

Joining the "Big Leagues": Politics, Race, and the Pursuit of NBA Franchises in Miami and Orlando, 1982-1987

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JOINING THE “BIG LEAGUES”:
POLITICS, RACE, AND THE PURSUIT OF NBA FRANCHISES
IN MIAMI AND ORLANDO, 1982-1987

by

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B.A. Florida Atlantic University, 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the formation of two National Basketball Association (NBA) franchises—the Miami Heat and the Orlando Magic—and the efforts of groups representing both cities to procure those franchises between 1982 and 1987. Drawing primarily from discourse found in local newspapers, this thesis serves as a case study of the dual nature of sport to both unite and divide communities. While proponents of the NBA in Miami and Orlando preached the social, cultural, and economic benefits of sport, they ignored the ways in which the pursuit of sport divided local governments and perpetuated historic hostility toward African-American residents in each city. Debates over basketball arena funding created deep divisions within and between city, county, and state governments. Arena construction ultimately displaced hundreds of families in the historically African-American neighborhoods of Overtown (Miami) and Parramore (Orlando). Still, prospective NBA franchise owners in each city promised residents that professional sport would galvanize their community, provide national relevance, and spur economic revitalization. Although city and team officials attempted to shape the discourse surrounding their NBA pursuit as wholly unifying, underlying discourse revealed divisions within each city.

Chapter one explores the history of arena and sport-related politics in Miami, relays the history of racial prejudice by Miami government toward Overtown African Americans, and analyzes how these two histories influenced the funding and location of the city's eventual NBA arena. Similarly, Chapter two explores the history of arena politics in Orlando, relays the history of racial prejudice from municipal government toward Parramore residents, and analyzes the relation of these two elements to the financing and planning of Orlando's arena. Chapter three

analyzes prospective NBA ownership groups in Miami and Orlando, their structural makeup, characteristics, and their efforts to sell season-ticket deposits in hopes of luring the league to their city. Chapter four analyzes the underlying destructive discourse surrounding the arenas and prospective franchises, particularly as it relates prejudicial language toward Overtown and Parramore and vitriolic language between Miami and Orlando.

This work is dedicated to my mother, Diane Elliott, whose love and support has helped me achieve goals that would have otherwise been impossible, and to my grandmother, Anastasia Lowell, who instilled within me a sense of academic discipline, work ethic, and the acceptance of nothing less than my absolute best effort. Thank you, and I love you both.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: MIAMI’S PURSUIT BEGINS.....	6
“Another Penny for Your Sports”	7
An Arena in Overtown.....	9
Arena Prospects Down, Not Out.....	16
An NBA Game in Miami.....	19
Miami Gets an Arena Developer and a Franchise Owner	23
CHAPTER TWO: ORLANDO’S PURSUIT BEGINS	31
Taxes, Tensions, and Orlando’s Penny Sales Tax Push	33
Arena Talks Reopen.....	36
An Arena in Parramore	39
Arena Prospects Down, Not Out.....	46
Orlando Gets an NBA Ownership Group	52
CHAPTER THREE: PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION	57
New Owners in Miami.....	59
Orlando’s New Front Man	63
Selling Tickets by Selling “Community”	66
Big League Identity.....	70

Big League Means Big Bucks.....	74
CHAPTER FOUR: REALITIES OF EXCLUSION.....	79
Empty Economic Promises.....	81
Persisting Prejudice.....	84
Vitriol Within and Between.....	88
The NBA Expands.....	92
Still Excluded.....	97
CONCLUSION.....	100
ADDENDUM.....	104
Magic and Heat Enjoy Success.....	104
Arenas Deemed Obsolete.....	105
The Same Old Song.....	106
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	109

INTRODUCTION

Professional sport franchises are often perceived as social, cultural, and economic engines. In the cities that host them, pro-sports teams are often credited with galvanizing communities, providing national relevance, and spurring economic activity. The truth is that professional sport franchises can be equally destructive for cities, because the politics and logistics of hosting a major league franchise can harm city governments and residents as much as they help them. In many cases, the catalyst for this harm is a sport stadium or arena.

Sport arenas are necessary for any city hoping to host a franchise, but are costly to build and can divide local governments over funding issues. Arenas also necessitate large tracts of land to build upon, which often means that homes and businesses must be razed to make room. Still, when major leagues undergo expansion by accepting new franchises—an occurrence that happens rarely—municipal officials and prospective team ownership groups interested in bringing a franchise to town sell “the mystique of sports and their mythical benefits” to city residents in hopes that it will help them fund and build arenas.¹ However, as members of one “community” align behind the goal of bringing a professional sport franchise to their city, members of other communities are alienated, disregarded, and infringed upon. As such, the process of procuring a professional sport franchise is one that both builds and erodes.

This thesis examines the expansion of the National Basketball Association (NBA) during the late 1980s, with a focus on the efforts of municipal officials and team ownership groups in

¹ Mark S. Rosentraub, *Major League Losers: The Real Cost of Sports and Who's Paying for It* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 4. See also: Dave Zirin, *Welcome to the Terrordome: The Pain, Politics, and Promise of Sports* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007).

Miami and Orlando to build arenas and secure franchises between 1982 and 1987. Drawing primarily from discourse found in local newspapers, this thesis analyzes the efforts of these government and team officials to shape the narrative surrounding their pursuit and sell the “mystique of sports” to city residents. While these municipal officials and prospective NBA owners attempted to sell professional sport as a wholly beneficial entity, they inadvertently revealed the ways in which their communities were divided. Some of these divisions were racial and rooted in historic prejudice. Ultimately, the fate of residents in the historically African-American neighborhoods of Overtown (Miami) and Parramore (Orlando) were disregarded in favor of arenas for the NBA.

By the early 1980s, both Miami and Orlando were well-known cities across the United States, albeit with very different reputations. According to one Florida historian, Miami became increasingly known as “a crime-ridden pesthole” due to drug trafficking and high murder rates, both of which made national headlines in the 1970s and 80s.² Around this same time, reactions to racial injustice in Miami’s African-American neighborhoods of Overtown and Liberty City contributed to Miami’s reputation as home to some of “the worst race riots in United States history.”³ Juxtaposed to these highly publicized issues were images of South Beach glamor and Art Deco style. As such, Miami appeared to be a “city of contrasts,” where “Third World poverty” met “First Class luxury.”⁴ Amid this tension, Miami and Dade County political leaders sought to make Miami “a first rank international city,” which meant, at least in part, adding an

² M. Barron Stofik, *Saving South Beach* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), p. 108.

³ Larry Eugene Rivers, “Florida’s African American Experience: The Twentieth Century and Beyond,” in Michael Gannon, *The History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), p. 444.

⁴ Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 26.

additional professional sport franchise and increasing the city's relevance in the national sporting world.⁵

Orlando, on the other hand, was “synonymous with tourism, high-tech business, and urban sprawl.”⁶ Over the course of the twentieth century, Orlando transformed from a “sleepy community with few outstanding characteristics other than 2,000 flaccid lakes and a healthy citrus and cattle industry,” into a burgeoning metropolis and a certifiable “mecca for tourists.”⁷ From the local perspective, Orlando was unable to escape its tourist town reputation. Economically beneficial though it was, Walt Disney World's omnipresence in the city prompted many local politicians to pursue avenues for developing a more uniquely “Orlando” identity. Much like Miami, Orlando's quest for an NBA franchise became as much a pursuit of an identity change as it was a pursuit of professional basketball.

Ultimately, both cities received franchises from the NBA, but not before damaging relations both within and between municipal, county, and state governments, and carrying on with a historic effort to utilize valuable downtown space used by African Americans in Overtown and Parramore for the benefit of political and business elites. While proponents of the NBA did unite several citizens in Miami and Orlando behind the goal of bringing a new team to town, they did so in a manner that proves professional sport can be equally divisive for cities that choose to pursue it. As such, this thesis serves as a case study of the dual nature of sport to both unite and divide communities.

⁵ Reginald Stuart, “Economic Trouble of Miami's Blacks is Major Issue Facing Prospering City,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1983.

⁶ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 26.

⁷ “What's Doing in Orlando,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1982.

Chapter one explores the history of arena and sport-related politics in Miami, relays the history of racial prejudice by Miami government toward Overtown African Americans, and analyzes how these two histories influenced the funding and location of the city's eventual NBA arena. Similarly, Chapter two explores the history of arena politics in Orlando, relays the history of racial prejudice from municipal government toward Parramore residents, and analyzes the relation of these two elements to the financing and planning of Orlando's arena. NBA supporters in municipal, county, and state governments pushed through funding legislation for arenas in Miami and Orlando, dividing politicians on the issue. Ultimately, those opposed to publicly funding arenas were muted by those who successfully gained popular support for the arena and professional sport agenda. While securing funding, these officials carried on a historic disregard for the consequences faced by African-American residents in Overtown and Parramore, many of whom would be removed from their homes in the wake of arena construction.

Chapter three analyzes prospective NBA ownership groups in Miami and Orlando, their structural makeup, characteristics, and their efforts to sell season-ticket deposits in hopes of luring the league to their city. Once arena funding was secured and construction began, prospective NBA ownership groups in Miami and Orlando worked to assure city residents, with help from their allies in local media, that professional sport would create a more united community, provide citizens with a "big league" identity, and bring a host of economic benefits. While NBA ownership groups in Miami and Orlando promised the constructive elements of professional sport, they conveyed prejudice and indifference toward the hundreds of families in Overtown and Parramore who would be disrupted, displaced, and disregarded. Furthermore, once the NBA pitted Miami and Orlando against each other for one expansion franchise spot,

members of each city espoused vitriol toward the other, revealing how each city began shaping their own identity based off a perception of the other. Chapter four analyzes this underlying destructive discourse surrounding the arenas and prospective franchises.

CHAPTER ONE: MIAMI'S PURSUIT BEGINS

When talks of a potential NBA franchise in Miami surfaced during the early 1980s, the city was already considered “big league” thanks to the National Football League’s (NFL) Miami Dolphins, who had tremendous success during the 1970s.⁸ “Amid the general din of Miami football furor,” city and county officials began looking for ways to bring at least one more major league sport to South Florida.⁹ Despite having a highly visible and successful NFL franchise, some felt Miami was not “the big-league city it should be.” The city was said to be well positioned for expansion into other leagues, especially Major League Baseball (MLB) given “the size of [its] market, [its] baseball-loving Hispanic population, and [its] accessibility to all of baseball-crazy Latin America via radio and TV.” A franchise with the NBA was also seen as a strong possibility, with “so many transplants” in Miami hailing from “basketball cities” like Boston, Chicago, and New York.¹⁰

Those arguing for more sports claimed that “without a place to play,” Miami had “no chance” of expanding its big league status to the MLB or NBA. In an effort to lure an additional major league sport to the city, members of Miami and Dade County government made efforts to pass legislation that would allow for arena funding. This effort lasted throughout much of the 1980s and generated local discourse regarding sport, community identity, and race. At the forefront of arena issues in Miami and Dade County was funding and logistics, but throughout

⁸ Bob Carroll et. al., *Total Football II: The Official Encyclopedia of the National Football League* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1999).

⁹ Peter Richmond, “Basketball Backers Push for Place in Sun,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1983.

¹⁰ Bob Rubin, “Penny Sales Tax is a Big Gamble – But Go for It,” *Miami Herald*, October 26, 1982.

the discussions underlying tensions, centered on race relations and “big league” identity, persisted.¹¹

“Another Penny for Your Sports”

In early 1982, Florida’s state legislature gave six Florida counties, including Dade County, the opportunity to vote on a one-year penny sales tax increase that would go toward funding cultural centers, parks, and potentially sports arenas and stadiums.¹² Dade County voters were divided over the sales tax. Supporters argued that the projected \$200-million generated by the tax would cover the cost of “a new 70,000-seat football-baseball stadium,” “an 18,000-seat downtown Miami arena” for basketball and other events, “a new performing arts center,” and “expansion of the Miami Beach Convention Center.”¹³ With polls in both Orange and Hillsborough County showing support for the tax, some in Dade County worried that a rejection of the measure would make South Florida “be looked upon as nonprogressive.”¹⁴ Opponents of the tax noted the ongoing nationwide recession, which caused economic “suffering” in Miami and left many feeling that the penny sales tax would be “an enormous burden for the taxpayer.”¹⁵

Proponents of the tax fired back by arguing that the “long-term return to the county” from a stadium, arena, and cultural centers could be “figured in the billions of dollars.”¹⁶ Stadiums and arenas were said to inherently stimulate job growth in construction and operations positions, as

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Susan Sachs, “Another Penny for Your Sports? Voters Poised to End Long Debate,” *Miami Herald*, October 31, 1982.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. Comment made by tax supporter Gene Autrey, a member of the South Florida Sports Authority.

¹⁵ Rubin, “Penny Sales Tax,” *Miami Herald*, October 26, 1982; Sachs, “Another Penny,” *Miami Herald*, October 31, 1982. Comment made by Norman Braman, a Miami auto dealer and leading opponent of the tax.

¹⁶ Sachs, “Another Penny,” *Miami Herald*, October 31, 1982.

well as economic activity related to services and accommodations. Stadiums were said to yield cultural benefits as well. One *Miami Herald* journalist argued that Miami's "identity as a community is defined by how much we offer visitor and resident alike in terms of recreational and cultural diversity," and that the penny tax would protect South Florida's "cultural health."¹⁷ For some, stadiums and arenas were linked with community identity. Cities with stadiums, arenas, and subsequently the major-league sports teams that played in them were perceived to have a larger national relevance than those without.

Still, the penny sales tax failed in Dade County. In November 1982, roughly 50 percent of county residents "defeated" the penny sales tax "by better than a 3-to-2 margin."¹⁸ Yet the penny sales tax was not "quite dead."¹⁹ Though the county had rejected it, Miami was set to hold a special election in early December to approve the penny sales tax for the city, looking to "renovate the aging Orange Bowl and build a downtown exhibition hall and arena." Miami Mayor Maurice Ferre, a supporter of the proposed tax, said the city's campaign to conjure support for the tax would be done "the right way." "We're not going to have the Chamber of Commerce and the president of the Orange Bowl Committee, who goes home in his limousine every night," Ferre said. "This is going to be a *people's* thing."²⁰ For Ferre, the county failed to relate the benefits of the stadium, arena, and other facilities to the common person. Ferre also

¹⁷ Bill Cosford, "If We Build it, Will They Come?" *Miami Herald*, October 31, 1982.

¹⁸ Susan Sachs, "Dade Rejects 1-Cent Sales Tax Hike: Proposal Fails in 5 Other Counties," *Miami Herald*, November 3, 1982; Helga Silva, "50% Turnout is Expected at Dade Polls," *Miami Herald*, November 2, 1982.

¹⁹ Sachs, "Dade Rejects," *Miami Herald*, November 3, 1982.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

noted that the county had especially neglected minority voters, who he claimed would be the tax's "key to success" at the city-level.²¹

An Arena in Overtown

Both the penny sales tax and the issue of bringing an arena to Miami had racial implications. Weeks before the Dade County vote on the sales tax, African-American civic and business groups "refused to back the tax until public officials guaranteed them a share of management and service contracts at the facilities."²² With no assurances on voting day, "predominantly black" precincts throughout Dade County issued a "sweeping rejection" of the penny sales tax, which "echoed the nearly unanimous opposition expressed by black business, religious, and political leaders to the tax."²³ Led by Miami City Commissioner Miller Dawkins, Miami's African-American business community "demanded...written guarantees that blacks would get up to 50 percent of all construction, management, and service contracts at tax-funded facilities" if they promised to support the measure at the city-level.²⁴

To get the support of Miami's "black leaders" before the city's penny tax vote, Mayor Maurice Ferre promised to reserve 20 percent of all construction contracts for African-American businesses.²⁵ Ferre also guaranteed that "any profits generated by the sports facilities would be earmarked for programs to help inner-city youths."²⁶ In addition, Ferre prioritized appealing to

²¹ Susan Sachs, "Ferre Pushes 'People's' Tax Hike: Overtown Coliseum Proposed," *Miami Herald*, November 4, 1982.

²² Sachs, "Another Penny," *Miami Herald*, October 31, 1982.

²³ Sachs, "Dade Rejects," *Miami Herald*, November 3, 1982.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Sachs, "Ferre Pushes 'People's' Tax Hike," *Miami Herald*, November 4, 1982; Sachs, "Dade Rejects," *Miami Herald*, November 3, 1982.

²⁶ Sachs, "Ferre Pushes 'People's' Tax Hike," *Miami Herald*, November 4, 1982.

“all residents’ ‘civic pride’” by labeling the tax as a “people’s” movement to make Miami an “elite” city.²⁷ Residents of Overtown, Miami’s historic African-American neighborhood, did not see themselves as part of this “people’s” movement.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Ferre promised that a potential arena would be built in Overtown, and attempted to sell this as a positive for the African-American community there. For Ferre, the location would ensure that the community would benefit from jobs building and maintaining the arena. For the residents themselves, the arena represented another domino in the city’s ongoing effort to raze their community. Ann Marie Adker, a longtime resident of Overtown, responded to Ferre’s guarantees with great skepticism. “Promises, promises,” Adker said.²⁸ “We’ve heard it all before.” Adker’s skepticism was rooted in her experiences of the 1960s, “when backers of building Interstate 95 through her Overtown neighborhood promised jobs and economic benefits for hundreds of residents.” However, the interstate highway only provided jobs “temporarily,” and left a once “bustling community...where blacks owned thriving businesses,” with “permanent concrete scars.”²⁹ For African Americans in Overtown, the penny sales tax and proposed arena were not parts of a people’s movement, but rather a reminder of I-95’s invasion, which itself was a microcosm of the subjugation faced by African Americans since their earliest arrival in Miami in the late 1800s.

In 1895, Miami’s black population numbered in the hundreds and was mostly comprised of former slaves from the Carolinas, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, as well as Bahamians who immigrated to the region for its agricultural employment opportunities. Henry M. Flagler’s

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Michael Cottman, “Blacks Doubt Coliseum Will Yield Them Benefits,” *Miami Herald*, November 6, 1982.

²⁹ Ibid.

Florida East Coast Railroad “brought in hundreds of black laborers” who worked with whites in both construction and community affairs. In fact, of the 368 people who voted in Miami’s incorporation election, 162 were black. Most of these voters were actually registered by the Flagler organization immediately before the election as a strategy to win incorporation, and the vote “marked the beginning *and* end of meaningful black involvement in municipal affairs [in Miami] for more than six decades.” African Americans in Miami were virtually disenfranchised through a slew of legislation that placed unreasonable barriers in their way, including poll taxes and an outright ban from participating in Democratic primaries. Residential segregation “was from the beginning the rule in Miami,” as African Americans were only allowed to own property and businesses in one section of the city, called “Colored Town,” the early name for what would eventually become “Overtown.”³⁰

Despite making up anywhere between 25 to 40 percent of Miami’s population during the early twentieth century, African Americans in Miami were relegated to living in Colored Town, which “lacked proper facilities for even a small population.” Colored Town’s roads were unpaved, homes were “rickety” and without indoor plumbing or electricity, and disease was “rampant.” Still, the community slowly improved thanks to the efforts of its leading residents to establish schools, newspapers, a hospital, and several churches that ultimately became centers for leadership and activist groups. Several businesses sprang up in Colored Town throughout the early twentieth century, and a few residents found great financial success in owning commercial real estate, hotels, and newspapers. Along with thriving community institutions and businesses,

³⁰ Paul S. George, “Colored Town: Miami’s Black Community, 1896-1930,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (April, 1978): 433, 435.

Colored Town also offered a range of leisure activities, including festivals, athletic contests, and trips to neighboring African-American communities throughout South Florida. Nightclubs and dance halls offered musical entertainment from well-known traveling jazz and blues musicians, giving Colored Town's "Little Broadway" section a "growing national reputation" during the 1930s and 40s. Still, Colored Town could not escape racial prejudice during this period. Its residents were lynched during times of racial tension with Miami's white residents, prevented from improving their community's quality of life due to prejudice in Miami's municipal and judicial sectors, and barred from political participation due to laws both *de jure* and *de facto*.³¹ According to one historian, "The communities of white and black residents [in Miami] were interdependent and yet completely separated."³²

Dade County played a large role in racial segregation as well. By the 1930s, Dade County was committed to a "purposeful official effort to impose racial boundaries and to segregate African Americans residentially." When Miami's "white civic elite" looked to expand Miami's white business district into an area intersecting with Overtown, city and county officials implemented or attempted a "variety of plans and policies...to move Overtown blacks out of the way." In an effort to "siphon off" Overtown's residents, "permit downtown expansion," and "put greater physical distance between white and black areas of metropolitan Miami," the Dade County Commission, in cooperation with Miami's municipal government, conceived of Liberty Square, a new area of exclusively African-American project housing five miles north of downtown Miami. The commission planned to force resettlement of Overtown residents to

³¹ Ibid., 436, 440

³² John A. Stuart and John F. Stack, *The New Deal In South Florida : Design, Policy, And Community Building, 1933-1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), p. 17.

Liberty Square through legislation. Overtown was simply in the way of white ambition to expand Miami's business district, and racial prejudice within city and county government allowed for the planned removal of its residents. While Liberty Square was ultimately built and attracted multiple African American residents from Overtown, Dade County's plans for *forced* African-American resettlement "were never implemented." Still, these proposed and attempted measures are important in how they both "reveal the racial thinking of white civic leaders" in Miami and "provide insight into the purposes of subsequent policies and plans that Dade County ultimately implemented."³³ Among these subsequent policies and plans was the construction of Interstate 95 through the heart of Overtown.³⁴

According to one historian, the federal interstate highway program of the 1950s was used by local officials across the country to "eliminate 'blighted' neighborhoods and to redevelop or 'reconvert' valuable inner-city land." Where Dade County failed to forcibly remove Overtown's African Americans in the 1930s and 40s, it viewed interstate construction as a new means to achieve old ends. Despite having an alternative construction option that would have left Overtown unaltered, Dade County Commissioners felt that building through Overtown would allow "ample room for the future expansion of the central business district." Finished in the late 1960s, the interchange of I-95 and the simultaneously constructed interstate 395 "took up twenty square blocks" of Overtown and "destroyed the housing of about ten thousand people" in its wake. Overtown's displaced residents moved to Liberty City and other predominantly African-American communities in northwest Dade County, though many remained behind in what was

³³ George, "Colored Town," p. 436, 440.

³⁴ Raymond A. Mohl, "Whitening Miami: Race, Housing, and Government Policy in Twentieth-Century Dade County," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Winter, 2001), pp. 319-345; 320-324.

quickly becoming a “decaying” community under siege of infrastructural invasion.³⁵ According to a journalist working for the *Miami Times*, Miami’s African-American newspaper, I-95 construction effectively “destroyed the black community.”³⁶

With Miami Mayor Maurice Ferre promising jobs and rejuvenation to Overtown in return for support on the December 1982 penny sales tax vote, longtime Overtown residents heard “echoes of the same promises” that ultimately displaced their neighbors in years past. “Overtown residents can’t afford to be taxed anymore,” resident Ann Marie Adker said, “and they certainly cannot afford to be entertained inside a coliseum.” Adker and her Overtown neighbors were well aware that the promises of an Overtown arena to yield direct benefits to the neighborhood and its residents were dubious at best, especially given that the entertainment itself would likely be too costly to enjoy. Overtown resident Livingston Rolle called the penny sales tax and the proposed arena a city and county plan “to destroy this community.” Sidney Cox, chairman of the Overtown Merchants Association pleaded for “housing before a coliseum.”³⁷ These residents knew that Miami

Responding to the criticism, Mayor Ferre assured Overtown residents that the proposed arena would not be built *in* Overtown, but rather on its outskirts, on the east side of the New Washington Heights Metrorail station. The proposed architect for the arena, African American Ron Frazier, was “leery of the plan” and would make no promises to Overtown’s residents about the location, admitting that he nor anyone he had spoken to had solidified the location. “If it’s built on the east side [where no Overtown residents lived], it will mean money for Overtown,”

³⁵ Ibid, 340-345; Cottman, “Blacks Doubt Coliseum,” *Miami Herald*, November 6, 1982.

³⁶ Julian M. Pleasants, *Orange Journalism : Voices From Florida Newspapers* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 199.

³⁷ Cottman, “Blacks Doubt Coliseum,” *Miami Herald*, November 6, 1982.

Frazier said. “If it’s built on the west side, it will mean trouble.” At the very least, Overtown residents saw the penny sales tax and proposed arena as too “premature.” With the vote just over a month away, Overtown residents and their community leaders were not open to supporting Ferre’s initiative. “We need housing and jobs,” said Rev. Thedford Johnson, pastor of Overtown’s St. John’s Baptist Church since 1950, “not a coliseum.”³⁸

As the vote for the penny sales tax drew near, Ferre increased the promised share of construction work for African Americans from 20 to 25 percent. Still, he dealt with criticism from Overtown residents and community leaders who cited a “loophole” in his proposed ordinance that “would allow a white-controlled firm” with an African American “serving as a ‘principal’ to qualify as a ‘minority contractor.’”³⁹ Ferre deflected by promising to “make sure this ordinance is absolutely in granite,” but the damage had been done.⁴⁰ Facing opposition from “black community activists” like City Commissioner Miller Dawkins, Urban League director T. Willard Fair, and former NAACP chapter president Bill Perry, along with most of Overtown’s residents who shared the opinions of Adker and Rolle, Ferre’s campaign to make the penny sales tax a “people’s” movement failed to unite the people of Miami across racial barriers.⁴¹ The tax itself had become inextricably linked with the proposed Overtown arena. For Overtown residents, the arena in turn became linked with the racialized past of infrastructure in the community. Miami as a whole was once again racially divided, and sport was quickly becoming situated at the center of that division.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ R.A. Zaldivar, “Loophole in City’s Minority Hiring Law will be Plugged, Ferre Promises,” *Miami Herald*, November 12, 1982.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Arena Prospects Down, Not Out

Despite his efforts to sell unity and civic pride to Miamians, Mayor Maurice Ferre's penny sales tax failed in "overwhelming" fashion.⁴² Miamians rejected the tax 4 to 1, and the rejection was seen as a likely end to any new stadiums or arenas in Miami, at least in the near future. Ferre himself saw "no way now for public money to be spent on stadiums," and many in Miami felt that any new taxes should go toward "things they [deemed] essential," such as healthcare, education, and transportation, among others.⁴³ In January 1983, Dade County commissioners voted against reviving the Dade County Sports Authority, and the authority's director, Richard Horrow, an avid supporter of the penny sales tax, was denied any new position with the county that would have continued the pursuit of professional sports and facilities.⁴⁴ Furthermore, some in Miami's private sector started backtracking on earlier promises they made to the penny tax's opponents guaranteeing they would help to privately fund arenas.⁴⁵ As such, the prospects of building a new arena and gaining an additional professional sport franchise appeared to be all but dead.

Two major factors reignited city-wide interest in adding sport facilities and franchises. First, an apparent jealousy of Tampa emerged as that city moved forward with its plans to build a baseball coliseum and add an MLB franchise.⁴⁶ In June 1983, 19 Tampa businessmen scored a political victory when the Florida Legislature adopted an amendment exempting "the expansion

⁴² Charles Whited, "Voters Refused to Take Sporting Chance with Tax," *Miami Herald*, December 16, 1982.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Susan Sachs, "Metro Refuses to Revive County Sports Authority," *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1983.

⁴⁵ Frederic Tasker, "Now, Put Your Stadium Where Your Mouth Is," *Miami Herald*, January 26, 1983.

⁴⁶ Peter Richmond, "The Push for a Big-League Team: Tampa Builds While Miami Waits," *Miami Herald*, June 5, 1983.

of existing sports facilities from the usual environmental review.”⁴⁷ For the Tampa businessmen, an environmental review was “the last major-league hurdle” to expanding the existing Al Lopez Field, which had long been a home to MLB teams during Spring Training and which was slated to be the new home of a Tampa major-league team. Despite the fact that the MLB had “no plans to expand,” the Tampa group felt “98 percent certain” that they would have a franchise in Tampa by 1985.⁴⁸ Many in Miami saw the good baseball news for Tampa as “bad baseball news for South Florida.”⁴⁹ In late 1982, Miami’s proposed arena promised to host either basketball *or* baseball, and many saw Tampa’s advancement with its own baseball team as an indicator that any hopes of acquiring that sport for Miami were quickly fading. One *Miami Herald* journalist touted “Major-league sports” as the “essential difference in any area’s quality of life,” warning that “in weighing the difference between big-league and bush-league, more and more people will be drawn toward Tampa Bay.”⁵⁰ Tampa’s apparent stadium and sport success was quickly equated with Miami’s failure in the same regard, and this revived interest in adding an additional professional sport franchise to the city.

Second, the passing of a local-option 3 percent resort tax increase by the Florida Legislature in July 1983 meant more money for arena and sports proponents in Miami.⁵¹ Miami city officials quickly approved the option, and plans to create a city sports authority to “handle the projected income from the tax” (mandated by the statute) moved forward.⁵² Initially, the resort tax was not viewed as a guarantee that an arena would be built. Mayor Ferre and others

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Herald Staff, “A Shutout?” *Miami Herald*, July 5, 1983.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ R.A. Zaldivar, “Miami Plans Exhibition Sports Board,” *Miami Herald*, 1983.

⁵² Ibid.

noted that the tax was “expected to generate only enough revenue to support a \$30-million bond issue,” falling short of contemporary assessments for arena building costs.⁵³ In addition, the city could only collect the tax if it was first approved by the Dade County Commission, and given the checkered history between city and county on arena and stadium issues, county approval seemed anything but a forgone conclusion. Still, the city created the Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority (MSEA) in October and named Rick Horrow, the former director of the defunct Dade County Sports Authority, as its executive director.⁵⁴ Horrow, a 28-year-old wunderkind with a degree from Harvard Law School and several high profile sports positions under his belt, immediately made “a new coliseum and arena for sports” a “top priority.”⁵⁵

Priority or not, Horrow and the arena faced an immediate obstacle in the form of a ruling by a Circuit Court judge that “cut off [MSEA’s] funding at the source.”⁵⁶ Hoteliers upset with the allocation of resort taxes for an arena they deemed to be unrelated to generating tourism “found a glitch in the state enabling law.”⁵⁷ Lawyers for the hoteliers were successful in convincing Circuit Court Judge Jack Turner to prevent the MSEA from collecting revenues from the resort tax, restricting any funding for arena construction for the time being. With his hopes for an arena, the MSEA’s funding, and his annual salary all hanging in the balance, Horrow shrugged off the ruling as a “minor technical interruption.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Herald Staff, “Richard (Rick) Horrow Executive Director of New Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority,” *Miami Herald*, October 19, 1983.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Richmond, “Basketball Backers,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1983.

⁵⁷ Charles Whited, “Ironies Dogging Effort to Build Miami Coliseum,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1983,

⁵⁸ Richmond, “Basketball Backers,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1983.

Horror gathered his political allies, which now included the MSEA members, the city attorney, and a state representative from Miami Beach, and moved forward with an appeal against the ruling.⁵⁹ With the appeal not slated to be resolved until at least April of 1984, Horror moved ahead with planning the arena and researching potential sports franchises during the interim. “What we must do now,” Horror said after Turner’s ruling, “is move forward faster than ever, so the planning will be done when the funding source is secured.”⁶⁰ Horror quickly began discussions with both arena developers and NBA officials in an effort to bring the NBA to Miami. For Horror, funding for an arena could be figured out later.

An NBA Game in Miami

In January 1984, Horror created two subcommittees within the MSEA—the Indoor Sports Committee and the Basketball Committee—to “find out what kind of events Miami [would] support, and how to bring them to Miami.”⁶¹ While the Indoor Sports Committee researched tennis, boxing, indoor soccer, hockey, gymnastics, track, and volleyball, the Basketball Committee put its focus on finding ways to bring the NBA to Miami.⁶² Meanwhile, the MSEA shopped for potential developers for its new arena, which still had no tangible source of funding. In an effort to “maximize creativity,” Horror sent letters to 451 developers, professional sport franchise owners, and other potentially interested parties across the U.S., asking for ideas and offering the chance to oversee design and construction.⁶³ By February, the

⁵⁹ Whited, “Ironies Dogging,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1983.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Jim Martz, “Sports Authority Planning to Make Dreams a Reality,” *Miami Herald*, January 10, 1984.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Herald Staff, “Developers Told to Submit Proposals for Sports Arena,” *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1984.

MSEA had received 140 individual responses regarding the arena, held meetings with “more than 45 persons, including architects, attorneys, developers, and contractors, from nine states and Canada,” and felt that they had serious interest from “at least three” major developers.⁶⁴ Horrow and MSEA members also met with the president of the Major Indoor Soccer League (MISL) about a procuring Miami franchise.⁶⁵ The talks were strictly exploratory, but Horrow felt that the chances of Miami getting an MISL franchise were strong.

Horrow, the MSEA, and arena proponents in Miami scored a major victory when an appellate court upheld the 3 percent resort tax, effectively clearing the way for the MSEA to collect roughly \$3 to \$4 million each year for its own funding and the funding of an arena.⁶⁶ The expected revenue would fall short of building a modern arena, but MSEA members and Miami officials were confident that they could find a private developer to “pick up the rest of the tab for the project.”⁶⁷ By July, the MSEA had offers from three developers for the prospective arena.⁶⁸ Though each offer contained “vague” descriptions of how construction would be financed, the mere fact that multiple builders were interested in the project gave the MSEA the leverage it needed to make contact with NBA officials.

The MSEA’s first “NBA meeting” came in November of 1983, when Horrow and MSEA vice chairman George Knox met with Boston Celtics owner Harry Mangurian to get advice on how to best pursue an NBA franchise.⁶⁹ Though the advice received was helpful, the MSEA was

⁶⁴ Sandra Dibble, “3 Developers Interested in Sports Arena,” *Miami Herald*, February 18, 1984.

⁶⁵ Staff, “Developers Told to Submit Proposals,” *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1984.

⁶⁶ Marc Fisher, “Bed Tax is Upheld on Appeal,” *Miami Herald*, March 1, 1984.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Rick Hirsch, “Plans Offered for Downtown Sports Arena,” *Miami Herald*, July 3, 1984.

⁶⁹ Herald Staff, “Laying the Foundation: 1972-84, Final Push for Expansion: 1985-87,” *Miami Herald*, April 26, 1987.

largely distracted with the resort tax issue through March of 1984. In early July, with the resort tax upheld and the arena development moving forward, if only conceptually, Horrow and MSEA members finally met with officials inside the NBA's league office in New York City to discuss Miami's potential to land a franchise.⁷⁰

During the meeting, Horrow shared the arena's progress with NBA general counsel Gary Bettman. Pleased to see Miami moving toward an arena, Bettman offered the MSEA a chance to showcase Miami's support for the NBA by hosting a preseason exhibition game.⁷¹ Horrow and MSEA were quick to accept the offer, and stressed that a "quick sellout" would "show NBA officials that Miami is serious about obtaining an NBA franchise."⁷² The game was slated for October 22, 1984, and set to be played at the 4,500-seat James L. Knight Center in downtown Miami. Following a statement by Bettman that the NBA "would seriously consider Miami" for an expansion franchise, especially if the game sold out, tickets for the exhibition sold rapidly.⁷³ By early October every ticket was sold, and Horrow called the feat a "very positive step in our efforts to bring first-class professional basketball on a regular basis to Miami."⁷⁴ Horrow said that while "the sellout should show how serious" Miami was about the NBA, the league still needed to see a "first-class arena," "willing investors," and some form of documented "community support" before the NBA could become a fixture in Miami.⁷⁵

As the game drew near, Horrow and the MSEA planned ways to treat Bettman—the NBA's representative for the game—"like basketball royalty." A "stretch limousine," "opulent

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Peter Richmond, "NBA, Bullets to Play Exhibition at Knight," *Miami Herald*, July 21, 1984.

⁷² Jerry Zgoda, "Tickets Selling Fast for NBA Game," *Miami Herald*, July 27, 1984.

⁷³ Richmond, "NBA, Bullets to Play Exhibition" *Miami Herald*, July 21, 1984.

⁷⁴ Herald Staff, "Bullets-Nets Exhibition Sold Out," *Miami Herald*, October 10, 1984.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

parties sponsored by local businessmen,” and general “hobnobbing” were all ways the MSEA planned to show Bettman that “Miamians [were] serious about basketball.” The highfalutin treatment was as much about edging out a growing set of cities also interested in courting the NBA as it was about conveying the seriousness of Miami’s basketball commitment. One week before the exhibition game, Miami’s competition for an NBA franchise amounted to at least five other cities, all of whom were “taking similar steps to woo the NBA.” Bettman stated that he cared much less about the manner in which he was courted and more about how “packed” the Knight Center would be and “how enthusiastic” the fans were. Unbeknownst to Bettman, 1,800 of the tickets sold were strategically sold in blocks of 100 to local law firms, banks, car dealers, and developers so that a sellout would be “virtually guaranteed.” These bulk sales “frustrated some citizens” who were effectively squeezed out from attending the game. The effort of Horrow and the MSEA to pad ticket sale numbers and prioritize Miami’s wealthier business sector, as well as the frustration of fans who felt neglected, represented the first instance in a trend that would continue throughout the group’s effort to land an NBA team.⁷⁶

The exhibition game was a major stepping stone for Miami in procuring an NBA franchise. The James L. Knight Center was indeed “packed” as Bettman, Horrow, and the MSEA had hoped it would be.⁷⁷ The success of the event prompted Bettman to reiterate Miami’s strong chances of getting a franchise. At the same time, Bettman was sure to remind the MSEA that an arena could not be purely conceptual—construction would have to be underway in order for the league to consider Miami as a possible NBA city. In addition, Horrow and the MSEA still had no

⁷⁶ Grant Overstake, “NBA Exhibition: A Chance to State Miami’s Case,” *Miami Herald*, October 17, 1984; These cities were Toronto, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Minneapolis, Sacramento, and Orange County (CA).

⁷⁷ Edwin Pope, “Arena Signals Sports Revival in S. Florida,” *Miami Herald*, October 23, 1984.

viable ownership group in place to operate the franchise, and Bettman was sure to stipulate that as a prerequisite for consideration.

The apparent success of the exhibition game belied the tension between Miami's wealthy business sector and the everyday Miamian in regard to attendance. Horrow and the MSEA had given preferential treatment to the business sector in the form of block ticket sales that limited the available numbers of tickets for single-ticket purchasers. What was viewed as a "civic thrust" to engage the community was more of an orchestration on the part of the MSEA to involve a group that was seen as more financially able to support a prospective franchise.⁷⁸ The exhibition game and pursuit of arena developers deflected attention away from the debate about Overtown and the placement of an arena in the neighborhood. In essence, the surface of Miami's basketball activities conveyed a community coming together over sport, while overshadowing elements under the surface that harbored developing tensions between various communities within the city.

Miami Gets an Arena Developer and a Franchise Owner

Horrow and the MSEA declared a March 1985 deadline for potential arena developers to finalize their plans. Horrow knew that the developers would need at least that much time to come up with ways for the arena funding. Talks in late 1984 made Horrow and the MSEA all too aware that the projected \$4-million annual revenue generated by the resort tax would not come close to meeting estimated arena costs, which projected to be in the neighborhood of \$80-million.⁷⁹ As the MSEA narrowed down its list of developers, Horrow stated that "a large part of

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Rick Hirsch, "City Urged to Give \$5 Million a Year for Sports Arena," January 29, 1985.

the authority's ultimate evaluation is going to be...how each developer can make up any missing financing, be it public or private sources.”⁸⁰ In anticipation of the March developer review, Horrow attended a February blue-ribbon panel meeting to discuss ways to “boost” the economy of Overtown.⁸¹ The 11-member panel only had the power to recommend Overtown development projects to the Miami and Dade County commissions, but their recommendations would carry weight when the respective commissions met later that year to discuss city and county projects. Though the arena developer had not yet been officially chosen, Horrow went to the meeting to lobby for Decoma Venture, a Houston-based firm whose Miami arena plans focused on building in Overtown.

When the panel opened debates over whether to recommend added housing in Overtown or a prospective sports arena, Horrow argued on behalf of the arena. A Philadelphia-based developer promised to build 426 condominiums on the same property of the prospective arena, which won the favor of Overtown residents who wanted more housing in the area. Panel member James Hunt, who was also the chairman of the Overtown Advisory Board, argued against the arena and in favor of the housing plan, carrying with him many similar sentiments from the penny sales tax debate of 1983. Ultimately, the panel voted 7-3-1 in favor of the arena, scoring a victory for Horrow and potential developer Decoma Venture.⁸² As the March deadline to choose a developer approached, Decoma Venture appeared to be at the forefront of the MSEA's evaluations. The vote also highlighted the ongoing indifference toward Overtown residents and their desires for their own community by Horrow, the MSEA, and Miami officials in general.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mike McQueen, “Panel Urges Overtown Site for New Arena,” *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1985.

⁸² Ibid.

Overtown was still mostly seen as a “blighted neighborhood,” and the panel voted for what it deemed to be in the best interest of Miami while discounting the opinions of the neighborhood’s residents and civic leaders.⁸³

On March 29, 1985, one day before the MSEA planned to announce its choice for the arena’s developer, Miami Beach auto dealer Alan Potamkin personally delivered a letter to Horrow stating his intention to apply for an NBA franchise. Though the NBA had “yet to firmly commit to expansion,” sources within and around the league felt the chances of expansion were strong. If the timing of Potamkin’s letter was not strategically planned, it was coincidentally perfect. Horrow credited the timing of the letter with adding “a level of credibility” to the MSEA’s efforts to solicit and choose a developer, as well as the efforts of all arena and sport proponents as far back as 1982 to bring another professional franchise to Miami. The successes of the resort tax decision and the NBA exhibition game, and even the failure of the penny sales tax all appeared to be leading to this moment. In Potamkin, the MSEA finally had a wealthy owner who promised to pay the NBA’s application fee and, if awarded a franchise, the millions of dollars it would take to officially enter the league and operate a team on a daily basis. Excited, Horrow and the MSEA turned their sites to picking a developer.⁸⁴

The MSEA’s choices for a developer were narrowed down to three. First, Miami-based Florida East Coast Properties proposed a \$97-million dollar dual arena and exhibition hall located in the Omni neighborhood, in downtown Miami’s entertainment district. The MSEA lauded the proposal for its price tag—the cheapest among the three—but noted that scheduling

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Rick Hirsch, “Car Dealer Seeks to Bring NBA to New Arena,” *Miami Herald*, March 29, 1985.

conflicts could arise by having a dual-purpose arena. Second, Dallas-based Lincoln Property Co. proposed a \$163-million project that included an arena, exhibition hall, office space, retail centers, and a hotel complex on the Miami River just west of downtown's James L. Knight Center. The MSEA applauded Lincoln's attention to the Knight Center, which had endured financial trouble and could possibly be aided by such a project. The proposal seemed unfeasible and overly audacious given the scope of its project and the estimated cost. Lastly, Decoma Venture, who had received outspoken support from Horrow, proposed an arena, exhibition hall, meeting space, parking garage, and a hotel and office complex. Decoma Venture's proposal, dubbed the "Biscayne Centrum," had the highest price tag at \$205 million, but its Overtown location was seen as the best of the three given its proximity to the Metrorail and its promise to carry out "the city's long-sought Overtown-Park West redevelopment plan." Though Decoma Venture had "the longest way to go to secure land" given the opposition of an arena by Overtown residents, the MSEA voted in favor of the Biscayne Centrum proposal.⁸⁵

Despite the decision's obvious indifference to the desire of Overtown residents, the vote also highlighted, yet again, the negative view of Overtown by Miami's elite. MSEA member George Knox said that he chose Decoma Venture over the other two developers because it was the only group that "committed itself to improving the outhouse of our community." Knox's community clearly did not include Overtown's residents, who were apparently living in the "outhouse." Still, Knox called Decoma Venture's "the best proposal for saving the dream of *all* Miami." Another authority member, Danny Medina, sought the moral high ground by claiming that he "honestly tried to place first Miami's future...[and] make a difference in the area that

⁸⁵ Ibid.

needed the most help.” Apparently for Medina, Miami’s future did not align with the wishes of Overtown residents for more housing. Gene Stearns, the Miami lawyer representing Lincoln Property Co., upset with the MSEA decision, claimed that placing an arena in Overtown would be “promoting our city with its worst foot forward.” The MSEA’s arena developer decision quickly became a discursive referendum on the need to improve the perceived quality of Overtown, and inherently the quality of its residents along with it.⁸⁶

With “blighted Overtown” selected as the location of a new arena, pro basketball seemingly promised a “glitzier downtown.”⁸⁷ In reality, the MSEA and Decoma Venture had yet to determine whether the \$205-million arena was “even feasible to finance.”⁸⁸ Given that the resort tax would only provide \$40-million over the course of ten years, it became abundantly clear that at least some funding must come from the city itself, and likely in the form of taxes. With a large portion of the \$205-million estimate slated for an exhibition hall, hotel, and office complex, many city and MSEA officials argued for building the arena first. Among the “arena first” proponents was potential NBA franchise owner Alan Potamkin.⁸⁹

Potamkin knew he needed an arena in order to procure an NBA franchise, and the idea of focusing on exhibition halls and hotels over a basketball facility went against his agenda. Potamkin’s sense of urgency was only heightened after a May 1985 announcement by NBA Commissioner David Stern claiming that “if Miami gets an arena, it will clearly be at the top of our list.”⁹⁰ Expansion talks within the NBA were heating up, and the league expressed interest in

⁸⁶ Rick Hirsch, “Firm Selected to Build Arena in Overtown,” *Miami Herald*, March 30, 1985.

⁸⁷ Rick Hirsch, “Miami Looks for Dollars to pay for Exhibition Hall,” *Miami Herald*, April 2, 1985.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Peter Richmond, “Miami ‘At Top of List’ for NBA Expansion,” *Miami Herald*, May 23, 1985.

expanding “as early as the 1987-88” season.⁹¹ This meant that Miami would need to have a completed arena by October of 1987 if it hoped to get a franchise, which put pressure on the MSEA and Miami municipal government given that the proposed Biscayne Centrum was slated to be ready for a 1988-89 season.⁹²

In June, Decoma Venture’s managing partners gave the MSEA and Potamkin the answers they were looking for, even if the numbers did not add up. Not only could Decoma meet a 1987-88 target date, but the overall cost of the proposed facilities had decreased from \$205-million to \$165-million. In addition, Decoma would put up \$9-million of its own money to complete the project, and assured the MSEA and Miami City Commission that the resort tax would cover the remaining cost of the arena, now projected to be \$56-million. Decoma also guaranteed to build the arena first, not only to improve Miami’s chances of getting an NBA team, but also “to generate cash that may be used to help build the exhibition hall.”⁹³ Despite the fact that the resort tax had been estimated to provide only 40 to 45-million dollars for an arena, MSEA and city officials were seemingly convinced that Decoma Venture’s leaders knew what they were talking about when they claimed the tax would cover the remaining \$56-million after its own \$9-million contribution. Miami’s City Commission unanimously approved the Decoma business proposal on June 13, waiting only for an official contract. The discrepancies were likely overlooked and accepted because “the timing of the commission’s action [was] critical in...sending a strong and positive signal to the NBA” before their summer meetings during the last week in June.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Neil Brown, “Arena Financing Plan Relies on Hotel Guests,” *Miami Herald*, June 7, 1985.

⁹⁴ Gary Long, “Expansion? NBA Biding its Time,” *Miami Herald*, June 23, 1985.

In anticipation of the NBA meetings, Alan Potamkin and Seth Werner (a new partner of Potamkin's in the NBA venture) met with league counsel Gary Bettman to "go over the next steps in filing a franchise application and a financial statement." Though the upcoming meetings were strictly exploratory, the NBA Board of Governors were set to discuss the expansion issue, and Miami's "optimistic" news concerning its arena and ownership group were sure to make a good impression with the board. Miami's competition for a franchise had jumped from five cities to six, so providing the good news to the league before the meeting meant keeping Miami "at the top of the list," as Stern had indicated just a month earlier. While Bettman assured the Miami group that the NBA meetings were "not intended to establish a pecking order among potential applicants," Potamkin and Werner were sure to note the size of Miami's television market, set to rank third nationally by 1989, as well as the positive progression of its arena.⁹⁵

By mid-1985, MSEA director Rick Horrow called Miami's prospects for an additional major-league sport franchise "better than ever." Still, Horrow cautiously noted the "failed franchise attempts and the failed arenas" of Miami's sporting past. Between Joe Robbie's stadium demands and threats, the failed penny sales tax at the both the county and city level, and the early hold up of the resort tax dollars to fund a new arena, a "presumption of failure" appeared to be Miami's "worst enemy" in their NBA pursuit. "Everything is moving on the right track," Horrow said in late June, 1985. "The problem is, I don't think people believe it yet." To

⁹⁵ Ibid. The cities contending for a franchise against Miami now constituted Minneapolis, Toronto, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Orange County (CA), and newcomers Kansas City and Charlotte. The Sacramento group dropped out upon purchasing the Kansas City franchise and moving them to Sacramento, which in turn launched a Kansas City group's effort to get a new team to replace the one taken from them.

raise that belief, Miami planned to embark on a major effort to conjure community pride and enthusiasm over the NBA.⁹⁶

Horror's optimism for Miami's NBA chances belied the divisive tensions building between Overtown residents and Miami's municipal movers. Plans to build an arena in Overtown not only built upon a historical pattern of infrastructural racism and urban redevelopment by county and city officials, but also rooted Miami's NBA franchise as a catalyst for the continuation of this pattern into the 1980s and 90s. The blatant indifference to the wishes of Overtown residents and leaders by city and team officials in preliminary arena discussions set the tone for a division between communities. While the Miami NBA franchise would be marketed as a way for the community to unite over sport, that same entity would continue to rupture the Overtown community and widen the divide between white elites and African Americans in Miami.

In Orlando, a similar pattern in local government arose as politicians in that city worked toward funding their own arena to attract professional sports. Just as in Miami, Orlando's municipal government battled county officials to secure funding for a sport arena and expand their city's "big league" identity. Also like Miami, Orlando's quest for an arena and sport franchise similarly built upon deep seated prejudice toward African Americans living in a historic downtown neighborhood.

⁹⁶ Greg Cote, "Pro Sports Outlook Brightens," *Miami Herald*, June 28, 1985.

CHAPTER TWO: ORLANDO'S PURSUIT BEGINS

Florida historian Gary Mormino calls the impact of Disney World on Orlando “so forceful, so profound, one is tempted to write the year 1971 followed by A.D. (After Disney).”⁹⁷ Indeed, the Magic Kingdom’s opening in that year greatly altered the course of Orlando’s history. Mormino also notes that “Orlando expanded its economic base and boundaries substantially before Disney World opened.”⁹⁸ Industrial and corporate growth, especially in regard to agriculture, contributed to Orlando’s population growth between 1950 and 1970, during which time it doubled from 50,000 to 100,000.⁹⁹ By 1981, Orlando’s population had grown to roughly 130,000, and the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metropolitan area had a population over 800,000.¹⁰⁰ Interstate highway systems and an international airport made the city accessible to the millions of tourists and new residents who were flocking to the city at rapid pace. Still, even with an accelerating population and myriad new industries, “the words metropolitan and Orlando were rarely used together,” and the city itself was perceived, both within and without, as little more than a citrus town in the shadow of Disney.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Gary R. Mormino, “Sunbelt Dreams and Altered States: A Social and Cultural History of Florida, 1950-2000,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Summer, 2002): 3-21; 16-17; “Number of Inhabitants Florida,” 1950 US Census (accessed December 12, 2015) <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/23761117v1ch05.pdf>. According to the 1950 census, Orlando’s official population in 1950 was 52,367.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, “Municipalities: 1979-2015,” (accessed April 1, 2016) <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/>; Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, “Metropolitan Statistical Areas in Florida: 1980-2015,” (accessed April 1, 2016) <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/MSA-2015.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* The term “citrus town” is peppered throughout the *Orlando Sentinel* when discussing Orlando’s reputation and identity. NASA and the federal defense industry also contributed to Central Florida’s rapid growth. See: William Barnaby Faherty, *Florida's Space Coast: The Impact Of NASA On The Sunshine State* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

In terms of sport, Orlando was anything but “major league.” During most of the twentieth century, Orlando sports revolved around local community leagues and high school teams. Orlando’s first professional sports franchise came in 1966 in the form of a Continental Football League (CFL) team called the Orlando Panthers. Despite winning two league titles, the Panthers only stayed in Orlando for four years, and the CFL never amounted to more than an off-brand NFL imitation. The Orlando Twins, a Class AA minor-league affiliate of the MLB’s Minnesota Twins, were established in 1973 and remained until 1989. Despite a strong and consistent attendance record, the Orlando Twins were always seen as what they were—minor league. Though the Minnesota Twins held Spring Training games at Orlando’s Tinker Field, they came and went in a matter of weeks and were never a fixture of Orlando’s identity. If anything, the Orlando Twins represented the city’s place as a second-rate sports town at best. The World Football League’s Florida Blazers played at Orlando’s Tangerine Bowl starting in January 1974, but were “beset with myriad financial problems” and were defunct by December of that same year.¹⁰²

Before the NBA, the closest Orlando ever got to the major leagues came in early 1985, when Orlando-area businessman Don Dizney moved the United States Football League’s (USFL) Washington Federals to Orlando.¹⁰³ The USFL “showed initial promise as a challenge to the NFL,” but the relocated and rebranded Orlando Renegades folded along with the league in late 1985.¹⁰⁴ Despite their lowly record of 5-13, the Renegades’ lone season drew an average

¹⁰² Roger Simmons, “Many Teams Have Called O-Town Their Hometown,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 19, 2012.

¹⁰³ Don Dizney is of no relation to Walt Disney or The Walt Disney Company. Dizney is an executive in the healthcare industry and also breeds horses in the Central Florida area. “Donald R. Dizney Lacrosse Stadium,” University of Florida website (accessed April 28, 2016), <http://www.uff.ufl.edu/facilities/facilities.asp?id=146>.

¹⁰⁴ Javier Solano, “Defunct Franchises,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 26, 1998.

attendance of 25,000 for its home games at the Florida Citrus Bowl.¹⁰⁵ Still, the USFL never surpassed the NFL as the nation's preeminent football league, and the Renegades never provided Orlando with any significant sense of being a "major-league town." By the mid-1980s, Orlando was still perceived by many as little more than "a great amusement park near a town."¹⁰⁶ For some, Orlando's lack of a true major league franchise served as an "identity barrier" separating it from cities like Boston, New York, and even Miami, which had the NFL's Dolphins and began showing signs of adding an NBA franchise.¹⁰⁷

Taxes, Tensions, and Orlando's Penny Sales Tax Push

Much like Miami, Orlando's efforts to build an arena for sports predated its pursuit of any specific franchise or league, and just like their neighbors to the South, Orlando city officials pushed for the adoption of the penny sales tax in late 1982. State Senator George Stuart, from Orlando, organized a political action committee (PAC) to "push for voter approval" of the tax in Orange County.¹⁰⁸ By marketing the tax as a cost-effective way of funding a new "12,000-seat downtown sports arena," Stuart and his "group of businessmen and bankers" hoped to procure funding for an arena that, in their minds, would need to be built "in the next 20 years anyway."¹⁰⁹ While neither the MLB nor the NBA had been directly contacted about expansion, Orange County and Orlando officials knew that a facility would be a necessity if the area had any chance at the major-leagues. For Stuart's PAC, dubbed "One Penny for Progress," pursuit of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid; The Tangerine Bowl, Citrus Bowl, Orlando Stadium, and Florida Citrus Bowl are all the same facility, located near Downtown Orlando since 1936. Today, the stadium is called the Orlando Citrus Bowl.

¹⁰⁶ Larry Guest, "One Last Bit of Giving is Difference for Orlando," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1987.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Associated Press, "Group is Formed to Urge Passage of Recreation Tax," *Miami Herald*, August 14, 1982.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

sport was an inevitability and the penny sales tax was a way to fund facilities that would need to be built regardless, but that initiative faced opposition from high places.

Orange County Commissioner Lou Treadway, a highly influential and polarizing political figure in local government, opposed the penny sales tax from the onset. While Treadway supported placing the tax on the ballot for county voters, he himself voiced outright opposition to the tax, arguing that it would place too much of a burden on local taxpayers who were in the midst of a nation-wide economic recession.¹¹⁰ Despite Treadway's opposition to it, initial polls in Orange County showed "support for the tax."¹¹¹ Still, just like voters in Dade County, Orange County citizens rejected the tax in November of 1982.¹¹² For Miamians, the rejection of the tax in Orange County meant that "the much-feared direct competition from Mouseland for sport franchises [was not] likely to materialize for several more years."¹¹³ Regardless, many municipal government officials in "Mouseland," much like those in Miami, considered the penny sales tax rejection a mere stumbling block on the road to the major-leagues.

Among the most ardent of arena and sport supporters was Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick, who pushed county officials to work with him on financing a sports facility. Frederick saw the arena and any potential major-league tenant as "his legacy to the city," but knew that the city alone could bear the burden of cost. After the failed penny sales tax, Frederick spent 1983 trying to convince county officials to assist the city on funding an arena by allocating funds from the county resort tax. Led by Treadway, Frederick's opposition within county government argued that the resort tax was not meant for an arena, and instead wanted to use it to generate tourism.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bob Rubin, "Penny Sales Tax is a Gamble—But Go for It," *Miami Herald*, October 26, 1982.

¹¹² Herald Staff, "Back to Plan A," *Miami Herald*, November 10, 1982.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Frederick's opposition felt that an arena would be a local facility only, and thus would not be an appropriate use of the resort tax. In addition, Treadway and his allies felt that if an arena *was* built, it should be built near the existing Orange County Convention Center, far from downtown Orlando, in case conventions there required any overflow. Without a permanent arena tenant identified, the county reasonably felt that the arena should be located where it could be used most often, as opposed to residing in downtown Orlando where it might remain empty most days of the year.¹¹⁴

For Mayor Frederick, this was "unacceptable." The mayor insisted that the arena be built in the heart of downtown. To appease county officials, Frederick made a series of promises that he would later break. First, he promised to limit the cost of an arena to \$20-million. Second, he promised that the city would purchase any land necessary for the arena. Lastly, Frederick promised the county that the city would finance the purchase and development of any additional land that might be needed to serve the arena, such as parking garages and office buildings. By December of 1983, Frederick had the county convinced. The Orange County Commission agreed to allocate revenue from the 2 percent resort tax to fund a "\$20 million...multipurpose arena in downtown Orlando." Per the agreement, Frederick and the city agreed to postpone construction until the early 1990s, when money from the resort tax totaled enough to begin the project. With the arena agreement all but settled, 1984 saw little discussion of the project, but Miami's accelerated NBA and arena discussions during that year made some Orlando officials feel

¹¹⁴ Lou Treadway, "My Agenda," (unpublished manuscript, 1993), Hard copy, Orange County Regional History Center, 196.

pressure to speed up their own pursuit of professional sport, which inevitably meant opening up new negotiations between city and county.¹¹⁵

Arena Talks Reopen

In April of 1985, State Senator George Stuart entered back into the Orlando arena discussions. Stuart argued that if Orlando wanted a chance at luring a professional sport franchise, its arena needed to be built bigger and faster, both of which meant spending more than \$20 million on the project. Because a deal between the city and county to use the resort tax for arena funding was already in place, Stuart argued for raising the tax itself by two cents on the dollar, from 2% to 4%, to cover the new costs.

In reaction, Central Florida hoteliers allied to fight against raising a tax they felt could potentially discourage their customers. The Central Florida Hotel/Motel Association hired a lobbyist to convince county officials to oppose Stuart's idea, arguing that "the arena should be paid for by the county or through a tax referendum."¹¹⁶ Despite the growing tension between state, county, and city officials over reopening arena funding talks, Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick continued to meet with city council members to select an arena developer. The city council members were less concerned over selecting a developer than they were about Frederick's vagueness on financing.¹¹⁷

The mayor had yet to provide Orlando city council members with specific details about the cost of a larger arena, hoping to wait and see if the county would raise the resort tax. When

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Julia Reed, "A Bigger Issue: Who Should Pay for What," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 1, 1985.

¹¹⁷ Goldie Blumenstyk, "Orlando Picks Architects to Draw Up Design for Downtown Arena," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 2, 1985.

speaking with the city council, Frederick revealed his agreement with Stuart on the size of the arena, expressing the need to change the sizing plans from around 12,000 seats to “a 14,000-seat arena that could be expanded to...17,000,” while relenting that the total cost would be closer to “\$60 million.”¹¹⁸ Though he promised not to “cut corners” with the city council, Frederick’s opaque plans blindsided the council and left members with “a real question about the size and cost” of the arena and its “liability...on the community.”¹¹⁹

Disagreements between the city and county regarding the arena reached a boiling point in 1985. In April, county officials agreed to raise the county resort tax by 1%, but they intended the revenue from the increase to go toward expanding the Orange County Convention Center, *not* funding a new downtown arena. In response, State Senator George Stuart threatened to “kill any bill authorizing an increase in the resort tax unless the city and the county made the arena deal final.”¹²⁰ County Commissioner Lou Treadway called Stuart’s demands “major surgery on [the original] 1983 agreement,” and suggested that the county instead “take a look at the whole cancer,” insinuating breaking off arena negotiations entirely.¹²¹ The back-and-forth threats only served to further divide those on either side of the issue.

In April of 1985, reports surfaced of The Walt Disney Company’s interest in bringing an MLB franchise to Orlando. This only strengthened Stuart’s and Frederick’s argument for an arena or stadium. Many in Orlando felt that “if Disney [did] go after major-league ball...the resort tax could be one way to help pay for a first-class stadium,” and that “a major-league

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Geri Throne and Goldie Blumenstyk, “County Balks Over Provisions for Early Arena Construction,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 9, 1985.

¹²¹ Ibid.

franchise in Orlando [was] too great an opportunity to get lost in a squabble” between city and county.¹²²

In late May, with the 1985 legislative session set to close, the city and county were at a “deadlock.”¹²³ Frederick had successfully wrangled the city council to agree on an arena financing plan, which he proposed to the county as a compromise. Frederick’s plan, “which was approved by the city council without discussion,” promised not to borrow money from the county until they had completed financing on an \$80-million expansion of the convention center, so long as the county would then allocate \$50-million toward “arena design, construction, and equipment costs.”¹²⁴ Feeling pressure from area hoteliers, Orange County Commissioners rejected Frederick’s financing plan, because it still required a 2% hike in the county resort tax. Stuart held to his threat to block the 1% increase preferred by the county, which would only pay for convention center expansions. In turn, the county threatened to “renege on the 1983 agreement” that promised the city resort tax funds in the first place.

Arena proponents argued that the convention center expansions would be a gift to Orlando’s visitors, and it was “time to give something back to the community.”¹²⁵ For these Orlandoans, the arena would symbolize their community and its effort to be “big league.” As the 1985 legislative session drew to a close with the city and county at odds, another Orlando community faced displacement as a result of the arena. African Americans in Parramore were effectively excluded from Orlando’s prospective big-league community.

¹²² Editorial, “A Resort Tax that Works,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 16, 1985.

¹²³ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Hopes Fade for Resort Tax Increase,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 27, 1985.

¹²⁴ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Orlando Okays Arena Funding,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 14, 1985.

¹²⁵ Editorial, “The Arena’s Time is Now,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 23, 1985.

An Arena in Parramore

As county and city officials bickered over arena financing, few were concerned with the racial implications of the arena's "downtown" location. As in Miami, Orlando's proposed arena was slated for an area of downtown that had been the heart of its city's African-American community since the turn of the twentieth century. Parramore, also known historically as Holden, Holden-Parramore, Callahan, and Parramore-Callahan, had experienced infrastructural invasion and resident displacement throughout its history. The proposed arena threatened to continue this historical trend. In April of 1985, some members of Orlando's Municipal Planning Board called the arena's proposed location "'fundamentally inconsistent' with the city's pledge to preserve residential areas" in and around downtown.¹²⁶ With city officials "nervous about any criticism of the arena project," Mayor Frederick and his arena allies moved "to quell" discussions of displacement. One of Frederick's key allies, City Administrator Lex Hester, promised to provide the board with regional impact reports that would reveal the city's plan to "be sensitive" to any residents who might be displaced.¹²⁷ The board agreed to wait for the city's plans, but many of Parramore's residents felt that city officials were simply resurrecting "an old strategy" of "literally and figuratively...paving the way" for structural projects that would further rupture the historically subjugated neighborhood.¹²⁸

Beginning around 1870, Orange County's white elites established living areas throughout Central Florida for "black domestic help and grove laborers." Located in small pockets just

¹²⁶ Goldie Blumenstyk, "Opposition to Arena Pops Up: Planners Say Location Violates City Promises," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 17, 1985.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Goldie Blumenstyk, "City Reserves Hotel Profits for Uses Besides Housing," *Orlando Sentinel*, September 1, 1985.

outside towns like Sanford, Winter Park, Maitland, and Apopka, these African-American communities were always within close proximity to the white neighborhoods in which their residents worked, while also figuratively a world away due to the harsh realities of Jim Crow segregation. According to historian Leon Litwack, African Americans across the South developed “a separate African American world” within communities like those established in Central Florida. “This interior life,” Litwack argues, was “largely unknown and incomprehensible to whites [and] permitted African-American Southerners to survive and endure.”¹²⁹

Parramore’s origin follows a “similar pattern” to that described by Litwack in that it was platted by Orlando mayor James Parramore in the 1880s and designated for African Americans by area reverend Andrew Hooper, both of whom were wealthy white political elites. Comprised of “small cottages to house domestics closer to the large Central Avenue homes of their employers,” Parramore was “usually poorly drained and unimproved,” confining Orlando African Americans to one of the city’s “least desirable places.” It was in these dilapidated conditions that Orlando’s African Americans developed their “separate world.” Between 1880 and 1900, the relatively tiny neighborhood featured four churches representing three different Christian denominations. Parramore’s first school, called “Orlando Black,” opened in Parramore in 1886 and helped former slaves and their children learn to read despite its “ramshackle” building and “outdated, damaged textbooks.” The school and churches served as community centers, where residents coalesced and forged civic groups often aimed at improving the

¹²⁹ Tana Mosier Porter, “Segregation and Desegregation in Parramore: Orlando’s African American Community,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Winter, 2004): 289-312; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1998), xvi.

condition of both the neighborhood and its people. Parramore's development was still stifled by political subjugation that limited the agency of African-American leaders to make major improvements to the neighborhood. In 1901, Florida instituted an all-white primary that all but restricted African-American participation in elections. While Orange County "discontinued its white primary in 1937," Orlando "retained the policy" until 1950. The disbandment of the white primary represented a "general progress" for Parramore, which experienced a renaissance in the 1950s, even if its residents were still mostly shut out from participation in local government.¹³⁰

With more "owner-occupied homes and black-owned shops lining the streets," Parramore's residents worked to organize a "parallel community" to their white counterparts. Parramore's businessmen formed the Negro Chamber of Commerce in 1945, which helped organize and sponsor community events and fundraisers and published its own business directory. By 1955, Parramore's number of churches had expanded to 15, and the neighborhood's education centers included two elementary schools, one high school, and seven kindergartens, day nurseries, or pre-schools. In the business sector, Parramore featured two attorney's offices, eight doctor's offices, as well as staples like "barbers, beauty parlors, dry cleaners, drug stores, grocery stores, restaurants, and shoe stores," all of which "flourished."¹³¹

Parramore also had its own newspaper and two hospitals serving residents. Movie theatres, realtors, insurance agents, and auto mechanics rounded out Parramore's "viable

¹³⁰ Ibid, 294; Mark Andrews, "Orlando a Final Stop in the Fight for Black Voting Rights," *Orlando Sentinel*, February 19, 1995. According to Andrews, Orlando was the last Florida city to discontinue the all-white primary, and only did so after the threat of a lawsuit by four African-American Orlandoans. Orlando held out long after Orange County in part due to the political strength of white segregationists within Orlando's municipal government. See also: Martin A. Dyckman, *A Most Disorderly Court: Scandal And Reform In The Florida Judiciary* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

¹³¹ Ibid.

commercial center.” Parramore residents established fraternal organizations as well. Men’s groups like “the Masons, Eastern Star, and American Legion” thrived in Parramore alongside women’s groups like “the Mothers Club, Modern Majestic Club, Society Debs Club, and Young Women’s Civic Club.” Despite efforts to intimidate African-American residents by Orlando-area Ku Klux Klan chapters, Parramore’s NAACP chapter “was one of the best organized in Florida” during the 1950s, and the chapter’s Youth Council staged sit-ins and demonstrations throughout Orlando during the 1960s. Still, Orlando’s African Americans found few liberties outside the Parramore neighborhood.¹³²

Orlando’s history with race relations at the municipal level is difficult to assess. While some members of local Ku Klux Klan chapters included government officials and law enforcement agents, Orlando’s city government worked with “established black leadership” to address race issues as far back as the 1920s. In 1951 alone, “fifteen separate incidents of Klan terrorism [were] reported in Orlando” with little effort made by local government and law officials to investigate and prosecute offenders. Yet when the Civil Rights Movement reached the city in the 1960s, “demonstrations and protests remained orderly and peaceful,” especially relative to similar demonstrations in Jacksonville and Miami, “where protests became destructive riots.” Likewise, a mayoral committee dedicated to solving racial differences formed in 1957, and included “both white and black members.” In any event, support from city government for Parramore residents and area African Americans came at a “painfully slow” pace, and “only after blacks demanded it.” During the 1960s, municipal government forced local restaurants and

¹³² Ibid. See also: Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan In Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

theatres to integrate, however gradually, “beginning with limited black seating at specific times,” and only after Parramore youth groups staged sit-ins that resulted in several arrests.¹³³

Orlando’s municipal indifference to the Parramore neighborhood is perhaps best understood by examining infrastructural changes. Public housing projects entered Parramore in the 1940s, displacing residents in single family homes and increasing population density in the neighborhood. In 1940, the Griffin Park housing projects opened to house 174 families in 24 buildings, but not before razing 154 houses to make way for construction. Efforts to block the city from building Griffin Park by Parramore residents were “futile,” in large part because city officials counted on the projects to house displaced African Americans on Orlando’s east side who were forced to move because of new zoning rules influenced by residential segregation.¹³⁴

More project housing followed during the 1940s and 50s, vastly increasing Parramore’s population density. Interstate 4 “slashed through Parramore in 1957,” displacing more families and “isolating” the neighborhood “behind the raised expressway, where neighborhood streets dead-ended.” By the time Orlando reached its years of gradual integration in the 1960s, many middle-class African Americans sought to leave Parramore for areas of town that did not have highways streaming through them, an option not previously available during segregation.

Florida’s East-West Expressway ripped through the neighborhood in 1974, further blocking off the community from the rest of Orlando, both physically and figuratively. By the 1980s, little was left of the historic and once-bustling Parramore community. Absentee landlords replaced

¹³³ Ibid. According to Porter, Orlando’s “peaceful” Civil Rights Movement, at least relative to the rest of Florida, had to do with the city’s lack of a major college or university, because colleges would often serve as a catalyst for student-led protests. For more on student protests in Florida during the Civil Rights Movement, see: “The Tallahassee Bus Boycott,” by Gregory Padgett in Samuel C. Hyde *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003) 190.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

African-American homeowners, and wealthy outsiders bought up commercial property where African-American-owned businesses once thrived.¹³⁵

By the mid-1980s, just as city and county officials were caught up in debates over arena financing, Parramore had developed a reputation within Orlando as a “run-down neighborhood,” rampant with “drug trafficking,” “shootings,” and “black-on-black crime.”¹³⁶ Gone were the local community groups of the past who funded cultural parades and festivals, leaving the few remaining long-term Parramore residents without means to unite in similar celebrations.¹³⁷ The neighborhood was a victim of “decades of weak zoning protection by Orlando officials,” effectively pitting “black residents against white landlords and business owners.”¹³⁸

As city officials pushed the arena agenda, they attempted to frame themselves as allies of Parramore residents. In June of 1985, city planners pledged “to improve the residential character” of Parramore by rezoning to encourage more housing in the area, which had become a “hodgepodge” of scattered homes and businesses. The rezoning proposal faced opposition from Parramore’s mostly white business owners, who argued that the rezoning would effectively amount to “down-zoning” their property values. Longtime residents fired back by charging the business owners with invading their residential areas. While these residents were justified in their desire to protect their neighborhood, Parramore’s white business owners were perhaps equally justified in questioning “the city’s sincerity” in aiding Parramore residents. The business owners correctly noted that “government-sponsored projects, particularly the development of...the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Bob Levenson, “Drug Gang Moving in from Miami: Flashy Group Shooting Rivals in West Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 26, 1985; Mildred A. Williams, “Programs Focus on Black Teens: Urban League to Fight Neighborhood Crime,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 25, 1985.

¹³⁷ Mildred A. Williams, “Lack of Funds Scales Down African Festival,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 25, 1985.

¹³⁸ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Groups Clash on Callahan Growth,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 17, 1985.

proposed sports arena, also [would] disrupt the neighborhood.” When asked if the city was serious in its commitment to protecting Parramore residents, Mayor Bill Frederick responded assuredly, saying “We are.”¹³⁹

Despite Frederick’s assuredness, when the city released its rezoning proposal in mid-June it proved “weaker” than the original one endorsed by Parramore leaders. “Feeling betrayed,” many Parramore residents staged “angry protests” outside Orlando’s city hall. One longtime Parramore resident said the city’s proposal proved that they felt “buildings [were] more important than people.” Essentially, the original zoning proposal favored by Parramore residents promised to “down-zone” many commercial properties to residential. The revised proposal, heavily influenced by the political weight of Parramore’s wealthy white business owners, proposed rezoning those same commercial properties “into a new office-commercial district,” effectively boosting commercial properties as opposed to altering them into additional housing.¹⁴⁰

Parramore attorney Jay Rose, who represented neighborhood residents, said the revised proposal did “little to correct the past discriminatory practices of the past.”¹⁴¹ Mayor Frederick, who once called Rose a “white social dilettante,” responded in a July city council meeting by urging the council to “make a six-year commitment to low-income housing.”¹⁴² But Orlando was still largely a “conservative Southern city,” and Frederick’s supposed commitment would ultimately prove hollow. In August 1985, the mayor and city council adopted a Parramore zoning

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Residents Protest Callahan Plan,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 19, 1985.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Rob Morse, “Jay Rose Blossoms in a City of Incongruities,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 26, 1985.

plan that initially “pleased residents” because it “increased opportunities for housing.”¹⁴³

Frederick knew that Parramore stood little chance to “remain a comfortable residential area in the face of downtown traffic and development pressures,” many of which would stem from his proposed arena site.¹⁴⁴ Frederick made promises to protect Parramore residents while knowing full well that arena developments would ultimately remove them. Just two months after promising to protect Parramore housing, Frederick was asked about his concern that the arena would displace families in Parramore. The mayor responded by saying “That area needs displacing. This would be an improvement.”¹⁴⁵

The mayor’s indifference toward Parramore and its residents did not emanate from thin air. A history of subjugation and segregation in the neighborhood fueled not only his attitude, but the opinions of many in Orlando that the Parramore residents were a necessary casualty of arena construction. Ultimately, the construction of a community identity built around major-league sport was worth the further destruction of a community widely regarded as insignificant. As such, the arena served as the catalyst for both community construction and destruction. Before the pro-arena community could get its facility, county and city government needed to resolve their lengthy debate over financing.

Arena Prospects Down, Not Out

Days away from Florida’s 1985 state legislative session closing, county and city officials seemed no closer to reaching an agreement on arena funding. “Three months of angry words

¹⁴³ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Zoning Vote Leaves Eola to Homeowners,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 9, 1985.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Orlando Drops Permit Law for Apartheid Protestors,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 8, 1985.

[had] taken their toll,” with “many hurt feelings among local leaders” and hardly any progress made.¹⁴⁶ The session closing was important because of State Senator George Stuart’s earlier threat to block a county-initiated resort tax increase without a city-county agreement on downtown arena funding and construction. In a decision seen as bizarre by many, Mayor Frederick left the city for China just days before the legislative session was set to close, leaving City Administrator Lex Hester and State Senator Stuart carrying the load for the pro-arena side. The arena opposition was led by County Commissioner Lou Treadway. With Stuart and Treadway sticking to their threats to void the other’s agenda, each side had a figurative “gun to [their] head.”¹⁴⁷ In the last hours of the legislative session, the two sides “reluctantly compromised” on a deal that would have adopted most aspects of Frederick’s recently rejected \$50-million arena plan, but the agreement came “too late,” and Stuart had no time to push through a bill allowing Orange County to raise its resort tax to 4% before the state legislature adjourned.¹⁴⁸

Frederick returned from China enflamed about the state and county’s failure to reach an agreement in time. The mayor accused Orange County commissioners of “double talk,” “pettiness,” and harboring old grudges related to other city-county projects where county officials felt scorned.¹⁴⁹ Specifically, Frederick named Lou Treadway as the individual most responsible for the impasse. “I think I was being punished by Lou Treadway about transportation issues,” Frederick stated at a June 4 news conference.¹⁵⁰ Treadway fired back saying “You’ve

¹⁴⁶ Blumenstyk, “Hopes Fade,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 27, 1985.

¹⁴⁷ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Orlando, County Agree on Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 31, 1985.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Arena Impasse County’s Fault, Mayor Claims,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 5, 1985.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

got to be kidding me,” suggesting that the mayor should instead “look inward.”¹⁵¹ Many in Orlando sided with the mayor, viewing the county as the party most unwilling to compromise.¹⁵² Many others charged Disney with pressuring county commissioners into keeping the resort tax lower.

While Disney expressed interest in bringing an MLB franchise to Orlando, which made them appear as proponents of professional sport in the area, they also worked behind the scenes to lobby against a resort tax they felt would discourage tourists. Disney “played a major role” in the failed attempt to untie city and county over an arena given their political and economic weight, allowing them to “lay down the rules by which all other players had to abide.” Ultimately, Disney “objected to the idea of spending resort-tax dollars on a downtown facility that would benefit local residents more than tourists,” so they pressured Orange County hoteliers and industry businesses, “many of which owed their very existence to Disney,” to vehemently oppose the tax. Still, State Senator George Stuart felt confident that he could still “sell fellow legislators and voters on the idea that the resort tax must be increased to finance a sports arena.”¹⁵³

Promising to revive arena talks during a “special legislative session in the fall,” Stuart set out to mediate discussions between the city and county moving forward, while also convincing the county that Disney and area hoteliers should not be considered when raising the resort tax.¹⁵⁴ “The tourist tax [or resort tax],” Stuart argued, “does not belong to the tourist industry...It’s the

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Editorial, “Letters to the Editor,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 7, 1985.

¹⁵³ Harry Straight and John Wark, “Achieving Its Goals While Keeping a Low Profile,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 8, 1985.

¹⁵⁴ Blumenstyk, “Orlando, County Agree,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 31, 1985.

people's money, and the people ought to decide how it's spent.”¹⁵⁵ Mayor Frederick also committed to “mend a fence or two” with county commissioners, especially Lou Treadway, admitting that he had been “a little hot under the collar” when accusing the county of “political vindictiveness.”¹⁵⁶ Also improving matters was a growing mutual resentment of Disney by city and county officials.

While Frederick and Treadway had disagreed over the resort tax, the two could “agree on at least one thing: Walt Disney World...ought to get more involved” in supporting community agendas.¹⁵⁷ For Frederick, who accused Disney of acting as an “isolated island that happened to fall in [the Orlando] community,” that meant supporting the downtown arena.¹⁵⁸ For Treadway, who accused Disney of having “a tendency to become somewhat arrogant,” it meant supporting county initiatives to develop a rapid-rail system.¹⁵⁹ But Disney saw itself as “a corporation first, with a responsibility to make a profit and to please its stockholders,” and felt that neither the arena nor a rapid rail system would “contribute to Disney profits.”¹⁶⁰ With a growing mutual understanding of the need to unite against industrial interests, the city and county moved forward to find a compromise on the arena.

In August of 1985, County Commission Chairman Hal Marston met with Frederick to discuss the arena and ways the city and county could find a common ground. The issue for each side remained the same—the county wanted civic center expansion and a resort tax increase to 3%, while the city wanted a downtown arena funded by the resort tax, which they felt would

¹⁵⁵ Straight and Wark, “Achieving Its Goals,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 8, 1985.

¹⁵⁶ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Mayor Now Gives Arena Deal Support,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 11, 1985.

¹⁵⁷ Editorial, “Magic Kingdom of Aloof,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 10, 1985.

¹⁵⁸ John Wark, “Disney’s Self-Isolation Stymies Area Governments,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 8, 1985.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

need to be increased to 4%. State Senator George Stuart never recanted his promise to block any resort tax increase in the State Legislature that did not also allow funding for a downtown arena. In essence, whatever mutual interests the city and county shared, the discussions were still ultimately driven by the county's fear that dismissing an arena meant dismissing civic center expansion as well, given Stuart's demands and his power in the State Legislature.¹⁶¹ In October, after "two months of behind-the-scenes courting of Orange County leaders" by Frederick, the two sides finally reached an agreement on arena financing, which contained compromises for each party.¹⁶²

As part of the compromise, the city promised not to open the arena before 1990 without county permission, to "avoid competition" with the convention center.¹⁶³ The county expressed concern that an arena would "lure many events away from the [convention] center," and because "large conventions and trade shows choose a location 7 or 8 years in advance," the city's promise to withhold opening the arena until 1990 would ensure that the convention center would thrive in the interim period.¹⁶⁴ The county was also protected from having to finance the project "until resort tax proceeds [were] adequate enough to cover extra indebtedness."¹⁶⁵ In return, the county agreed to let the city use some of the resort tax "to buy additional land" should they need it, while also promising \$15-million in advance so the city could buy land and begin arena construction "as soon as possible."¹⁶⁶ The new deal allowed for arena funding while only

¹⁶¹ Goldie Blumenstyk, "Frederick Has Talks on Arena: Mayor Nudges County for Deal on Financing," *Orlando Sentinel*, August 27, 1985.

¹⁶² Gary Marx and Goldie Blumenstyk, "City, County Strike Deal Over Arena," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 1, 1985.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Gary Marx, "County: Arena Could Double Convention Center's Losses," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 20, 1985.

¹⁶⁵ Marx and Blumenstyk, "City, County Strike Deal Over Arena," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 1, 1985.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

increasing the resort tax to 3%, a victory for both sides. While Frederick applauded the county for “having an open mind” during negotiations, many on the county commission felt blackmailed by Stuart and only agreed to compromise because without an agreement they knew there would be no civic center expansion. County Commissioner Bob Harrell expressed concerns that the compromise marked the beginning of a series of concessions the county would be forced to make. “As soon as we pass this agreement,” Harrell stated, “they [city officials] will come back and ask for more changes. It’s called getting your foot in the door.”¹⁶⁷ Still, Chairman Marston called the agreement “significant, because it shows that the city and county can cooperate when we have a mutual goal.”¹⁶⁸

As in Miami, Orlando’s arena discussions involved years of back-and-forth between government officials, fracturing city residents on either side of the issue. Once an agreement to finance and construct an arena was in place, the attention turned to procuring an NBA franchise. For some, the downtown arena would “undoubtedly stir interest in an NBA franchise.”¹⁶⁹ Many believed that Frederick’s proposed size of the arena, which was up to 17,000 seats, meant that he intended “to look into luring an expansion team.”¹⁷⁰ Orlando’s history with professional sport did not bode well for its chances to land a franchise in a league that was being actively pursued by cities with more “major league” credibility. For many, Orlando was still “a town known more for Mickey Mouse than any sports celebrity,” and the city had “yet to show it’s willing to support...the high-cost product of the NBA.”¹⁷¹ For Orlandoans, “interest in basketball [would]

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Gary Marx, “Arena Pact Ends Fight on Resort Tax,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 16, 1985.

¹⁶⁹ Barry Cooper, “UCF’s Carter Retains Illusions of Success,” *Orlando Sentinel*, December 18, 1985.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

have to be nurtured,” but with the arena deal in place, one city native with deep pockets and a love for sport set out to pursue the NBA.

Orlando Gets an NBA Ownership Group

By January 1986, pro-sport advocates in Miami had already solidified plans to build a downtown arena, formed a prospective NBA franchise ownership group, and began serious discussions with the league about procuring a team. Orlando, however, was just getting started. Unlike Miami, Orlando had no sports authority or other municipal branch dedicated to bringing professional sport to the area. In fact, despite the strong desire by many in the city to build an arena, few had any ideas of what would occupy it. The only permanent tenant on the table appeared in mid-1985 when a man from Pittsburgh offered to house his nearly “1 million mementos” of various sport history—uniforms, balls, programs, and other ephemera from famous athletes and games—in a “sports immortals museum” that would supposedly “attract visitors daily.”¹⁷² Proponents of the museum argued that it could “help pay for the operating costs” of the arena, and could be moved for any exhibition games or concerts that would be held sporadically throughout the year. The museum idea never took off, and as the city focused its energy on procuring arena funding from the county in late 1985, it all but ignored finding a prospective sports franchise to occupy the facility year round.

In January 1986, Jim Hewitt met with city officials to discuss the idea of bringing an NBA team to Orlando.¹⁷³ Hewitt, a graduate of Orlando’s Edgewater High School, made about \$300,000 developing and ultimately selling a string of Central Florida day care centers before

¹⁷² Bob Fowler, “Collection, Orlando Arena May Be a Perfect Match,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 15, 1985.

¹⁷³ Gary Silvers and Tim Povtak, “Group Tells NBA Orlando Wants In,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 24, 1986.

starting a property management company with his brother.¹⁷⁴ Though relatively unknown in the city and not as wealthy as owners in Miami's group, Hewitt was effective in assembling an ownership group that made up for his lack of distinction and capital. Among the initial prospective owners was Don Dizney, the former owner of the USFL's Orlando Renegades, who still longed to be part of a viable professional franchise and brought with him substantial wealth and local celebrity.

When Hewitt met with Orlando officials in early 1986, he informed them of his intentions to lure the NBA but stressed the importance of opening an arena for the 1988-89 season, which the league publicly called its target year for potential expansion. Despite the city's promise to the county not to open the new arena until after 1990, "city officials indicated that they would try to accelerate [arena] construction," and could arrange for it to open as early as "the fall of 1988."¹⁷⁵ City officials made promises to Hewitt's group under "the assumption that Orange County would cooperate," despite the fact that the previous year had been mired by either side's inability to cooperate with the other.

Still, Hewitt and his prospective ownership group left for New York City later that January to meet with NBA commissioner David Stern and express their interest in procuring a franchise. Armed with "growth data and a film on Central Florida," Hewitt, Dizney, and Hewitt's brother Bob sold Orlando to the league. Alex Sachare, the NBA's Director of Information, informed the group that the league had "great interest in expanding to Florida because of the state's growing population and the league's past success with other franchises in the Sunbelt."

¹⁷⁴ Peter Adams, "Jim Hewitt," *Orlando Sentinel*, September 1, 1986.

¹⁷⁵ Silvers and Povtak, "Group Tells NBA," *Orlando Sentinel*, January 24, 1986.

By that time the league had only received franchise deposits from groups in Miami and Orange County (CA), and Sachare wondered whether the Orlando group was seriously applying or “just sticking a toe in the water.” Hewitt calmly responded, “We’re serious.”¹⁷⁶

Despite Hewitt’s serious approach and a promise from Stern that “a bid by the [Orlando] group would be taken seriously” in kind, Orlando entered the race many steps behind other interested cities. Aside from Miami and Orange County, Orlando faced competition from groups in Minneapolis, St. Louis, Toronto, and Charlotte, all of whom began talks with the NBA months—and in some cases, years—prior to Hewitt’s group. Optimistic though he was, Hewitt himself admitted that Orlando “could be left out” of NBA expansion.¹⁷⁷ Hewitt moved forward by adding “four Orlando businessmen” to his group, bringing the total number of prospective owners in the group to seven, and scheduled meetings with the Dallas Mavericks to discuss the logistics of pursuing an expansion franchise.¹⁷⁸

By February of 1986, Orlando’s prospective NBA ownership group, headed by area businessman Jim Hewitt, positioned itself to enter the race for a franchise. Despite being “one of the last cities to jump into the fray,” Orlando’s group was determined. Assurances from the NBA to take their bid seriously and a new downtown arena set to open within five years all meant that the Orlando group’s chances were strong despite their late entry. This optimism came only after of months of pessimism that marked 1985. Discussions between city and county government concerning arena financing became so contentious that many feared it would “damage future cooperative efforts” between the two parties.¹⁷⁹ Political threats and allegations of blackmail

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Barry Cooper, “Hewitt Keeps Ball Rolling for NBA Team,” *Orlando Sentinel*, February 9, 1986.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Blumenstyk, “Hopes Fade,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 27, 1985.

characterized the back and forth debates over how the arena should be funded, and often times during 1985 it seemed an arena would not be built. Ultimately, municipal and county officials compromised in a way that benefited each party. Hewitt and his ownership group rode this wave of optimism into 1986, confident that the new arena would give them a leg up on their competition.

Little had changed for Parramore, Orlando's historically African-American neighborhood. As wealthy Orlandoans and their political allies toasted the possibility of professional sport, Parramore residents were left with the prospects of further infrastructural changes in their community. Long beleaguered by the efforts of Orlando's white elite to dampen their political voice, Parramore residents were ultimately powerless to prevent the construction of an arena in their community, which had already suffered the ramifications of public housing and highway construction in past decades. The indifference to Parramore's residents by Orlando officials built upon a history of prejudice toward African Americans in the city. Just as in Miami, Orlando's NBA franchise would serve as a catalyst for both community construction and destruction. Those in favor of bringing professional sport to the community—namely city politicians, wealthy prospective owners, and citizens who felt they could afford to enjoy the games—would grow closer together over sport. Those opposed to sport and the accompanying arena—namely county politicians who opposed the idea on economic grounds, and Parramore residents who feared certain displacement—would see themselves further removed from the inclusion process.

By mid-1986, the main focus for proponents of the NBA in Miami and Orlando shifted to selling perceptions. Prospective NBA ownership groups in each city would spend much of the

year attempting to shape the narrative of their professional sport pursuits as efforts to create communities, make their city's "big league," and spur economic development around sport. Before this process began, ownership groups in both cities underwent major changes to their personnel structure that would heavily influence the character of the expansion race.

CHAPTER THREE: PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION

In late May 1986, with arena construction scheduled to begin in both Miami and Orlando, prospective NBA ownership groups turned their focus to selling season ticket deposits. Despite his league's recent financial success, NBA Commissioner David Stern urged the league's board of governors to limit league expansion to "one team." Stern argued that the NBA was "simply not the healthiest league," and felt that without more signs of "sustained staying power," adding multiple new franchises would be "shortsighted." Stern's recommendation carried considerable weight with NBA owners, who would ultimately vote on the number and location of any new franchises. Chief among Stern and the NBA owners' concerns was a city's ability to "clearly demonstrate the capacity to support NBA franchises." While this capacity meant support in the form of a finished arena, a fact that shaped the agenda of ownership groups and local governments in Miami and Orlando for years, it also meant support in the form of fan interest. Proponents of pro-basketball in Miami and Orlando had done little to truly gauge ticket interest among city residents. Each group had gut feelings about their city's interest in the NBA, most of which were extremely optimistic and based off of recent popular support for arena construction, but neither had begun season-ticket drives to translate those feelings into tangible numbers that could impress NBA owners.¹⁸⁰

Between May 1986 and April 1987, prospective ownership groups in both Miami and Orlando would focus the bulk of their attention on selling season ticket deposits to provide the

¹⁸⁰ Robert Sansevere, "Q&A—NBA Chief Likes Minnesota," *Star Tribune*, May 31, 1986; NBA rules dictated that 18 of the 23 NBA owners needed to approve an ownership group before they could be granted a franchise.

NBA with evidence that their efforts warranted a franchise. To accomplish this, each side marketed their prospective franchise as a multipurpose engine for their respective city, focusing primarily on three aspects. First, the NBA was sold as a force for unification and collective civic pride. This civic pride could only be felt if citizens bought tickets, an act that quickly became marketed as a civic duty. Miamians and Orlandoans alike were told that they owed it to their city to buy season tickets and show the NBA they could support the sport. Second, each argued that the NBA would mean an elevated national relevance for their city. The promise of becoming a “big league town,” which had also influenced arena politics, would prove a powerful tool for selling deposits. For Miami, this meant a chance to join other multi-sport towns like New York, Boston, and Chicago as a location important enough to warrant more than one sport franchise. For Orlando, this meant finally entering the national sport conversation, and gaining national recognition for something other than Disney. Third, the NBA was advertised as an economic engine, providing jobs, rejuvenating “blighted” downtown areas, and attracting new industries and tourists. When new issues related to arenas arose or ticket sales lagged, NBA proponents deflected attention to the dollars that were sure to reach all citizens should the league come to town.

Before either ticket deposit drives began, major changes were in stake for both sides. Miami saw a complete overhaul of the ownership group vying for a franchise, in which the original group was pushed out and a new group brought in. This new group, headed by a theatrical producer and an NBA Hall of Fame player and coach, would come to shape Miami’s push for a franchise. In Orlando, NBA hopefuls sought to add theatrics and NBA experience of

their own. The group would add both in one man, whose knowledge of the game was only outdone by his energetic personality.

New Owners in Miami

In October of 1985, with Orlando officials still mired in political debates over their own arena plans, Miami officials moved forward with their pursuit of the NBA. Miami businessmen and potential NBA franchise owners Alan Potamkin and Seth Werner “formally applied” for an NBA franchise by depositing a \$100,000 application fee with the league.¹⁸¹ Shortly after Potamkin and Werner’s application was submitted, the Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority (MSEA) approved a bond issue to cover the remaining cost of the proposed Overtown arena, ensuring that it would be built by late 1987.¹⁸² With arena financing in the rearview mirror, Potamkin and Werner set their sights on launching a “season-ticket campaign” in early 1986 to show the league that Miamians were more serious about supporting professional basketball than other potential NBA cities.¹⁸³ Before the pair of would-be owners could begin their competition against cities like Minneapolis, Charlotte, and eventually Orlando, they encountered stiff competition from within their own city lines.

Before Potamkin and Werner got their season-ticket campaign off the ground, they were contacted by Billy Cunningham, a former star player and coach for the Philadelphia 76ers, who expressed interest in joining the Miami group.¹⁸⁴ After ending his tenure as 76ers coach

¹⁸¹ Jim Martz, “\$100,000 Deposited for NBA Team Here,” *Miami Herald*, October 23, 1985.

¹⁸² Cathy Shaw, “Timing Crucial on Vote to Award City Arena Bonds,” *Miami Herald*, December 16, 1985; Mark Alesia, “McMullen Key Figure for Arena,” *Miami Herald*, December 20, 1985.

¹⁸³ Martz, “\$100,000 Deposited,” *Miami Herald*, October 23, 1985.

¹⁸⁴ Peter Richmond, “Following the Bouncing Ball: If NBA Comes to Miami, Don’t Let It Fast Break Away,” *Miami Herald*, February 23, 1986.

following the 1984-85 season, Cunningham spent the latter part of 1985 commentating for CBS-TV's coverage of the NBA. As expansion discussions continued throughout the league, Cunningham admitted his desire to get "back into the NBA...through ownership."¹⁸⁵ In April of 1986, Cunningham held "an exploratory meeting" with Potamkin and Werner to discuss their pursuit of an NBA franchise.¹⁸⁶ Cunningham left the meeting feeling that "Miami [had] some great qualities," citing its "great TV market" and "growing" population as indicators of the city's great potential, but he decided not to join the pair in their pursuit of NBA basketball.¹⁸⁷

Shortly after their meeting with Cunningham, Potamkin and Werner voiced concern over the proposed Overtown arena's parking plans. The pair cited a lack of parking adjacent to the arena as an "underlying issue" that could jeopardize their pursuit of the NBA.¹⁸⁸ Potamkin was told by a "high source" with the league that "people don't go to NBA games by public transportation," making him worry about an arena plan that relied on patrons using Miami's metro system.¹⁸⁹ MSEA Executive Director Rick Horrow stressed the "need to have a shovel in the ground" before the NBA's October meetings, during which the league's Board of Governors planned to seriously discuss the potential expansion franchise cities.¹⁹⁰ Horrow tried to alleviate Potamkin and Werner's concerns by insisting that "existing parking" would "accommodate, based on national averages, 17,000 people even if everyone drove," and added that "traffic consultants" felt that "at least 20 percent of the crowd would take mass transit."¹⁹¹ Potamkin

¹⁸⁵ Gary Long, "Cunningham Sees a Title Rematch," *Miami Herald*, April 18, 1986.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Greg Cote, "Arena Plans Clouded by Financial Questions," *Miami Herald*, May 9, 1986.

¹⁸⁹ Richmond, "Following the Bouncing Ball," *Miami Herald*, February 23, 1986.

¹⁹⁰ Cote, "Arena Plans Clouded," *Miami Herald*, May 9, 1986.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

disagreed with Horrow's claims, and added that he would be "holding off" on a season-ticket drive until arena parking plans became clearer.¹⁹²

Less than a week after Potamkin and Werner raised concerns over parking, Horrow and the MSEA found an alternate ownership option. In May 1986, Miami theatrical producer Zev Bufman announced his intention to pursue an NBA franchise, directly competing with Potamkin and Werner, and revealed that his partner would be a familiar name—Billy Cunningham. Bufman gained his wealth operating "a national chain of theaters headquartered in Miami," and boasted that he had "advertised and sold tickets for 25 years," making a potential NBA season-ticket drive "as natural as getting up and having breakfast." Cunningham brought with him two NBA championships—one as a player and one as a coach—and declared that he was ready for "the next level up" in ownership. More than anything, Bufman and Cunningham were both content with the arena parking plans as they were, giving them an edge in the MSEA's eyes. The pair let Horrow and the NBA know that they had already "filled out all the forms" and could apply with a \$100,000 deposit within a week. Russell Granik, NBA Executive Vice President, applauded the announcement. "Our interest is to get the best ownership possible," Granik said. "The more people to choose from, the better the chance." Potamkin and Werner were not as elated. When asked about Bufman and Cunningham, Werner simply said "If you're asking if I like the competition, the answer is no." For Potamkin and Werner, the new competition was an orchestrated effort by the MSEA to find a more agreeable group in regard to arena logistics.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Greg Cote, "Bufman, Cunningham Seek NBA Team Here," *Miami Herald*, May 14, 1986.

It did not take long for a bitter rivalry between the two potential ownership groups to arise. Within three days of Bufman and Cunningham's announcement, Potamkin and Werner announced "plans for a privately funded arena in West Dade," still unhappy with the Overtown arena's "lack of on-site parking."¹⁹⁴ Bufman charged the pair with trying to "scuttle [Miami's] finest opportunity to get an NBA team," and added that he personally saw no problem with the current parking plans.¹⁹⁵ Werner fired back by charging the MSEA with recruiting Bufman and Cunningham simply to have an ownership group that would not challenge the status quo. Potamkin and Werner failed to adequately assess the patience of the MSEA and Miamians who had gone through years of failed attempts to bring more big league sports to the city.

The NBA and proposed Overtown arena were "widely regarded as central to the future of the downtown business district," and many in Miami considered the arena as potentially "one of the most visible symbols of a central-city renaissance."¹⁹⁶ Potamkin and Werner's increasing opposition to the Overtown location was perceived as a threat not only to the city's chances at luring the NBA, but also at "resuscitating a downtown...marked by locked doors and desolate streets."¹⁹⁷ "Local enthusiasm for the arena" increased with the announcement that Bufman and Cunningham would happily accept the current arena plans and not disrupt a process years in the making. On May 29, the Miami City Commission sided with this "local enthusiasm" and "slapped a resounding 'Go!'" on the Overtown arena plans, effectively ending Potamkin and

¹⁹⁴ Greg Cote, "Parking Rift Splits Miami NBA Groups," *Miami Herald*, May 17, 1986.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Justin Gillis and Larry Dorman, "Miami Likely to OK New Arena," *Miami Herald*, May 21, 1986.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Werner's pursuit of the NBA and elevating Bufman and Cunningham to the forefront of Miami's expansion effort.¹⁹⁸

In May 1986, with the Potamkin and Werner out and arena construction scheduled, Bufman and Cunningham turned their sights toward selling tickets. Both prospective owners knew that while competition was abundant across the nation, their main competition would be another Florida group just four hours north, whose own NBA efforts had been gaining significant traction and attention. Though the battle between the two Miami groups was over, as one *Miami Herald* columnist declared, "Now the *war* is on...Miami vs. Orlando."¹⁹⁹

Orlando's New Front Man

In Miami, early 1986 saw a complete overhaul of prospective NBA ownership groups. Fresh debates over arena logistics prompted the Miami Sport and Exhibition Authority to recruit a group that would go along with the existing plans. When new prospective owners Zev Bufman and Billy Cunningham took over Miami's NBA pursuit, they promised city residents that they would "make Miami the two-sport town it [had] always claimed it could be."²⁰⁰ Orlando's prospective ownership group, headed by area businessman Jim Hewitt, faced the challenge of convincing the NBA that its city could support even *one* professional sport.

The NBA was "said to be keenly interested in having a team in Florida," but had been in talks with Miami long before Orlando ever entered the picture.²⁰¹ In addition, Orlando faced a

¹⁹⁸ Edwin Pope, "Go to the Hoop: First and Arena, Then...The NBA," *Miami Herald*, May 30, 1986.

¹⁹⁹ Larry Dorman, "Arena Would Keep Miami Ahead," *Miami Herald*, May 23, 1986.

²⁰⁰ Marc Fisher, "Dynamic Duo Shoot for Miami Basketball," *Miami Herald*, May 25, 1986.

²⁰¹ Barry Cooper, "NBA Owners Meeting May be Key for Orlando," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 11, 1986.

“stigma of being nothing more than a sun-kissed resort next to Mickey Mouse’s house.”²⁰²

Orlando was, for many, “an unsophisticated market” for professional sport, but Jim Hewitt remained “convinced” that NBA basketball would “thrive” in the city.²⁰³ Still, Hewitt himself was ill-equipped to conjure the kind of enthusiasm the ownership group would need to convince city residents and the NBA of its ability to support pro-sport. While he had proven himself as an “astute businessman” with ties to Orlando’s elite, Hewitt was also “so publicity shy” that many predicted he would “bury himself in the background” should the NBA grant his group a franchise.²⁰⁴ Hewitt also had zero experience in sport beyond serving as a booster for Florida State University’s athletic program. Hewitt’s business sense and connections would serve Orlando’s NBA effort well, but his group still needed someone with direct knowledge of “the ins and outs of the league,” and a personality that could get people excited about sport.²⁰⁵ They would get both, in droves, with Pat Williams.

Hewitt officially signed former Philadelphia 76ers General Manager Pat Williams on June 20, 1986, to a five-year deal that promised Williams a five percent stake in Orlando’s prospective franchise and total control over day-to-day operations of the team, but the partnership had actually been over a year in the making.²⁰⁶ Williams first met Hewitt in September of 1984 while in San Antonio for a speaking engagement, where the two were introduced by mutual friend John Tolson, associate pastor of Orlando’s First Presbyterian Church. A year later, Tolson invited Williams to speak to his church in Orlando. Hewitt was a

²⁰² Brian Schmitz, “Kiss Chris Goodbye: WKIS Trims Sports Talk,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 1, 1986.

²⁰³ Barry Cooper, “Low-Key Hewitt Hopes to Unlock Orlando for NBA,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 4, 1986.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Barry Cooper, “City’s NBA Future Hinges on Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 29, 1986.

²⁰⁶ Barry Cooper, “5-Year Contract for 76ers’ Williams Awaits Signature,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 18, 1986.

member of the church, and after the service the three began discussions of bringing the NBA to Orlando. Throughout the 1985-86 NBA season, when Williams was still working for the 76ers, Hewitt sent him “briefings” of his progress, detailing his meetings with Orlando and Orange County government officials and conveying the city’s arena progress. Hewitt told Williams that he even managed to convince *Orlando Sentinel* publisher Tip Lifvendahl to “solicit support” for the team through the newspaper. Hewitt’s progress made Williams optimistic about Orlando’s NBA chances. When Hewitt and his ownership group met with the NBA in January of 1986, their meeting had only come to fruition because of a phone call Williams made to NBA Executive Vice President Russell Granik, begging him to give the Orlando group a shot. Williams later admitted that he spent the entire 1985-86 season “feeling somewhat like a fifth wheel [under overbearing 76ers owner Harold Katz],” and knowing that he “had more drive and creativity to devote to something.” In late April, Hewitt gave Williams an ultimatum, telling him that the group would not continue to pursue the NBA without him on board as president and general manager. For Williams, the opportunity meant he could apply his drive and creativity to an expansion franchise.²⁰⁷

For Hewitt, Williams’ addition to Orlando’s ownership group seemed a necessity. The “dominant feeling” in NBA circles was that “Billy Cunningham’s involvement with [the] Miami group [would] push the city over the top,” and that if Orlando stood any chance at all, it “must hire a big-name general manager.”²⁰⁸ Williams was indeed one of the biggest names Hewitt

²⁰⁷ Pat Williams and Larry Guest, *Making Magic: How Orlando Won an NBA Team* (Orlando: Sentinel Communications Co., 1989) p. 11-16. This book is a firsthand account of Orlando’s pursuit of an NBA franchise, written by Pat Williams. While the book provides excellent details about the inner workings of the Orlando group’s efforts to land a team, it does not explore the extent of the political debates surrounding the arena, urban dislocation in Parramore, or the ensuing war of words with Miami’s NBA group.

²⁰⁸ Barry Cooper, “Reid: ‘We Have Got to Get More Nasty,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 1, 1986.

could have hoped to hire. With a 1983 NBA Championship on his resume and a reputation for “making shrewd trades and identifying player talent,” many viewed Williams as “one of the best general managers in NBA history.”²⁰⁹ Williams also had the kind of personality and flair that Hewitt’s group needed. Williams was known to wait by arena exit doors following 76ers games so that he could “shake the hand of every passing fan and whisper, ‘thanks for coming,’ into their ears.”²¹⁰ While serving as general manager for the Chicago Bulls in the 1970s, Williams wrestled a bear as a ploy to sell tickets.²¹¹ Williams’ outgoing personality and aptitude for hijinks were equally as important as his basketball managerial know-how. For Williams himself, who had just seen former 76ers colleague Billy Cunningham take on a similar role for Miami’s prospective ownership group, the chance to create a franchise out of thin air promised to be “a big adventure.”²¹²

Selling Tickets by Selling “Community”

With both ownership groups in place, Miami and Orlando’s season ticket drives began in late May 1986 and late June 1986, respectively. From the onset, both groups focused on garnering “community spirit” around their NBA efforts. Like his counterparts in Orlando, Bufman was able to solicit support from the local newspaper, the *Miami Herald*. Despite sports editor Edwin Pope’s claim that his paper was “not in the ticket selling business,” the *Herald* routinely informed its readers where and how to buy ticket deposits, while also charging its

²⁰⁹ Barry Cooper, “Williams’ New Act—Selling Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1986.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Cooper, “5-Year Contract for 76ers’ Williams Awaits Signature,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 18, 1986.

readers with the responsibility of bringing the NBA to Miami.²¹³ One *Herald* sports writer bluntly told his readers to “Do your part. Put up or shut up. Buy a ticket.”²¹⁴ In Miami, the NBA was branded as “one of the few things that draws support from all segments of the population,” and as an element that “can bring a community together as no other institution can.”²¹⁵ As one *Herald* journalist wrote, “If ever a community needed bringing together, it’s ours.”²¹⁶ Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority Executive Director Rick Horrow echoed these sentiments when he said that “a sports franchise is one of the few things that can galvanize a community.”²¹⁷ Orlando’s “community” effort was no different.

At his introductory press conference on June 20, 1986, Pat Williams took off his suit jacket to reveal a shirt that read: “Orlando on the Way to the NBA...Together We Can Do It.”²¹⁸ The shirt perfectly exemplified the Orlando group’s season ticket drive, as it was created by Williams and predicated on the promise that professional sport would bring togetherness to the city. Williams faced an uphill battle against a historic “blanket apathy” toward professional sport in Orlando, but his “dynamic energy” and the aid of the *Orlando Sentinel* would prove beneficial.²¹⁹

While Williams planned his market strategy, one *Sentinel* journalist told Orlandoans that “establishing a season-ticket base is by far the most critical factor [in procuring an NBA franchise], and that throws the ball back in *our* court...Only *we* can make it a reality.”²²⁰ Just as

²¹³ Pope, “Miami Needs Full-Court Press for Basketball,” *Miami Herald*, June 1, 1986.

²¹⁴ Bob Rubin, “Hoop Scoop: Buy a Ticket to Land Team,” *Miami Herald*, September 11, 1986.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Tim Povtak, “Florida’s Continued Growth Provides Competition from Within,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1986.

²¹⁸ Brian Schmitz, “It is Time for Orlando to Join Major Leagues,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 20, 1986.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

in Miami, the onus was placed on the city residents to bring the NBA to town, and their incentive was clear: “teams tie communities together.”²²¹ If the city wanted a team, then each citizen had to do their part to buy tickets, and in doing so they could experience the “community” that only professional sport could provide.

Both ownership groups used their allies in the newspaper to orchestrate contests that allowed city residents to name the team. Despite the grassroots image of the contests, the nicknames were ultimately more influenced by the prospective owners themselves, who sought to shape their team’s identity to fit their own agenda. Bufman and Cunningham’s “Name-the-Team contest” allowed area residents to submit team names via “entry blanks” found at local eateries, which were later collected and disseminated by the *Herald*.²²² The only specification for the team name was that “Florida or South Florida” be the first name, because Bufman’s chief goal was “marketing the team over the region, not just Miami.”²²³ From the onset of his group’s ticket campaign, Bufman prioritized selling the effort as “regional,” under the guise of uniting Miami and all “South Floridians” under one banner, targeting potential ticket holders throughout Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach County.²²⁴ Bufman branded his team for “regional appeal,” seeking to reach a wider group of patrons and ticket buyers.²²⁵ Though several fans suggested the winning “Heat” nickname, Bufman insisted that it be precipitated by “Florida,” in an attempt to make his Miami team appear as a statewide team.²²⁶

²²¹ Blue, “Revving Up for Pro Ball,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1986.

²²² Richardson, “Teams Go on the Offensive to Sell Tickets,” *Miami Herald*, September 8, 1986.; Herald Staff, “Fans Can Help Name NBA Team,” *Miami Herald*, September 19, 1986.

²²³ Richardson, “Teams Go on the Offensive to Sell Tickets,” *Miami Herald*, September 8, 1986.

²²⁴ Edwin Pope, “Miami Needs Full-Court Press for Basketball,” *Miami Herald*, June 1, 1986.

²²⁵ Larry Dorman, “S. Fla NBA Fans Try Name-Calling,” *Miami Herald*, October 14, 1986.

²²⁶ Larry Dorman, “The ‘Heat’ is On for Team Name,” *Miami Herald*, October 17, 1986.

The *Sentinel* also helped Orlando's basketball group organize a "nickname contest," in which readers could fill out "an entry blank" and mail their suggestion to the newspaper's offices.²²⁷ Williams claimed that the contest would allow "the community [to] pick a name," and in turn become more involved with defining the identity of the team.²²⁸ In reality, the effort was another tactic to get Orlando residents more invested in bringing the NBA to town. It would ultimately be Williams himself who would name the team.

On July 2, 1986 Williams and Hewitt announced that the name of Orlando's prospective NBA franchise would be "The Orlando Magic." While an Orlando man had been selected as the winner of the nickname contest for suggesting the name, Williams admitted that his own daughter was most responsible for the name. After visiting her father during his first month in the city, Williams' daughter told him that she felt as though she "had been to magic land."²²⁹ Williams said that his group was "looking for one word that would describe Orlando, and that one word truly is magic."²³⁰ Orlando native Hewitt agreed, stating that the word "exemplifies the Central Florida area...an exciting place, a magical place."²³¹ Despite their romantic claims about the name, Williams used the "Magic" nickname as a way to capitalize on the city's image as a Disney-town.

While Disney's presence in Orlando had initially been characterized as a negative by sport advocates, who felt that it cast an ominous shadow over the city, Williams sought to use Disney as part of their sales pitch to the NBA. Boasting of Orlando's "tourist lure," Williams

²²⁷ Barry Cooper, "Select the Name for the NBA Team," *Orlando Sentinel*, June 29, 1986.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Barry Cooper, "Abracadabra! It's Magic: Orlando's Prospective NBA Team Now Has a Name," *Orlando Sentinel*, July 27, 1986.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

claimed that Disney gave “all things Orlandoan a positive, all-American glow.”²³² The name “Magic” drew from Disney’s “Magic Kingdom,” and highlighted the city’s reputation as a national attraction. Within Orlando, Williams drew comparisons to Walt Disney himself, described as having “the shrewd business sense of Disney,” and sharing an optimism about Orlando much like “the man who had the far-fetched idea of building a theme park in a swamp.”²³³ Almost overnight, Magic officials switched from combatting “Mickey Mouse town” stereotypes to embracing them.²³⁴ When Williams traveled to New York City to meet with Commissioner Stern and present the Magic’s \$100,000 application fee, he “stuck a pair of Mickey Mouse ears on the commissioner’s head.”²³⁵ By embracing Disney, Williams not only embraced Orlando’s perceived shortcomings, but also positioned himself to sell the city to the NBA as a “squeaky clean” town.²³⁶

Big League Identity

Promising the possibility of becoming a “big league town” was nothing new when NBA hopefuls utilized it to sell tickets in late 1986 and early 1987. The “big league” promise was dangled in front of voters and taxpayers throughout each city’s efforts to procure funding for an arena. With arena construction underway in each city and NBA expansion all but guaranteed (even if only by one franchise), the promise was now within reach. In both Miami and Orlando,

²³² Blue, “Revving Up for Pro Ball,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1986.

²³³ Lisanne Renner, “Orlando’s Mr. Basketball Pat Williams is the Point Man for City’s NBA Dream,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 7, 1986.

²³⁴ Cooper, “Abracadabra! It’s Magic,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 27, 1986.

²³⁵ Renner, “Orlando’s Mr. Basketball,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 7, 1986.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

prospective franchise owners and their allies in local media ramped up the big league discourse as a way to sell tickets.

In both cities, notions of celebrity were used to sell tickets. Today, celebrity fans are commonplace in professional sport, and especially in the NBA, where courtside seats allow celebrities to be closer to the action and the cameras. Famous actor Jack Nicholson is known to attend Los Angeles Lakers games religiously, just as renowned film director Spike Lee is known to frequent New York Knicks games. More recently, well-known hip-hop artist Drake has become not only a courtside patron for the Toronto Raptors, but an official “team ambassador” as well.²³⁷ For many NBA franchise owners, “celebrities in the stands help promote the exceptionalist notion that the city is special.”²³⁸ In Miami and Orlando, celebrities were directly and indirectly used to excite fans and push an exceptional idea that sport would mean celebrity, and celebrity would mean “big league” identity.

In Miami, Zev Bufman and Billy Cunningham promised celebrity fans at the games. In addition to having Julio Iglesias as part of the ownership group, Bufman sought to enlist “several national and/or international show-business stars” as fans and public faces of the franchise.²³⁹ Bufman asked fans: “Wouldn’t you like to see Julio Iglesias or Don Johnson taking the same part with us that Jack Nicholson does with the Lakers?”²⁴⁰ For Bufman, Miamians would only buy into the team if “every basketball game [was] a Broadway production.”²⁴¹ “You give them Elizabeth Taylor,” Bufman said, “and it’s a sellout...You sell the superstars, then you sell the

²³⁷ Associated Press, “Drake Named Raptors’ Ambassador,” ESPN.com (accessed April 28, 2016) http://espn.go.com/nba/story/_/id/9750332/rapper-drake-assumes-role-toronto-raptors-team-ambassador.

²³⁸ Sarah Lyall, “Knicks Have a Star Magnet: Courtside Seats,” *New York Times*, January 21, 2014.

²³⁹ Pope, “Zev and Billy,” *Miami Herald*, June 6, 1986.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ David Satterfield, “Hot Tickets Heat Hopes Broadway Flair Will Pack Arena,” *Miami Herald*, April 24, 1987.

team.”²⁴² Bufman promised that Iglesias, Don Johnson, and Elizabeth Taylor could all be part of the in-game experience for fans, which would help catapult Miami to an upper echelon of “big league” cities. Miami would not only join the big league NBA, but they would build a reputation as a big league celebrity town as well.

When Bufman announced implementing a “media blitz,” MSEA’s Rick Horrow said “We’re about to see some fresh marketing techniques that this market has never seen before. That’s what expected in a *big league sports town*.”²⁴³ As part of their “big league sports town” marketing campaign, Cunningham enlisted support from two NBA friends—superstar players Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson—who agreed to “appear in promotional television ads on Miami’s behalf,” in which each would deliver the message: “You want to see us come down there and play in that new arena? Go and buy season tickets.”²⁴⁴ Using megastars like Jordan and Johnson to promote their presence in Miami was a clear ploy to make Miamians feel an increasing sense of national relevance in the sporting world. Miami’s potential NBA franchise was increasingly marketed as “an excellent shot, its best ever, to become major league in a second sport.”²⁴⁵ If Miamians wanted this big league promise to come to fruition, all they needed to do was buy a ticket. The celebrities—both on and off the court—would naturally show up as a result of the NBA’s presence.

Orlando was no different in promising its citizens a new “big-league pride.”²⁴⁶ The Magic were marketed as “ambassadors for our city” and an “ongoing national advertising”

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Richardson, “Teams Go on the Offensive,” *Miami Herald*, September 8, 1986.

²⁴⁴ Larry Dorman, “Bufman Adds Big-Bucks Partner,” *Miami Herald*, September 10, 1986.

²⁴⁵ Bob Rubin, “Hoop Scoop,” *Miami Herald*, September 11, 1986.

²⁴⁶ Blue, “Revving Up for Pro Ball,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1986.

tool.²⁴⁷ Williams and Magic officials told Orlandoans that the NBA would “put Orlando in the national spotlight,” by “focusing [national] media attention” on the city.²⁴⁸ Magic officials sold the idea of “making Orlando a *true* big-league sports town,” by borrowing a page from Miami’s book and enlisting the support of several national sporting celebrities.²⁴⁹ Instead of promising celebrity appearances, the Magic worked to make the celebrities a part of the ticket-purchasing process. When the Magic sold their 7,000th season ticket deposit in September of 1986, the buyer was Curly Neal, “star performer with the Harlem Globetrotters.”²⁵⁰ Neal purchased his deposit at a “public appearance” announcing his role as “honorary chairperson” of the remaining months of the ticket drive.²⁵¹ The next day, golfing legend and Central Florida resident Arnold Palmer purchased 8 season ticket deposits of his own, a fact highly publicized in the *Sentinel*.²⁵² One day after Palmer’s purchase, well known football coach Lee Corso “purchased ticket No. 8,000.”²⁵³ Less than one week later, the Magic sold their 10,000th deposit, and enlisted “celebrity customer” Davey Johnson, then manager of the New York Mets baseball franchise, to purchase the “milestone” ticket.²⁵⁴ In the final days of their ticket-drive, Williams felt that the team needed a push to reach 14,000 season-tickets sold. He brought in MLB Hall-of-Famer and then-Boston Red Sox third baseman Wade Boggs to buy ticket number 13,657, in a sale that was staged in front of city residents and local press at a well-known downtown saloon.²⁵⁵ Orlando’s use of

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Susan G. Strother, “Chamber of Commerce,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 20, 1986.

²⁴⁹ Tim Povtak, “City, County Leaders Pledge All-Out Drive to Team Goal,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 22, 1986.

²⁵⁰ Barry Cooper, “Ex-Globetrotter to Lend Magic Assist,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 25, 1986.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Barry Cooper, “7,807 Want Magic Show,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 26, 1986.

²⁵³ Bill Buchalter, “Basketball,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 27, 1986.

²⁵⁴ Larry Guest, “Magic Number Takes Another Giant Step,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 2, 1986.

²⁵⁵ Barry Cooper, “Magic Expand Gap Over Heat,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 17, 1986.

celebrities to purchase milestone deposits marking the advancement of the ticket drive represented their agenda to make Orlandoans feel like a part of the national sporting scene. Each “celebrity” represented a different national sport, allowing many Orlandoans to conceive of themselves as potential patrons of a “big league” and “celebrity” world.

The *Sentinel* aided Williams in his efforts to promise Orlandoans a “big league” identity, urging their readers to prepare to “say hello to Boston and New York and Dallas,” “shake hands with Chicago and Denver and New Orleans,” and “take your seat alongside Cincinnati and Detroit and Kansas City and sports’ other regular datelines.” For any citizen not sold on the community element of the NBA, *Sentinel* journalists promised the potential to join “other select urban areas certifiably stamped as major cities by the mere presence of a major-league sports franchise.” While many in the city already knew that Orlando “was a great place to live and work and play,” the NBA would ensure that “the rest of the country [would] take notice.” Even though Magic officials had done well to embrace the stigma of an Orlando identity dominated by Disney, Orlandoans were promised that with an NBA franchise the city would be instantly “transformed from a great amusement park near a town, to a major town with a great amusement park.” Williams himself assured Orlandoans that the NBA would “spring this city forward 100 notches,” to a higher plane of national relevance and attention.²⁵⁶

Big League Means Big Bucks

Miami and Orlando’s prospective franchise owners knew that not every citizen would buy into notions of community or big league identity. To appease these citizens, both groups

²⁵⁶ Larry Guest, “One Last Bit of Giving is Difference for Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1987.

harpd upon a promise of economic prosperity. Whether a Miamian or Orlandoan loved sport or hated it, they were assured by the NBA hopefuls that professional sport would “revitalize” downtown areas and “pump” millions of dollars into the city, benefitting sports fans and everyday citizens alike.²⁵⁷ At the center of these economic promises were each city’s arenas. Bufman and Cunningham assured Miamians that “the arena [would] prove to be a cornerstone for the revitalization of downtown,” bringing in “\$12 million to \$30 million per year” into the local economy.²⁵⁸ Miami’s Overtown arena was touted not only as a benefit to the immediate surrounding area, but also as an “an important asset for all of South Florida,” because it would be “a place for events that have bypassed [the] region because of its lack of satisfactory facilities.”²⁵⁹ Miamians and South Floridians alike could enjoy NBA basketball, as well as concerts and events that would serve to entertain the region’s residents and bring in dollars. A new arena and NBA team meant “crowds, money, and nightlife,” all elements that could be enjoyed by anyone.²⁶⁰

In Orlando, the new arena also meant the “spawn of a lot of business in industries that are not readily associated with basketball teams and rock concerts.”²⁶¹ Aside from NBA excitement, the arena and its tenant would generate business for “paper-product vendors, janitorial-supply companies, office-equipment suppliers, and hardware stores.”²⁶² The arena was sure to have a “tremendous economic impact on the city,” but not nearly as much as it would with an NBA

²⁵⁷ Rubin, “Hoop Scoop,” *Miami Herald*, September 11, 1986.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Gillis, “Miami Likely to OK New Arena,” *Miami Herald*, May 21, 1986.

²⁶¹ Robin Foster, “vendor’s Potential Far from Peanuts,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 12, 1986.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

tenant, which would bring about ticket, concession, and novelty sales throughout the year.²⁶³

While Williams' campaign to sell the Magic harped primarily on national "prestige" and "a sense of community," he also assured Orlandoans that professional sport meant "moving an industry" into town. Though he admitted having "no firm idea of the direct economic impact of a basketball team," Williams promised Orlandoans that the annual income from the NBA would be "somewhere" between \$20 and \$25-million. Jim Hewitt told Orlandoans that he "heard from the other owners" in the NBA that "the impact is \$20 million to \$30 million a year." According to one *Sentinel* reporter, professional sport would help Orlando "sell itself to companies considering relocation."²⁶⁴

Several *Sentinel* articles published in late 1986 cited a "definitive work on the subject" of arena economics conducted in 1985 by a professor of entrepreneurial studies at University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.²⁶⁵ According to the study, "the four major league sports teams in the Philadelphia area made a direct economic contribution to the city in 1983 of \$202 million."²⁶⁶ In addition, the study showed that when "fans' dollars trickle through the economy, the number became \$343 million."²⁶⁷ The *Sentinel*, however, did not report that the study had been funded by the Philadelphia Professional Sports Consortium, which was comprised of "the city's four major sports teams [baseball's Phillies, basketball's 76ers, football's Eagles, and hockey's Flyers]."²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Tim Smart, "Orlando Gets Ready as Idea Takes Shape," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 12, 1986

²⁶⁴ Tim Smart, "Williams Preaches Bottom Line to Multitudes," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 19, 1986.

²⁶⁵ Ibid; Edward B. Shils, *Report to the Philadelphia Professional Sports Consortium on its Contribution to the Economy of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Associated Press, "Study: Professional Sports Vital to Big Business," *Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA), January 30, 1985.

For any resident of either Miami or Orlando, the numbers promised by proponents of the NBA had to be exciting. Not only did a new team mean a closer community and a larger national relevance, but it also meant millions of dollars pumped annually into local economies. The numbers were based upon projections that favored the interests of pro-sport advocates. The financial benefits were thusly used as a tool to sell the perception of economic growth generated by professional sport. Much like the perceptions of community and big league identity, the perception of economic benefits was inflated by supporters of NBA expansion as a means to an end.

After changes and additions to each ownership group, Miami and Orlando NBA hopefuls began a push to sell tickets, which was masked as a push to build “communities” around sport. As they worked to sell tickets, ownership groups in each city sold the idea of building new communities that would unite city residents. Both ownership groups allowed fans to name their new team, but ultimately decided on elements to the team name that fit better with their own strategic agendas. In addition, each city sold a “big league identity,” promising people a more relevant place in the national spotlight. For Miami this meant joining the ranks of other cities with more than one sport team, making them an even bigger “big league city.” For Orlando, this meant an opportunity to be known for more than Disney and join the national sporting headlines. For both cities, big league identity was tied to notions of celebrity. By joining the NBA, both Orlando and Miami would attract more celebrities to games, and in turn attract more national renown as an exceptional city. Those not enamored with the aforementioned selling points were promised the economic benefits that major league sport would bring. The NBA was promised as

an economic engine, and arenas were sold as venues that could attract more than just sport dollars.

While ownership groups attempted to shape the discourse around the constructive elements of professional sport, they also revealed many of its destructive elements as well. As the race for NBA dragged on, Orlando and Miami were increasingly positioned as adversaries. This us-against-them mentality produced discourse that revealed prejudice within and without each city. As Orlandoans and Miamians espoused vitriol toward one another, they revealed the ways in which they perceived themselves and their “community,” as well as that of the other. Much like the discourse surrounding arena funding and construction, language surrounding the race for an NBA franchise revealed a larger indifference, and often an outright hostility, toward minority communities in each city. Yet again, the Overtown and Parramore neighborhoods and their residents came under fire. Though Zev Bufman, Pat Williams, and other pro-sport advocates touted the communal elements of their agenda, discourse surrounding the events showed that sport can be damaging for communities as well.

CHAPTER FOUR: REALITIES OF EXCLUSION

Historians examining sport and community commonly explore the dual nature of sport to include and exclude. Normally, these historians focus on sport spectatorship and play. Historians of sport spectatorship note that “rooting for local athletes and home teams...is an expression of connectedness,” that can be a “double-edged process of inclusion and exclusion.”²⁶⁹ For these historians, sport can shape how communities view themselves and their rivals. Fans imagine that their local team represents who they are and what their community stands for, while rival teams and their fans represent “the other.” For historians who view the inclusive and exclusive nature of sport as related to participation and play, “exclusion” mostly relates to “segregation” *on the field of play*, where athletes at the professional and amateur levels are separated by gender and race.²⁷⁰

During Miami and Orlando’s NBA pursuit, segregation and exclusion were reflected in the *logistics* of sport as well, long before players played or fans watched. Though municipal governments in each city promised economic benefits for Overtown and Parramore residents, these promises were ultimately abandoned. In both cities, arena construction displaced hundreds of families in the neighborhoods. These two communities, developed over the course of a century and in the face of prejudice, were regarded as “blighted” neighborhoods where resident displacement was deemed an “improvement” by those who shaped municipal government and

²⁶⁹ Dan Nathan, ed., *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 2, 4.

²⁷⁰ Mark Dyreson, “Maybe It’s Better to Bowl Alone: Sport, Community, and Democracy in American Thought,” *Culture, Society, and Sport* 4 (Spring 2001): 26; Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*, 4.

dialogue in local media.²⁷¹ As arena construction progressed, historic indifference and hostility toward these neighborhoods surfaced again, and the “rallying point” created by sport served to simultaneously rally against communities that were evidently excluded.²⁷²

In addition to the hostile discourse developing within each city, hostility and vitriol *between* each city arose when the NBA’s stance on limited expansion prompted a cross-city rivalry over which community most deserved a franchise. In late June of 1986, near the beginning of both Orlando and Miami’s season ticket campaigns, “few” expected the NBA to “take two teams from the same state.”²⁷³ As such, ownership groups in the two Florida cities saw each other as adversaries. With “battle lines...clearly drawn,” any momentum for Miami was seen as “bad news for Orlando,” and vice versa.²⁷⁴ Throughout each ticket campaign, ownership groups exchanged insults at the other aimed at rallying their own “community” and espousing why their rival was unsuitable for an NBA franchise. These insults reveal the perceptions that members of each city had of the other. As each ownership group sought to define the identity of its city, they did so in part by defining the other as less worthy of the big leagues. By April of 1987, with the NBA in a stalemate over which Florida city most deserved a franchise, insults evolved into vitriol. This vitriol carried prejudicial sentiments that further amplified each city’s negative perceptions of the other.

²⁷¹ Robert A. Liff, “Miami Commissioners Okay 15,000-Seat Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 30, 1986; Herald Staff, “Ball is in Our Court,” *Miami Herald*, April 24, 1986; Blumenstyk, “Orlando Drops Permit Law,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 8, 1985.

²⁷² Bud Brewer, “To Make Magic a Reality, We’ve Got to do Our Part,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 10, 1986.

²⁷³ Barry Cooper, “Bufman has High-in-the-Sky Hopes to Bring the NBA to Miami,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 29, 1986.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Empty Economic Promises

In late 1982, when Miami municipal officials attempted to push through a penny sales tax to pay for an Overtown arena, they promised that the arena would create jobs for the neighborhood's African-American residents. Calling the promise a "smoke screen," Overtown residents vowed to "fight to death any plan to destroy [their] community" by using whatever political influence they could to halt arena construction.²⁷⁵ The fight proved to be futile, and construction began on the Overtown arena in August of 1986. Still, city officials continued to assure economic benefits for African Americans in Overtown in an effort to quiet any criticism. These assurances proved to be little more than empty economic promises.

As Miami officials finalized their plans for arena construction, city commissioner Miller Dawkins "demanded assurance" from Decoma Venture, the contractor building the arena, that they would hire Overtown residents as construction workers.²⁷⁶ Dawkins received "a pledge" from Decoma, but it was never honored.²⁷⁷ At Miami's arena groundbreaking ceremony, Donald Benjamin, an Overtown resident and Overtown Advisory Board member, said he felt the arena project would "spur economic investment in the surrounding area and create jobs for the residents of Miami's poorest neighborhood."²⁷⁸ In reality, the arena and the promised revitalization "wasn't designed to improve life in the ghetto," but rather "explicitly designed to get rid of the ghetto."²⁷⁹ Municipal officials and their contracted developers, both for the arena and proposed residential and commercial properties adjacent to the arena, sought to "turn the

²⁷⁵ Cottman, "Blacks Doubt Coliseum Will Yield Them Benefits," *Miami Herald*, November 1986.

²⁷⁶ Charles Whited, "Miami Makes Good on Decision to Build Arena," *Miami Herald*, May 31, 1986.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ M. Dion Thompson, "Arena Quandry (sic): For Some, Renewal Means Removal," *Miami Herald*, August 7, 1986.

²⁷⁹ Gillis, "Doubts Cloud Hope for New Overtown," *Miami Herald*, August 10, 1986.

black neighborhood into a new downtown, full of young, racially mixed middle-class residents.”²⁸⁰ Instead of revitalizing Overtown in the true sense of the word, the arena was part of a city effort to erase Overtown, remove its residents, and rewrite its history. Promises of jobs or direct benefits to Overtown’s residents never came to fruition.²⁸¹

In early 1987, with arena construction set to begin later that year, Orlando city council members proposed a hiring program to “assure residents from nearby neighborhoods first crack at many of the less-skilled construction jobs.”²⁸² The proposal soon lost traction because council members feared that guaranteed wage minimums for Parramore workers would be too costly.²⁸³ In response, Orlando-area labor unions, lawyers, and civil rights activists joined with Parramore residents to advocate for the hiring program. On behalf of the group, local labor lawyer Joe Egan told the council, “Most of these people... will never buy a ticket to see the Magic play,” and argued that a “well-paying construction job” would be “the only benefit” they ever receive from the NBA’s presence in town.²⁸⁴ Soon after, the Parramore advocacy group met with city council members to discuss ways that the neighborhood’s residents could work on arena construction. During their meeting, the city council was unusually “wary,” and “stationed nine uniformed officers in a conference room next to the council chambers,” where usually only two were stationed.²⁸⁵ The advocacy group spent the meeting “reminding the city council several times

²⁸⁰ Lisa Getter, “Builders Hope Arena, Heat Make Overtown Hot Again,” *Miami Herald*, August 9, 1987.

²⁸¹ Andres Viglucci and William Yardley, “New Housing, Retail Space in Works after Decades of Broken Promises,” *Miami Herald*, July 27, 2003.

²⁸² Goldie Blumenstyk, “1st Shot at Arena Jobs May Go to Neighbors,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 6, 1987.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Compromise Likely on Hiring for Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 27, 1987.

that residents were being displaced to make room for the arena,” and urging the council “to hire the people who will be most affected by it.”²⁸⁶

Ultimately, the advocacy group failed to convince council members that setting aside jobs for Parramore residents was important. Many on the council stated that they wanted to “just let the free market system work,” and disregarded the idea of designating jobs for neighborhood residents.²⁸⁷ As a sort of “compromise,” the council instead pledged to raise the minimum wage for arena construction jobs from \$3.35 per hour to \$6.00, and create a new “program aimed at bringing unskilled residents into Orlando’s work force at livable wages.”²⁸⁸ Still, the compromise was viewed by Parramore’s residents as a failure, because it did nothing to ensure that neighborhood residents would ever get the “first crack” at construction jobs they had been promised earlier.

The only financial compensation directly provided to Overtown and Parramore residents came in the form of relocation money given to those who were forced to move due to the arenas. By August of 1986, only days after breaking ground on arena construction, “nearly 400 families” in Overtown had already been told to leave their homes.²⁸⁹ Most of these residents were renters, living in large apartment complexes owned by absentee landlords. With their legal recourse limited, they were forced to accept “an average of \$350” in moving costs, and “many jumped to the top of the list for public housing” outside of the downtown area.²⁹⁰ In Orlando, city government “committed to buy seven blocks of homes, apartments, and rooming houses” to

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Mildred A. Williams, “\$6 Minimum Wage Set for Arena Jobs,” *Orlando Sentinel*, February 3, 1987.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

make way for the arena.²⁹¹ Parramore lost “at least 187” households, many of them housing “families with children.”²⁹² While residents were provided with as much as \$600 in moving costs, they failed to account for the ways in which displaced residents would have to readjust their lives. One displaced Parramore resident was forced to leave her job, because her new southwest Orlando apartment was too far from where she worked in Parramore, and she had no means of transportation.²⁹³ Ultimately, many in city hall considered the neighborhood “better off demolished,” and “the people who lived or owned property there” were forced to make adjustments that would “continue long after the bulldozers [had] gone.”²⁹⁴

Persisting Prejudice

Just as the actions of city officials and white elites carried a historical disdain for the African-American neighborhoods in Orlando and Miami, the general discourse surrounding the neighborhoods was also reminiscent of days past. While Overtown had indeed become a low-income area following integration and the exodus of many middle and upper class African Americans, the neighborhood was still home to hundreds of families and many lifelong residents who still remembered the neighborhood’s bustling and thriving community. These residents did not want to leave, but rather wanted to see the city aid in restoring the neighborhood’s stability by providing suitable low-cost housing. Still, Overtown seemingly held no redeeming quality in the eyes of many Miamians, and especially those interested in bringing an arena and NBA franchise to the city.

²⁹¹ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Arena Model ‘A Spectator’s Delight,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 12, 1986.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Dislocated Residents Face Changes,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 14, 1986.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Overtown was perceived as an area of “flophouses,” “enduring vandalism,” and was called “Miami’s skid row.”²⁹⁵ The permanent residents of the neighborhood, including the hundreds of families forced to move for the arena, were seemingly ignored in the characterizations made about Overtown. The neighborhood was instead seen as home only to “vagrants who wander the streets during the day and sleep on sidewalks at night.”²⁹⁶ And while these depictions acknowledged the presence of a homeless population, there was no effort made to combat homelessness. In fact, Overtown’s Miami Rescue Mission, which provided many downtown Miami homeless people with shelter, was “shut down and razed” to make way for “the arena’s east flank.”²⁹⁷ These negative perceptions of Overtown were shared by Miami’s NBA ownership group, who worked to combat these negative images in their marketing campaigns.

When they began their season ticket campaign, Miami’s prospective NBA ownership group prioritized “allaying fears raised by the location of the arena on the outskirts of Overtown.”²⁹⁸ Front man Zev Bufman declared that “to too many people [in Miami], Overtown conveys images of riots, drugs, [and] crime.”²⁹⁹ Bufman’s partner, Billy Cunningham, echoed these sentiments by calling Overtown a “war zone.”³⁰⁰ In an effort to combat this image, the pair moved to “enlist the aid of the police and city officials to let people know” that the neighborhood would change when arena construction finished.³⁰¹ Throughout the season ticket campaign,

²⁹⁵ Viglucci, “Merchants Finding Hope,” *Miami Herald*, July 21, 1986.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Dorman, “Miami Shifts into Full-Court Press,” *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1986.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ Jim Martz, “Cunningham: No Timeouts in Final Weeks,” *Miami Herald*, September 13, 1986.

³⁰¹ Dorman, “Miami Shifts into Full-Court Press,” *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1986.

municipal officials and police joined Bufman in public appearances reassuring all Miamians that the arena's location would be made safe by the time the NBA arrived. As they worked to ease the worries of Miamians, Bufman and Cunningham simultaneously worked to convince the league that their arena location would be a place patrons felt comfortable visiting.

When the pair prepared their presentation to NBA owners, they stressed the need to “say this is a safe place.”³⁰² “Some of the owners,” Bufman told *Herald* reporters, “believe this is Harlem we’re talking about. They think it’s a war zone, that people are being killed.”³⁰³ Bufman failed to acknowledge that his partner Cunningham had previously made “war zone” statements of his own about the neighborhood. That Overtown’s comparison to Harlem would be seen as totally negative conveys the level of disdain Bufman, many Miamians, and apparently many NBA owners had toward African-American communities in general.

In Orlando, Mayor Bill Frederick declared that Parramore was an “area that needs displacing,” and his statement reflected the views within Orlando’s municipal government.³⁰⁴ During their planning sessions regarding arena construction timelines and designs, Orlando Magic officials, the Orlando Municipal Planning Board, and the Orlando City Council rarely discussed displacement and the welfare of Parramore’s residents as a point of concern. In fact, to better compete with Miami, the Orlando Municipal Planning Board “unanimously recommended that construction start...before a regional impact study [was] completed.”³⁰⁵ As such, “city

³⁰² Larry Dorman, “NBA Presentation: Slick Sell on Videotape,” *Miami Herald*, October 17, 1986.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Blumenstyk, “Orlando Drops Permit Law,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 8, 1985.

³⁰⁵ Geri Throne, “Arena Pitch Works with Magic Board,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 19, 1986.

officials...did not know how many families would be displaced” before they began constructing the arena.³⁰⁶

By the time the city received its regional impact study, in June of 1987, arena construction was already well underway. The report, conducted by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, seemingly agreed with Mayor Frederick’s earlier stance that displacement would be an “improvement,” noting that “a direct benefit [of the arena] is the redevelopment of a *blighted* downtown area and the subsequent increase in nearby property values.”³⁰⁷ A few lines later, the council report admitted that there would be “many displaced residents,” though never provided a number, and concluded that those displaced residents would likely “face higher housings costs as they are relocated from their low income homes.”³⁰⁸ Still, the planning council was more concerned with issues like air quality, economic impact, and sewage treatment than the residents of Parramore. According to the report, any “ill effects” of the arena on “the adjacent neighborhood” was strictly “a local issue.”³⁰⁹ For locals, the issue of location was not one concerning Parramore’s residents, but rather the arena patrons. One *Sentinel* journalist, critiquing the location of Miami’s Overtown arena, boasted that Orlando’s arena and its “cocoon-like design” would “shield most arena patrons from the neighborhood.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Arena Lease for Magic Approved,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 7, 1987.

³⁰⁷ Blumenstyk, “Orlando Drops Permit Law,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 8, 1985; East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, “DRI: Development of Regional Impact Statement,” June 19, 1987, p. 25. The East Central Florida Regional Planning Council was made up of 24 individuals, most of whom were county or city commissioners from counties including Orange, Seminole, Lake, Volusia, Osceola, and Brevard and cities including Orlando, Clermont, Daytona Beach, Altamonte Springs, Oviedo, Kissimmee, and Palm Bay.

³⁰⁸ East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, “DRI: Development of Regional Impact Statement,” June 19, 1987, p. 25.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³¹⁰ Goldie Blumenstyk, “A Tale of 2 Arenas,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 13, 1987.

Vitriol Within and Between

From the onset of Orlando's entry into the NBA franchise race, insults were lodged between Orlando and Miami denigrating the other's ability to host a team. Upon signing with Orlando's prospective NBA ownership group, Pat Williams was asked about Miami posing a threat to his effort. Williams stated that "Orlando's perception among the NBA people is an All-American city – apple pie, Chevrolet, baseball and Mickey Mouse. Miami is not viewed that way, for obvious reasons."³¹¹ In response, Miami's Zev Bufman said "I guess the mudslinging begins," and added that "If Pat wants to compare cities, I would also point out that Orlando is one-quarter the size of Miami. I love Orlando, but it doesn't compare to Miami."³¹² The initial "barbs" thrown out by either side focused on stereotypes of clean images and city size.³¹³ The "mudslinging" undoubtedly served to benefit both parties, as the budding rivalry further generated "community" spirit around the sport. The initiative for prospective ownership groups evolved from boasting city identities to protecting community egos from a cross-state assailant. Miami's Billy Cunningham reached out to his former colleague Williams asking him to stop "saying this and that [about Miami] in a negative way," and to compete the "right" way, but the rivalry had already permeated local press.³¹⁴

Taking their lead from Williams, *Orlando Sentinel* columnists called Miami's arena location "a rough area frequented by prostitutes and small-time drug dealers," and called Miami "a once revered town whose reputations has been sullied by its battles against drugs and illegal

³¹¹ Phil Taylor, "Orlando Goes to the Hoop: Ex-76er GM Joins Bid, Fires Barbs at Miami," *Miami Herald*, June 20, 1986.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Larry Dorman, "Dead Heat: Florida, Minnesota Vie for NBA," *Miami Herald*, June 29, 1986.

immigrants.”³¹⁵ Despite his earlier request to compete the right way, Miami’s Cunningham told *Herald* reporters that Orlando was not a serious threat to his effort, and that he was more concerned with franchise groups in Minneapolis. Williams told the *Sentinel* that “our whole community has been put down, written off, really challenged,” and stated that “the gauntlet has been dropped.”³¹⁶ Thereafter, *Herald* columnists began referring to Orlando’s prospective ownership group as “that Central Florida team.”³¹⁷ Miami’s newly appointed General Manager, Lewis Schaffel stated that “the worst thing that could happen” in the race for a franchise “would be if we lost out to Orlando.”³¹⁸ Williams questioned Miami’s momentum in selling ticket deposits when they increased their marketing budget, stating that “Momentum is something you...can’t create...We can feel it on the street here.”³¹⁹ Bufman responded by claiming that “Orlando’s support [was] not coming from the man on the street,” charging Williams with targeting corporations over “honest-to-goodness fans.”³²⁰ Tensions escalated in late October of 1986, when Schaffel called Orlando “a second-rate city” when speaking to the NBA’s Board of Governors at a meeting attended by all ownership groups seeking a franchise with the league.³²¹ Williams “pulled [Schaffel] aside” to discuss the matter, and the two agreed to halt the ongoing insults.³²² An NBA decision in April of 1987 would spark discourse between the cities that became vitriolic.

³¹⁵ Barry Cooper, “Bufman Has High-in-the-Sky Hopes to Bring the NBA to Miami,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 29, 1986.

³¹⁶ Barry Cooper, “Magic Act Quickly After Rival’s Snub,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 7, 1986.

³¹⁷ Larry Dorman, “Miami Shifts into Full-Court Press,” *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1986.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Larry Dorman, “NBA Push Hitting Overdrive,” *Miami Herald*, October 1, 1986.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Larry Guest, “Magic-Heat Rift Over—For Now,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 22, 1986.

³²² *Ibid.*

On April 3, 1987, the NBA announced that three expansion franchises would be granted. Ownership groups in Charlotte, NC and Minneapolis, MN would be awarded franchises for the 1988-89, and 1989-90 seasons, respectively. The third franchise would go to either Orlando *or* Miami, not both, and the decision was not likely to come “until October,” some seven months away. The NBA’s announcement “paired Orlando against Miami in a battle for the third of three expansion franchises,” heightening the sense of urgency in both cities to sell themselves to the NBA as a viable destination for a team.³²³ Orlando’s Jim Hewitt and Pat Williams were “stunned” and urged the league to make a decision that month, noting the “many lives hanging in suspension.”³²⁴ From the onset of the NBA’s decision to only allow only one Florida franchise, Williams “welcome[d] the chance to square off against Miami.”³²⁵ The following three weeks would not be a welcomed squaring off. Instead, they would see an exchange between the two cities that touched on issues of race, culture, and stereotypical perceptions.

Many government officials and business leaders in Orlando sounded off about the decision. President of the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce Frank Kruppenbacher likened the difference between Orlando and Miami to “the difference between heaven and hell.”³²⁶ Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick criticized Miami’s arena location, saying “Look at the setting itself. It’s almost sitting in Liberty City,” referencing the Liberty City Riots of 1980.³²⁷ *Sentinel* reporters seemingly agreed with Frederick’s disposition, noting that while Orlando’s arena was also in a “predominantly black community,” the arena itself would be “campus like,” with

³²³ Barry Cooper, “Orlando, Miami in NBA Shootout,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 3, 1987.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ Goldie Blumenstyk, “City Leaders, We’ll Get Team Commitment, Better Arena Seen as Edge Over Miami,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 3, 1987.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

“landscaping, fountains” and “open-air patios,” whereas Miami’s would be “surrounded by vacant lots, run-down apartment houses and abandoned warehouses.”³²⁸ Williams urged the community to “battle with [the Magic] right to the last second.”³²⁹

In response, some Orlando “community” members followed up by writing letters to NBA Commissioner David Stern, in a movement spearheaded by the *Orlando Sentinel*. One Orlandoan wrote saying “It would be a cold night in hell before I would drive myself or my family into the area in which Miami’s arena is located. I value our lives too much.”³³⁰ Another echoed the same sentiment, saying “I won’t even offer to drive through Miami’s arena area in a locked automobile at night.”³³¹ One *Sentinel* writer sarcastically wrote: “I want no part of a war with Miami—They have all the Uzis.”³³² The vitriol that began with the NBA ownership groups matriculated to local government, press, and citizens themselves.

Miami Herald writers fired back by calling Orlandoans “Disney wimps,” whose only “reason for being” was to serve as “home of a giant cartoon rodent and duck.”³³³ Without Disney, Miamians charged, “there’s little reason to think of Orlando.”³³⁴ Miamians knew that “Liberty City” was a “code phrase” used by Orlando’s mayor to insinuate that Miami’s arena location was in an undesirable African-American neighborhood.³³⁵ Miamians seemingly agreed,

³²⁸ Ibid; Goldie Blumenstyk, “A Tale of Two Arenas,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 13, 1987.

³²⁹ Barry Cooper, “Fans Remain United in Magic’s Corner,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 10, 1987.

³³⁰ Barry Cooper and Melissa Isaacson, “Fans Make Write Choice with Support for Magic,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 8, 1987.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Larry Guest, “Williams Expects NBA to Halt State’s Civil War,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 19, 1987.

³³³ Carl Hiaasen, “Basketball Team’s Name Not Hot Item,” *Miami Herald*, April 24, 1987; Bob Rubin, “Orlando’s Miami-Bashing is Mickey Mouse,” *Miami Herald*, April 16, 1987.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

because instead of combatting this assertion and exchanging vitriol with Orlando, they blamed the NBA stalemate on their own minority citizens.

Experiencing their own “shock, bewilderment, [and] anger” over the lack of a decision by the NBA, many Miamians felt that “the location of the new arena in Overtown” was the primary cause for the league’s indecision.³³⁶ Other suggestions included Miami’s “large Hispanic population,” who seemingly “wouldn’t support basketball.”³³⁷ One *Herald* reporter cited “front page stories detailing that the number of non-Hispanic whites in Dade dropped 115,000 between 1980 and 1985” and “an arena on the outskirts of Overtown” as the reasons for Miami’s lack of a franchise.³³⁸ Yet again, Miami’s minority citizens were cast as villains, and this time were blamed for the city’s failure to secure a franchise.

The NBA Expands

Roughly three weeks after announcing their plans to choose either Miami or Orlando, the NBA announced that it would expand to both cities. NBA officials decided that Miami would enter the league for the 1988-89 season, while Orlando would enter one year later for the 1989-90 season. Orlando’s government and NBA officials did not feel slighted by the league’s decision to accept Miami earlier, because the timing was based strictly off of “construction schedules” for the two arenas.³³⁹ The NBA had planned to wait seven months to deliver their decision, but felt prompted to accelerate their announcement given the mounting vitriol between

³³⁶ Bob Rubin, “NBA’s Surprise Moves Deserve an Explanation,” *Miami Herald*, April 3, 1987.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Goldie Blumenstyk, “It’s Magic – For Real! Corks Pop – City Enters ‘Big Leagues,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1987.

the cities. Phoenix Suns owner Richard Bloch, chairman of the NBA's expansion committee, said "the two Florida applications were in such excellent shape that the board [of governors for the NBA] just couldn't turn them down."³⁴⁰ NBA Commissioner David Stern agreed, saying "What do you do when you have two great applicants? You take them both."³⁴¹ Stern called Miami and Orlando "two great American cities," and said he was "happy to make them a part" of the NBA.³⁴² Many Orlandoans and Miamians were happy as well, restating their goals to be communities united over sport and more relevant in the national "big league" scene.

In Orlando, Mayor Bill Frederick celebrated the NBA's announcement and claimed that the campaign for a franchise "focused and galvanized such a diverse group of people."³⁴³ Frederick also called the Magic "something uniquely for Orlandoans...not tourists."³⁴⁴ Pat Williams noted the new "big league" identity the city had gained, stating "a lot of people in Central Florida woke up today and probably puffed out their chests, looked in the mirror and said 'We live in a major-league sports town now.'"³⁴⁵

In Miami, the "hard-fought victory" for an NBA franchise was "a sign that Miami [was] coming of age, gaining recognition as a major-league city" big enough to support two professional sports.³⁴⁶ In fact, the broader reaction to the NBA news in Miami was that the decision meant even more professional sports. *Herald* sports editor Edwin Pope called the

³⁴⁰ Barry Cooper, "It's Magic – For Real! Miami Gets Team for 88 – Orlando Tips Off in 89," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1987.

³⁴¹ Larry Dorman, "The Heat is On! Miami Gets Basketball Team," *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1987.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Blumenstyk, "It's Magic," *Orlando Sentinel*,

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Tim Povtak, "Central Florida Puffs Out its Chest for Magic," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 24, 1987.

³⁴⁶ Herald Staff, "Ball is in Our Court," *Miami Herald*, April 24, 1987.

NBA's gift "an opportunity to show [that Miami] can support another pro franchise."³⁴⁷ Pope warned Miamians, "We are going to have to prove we can make pro basketball work before we get even the slimmest chance of getting what even more people want – major league baseball."³⁴⁸ One Miami resident, Amancio Suarez, responded to the NBA news by saying "It's time to get behind football, basketball, and hopefully major-league baseball in our community."³⁴⁹ Many Miamians welcomed the NBA not only for the sport itself, but for what the sport could do to get the city a *third* franchise. As Pope explained, "anyone who buys a basketball season ticket is casting a vote for baseball as well, even way down the line."³⁵⁰

The NBA's decision to expand to both Florida cities reverberated nationally. In many cities across the country, the "surprise" decision was seen as largely financial. Because league entry fees were set at \$32.5-million per franchise, bringing in four new franchises meant the NBA's 23 owners were able to divide \$130-million between themselves, instead of \$97.5-million had either Orlando or Miami been left out, or \$65-million had both been denied. According to one journalist, "The NBA decided to expand by four teams instead of two for one simple reason: The NBA owners like money."³⁵¹ Others felt that the league made their decision to deflect attention from the fact that three players on the Phoenix Suns had been indicted for drug possession just days before the announcement.³⁵² In Anaheim, CA, where many felt spurned by the league for rejecting a local bid for a franchise, Miami and Orlando's arenas were said to have

³⁴⁷ Edwin Pope, "Now, Fans Must Pay Freight," *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1987.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ George Diaz, "Radio Exec Not Fretting about Risk," *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1987.

³⁵⁰ Pope, "Now, Fans Must Pay Freight," *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1987.

³⁵¹ Sid Hartman, "Why Add Four Teams? Money, of Course," *Star Tribune*, April 23, 1987.

³⁵² Steve Aschburner, "Good News Helps Balance Drug Scandal," *Star Tribune*, April 23, 1987; Jan Hubbard, "Phoenix Drug Scandal Appears Likely to Get Worse," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 26, 1987; Alan Truex, "Suns Not Shining Through Dark Clouds Over Phoenix," *Houston Chronicle*, April 26, 1987.

helped their causes. Nick Mileti, leader of the Anaheim group, said “We’re not in the game without a building,” and cited Orlando and Miami’s arenas, by then under construction, as reasons why the NBA preferred them.³⁵³ Still, the national consensus was that the NBA simply made more money for itself and its owners with four new teams instead of three.³⁵⁴

The build up to opening night for the Miami Heat sparked excitement in the city. “For the first time, the NBA would be center stage in Miami,” and as fans in the city waited for basketball games to begin, the *Miami Herald* reported on the arena, its amenities, and the score of non-NBA events that would bring additional excitement.³⁵⁵ As Miami’s \$52.5-million arena neared completion in early 1988, it looked to be “one of the most prominent facilities to exist,” thanks to its nearly “\$1.4-million worth of upgrades.”³⁵⁶ These upgrades included “expanded restroom facilities,” “acoustic panels” throughout the arena to amplify noise, and more skyboxes for corporate parties.³⁵⁷ For the arena’s opening night on September 24, 1988, Miami Heat owner Zev Bufman planned a concert featuring Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis Jr.³⁵⁸ The University of Miami basketball team announced its intention to play its home games in the new arena beginning the following year.³⁵⁹ In total, the Miami Sport and Exhibition Authority planned “200 events per year” for the new facility, of which the NBA would only account for 41 or 42 nights.³⁶⁰ Miami’s arena and basketball team promised to be at the heart of a larger

³⁵³ Janis Carr, “NBA to Bypass Anaheim,” *Orange County Register*, April 1, 1987.

³⁵⁴ Journalists in cities such as Chicago, Houston, Sacramento, New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle all cited money—\$130-million divided between owners instead of \$97.5-million—as the primary factor in the NBA’s decision to expand to both Miami and Orlando.

³⁵⁵ Shaun Powell, “Heat Fans’ Enthusiasm Lifts Team,” *Miami Herald*, August 11, 1988.

³⁵⁶ Shaun Powell, “Progress Takes its Seat in Miami Arena,” *Miami Herald*, February 24, 1988.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ Herald Staff, “Sinatra, Martin, Davis to Open Arena,” *Miami Herald*, March 4, 1988.

³⁵⁹ Ronnie Ramos, “Miami Arena is UM’s Home Next Season,” *Miami Herald*, April 12, 1988.

³⁶⁰ Tom Moon, “Shows to Warm Up Arena for Heat,” *Miami Herald*, June 3, 1988.

municipal agenda aimed at “enlivening...downtown’s social scene.”³⁶¹ The Heat and their new arena were expected “to keep people downtown after dark” and revitalize the area by bringing in events, money, and excitement.³⁶²

In Orlando, the Magic and the new Orlando Arena conjured the same feelings throughout 1989. At a cost of \$75-million for the arena itself, and an additional \$23-million for “road improvements, landscaping, [and] parking garages,” the Orlando Arena was “one of the most expensive sports and entertainment facilities in the country.”³⁶³ Still, “based on the amenity level,” the arena was seen by many in municipal government as “a bargain.”³⁶⁴ The Orlando Arena’s “palatial” design included “landscaping, intricate brickwork, [and] elaborate fountains” spread across roughly 81 acres of downtown land.³⁶⁵ After an “invitation-only preview party” of the arena for “city employees, elected officials, promoters, and friends of Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick,” one municipal official credited the facility for moving Orlando “into the major leagues.”³⁶⁶ Bill Mack, a project manager working for the city government, said the arena would surely “receive national acclaim as the finest arena in the United States.”³⁶⁷ As in Miami, Orlando officials planned multiple events for the arena, including concerts and appearances by Bill Cosby, Dolly Parton, and Bon Jovi, among others.³⁶⁸ Also like Miami, Orlando officials brought college basketball to the arena, in the form of annual tournaments and regular-season

³⁶¹ Gregg Fields, “The Revival Downtown Miami is Back – Almost,” *Miami Herald*, June 13, 1988.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ S. Renee Mitchell, “‘Very Classy Place’ and Costly – Orlando Arena One of Most Expensive of its Kind,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 29, 1989.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ S. Renee Mitchell, “City Opens Doors to Future Today – Orlando Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 29, 1989.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Editorial, “Take a Bow Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 29, 1989.

matchups between marquee Florida programs like the University of Florida Gators and Florida State University Seminoles.³⁶⁹ For many in Orlando, the new arena and upcoming NBA season represented “hoops heaven,” despite its steep price tag.³⁷⁰

Still Excluded

As was the case throughout the push for the NBA, the years and occurrences immediately following the NBA’s expansion announcement in April of 1987 were not kind to residents in Overtown or Parramore. As Miami neared its NBA debut in late 1988, Heat officials and their allies in local government focused on “lighting up the streets” of Overtown and “cleaning up the sidewalks” of the neighborhood.³⁷¹ Bufman applauded the “cheap housing torn down and land cleared for parking” in Overtown, and tried to assure potential NBA patrons that the neighborhood would be safe for walking to and from games.³⁷²

Months before the Heat’s NBA debut, Bufman admitted that he “used to look behind [his] shoulder and case the neighborhood” when visiting the area, but assured fans that had “all changed” thanks to his groups razing of several Overtown homes and buildings.³⁷³ Still, many hoped that more razing and development would continue in the neighborhood. One *Herald* journalist remarking on the location stated that “within view of the arena is Overtown, a moribund black neighborhood scattered with pockets of hope and determination,” and added that

³⁶⁹ Tim Povtak, “Orlando Arena can be Boon for Colleges,” *Orlando Sentinel*, February 3, 1989.

³⁷⁰ Editorial, “Hoopla in Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, February 7, 1989.

³⁷¹ Craig Gemoules, “Downtown Looking Up Again,” *Miami Herald*, April 8, 1988.

³⁷² Dave Hyde, “Miami Arena Joins the Neighborhood – Question of Safety Remains No. 1 Concern,” *Miami Herald*, June 26, 1988.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

the city needed to “replace it with something vibrant” in the years to come.³⁷⁴ For many, the Overtown neighborhood and its drawbacks were only temporary, and the arena would lead “to more milestones in creating a bold new downtown Miami.”³⁷⁵

Parramore residents were also neglected during the years leading up to the NBA’s opening night in Orlando. Despite its promise to hire the minority laborers in the neighborhood first, the city never held arena contractors accountable to that commitment.³⁷⁶ In fact, the franchise itself only hired three minorities, only one of whom was African-American, for front office positions during its first two years following the NBA’s expansion announcement.³⁷⁷ After the arena displaced over 100 families in Parramore in 1986 and 1987, the *Orlando Sentinel* virtually ignored the arena’s impact on the neighborhood. It would ultimately take over ten years and a *new* arena debate to prompt the local paper to analyze the Orlando Arena’s negative impact on the neighborhood.

Structural changes for both Miami and Orlando’s prospective NBA groups in May and June of 1986 signaled the beginning of new marketing campaigns. In both cities, energetic front men worked to ignite a passion for sport and an excitement around bringing the league to town, while using their allies in the press to serve as foot soldiers in the mission to get a team. Large-scale marketing campaigns and media blitzes aimed to sell citizens on ideas of communities created around sport, the promise to become a “big league” city among the ranks of America’s sporting elite, and economic opportunities that would pump locals with revenues generated by a new industry.

³⁷⁴ Editorial, “A Bold New Look,” *Miami Herald*, July 12, 1988.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Arena Work Snagged on Minority Rule,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 13, 1987.

³⁷⁷ Barry Cooper, “Magic Have Growing Pains in Confined Quarters,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 19, 1989.

Concurrent with messages disseminated by Bufman, Williams, and those in favor of bringing the NBA to their city, was an underlying truth about the way minority citizens were perceived in both Miami and Orlando. Promises and pledges made to African Americans in Overtown and Parramore concerning arena jobs were never honored, in large part because those citizens carried little importance in the minds of those in power. Dislocated from their homes with insufficient relocation benefits, Overtown and Parramore residents were both physically and figuratively excluded from the space now occupied by arenas and professional sports. Furthermore, when vitriol between Orlando and Miami was exchanged during the heated months in which both cities feared the loss of their NBA dreams, minorities in both cities were once again the victims of stereotypes built largely on perceptions rooted in history. While both cities received NBA franchises after successfully demonstrating to the league their ability to support pro-sport, both cities also revealed the ways in which they perceived themselves and their rivals, who existed both within and without city lines.

CONCLUSION

Sport is an equally unifying and divisive force that both includes and excludes. Though sport can bring together large amounts of people behind a common goal, it can also serve to separate people simultaneously. For many in Miami and Orlando, the goal was to procure a professional sport franchise. Community togetherness, national relevance, and economic stimulation were said to be the primary benefits of professional sport. Pursuing sport actually created political and social tension, in large part because the logistics of hosting a professional franchise meant funding and constructing state-of-the-art arenas.

In 1982, when efforts in Dade and Orange County to adopt a penny sales tax failed to bring in funding for new downtown arenas, municipal government officials stepped in to find other means of financing. Between 1983 and 1985, city mayors in Miami and Orlando worked with their political allies to utilize county resort tax dollars for funding these arenas. The NBA's imminent expansion meant an opportunity to add the major league to their city, but not without a premier arena in place. Efforts to allocate county resort tax dollars for what were essentially city initiatives spawned political tension that lasted years and proved immensely divisive.

Running concurrent with political tension over arena funding was the issue of arena construction and location. Backlash from African-American residents in Miami's Overtown neighborhood and Orlando's Parramore neighborhood arose when residents realized that their neighborhoods were once again being infringed upon by municipal agendas. Throughout the twentieth century, Miami and Orlando's African-American communities had been subjugated by prejudice, and the pursuit of professional sport built upon this history. Ultimately, residents in each neighborhood were unable to halt arena construction, largely because the political

momentum behind the NBA pursuits in each city were too great, and the prejudices and indifferences toward Overtown and Parramore residents were too deeply rooted.

The fate of Overtown and Parramore residents took a backseat to the pursuit of the NBA, especially when prospective NBA ownership groups in each city began launching season-ticket campaigns. Each ownership group aimed to sell perceptions of inclusion to their respective cities. By joining the NBA, these groups claimed, Miami and Orlando would create communities around sport, in which citizens would be more closely united by a common interest. Similarly, both groups promised their citizens an inclusion in the national major league sports scene. For Orlando, this meant finally escaping the shadow of Walt Disney World attractions and joining the ranks of other cities that had professional sport franchises. For Miami, which already had an NFL franchise, the NBA meant growing their major league status even more, and perhaps opening the door to even more franchises in leagues like the MLB or NHL (National Hockey League). For those residents uninterested in sport, NBA groups promised immense economic benefits generated by the presence of the major leagues. From concerts to concession companies, new sports teams and their arenas meant constant economic activity, which even non-sport fans could benefit from.

In reality, the NBA pursuit excluded many Miami and Orlando residents. Residents of Overtown and Parramore, who had protested arenas when the facilities and their funding were still in the planning phases, were displaced by the hundreds to make room for arena construction. Given little compensation for the loss of their homes, which were owned mostly by absentee landlords, these residents were inherently excluded from the NBA community. Making matters

worse, promises from municipal officials to include these residents in the construction and maintenance of the arenas went largely unfulfilled.

Furthermore, when the NBA announced in April 1987 that it intended to expand to either Miami *or* Orlando, but not both, members of each city launched insults toward the other. What began as a rivalry grew vitriolic, and each city characterized the other based on harsh stereotypes, many of which held prejudicial sentiment. This Miami-Orlando rivalry predated any on-court action, and touched on issues deeper than box scores. By the time of the announcement, Miamians and Orlandoans felt too invested in the NBA pursuit to accept that another in-state city could receive a franchise while their own was left empty-handed. In this regard, sport drove people further apart, and stimulated othering.

In the end, both cities received NBA franchises. Initially, the new NBA teams excited many citizens who enjoyed seeing the major league sport in their town. Before long, the NBA teams demanded new arenas, deeming their existing facilities as obsolete and inadequate. As municipal officials in Miami and Orlando worked to keep the Miami Heat and Orlando Magic from moving to another city or state, they promised city residents that new arenas would help revitalize downtown areas, just as they had in the past. Neither municipal officials nor team executives accounted for the broken promises of the late 1980s. This lack of accountability allows for the same process to carry on through the present day, as modern-day initiatives to bring additional professional sports franchises to Miami and Orlando harp on the same mantras—and prejudices—of the past.

So while sport projects images of teamwork and togetherness, the pursuit of professional sport presents a harsher reality. While fans may perceive that their hometown team represents

unification, major league sports can divide local governments and destruct local communities that pose a threat to the logistics of hosting franchises. For Miami and Orlando, the NBA meant bringing together Heat and Magic fans, respectively. Franchises also meant division and exclusion for those who found themselves on the outside of the NBA community looking in.

ADDENDUM

Magic and Heat Enjoy Success

Despite paltry inaugural season win-loss records, each franchise experienced tremendous support from their fans. Though they finished the 1988-89 season with a league-worst record of 15-67 and endured a winless record through their first 17 games, the Miami Heat created atmospheres of “euphoria” for fans at Miami Arena and sold out all but four of their home games.³⁷⁸ Similarly, at 18-64 the Orlando Magic finished with the second-worst league record in their inaugural season, including a 1-15 record to close out the season.³⁷⁹ Still, the team managed to sell out every single one of its 41 home games that year, and Magic fans stamped themselves as “NBA fanatics.”³⁸⁰

Eventually, each team improved by adding basketball stars and experienced coaches. In Miami, players like Tim Hardaway and Alonzo Mourning and coaches like Pat Riley turned the Heat from perennial losers to championship contenders in the mid-1990s. In Orlando, the mid-1990s introduced names like Anfernee “Penny” Hardaway and Shaquille “Shaq” O’Neal, who brought the Magic wins and national and international attention.³⁸¹ As early as 1994, Magic apparel could be “spotted in many countries, including Canada, and around Africa and Asia.”³⁸² Before the start of the 1994-1995 NBA season, “the NBA invited the Magic to play two

³⁷⁸ Herald Staff, “The Inaugural Season: The Year in Review,” *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1989.

³⁷⁹ Tim Povtak, “Fans: Thanks for Magic Moments,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 21, 1990.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Both Shaq and Penny were endorsed major American companies with international markets, such as Pepsi, Nike, Reebok, and McDonald’s. Both played on the 1996 Olympics Men’s National Basketball Team, which also expanded their fame worldwide. Shaq also recorded several hip-hop albums, one of which went platinum, and starred in several films. In fact, Penny and Shaq first met while *both* starred in the film *Blue Chips*.

³⁸² Barry Cooper, “Pro Sports Provide Boost – Orlando Gains More Recognition with NBA Team,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 10, 1994.

exhibition games in London because fans in Europe wanted to see O’Neal.”³⁸³ However, as the teams improved, the once-praised arenas they played in quickly became outdated according to team officials.

Arenas Deemed Obsolete

Just five years after its opening, Miami Heat officials called the Miami Arena “all but obsolete for professional basketball.”³⁸⁴ Said to be “eclipsed by much larger and more sophisticated arenas” in those five years, Miami Arena quickly went from “prominent” to outdated.³⁸⁵ Heat officials wanted more luxury seating closer to the court, as well as more outdoor space and a more modern interior design.³⁸⁶ Orlando’s arena also drew criticism just five years after it opened its doors. In 1994, Orlando Magic officials told the city they needed money for expanding the arena, if not a new arena altogether. According to the team, Shaquille O’Neal’s “drawing power” meant that many games were sold out with “thousands” of fans left standing outside the arena without access to a ticket.³⁸⁷

In Miami, Heat officials began their campaign for a new arena in 1993, when they “threatened to leave” Miami if a new arena could not be built and paid for by the city in the near future.³⁸⁸ In an effort to scare local politicians, “team leaders” with the Heat “discussed relocating with several Broward and Palm Beach communities.”³⁸⁹ In Orlando, Magic officials

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Charles Strouse, “Why Miami Arena Got Old So Fast,” *Miami Herald*, June 27, 1993.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Cooper, “Pro Sports Provide Boost,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 10, 1994.

³⁸⁸ Charles Strouse and David Satterfield, “Efforts Stepped Up to Keep the Heat,” *Miami Herald*, June 4, 1993.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

renewed their arena lease in 1997, but demanded a new facility by the contract's completion in 2004.³⁹⁰ By 2000, Magic officials began threatening to relocate the franchise to cities like Louisville, New Orleans, and Albuquerque if the city could not finance a new arena by 2004.³⁹¹ In the end, both teams got what they wanted.

Miami's new arena came in 1999, when the American Airlines Arena opened its doors in a downtown location along Biscayne Bay, blocks away from the old arena in Overtown. Just as in the 1980s, a Miami mayor promised Miamians that the new arena would “spark a rebirth of a decaying section of the city's downtown.”³⁹² Orlando's Amway Center opened its doors in 2010 in another section of Parramore, and was also promised to generate “an enormous amount of economic growth” for the neighborhood.³⁹³ Ultimately, municipal government officials were pressured into building new arenas by the very communities they created—communities that bought into the “big league” mystique of sport—who desperately wanted keep the NBA in town.

The Same Old Song

While team representatives in Miami and Orlando sold their new arenas as economic drivers for the communities in which they planned to build, they never explained their failures to do so in their earlier efforts. In Miami, “the hope that Miami Arena would revive” Overtown went “largely unfulfilled.”³⁹⁴ Miami Arena, “meant to inspire hope for the historic predominantly black Miami neighborhood,” ultimately “failed” to do so.³⁹⁵ Miami's city

³⁹⁰ Dan Tracy, “Magic's Goal – New O-Rena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 8, 1997.

³⁹¹ Mike Thomas, “Has Arena Changed, or Just Times?” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 26, 2000.

³⁹² Joseph Tanfani, “Mayor's Handshake Seals Deal for Heat Arena,” *Miami Herald*, August 7, 1997.

³⁹³ Willie Clark, “7 Ways Black Orlando Can Share in Venue Success,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 2, 2007.

³⁹⁴ Herald Staff, “Face-Off in Center Ice,” *Miami Herald*, January 10, 1993.

³⁹⁵ Joanne Cavanaugh, “Miami Arena Could Succumb to Wrecking Ball,” *Miami Herald*, April 4, 1996.

planners “predicted that restaurants and shops would spring up around the arena,” but “that didn’t materialize.”³⁹⁶ In 1998, as they finished construction on the brand new American Airlines Arena, Miami Heat officials promised African-American arena workers, many of them Overtown residents, that their jobs working in concession, usher, and custodial positions would be there for them at the new arena.³⁹⁷ Less than a year later, in an effort to show that the team was “pro-community,” 175 of those positions were given instead to local community organizations and their volunteers.³⁹⁸ While this move helped some local charities raise money, it squeezed out many of the former Miami Arena workers who were promised the same number of positions at the new arena. The Heat and Miami municipal officials effectively “abandoned” Overtown, along with all the promises they made to improve it during the 1980s.³⁹⁹

In Orlando, the Magic’s new Amway Center arena “book-ended” Parramore with old and new sports facilities on either side of the neighborhood.⁴⁰⁰ One “lifelong resident of Parramore” poignantly asked, “Are they trying to drive the west-side [Parramore] community completely out?”⁴⁰¹ Still for many Orlandoans, including then-Orange County Chairman Mel Martinez, Parramore was “dirty” and “undesirable.”⁴⁰² For these Orlandoans, a new arena yet again meant the promise of “a massive downtown makeover,” complete with refurbished buildings, entertainment complexes, and new shops and restaurants.⁴⁰³ Parramore residents were not as

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Alfonso Chardy, “Lost Heat Games Cost Arena,” *Miami Herald*, October 15, 1998.

³⁹⁸ Harriet Johnson Brackey, “Miami Arena Works Seek First Crack at New Arena’s Jobs,” *Miami Herald*, August 25, 1999.

³⁹⁹ Don Finefrock, “New Plan Means Longer Walk to Arena,” *Miami Herald*, April 23, 1996.

⁴⁰⁰ Dan Tracy, “Arena Deals Still a Dream,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 17, 2000.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

enthused, calling their neighborhood “another cement-ville” thanks to the Magic.⁴⁰⁴ What was once the heart of African-American culture in Orlando turned into “little more than a part-time entertainment enclave for the elite.”⁴⁰⁵ Still operating with “little or no political clout,” Parramore residents in the early 2000’s could only watch as the Amway Center moved in.⁴⁰⁶

Today, Overtown and Parramore are still vulnerable to the desires of pro-sport enthusiasts who seek to use the downtown space for stadium construction. In Orlando, Major League Soccer’s (MLS) Orlando City Soccer Club is constructing a new Parramore stadium set to open in 2017.⁴⁰⁷ In Miami, an MLS expansion franchise plans to move into Overtown before 2020.⁴⁰⁸ Just as Miami and Orlando officials did in the 1980s when seeking to build basketball arenas and bring the NBA to town, officials with the MLS franchises achieve their ends by promising community unity, economic benefits, and a bigger piece of the “big-league” pie. However, the reality is that these present-day initiatives will likely do little to *truly* bring people in their cities together. African-American residents in Overtown and Parramore will likely be pushed further out of the neighborhoods. While the teams themselves may be profitable, city residents and municipal governments will likely receive little, if any, major economic benefits. In regard to “big-league” identity, many citizens of each city may feel more nationally relevant when rooting for “their” home team. But as they cheer on the local franchise, and feel themselves included in the major league community, they will be doing so juxtaposed to a community long excluded.

⁴⁰⁴ Dan Tracy, “Parramore Residents Still Skeptical of Arena,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 7, 2000.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Katie Santich, “East Side, West Side – The Great Divide,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 22, 2001.

⁴⁰⁷ Mark Schlueb, “Dyer: Soccer to Benefit Parramore Residents,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 13, 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ Douglas Hanks, “Beckham Announces Overtown Site for Soccer Stadium,” *Miami Herald*, December 4, 2015.

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