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## **Does Milwaukee Keep the Bucks? The Role of NBA Arenas and Sport-anchored Urban Revitalization**

What does it take for a new major league arena to be a success in the eyes of stakeholders? How does a sports venue benefit the public? How best can team owners, major leagues, investors, governments, and local businesses collaborate?

In 2013, the NBA Milwaukee Bucks were in a challenging state, both on and off the court. The team was one of the NBA's least competitive franchises, finishing the 2012-2013 season with a 38-44 record. Prior to 2013, the Bucks had experienced a prolonged period of basketball mediocrity, marked by limited success and frequent roster changes. After reaching the Eastern Conference Finals in the 2000-2001 season, the team had struggled to regain that level of competitiveness. The Bucks made sporadic playoff appearances over the following decade but rarely advanced beyond the first round.

Herb Kohl, owner of the Bucks since 1985, was known for his dedication to the team and the city. Kohl was a former U.S. senator and longtime Milwaukee advocate, committed to keeping the team in Wisconsin and preserving its community ties despite the challenges of operating in a small market.<sup>1</sup> Kohl invested in the franchise's stability, yet more often with cautious spending rather than bold moves in the player market, limiting the team's ability to compete with larger-market franchises.

The Bucks' home arena, the BMO Bradley Center, which opened in 1988, posed additional problems. Unlike newer NBA arenas, it lacked the luxury suites, club seating, and modern facilities necessary to generate substantial revenue and improve the fan experience. It became clear that the Bucks needed a new facility to remain financially viable and competitive within the NBA.<sup>2</sup> Even with Kohl's dedication to keeping the team local, he struggled to secure the necessary public and private support for a new arena. As a result, the Bucks were in a precarious position, facing declining attendance, limited success on the court, and a pressing need for a modernized home to ensure the team's long-term future in Milwaukee.

Despite these challenges, General Manager John Hammond was gearing up for a promising new season. Astute player acquisitions sparked excitement, especially the team's first-round draft pick, Giannis

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