

Name that park: The attachment-of-the-year

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [March 8, 2003](#) issue

Comiskey Park in Chicago is being renamed U.S. Cellular Field. Announcement of this change vied for newspaper space with news of the Shuttle Challenger disaster. In other words, it was treated as an event of cosmic importance. A few days later the city's sports and gossip columnists reported that the citizenry had treated this renaming as no big deal. They were not nearly as aroused as they were expected to be. They yawned.

Longtime readers know that I am not competent to comment on baseball with reference to anything that occurred after my boyhood fascination with the sport in the 1930s. The Marty family and friends did go to a Wrigley Field game 35-plus years ago and saw the Astros defeat the Cubs. A friend and I drove through the night in the late 1940s to see Satchel Paige or Larry Doby debut at Comiskey Park, and I know we were there the week the Sox won the pennant in 1959.

That year I was pastor of a church a-building, and in its cornerstone we placed a newspaper announcing the pennant. Someone noted that there'd been no pennant for the club since the Black Sox year, 1919, and wondered: what if another 40 years went by without one? Forty-four have. And I've not been back to Comiskey, now U.S. Cellular, in all that time. So my choice to keep referring to and identifying with the name Comiskey may impress few.

The *Chicago Tribune* editorialized that the sellouts that produced CMGI Stadium, PSI-Net Stadium, TWA Dome, Adelphia Coliseum or Enron Field have inured people to such changes. Does it pay to get excited about one more name that probably will not last?

In the *Chicago Sun-Times* Greg Couch wondered where the outrage was, and turned to Christian End, a Missouri psychologist who specializes in fan-team relations. "With the mobility of sports in general, teams moving around, players leaving through free agency, it has become difficult for fans to form attachments."

That observation prompted some parabolic thinking. Many have noted the lack of constancy and continuity in the words on church signs. The analogue to “Comiskey” or “Mile High” would be the old words “Presbyterian” or “Episcopal” or “United Methodist” as brand names that helped people form attachments. Almost every social scientist in the field observes that today, when members, pastors and creeds are subject to mobility, the old symbols get replaced by something that conjures up the “now,” as U.S. Cellular does. The churchly change results less from the “corporatization and sellout” plaguing sports than from restless bids for newness and new markets.

So old First Presbyterian becomes something like Crossroads Hollow Worship Community and Grace United Methodist becomes Meadows Christian High Life Center. Not that the old identifications signaled perfection. Denominational names often stood for dull and sometimes contentious bodies. Yet ecumenical leaders knew it was creative to work with them, to form councils and federations rather than mergers, because identity mattered.

Less so now. Fans have found their way, sometimes in greater numbers than before, to the spiffy new stadiums that have replaced the classics. So Christians can learn to identify with “Hollow” or “Crossroads” or other names that replace “Saint Paul” or “Holy Trinity.” Baseball changes, church changes and the public response to them remind us that we are a people forgetful of the past and restless, yet full of hope that, mobile though we be, the attachment-of-the-year will attract and sustain believers.