

Isle Be Damned: A Tale of Two Cities (A 'Dickens' of a story)

Written by Steve Viuker
Tuesday, 07 April 2009 19:48



NY Islanders owner Charles Wang has moved from making veiled threats, to now outright saying it: If Nassau Coliseum isn't upgraded, the Islanders are relocating.

Actually, it's a tale of one city and a county. The city is Newark and the county is Nassau. And it is the tale of two New York area hockey teams who play in the shadows of the 'greatest' arena in midtown.

Last season, the New Jersey Devils moved from nowhere-land (the swamps of the Meadowlands) to a sparkling new, state of the art facility in downtown Newark. The building is the Prudential Center (after Prudential Insurance) but it's known by fans as The Rock (as in a 'piece of The Rock; the long-time slogan of the insurance firm).

Skepticism regarding whether the Devils largely suburban fan base would trek to an urban landscape to watch has been answered. Due to the nearby access to PATH and New Jersey Transit at Newark Penn Station, fans from away as Brooklyn are coming to watch NHL hockey. Even fans from New Jersey are leaving the car home and taking mass transit. (Do you believe in miracles? Yes!!)

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Meantime, Charles Wang has told Nassau County he is out if he doesn't get a new arena as part of his Lighthouse real estate venture. The plan is to eventually have housing, retail and transportation on the Coliseum site. The Coliseum sits within shouting distance of the LIRR Hempstead station. However, a bus or rail link was never put into place. Any fan taking the LIRR must take a cab from the station to the arena and back. That costs \$\$\$. Perhaps building the Coliseum in downtown Hempstead would have been the answer but back in 1972, many arenas were built in the suburbs where the land was plentiful.

It would be a shame if the Isles left the Island. In these tough times of foreclosures, job losses and stock market dives, a night out at the arena or ballpark is just what folks need. And the Islanders have providing that for millions of Long Islanders since 1972. And all at the much-maligned Nassau Coliseum or 'mausoleum' or white elephant. Or whatever you want to call the facility that sits on a former airfield. (My wife went to Nassau Community College and used to drive on that scared bit of land.)

I've been Rangers fan since the games were on WOR television and Win Elliot was behind the mike. Think Ralph Kiner. And the Rangers /Islanders rivalry is the hockey version of the old Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants and the Yankees; all rolled into a nice package. (And you can throw in the Devils)

I remember watching a show called 'Sports' Extra; a half-hour wrap-up show on Sunday nights that was hosted by Bill Mazer. Stan Fischler was a frequent guest and Bill would say, "What about this kid Bossy." He was 'Boss' before we ever heard of Springsteen. Even Rangers fans had to give this gritty squad headed up by Al Arbour credit as they won Stanley Cup after Stanley Cup in the shadow of their more famous rivals.

I don't know what the answer is for Mr. Wang. But this is a franchise that has survived John Spano and the fisherman uniforms. Whatever is determined, let's hope the team will be singing "Isle" Be Home for Xmas" this year and for many years ahead. You can't spell Islanders without Long Island.

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