

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

## EDITORIAL

### New arena site makes sense, saves money

The University went forward this past weekend with what some may consider the last piece of this campus's intercollegiate arms race. Having spent close to \$100 million on Autzen Stadium renovations in 2002, an additional \$100 million — and that's a rough estimate — for a new athletic arena shouldn't come as much surprise.

What may have come as a shock, however, was the location where the University chose to locate the facility that will, in 2006, replace McArthur Court. After starting with a list of about 20, and then whittling it down to a more condensed assortment of seven locations, University officials announced Saturday that Howe Field would house the new arena.

A few weeks prior to the announcement, word began circulating that Howe Field had become the likely choice. At the time, no one really knew if the rumors were true. On Tuesday, the Editorial Board had the chance to sit down with University Vice President for Administration Dan Williams, who oversees the athletic department. We now know a little more, and here's what he had to say:

After seven serious locations were selected to house the new arena, one quickly rose to the top in the eyes of many University officials. Williams' Bakery, with its close proximity to campus and Franklin Boulevard, emerged as the top choice.

The arena would be situated there, were it not for a \$20 million selling price the bakery requested. As Williams said, the University was looking to buy a piece of land; Williams' Bakery was looking to sell a business.

With the red tape associated with the buyout, Williams said, the endeavor became beyond reasonable. The bakery eventually backed out of negotiations.

After the bakery location, Williams said, University personnel began looking at the courthouse site and the two University-owned properties, Autzen Stadium and Howe Field.

City officials were helpful during the process, Williams said, but they couldn't make assurances that things would work out at the courthouse site. On top of that, buying land near Eighth Avenue could cost between \$15 million and \$20 million.

When comparing the two University properties, Howe Field seemed to be just as favorable as Autzen Stadium. But with the Howe Field site, the University could build much-needed parking and keep the facility in the heart of campus.

And thus, Howe Field was chosen.

Beyond that, the Editorial Board learned a handful of other tidbits that serve as an interesting subplot to the story.

When the athletic department announced that it had donor support for a new arena, few people — at least in this office — questioned whether it would be built. Turns out, University President Dave Frohnmayer only gave the go-ahead for the arena after approving nine or 10 individuals to donate toward the project who would also donate money for academics. The University, in the midst of a \$600 million campaign — money of which went toward the Autzen renovation and will go to the new arena — didn't want donors only committing funds to athletics.

While a final cost for the project has yet to be determined, Williams gave assurances that the relocation costs of Howe Field, the nearby tennis courts and the outdoor recreation facilities will be included in the total. Assurances, he stressed, are not promises, however.

All in all, Williams made a good pitch as to why Howe Field should be the home of the new arena. The relocation costs should be less than a quarter of those to purchase other land, more parking will be added on campus, the new softball field could be closer to other athletic facilities at Autzen Stadium and the arena will be centralized.

The only downside, it seems, will be the noise and road closures during construction, along with potential traffic congestion in the South University neighborhood the arena may attract.

We, like University officials, wanted to see the new arena go at the Williams' Bakery site. But considering that could have cost about \$15 million extra — more than 10 percent of the total project — we agree that it wasn't feasible.

On the other hand, considering more than \$100 million has been "secured" for the arena from just a handful of sources, what would have been another couple of million from each party?

Well, that's just talk now. So, we applaud University administrators' decisions. They made the right choice, provided the new facility isn't named Swoosh Arena.



Eric Layton Illustrator

## CALLING MR. LIPPMAN

The great journalist and thinker Walter Lippman put forth a new and innovative concept in news reporting 80 years ago, and our world may never be the same. In the view of this American genius, the common folk were too 'dern stupid' to understand or to be involved in the complex issues of their world. Because he believed participatory democracy was no longer possible, Lippman proposed a completely objective press staffed by professionals whose job was not to engage the public, but simply to inform them. To do this, reporters from then on were expected to ignore all personal beliefs and professional pressures in order to record and relate the truth exactly as it occurred in the real world.

Today, 70 percent of the population believes that Saddam Hussein was directly linked to the Sept. 11 attacks.

Whether you believe the polls or not, journalism is in a more serious crisis now than it ever was in Lippman's time.

The halcyon days of gritty, hard-nosed journalists diligently protecting the public from political wrongdoing are dead and gone. Instead of serving as a "Fourth Estate" in our system of government, journalism has become the fourth echo of the insipid tripe repeatedly blathered by the same questionable sources. Journalists feed from their official sources' hands, flutter back to their little nests and parrot the same rubbish right back to the people. Then they ask why everyone believes the same silly untruths.

Today's journalism is a lot of hugging, kissing, schmoozing, coattail-riding and repeating of official reports as if they are handed down from the heavens by God himself. The Project for Excellence in

Journalism recently found that the use of stories from wire services has doubled in the past five years.

On top of that, a study by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting of seven popular national news programs found that "viewers were more than six times as likely to see a pro-war source as (they were) one who was anti-war; with U.S. guests alone, the ratio increases to 25-to-1." A stunning 68 percent of American informational sources were military officials, and only 3 percent of the U.S. sources opposed the war while 25 percent of the general public dissented.



Joe Bechard

Cultural obstetrician

In a 2002 study, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting found the average American interview source for ABC, CBS and NBC evening news programs to be 92 percent white, 85 percent male and 75 percent Republican, while independents represented a meager 1 percent of the total sources used.

But the situation gets uglier. In the words of investigative journalist Greg Palast, investigative reports "are risky, they upset the wisdom of the established order and they are very expensive to produce."

As journalism becomes increasingly a product not of public service but of profit motivation, investigative reports become less practical. The fear of lawsuits, losing sources and upsetting sponsors subconsciously, or even consciously, affect the way a story is covered. As the Project for Excellence in Journalism reports, 54 percent of news directors have been pressured to do stories about their sponsors.

The PEJ also recently claimed that investigative reporting decreased 60 percent in local television markets during the last six years. The study showed that hard news stories fell 33 percent in the last twenty years, while lifestyle and entertainment stories increased nearly twofold.

The evolving definition of "news" isn't the only thing threatening the very notions of democracy, however. The profession itself is being redefined. The more journalists become television stars, the less likely they are to bite the hands that feed them. With every appearance, the star shines a little brighter and can make a little more money. In a survey of Washington-based journalists, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting found that 31 percent of them earn \$150,000 or more.

Journalists don't become stars by challenging those they work with or by upsetting the status quo, but if you truly believe in democracy, this is exactly what you should want journalists to do.

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