



January 29, 2009

In Dead of Winter, Shea Stadium Is Melting Away

By [KEN BELSON](#)

With each passing day, [Shea Stadium](#), the home of the Mets since 1964, fades further from Citi Field, the team's new home. In the last few weeks, demolition crews have been ripping down entire sections of Shea from both ends of the outfield decks toward its middle. What was once a semi-enclosed bowl with 57,000 seats is now a skeleton of a grandstand.

In the first weeks after the Mets finished their final season at Shea (with another desultory loss that knocked them out of playoff contention), crews removed the seats, signs and anything else that could be sold to collectors or reused in city parks. Then demolition crews started knocking out the field level and the concrete decks that made up the loge and the mezzanine. But the structure of the stadium, built for nearly \$30 million, was largely intact.

Not so anymore.

Since the beginning of the year, crews have clawed away at Shea's walls and beams, exposing escalators, elevator banks and air ducts. The stands above Gates A and E have vanished and parts of the neon players that adorned the outside of the stadium are gone, too. Twelve sections of the upper deck still have their concrete floors, but the other sections that remain are outlined only by their steel beams. Unlike stadiums in other cities that have been imploded, Shea had to be taken down piece by piece because of building codes.

The rat-a-tat-tat of the construction machinery drowned out the noise of the jets taking off from LaGuardia Airport. Tarps on chain link fences say "Almost Home," a reference to the soon-to-be-opened Citi Field, but also the six-month process of erasing Shea.

In all, nearly 10,000 tons of steel and another 2,500 tons of concrete will be pulled out of Shea. Some of the concrete will be ground up and reused as the base material for the parking lot that will be installed in its place. The lot will include space for 2,000 cars and signs marking where home plate and the pitcher's mound once were.

Team representatives said that the demolition will be completed some time in the coming weeks, which is not hard to imagine. On Wednesday, lines of dump trucks made their way onto what was once the outfield, weaving around piles of crumpled metal and concrete covered in snow.

Several Web sites have sprung up that have chronicled the destruction of the place where Seaver once threw, Piazza once squatted and the Stork, George Theodore, once roamed. In a way, the sites are a testament to the morbid curiosity of Mets fans, who have endured many morbid Mets teams.

“It’s interesting how they are doing it piece by piece,” said Eric Okurowski, a 31-year-old master’s candidate and a life-long Met fan from Babylon, N.Y., who runs stadiumpage.com. “Most old stadia are blown up and it takes just a few seconds. It’s pretty interesting seeing it come apart in pieces over the course of four months.”

Okurowski and several other die-hard fans are organizing a final farewell at Shea at noon Saturday to share stories and take photographs of what is left of the ballpark.

As Shea diminishes, Citi Field emerges. While less imposing than Shea, the new stadium, at least from the outside, has an elegance that Shea lacked. Instead of the lattice of concrete ramps that constituted Shea’s exterior, Citi Field is covered in brick and punctuated with arches and an entrance rotunda. Flood lights highlight the outside while klieg lights illuminate what is left of Shea.

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