

The preservation battles surrounding the demolition of Memorial Stadium were numerous and complex. Economic incentives, the competition for land approximate to the Minneapolis campus within the University, and divided public opinion all contributed to the University's decision to raze Memorial Stadium.

Memorial Stadium cost \$700,000 to build in 1924. It seated over 50,000 people in a giant horseshoe shape and covered 7 1/2 acres. The inscription over Memorial arch dedicated it to "...the men and women of Minnesota who served their country in the time of [World] War [I]". The Stadium quickly earned the nickname of "The Brickyard" (Minnesota Alumni Association, "Memorial Milestones"). In the 1930's, Cooke Hall was built across from Memorial Stadium.

Even as bleachers were being built in the open west end zone to increase seating capacity in 1954, University reports were beginning to question the stability of Memorial Stadium. In 1956, a story ran in the Minneapolis Tribune about how the University was considering tearing off the end towers to make Memorial Stadium into a complete domed oval, adding a 40 row balcony, replacing the lower 12 rows of seats, and 15 rows of seats in front of those (Flanagan, "How 'U' plans to enlarge stadium", Minneapolis Tribune, Nov. 18, 1956).

In 1958, the Minneapolis Star reported that a stadium advisory committee had recommended that the University build a new Stadium off campus (Sittard, "Advisors urge new University Stadium", Minneapolis Star, July 23, 1958). In 1963, the Board of Regents commissioned a study of Memorial Stadium, but made no further decisions regarding it. These early studies show that the University was already following a policy of doing the minimal necessary to keep Memorial Stadium operational while avoiding a commitment to keeping Memorial Stadium operational for the long term. It was estimated that Memorial Stadium could be remodeled for \$3 million in 1958 (Sittard, "Advisors urge new Stadium"), but as the years dragged on, the cost of remodeling Memorial Stadium

increased and the likelihood that Memorial Stadium would be remodeled decreased. By the 1970's, it was evident that the Stadium was approaching a state of disrepair which would require something to be done. A 1971 study by Lee Brown of Memphis based Gassner / Nathan / Brown was sponsored by the U of M's Education Facilities Laboratories. This study recommended doming the stadium for continued use as a spectator stadium, intramural center, and community Center. Brown estimated that lowering the playing field, removing the lowest level of concrete seating, building a new west end wall, constructing new seating, resurfacing the turf, updating heating, cooling, ventilation, emergency power, sound system and scoreboard, building a tunnel from Cooke Hall and elevators, fitting the entrances with air locks, and constructing the dome would come to \$6,183,650.

University reports published the dome proposal in 1973, but the Board of Regents remained neutral, waiting upon legislative reports and hoping that the Minnesota Vikings could be convinced to share the remodeling costs. In 1974, the Metropolitan Council created a sports commission "...to study the planning and development of major sports facilities in the metropolitan area." (Hall, Minnesota Daily, January 25, 1974). The commission studied the remodeling of Memorial Stadium, but it also studied building a new stadium. DFL representatives from the 57th district, which surrounded the Stadium, opposed doming and expansion on the basis that a remodeled stadium would decrease parking, attract fast food facilities, and raise housing rates in the area (57th district DFL convention, "Domed Stadium Resolution", April 27, 1974). Estimates for the cost of remodeling Memorial Stadium climbed to \$30-35 million. The Regents proposed that the Vikings would cover \$15 million of the cost through renting the stadium, \$10 million come from gifts, and \$10 million come from concessions so that the remodeling could be financed without taxes (Minneapolis Tribune, May 7, 1974). Disagreements arose in 1975 over whether alcohol would be sold in Memorial Stadium if it was shared with the Vikings (Harmon, "Stadium proposal reaches bottleneck concerning liquor issue", Minnesota Daily, Nov. 14, 1975). Inter-university briefs also questioned if the rules of collegiate athletics would allow the Gophers to share a Stadium

with the Vikings. Although the NCAA approved a dispensation of this regulation, the Vikings (and the Twins, which shared Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington with them) threatened to leave the Twin Cities if they did not receive a new stadium. By the end of 1976, the Minneapolis City Council has approved \$61.2 million for the construction of the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome (Madsen, "City Council unit approves a downtown stadium proposal", Minnesota Daily, Nov. 23, 1976).

The discussion over what to do with Memorial Stadium was forgotten until a \$63 million proposal to renovate Memorial Stadium was discussed at a joint meeting of the Minnesota Senate committees on taxes and governmental operation in 1979 (Minnesota News Service, April 20, 1979). Under the plan, the Vikings would play at Memorial Stadium and the Twins and the Kicks soccer team would play at Metropolitan stadium, but the Vikings, who hadn't held discussions with the U since 1975, refused to play in a renovated facility (Glasenapp, "U supports plan to dome Memorial Stadium, Minnesota Daily, April 13, 1979). These demands for a new stadium halted the idea of a shared on campus stadium.

From February 14-28, 1981, Koser Surveys conducted a telephone survey sponsored by University Poll, the VP for Student affairs, and the VP for Administrative Planning. They found that:

"Majorities of public and employee ticket holders, athletic fund donors, and a plurality of faculty preferred a move to the domed stadium. Majorities of student in general, student season tickets holders, and a plurality of staff advocated keeping the games in Memorial Stadium. Majorities of all groups said that a move to the new stadium would help public attendance at games and the recruitment of student athletes. Majorities or pluralities of the two student groups said that a move would harm school spirit and student attendance."

Despite the mixed opinions among other campus groups, the people with the money - athletic fund donors - supported moving to the Metrodome, and the Board of Regents followed suit in making up its mind. In March, 1981, the Board of Regents voted to sign a 30 year contract with the Metrodome that moved Gopher home football games out of Memorial Stadium. Signing this contract would amount to a death sentence for

Memorial Stadium, but for the time being, the fate of the stadium again dropped out of the Regents' discussions for a few years.

In 1983, The Amateur Sportsmen's Club published a booklet entitled "Making the Most of Memorial Stadium", which was largely based upon Brown's 1971 survey. It advocated doming, remodeling, and completely the oval of Memorial stadium to accommodate a football field (which could also be reconfigured for Basketball, softball, baseball, soccer, and concerts), players' locker rooms, coaches offices, an olympic swimming pool, dance studios, weight training rooms, storage rooms, observation galleries, classrooms, Physical Education labs, physiological hygiene labs, concession stands, student lounges, and alumni gallery, 20 volleyball courts, squash courts, pools for diving, and an expanded press box. This plan was not reported on by newspapers in the Twin Cities and there are no indications that the Regents discussed it.

In 1986, the Regents began discussing a \$85 million plan to renovate Cooke Hall, Williams Arena, Mariucci Arena, the St. Paul Gym, various recreational playing fields, and Memorial Stadium, but it was clear Memorial Stadium would receive the short end of the deal. The facade of Memorial Stadium would be preserved, but a swim center, basketball, recreational sports, and gymnastics facilities would be built inside in. Community groups pressured the University to complete the swim center in time for it to be included in a bid to bring the 1992 Summer Olympics to the Twin Cities. (Larson, "U sports facilities slated to undergo \$85 million update", Minnesota Daily, Sept. 25, 1986) In 1988, first a Regents Committee, and then the full board of regents, voted to demolish Memorial Stadium within ten years to make way for the swim center. DFL state senators Gene Merriam and Gene Waldorf threatened to hold back \$8.5 million in state funds if the fate of the stadium wasn't decided. (Guest, "Regents Committee votes to demolish Memorial Stadium", Minnesota Daily, March 11, 1988).

A Lawsuit to save the stadium was filed by the Memorial Stadium Committee in October. Judge Beryl Nord, perhaps believing only the west end of the stadium would be affected, ruled that construction of the \$20.7 million Rec. Center could go forward because it wouldn't result in "imminent demolition" of the stadium (Remwolt, "Judge

clears way for new rec center”, Minnesota Daily, October 24, 1988). The University now stood to gain \$3 million from the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission if the Swim Center was completed in time for the 1990 Summer Olympic Festival, which is when bid for the 1992 Olympics would take place.

The construction of the Rec. and Aquatic Centers made it clear the University no longer considered Memorial Stadium an asset. It is unlikely anyone was surprised when the University tore down Memorial Stadium only a few years after the Aquatic Center was completed. On July 27, 1992, the demolition of Memorial Stadium began. The destruction of Memorial Stadium largely came down to a question of convoluted economics. The stadium would have cost upwards of \$27 to preserve in useable state; it only cost \$1.3 million to tear down. Although money was found for the University to build a recreational and aquatic center in the hopes of attracting the olympics, it was deemed more attractive to build a completely new facility for \$7 - \$10 million less than the cost as remodeling Memorial Stadium to fit the same purposes. However, those numbers don't tell the whole story.

The legislature approved twice as much money for the Metrodome as remodeling Memorial Stadium would have cost. If the University and the legislature had wanted to save Memorial Stadium, they could easily have afforded to do so. In the end, the state legislature, the governmental organizations of the Twin Cities, and the University itself considered keeping the Vikings more important than keeping University History.

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