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NFL teams should fund their own stadiums

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The state-owned Georgia Dome in downtown Atlanta is less than 20 years old. Since opening in 1992, it has served primarily as home field to the NFL's Atlanta Falcons, but it also has served as the venue for numerous college football games and other sporting events. Over that time, the Dome has also hosted two Super Bowls; the most watched sporting event in the country. By all normal measures, the Dome is alive and doing quite well. But not quite good enough for the folks in the NFL front office.

During a recent visit to Atlanta, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell made it quite clear that if Atlanta ever wants to host another Super Bowl, city leaders and the state first will have to construct a brand new stadium. In other words, simply to win the privilege of hosting one particular football game several years from now, Georgia taxpayers would have to pony up hundreds of millions of dollars for a state-of-the-art sports stadium.

While it is always easy to spend other people's money – just ask any congressman – Goodell's demand on Atlanta and Georgia in these tight economic times is particularly galling. The commissioner's arrogance did not stop with his demand for a new stadium; he even told us what kind of stadium would have to be built in order to win the NFL's favor. Goodell said the new facility would either have to be open-air, or enclosed but with a retractable roof. Sounding like a true football purist, he said this design was necessary because "the game is meant to be played in the elements."

Jason Cole at Yahoo! Sports caught Goodell on his doublespeak in that statement. Cole noted that eight of 16 Super Bowls, from 2000 to the already scheduled game in 2014, will take place in *domed* stadiums; including the 2013 spectacle, scheduled to be played in the by-then 38 year old Louisiana Superdome.

Goodell's comments lend aid to Falcons owner Arthur Blank, who has been pushing for a new stadium for at least a year. According to ESPN, state officials have proposed installing a retractable roof on the existing facility in hopes of appeasing Blank and the NFL. However, this less-costly compromise has fallen on deaf ears with the NFL big wigs.

Supporters of a new stadium make the standard claim that bringing the Super Bowl back to Atlanta would create thousands of jobs and net the area hundreds of millions of dollars. These Super Bowl boosters claim that the economic benefit of the memorable Super Bowl in 2000 was \$292 million. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution's* own "PolitiFact Georgia" recently found that claim to be false; noting that the true impact was only about half that figure, at \$150 million.

History shows that the claims of economic benefit that come as teams lobby for bigger and costlier stadiums do not withstand scrutiny. This was discussed at length in a study published by the Cato Institute during a public debate on whether the District of Columbia should have financed a new major league ballpark a few years ago. The *Wall Street Journal* points out that most of the long-term employment that came with construction of the ballpark for the Washington Nationals were low-paying jobs.

Like most major-league sports franchises, the Atlanta Falcons are a profit-making machine; and team owners as a group and individually are hardly living paycheck to paycheck like many taxpayers.

Leaders of the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia have more than enough fiscal problems on their plates than to worry about appeasing the NFL or one of its clubs. They should say "no" to corporate sports welfare, even if it means temporarily disappointing some sports junkies.

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