposing a stadium in Addison circa 1986. Old Comiskey Park was crumbling, and the majority of Sox fans had moved away from the South Side proper. DuPage County westward started to enjoy a population explosion. Look at census figures for Naperville and Aurora. The Sox could have carved out a market separate from the city-bound Cubs if they had moved to the suburbs. Perhaps it could have been an Anaheim vs. Los Angeles situation as exists now with the Angels and Dodgers. Too bad DuPage political hack Pate Philip, warning of urban terrors descending on the stadium, blocked the project. Forced to go back to the South Side for political reasons, the Sox have discovered to their chagrin the very location of U.S. Cellular Field is a drawback for a number of reasons.

All the more reason to mourn ideas that would have placed a new ballpark downtown or immediately south, over the railyards. Such an idea dated back to the 1960s, when Cubs, Sox and Bears officials all posed with a drawing of a central stadium.

No matter how adeptly modernized, Wrigley Field will still lack enough nearby parking and unclogged road access in its neighborhood-locked address. But fans learn to cope with the commute. North suburban rooters and even Brewers fans driving in from Milwaukee have learned to park 14 miles away from the ballpark at the CTA Yellow Line lot at Dempster Street in Skokie, just east of the Edens Expressway. They pay \$2 or \$4, depending how close they want to park to the terminal. It's \$4.50 a head round trip on the L to the ballpark. That's still far cheaper than the gas and parking charges if they drove all the way to the ballpark area. The park-and-ride deal is so popular one nearby congested Skokie street full of three-flat apartment buildings even has a residents-only restriction on parking during Wrigley Field night games.

What fans won't tolerate is a facility that is uncomfortable for them and the players. Their first choice is Clark and Addison. There, the Cubs have to construct in essence Wrigley 2.0 to do the right thing.

Some say to forget the political controversies, just blow it up and move to the suburbs. Careful, though, what you wish for.