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## Take me out to the ballparks

Monday, March 30, 2009

Last updated: Monday March 30, 2009, 8:10 AM

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### TOUR THE STADIUMS:

[Yankee Stadium](#)  
[Citi Field](#)

It's hard to imagine a worse scenario for the Mets and Yankees to be unveiling new stadiums. Their respective Opening Days, April 13 and 16, fall during a deep recession, with unemployment rising daily.



Opening new stadiums in a deep recession may seem like bad timing, but the novelty may help the Mets and Yankees keep tickets sales high.

But some experts say the situation could be much worse — such as having the recession come during the third year of a stadium's life.

### FEWER SEATS A PLUS

One reason the Mets and Yankees may sell most of their seats this season, despite the bad economy, is a reduction in seating capacity. Both teams averaged more fans per game in their old stadiums last season than would even fit into their new parks: Fans per

#### Mets

Seats | Fans per game

2008 Shea Stadium: 57,333 | 51,165

2009 Citi Field: 45,000

#### Yankees

Seats | Fans per game

2008 Yankee Stadium: 56,886 | 53,069

2009 Yankee Stadium: 52,325

### BY THE NUMBERS

The best seats in two houses — the Yankees' and Mets' new ballparks — are still available, but getting those seats will cost you.

#### YANKEES

- Front-row Legends Seats behind home plate are available for \$2,625 per game. But the team tacks on \$62.95 per ticket as a "convenience charge and order processing fees," bringing the price to \$2,687.95 per ticket. The cost drops to \$2,500 per ticket per game for a season-ticket holder. But they have to pay about \$200,000 per seat per season.
- The rest of the seats in the 4,300-seat Legends section start at \$525 per game. Other field-level sections range from \$95 to \$375.
- The cheapest seats? \$5 for "obstructed view" bleachers seats and \$14 for some "full-view" bleacher tickets.

## METS

- If you want to attend a Mets-Yankees game at Citi Field, or Opening Day, and sit in the front row behind the plate, it will cost you \$695. But the same seat for most home games against less desirable teams, such as the Florida Marlins or Washington Nationals, costs \$295.
- The same sort of variation applies to the cheapest seats in the Promenade, or upper deck. Those seats cost \$11 when the Marlins and Nationals are the opponent but \$27 if the Yankees are playing.
- The Mets, unlike the Yankees, have five tiers of pricing for each seat — Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze and Value.

Kyle Burks, who runs the [seasonticketrights.com](http://seasonticketrights.com) sports tickets marketplace, said there typically is a two-year "honeymoon period" for new stadiums and arenas.

"A lot of fans care not quite as much about price and performance; they want to see the brand-new stadium," Burks said. "But after those two years, a softness in the market starts to present itself. It's actually better for the teams to have the bad economic year be right now."

Seton Hall Professor Kurt Rotthoff, who teaches sports finance, calls it the "honeymoon effect."

"It's hard to predict anything in these current economic times — but any time new stadiums have been built, they haven't had a hard time selling seats," Rotthoff said.

Jeff Wilpon, the Mets' chief operating officer, said he is indeed "thankful" to have the \$800 million Citi Field opening next month.

"Imagine trying to sell Shea [Stadium] right now, in this economy," Wilpon said of the Mets' 45-year-old stadium that recently was demolished. "People wouldn't say, 'Gee, I want to see what's new and different [about Citi Field].' They'd say, 'I don't have to be [at Shea], so I'll wait and see what the economy does and what the team does.'"

Mets officials estimate that ticket sales are up nearly 10 percent from last year — despite higher prices for the new stadium — and that more than 2 million tickets already have been sold.

The Yankees say that they have sold the equivalent of more than 35,000 season tickets, and online ticket inquiries for both teams show very limited availability for some games.

Rotthoff said the love of the game is a powerful lure for many.

"Baseball fans want to see baseball," Rotthoff said. "They just might not be buying as many expensive tickets."

That appears to be the case with the Yankees, who have more than 4,000 premium seats priced at \$525 to \$2,625 per game.

While club officials announced last summer that all but 800 of those seats had been sold as season tickets, the Yankees recently have been advertising the availability of premium seats as well as holding a recent "open house" for fans. The club also hired powerful residential real estate brokers Prudential Douglas Elliman in January to help sell the highest-priced seats.

Both teams also have to worry about whether businesses, even those with solid bottom lines, will shy away from the pricey seats to avoid the appearance of being out of touch with the public.

"With the AIG bonus scandal, there's a negative stigma to having money right now," Rotthoff said.

Bank of America, like AIG a recipient of billions in federal bailout money, recently dropped out of a reported \$400 million sponsorship with the Yankees over a 20-year period that would not have included naming rights. The Mets' naming-rights partner, Citigroup, has been criticized for its similarly expensive deal in light of its own acceptance of bailout money.

Still, the Mets say they have sold all 49 luxury suites at prices ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000 a year — in part because they began soliciting buyers in 2007 and wrapped up the deals in October, before the worst of the economic downturn had hit.

The Yankees say only a handful of their 59 luxury suites, priced at \$600,000, are available, while the higher-end suites, costing \$650,000 to \$850,000, have been sold.

Opening Day, meanwhile, continues to be a must-see game for baseball fans.

Sean Pate, a spokesman for the StubHub ticketing resale site, said that Opening Day tickets are being sold on his site at an average price of more than \$400 for the Yankees and more than \$300 for the Mets. Tickets for the World Series champion Philadelphia Phillies' opener are selling for around \$175.

"There's always such a cachet to saying that you were at the first game," Pate said, adding that tickets for the Yankees' second game are selling for an average of only about \$70 on StubHub.

One fan paid \$5,883 per ticket for his Opening Day seats behind the dugout on the first base side, Pate said.

Mets Opening Day tickets are still available — with a plan called the "Citi Field Opener Pack," in which a fan buys tickets for the same seat as five games. Under that plan, a budget-conscious Mets follower could buy a "baseline box" seat to four "value" games against Washington or Florida in April and May for \$45 per game, then pay the "platinum" face-value price of \$105 for the same seat at the opener.

While ticket charges may be pricing some fans out of the market, both teams say they at least are trying to offer a break at the concession stand. The Yankees announced they will offer a \$6 beer, a \$3 hot dog and a \$3 soda — all significant discounts on the usual prices. The Mets are marketing a kid's meal of a hot dog, bag of chips and a soda for \$5.

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## FAST FACTS

The recession has led many professional sports teams to adjust their ticket-sales and concession-pricing decisions. Some examples:

### MLB

- The San Diego Padres are offering a "5 for \$5" promotion for all 2009 home games — for \$5 you receive a hot dog, 22-ounce soda, medium bag of popcorn, small bag of peanuts and a large cookie. The price of beer was cut by 50 cents.
- The Pittsburgh Pirates are holding "Dollar [Hot] Dog Night" for all Friday night home games.

### NBA

- The Sacramento Kings cut the price of some season tickets to \$22.50 per game from \$40.50, with an average savings of \$594 per season ticket.
- The Detroit Pistons are offering fans either a 10 percent discount on season tickets if they renew by May 1 or a complementary seat upgrade instead.

### NHL

- The Colorado Avalanche offered fans who renewed season tickets by mid-March an invitation to a "Meet the Team" party, plus opportunities to buy concert tickets before they are offered to the general public and have their names engraved on a brick in front of the arena.
- St. Louis Blues fans no longer have to pay upfront for playoff games that may not be played and then wait weeks for refunds if the games are not held.

### NFL

- For the first time in nine years, the Giants are not raising ticket prices for the 2009 season, their final campaign at Giants Stadium.
- At least two dozen other NFL teams also are freezing prices — an almost unprecedented event in the popular league.

### PGA

- U.S. Bancorp, which received more than \$6 billion in federal bailout funds, dropped its sponsorship of a PGA Tour event in Milwaukee.
- Other "bailout banks," such as Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley and Northern Trust, also extensively scaled back their sponsorship of golf events.



## Reader Comments

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