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HEADLINE: Two Loaded Questions For Jets, Nets
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Let's begin with two loaded questions from a certified sports nut. Can New York afford to build two new sports arenas at the same time, using some city funds, while the city has a budget deficit?

Should we do this civic favor for two sports teams - the Jets and Nets - that were in the New York area and then abandoned us for the quick buck in New Jersey, and now want to crawl back?

My answers are nuanced, qualified, and provisional. And different in each case.

The proposed new stadium for the Jets on the West Side seems like a flawed idea in terms of city and state public money - at least \$600 million - traffic congestion, planning, land use, and the public interest. The Jets stadium has become too entangled with the city's quixotic crusade for the 2012 Summer Olympics, and the expansion of the Javits convention center.

The Javits expansion seems like a good idea. It should be disentangled from the stadium scheme and developed on its own substantial merits as a boost for tourism and jobs.

The Olympic bid seems highly dubious. We won't know the site of the 2012 games until next year, although Brazil, Spain, and China seem more likely to win the designation. America got the summer games in 1984 and 1996. New York might have gotten the games if the international vote had been in 2002, right after the terrorist attack created worldwide sympathy for New York.

But the war against Iraq and the bypassing of the United Nations has made America more unpopular in the world community.

The linkage of the Jets stadium and the Olympics bid hangs on a hair. The Jets will play only eight home games, unless they make the playoffs. What do we do with this stadium the other 357 days and nights in the year? Besides Springsteen and the Stones, who can fill it?

There seems almost no justification to allocate taxpayer money to pay for the platform over the rail yards or the retractable roof.

If the Jets want to build this 75,000-seat West Side stadium they should pay the complete cost themselves and not burden the taxpayers. Between auctioning off the naming rights and the selling of the luxury boxes and/or condos, the Jets can afford it.

Based on the report of the city's Independent Budget Office and the experience of other large cities, sports stadiums do not generate permanent improvements in local economies.

Given New York's need for moderate and low-income housing and improved public education, it would be irresponsible to spend public monies on eight Jets home games on the West Side, with Shea Stadium available in Queens. Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff is obsessed with luring the Olympics, but New York needs more balanced economic development that is not so Manhattan-centric, and not so dependent on a one-shot gimmick.

Mr. Doctoroff has also made a huge blunder by saying he will circumvent the City Council on land-use approvals. This anti-democratic manipulation only makes him look like a Robert Moses wannabe, which conjures an image of a bully driving a bulldozer over a community.

By cutting the council out of the process, Mr. Doctoroff makes a prolonged lawsuit the only alternative available to critics. Not a smart idea.

The Nets' proposed new arena in Downtown Brooklyn has more appeal, but needs more refinements, transparency, and clarification.

Would displaced residents be paid compensation for their uprooting by eminent domain? What exactly is the financing and is there any public money involved in what is called "tax increment financing" and "anticipated tax revenues"? Are the design plans flexible enough to be made more acceptable in negotiations with the community? The Nets owner, developer Bruce Ratner, should be more forthcoming and open.

Also, somewhat murky is the number of people who would be displaced. Mr. Ratner says 100, but the local opposition says more than 850. If he proves to be more flexible and reasonable than Mr. Doctoroff and the Jets, it will give Mr. Ratner an advantage in these two simultaneous chess games being played out.

One carrot making the Nets plan more attractive is the promised construction of 880 units of new housing priced for low-income residents as part of the package.

The most constructive analysis of the Brooklyn arena came from my colleague Errol Louis in a January 27 column in *The New York Sun*. Mr. Louis, quoting Columbia University architect Karla Rothstein, argued that the project's legendary designer - Frank Gehry - can "lift, spin, and shift the arena one block north." This would enable the Nets's new home to be built without demolishing anyone else's home.

If Mr. Ratner adjusts the most objectionable part of his plan - the taking of private homes through eminent domain - a compromise could be reached without litigation or dislocation. This would be fair reparation for the old Roy Boe Nets quitting Long Island and trading away the great Julius Erving. Mr. Ratner has this ball in the paint. If he is smart he will dish off and win the cheers of the crowd.

There is a consensus among the city's civic/political/business elite that only one of these two sports fantasies will come to fruition, given all the competing claims on the city's resources.

The difference between them may be the millionaire's hubris of Mr. Doctoroff, in circumventing the elected members of the council, to impose his obsession.