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American Taxpayers Have Spent $33 Billion on Sports Stadiums. They Got Fewer Seats - and Higher Prices.

When the Buffalo Bills open their $2.2 billion Highmark Stadium this September, they'll be opening the NFL's smallest venue: 60,108 seats, down from the 71,608 the old stadium held. And to make that happen, New York State and Erie County paid $850 million in public funds, resulting in 11,500 fewer seats, with personal seat licenses (the mechanism allowing holders the right to buy season tickets) running as high as $50,000 per seat. Get-in prices on opening night have already listed at $663 on the resale market.

The stadium was built, in significant part, with the money of the fans being priced out of it. New York State contributed $600 million; Erie County contributed $250 million, which collectively is the largest public subsidy ever committed to an NFL facility. But the Bills Mafia's new stadium isn't unique in this funding: In deal after deal across American sports, it's the same playbook in which the public funds a venue, and the owner uses it to serve a wealthier, smaller crowd.

How much did local and state governments spend on sports?

On the first day the FIFA World Cup opened, FIFA President Gianni Infantino held a press conference in Mexico City and offered this defense of his tournament's sky-high ticket prices: "If we are doing something wrong, everyone in North America is doing something wrong." It was his more forward argument following his comments at the Milken conference in April, in which he blamed the U.S. market's design for encouraging these exorbitant prices. "We have to look at the market—we are in the market in which entertainment is the most developed in the world, so we have to apply market rates."

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News Editor

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