

6-27-1995

Chicago St. Louis Phoenix Cardinals

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Chicago St. Louis Phoenix Cardinals" (1995). *On Sport and Society*. 393.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/393>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
June 27, 1995

The Al Davis Oakland Los Angeles Irwindale Raiders are heading back to Oakland; the Chicago St. Louis Phoenix Cardinals are revving the engines on the moving vans headed to Los Angeles; the New York Yankees have signed Darryl Strawberry to a contract to play baseball; the New Jersey Devils have swept the Detroit Red Wings and won Lord Stanley's Cup on their way to Nashville; and Mike Tyson was honored as a hero in a public ceremony in Harlem.

All signs indicate that the end is near. The past two weeks in sports would lead anyone with any sensitivity to put their affairs in order and prepare for the apocalypse. Either that or an alien force has put something funny in the Gatorade.

Years ago in the midst of Al Davis' nomadic period a friend of mine and I began to refer to Davis' team as the Al Davis Raiders on the grounds that they had no permanent identification with, nor loyalty to, any particular geographic location. Now more than ever that seems to be, as Al will take his Raiders back to Oakland after thirteen years in lotus land. Obviously absence made the city wallet grow more willing to open.

And open it will. The sixteen year agreement will guarantee \$85M in stadium improvements, including the coveted luxury boxes, and a new total capacity of 65,000. Question: How long is a sixteen year agreement when dealing with Al Davis?

While the Raiders prepare to leave town the Chicago St.Louis Phoenix Cardinals are ready to move into the now vacant LA Goldmine. Before the ink was dry on the agreement between Al and Oakland, one of the lawyers for Bill Bidwell in Phoenix announced that the Cardinals were ready to jump on I-10 to LA, contracts with Arizona State University for Sun Devil Stadium notwithstanding. (This team should not to be confused with the Cleveland Los Angeles St.Louis Rams who moved to St.Louis and were told they couldn't, and then were told they could as long as they gave the NFL a moving van full of money.)

Think about this. We now have the possibility of a head-on crash on I-10 between the moving vans from the ex-St.Louis team headed to Los Angeles with the ex-Los Angeles team heading to St. Louis. Of course previously they occupied Chicago and Cleveland.

I promise you I am not making any of this up.

A few days earlier in New York the Boss, George Steinbrenner, determined to further disrupt the Yankees, signed Darryl Strawberry to play for the Yankees. He will be paid \$850,000 this year and a potential \$2.5M next year. Bill Clinton's drug Tsar and Tommy Lasorda were among a large group of critics of this move. It seems that Lasorda, who once welcomed Darryl like a son to L.A., and others, think that this signing is sending the wrong message to the youth of America about drug use and violation of the law.

Well, maybe, but I would suggest that the message being sent is twofold: George Steinbrenner either doesn't know what he is doing or doesn't care what happens to the Yankees; or the message is the same one being sent by Al Davis: If it will make money do it, nothing else matters. Or maybe George just has empathy for a fellow convicted felon.

Of less concern but more interest, the New Jersey Devils who may be on their way to Nashville, put on a clinic while winning Lord Stanley's Cup. The Devils system is really not all that revolutionary. They play defense. What is revolutionary is that they play it extremely well, with awesome discipline, and this gives them what would be called in basketball, an excellent transition game. They held their opponents to about half their season average of shots on goal, and they did it by preventing shots from ever reaching the net. The number of blocked shots by the Devils may have set some sort of record.

At the same time the Devils ownership is ready to move to Nashville where the bottom line is most inviting, unless of course they can use this threat to vastly improve the bottom line in New Jersey. What the Devils want is control of the Brendan Byrne Arena, or put another way, they want private control of a public facility. This seems relatively reasonable in an age when local and state governments routinely turn over public funds to sports franchises in vast quantities, while simultaneously condemning welfare recipients.

And finally there is that matter of heroes again. Mike Tyson last week was honored in a public ceremony in Harlem as a hero. This event was produced and directed by Don King with production assistance from Rev. Al Sharpton. Two thousand people turned up for this performance designed to simultaneously irritate the white population and strike back at African American women. It will also enhance Don, Al, and Mike's bottom line.

It all makes sense after all. It's the money.

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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