

The challenges of being second: Archbold Stadium and its interesting place in the American college stadia lexicon

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Abstract

Scholars who research or teach in the facility and event world can readily identify Harvard Stadium, Fenway Park, Weeghman Park (later Wrigley Field), or the Yale Bowl. These unique facilities all provide significant moments in stadium development in the United States and an important understanding of the advancement of amenities and other improvements within the early modern and permanent venues including utilizing reinforced steel and concrete for construction, increasing the number of bathrooms, and adding concession stands (Seifried, 2010a; Tutka & Seifried, 2020; Demiris, 2023). As part of a larger research study analyzing the development of college football stadia and the process of innovation diffusion (Tutka, 2016), Syracuse University's Archbold Stadium is a rather interesting outlier in stadium development across the United States. Many of the studies identify Harvard Stadium and the Yale Bowl as seminal structures in college football stadium construction before exploring westward and southern expansion (Demiris, 2023; Schmidt, 2007; Smith, 2008; Watterson, 2002). However, Archbold Stadium is either disregarded or mentioned as an isolated example within early college football stadia development (Ingrassia, 2012; Schmidt, 2007; Smith, 2008; Tutka, 2016; Watterson, 2002). The goal of the current research is to provide Archbold Stadium some of its rightful place in that history while detailing why it is often disregarded by those who discuss early American college football venues.

Syracuse University is in upstate New York and possess a rich sport history to warrant comparisons to other traditional elite sport institutions within the college sport ecosystem (e.g., The Ohio State University, University of Michigan, The University of Alabama, The University of Texas, etc.; Crawford, 2018; Forde, 2022; Watterson, 2002). However, in 1907, Syracuse was not considered an elite nor a well-known national institution (Tutka, 2016; Tutka & Seifried, 2020; Watterson, 2002). Comparatively, the university did maintain a relationship with a relatively wealthy donor who was interested in the growth of the university and its athletic programs (Holdridge, 1977).

To detail the history of Archbold Stadium, the researchers incorporated Seifried's (2010b) historical methodology steps. These steps include: (a) pursuing useful documents and records from primary and secondary sources; (b) engaging in an historical criticism (i.e., validity and reliability check); (c) analyzing and interpreting evidence to establish themes; and (d) recording conclusions through an understandable narrative. By incorporating these steps, the researchers ensure the same level of rigor associated with other forms of research techniques is applied to historical methodologies.

The current research involved the researchers traveling to Syracuse University to access their archival data at their library, collecting all available historical information on the construction, renovation, and eventual replacement of Archbold Stadium. The visit yielded a variety of unique data, which was then cross referenced with newspapers and other resources to verify its validity and reliability. Archbold has three unique themes: (1) its construction period; (2) its period of renovation as Syracuse football achieved mainstream recognition in the 1950s through integration; and (3) its period of deconstruction and replacement by the Carrier Dome (now JMA Wireless Dome) in 1980. Before the Syracuse Orangemen could utilize their new facility, the team spent the 1979 season playing games at three different home venues as the Archbold Stadium site would soon be home to the Carrier Dome's construction (History, 126 Years, 2016). Much of the Archbold Stadium history and lore has been lost to time due to its place in the evolution of college stadium construction. However, the researchers were able to develop the most comprehensive narrative possible from the available archive information collected. Like Harvard Stadium, which was built four years earlier, Archbold Stadium was developed in a tight O-shape. Comparatively, both endzones at Archbold Stadium were enclosed, and the stadium was sunk into the ground using the hillsides as construction support (Syracuse University Stadium, 1907). This technique lowered the total venue construction costs for to approximately \$400,000, which was exclusively funded by John D. Archbold, a trustee and vice president of Standard Oil (Searing, 2021). In total, Mr. Archbold donated over \$4 million to the university for a wide variety of projects that reshaped Syracuse University (Hadden, 1926; Searing, 2021). Archbold Stadium seated 16,000, which is under the 30,000 seat Harvard Stadium (Syracuse University Stadium, 1907; Watterson, 2002). The stadium had some unique features due to its location and design. For example, fans could drive their horse-drawn carriages up to the edge of one part of the stadium due to the slope of the ground being level with the stadium concourse (Hadden, 1926; Syracuse University Stadium, 1907). Additionally, the stadium became the first reinforced concrete and steel facility to use significant underground sewer and drainage systems to keep the field playable and dry (Syracuse University Stadium, 1907). This exploration into Archbold Stadium helps detail the early issues with facility construction while simultaneously exploring how facility developments are spread across the college sport ecosystem. Additionally, the current research helps explain the movement of universities to permanent structures overall and why Syracuse University deviated from the established norms of the time.