



REMARKS OF ROBERT MOSES
AT THE
GROUNDBREAKING
OF THE
FLUSHING MEADOW PARK MUNICIPAL STADIUM

OCTOBER 28, 1961

Commissioner Morris, Athletes, Sportsmen and Spectators.

Well, here we are at last. When the Emperor Titus opened the Colosseum in 80 A. D. he could have felt no happier. We shall never know whether in the bistros and narrow alleys of ancient Rome the aficionados who owned pieces of gladiators or of circus wild beasts muttered against Trajan for his dumb and artless arena. No doubt there were contemporary sports writers, relaxing between bouts in the nearby holes in the walls where the vino flowed, who had the gift of tongues and talked and wrote about legendary heroes, with sly, salty humor, happy metaphors and of course scrupulous fairness. Perhaps among them there were a few unhappy souls who viewed their gladiatorial world through jaundiced eyes, talked out of the corners of their mouths and dipped their pens in vitriol. It was always thus.

I have lived through many denunciations of what proved in the end to be eminently success-



Baseball

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ful enterprises, but none more outrageous than those aimed at this Stadium by some who, in their hearts if not in their typewriters, knew better. It is all part of the great American game of editing. The Colosseum at Rome seated 50,000 and, unlike this edifice of the Emperor Shea, had no provisions for expansion or for a future cover. That's where we have it all over the old Romans. If the future proves we need more room and a plastic dome we have the flexibility to provide them.

Hold your bile, you laureates of sports. We bureaucrats, smarting under attacks, sometimes get good and mad at you. And then we reflect that out of the "terf", sweat and tears of the ring, the cursing and prayers of the Arena, the hyperbole of track, field, tank, ice and water, the rancid smells of gymnasiums and dressing rooms, the Rabelaisian gossip of taverns, trains and planes, have come many of our most honest, earthy and genuinely American authors. Sports writers are not, like the French Academy, the final arbiters of our American tongue, but sporting lingo at its best is an influential source of changing colloquial English. If it is embellished now and then by a classic allusion or by a hint that the bozo has mitted Shakespeare and come away with a whiff of the classics, the fans will take it along with the good sweat, peppermint smell of Omega Oil. This, my fine friends, is an event in literature as well as sport. The folklore of baseball will climb like ivy over this stadium, encrust it with tradition, mellow it with the lurid colors of fiction, invest it with the visions of boyhood and the dreams of age, challenge the giants of Homer, Rabelais, Bret Harte, Mark Twain and Daudet and put Paul Bunyan to shame.

When I think back over the dilemma of Walter O'Malley, torn between his love of

Ebbets Field and the desire to be on the side of Los Angeles, I am weak with the perspiration of dramatic suspense. At this threat of piracy, the entire nation stood aghast. More influences were brought to bear to hold the Dodgers in Brooklyn than to keep the French in Algiers. "Spare us your satire", shrieked the fans. "You are speaking of the team we love. No, no, you can't take them away from us. Think of the Rape of the Sabines. Remember Helen of Troy and the face that lunched a thousand chips. A bum is a bum is a bum." Strong men wept and little children cried in the streets, but it was all in vain.

Walter O'Malley's rendering of Tosti's Goodbye made the first cornettist in Sousa's band look like a national guard bugler. On the third reprise of Kathleen ni Hollihan, Walter used to embroider his theme with harps, wolf-hounds and shamrocks, and when he came to those fateful words "it may be for years and it may be forever", he glimmered and glowed with fantasy like the magic garment of Kathleen herself.

From Walter O'Malley's angle, there was, to be sure, no gold in them thar Corona hills of ashes and refuse celebrated by Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*, and no oil or uranium in the offscourings and leavings of Brooklyn levelled to fill Flushing Meadow. This dubious real estate became a public park and must stay that way. How could we compete with an entire arroyo in California? This question, my fine friends, is rhetorical and calls for no answer. It is all as the French say, of a great sadness.

Then my mind goes back to the frantic search for a substitute home for the Dodgers, their departure drenched with the tears of Brooklyn, the profound and obscure delibera-

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tions over a new league or an enlarged old one, the emergence of Bill Shea as a lad who is occasionally down but never out, the painful decisions at City Hall and Albany, and finally to this day of triumph. I am limp with the enthusiasm of victory. Joy has returned to our own favored Flushing Meadow, the sun shines, bands play, children shout and a great Macedonian cry rises from the crowd as another Casey, Casey Stengel, armed with fractured English, comes to bat. It may be that Casey has confused the Fountain of Youth with the Pool of Bethesda. Konrad Adenauer at the age of eighty-five is back in Bonn, and no doubt Casey feels the noise about his keel.

My faith in the ultimate triumph of the democratic process has been restored. I now believe there are absolutely no limits to what can be accomplished, at least in the field of sports. The Iron Duke said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Many a future American triumph will have its origin in the Flushing Meadow Stadium.

I continue to regard this Stadium as an all-purpose municipal athletic field, hospitable to many sports beside baseball, and as a major attraction of the Fair and most important feature of the future Flushing Meadow Park. I believe that before long soccer will be the top worldwide sport and here it will have a magnificent home, but baseball will remain typically American, the best manifestation of our genius in a contest where player and spectator are one.

My compliments to Newbold Morris, to Bill Shea who is battling one thousand, to their loyal associates, to the Mayor and to all those who stayed with this enterprise through thick and thin, never doubting, fainting or failing. It's the old story. Those who won't admit defeat can't be beaten.



Football

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