

Soul of the City: Changing the Way We Design for Professional Sports

INTRODUCTION

Professional sports facilities can have an immense effect on communities. Through economic impact, cultural influence, rate of usability, and versatility of design, stadiums can be a valuable collective resource that elevate the people, place, and culture of a city. Through designed spaces that encourage a sense of pride and togetherness, stadiums can reach beyond a place of mere entertainment and spectacle and become something much larger and more profound — a nucleus of the human experience.

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Now more than ever, it is important to design stadiums as completely versatile structures — not facilities used only for sports.

INSIGHTS

Intended Use

While stadiums and arenas were once built only for sports, the use of modern stadiums must include more versatile applications. To connect with local communities more fully, new stadiums must be flexible enough to host concerts, conferences, and other events to create a tangible benefit to residents.

Increased Technology

Surpassing the large screens and flashy lights of today’s stadiums, future stadiums must incorporate augmented reality, virtual

reality, drones, and other technological advancements to create interactive experiences that feel tailored to each fan. This will heighten involvement and increase community connectivity.

Sustainability

No longer a choice, sustainability is expected in stadium design. Decreasing the environmental footprint by creating a net-zero, carbon-neutral facility will need to factor into the construction and operation of future stadiums.

Economic Viability

Stadiums often require monumental resources and tax dollars for construction and maintenance, and may deplete funds from other pressing community issues. Constructing and centering a new district around a stadium — one that features plazas of local businesses, shops, restaurants, and bars — provides economic stimuli to a region and a tangible benefit to a community. By generating tourism and nourishing local development, a new stadium can energize a community with renewed commerce and purpose.

Design Elements

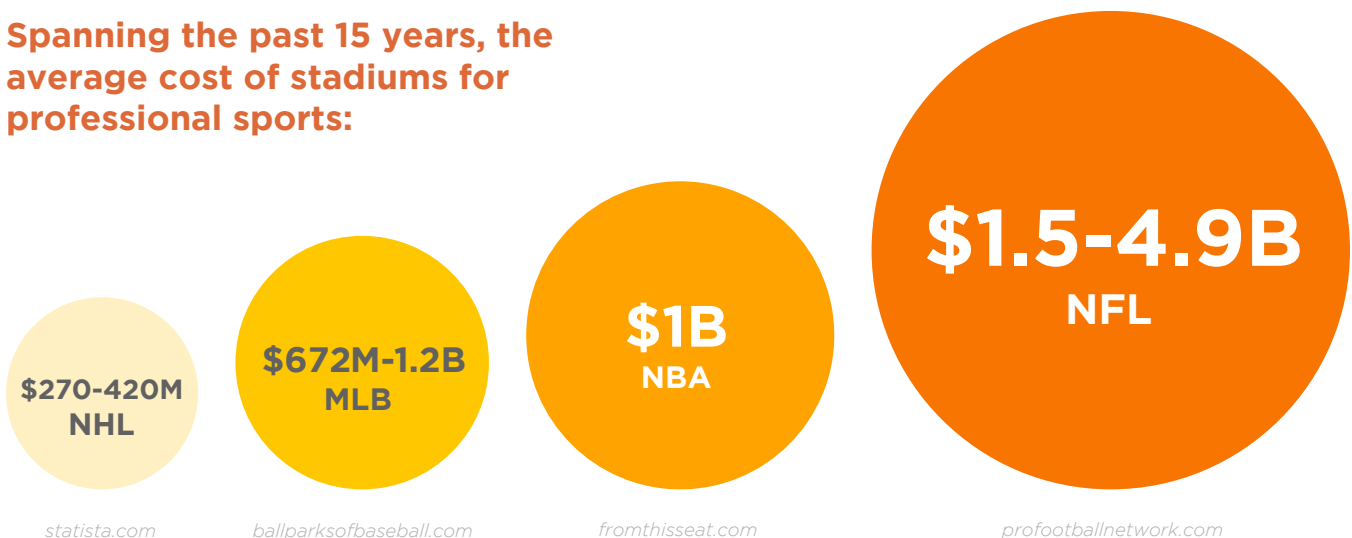
To remain versatile and create near-constant use of the space, new stadiums should consider incorporating an enclosed roof, a retractable pitch, and a multi-floor system to alternate between surfaces and allow the facility to transform for different purposes. These features provide the possibility for year-round usage and more opportunities for economic growth and youth sports, including hosting multiple teams that require surfaces of grass, turf, hardwood, or ice. Further, through added spaces like dog parks, game rooms, shopping plazas, and

nightlife destinations, a stadium can be reshaped from a special events destination to an everyday cornerstone of community activity. Constructing a comfortable, inviting mixed-use development encourages social interaction and interweaves the space into the fabric of the community. Incorporating the development with residential and commercial properties ensures it will serve as more than a place to attend games, but as a communal center where locals live and work.

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Through mindful design, planning, and versatile use, architects and designers can bring a new sense of purpose and value to sports facilities.

Spanning the past 15 years, the average cost of stadiums for professional sports:



CONCLUSION

Sports teams are expected to spend an estimated \$10 billion on new facilities by 2030. This significant expenditure reflects a sizable segment of the future of architecture. As sports and society continue to evolve, it is paramount that the professional sports industry progresses alongside societal changes to find success as an enterprise and engine for community development. Through mindful design, planning, and versatile use, architects and designers can imbue sports venues with new purpose and value.

The architecture of professional sports must evolve with society. Despite high financial cost when municipally funded, a reimagined stadium can positively transform a city and financially benefit the local community and its residents. To create a successful community hub, a new stadium must maximize facility use, promote community, encourage local development, and justify community investment. By reimagining how a stadium functions, a new facility can become a valuable element of the community — an asset rather than a liability for a city and its residents.



Sports teams estimated spend on new facilities by 2030.

These research insights were informed by Claire Johnson (M.Arch), 2023.

SCADask is an applied research unit of the Savannah College of Art and Design that generates timely research at the intersection of commerce, creativity, and culture. To learn more, or to partner with SCADask, contact research@scad.edu.