

# Stadium? Let's build on our past

**M**ayor Rendell's extraordinary ability to stare down the city's unions, eliminate municipal waste and attract a tourist industry have allowed him to rescue Philadelphia from near-bankruptcy. But as his second term as America's Mayor unfolds, he has yet to deliver one of his own stated priorities — a new ballpark.

Over the last three years, every serious discussion of the issue always seems to be de-

railed by the exorbitant expense of such a project. I have a simple solution to the problem — rebuild Connie Mack, baseball's first steel-and-concrete stadium, which once stood at 21st Street and Lehigh Avenue. Here are three good reasons:

■ **Cost-effectiveness:** Before Connie Mack was bulldozed into oblivion in 1976, some 1,500 seats from the old ballpark were removed and shipped to Duncan Park in Spartanburg, S.C. Another 1,500 were sent to War Memorial Stadium in Greensboro, N.C. Together with home plate, which was taken to the Vet, the city can retrieve enough of the original park to save on initial expenses. What's more, if the original blueprints from the William Steele & Sons Co. can be recovered, the city might also be able to negotiate the original cost of construction, which came to only \$315,248.69.

■ **Affordable ticket prices:** With the money saved on construction, the Phillies could charge the old-time admission prices: 50 cents for bleachers, \$1.25 for grandstands and \$2 for box seats. Sellout crowds wouldn't pose a problem if the ballpark is rebuilt in a residential area. Fans could crowd onto nearby rooftops, just as they did on 20th Street during the Athletics' glory years of 1929-31. Such an arrangement would serve as an economic boost to the neighborhood, too. Residents could charge 35 cents admission during the regular season and as much as \$5.50 in the event of a World Series.



WILLIAM  
KASHATUS



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■ **Attracting tourism:** To be sure, Connie Mack Stadium had its faults. But it also had a unique magic inspired by a special intimacy. Its double-decked grandstands hugged the infield. Fans felt the excitement of the game. Each game seemed to provide another story to remember. Every home run, a history of its own. It is a magic that continues to live in the memories of those fortunate enough to have passed through the turnstiles of the old stadium. A magic they want to feel again, and share with their children and grandchildren. Ultimately, it's that kind of magic that has made Camden Yards in Baltimore and Jacobs Field in Cleveland — and continues to make Wrigley in Chicago and Fenway in Boston — among the most popular as well as lucrative tourist attractions in the country. ■

William Kashatus, a Philadelphia educator, is author of "Connie Mack's '29 Triumph," to be published by McFarland this summer.