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**Op-Ed Columnist**

## **Pricing the Kids Out**

By **[BOB HERBERT](#)**

The [Yankees](#) took the field in gruesome weather Friday night — cold, windy, rainy — for the first game of the American League Championship Series against the clumsily named [Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim](#).

The game was played in the new [Yankee Stadium](#), which is equipped with all the upscale accoutrements that are becoming essential in professional sports — enormous video screens to give you the real-life feel of watching the game on television, luxurious restaurants, luxury boxes, outlandish prices and so forth.

You need a mortgage now to get season tickets. Someone recently told me that at the prices the Yankees were originally charging for the best seats in the house, it would have cost around \$800,000 for season tickets for a family of four. A lot of those seats stayed empty earlier in the season, so prices were dropped enough so that you only had to be rich to afford them, not superrich.

New York's other baseball team, the [Mets](#), were pathetic this year, so they've gone into hiding. But the Mets have a brand new stadium, too — [Citi Field](#), named for the bank. I can't think of anything more appropriate.

Baseball was called the national pastime not only because it's a great sport but because it was a sport that was affordable for nearly all American families. You didn't have to be Bernie Madoff to get good seats at the Stadium or the Polo Grounds or Ebbets Field, or any of the other classic old parks that have since faded — or are fading — into the ether.

Those old parks might have been a bit grimy, and they might have rattled and swayed a bit when the crowd roared, but you couldn't beat them for fun and excitement if you were there between your mom and your dad — and the hot dogs and Cokes and peanuts and beer were accompanied by the likes of Mays and Mantle and Snider, sometimes in a doubleheader.

There are an awful lot of ordinary families who would have a very tough time paying for even what passes as moderately priced seats nowadays, and even the hot dogs and sodas are increasingly unaffordable.

My [Jets](#) will be playing the [Buffalo Bills](#) on Sunday in the huge, perfectly fine football stadium that they share with [Giants](#) in the New Jersey Meadowlands. But apparently that stadium is as obsolete as the old Yankee Stadium and [Shea Stadium](#), where the Mets used to play. Because next year the Jets and Giants will go halves on yet another sparkling new stadium for the New York metropolitan area.

Some of the greatest times I had with my dad were at Shea Stadium, which is where the Jets also played back in the days when [Joe Namath](#) was their quarterback. On a cold, rainy Sunday, like the one forecast for this weekend, we'd drive out to Queens from New Jersey and shiver and cheer and laugh as Namath lit up the sky with passes that seemed to arc like a rainbow high over the heads of the defenders and then descend into the sure-fire hands of crackerjack receivers like Don Maynard and George Sauer Jr.

The prices were reasonable enough that my dad and I never gave a second thought to the cost. Even the scalpers' tickers were affordable.

The changes over the years were imperceptible enough that no one gave them much notice. There's no way to pinpoint when we became a country that could build the biggest, most garish, most electronically equipped stadiums you could imagine, but almost nothing else.

The auto industry is on its knees and we've got school buildings in sorry shape and we can't even rebuild a public hospital in New Orleans. But the Dallas Cowboys have a brand new billion-dollar-plus domed stadium that looks like something out of "Star Wars."

They actually sell tours of this stadium, and the ticket prices for the tours are more than families used to pay to go to professional sporting events.

Almost every adult I've ever spoken with who went to a baseball or football game as a child remembers the shock of entering the stadium and then suddenly coming upon the glorious expanse of emerald green grass, sparkling beneath the sun or the brilliant lights at night games.

I remember that those games seemed to go by with the speed of light. The seventh and eighth innings — or the fourth quarter in football — used to come so fast. You never wanted it to be over.

Maybe this is not the biggest issue facing the country, but I can't help feeling we're making a big mistake pricing these games out of the reach of today's boys and girls who are growing up in families of modest means.

*Gail Collins is off today.*

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