

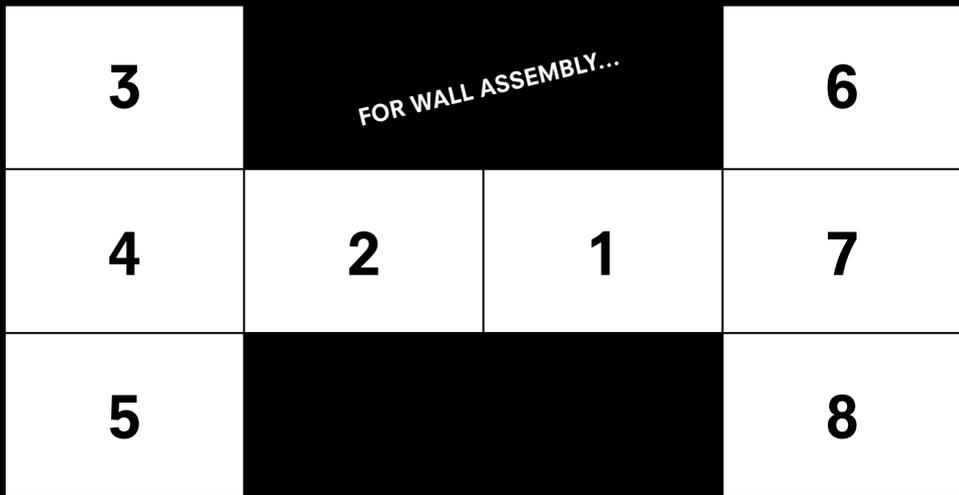


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The New City Reader is a newspaper on architecture, public space and the city, published as part of "The Last Newspaper," an exhibition running at the New Museum of Contemporary Art from October 6, 2010–January 9, 2011. Conceived by executive editors Joseph Grima and Kazys Varnelis, the newspaper's content centers on the spatial implications of epochal shifts in technology, economy and society today. The New City Reader will consist of one edition published over the course of the project, with a new section produced weekly from within the museum's gallery space, each led by a different guest editorial team of architects, theorists and research groups. These sections will be available free at the New Museum and—in emulation of a practice common in the nineteenth-century American city and still popular in China and other parts of the world today—will be posted in public on walls throughout the city for collective reading.

Next week's issue will be **LEISURE**, guest edited by Beatriz Colomina, Spyros Papapetros, Britt Eversole and Daria Ricchi of Media and Modernity, Princeton University.

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<p>2 <b>INSIDE OUTSIDE IN</b></p>	<p>5 <b>ONE, TWO, THREE VOTES, YOU'RE OUT!</b></p> <p><b>THIN AIR</b></p>	<p>7 <b>A FIELD GUIDE TO NEGOTIATION</b></p> <p><b>NOW THAT THE MAGIC'S GONE</b></p>
<p>3 <b>JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES TODAY'S BALL-PARKS SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING?</b></p>	<p>6 <b>JUDGING SPEED</b></p> <p><b>THE PRO-SPIN ZONE</b></p>	<p>8 <b>CONVERSATIONS—DHANI JONES &amp; GREG ECONOMOU</b></p> <p><b>RADICAL ACTS OF GOLFING</b></p>
<p>4 <b>THE GHOST PARKS OF NEW YORK</b></p>		

# INSIDE OUTSIDE IN

by Jeannie Kim and Hunter Tura

Game 2 of the 1977 World Series between the New York Yankees and the Los Angeles Dodgers—the game where Howard Cosell apocryphally proclaimed, “There it is ladies and gentlemen...The Bronx is burning,” during ABC Television’s broadcast—represents a turning point in the relationship between sports, media, culture and society. The top of the second inning, when ABC’s aerial coverage suddenly turned away from the action of the game itself to the burning abandoned New York City public school, is the crucial moment when the floodgates between sports and seemingly everything else came crashing down.

There has always been a relationship between sports and society, of course. An NFL game of thirty years ago was as choreographed a television spectacle then as it is today, but the difference is that sports have created such an overwhelming centripetal pull upon our culture—encompassing beer companies, fantasy leagues, apparel manufacturers, credit card companies, presidential campaigns, fusion cuisine, political activists, etc.—that today very little in a 24-hour news cycle is free of the looming presence of sports. Wayne Rooney, Michael Vick, Brett Favre, A-Rod, Derek Jeter, LeBron, Shaq, David Beckham and others have established themselves as global cultural forces in their own right, brands almost as powerful as the teams and leagues they represent.

All of this is well-documented, but while sports and culture have always had a somewhat uncomfortable or embarrassing and often one-sided relationship (see Rupert Murdoch, ascendancy of), to look at sports through the lens of contemporary creative output (art, design, architecture) suggests a new kind of hybridization that might begin to inflect both milieu. Large-scale LED displays and advertising techniques like tri-vision have shifted from stadiums to galleries; golf course design is now a legitimate form of landscape architecture practice; the Society of American Baseball Research has transformed both our appreciation of the game and the nature of political campaigns; the global domination of Populous (née HOK Sport) has brought to high-definition televisions throughout the world a familiar kitsch aesthetic that we thought we had escaped three decades ago; we were introduced to Boise State football by their creative defeat of Oklahoma in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl, but recognized the team’s trademark blue artificial turf from Matthew Barney’s “Cremaster I” (1995).

Have sports become a form of creative cultural production in their own right? How has the historically marginalized spatial legacy of sports informed our understanding of urban planning and real estate development? How have increasingly innovative offensive (and defensive) strategies transformed the way sports is perceived and subsequently broadcast and consumed? Formerly ignored—at least until poorly executed—aesthetics, innovation and good design now not only characterize the sporting experience but define it as well. In these pages, some rabid sports fans with day jobs contemplate the relationship between sports, culture and the city.

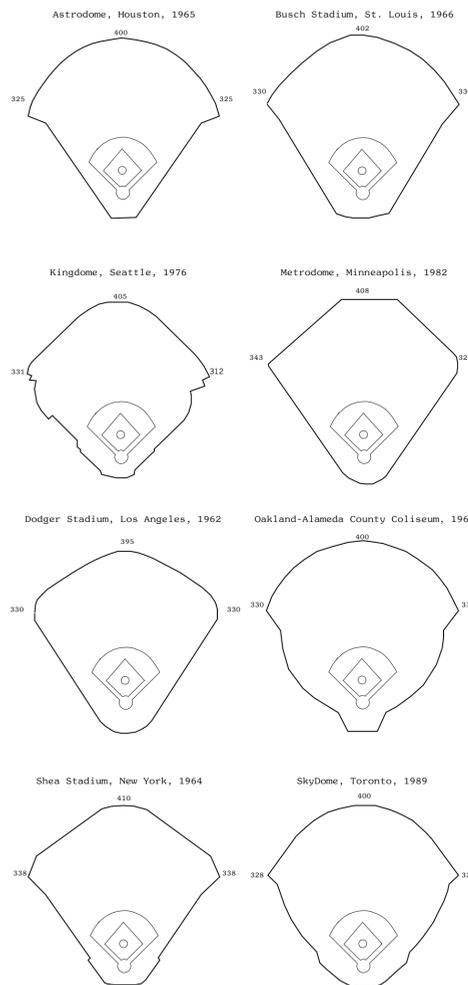
# The New Yorker A Newspaper Of Public Space New York City

# JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES TODAY'S BALLPARKS SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING?

by Michael Kubo

Baseball-watching in the 1960s must have been a fundamentally dependable experience. It was always there, a constant backdrop on the radio or on television. The era's new ballparks guaranteed a similarly comfortable environment. Largely cut from a standard architectural template, the decade's latest stadium designs, like Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum (SOM) and St. Louis's Busch Stadium (Edward Durrell Stone), eliminated the annoying irregularities of the older ballparks—often a result of cramped urban sites—replacing their contingent features with clear and expansive layouts, perfect sightlines and ample parking. These idealized new spaces—now called Stadiums or occasionally Coliseums, their monumental associations replacing the earlier pastoral language of parks and fields—were resolutely artificial, modern temples with invariably regular (usually circular or ovoid) geometries. Concrete was the chosen material, providing a functional, largely mute background; color was reserved for the rows of seating or else for functional purposes, for example in coding different sections of the park. With the ubiquity of baseball on color television after 1951 and the spread of Major League Baseball coast-to-coast, this was the heyday of baseball's popularity. The era's concrete stadiums were serene, durable monuments to the sport.

By the time the next wave of ballpark architecture began, with Oriole Park at Camden Yards in 1992, these once-modern stadiums were vilified as lifeless and dull. Derided as "cookie-cutter" projects, visitors and ballpark owners demanded ever more uniqueness for their home parks to differentiate and enliven the experience of the game. The contrast between these newer stadiums and their concrete predecessors is often described as an opposition of the singular to the generic, individuality to similarity, excitement to monotony. It was also a debate over ideal (modern) forms versus the (historical) accidents of the contingent and irregular, (now valued as signatures of the classic older parks). But isn't an argument about visual variety also an argument about color? Think of

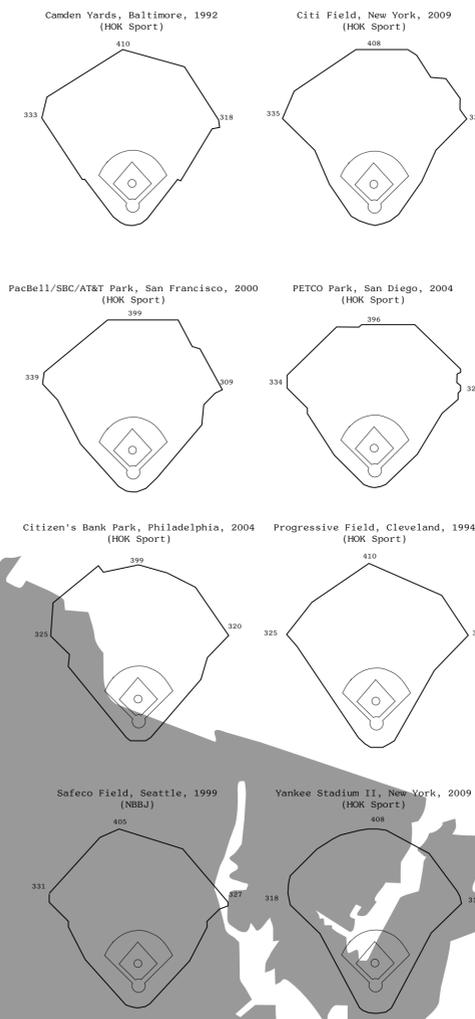
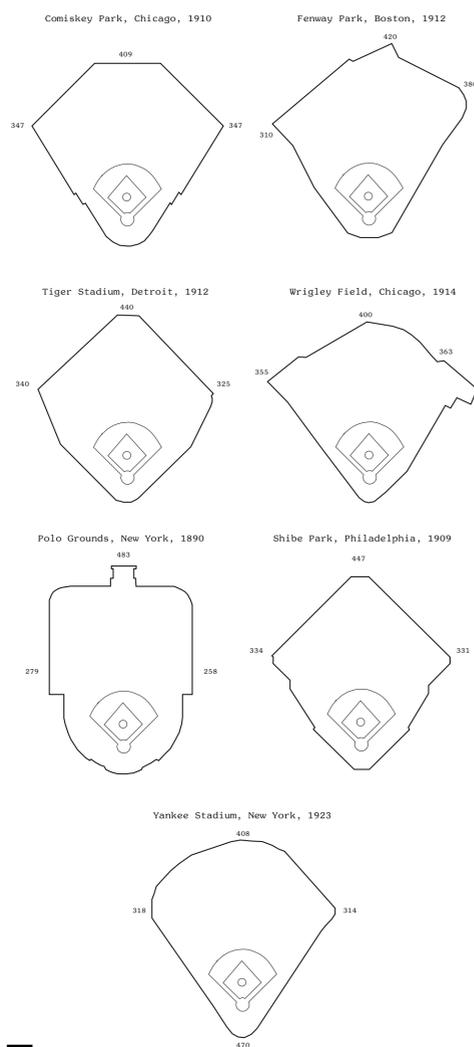


the most cherished original icon of contingency and uniqueness in the American ballpark, the Green Monster in Fenway Park, which in both scale and name has remained memorable essentially as a gigantic color field. In this narrative, the dull gray of the concrete stadium gives way to the multicolored richness of the current parks, perhaps prepared by a brief interlude of Technicolor in 60s-era parks like Shea Stadium, whose garish colors formed a first wave of coloration eventually replaced by the naturalized hues of red brick and green-painted steel at Citi Field.

Is this contrast merely reflective of the broader shift in architectural production after the 1970s from late modernism to the visual varieties of postmodernism (often brick and historicizing), or were other forces at work? Consider that ESPN started twenty-four hour sports coverage on its flagship highlight show, "SportsCenter," in 1979. Live broadcasting of baseball began on the network in 1989. Is it possible that the colorless palette of the concrete parks simply couldn't make the transition to the nonstop visual variety demanded by round-the-clock sports coverage? That the constant shimmer of scrolling graphics and highlight reels forced the look of baseball stadiums to catch up? For entertainment like baseball—never the flashiest of sports—the imperative to differentiate the experience of its ballparks after 1991 may reflect not so much a general shift in architectural aesthetics (in which case it would have been pretty far behind the times) as the specific visual impact of television. Since then, the fragmentary, endlessly spectacular sequences of the highlight reel and instant replay have found their counterpart in the architecture of the stadium, where the remote viewer can immediately locate any play against an iconic, colorful, often

urban backdrop. No wonder that spectacular scrolling graphics would soon make their way into the stadium experience itself through the digital screens that cover practically every surface of the newest parks.

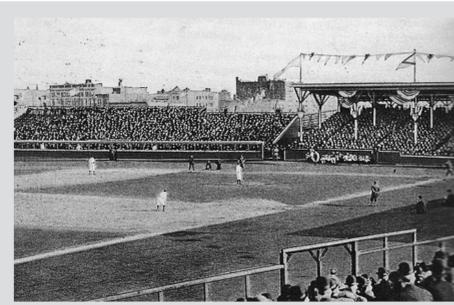
Paradoxically—or maybe not—this production of visual variety has been inversely proportional to the actual diversity of architectural firms designing these stadiums. Whereas in the Stadium Era a wide range of architects all searched independently to embellish the same geometries with a certain refinement—see again the graceful curve of the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum bowl or the majestic arches of Busch Stadium—the profusion of new designs in the last 20 years, whether in historicizing or contemporary styles, has been almost entirely the product of a single firm, HOK Sport (now Populous). 18 of the 23 Major League stadiums built or renovated since 1991 have been designed by HOK Sport, an astonishing monopoly over a building type by a single practice (with the occasional additional firm adding touches of spectacle or of local authenticity, but the basic elements remain the same). Like the highlights packaged on "SportsCenter" every night, the endless visual variations of the last 20 years of stadium design have been churned out from the same source, a thin veneer of representational difference over the same section, the same layout, the same sightlines. So what makes today's ballparks so different—so appealing?—is in fact the styling of a single, corporate producer. The old ideal of consistency has finally been achieved at the ballpark, but now as part and parcel of the logic of spectacle, which demands that such regularity be masked by the constant multiplication of appearances.



# THE GHOST PARKS OF NEW YORK

by Mark Lamster

“Hit ‘em where they ain’t,” was the famous refrain of “Wee” Willie Keeler, who played fourteen of his nineteen Hall-of-Fame seasons in New York. Today, alas, they ain’t where “Wee” Willie hit ‘em—not one of the ballparks in which he played still stands. In fact, ghosts of the great ballparks of yore haunt all five New York boroughs.



**HILLTOP PARK, MANHATTAN, 1903–1912**  
When the Yankees played here they were the Highlanders, and they were terrible. General admission was a quarter. Now the site of Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.



**POLO GROUNDS, MANHATTAN, 1911–1964**  
A great horseshoe below Coogan’s Bluff along the Harlem River built by John T. Brush, the imperious Giants owner who tried to ban foul language from professional baseball, with predictable results. Now the Polo Grounds Towers housing project.



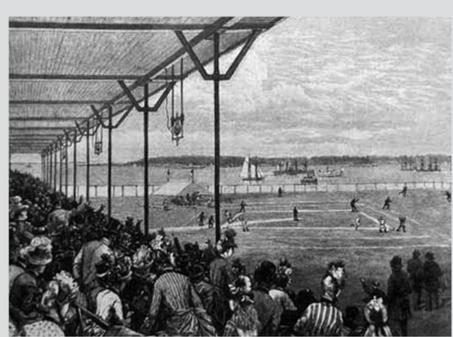
**YANKEE STADIUM, BRONX, 1923–2010**  
The House that Ruth Built was baseball’s first true stadium, with a capacity of better than 70,000. Though the Bronx location was often derided by ownership, it was ideally situated between the team’s three major markets: Manhattan to the south, the Bronx and Westchester to the north, New Jersey to the west. Replaced by a luxurious facsimile next door. Now a park.



**POLO GROUNDS, MANHATTAN, 1880–1889**  
The first Polo Grounds was a lawn running along the northern edge of Central Park, between Fifth and Lenox avenues. The Gothams of the teetotaling National League (the future Giants) and the competing Mets of the American Association (“the Beer and Whiskey League”) played on adjacent diamonds.



**SHEA STADIUM, QUEENS, 1964–2009**  
New York’s first suburban-style stadium—an unloved concrete donut in a sea of parking—was the brainchild of Robert Moses. In 2009, it was torn down to create more parking for CitiField, the Mets’ ersatz incarnation of Ebbets Field.



**ST. GEORGE CRICKET GROUNDS, STATEN ISLAND, 1886–1889**

The cricket field was also home to championship baseball, courtesy of that era’s Mets and Giants. Ferry tickets came with the price of admission. Today it’s home to the ballpark of Staten Island Yankees; ferry fare is paid for by your tax dollars.



**WASHINGTON PARK, BROOKLYN, 1884–1889**  
Home to the Brooklyn Bridegrooms of the American Association on what is now the site of Park Slope’s J.J. Byrne Park. It was replaced by a new park across Third Street, now a Con-Ed facility. The handsome concrete retaining wall of that park remains, the oldest standing ballpark remnant in New York.



**EBBETS FIELD, BROOKLYN, 1913–1957**  
Built on a garbage dump, it was home to Brooklyn’s beloved Dodgers before their departure for the Left Coast. Occupied since 1963 by a housing project named for Jackie Robinson.

# ONE, TWO, THREE VOTES, YOU'RE OUT!—ADVANCED STATISTICS FOR BASEBALL AND POLITICS

by Daniel Payne

Tuesday, November 2nd is Election Day; it's also a scheduled off-day between Games 5 and 6 of baseball's World Series. While the timing removes one possible deterrent for often-apathetic voters, it also eliminates the possibility of a serious disruption in duty for one subset of the population: statisticians. The last half-century has seen the statistician become an essential cog for both politics and baseball, a parallel development fueled by increased societal concern with rational evidence and the development of technologies that allow us to navigate large sets of data.

Statistical models began their political life as a way to make sense of the chaos of war. Robert McNamara brought the logical methods of systems analysis from Harvard Business School to the Office of Statistical Control during World War II, providing new ways for military decision makers to define success and failure. These techniques were so successful that they soon spawned independent organizations like the RAND Corporation, which provided "rigorous, fact-based analysis" to benefit the nation's "public welfare and security." A decade later, as McNamara and his statistical methods returned to Washington as the Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the role of the rational academic expanded to other areas of government. The newly created Office of Housing and Urban Development was an early adapter of this statistical orientation; HUD would spawn its own RAND-like think tank in 1968, the Urban Institute, which continues today as a prime locus of research on urban policy.

As the National Pastime, baseball serves as an introduction to statistics for much of the population outside academia and government. Baseball cards, their backs covered with the glorious ephemera of each player's production, have long filled fans' minds with statistics. But the years following Lyndon Johnson's presidency saw a scientific approach also emerging in baseball. In 1969, Macmillan Publishing printed the first edition of its "Baseball Encyclopedia," a tome that enlisted early computers to help compile statistics for every player in baseball history.

Two years later, Bob Davids began an organization called the Society of American Baseball Research. Despite its broad historical focus, the organization became best-known for those members focused on advanced forms of statistical analysis

in baseball; the organization's acronym, "SABR," became part of the term often used to describe these new statistics, "sabermetrics."

Several SABR members wrote heavily statistical, yet still accessible books that began to change how fans watched the game. From 1977 to 1988, Bill James produced the yearly "Bill James Historical Abstract," which enlisted advanced statistical measures to find player actions that most directly led to wins. John Thorn and Pete Palmer would expand on these new statistics in their 1985 book "The Hidden Game of Baseball," providing additional foundation for the burgeoning field of baseball analytics.

Over the next twenty years, the democratization of statistical analysis continued, both in baseball and politics. The Internet increased availability of data sets and made research more accessible, while fantasy sports increased fans' desire for statistical information. But it was not until 2008 that a direct link between baseball and political statistics was made, woven together in the person of Nate Silver, a young statistician who joined the stats-focused website "Baseball Prospectus" in 2003. Five years later, Silver believed another set of commonly reported numbers might be improved by rigorous statistical analysis: political polling. He began the website FiveThirtyEight.com and discovered a growing following during the 2008 presidential election. Silver's models proved so successful that the New York Times acquired "FiveThirtyEight" in 2010, adding Silver and his analysis as a focal point of its 2010 midterm elections coverage.

Today, political statistics have moved beyond the military realm and become entrenched in electoral politics. The systems of data analysis that gathered intelligence in the Cold War and targeted consumers for credit card companies are now being used to find likely voters and deliver customized messages. But are these numbers providing faux certainty and unduly shifting the public's focus? Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell calls this the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Numbers grab headlines, both in sports and politics. Critics of sabermetrics say its advocates are implicitly extending late capitalist mechanisms of control to what is still a game, a space of play and imagination. Meanwhile, media coverage of politics is now dominated by horserace reporting, as journalists focus on the latest polling results instead of reporting on issues that could create a more informed electorate.

## THIN AIR

by Marcos Sanchez & Mark Wasiuta, International House of Architecture (Excerpt from "Air Mexico")

When "atmosphere" is discussed in sports, it's usually a crazy crowd or the backdrop of a famous stadium. Sometimes, though, it's the air itself that matters. During this summer's World Cup, commentators exhausted themselves discussing the effects of South Africa's high altitude on the balls used during the tournament. Passes dipped, or didn't. Shots swerved, or straightened. Goalkeepers were consistently befuddled. Air isn't a new issue either. The New City Reader breathes in a history of air and athletics during Mexico City's turn as the world's host for the 1968 Olympics.

Of all the episodes of air occlusion that occurred through the 1960s, arguably the most symptomatic took place during the period leading up to the 1968 Olympic Games. International concerns about the physiological effects of Mexico City's high altitude led to an obsession with atmosphere that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would eventually identify as "altitude psychosis." Consternation over the height of the city's plateau compelled the IOC and participating Olympic nations to conduct a series of laborious scientific studies. As the Olympics' opening date approached, the city became a site of atmospheric testing in an effort to evaluate the effects of Mexico's so-called "thin air" on the athletes. Mexico City's altitude was constructed both as a technical problem and a threat for the body. Physiologists, uncertain about athletes' capability to adapt to the environment, worried that sudden exposure to Mexico's thin air, coupled with strenuous activity, would not only cause unpredictable performance but could also endanger athletes' lives.

While local air testing followed its own sporadic agenda, several international organizations began testing the city's air and compiling databases of high-altitude oxygenation. The French Olympic delegation, for example, collected information on the respiratory behavior and oxygen concentration in the blood of Bolivian miners. As the games approached, various nations armed themselves with similar data and increasingly competed for respiratory advantage. Despite incessant repetition in IOC literature, scientific papers and the popular press, anxieties around thin air eventually dissipated, only to be replaced by speculation on the hazards of increasing athletic performance testing. The conception of the athlete as nothing more than a breathing apparatus—whose performance depended on the calibration of altitude to oxygen intake—rather than a model of youthful self-discipline began to haunt the Olympics and Mexico City. The notion circulated within the IOC that the Olympic athlete had been reduced to a mere "laboratory champion" controlled by test results.

Anxieties around the Olympic ethos notwithstanding, the IOC soon focused on the complication of altitude in relation to the use of performance-enhancing drugs. If the "laboratory champion" was understood to be antithetical to the spirit of athleticism, the danger of impurities in the athlete's blood was exposed as an even greater threat to the Olympic spirit. To help ward off this violation, the IOC, assisted by various testing organizations, asserted that doping would have lethal effects at higher elevations.

From thin air to doping and through this series of air alarms, the question of Mexico City's altitude exacerbated anxieties around the Olympics, and arguably, around the country's international ascension. Further, the IOC and other observers' displacement of these anxieties onto the altitude and the atmosphere produced a curious cross-registration of Mexico City's largely absent atmospheric record. The athlete's bodies served as surfaces of atmospheric inscription, as sites of oxygen crises and as concentrations of performance-enhancing contaminants. Through the production of the athlete's body as sensitive recording mechanism and as target of empirical observation, Mexico City's Olympics and its air pollution were bound together in at least two ways: first, the athletic body became a substitute for the absent archive; second, both the Olympics and air pollution were understood as inevitable byproducts of a national modernizing telos.

Because of—or despite—this Olympic coupling, this attention to thin air and physiology became increasingly uncanny in relation to the ongoing misconstrual of Mexico's air pollution. If not entirely invisible to the visiting delegations and the IOC, the city's polluted air was viewed as unremarkable. Its urban haze was noted but dismissed as "experienced by every modern town." This familiar pollution was, it seems, merely the necessary by-product of Mexico's ascent into advanced industrialization. As similar occlusions and refractions were seen throughout the 1960s in Mexico, the city's airborne contaminants were considered barely noteworthy; the haze over the modern city was already ubiquitous, while the effects of thin air, largely chimerical, produced years of intensive examination.

# JUDGING SPEED

by Troy Conrad Therrien

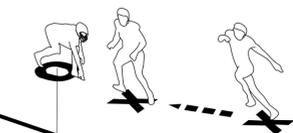
The quarterback had long been the one human holdout in the eyes of scouts who reduce potential draft picks to animals of precise measure and value. The quarterback has to be able to make decisions, to think. But in recent years, NFL teams have increasingly fawned over mobile pivots, implying that decision making can be taught, but speed is a gift. One of the harbingers of the new quarterback, Donovan McNabb entered the league in 1999, a gifted athlete who came with the tag "and-he-can-throw." The first pick the previous year, Peyton Manning, was a classic drop-back passer, devoted to film study and beneficiary of his father's NFL pedigree. But despite his continued success, he has been dogged throughout his career by the label "but-can-he-move?" These two signal callers matched up in a Week 6 game that explicated a moment of truth that stretches beyond the field.

By converting the entire game into an extended two-minute drill, the slower but headier Manning dashed his Colts up and down the field as an often-befuddled McNabb and his Redskins labored on. Neither the forty-yard dash nor the shuttle drill can account for the speed at which Manning played. His speed was not measured between the whistles but between the plays. It was the speed of analysis, judgment and control. Coaches of yore would have praised Manning for his "intangibles," but in an age where a quality is not valued unless it can be entered

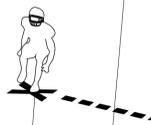
into a spreadsheet, perhaps a new metric is needed, a measure for the speed of judgment. In a moment when high-frequency trading occupies more than seventy percent of market transactions—in which neither value nor fundamentals hold sway, but rather algorithmic systems siphon value from the market—is there something to be learned from the gridiron? A closer reading of Manning's performance reveals the very tangible effects of the human side of quarterbacking, making an argument not against quantification, but for finding the right variables.

Of course, some numbers we already know: the Colts won, 27-24.

**Consequence 1**  
The defense is unable to call a play and get set before the ball is snapped, giving an advantage to the offense.



**Consequence 2**  
Defensive players play on their heels, backing off instead of attacking at the beginning of each play.



**Consequence 3**  
Defensive players have no time to recover from each play, or make substitutions, leading to fatigue.



**Consequence 5**  
Defenses are required to call more time outs earlier in the half to slow the offensive pace.

**Consequence 4**  
Fatigued and confused defensive players are more prone to injury.



**Consequence 6**  
More points can be scored in less time against a less prepared defense.

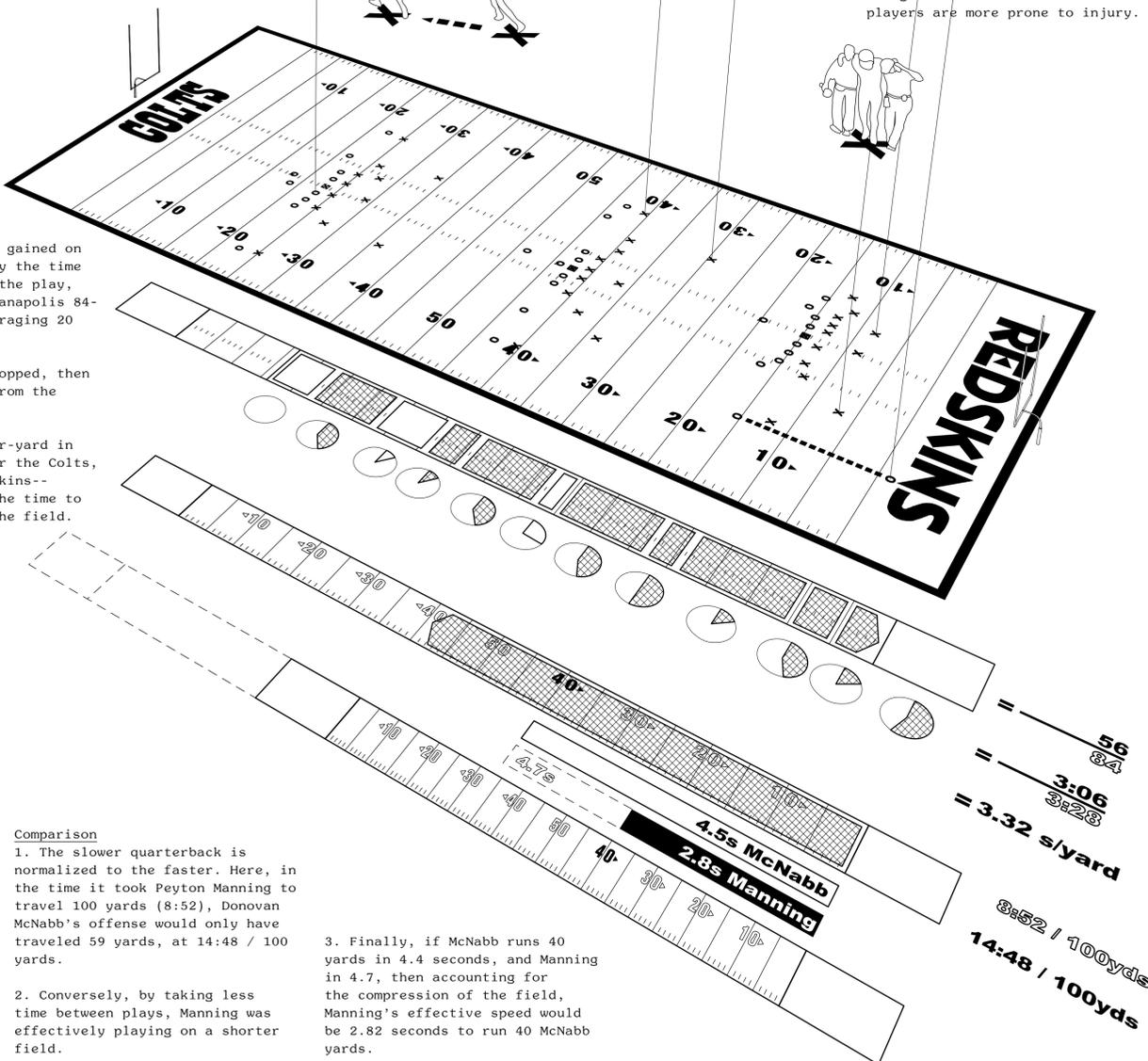


## Calculating

1. The number of yards gained on each play is divided by the time taken to call and run the play, shown here for an Indianapolis 84-yard scoring drive averaging 20 seconds per play.

2. If the clock was stopped, then the value is removed from the calculation.

3. The average time-per-yard in the game--5.32 s/yd for the Colts, 8.88 s/yd for the Redskins--is used to calculate the time to travel the length of the field.



## Comparison

1. The slower quarterback is normalized to the faster. Here, in the time it took Peyton Manning to travel 100 yards (8:52), Donovan McNabb's offense would only have traveled 59 yards, at 14:48 / 100 yards.

2. Conversely, by taking less time between plays, Manning was effectively playing on a shorter field.

3. Finally, if McNabb runs 40 yards in 4.4 seconds, and Manning in 4.7, then accounting for the compression of the field, Manning's effective speed would be 2.82 seconds to run 40 McNabb yards.



# THE PRO-SPIN ZONE

by Roberto Carabeo

During a televised match at Wimbledon in 2008, Rafael Nadal hit such a sensational forehand return against Roger Federer that the announcer declared that topspin had just been redefined. Indeed, the high-arching, quickly dipping shot that sped through the grass, feet beyond Federer's reach, was impressive in its pace and power. But Nadal hadn't changed topspin; rather, through the power in his application of it, he—along with his opponent—have redefined the geometry of the court and the way the game is played.

Federer's use of topspin defines a classical style of tennis in which touch and spin open the court. Federer carves the court like a surgeon, creating impressive angles that pull his opponent out of position and opens the court for a relatively easy winner. Coupled with his masterful court awareness and positioning, he is able to quickly evaluate the range of available shots and select the best one to gain advantage. Federer's extreme spin—2,700 revolutions per minute, whereas the dominant players of the 1990s, Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi, were clocked only at 1,800 rpm—expeditiously dips the tennis ball into the court, allowing him to generate shots that are tightly angled to the net and spring to the sides. Shots that were once only available when at net increasingly originate from the baseline, transforming the court geometry from a rectangle into an amphitheater in which Federer is the central figure.

Nadal, on the other hand, blows the theater open with his topspin. There are no subtleties with Nadal's strokes, each laced with heavy spin consistently measured at an unmatched 3,500 rpm and sometimes clocked near 5,000 rpm. His shots dip quickly and spring forward in a trajectory previously unseen on the professional tour. Nadal's game is

predicated on this high and deep bounce; his lone career French Open loss came when injury sapped his usual penetrative topspin power. To return Nadal's groundstrokes, his opponents often retreat ten feet behind the baseline, essentially forfeiting court positioning and increasing vulnerability to an angled winner.

Tennis is an evolving sport. New strings and equipment are developed. A new paradigm of player is emerging, one who is tall, fast and strong. Stroke mechanics are tweaked to generate shots that bounce faster, higher and farther—both Federer and Nadal benefit from the open stance forehand introduced by Agassi and the windshield wiper forehand motion first seen in Aaron Krickstein's game. Despite these developments, one constant is the court's dimensions—36 feet wide and 78 feet long. But the new generation of tennis players, led by Federer and Nadal, have essentially redefined even these constants, spinning the game beyond the straight and narrow.

Above, left to right:

1. The current tennis court dimensions and configuration
2. How a tennis court would be seemingly perceived by Federer's opponent: a greater area of coverage around the net and slightly increased depth
3. How a tennis court would be seemingly perceived by Nadal's opponent: longer side-to-side distances and an increased depth

# A FIELD GUIDE TO NEGOTIATION

by Tom Vanderbilt

For the past fifteen years or so, I have played, as often as circumstances will allow, in a weekend pickup soccer game in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. The importance of this in my life is not to be underestimated, and I sometimes think the week in between exists for no reason but to frame this pleasure. It is not just the sense of physical release or the camaraderie, but the sense that, in this self-organized ritual in a great public space, something ennobling is going on.

As the critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen recently argued, the United States "has become more an archipelago than a nation, increasingly balkanized into ethnic, class, faith and interest groups whose members rarely interact meaningfully with people whose affiliations they do not in large measure share." Among the few places this divide is bridged, she writes, are urban parks, which by design should be "unstructured and non-goal-oriented, because humans, wired to concentrate on goals when goals are set before them, will focus on people whom they might not otherwise see (or whom they might otherwise choose to ignore) only if the pursuit of concrete goals is withdrawn."

This being soccer, we are "goal"-oriented, but the event, unlike anything else in my life, is unstructured; people just show up, as tides drawn by lunar forces, a few hours before sunset. For more than a decade, through all seasons, players have simply appeared. Recently, a few people we hadn't seen before tentatively approached and asked, "is this the soccer meet-up?" Meaning: Is this where a group of people have agreed, via some internet site or another, to gather for a game?

I explained that this game predates social media, that while, yes, it is open to anyone, one does not have to "check in" beforehand—it just happens. "Cool," one replied. And further to Goldhagen's point about balkanization, it strikes me that these weekly few hours are the most effortlessly diverse moments of my week. It is where, for example, I most regularly encounter people of the Islamic faith, whose affiliation is noted by mid-game prayers.

I have lately been interested in what architecture-types would call the game's "spatial practice." While the regulation minimum length for an international, 11-on-11 match is 110 yards, we never approach that; our length is typically determined by whatever activities are happening on either end. Indeed, to participate in an informal—i.e. sans legal permit—sport in a New York City park is to constantly engage in a negotiation over space. On a recent weekend, our match fit precisely into a rough perimeter marked by a softball game, a game of American football and an Ultimate Frisbee game. Even the "air rights" were occupied, by, in rough order, a remote-controlled airplane, a kite and a hawk. The boundaries are of course entirely fluid. Balls and even players go spilling into rival territory, brooking moments of confusion; even when space is determined by legal permits, this is incredibly abstract. The space beyond an outfielder, for example, is acceptable for soccer play—until, of course, someone hits the ball over the outfielder's head.

Each sport has its own particular spatial practice. Baseball compresses the majority of action in its tight diamond, with vast stretches of largely surplus, anticipatory space

(how many balls in a game go to right field?). American football employs the most regimented space, with plays often moving only a few yards; even though there is no "gridiron" painted here, the players seem to act as if there is, invoking Rem Koolhaas' depiction of the Manhattan grid as a "conceptual speculation" that claimed "the superiority of mental construction over reality." Ultimate Frisbee, because of the throwing distance of its medium, consumes enormous amounts of space considering the number of players; somewhat against the ethos of the park, Frisbee players set down boundary cones. Soccer is somewhat fluid: 18 players can play in a space that is larger than a football field or as small as a basketball court. The space will determine the sort of game played. Small spaces favor the intricate streetball of Brazil's favelas; larger expanses tend toward the English thump-and-run game. David Winner, in his book "Brilliant Orange," argued that this kind of spatial determinism helped explain Dutch football—that the experience of the Netherlands, its creativity and expertise in overseeing the world's most managed landscape—all those polders, and even the "polder model" of governance—extended to the football pitch. "No one has ever imagined or structured their play as abstractly, or architecturally, in such a measured fashion as the Dutch," writes Winner.

There is irony in all the different forms of space that are being consumed by sports in Prospect Park, which is that its designer Frederic Law Olmsted, as historian Harold Seymour writes in his encyclopedic study "The House of Baseball," considered the park "primarily a place for contemplation in simulated rural serenity." Olmsted's collaborator, Calvert Vaux, wrote: "Nothing is more certain than that the beauty of these lawns would soon be lost, and they would be rendered disagreeable objects, if these games were to be constantly played upon them." And indeed, every winter, our game is inevitably interrupted by a dreaded white Jeep bearing Parks Department officials. They signal that the park is now closed, so the damage we have inflicted can be repaired. We play for a few months in a fenced-in artificial turf facility, but at night, I dream of grass without boundaries.

# NOW THAT THE MAGIC'S GONE

by John Southern

The remarkable post-basketball career of Magic Johnson has involved real estate development and urban renewal projects, forays into the restaurant and movie businesses, but never scores. "We don't eat scores," the former NBA star once said, referring to the African-American and Latino communities Johnson served with the more than 100 Starbucks franchises he opened in working-class areas of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles over the past dozen years. Wrapped up in this statement was a bigger idea—that communities that had once been among the nation's poorest now desired (and could sustain) shops that charge \$3 for a cup of coffee.

Johnson's Urban Coffee Enterprises, the official name of his Starbucks venture, was therefore much more than a simple push to open new coffee shops: it enabled thousands of minimum-wage service jobs to bloom in working-class urban neighborhoods long-abandoned by skilled industrial jobs and introduced middle-class branding and consumption models into areas that, before Johnson's investment, had been largely ignored by not only Starbucks, but many other commercial giants as well.

After recently selling his Starbucks franchises back to the Seattle-based corporation, however, Johnson has closed the Urban Coffee Enterprises chapter in his company's history. With the U.S. economy in a prolonged stall, the seemingly prosperous commercial landscape of South Los Angeles cities like Compton, Inglewood and Gardena, once aided in part by Johnson's company, Magic Johnson Enterprises, are visibly in trouble. All it takes is a drive through the numerous industrial and commercial zones that dot the South Bay, which together represent a large part of the Southern California region's blue-collar mercantile economy, to see the impact of the current recession.

"For Lease" signs are the most prevalent feature of these districts. They are not only a hallmark of the economic downturn but representative of an ominous future facing the commercial viability of Magic Johnson's remaining development enterprises, which rely largely on boom-time consumer spending as a catalyst for success. The possibility of looming failure only calcifies when large retail corporations, like the now-shuttered Circuit City in Compton's Gateway Towne Center, a once failing retail development which Johnson helped to reinvigorate with the opening of a Starbucks, stand as vivid testaments to the fragility of consumer-based retail enclaves in working-class communities hit by recession.

Johnson Development's success relies heavily on both Magic Johnson's celebrity status as well as his dogged determination and age-old capitalist ethics. Many of the projects promoted by both Johnson Development and his partnership with Canyon Capital rely largely upon the production of commercial retail and office space to house big-name tenants. Among the Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund's larger projects was the renovation of the former Trans-America skyscraper in Downtown Los Angeles, a 1960s office building now re-designed, re-branded and partially occupied by AT&T. The AT&T Center and its connections to global capital are emblematic of the larger visual impact Magic Johnson has had on Los Angeles' urban landscape and its infatuation with the cult of celebrity. And his involvement in introducing working-class neighborhoods to a revolving set of low-paying corporate service-sector jobs is arguably only a temporary socioeconomic achievement, one that is unsustainable in an environment where consumer spending has been deflated by rampant job-loss and economic stagnation.

While Magic brought global corporate investment brands such as Starbucks, TGI Fridays and 24-Hour Fitness into working-class neighborhoods and is seen as a civic leader because of it, the sustainability of those partnerships comes into question when the Los Angeles metropolitan region's unemployment is now topping 12%. As observations of the largely empty interiors of Starbucks in both Compton and Gardena illustrate—perhaps only some of the "Partners for Progress" murals that commemorate the former NBA star's dedication to "Urban Coffee Opportunities" remain—when faced with the realities of a global trade deficit and a prolonged economic recession, Magic Johnson's commercial ventures and catalytic brand recognition may be nothing more than smoke and mirrors, a conjuring trick now laid bare by the harsh realities of global capitalism.



Prospect Park. Photo by Sarah Heiman; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sheiman/2526498124>

# CONVERSATIONS

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# DHANI JONES

Alexis Green of Bruce Mau Design interviews Cincinnati Bengals linebacker Dhani Jones on the role of creativity in the NFL from the perspective of a player whose own pursuits off the field have included the launch of a successful line of boutique bow ties (BowTieCause.com), a café for collaborative dialogue and fostering partnerships between corporations and the non-profit sector (BowTieCafe.com) and a creative agency based in New York and Los Angeles with a client roster that includes Procter & Gamble and Ralph Lauren (VMG-creative.com).

**AG** You played in the NFL for more than a decade and you now define yourself as both an artist and an athlete. So would you say that you identify more with your artistic side or your athletic side at this point in your career?

**DJ** I think it's something that works together; it's sort of a synchronistic connection. Meaning that while you're playing the game of football—or any other sport that you play—you bring your own style, your own flavor, your own way about yourself. And I think that exudes itself through a certain level of creativity that each person showcases.

**AG** What do you think the state of the creative output in the NFL is?

**DJ** When I first got into the league it was still taboo to express yourself outside the realm of the game of football. You'd be ridiculed and put down; in some cases, you'd be released. But, the last 10 years, I've seen more expression, self-expression, if you will—people being able to talk about the types of things that

they're really interested in. [Before], the platforms really didn't exist or [people] didn't really feel comfortable talking about [creativity]; now...things are different. I've known different players who are amazing [at drawing] or amazing painters or amazing singers or amazing musicians, but they never said anything. But now there's a platform, now there's a stage and now people are more comfortable about talking about it. I'll be in a game and it'll be 3rd-and-1 and all of a sudden the ref will call a timeout. One of the players will come up to me and say, "Hey, what's going on, Dhani? Hey, I really like your show. I've got an idea." That never happened before...If you have a 53-man roster, I think it's fair to say that a large majority of [players] have a creative personality that's just waiting to [be expressed]. And, whether it's while they're in the league or when they leave the league, it's important to recognize that football players are not just one type of individual that just hits people. They're also quite innovative, and they have an entrepreneurial spirit. Each person, each player is an entrepreneur for himself; when someone sets foot in the league, he's building a business around who he is as a person. [In my own work,] there are four principles that I break it down into: self-representation, service, collaboration and critical thought. I think those summarize all of the things I'm doing.

**AG** If you could re-design one aspect of playing in the NFL, what would it be?

**DJ** I don't think anybody has really illustrated the play. The defense or the offense or the special teams. Of course there are drawings that coaches make every day that say, "Okay, you're supposed to start here, you're supposed to end up there. This is supposed to happen." But nobody has really truly illustrated that in the chaotic manner in which it occurs. It's almost like a symphony. Like in an orchestra, sometimes somebody throws

a little extra in there, and of course the conductor hears it, and he allows it to continue or he doesn't. But the melody always remains the same. The melody remains the same, but there are certain solos that make the entire symphony unique. Nobody has ever illustrated all the chaotic movements [of the NFL] as some sort of amazing piece. Or several pieces.

## Each person, each player is an entrepreneur for himself.

# RADICAL ACTS OF GOLFING—TWO CASE STUDIES



by Wayne Congar

No major sport seems to inspire more public ridicule than golf. Its perception is stained by the watermarks of an elitist history where, for non-golfers at least, a cartoonish image still resonates: plaid-clad rainmakers cutting nefarious deals on the fairway. When class concerns couple with the environmental degradation of golf course construction and maintenance, the game seems woefully out-of-touch with the contemporary world.

Yet the game continues to spread. New players worldwide are circumventing traditional routes to the game and, by hook or by crook, dropping golf into cities and new markets far afield from the game's comfort zone in anglophone suburbia. Golf is undergoing fascinating evolutions as it rubs against unsupportive political systems and incompatible landscapes; the further golf expands, the more it becomes a game for outlaws. Here are two examples of golf's new spatial engagement.

### THE BEIJING GOLF POLICE

The Anji King Valley Country Club, located 140 miles southwest of Shanghai, was scheduled to play host to an LPGA tournament this month. Was. The Chinese government contracted a local team of bulldozer operators who excavated the fairways and shut off the municipal water supply to the course's irrigation system.

Golf's self-governing rules of play and its sporting embodiment of socioeconomic hierarchy made it an adversary to the ideals of Mao's China. When the Communist Party hesitantly lifted its ban on the sport in 1984, 176 courses were built within China's borders over the next 20 years. In 2004, Hu Jintao placed a moratorium on golf course construction, citing two key domestic reforms: increasing rural land rights, particularly access to arable land, and closing the gap between China's rich and poor. But since the moratorium, an estimated 400 new golf courses—built in violation of Beijing's strict land-use policy—have popped up in China, tripling the country's total.

While golf is still at odds with Jintao's national platform, the business of golf is very attractive to local governments—and golf course developers know it. Take for example the coastal province of Zhejiang in Southeast China, home of the shuttered Anji King Valley. Beijing paints Zhejiang as a bastion of bucolic China, but the local government has separate ambitions. The market, for better or worse, has chosen Zhejiang as a golf destination, supplanting cotton and jute farming. Zhejiang intends to supply the demand for golf by continuing to approve new course construction projects, despite not having the authority to do so. Golf course developments are repackaged in provincial budgetary reports as land trusts and conservation efforts, then sent to Beijing for review.

wedged between a rock and a root, it's from that unfortunate location that you must play. But the history of golf course design and groundskeeping could be read as a series of developments implemented to skirt this golden rule, or at least make it more palatable. New grass types are bioengineered for consistency across fairways. Putting greens are cut daily, made smooth as glass to ensure the ball rolls true. Bunkers are shallower and filled with imported sand, making them less hazardous than ever before. Obsessive golf course maintenance makes it easier than ever for contemporary golfers to play the lie.

Urban golf takes a different view of the game's environment. Its origins stretch back more than two decades to the American Southwest and the game's founder, Brian Jerome Peterson. During a road trip from Tucson to Phoenix, Peterson spotted backhoes and construction crews excavating the ground every few miles: yet another housing development next to yet another desert golf course. Peterson asked himself a simple question: "Why do they have to play on grass?" For the first time, someone had brought into question a seemingly inextricable part of the game—the surface of its courses.

Tearing the game away from today's cushy landscapes, urban golfers reclaim the game as one fraught with trouble, if not water and sand then medians and parked cars. In the (not so) official urban golf handbook, the rules committee states that their form of the game is closer to golf's origins than the contemporary, mainstream version: "While urban golf may seem extravagant to purists, it does in fact grasp back to the fundamental principles of golf, as golf was originally a cross-country game played on unstructured links land, not on planned spaces designed for the sport. Over the centuries our landscape evolved from largely rural to largely urban, so following the same logic of playing on 'natural' courses as they occur, urban golf utilizes the scenery of our modern cities."

Urban golfers take great care to guarantee that they're not misunderstood as vandals masquerading as athletes. Their impromptu courses are located far from residential districts so as not to break Rule #1 in the urban golf code of conduct: "Show Respect: Respect your neighbors' privacy and property..Vandalism, destruction of property and rude behavior are for punk-ass kids and do not belong in this sport." Equipment alterations reduce the possibility of mid-flight property destruction; golf balls are swapped out for tennis balls and low-loft drivers are the preferred club choice to keep the ball from flying too high.

Urban golf both expands its demographics and alters the motivations for participation. Take Rule #2: "Everybody Sucks: The worse you play, the more fun you have. Leave your competitiveness on the PGA tour. Boasting and other petty bullshit does not belong on the urban course." The organizers of Portland's World Urban Golf Day Tournament plotted the course such that it passed as many bars and pubs as possible, virtually guaranteeing adherence to Rule #2. With no green's fees or travel necessary, urban golf is open to any city dweller with a used golf club and a desire to whack a tennis ball towards a dumpster or bench. Urban golfers, by "combining egalitarian ideals with natty fashion, a dose of whimsy and plenty of beer," are not ridiculing the game but liberating it from its tired stereotypes.



Top: Golf Course and Century Park Shijiazhuang. Photo by Ingsoc; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/slipsliding/18666875>

Left: Urban golf. Photo by Pieter Baert; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pietel1/1557851337>