

Metropolitan Stadium



THERE IS A CERTAIN AIR of poignancy in this August 1971 photograph of Harmon Killebrew doffing his hat to the crowd in Metropolitan Stadium, as if the 35-year-old Twins slugger is bidding farewell. And well he might, as the baseball world captured here would soon disappear.

Killebrew signed with the Twins in 1954 (when the team was the Washington Senators) and, except for a final-season cameo with the Kansas City Royals, spent his entire career with the franchise. Baseball's reserve clause was one reason for this: it bound players to teams even after their contracts expired. The advent of free agency in 1975 would transform this practice; henceforth, out-of-contract players could weigh multiple offers and sign with other clubs. Numerous athletes followed the lure of higher pay. Salaries sharply increased, and the era of players locked into one team was over.

In the 1970s certain owners could more easily afford these higher salaries. Businessmen like George Steinbrenner in New York and Ted Turner in Atlanta began to purchase teams as part of their portfolios and inject comparatively large sums of money into them. Twins owner Calvin Griffith, on the other hand, represented an older generation—the club had been owned and/or managed by successive Griffiths since 1920. The family business was the Twins, and its resources were dwarfed by the magnates buying into the game. From division winners in 1969 and 1970, the Twins drifted to mediocrity by the mid-1970s and last-place finishes in 1981 and 1982. Griffith finally sold the team in 1984—to Carl Pohlad, who had earned his fortune in banking.

Like the players and owners, Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington—the Met—also faced radical change. By 1970 new multipurpose venues, as in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, were replacing older, baseball-only structures. The Met was built in 1956 for baseball and modified to accommodate the NFL Vikings; by 1971 both teams criticized the stadium as outdated in capacity, design, and comfort and began calling for a multipurpose structure. In 1977 the Minnesota legislature passed a bill funding such a facility, and in December 1978 the



Metropolitan Stadium, Bloomington, August 11, 1971: Twins owner Calvin Griffith presenting Harmon Killebrew with a boat in recognition of his 500th home run, hit the previous evening.

(MHS COLLECTIONS)

Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission voted to construct a domed stadium in downtown Minneapolis. Some grassroots activists protested the demise of outdoor baseball, but to no avail. In 1982 the Twins (and the Vikings) moved to the Metrodome. Three years later the Met was demolished, and the era represented in our photo came to an end.

—Thomas Saylor

Thomas Saylor is a professor of history at Concordia University, St. Paul. His most recent book is Long Hard Road: American POWs During World War II (2007); he is currently coauthoring a work on Minnesota in the 1970s, to be published in 2013 by MHS Press.



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