

## **Why Aaron stayed in Atlanta and Cobb didn't go to Cobb County: when baseball statues meet ballpark relocation**

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In the last three decades, public sculptures of sporting heroes have grown exponentially, with baseball franchises particularly active in this regard. Statues are associated with permanence, yet sports statues sited at stadia face a challenge to the assumption of immortality in bronze. Stadia are not immortal, nor always particularly venerable: major and minor league baseball welcomed a plethora of new ballparks in the 1990s and 2000s.

When a sports organisation vacates a stadium in favour of a newer model, the fate of any statue sited around it is uncertain. A migrating franchise will typically take their statues with them, using the past to bring identity to their new home. However, a statue might not be considered suitable for the new venue - or its ownership may be contested by residents or the civic authority. Such disputes and their resolution can tell us much about how the sports organisation, its fans, local residents and public bodies interact with their heritage and each other, encapsulating wider ownership debates regarding the 'identity' of a sport's team, and the stadium environment.

In this paper I focus on a recent franchise move that brought such issues into sharp focus: the Braves' 2017 relocation from downtown Atlanta to suburban Cobb County. This resulted in the Braves' statues - Hank Aaron, Ty Cobb, Warren Spahn and Phil Niekro - variously proving to be immovable, removable or movable. By examining the different disputes that erupted around the Aaron and Cobb statues, I hope to illuminate and untangle the tensions existing around different layers of perceived ownership of these players', the Braves' and Atlanta's sports heritage and history. Just as a sports statue allows different communities that coalesce around a sports organisation to simultaneously perceive ownership of the team's heritage, identity and territory, so moving that statue disrupts multiple claims and assumptions, reopening divisions and creating conflict.