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Falling Stars  
The Local Impact of the North Stars Relocation  
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Abstract

In 1993, The State of Hockey was shocked by the relocation of their beloved National Hockey League franchise, The Minnesota North Stars. Reasons for the move were numerous; slipping attendance, a failed deal for a new arena, and even an extramarital affair by the team's owner were all cited. The dislocation of the North Stars not only broke the hearts of fans, but also affected the local community's economy. Many places around the arena, such as sports bars and restaurants, relied on the team to bring them business. Articles from newspapers, as well as other sports magazines, and memoirs and testimonies from people within the organization will shed light upon the decisions made by the franchise. Economic census data on the team and the surrounding area shows how Bloomington was affected when the North Stars moved.

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## Introduction

Professional sports franchises walk along a fine line. In many ways, these franchises are the heart and soul of the cities in which they play. They offer a sense of pride and almost give a persona to the area. For example, football fans will always think of people in Wisconsin as “Cheese Heads”, a role many are more than happy to fill. People welcome their favorite sports teams into their homes on a regular basis, and put their everyday life on hold to watch the games on television. These same fans spend their money to buy items to show their loyalty and dedication to their favorite team. These teams can also serve as a beacon of hope and rallying point after tragedies, such as the Boston Bruins first home game after the Boston Marathon bombings. Not only were the people of Boston united in that arena that night, singing the National Anthem in unison and proudly chanting “We are Boston” and “Boston Strong”, the whole country and the National Hockey League were also able to use that venue to show support.

However, franchises are also businesses. They must be making profits in order to continue to field the teams the fans love. If the money is not there, then selling the team to new owners, or moving the team to a new location becomes a very real possibility. These transactions leave the city with not only an empty arena, but also empty hearts.

The relocation of the National Hockey League's Minnesota North Stars to Dallas, Texas illustrates this point all too well. In 1993, the team's owner, Norm Green, decided to move the team after a combination of dwindling profits, being denied a new arena, failed development

plans, and personal issues. The team's move hurt North Stars' fans emotionally, as well as the city of Bloomington, Minnesota economically.

### Historical Significance

Sports history is an underutilized medium of research. In most cases, the only writing found on sports is from either professional sports-writers who usually fail to delve into the depths beyond narrative history of the team or events. Any in-depth exploration of a team usually comes from a person inside the organization, who almost always focus on a personal aspect within the larger context of the franchise.

In this case, Bob Showers' book, *Minnesota North Stars: History and Memories with Lou Nanne*, provides a great source of history for the team, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at the decisions made by the organization as both men were crucial members of the franchise. The article "Spleen for Green", by Leigh Montville, also provides a glimpse into the feelings of the time. Newspaper articles from the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* also show how both the public and the franchise responded to different factors involved in the relocation, as well as the time leading up to it.

Professional historians seem to completely ignore sports as an area of study. This is unfortunate as sports affect nearly everyone's daily life, whether they know it or not. For example, people in Wisconsin often plan their Sundays around Green Bay Packer games. A huge portion of Green Bay's economy is driven by the Packers. Sports provide a link between the professional business world and the everyday casual world. This project will be of significance

to history as it explores the link seldom undertaken between these two worlds, as well as how it affects the city economically and the lasting impact it can have on fans.

### Background

Minnesota has always loved hockey, often producing some of the top recruits for colleges and professional leagues alike. The state is even unofficially called “The State of Hockey”. Naturally this state loved their local National Hockey League franchise, the Minnesota North Stars. The 1993 NHL season was disappointing for the North Stars, but things were looking hopeful. They missed the playoffs that year, ending a four year playoff streak that included a trip to the Stanley Cup Finals in 1991 (they lost the Stanley Cup to the Penguins in 6 games).

Adding to North Stars fans’ optimism was the emergence of their 1988 first round draft pick, Mike Modano. Modano was touted as one of the most promising American born players ever, and was to be the backbone of the franchise for years to come. That year, he seemed to be right on the verge of becoming the star everyone expected him to be, scoring a then career-high 93 points.

Their optimism would be crushed on March 11, 1993. On that fateful day Norm Green announced he would be moving the team to Dallas, Texas, almost literally selling them down the river.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, this upset the fans that had forged a bond with the team. Unfortunately, the reality of sports is not simply driven by love and passion, but money as well. The North Stars

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<sup>1</sup> “North Stars’ Move to Dallas Finalized,” Chicago Tribune, March 11, 1993, Sports Section.

decision to move was driven by financial reasons, as well as personal difficulties faced by the Green family, and in turn caused economic fallout in the surrounding area in Minnesota.

Rumors of the team moving had started before Norm Green had even taken ownership of the team. Since 1967, the team was owned by brothers Gordon and George Gund. In 1987, while the team played at the Met Center in Bloomington, nearby land came up for sale. The Gunds saw this as a great opportunity to not only remodel the Met Center, but also build a shopping center. The deal would eventually fall through, with the competing developers, the Ghermezian brothers, obtaining the property from the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission. They would go on to build the Mall of America.<sup>2</sup>

The Gunds still wanted to remodel the Met Center. They planned on expanding the concourses in order to better accommodate the fans, add some 40 suites, put a ticket office in front of the building, and even add a restaurant. In order to do this they would have needed 15 million dollars from the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission. In a show of their good faith, the Gund brothers offered to sign a 20-year lease. They were turned down by the Commission, as well as the city of Bloomington. During the late 1980's in Minnesota, people believed that sports teams should exist financially independent from the cities, so the commission did not want to part with a sum of money that large.<sup>3</sup> The Target Center was also under construction downtown, and many believed the North Stars would simply move into the

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Showers, *Minnesota North Stars: History and Memories with Lou Nanne* (Edina: Beaver's Pond Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Showers, 13.

new complex.<sup>4</sup> The Gunds funded and installed 20 suites for 3.5 million dollars, and sold them with ease.<sup>5</sup>

The Gund brothers' requests for money from the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission were denied again in 1989. With the Target Center being developed downtown, the Gunds were growing anxious. The Gund family had connections to San Jose, and the city was willing to build an arena. The Gunds were seriously weighing their options. Eventually they sold the North Stars franchise to Howard Baldwin and Morris Belzberg<sup>6</sup> in a deal to bring NHL hockey to the Bay Area, creating the San Jose Sharks. The deal allowed them to take a certain number of players with them from the North Stars in order to form a competitive team. The North Stars would then be allowed to participate as an equal partner in the expansion draft that would occur later that year.

In 1990, after failing to move the team to the Target Center due to advertising disputes with the building's owners, Baldwin sold his share of the team to the man who would eventually crush the heart of Minnesotans, Norm Green. Green fired Baldwin as manager almost immediately because he did not agree with his management style.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the team's success in the late 80's and early 90's, attendance was dwindling for the North Stars, while average attendance in the league was actually rising.<sup>8</sup> In order to fix this issue, Green sent some of his employees to Detroit to see how they had managed to increase

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<sup>4</sup> Showers, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Showers, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Showers, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Showers 16

<sup>8</sup> John C. Leadley and Zenon X. Zygmunt, "When Is the Honeymoon over? National Hockey League Attendance, 1970-2003", *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Jun., 2006), 227.

ticket sales while dealing with similar issues. After hearing the report and some ideas, Green was not impressed and chose not to pursue any of the ideas. Belzberg was outraged by this, and reportedly stood up and demanded for Green to buy his share of the team so he could leave.<sup>9</sup> Green now owned the entire franchise.

Green had a development plan similar to the Gund brothers. He wanted to build a shopping area between the Met Center and the Mall of America. Like the Gunds, however, he was turned away by the Bloomington Commission. History would repeat itself again, as Green asked the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission to help finance the construction of more suites in the Met Center. Green was denied. He had been hoping the extra revenue from these ventures would help offset the revenue lost from dwindling ticket sales.<sup>10</sup>

This led to the next hint at the eventual relocation. Green went to Lou Nanne, who was at that time overseeing operations of the team, and asked him to find designs for a new logo that would incorporate just the word "Stars" on the jersey, as well as incorporating black into the colors. He was assured the North Stars Logo would stay around, but that this would be much better for merchandising.<sup>11</sup> In reality, it seems as though the new logo would actually be much easier to transfer to a new franchise due to its ambiguity. Al Shaver, the play-by-play broadcaster for the team's entire history saw what was happening. On the night of the final home game Shaver gave an interview and said, "I think Norm was going to move the team from the beginning. I think that was his idea when he bought the team. We all should have known

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<sup>9</sup> Showers, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Showers, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Showers, 17.

when he changed the uniforms, taking away the N and leaving just the word STARS on the jersey. Stars? You can be Stars anywhere."



North Stars Original Logo



North Stars New Logo

After eight years of being in the red, the move was finalized and announced in the March of 1993. The North Stars would no longer be the pride of Minnesota, moving south to Dallas after the North Stars' season ended. There was still a small glimmer of hope for the fans,

as they were only one point out of playoff contention with a handful of games remaining. Perhaps they could delay the inevitable for a few more weeks, maybe even make a playoff run and send the team off as Stanley Cup Champions. The team played their final game in Minnesota on April 13, 1993. In front of a sold-out crowd, they lost to the Chicago Blackhawks. On April 15, 1993, the end had come. The North Stars lost their last game to the Detroit red Wings by a score of 5-3.<sup>12</sup> After over two decades of hockey in Minnesota, they were gone in an instant.

A shift in markets is in no way unique to Minnesota. In 1995, the Quebec Nordiques did the same thing. They moved to Denver, Colorado, and became the Colorado Avalanche in order to have their own hockey market. They had previously shared a market with the more successful Montreal Canadians, in a rivalry termed the “Battle for Quebec”. They also faced another unique issue in that Canadian teams received revenue in Canadian dollars, but paid contracts in American Dollars. This was a concern, as during this time the Canadian dollar was significantly weaker than its American counterpart.<sup>13</sup> There was also no salary cap in this era, which allowed players’ salaries to inflate at remarkable speeds. This salary inflation is an issue that all NHL teams had to deal with at the time.

Similar to the North Stars, they also faced the trouble of an ailing facility. The rink the Nordiques played, the Colisee de Quebec, faced many of the same issues the North Stars own facility faced. The Colisee de Quebec was built in the 1940’s, meaning it lacked many of the technological abilities needed to support modern professional sports. They lacked luxury boxes

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<sup>12</sup> Showers, 11.

<sup>13</sup> OANDA. “Historical Exchange Rates”. <http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates/>.

that could attract corporations to finance the team. They also did not have modern concession areas, meaning they could not serve as many people or prepare the food as efficiently.<sup>14</sup> When ticket sales and contracts to outside parties (advertising, television, etc.) are what pay the bills, lacking the amenities of modern professional sports buildings can have a large impact.

Another franchise that had to relocate due to similar issues was the Houston Oilers. The Oilers originally played in the American Football League, and joined the National Football league in their later years as part of a merger. After the 1995 season, the team announced they would move to Nashville and become the Tennessee Titans.

The main reason for the teams' move was Houston's the refusal to build a new stadium. Their stadium in Houston, the Astrodome, did not have the advertising resources and space available that modern stadiums of the time utilized. In 1987, amidst the threat of the Oilers moving to Jacksonville, Florida, the city renovated the Astrodome in order to keep the team. These renovations included new AstroTurf, 10,000 new seats (it previously had only 50,000 seats, the fewest of any professional football stadium), and 69 luxury boxes. This would cost 69 million dollars, which the city funded through taxes.<sup>15</sup> These managed only to delay the move, as the franchise continued to demand more renovations that the city, and its taxpayers, denied them funding for.<sup>16</sup>

Green blamed the move of the North Stars on finances. It was no secret that the team had been less-than-profitable for years. They often had open seats in the arena during games,

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<sup>14</sup> CBC Sports, "Nordiques, Au Revoir", Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/sports/hockey/hockey-flight-in-canada/nordiques-au-revoir.html>

<sup>15</sup> "Houston's Mistake". Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. (January 2, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Animosity toward Adams/Poll indicates Oilers' boss is own worst enemy. "The Houston Chronicle". (August 12, 1995)

even though they had the lowest-priced tickets in the league, often only selling for around 21 dollars.<sup>17</sup> Green brought up his lost figures many times in interviews, with the numbers constantly inflating. Initially, reports stated that Green was in the hole about 6 million dollars.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the announcement Green said he was down over 24 million dollars.<sup>19</sup> This all coming from the man who once said, "Only an idiot could lose money on hockey in Minnesota."

Green had backup plans for if the North Stars could not make the profits he wanted. He planned to unite the development of the Mall of America with the Met Center. In an interview with the *Star Tribune*, Green's lawyer and chief aid Jim Erickson confirmed Green's plan. "That was Norm's dream. He hoped to turn the team into a moneymaker, but if it did not make money, his insurance policy was to use his developing expertise and tie the Met Center into the mall"<sup>20</sup>. His plan centered on the city giving him the land tax free, in order for him to develop it. Executive vice president of the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, Bill Lester, had a simple statement about why they denied Green the land, "He did not want to pay for it, and that was not acceptable to us."<sup>21</sup>

Adding to the financial woes, the North Stars could not draw as much of a crowd as the other professional sports in the area, as they also had a hockey competitor in the form of another beloved Minnesota staple to contend with. The Minnesota Golden Gophers of the University of Minnesota perennially have one of the best college hockey teams in the nation. As

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<sup>17</sup> Leigh Montville, "Spleen For Green: Norm Green is reviled in Minnesota for his decision to move the North Stars south", *Sports Illustrated* (April 19, 1993) , 2.

<sup>18</sup> Scott Goldberg, "Hitting the Post: Interview about Norm Green, With Scott Goldberg of KARE 11". (February 20, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Montville, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Josephine Marcotty and Curt Brown, "Norm Green had many reasons to take the 'North' out of Stars," *Star Tribune*, March 14, 1993, News Section, Metro Edition.

<sup>21</sup> Marcotty and Brown.

this was also very good hockey to watch, and produced many future NHL players, this was a popular choice for fans.

The Golden Gophers were very successful during this time, adding to their ability to draw attendance from the North Stars. The Golden Gophers were regular season champions in their conference in 1988, 1989, and 1992<sup>22</sup>. Adding to this string of accomplishments, they appeared in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Frozen Four tournament in 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1989<sup>23</sup>. They also won their conference championship to take home the MacNaughton Cup in 1993, the final season of the North Stars<sup>24</sup>.

As collegiate students are not paid to play by their schools, the North Stars had a tough time competing with the ticket prices of these games. This forced the North Stars to charge well below the NHL average. In 1992, the tickets averaged only 21 dollars each.<sup>25</sup> To put that into better context, the average ticket for an NHL hockey game in those days was just about 30 dollars<sup>26</sup>. The North Stars also had a very small season ticket base, only selling 6,400 season tickets in their final season<sup>27</sup>.

Green blamed the fans for not supporting the team by buying tickets. "I'm really disappointed and hurt that nothing has happened yet," Green said. "The public knows the circumstances. They've known them for a long time. We're not looking for any government

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<sup>22</sup> "Regular Season Champions – Gophers Only".

<http://gopherhockeyhistory.com/history/league/mnRegChamp.asp>.

<sup>23</sup> "League Statistics", <http://gopherhockeyhistory.com/history/league/index.asp>.

<sup>24</sup> "All time MacNaughton Cup Winners",

<http://gopherhockeyhistory.com/history/league/macNaughton.asp?offset=25>.

<sup>25</sup> Montville, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Bernt Polling-Voche, "Wallet Vs. NHL tickets", 1994/1995.

<http://www.hockeyarenas.com/fancost/fancostpagegerman9495english.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Montville, 2.

support or guarantees. What we are looking for is a groundswell from the public.”<sup>28</sup> Green placed the onus directly on the fans for the team moving. He backed up his comment with another statement explaining how the fans were not buying enough season tickets:

If someone thinks it's OK for us to lose millions, and they don't have season tickets and they think that's OK, that's a problem. Everyone has to ask themselves if they have season tickets. There are no excuses; we have a great coach, and the kids are working hard. But there are only 2,000 clients who have season tickets. That's not enough.<sup>29</sup>

There were other factors involved in the move, however. In March 1993, one month prior to the announcement, Green was involved in a sexual harassment suit filed by his former executive assistant. Green was not the most liked person by his female employees. According to reports, Green would often kiss his female workers and demand kisses back.<sup>30</sup> To make matters worse for him, he allegedly also shook women by their shoulders to determine if they were wearing bras. Obviously this is another big thing that would get most people sent to human resources immediately. Green also wanted to hire women with the “right look”, which were apparently blondes with large breasts and pretty faces. He also reportedly fired a female employee because she did not have the “right chemistry” with him.<sup>31</sup> Green’s former assistant Kate Hayes wrote in a sworn testimony that she quit her job in 1991 and warned the North

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<sup>28</sup> Rachel Blount, “Green puts blame on fans; Says ‘there are no excuses’ for not buying tickets”, *Star Tribune*, February 19, 1993, Sports Section, Metro Edition.

<sup>29</sup> Blount.

<sup>30</sup> Montville, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Montville, 2.

Stars' vice president Patt Hoffman that "Norm Green was a sexual harassment case waiting to happen."<sup>32</sup>

Many fans believed that this situation influenced his decision to finalize the move. His wife was upset with him, for understandable reasons, and she wanted him away from those women. What would be a more perfect way to escape this little dilemma than pack up and move to a warmer climate, and buy your wife a new house to ease her pain and suffering? In a deposition, Green's senior vice president Pat Forcica confirmed the allegations indeed did play a role, "When allegations of Green's inappropriate behavior became public in November 1992, he concluded that the hockey team would leave the Twin Cities because Green would not tolerate the publicity."<sup>33</sup>

Green eventually settled the suit out of court for an undisclosed amount, while maintaining he was innocent. In an interview Green said, "In my view, that lawsuit was strictly a money grubbing thing. They were wrong, they lied, they made some money, and that's how I feel about it."<sup>34</sup>

### Economic Impact

The sight of people migrating from bars toward a sports arena is familiar to anybody who has ever gone to a professional sporting event. Sports arenas are more often than not surrounded by bars, restaurants, and within walking distance (or at the very least a short drive) from blocks of hotels. Sporting events are also great places for businesses to advertise, which

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret Zack, "Papers detail alleged harassment by Green", Star Tribune, January 29, 1994, News Section, Metro Edition.

<sup>33</sup> Zack.

<sup>34</sup> Jane Helmke, "KARE 11 Exclusive: One-on-one with Norm Green", *KARE 11 Sports Extras* (February 21, 2008)

allows them to reach thousands of potential customers at one time. These local businesses are financially tied very closely to the sports teams.

The 2012/13 NHL lockout proved this point well. Los Gatos Brewing Company resides in close proximity to the San Jose Sharks home arena, the H.P. Pavilion. Liberty Miller, the manager of Los Gatos Brewing Company, noticed the impact of the teams absence during the lockout immediately. "When the Sharks play, it brings customers to our restaurant. Without the games, we saw a significant decline in business," Miller said. "We usually hire more people during the NHL season but the lockout this year did not allow us to do that; rather, it forced us to cut some employee's hours."<sup>35</sup>

Pittsburg also demonstrated the link between sports franchises and the local economy. According to Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey, the city of Pittsburgh gains 2.1 million dollars in revenue from each Pittsburgh Penguins home game, with half of the revenue going to the surrounding local businesses. Therefore, for every home game that was not played the local economy lost over 1 million dollars of revenue.<sup>36</sup> Multiply that number by the amount of games missed during the season, and you can see how detrimental the absence of the local sports teams can be to the businesses around the arenas. If half a season lost to a lockout can cost a large market city, such as Pittsburgh, over 40 million dollars, imagine what the complete loss of a franchise could do. That loss is felt even more when that city is a small market, such as

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<sup>35</sup> Seana Smith, "Local Businesses Pay for NHL Lockout", Fox Business (January 14, 2013). [http://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/2013/01/14/local-businesses-pay-for-nhl-lockout/?cmpid=prn\\_aol&icid=maing-grid7%7Cmaing5%7Cdl6%7Csec3\\_Ink1%26pLid%3D257096](http://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/2013/01/14/local-businesses-pay-for-nhl-lockout/?cmpid=prn_aol&icid=maing-grid7%7Cmaing5%7Cdl6%7Csec3_Ink1%26pLid%3D257096)

<sup>36</sup> Smith.

in Bloomington, where those surrounding businesses may fully rely on the games attracting business to them.

In order to measure economic effects on this scale, the United States performs an economic census every five years. This census measures how many establishments of various categories exist, and is broken down by state, county and city. In 1992, the city of Bloomington had a total of 23 hotels<sup>37</sup>, 157 restaurants, 7 bars, and 705 retail firms total<sup>38</sup>.

Because the census only occurs every 5 years, it means that after the team relocated to Dallas in 1993, there was a 4 year gap before the next census in 1997. However, the impact can still be seen as little growth or decline can be seen in these categories. According to the 1997 census, 22 hotels, and 8 bars existed in Bloomington<sup>39</sup>. Although this is not a giant loss of business, it still shows that demand for places to stay in Bloomington didn't grow, even during the economic boom the United States experienced during the 1990's.

The real impact of losing the North Stars can be seen in the number for restaurants and retail firms. In 1997, Bloomington had 72 restaurants<sup>40</sup>, less than half the number recorded by the previous census. Total retail firms in 1997 numbered 587<sup>41</sup>, a total loss of 118 retail

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<sup>37</sup> "1992 Census of Service Industries". Geographic Area Series: Minnesota. U.S. Department of Commerce. Issued December 1994.

<sup>38</sup> "1992 Census of Retail Industries". Geographic Area Series: Minnesota. U.S. Department of Commerce. Issued November 1994.

<sup>39</sup> "1997 Census of Accommodation and Foodservices". Geographic Area Series: Minnesota. U.S. Department of Commerce. Issued December 1999.

<sup>40</sup> "1997 Census of Accommodation and Foodservices". Geographic Area Series: Minnesota. U.S. Department of Commerce. Issued December 1999.

<sup>41</sup> "1997 Census of Retail Trade". Geographic Area Series: Minnesota. U.S. Department of Commerce. Issued March 2000

businesses. When you consider the lost tax revenue the city could have had from these places, as well as permit and licensing fees they could have collected, that is a large loss.

This loss would not just be felt by the local government and businesses that were forced to close. An economy is like a large web; all the firms are interconnected and rely on each other. When you take this into account the loss is multiplied. If the city of Bloomington lost 85 restaurants, that is not just revenue for the local government lost, but revenue from restaurant supply companies and local food producers. The loss continues to spread throughout the chain, hurting firms all around the city, and perhaps even the state.

However, because the loss is spread among so many firms, and the loss is mitigated with each new link in the chain, the loss of the team does not appear to have hurt any area larger than Hennepin County. The State of Minnesota, as a whole, showed growth between 1992 and 1997.

According to the Economic Census data from 1992 and 1997, every category except auxiliary firms showed large growth. The number of service industries, which declined in Bloomington, grew by 21.3 percent. The numbers of employees for service industries grew by 34.1 percent. That is a large amount of growth by any standard.

Retail trade also showed growth, although not on the same scale as service industries. Retail trade grew by 2.4 percent, which resulted in the 12.7 percent growth in employees over the five year gap. Taking into account the fact that every other major category of industry grew, it appears as though Minnesota, as a state, flourished.

1987 SIC Description	<u>Establishments</u>			<u>Sales, receipts, or shipments (\$1,000)</u>		<u>Paid employees</u>			<u>Annual payroll (\$1,000)</u>				
	1997	1992	% chg	1997	1992	% chg	1997	1992	% chg	1997	1992	% chg	
<a href="#">Mining</a>	146	N	N	1,739,417	1,325,031	31.3	7,155	N	N	347,723	N	N	
<a href="#">Construction industries</a>	12,709	10,664	19.2	18,208,956	12,035,648	51.3	(100,000 +)	85,977	N	3,572,392	2,453,914	45.6	
<a href="#">Manufacturing</a>	8,471	7,691	10.1	78,725,094	57,301,995	37.4	399,756	346,639	15.3	13,759,547	10,261,516	34.1	
<a href="#">Transportation, communications, and utilities %% **</a>	6,124	5,132	19.3	16,400,262	11,947,356	37.3	103,124	86,428	19.3	3,250,254	2,375,404	36.8	
<a href="#">Wholesale trade</a>	10,915	10,219	6.8	103,287,268	72,451,248	42.6	147,559	123,135	19.8	5,479,893	3,819,114	43.5	
<a href="#">Retail trade</a>	28,378	27,710	2.4	48,814,277	35,622,218	37.0	419,310	371,951	12.7	5,423,993	4,068,740	33.3	
<a href="#">Financial, insurance, and real estate industries</a>	12,840	10,610	21.0	N	34,482,844	N	152,750	124,756	22.4	6,232,366	4,116,265	51.4	
<a href="#">Service industries</a>	Taxable	37,594	31,004	21.3	30,489,747	18,764,207	62.5	468,166	349,240	34.1	11,925,851	7,543,950	58.1
	Exempt	6,133	5,626	9.0	12,913,528	9,717,732	32.9	222,786	208,341	6.9	5,350,092	4,346,135	23.1
<a href="#">Auxiliaries</a>	943	964	-2.2	471,853	N	N	96,581	92,014	5.0	5,197,842	4,064,554	27.9	

1997 Economic Census: Comparative Statistics for Minnesota 1987 SIC Basis

Although this seems counter-intuitive, considering Minnesota lost a professional sports team, the result really is not that surprising. As mentioned earlier, the loss is spread out among so many firms total that they are able to absorb the loss. That means that only the directly affected firms in Bloomington were hit hard enough to be forced to shut down.

The fact that Minnesota was not hurt economically is also addressed by economic theory. Individuals have a set amount that they choose to consume. This consumption comes in

the form of anything they buy; food, clothing, shelter, entertainment, etc. When one of these forms of consumption is eliminated as a possibility, in this case the entertainment in form of a North Stars game, the individuals will spend the money that would have been spent on tickets on new forms of entertainment. This could be items such as dinners at restaurants, golfing, or going to movies. According to this theory, the money lost by the franchise's relocation is then reinvested into the larger economy. This theory explains the fact that Bloomington suffered, while the state of Minnesota seemed to thrive during this period.

### Public Reaction

Hockey is a game of passion, and that passion extends to the fans. As one would expect, when the move was finalized the fans did not take it well. Unfortunately for Norm Green, he was by far the easiest person to blame for the move, and took all the heat from the fans.

At the final game, fans came prepared to send off their beloved team, as well as their favorite target of spite. For every sign stating the team and players would be missed, there was another sign that read "Norm Sucks." This would become the favorite chant of the crowd that night as well, being heard at every almost every pause in the play.<sup>42</sup> The passion was used for a positive gain as well. At the doors and around concourses, buttons with the ever-so-popular slogan "Norm Sucks" were sold to benefit Cerebral Palsy, and people were more than ready to support the cause.<sup>43</sup> Lori Russell, of West St. Paul, echoed the same sentiments. When asked

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<sup>42</sup> Montville, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Montville, 2.

her feelings at the final game she said, "I'm here to support the Stars. To hell with [Green]." <sup>44</sup>

When asked about the team's relocation, Irwin Jacobs, a financier in Minneapolis, said, "Norman went from being a god to hearing fans yell, 'Norm sucks,' and he didn't have to put up with that, so he left town. He felt so abused by everyone here that he didn't want any part of this community. He wasn't born or raised here, so it all became a game of chicken and someone lost" <sup>45</sup>

The hate for Green was not isolated to just Minnesota. In early April, the North Stars were playing a road game in Los Angeles at the famous sports arena The Forum. While Green was sitting in his press box and taking in the game, a disgruntled fan found him. The fan proceeded to pour the entire contents of his alcoholic beverage on Green's head. <sup>46</sup> While it is not unusual for fans to disagree with management, you very rarely see them physically attack management or owners.



Norman Green

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<sup>44</sup> Kevin Duchscherer and Eric t. Pate, "Fans party heartily to the bitter end; With no Stars on horizon, they'll miss players, but not you-know-who", *Star Tribune*, April 14, 1993, Sports Section, Metro Edition.

<sup>45</sup> Marcotty and Brown.

<sup>46</sup> Montville, 2.

A video camera was also present before the start of the final home game, recording peoples' thoughts. Of course there were the familiar "Norm sucks" chants and other more colorfully worded shots at Green, but other people shared some more personal stories. One man talked about how his earliest memory of his father was sitting behind the net at a North Stars game, and how sad he was that he did not have the opportunity to do that with his son. Another man said, "He is taking away 26 years of tradition... this is a way of life for us." Also on the video was a particularly memorable fan sign that read, "Norm may have harassed his employees but he screwed the fans."<sup>47</sup>

Andrea Brouillette, of Minneapolis, only missed one North Stars game in her life in order to get married. She offered her thoughts on the situation after the game. "I don't know how to deal with this, cry or scream or be angry," she said. "I've been coming since I was 12. It kept me out of trouble when I was a kid"<sup>48</sup>.

To compare, the fans of the Houston Oilers who lost their team in a similar manner, behaved in a completely different manner. Oiler games hit a Television rating low in their final season, with only 11 percent of households in the viewing area watching the games on television.<sup>49</sup> Oilers merchandise also disappeared from stores. Places that once made huge profits on Oilers apparel pulled the items from the shelf as soon as the team packed its last

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<sup>47</sup> "Norm Sucks", Mosquito Video Productions.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngtu5F5aBME&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngtu5F5aBME&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>48</sup> Duchschere and Pate.

<sup>49</sup> Michelle Koidin, "Life in Houston goes on without the Oilers", TexNews (December 18, 1997).

box.<sup>50</sup> The fans, who could have saved the team through tax hikes, completely abandoned their franchise.

North Stars fans were the complete opposite. They rallied around their franchise as it took its dying breaths. As mentioned earlier, the last few games sold out. Merchandise not only stayed on shelves, but can still be purchased today, 20 years after the team left. To this day, when going to a game of Minnesota's current NHL team, the Minnesota Wild, there are almost as many North Stars Jerseys as Wild jerseys. Mike Modano echoed this in an interview after his retirement. "They were just devastated. They still are. Every time we still go up there to play in that building, there are North Stars jerseys and people that were season ticket holders when we were at the Met Center in Bloomington. It was a big blow to that town."<sup>51</sup>

This kind of support for former players is rare in sports today. Look at the Brett Favre saga for example. Favre was the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers from 1992 to 2007. He would eventually come out of retirement to play for the division rival Minnesota Vikings. A man who was once the heart and soul of a franchise, as well as the idol of every little boy who grew up watching the Green Bay Packers, became public enemy number one in Wisconsin in a heartbeat. This kind of passion and love is a true testament to North Stars Fans.

Perhaps the best example of this is Mike Modano, who was the last North Stars player in the NHL. Even though he played for the Dallas Stars for all but the last year of his career when he moved to a Western Conference rival in the Detroit Red Wings, fans always cheered

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<sup>50</sup> Koidin.

<sup>51</sup> SportsDayDFW, "Mike Modano's reaction to moving Stars to Dallas: 'Where the hell is it?'" , Dallas Morning News (September 23, 2011).

for him when his name was announced (it is not uncommon in the NHL to hear boos when a former hometown player touches the puck while playing with his new team). After he announced his retirement, he had one game remaining to play in Minnesota against the Wild. He came onto the ice in a North Stars jersey and received a standing ovation from the crowd that lasted several minutes.



Modano's final game in Minnesota

### Conclusion

The Minnesota North Stars' move to Dallas illustrated the impact a team can have on its fans and community perfectly. Although a sports franchise relocating is not a new phenomenon, several factors made the North Stars' decision to move unique.

An arena's ability to support large crowds is important to a franchise. If the arena cannot support enough attendance to generate feasible amounts of income, a franchise must decide to remodel or build a new arena. In the North Stars' case, this came in the form of adding suites to the Met Center and contemplating a move to the Target Center. This led to

money issues with the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, and eventually played a major role in starting the process for relocation.

Battles over land for development between the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission and North Stars' owners, the Gund brothers and Norm Green; show how local government and factors more than the sport itself can influence decisions made by the franchise. This battle also showed how little influence the fans really have, even though the fans are the heart and soul of the franchise, providing revenue and support.

The sexual assault allegations against Norm Green also show how factors completely unrelated to the sport the franchise participates in can become a factor in the franchise's decision. These events seemed to play a larger role in the team's decision to move than many people thought. This is unfortunate for fans of the team, who were in no way involved in those activities.

The role of the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers hockey team also shows a unique relationship that sports franchises must make sure to pay attention to. The fact the Golden Gophers could play a brand of hockey that competed with the North Stars for less money drew attendance away from the North Stars' home games. This played a role in attendance, but is still somewhat shocking as the state of Minnesota is very proud of their hockey.

As easy as it is to blame Green for the team's move, his statement about the fans not buying tickets is a good point. The team charged the lowest ticket prices in the NHL, and if the fans loved the team as much as they claimed, it is surprising that they did not financially

support the team more than they did, even though they were not always the most competitive team. Some blame must be accepted by the fans, as hard as that may be to swallow.

Economically, Bloomington was affected by the North Stars' departure. Retail sales and service industries, such as hotels and restaurants, took the brunt of the blow. Between 1992 and 1997, Bloomington lost several businesses in these categories. These losses would impact the tax revenue and overall economic health of Bloomington.

However, this impact was not felt by the state of Minnesota. This is due to the fact that the economy as a whole was able to absorb the loss of the North Stars. The loss was spread around enough firms that only those in Bloomington directly reliant on the business brought in by the franchise were affected enough to close. After the loss of the North Stars, Minnesota actually thrived, growing in all major divisions of firms in the Economic Census.

Economic theory also helps explain why the loss was not detrimental on a larger level. Individual's consumption habits tend not to change, leading to the investment of their money that would have gone to the North Stars to new forms of entertainment. Because of this simple fact, the loss of any sports franchise will not be as big a blow to the larger economies on a state-wide level.

The loss of the North Stars will always bring back some tears for Minnesota hockey fans. For many of the fans, it was the team they grew up with, and in some ways shaped their identity. These fans should also be commended for their continual dedication to their team, even though they no longer play in Minnesota. Their passion and pride can still be seen as they

support their current NHL team, The Minnesota Wild, by wearing the old North Stars jersey and apparel. Their love and respect for former North Stars players was also awe-inspiring.

Although the Minnesota Wild are firmly cemented in the Twin Cities and North Stars have faded into the past, the fans are still here. Their memories will always remain and be cherished, and those cannot be taken away by the quest for more money.

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