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Change of View

ATLANTA, Ga.—A couple of years ago, a visitor to the Georgia state capitol building in downtown Atlanta, if he chose to take a morning look to the south from one of the upper stories, would have had the soft November sun bouncing into his eyes off tin siding and roofs. Today, from that same spot, a visitor again is bothered by the flickering riotous, but not so much as before. Reason is, this time it's in color, blue to be precise, from sparkling new theater chairs being set into place in Atlanta's 18 million dual purpose stadium.

The new stadium, which will become the home of the Milwaukee Braves in a year, if not sooner, and one day, a pro football team, is on construction schedule. If completed by April, it will set a universal record for speed in stadium erection and, to be more practical, be worth \$700,000 extra to the owners of the seven huge cranes busying around the area yesterday.

Jan Van Duser, former Tampa sports writer now a key member of Jesse Oulinar's Constitution staff, was the volunteer guide for a tour of the staggering complex, being built where there used to be slum and/or near slum housing. The story of this stadium, yet without an ending, is one of bold courage, conviction and a handful of men of action.

Future Home of Braves

In the event you are but an occasional reader of such, the Milwaukee Braves were to shift here beginning this April but have now been told by the National League to remain in Minnesota one more summer. It isn't likely to be a financially profitable season there with fans angry at the projected move.

With tacit agreement to move to Atlanta for the 1965 season, the contract for the structure was let. Meanwhile, the St. Louis Cardinals of the National Football League came with an ace of shifting but the city and the Cards patched up their domestic squabbling with promises of a new stadium and Stormy Bidwell decided to stay indefinitely in the blues city.

Atlanta, meanwhile, holds a glimmer of hope that the Braves may yet come for the '63 season, meanwhile ready to invite any National Football League member who may become disenchanted at his present surroundings. The American Football League is ready to expand now and probably would take in Atlanta and New Orleans next fall, if the two southern cities gave it the sign. Atlanta, however, probably will hold out for the NFL, a while anyway.

The stadium is but a quarter-mile from the heart of Atlanta. A major interchange of all highways is right next to it.

Seating for Huge Crowds

It is convertible. Will seat 51,500 for baseball, 37,100 for football, all most comfortably. It is a bowl three-tiered and an excavation. That is, park, walk in from street level and you're on the second tier. You walk down to 16,455 lower grandstand and box seats. The upper grandstand seats 25,200. Offices are built into the structure. Milwaukee has them rent free in the 25-year-contract that is in the vault. Milwaukee also has the concessions, with a percentage to the stadium authority.

In a sentence, the stadium is being built because the city's mayor, Ivan Allen Jr., felt one was needed, saw the benefits of it, coupled with the pro football and/or major league baseball. He went out and got it.

This way:
Allen, a former chamber of commerce president was elected as the "businessman mayor." His first team for the maneuvering that brings the stadium and ball club, included Mills Lane, chairman of the board of the Citizens and Southern Bank, Georgia's largest; Arthur Montgomery, Atlanta Coca-Cola bottler; Opie Shelton, chamber of commerce executive director; Furman Bisher, Journal sports editor, and Atlanta architects Bill Finch and George Heery.

"All we had to do, those two years ago," said the mayor, "was find a club which might be wanting to move, then persuade them to make that move to Atlanta, where we offered them a stadium not yet designed, to be built with money we didn't yet have, on land we didn't yet own."

Mayor Author of Project

Allen was the author of a "Forward Atlanta" promotion project and the stadium was one part of this. Biggest assist, really, came when at least two big league clubs did show genuine interest.

On assurance of payment, banker Lane got two architectural firms to pool skills to design the stadium. Forty-five members of their staffs worked on drafts for which there was yet neither a contract nor building money.

Options on urban renewal land, 52 acres, were snapped up before it could be broken into small pieces. Lane was to provide almost \$700,000 in unsecured loans to finance the first steps for the stadium which as one had yet agreed to build.

Coca-Cola man Montgomery took the job as chairman of the Atlanta and Fulton County Recreation Authority, the official

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Morning After

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unit. The group set about talking to the Kansas City Athletics, Braves, anybody who'd listen.

A two-year juggling act began, trying to get a team with which to get a stadium to entice a team. Sports fans—and this was important—and those favoring a cultural center and auditorium pooled support for the passage of the bond issue that would make it possible. Previously, both proposals had been defeated in bond issues. The joint team of sports and high brows got the referendum through.

Next, the contract, for construction, and for the big league team.

With the disappointment caused when the National League chose to force the Braves to remain in Milwaukee another year, there has been some grumbling, but not much. The minor league Crackers will play in the swank surroundings this year, on grass that is already grown in hot houses, as the grand structure has a shakedown year.

The supreme test follows. A couple of years from now, will those magnificent interstate highways which brush against the stadium see Atlantans driving the 70-mile-an-hour limit to get to the ball game, or, to get on through the city to whatever it will be that will be more magnetic, then?

At least, Atlanta bids for an answer.