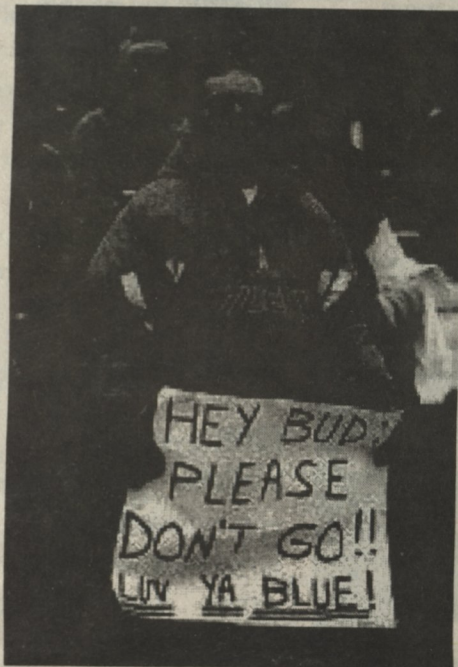


COMMENTARY

The reality of relocation

by Marc Macdonald
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Regardless of who won this year's Super



Bowl there were many obvious losers. These loser is, of course, were cites that have lost their professional sports franchises. The fact that it was not the Los Angeles Rams and the Houston Oilers in Super Bowl XXXIV says something about the relocation of teams.

It is not luck that teams often begin to win when they are moved to a new city, but Charles Darwin's theories applied to modern sports ownership. Owners care enough about the winning record of their team (or the amount of money coming in), that they will move the team if fans are not attending games. If fans don't come, the team doesn't make money. If the team doesn't make money it can't afford to get high caliber and ex-

pensive players. If the team does not have the best players it can not win. Cities with losing teams

have fans that often lose interest in attending games. Attendance is tied to finance which is tied to winning. It may be only natural that if teams are not getting good attendance in their home city they should adapt, as Darwin would say, and move to another, more receptive city. Relocation of professional

sports teams may just be survival of the fittest.

The evidence given earlier is a prime example. The two teams that made it to the championship game in football were two teams that recently relocated. The fact that Tennessee and St. Louis wanted these teams led to their success. The cities showed enough interest to get the teams to move and then supported them when they arrived. Both franchises had been mired in anemic post season records, the Rams since the early eighties, and the Titans (nee Oilers) since the time of Earl Campbell, in their previous home. The support waned and they moved to gain, once again, a truly home field

advantage. This support filtered down to the playing field and the teams made it to the NFL's biggest game and sport's most heavily televised game.

Football is far from the only example. Take a Quebec fan and ask him about the Colorado Avalanche. Fans of the Nordiques were upset when the teams left Quebec but they were seemingly unsure of how to react off when the Avalanche won the Stanley Cup the next season. Some people in Quebec even suggested having the Avalanche in a Stanley Cup parade in Quebec City. The fact is that the team never won a Stanley Cup while in Quebec. Although it may be a coincidence that the team won the very next year it

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can not be denied that Colorado has giving the team greater support now than Quebec City did in the years immediately before the team moved.

Atlanta is another good example in the NHL. The Georgia city had the Flames who moved to Calgary and eventually won a Stanley Cup. Now Calgary is in danger of losing the Flames and the Thrashers are playing hockey in Atlanta this

year. The cycle that once brought Alberta the Flames and a Stanley Cup has now swung back for the Thrashers and could once again move the Flames south of the border.

The same thing happened in Minnesota where the North Stars moved to Dallas in the mid nineties and then won the cup last year. Support had gone stale in the rabid hockey area of Mineapolis, and now, perhaps because of the Stars success next year NHL hockey will return to Minneapolis in the form of the Minnesota Wild.

A similar trend exists in the NFL as well. The Cleveland Browns moved and became Baltimore Ravens, then last year Cleveland won the rights to another franchise and the

city of Cleveland had the Browns again, three season after they left. And of course you can not forget the Raiders bouncing from Oakland to L.A. then back to Oakland again. It seems that in order

for some cities to appreciate thier franchises, they first have to lose them and then pay excessive amounts of money in order to get another franchise a few years down the road.

Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association are not exceptions to the relocating then winning big phenomena. Although some of the examples in these leagues are much older they prove that the

problem has existed for some time. Most of us cannot remember whether the Minnesota Lakers were any good but most people can testify to the winning records of the Magic Johnson Showtime era and the current Kobe and Shaq league leading Lakers. The Jazz have also enjoyed many successful seasons in Utah since relocating there. In baseball there the classic are examples of the Dodgers and the Giants, moving from East to West and then winning.

Perhaps the answer is, as Dave Supleve sports editor for the Winnipeg Sun put it, when explaining the loss of the Winnipeg Jets. Supleve said that Winnipeg was a second class city and did not deserve a first class sports team. This may be true of all smaller cities in that they cannot support (and therefore do not deserve) teams from the major sporting leagues. Or perhaps it is simply a case of cities appreciating their teams because relocation is only becoming more popular and if sports fans are not careful they may wake up tomorrow morning and find their home team thousands of miles away.

