

Foreword

Have you ever been sitting alone reflecting back in life on some of the most memorable moments that are implanted in your soul forever?

Almost always, some of the first recollections are childhood memories. Realizing that I haven't actually grown up yet, some of the most memorable for me were the 14 years of fulfilling a childhood dream at a place called Veterans Stadium.

I recall savoring my first cup of big league coffee back in 1983 with legends such as Mike Schmidt, Steve Carlton, Tony Perez, Joe Morgan, Gary Maddox, and yes, Peter Edward, whose last name is still missing from the archives in Cooperstown.

After 10 years of cultivating, the coffee turned into champagne in 1993. Diehards refuse to forget the long-haired gunslingers led by Jim Fregosi and his band of horse thieves. Yes, Uncle Bill had pulled off one of the all-time capers in assembling a cast of characters that would turn America's pastime into the most watched "reality show" on Earth.

Co-worker and long-time friend Rich Westcott will touch your heart with stories of the Vet from its inception in 1971 to its implosion in 2004. You will have a bird's-eye view from some of the Eagles superstars of what it was like to play on the artificial surface in the dead of a Philadelphia winter as well as what it was like for the "Boys of Summer" to endure 165-degree temperatures in July.

Imagine coming home from a long road trip at 3:30 A.M. and hearing the rats fighting the cats in the dark doldrums below your favorite seat. I honestly believe that over the years the rats grew so big that we swore they decided to share the real estate and started breeding with each other.

I will always remember the curtain calls of various stars who were reluctant to step out into the fickle fog of the Philly faithful, knowing you were an error away from the ever-compromising boobirds that nested in the same seats.

From The Great Wallenda, Kiteman, National League Playoffs, and World Series to Eagles and Army-Navy games to some of your favorite concerts, Rich will pull up "blasts from the past" that will tickle your funny bone as well as draw a memorable tear from the pit that resided right across from the "Broad Street Bullies."

I was born and raised in the land of Oz just south of the border from one of our all-time greats, Whitey Ashburn. He always reminded me that there's no place like home field advantage.

I want to personally thank you, the fans, for sharing with me the experience of Grit, Guts, and Glory—South Philly style. Foremost, I would like to thank Rich for allowing me to write the Foreword to this wonderful read.

So, sit back, put the remote down, pull the cooler over, loosen up your blue collar, and get ready to enjoy 33 years of a place the boys in red and white pinstripes affectionately referred to as “If They Only Knew.”

Darren Daulton

Introduction

It was 4:32 A.M. on March 21, 2004, when I arrived at Veterans Stadium for the last time. As I approached the once-proud structure, it seemed almost human as it stood there in dark, eerie silence. And I couldn't help but think how sad and lonely it looked.

A ghastly pall seemed to cover the old ballpark. Its insides gutted by a demolition crew's scalpel, it waited forlornly on its deathbed as the final hours of its life ticked away. Soon, its old, tired body would be snuffed out in a 62-second implosion.

For me and for many others, it was kind of like going to the funeral of an old friend. And I felt a strong sense of sadness. I had spent thousands of hours in the old stadium's company. I had been with it in the best of times . . . and in the worst of times. I knew it intimately.

I envisioned what an obituary might say: "Veterans Stadium, 33, home of some of the most memorable moments in Philadelphia sports history, died suddenly March 21 at home in South Philadelphia. Cause of death was obsolescence."

The Vet, as everybody called it, had once been considered a state-of-the art facility. One of the last of a group of similarly designed multi-purpose stadiums, it was born in an era when such venues were both fashionable and functional. They could be used for a variety of different sports as well as for all kinds of nonsporting events. And they could accommodate huge crowds.

Indeed, the Vet had been the site of countless great moments. The greatest, of course, was the night in 1980 when the Phillies won the World Series, clinching victory over the Kansas City Royals in the sixth game when Tug McGraw struck out Willie Wilson for the final out.

The Phillies also clinched the 1983 and the 1993 National League pennants at the Vet.

Mike Schmidt hit 286 of his 548 home runs there. Steve Carlton won his 15th straight game and recorded his 3,000th strikeout there. Rick Wise retired 32 straight batters in a game there. Pete Rose got his National League record 3,631st hit there. Terry Mulholland and Kevin Millwood pitched no-hitters there. Jim Thome won the admiration of fans with his down-to-earth manner and his volcanic home runs there.

Two All-Star Games were played at the Vet. The Phillies won a game, 26–7, over the New York Mets. They lost two straight playoff games to the Los Angeles Dodgers, one on a controversial error and one in pouring rain. They bowed to the Toronto Blue Jays in the 1993 World Series, 15–14, one night, then came back to win the next night, 2–0.

Greg Luzinski hit monster home runs. Gregg Jefferies hit for the cycle. Bobby Abreu hit for high average every year. And guys such as Darren Daulton, Garry Maddox, Larry Bowa, Juan Samuel, Lenny Dykstra, Scott Rolen, Gary Matthews, Manny Trillo, John Kruk, Dave Cash, Bob Boone, Von Hayes, Jimmy Rollins, Jim Eisenreich, Glenn Wilson, Rico Brogna, Mickey Morandini, and Mike Lieberthal had sparkling seasons at the Vet, as did pitchers Jim Lonborg, Dick Ruthven, Larry Christenson, Steve Bedrosian, Randy Wolf, John Denny, Al Holland, and Curt Schilling.

The Eagles also had some memorable times. They won the game at the Vet that sent them to the Super Bowl, beating the hated Dallas Cowboys, 20–7, in one of the most celebrated football games ever played in Philadelphia. Who can forget Wilbert Montgomery's 42 yard touchdown in the early minutes of that game?

The Eagles also won two other NFC division titles at the Vet. Ron Jaworski connected with Mike Quick on a 99 yard touchdown pass. Al Nelson raced 101 yards for a touchdown with a missed field goal. Joe Lavender ran back a fumble for a 96 yard TD. Tom Dempsey kicked a 54 yard field goal. Donovan McNabb completed 32 passes in one game. All occurred at the Vet.

Other outstanding Eagles players such as Bill Bergey, Duce Staley, Harold Carmichael, Randall Cunningham, Stan Walters, Randy Logan, Reggie White, Brian Dawkins, Jerry Sizemore, Charley Young, Hugh Douglas, Bill Bradley, Charley Johnson, David Akers, and Troy Vincent played at the Vet.

Army-Navy games, Temple football, and the Stars, Atoms, Fury, and A's all were indelible parts of the Vet's history. So were Bill Giles, the Phillie Phanatic, Karl Wallenda, Dan Baker, Paul Richardson, Harry Kalas, Richie Ashburn, Merrill Reese, Larry Shenk, Jimmy Gallagher, and countless others whose names if listed here would fill the rest of this book. And this is not to overlook the unforgettable contributions of the artificial turf, rowdy 700 level fans, the Zamboni, cats, rats (real or imagined), stuck elevators, overpriced food, sky boxes, Eagles cheerleaders, leaky roofs, cadets, midshipmen, tailgate parties, police dogs and horses, and all the other elements—both good and bad—that were very much parts of the Vet.

Was the Vet unfairly maligned, especially over the last decade? Were the ugly slurs so frequently hurled its way in its later years deserved? Of course, the place had flaws. What doesn't? But the good times outweighed the bad; the good memories trumped the nightmares. The Vet may have had some problems, but it was like a second home for many of us. And at least some of us treated it accordingly.

A few years back, I wrote a book called *Philadelphia's Old Ballparks*. The main subjects of that book were Baker Bowl and Shibe Park/Connie Mack Stadium. Both were particularly appealing ballparks, the former because it was so eccentric, so unusual, in a way so strange, the latter because

it was the place where I watched my first game as a kid, covered my first game as an adult, and saw scores of games in between.

My grandfather, who many, many years ago regaled me with stories about games and players he watched at Baker Bowl, and my father, who regarded Shibe Park as though it was some kind of a shrine, would not approve of this view. But at the risk of disturbing their heavenly souls, I must state that as far as I'm concerned, neither ballpark rated nearly as high as the Vet. For me, the Vet was a true field of dreams, a place where I spent much of my professional life, a stadium that would give me a rush virtually every time it came into view as I approached it for a game.

Now, two stadiums have taken the place of the Vet. One houses the Phillies. One houses the Eagles. Both are magnificent stadiums. Both satisfy the needs of teams that have moved into another era in the way games are played and watched. Both will have significant roles in the future years of Philadelphia sports.

Things change. Time marches on. History is pushed aside. The Vet outlived its usefulness. But for just a little longer, let us linger in the past, while we take a close look at the people, the teams, and the games that made the stadium the memorable place that it was. Let us record the comments of well over 100 people who have graciously shared their views and experiences. And let us explore the special parts of the stadium that used to be the centerpiece of Philadelphia sports.

This, then, is the story of that stadium. Veterans Stadium. The Vet. May it rest in peace.



THE LONG TRIP TO COMPLETION

*It took nearly 20 years
to get a new stadium*

When Veterans Stadium opened in 1971, it was the first major outdoor sports facility built in Philadelphia in 45 years. Obviously, such a place was long overdue.

There hadn't been a large stadium built in Philadelphia since the city-owned Sesquicentennial Stadium—later to be renamed Municipal, then Philadelphia, and finally John F. Kennedy Stadium—opened in 1926. Before that, Franklin Field, first constructed in 1895, had been rebuilt in 1903 and

Above: An architectural rendering of Veterans Stadium.

again in 1922. Shibe Park, which later became Connie Mack Stadium, housed its first game in 1909.

Baker Bowl, which was originally called Philadelphia Base Ball Park and Huntingdon Park, first opened in 1887, was partially rebuilt in 1894, and lasted as a major outdoor stadium until 1938. Many other outdoor facilities, most notably Recreation Park, Jefferson Park, Columbia Park, and Penmar Park, had briefly dotted the Philadelphia landscape over the years. But they were all long gone, and the stadiums that did remain had outlived their usefulness.

By the 1960s, the Phillies were stuck at Connie Mack Stadium, which had become not only obsolete but was surrounded by an increasingly undesirable neighborhood. Attendance had declined drastically. The Eagles played at Franklin Field, which, despite huge crowds, also had serious flaws, not the least of which was its antiquated interior, its minimal parking, and the absence of offices for the team. And JFK Stadium, home of the Army-Navy game and assorted other sporting events, had been reduced to being an ancient relic that was virtually dysfunctional as a sports venue.

Clearly, Philadelphia needed a new, first-class outdoor stadium, preferably one that could house the Phillies, the Eagles, the Army-Navy game, and the many other sporting and nonsporting events that would keep it in service throughout much of the year. The time had come to take action.

The idea of building a new stadium in Philadelphia did not arrive suddenly. In the early 1950s, when both the Phillies and Eagles were playing with an ample degree of discontent at Connie Mack Stadium, the vision of a new stadium had crossed the minds of owners of both teams as well as some of the city's political leaders.

Both Phillies president Bob Carpenter and Eagles president Frank McNamee went before the City Planning Commission and pleaded for a new stadium, urging that it be built as soon as possible. If you build it, they will come, Carpenter and McNamee insisted in a far-advanced precursor of a movie that would appear in the future called *Field of Dreams*.

In 1954, Fairmount Park commissioner and millionaire builder John B. Kelly Sr. proposed a new \$10-million stadium at 33rd and Oxford Streets, just a few blocks from the site of Columbia Park, first home of the Philadelphia Athletics. But despite the support of Mayor Joseph Clark, Carpenter, and others, the idea was vetoed by the City Planning Commission. Two years later, new Philadelphia mayor Richardson Dilworth, a former attorney for Connie Mack and a man keenly interested in having a new ballpark built, appointed a stadium commission chaired by Kelly. With an appropriation of \$35,000, it was asked to study and recommend a site for a new stadium. The commission came up with a handful of possible sites, none of them conclusive.

Two additional study commissions were appointed in the ensuing years. Again, no site was selected, although a leading candidate emerged. It

was a site located at 30th and Arch Streets, where the plan would be to build a stadium on stilts that would hover over the tracks of and be built in concert with the Pennsylvania Railroad, with a big contribution from federal urban renewal funds. The idea received little support. Especially strong opposition came from the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, which, led by Executive Vice President W. Thatcher Longstreth, argued that a stadium at that location would cause excessive noise and congestion and would attract “unsavory characters.”

By 1958, the Eagles had soured sufficiently on Connie Mack Stadium and they bolted to Franklin Field. Soon after, a plan was floated to spruce up Connie Mack Stadium by building an \$8 million, multilevel parking garage next door. That deal fell through, as did a plan to build a 45,000-seat stadium near the city-owned Torresdale water filtration plant along the Delaware River in northeast Philadelphia. “If we don’t get a stadium soon,” Dilworth said, “we’ll lose our major league sports and people will think Philadelphia is a creepy city.”

By the early 1960s, more than 20 other sites, including ones at 41st Street and Parkside Avenue, Eighth and Race Streets, 11th and Vine Streets, 30th and Walnut Streets, and one on Roosevelt Boulevard, had been proposed. The most appealing site was located at the corner of Broad Street and Pattison Avenue in South Philadelphia. The Chamber of Commerce endorsed a study conducted by a blue-ribbon committee headed by John Wanamaker chairman Richard Bond, that concluded that the site was the best of five possible locations. Although he originally supported the 30th and Arch Streets site, so did Mayor James H. J. Tate, the former City Council president who had replaced Dilworth after he had resigned to run for governor of Pennsylvania.

With calculations that the new stadium would cost \$22.7 million, Tate recommended to City Council that it approve a bond issue in that amount and place it before the voters of Philadelphia on the November 6, 1962, ballot. “At that point,” Tate said many years later, “I ran into two problems: politics and community opposition, which was also heavily tinged with politics.”

Residents of the area near the Broad and Pattison site were vehemently opposed to a stadium in their neighborhood. And they let their political leaders know it in no uncertain terms. City Council members, Democrats and Republicans alike, bickered with the mayor and each other and rejected the loan question. It never went before the voters.

His proposal having been defeated, Tate tried to renew interest in the site at 30th and Arch. Again, heavy opposition materialized. The most outspoken opponent was a powerful local businessman and civic leader named Harry Batten, who was co-chairman of the highly influential Greater Philadelphia Movement. Batten, who had conceived the plan for the nearby University City Science Center, felt that a stadium would be an undesirable neighbor. He not only personally opposed the idea, he also convinced local civic groups to disapprove the plan as well.

Once more, the proposal to build a stadium on stilts was rejected. Shortly afterward, Pennsylvania Railroad announced that it was withdrawing its participation in the project. Once and for all, the plan was dead.

Meanwhile, the frustration mounted. One especially frustrated person was Carpenter. He hired Alexander Ewing & Associates, a local architectural firm, to search for a suitable site for a baseball park and to produce a design for it.

Alexander Ewing was a major figure in that effort. “Bob Carpenter was anxious to build his own ballpark, and when he couldn’t persuade the mayor to go along with that, he hired us,” Ewing recalled. “We spent several years working with the Phillies.”

In 1964, with no action on the part of the city in sight, Carpenter stunned local leaders by purchasing nearly 100 acres of land in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and threatening to build his own ballpark and move the Phillies there.

“It was really just a ploy to put pressure on the city to get its act together and build a new stadium,” remembered Ruly Carpenter, who later succeeded his father as president of the Phillies. “I don’t think he would’ve moved to New Jersey.”

Nevertheless, Bob Carpenter was determined to push ahead. He asked Ewing to design a new ballpark. Ewing plunged heavily into the assignment.

“We looked at sites all over the country,” Ewing said. “We looked at the Astrodome, we went to Candlestick Park, Chavez Ravine, Shea Stadium. In Los Angeles, we met with Walter O’Malley, owner of the Dodgers, and he strongly advised the Phillies to build their own park. After we came back, we developed a design that could best be described as Connie Mack Stadium without the columns.”

Ewing visited a number of City Council members, but he found that there was little interest in a baseball park. “They and the mayor wanted a multi-purpose stadium,” he said.

The Carpenters then threw their support behind the site at Broad and Pattison. A survey done by the team showed that a large number of its fans came from New Jersey, Delaware, and Delaware County. “It was accessible to most people, and it had plenty of good parking,” Ruly Carpenter said. “It was a very good location for us.”

Suddenly, without notice, City Council president Paul D’Ortona jumped into the fray. He said that he, too, favored the South Philadelphia location. Other Democrats dropped their opposition to the plan, as did Republican leaders. And civic leaders, such as Batten and Longstreth, plus the City Planning Commission also endorsed the site.

One body that did not endorse it, however, was a group with the wordy name of the Combined Citizens Committee Opposing the Proposed Stadium Site in South Philadelphia (CCCOPSSP). It was an extension of the civic group that had fought against a ballpark in its neighborhood two years earlier, but it had vastly increased in numbers.



South Philadelphia residents protested the proposed new stadium.

While the CCCOPSSSP mounted its campaign, City Council approved the South Philadelphia location and voted to place a bond issue—now increased to \$25 million—on the November 3, 1964, ballot. Both the Phillies and Eagles were thrilled. “Council did the right thing, and we will be very happy to play in the new stadium,” said Eagles owner Jerry Wolman.

The citizens group filed suit to block the question from being placed on the ballot, but it was dismissed by Common Pleas Court Judge Edmund B. Spaeth Jr. The following day, Philadelphia voters approved the loan by a count of 233,247 to 192,424. “We confidently look forward to the stadium opening in 1967,” Tate said gleefully.

The stadium, with parking for 12,000 cars, would be built on a 67-acre tract that extended from the northeast corner of Broad Street and Pattison Avenue to 10th Street one way and Packer Avenue the other way. Thirty-eight acres were already owned by the city, which had bought the land in 1957. Another 19 acres on the corner of Broad and Pattison held a drive-in movie theater. The Delaware River Port Authority owned 3.2 acres. The rest of the site consisted of vacant lots that were owned privately by a

number of individuals. A man with a pet goat lived in a shack on part of the property.

The city got the ball rolling by awarding contracts to design the stadium to two local architectural companies, Stonorov & Haws and George M. Ewing Company. But major problems soon began to appear.

Lot owners wanted considerably more for their properties than the city, which would condemn them, was willing to pay. A new zoning variance that would allow for the existence of the stadium was met with strong opposition from the neighbors. And fees paid to the architects and engineers and for studies were coming in higher than expected (it cost \$73,000 to study the feasibility of putting a dome on the stadium).

The city was also courting the American Football League (AFL) with the hope of bringing a new team to Philadelphia and housing it at the new stadium. AFL expansion committee chairman Lamar Hunt said it was a done deal if the city assured the new team that it would play in the new stadium. “The AFL has definitely decided they want to come into Philadelphia,” Hunt told the media.

That, of course, did not sit well with the Eagles. Wolman, who in 1961 had purchased Connie Mack Stadium from the Phillies, ostensibly as an investment, claimed that his team had been granted an exclusive right to play in the new stadium after it was built. He said that if the city failed to live up to that commitment, he would file suit against the city and would play either at Franklin Field or build a new stadium himself. “As long as I own the Eagles, they will not leave Philadelphia unless I’m forced to,” Wolman said.

Eventually, a showdown was averted when a blue-ribbon city committee worked out a compromise with the Eagles. Among a variety of terms, the team was given exclusive rights to the stadium for 10 years with renewable clauses for two more 10-year terms. A minimum rent of \$150,000 or 10 percent of the gross receipts—whichever was higher—would be paid.

The Phillies, meanwhile, received a 30-year contract that guaranteed the city a minimum rental payment of \$160,000 per year. The team would pay an extra 10 percent if its revenue exceeded \$1.6 million. Like its deal with the Eagles, the city also got the parking revenue, 50 percent of the concessions, an amusement tax, and percentages of the restaurant, advertising, and seat prices.

On December 3, 1965, the architects unveiled preliminary plans for the stadium at a gala ceremony in the mayor’s reception room. Several hundred civic leaders and city officials attended. Not a Phillies or an Eagles representative was in sight, both teams having had practically no participation in the design and sharing a strong distaste for the one that existed.

The plan called for a stadium that would seat 60,750 for baseball and 72,579 for football. But Carpenter said the design favored football, and he wanted just 50,000 seats. Wolman wanted at least 65,000 seats while claiming dissatisfaction on a variety of other counts.

To break the deadlock, still another new commission was appointed to find what was being called an “executive architect” who would redesign and oversee the entire operation. Although he had no previous experience in building stadiums, internationally prominent architect Hugh Stubbins of Cambridge, Massachusetts, got the job for an initial fee of \$235,000.

This time, the Phillies and Eagles had more input in the design, while the city had less. And not only were relations between all parties more compatible, but the ultimate design was more satisfactory to both teams.

“Everyone had a significant input in the design,” said Ewing, who had been retained by the Phillies as a special consultant. “Upwards of 100 people were involved. The whole process went rather smoothly.”

Nearly 1,000 drawings were used before a final design was selected. Ultimately, chief architect Ronald A. Knabb Jr. came up with a design in which the stadium was in the shape of an octorad, “octo” being Latin for the number eight and “rad” a shortened version of the word radius. Although it appeared to be circular, the stadium would actually have eight sides.

Having selected a design, the next step was to launch the actual building process, which was expected to take 22 months to reach completion, with the stadium opening in the spring of 1967. Bids to excavate and build the foundation were solicited. After a public hearing before the municipal development and zoning committee, City Council passed a new ordinance that would change the zoning of the Broad and Pattison area from residential-commercial to a “sports stadium district.” And ultimately, the land was fully acquired at a final price of \$4.65 million.

Tests at the site, originally begun in late 1964 and performed by the structural engineering company of McCormick, Taylor & Associates, were resumed to determine the best way to build the foundation. Core borings to establish the composition of the land into which columns would be sunk were made by drilling in some locations on the site down to about 110 feet.

“We drove pipes into the ground,” recalled Jack Meyer, an engineer working on the job for McCormick, Taylor. “After going through weeds and top soil, the pipes went through old tires, mattresses, and other junk because the site had been a dump. The next level was clay. We went through several different kinds of clay, some which were mixed with rocks and small boulders. Finally, we got down to white sand. It was the whitest sand I’ve ever seen and as fine as flour.” Meyer speculated that the sand remained from a period millions of years ago when it may have been the beach for the ocean that covered much of New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

As the tests progressed, skirmishes continued to erupt. The \$25 million cost of the stadium came under repeated criticism. City Controller Alexander Hemphill accused Tate of being “deceitful” for not revealing to the public what he claimed would be a much higher cost to complete the stadium. By September 1966, the city had already spent nearly \$5 million without one shovel having been stuck in the ground.

The Phillies wanted seats that would slant toward the baseball diamond; the Eagles wanted no slant in the stands. The debate over whether or not to build a domed stadium continued. A new developer entered the picture with a quickly rejected plan to build a stadium as part of a \$100 million riverfront complex near the Ben Franklin Bridge. And it was revealed that architectural fees could reach \$2.5 million, including \$595,000 to Stubbins, even if the stadium was not built.

Worst of all, Stubbins said that the cost of building the stadium had now risen to \$40 million, or \$61 million if it had a dome. That news prompted *Evening Bulletin* columnist Hugh Brown to write that the “long-drawn out stadium drama had, in the scheme of civic progress, taken up too much of the stage already,” and to question why a far lesser amount couldn’t be spent to modernize Connie Mack Stadium and Franklin Field.

With all the hassle, the Eagles were, indeed, interested in remaining at Franklin Field, according to Pete Retzlaff, the team’s one-time all-pro tight end who had become its general manager. “We would’ve been very happy to stay there,” Retzlaff said. “Our relationship with Penn was very good, and there was not a better stadium around from which to view a game.”

And if the Eagles couldn’t stay there, Retzlaff said he proposed having the city renovate JFK Stadium, turning it into a true football stadium while employing a new ballpark strictly for baseball. “But the city said no way it would build a single-occupancy stadium,” Retzlaff recalled.

With the projected increased cost in the Broad and Pattison stadium, Tate had no choice but to go back to the voters of Philadelphia and to ask for a new bond issue. After some political maneuvering behind the scenes—which included D’Ortona persuading Stubbins to reduce his estimated cost to \$38 million—a \$13 million issue was placed on the ballot in the May 16, 1967, spring primary. With a voter turnout of only about 40 percent, the loan was barely approved, 139,733 to 135,022.

Finally, on October 2, 1967—some six months after the stadium was originally supposed to open—a groundbreaking ceremony took place at Broad and Pattison. With Tate, D’Ortona, Carpenter, Ed Snyder representing the Eagles, Bond, and others wielding shovels, the stadium that was first considered 14 years earlier was at long last on its way.

“Today,” said Tate, “we, the city officials, are demonstrating that we are prudently spending the \$38 million which has been allocated by the voters of Philadelphia to afford them the prestige of having the greatest sports stadium in the nation.”

Ironically, right across Pattison Avenue stood the new, privately owned indoor arena called The Spectrum that was built to house the NBA 76ers and the NHL Flyers. Construction on the 14,700-seat arena had started in early 1966. The Flyers played the first regular-season game there October 19, 1967.

It took until mid 1968 before bids that had gone out much earlier for various jobs on the new stadium were finally unsealed. By then, the city had



Dignitaries wielded shovels at the groundbreaking ceremony on October 2, 1967. The diggers included (from left) city council president Paul D'Ortona, mayor James Tate, city managing director Fred Carletto, Ed Snyder of the Eagles, Phillies president Bob Carpenter, and businessman Richard Bond.

spent \$252,000 for site excavation and \$2.3 million for piling and foundation work, which, along with the money paid for land acquisition, reduced the cost that could be paid for the actual stadium to \$28.3 million.

McCloskey & Company was the low bidder for general construction at \$19,390,000. Winning bids for other jobs included \$1,873,000 for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, \$1,403,799 for seating, and \$217,994 for escalators and elevators.

As construction got underway, a new controversy surfaced. What would the stadium be called? Naming the new facility became perhaps the most acrimonious battle of all the stadium's fights.

Nearly everybody had an idea. Independence Stadium, Philadium, William Penn Stadium, Eisenhower Stadium, and Apollo Stadium were among the most popular suggestions. So was Philadelphia Stadium, a name endorsed by some major local businesses. Anti-war activists proposed names such as Peace Park, Love Park, and Dream Park. And in a poll conducted by the *Evening Bulletin*, which attracted some 500 suggestions from 1,650

readers, all of the above names were supported, as were The Pill, Boo-Bird Park, Billy's Penn, Philly's Folly, Quaker Bowl, Raspberry Park, Keystone Stadium, Ye Old Park, Pretzel Stadium, Shocker Field, Bell-Mack Park, and The Playpenn.

The people making the loudest noise about a name were war veterans, especially those affiliated with the American Legion. They wanted the park to be called War Veterans Memorial Stadium as a tribute to the millions of Americans who had served in the military during wars. Except for their proponents, that name was about as popular as the idea of a ballpark beneath the Delaware River.

Naturally, anti-war activists, then embroiled in the social polarization produced by the war in Vietnam, opposed the name. Business leaders did, too, as did most Republican members of City Council.

Republican councilman Longstreth proclaimed: "If we end up with a Veterans Stadium, we will be the laughingstock of the United States."

"It (the name) will do nothing to improve the image of the city," said Councilman John B. Kelly Jr., a Democrat who called it "dull, sedate, and aged. Too many people already think of Philadelphia as a cemetery with lights. The people who will pay for the stadium over the next 30 years don't want that name. It's an unnecessary flashpoint in volatile times."

Twice in 1969, City Council members introduced bills to name the stadium. One bill proposed the name War Veterans Memorial Stadium. City Council Republicans endorsed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower Stadium. Both times, the names were referred to committee.

For both teams, it didn't matter what the stadium was called, as long as they could soon play in it. "We don't really care what they call it," said Phillies treasurer George Harrison. "My mind's a blank," added Eagles new owner Leonard Tose. "I haven't been consulted and I haven't thought about it."

Most Democrats on City Council, reacting to heavy pressure put on them by representatives of some 400,000 local war veterans, supported the former name. Finally, after much debate, Council president D'Ortona, under heavy pressure from veterans' groups and seeing an opportunity to make some political hay, proposed a compromise name: Philadelphia Veterans Stadium. Despite accusations that D'Ortona was acting tyrannically, the issue was put to a vote on March 12, 1970.

More than 500 people packed into Council chambers, protesters from both sides, some wearing caps of veterans organizations, others carrying signs with slogans such as "Vets Need Beds in Hospitals, Not Seats in a Stadium."

Democratic councilman George X. Schwartz said he couldn't understand why there were so many objections to the word "veteran." "Why is it so terrible to be patriotic today?" he asked. Councilman David Silver, also a Democrat, called the turnout a "fiasco." Even Republican city controller Tom Gola had his say, making the then-audacious suggestion that the city sell



City Council chambers were packed with veterans groups lobbying for a stadium name that would pay tribute to their members.

the naming rights to the stadium. Claiming that such a tactic might produce revenue of up to \$30 million, Gola was virtually laughed off the floor.

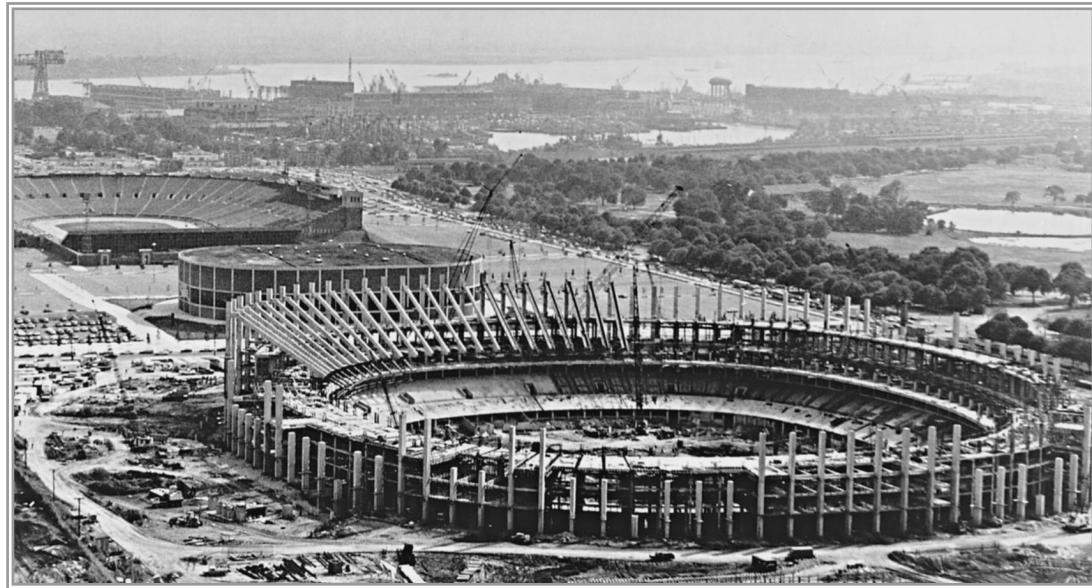
When the issue was put to a vote, D'Ortona's proposal carried, 11 to 5. Philadelphia Veterans Stadium was the name of the new facility in South Philadelphia.

But the name that had no stadium was still a long way from having a place to go. And by the time it got a name, the stadium had already been covered with controversy, and more of it was on the way.

After a special investigation, both McCloskey & Company and McCormick, Taylor as well as two individuals had been indicted in 1969 by an October grand jury on charges of false pretense and conspiracy in connection with construction of the new stadium. District Attorney Arlen Specter, using just one witness, based his case on charges that steel that was lighter than specified and other cheaper materials were used in the roof and flooring. The charges were dismissed later by the State Superior Court.

There were other problems. Charged and convicted of trying to solicit a \$10,000 bribe from the company that was supplying seats, the city's stadium coordinator Harry Blatstein resigned his \$20,000 per year job after serving for two years. Heavy rains caused some 10 feet of water to cover the field before it could be drained. A major snowstorm delayed work for two weeks. Several fires occurred.

To make matters worse, there were two labor strikes, one lasting six weeks. Theft and vandalism were rampant. Graffiti was scrawled throughout the stadium and had to be removed. Worker's tools and equipment and fixtures such as copper tubing were often stolen. So critical was the problem



With the Navy Yard, JFK Stadium, and the Spectrum looming in the background, Veterans Stadium began to take shape.

that fences had to be erected around the site and junk cars used to block gates in an attempt to tighten security.

Financial problems also continued to plague the stadium. It was learned that the city would have to pay at least \$500,000 per year to maintain the stadium. A special committee appointed by Tate revealed that architectural fees had again risen. And in several cases, unexpected modifications had to be made. These included removing and rebuilding concrete steps, changing the location of six misplaced fire hydrants, lowering manholes to avoid conflict with drainage lines, and moving construction trailers and temporary offices to a new location.

At least, there was no repeat of the gaff in San Diego. There, during the construction of Jack Murphy Stadium, a builder had been told that there were nine men on a baseball team, and hence had installed nine lockers in the clubhouse.

Of course, all of the alterations at the Philadelphia stadium drove the cost of construction up higher. From \$38 million, the estimate went to \$43 million. Then it rocketed to \$48 million. "Nothing surprises me anymore," said Gola as he claimed that with interest and the continued escalation in costs, the stadium could wind up costing more than \$100 million.

Also included in the costs was the \$700,000 to reconstruct Broad Street to allow for improved traffic flow—\$600,000 being contributed by the State Highway Department and \$100,000 by the city. An estimated \$1.5 million also was needed to erect a 50-foot-high message tower at 10th and Packer. Added to that was the \$600,000 the Phillies would shell out to build 28 luxury boxes that would be rented for \$12,000 to \$16,000 annually.

One item that would cost zero was the pedestrian walk that the city planned to build over Pattison Avenue for fans who parked their cars in the Spectrum and JFK Stadium lots. That's because the idea was scrapped.

With one delay after another, city officials, still fighting over costs, were now saying that the stadium that was called "The Big Doughnut" by *Evening Bulletin* columnist Sandy Grady wouldn't open until 1970. "The Phillies are counting on playing in the new stadium on May 5," Ruly Carpenter said resolutely. Meanwhile, the Eagles made plans for a 1970 pre-season game at the stadium.

By 1970, all but one (Olympic Stadium in Montreal) of the members of the nation's "Big Doughnut" family were open for business. They were of similar design and shape—circular, concrete, multi-purpose structures that were the trend in that era. The Astrodome in Houston had come to life in 1965. Busch Stadium in St. Louis and Fulton County Stadium in Atlanta had held their first games in 1966. Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium and Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium opened their gates in 1970.



Phillies general manager John Quinn (left) and future team president Ruly Carpenter inspected progress in the construction of the Vet.

But the Vet, as it was now being called, was still a work in progress. And as costs continued to escalate, the city was forced to take out a \$4.7 million loan. At about the same time, the state legislature voted to allow beer and liquor to be sold in the stadium restaurant, the Senate approving the measure unanimously and the House endorsing the bill by a 108-80 vote.

The Phillies, who originally had planned a 1969 special farewell at their last game at Connie Mack Stadium, were now resigned to the idea of playing at the old ballpark again in 1970. The Eagles scheduled one more season at Franklin Field. And Gola, ever the watchdog, withheld payment for an assortment of invoices that he said overcharged the city.

More than 800 workers labored tirelessly to complete construction of the stadium. They toiled through the winter and into the early spring of 1971, using more than 50 pieces of equipment that ranged from bulldozers, front-end loaders, and cherry-pickers to a 250 foot high, 175-ton crane. At long last, the job was completed in time for the Phillies' 1971 season opener. The final cost of the job was \$52 million.

It had been an insufferable, anguishing, incredible, nearly two-decade journey packed with virtually every imaginable problem. But Philadelphia finally had its new stadium.

It would become the single most significant facility in Philadelphia's long sports history.