

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Commercial Alert Asks Sportswriters to Call Sports Stadiums by Nicknames, Not Corporate Names**

Responding to the rise of sports stadiums with corporate naming rights agreements, Commercial Alert sent letters today to sportswriters at the fifty largest U.S. and Canadian newspapers to encourage them to call stadiums by nicknames instead of corporate names, such as the FleetCenter, Enron Field, Staples Center, and FedEx Field. The letter follows.

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There comes a time when all of us must stand up and be counted, sportswriters not excepted. They too must come to the proverbial plate on occasion, with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth with two outs and the team down by three.

Now is one of those times, and the question is the names of the locations of the sports events which they cover.

Ball parks and stadiums are part of sports lore and legend. Can one recount Willie Mays' back-to-the-plate catch off Vic Wertz in the 1954 World Series, without mention of the spacious center field of the old Polo Grounds? Would Reggie Jackson's October heroics have loomed quite as large in any stadium besides the House that Ruth Built? Could Havlicek have stolen the ball anyplace besides the Garden?

Those stadium names -- Polo Grounds, Fenway, Forbes Field, Tiger Stadium, and on and on -- are part of the poetry of sports. They cast their spell on us throughout our lives. They serve to connect professional sports in locality and place, and provide a thread of connection between parents and kids, one generation and another.

How many fathers have taken their kids to Yankee Stadium or Fenway and pointed out where they were sitting at some momentous game of yore? In times of turmoil and change these threads become precious. Yet they are being ripped from our lives, and the reason is that corporations are seizing the names of our beloved parks and stadiums, and replacing these with their own.

It was a sad, sad day when Boston's Garden became the Fleet Center, and San Francisco's Candlestick became 3Com Park. Even the name Meadowlands Arena provided a touch of grace to that maligned venue that the new name -- Continental Airlines Arena -- does not. This change represents a flattening of our culture, the emotional equivalent of a Soviet marriage. It uproots sports from local culture and tradition, and wraps them in the pecuniary legalism of commerce instead. It is yet another instance of the chilling and Orwellian corporate takeover of our civic and cultural life.

Sports writers are our last line of defense. You are the keepers of the language of sports. You have the power to name, which is the power to define. You wield this power each time you sit down to write; and I urge you to wield it on behalf of our memories, our local cultures, and the bonds between parents and kids.

I urge you to write as a keeper of the magic that draws us to sports, rather than as -- I must say this -- a corporate shill.

There is no law that says that you have to call a sports venue what a big corporation wants you to call it. Nicknames are another rich sports tradition, from Bronco and the Babe to Magic and Dr. J. Today most of you call the manager of the San Francisco Giants by a name (Dusty) other than the one his mother gave him.

If you can do that, then why can't you call the stadium where he manages by a name other than the one its corporate sponsor gave it?

There is no reason. There is no reason why 3Com cannot have an affectionate local nickname in your columns and stories -- the New Candlestick perhaps. There is no reason why the Fleet Center cannot become the New Garden (pronounced without the "r" of course), and why the United Center cannot become New Chicago Stadium, or perhaps something better.

This would be a service to sports fans -- at the most simple level they would know where you are talking about. How many of us can keep straight the corporate names that have no grounding in place in our minds. 3Com, Qualcomm -- who knows which is which?

But more important is the role you can play in reclaiming this one vestige of sports tradition and memory from the marauders with deep pockets and shallow hearts.

You can do this. No one can stop you. What good is freedom of speech if you are not willing to exercise it?

The bases are loaded. It is the bottom of the ninth. Will you show the courage you expect of the players of whom you write?

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin  
Director

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Commercial Alert opposes the excesses of commercialism, advertising and marketing. Commercial Alert's website is at <<http://www.essential.org/alert/>>.