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## Major League Baseball: Orlando's Bid

Richard C. Crepeau  
University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

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The City of Orlando and designated majority owner Norton Herrick are scheduled to make their presentation of Orlando's case for major league baseball on Wednesday of next week. So it might be a good time to make an assessment of Orlando's chances for getting a team.

Assuming a strike settlement what are Orlando's prospects? This depends basically on two things: the state of the Orlando bid and the state of the competition.

Let's look at the last first. The other three cities that are vying for what should be two expansion franchises are Phoenix, St. Petersburg, and the Northern Virginia area in Fairfax County. Since the presentations made in Chicago a few weeks ago two things seem fairly clear. Phoenix made an extremely strong presentation with an extremely strong ownership group led by the Phoenix Suns owner Jerry Colangelo, and it is now likely that they will receive one of the two franchises.

Second, it has also become clear that St. Petersburg is nearly out of contention. As I have suspected for over a year now major league baseball simply doesn't want to put a team in the Suncoast Dome Mausoleum. It is a dreadful building, in a location with parking and traffic problems, and with accessibility problems if coming from outside St. Petersburg. The only thing going for it is that there are law suits against major league baseball that will be dropped if a franchise is awarded to St. Pete. This worked for Milwaukee and Seattle, but I don't think it will work this time.

That means that the Fairfax County, Northern Virginia bid is the chief competition for Orlando. The presentation made by these two groups was most impressive. Fairfax County is a rich upper middle class suburban community, the ownership groups have deep pockets, it is adjacent to the political power of Washington, and there is a significant minority representation in one ownership group. In addition their plans are well thought out and the presentation was first class. Suddenly Northern Virginia is the leader for the second franchise, much to the surprise of nearly everyone.

About a year ago I did an analysis of Orlando's prospects for a major league team for the Orange County Sports Authority. In that analysis I made the point that Orlando could bring two extremely compelling factors to the table which would blow St.

Petersburg, at that time the leading opposition to Orlando, out of the water. The first would be Disney involvement which would leave baseball owners drooling and falling all over themselves to bring baseball to the City Beautiful. The other essential element was a significant minority component in the ownership group.

As of today neither of these elements exist within the Orlando bid package. Disney apparently has backed off from any involvement, although they stand to be a major beneficiary through increased theme park attendance and unlimited marketing possibilities of team logo merchandise as they are doing with the Mighty Ducks.

As for significant minority representation in the ownership group there is none, although there is talk of an effort to bring Shaq into the ownership group. This couldn't hurt, but may not be enough, and it is clearly a point on which the Fairfax County bid is way ahead of Orlando.

But what does Orlando have? It has a deep pockets owner in Norton Herrick who is connected to Wayne Huisenga, and two co-owners in Paul Jacobs and Steve Kurtz who were involved in the Colorado Rockies effort. It has clear and strong support from both Glenda Hood and Linda Chapin, plus the fact that voters rejected Chapin's opponent who tried to use the baseball effort as an issue against Chapin. Now however the controversy over the surplus revenues generated from the increase in the tourist tax clouds the whole effort. Unless this issue is resolved on Tuesday Orlando's chances will be greatly diminished. But Orlando must not let Norton Herrick run off with city tax dollars.

Orlando has excellent stadium plan with a good location and well planned access. It is an outdoor stadium of attractive design. There are some indications of a solid fan base, local business support, and the fact is that Orlando is the new center of the universe, and baseball, especially the American League, would love to be here.

I would say that at this time the edge belongs to the Northern Virginia bid because they have nearly everything Orlando has, plus a minority ownership group. While in Orlando Disney is riding the pines and a squabble has developed between the Orange County Commission and the ownership group over the expenditure of future surplus tax revenues.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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