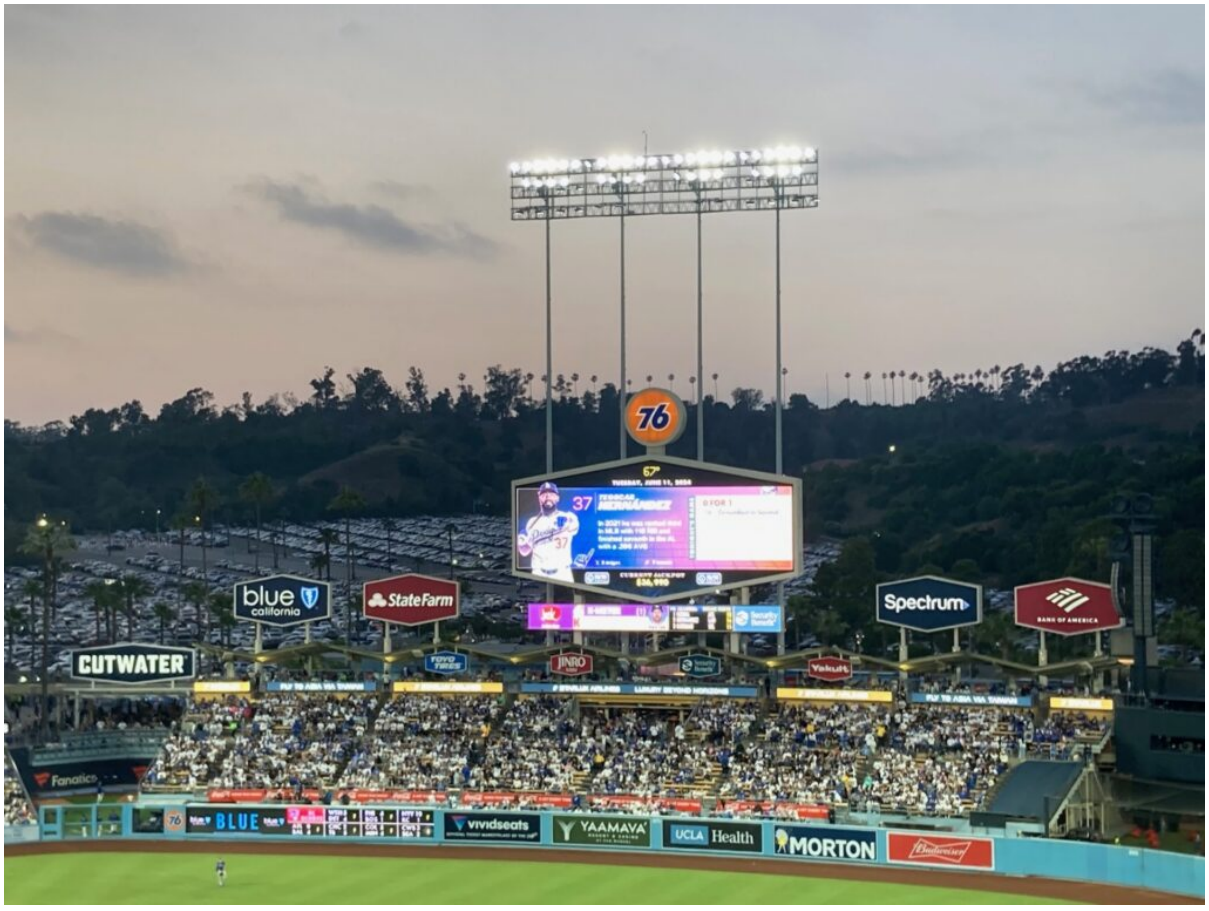


The Dodgers Stadium scoreboard topped by a prominent ad for the gas company 76

On a recent trip to the Ravine, a friend and I couldn't help but be struck by the prominence of advertisements for 76, a gas station company owned by the Big Oil conglomerate Phillips 66. A couple of giant 76 signs sit atop the two main Dodgers scoreboards; their placement is such that they dominate any view of the outfield and provide the backdrop for every photograph the Dodgers project of the team's beloved boys in blue. (See, for example, the photo above.)

This seems out of place, to say the least, in a stadium in Los Angeles, California, a city and a state forging pathbreaking climate policies and working mightily to combat the effects of climate change. In fact, the state of California is currently suing Phillips 66, along with other fossil fuel companies, for harms caused by climate change to communities around the state. According to the complaint filed by California on behalf of the public, Phillips 66 has deliberately deceived California consumers about the harms of its oil and gas products for decades, which in turn

has worsened wildfires, extreme heat, drought, flooding, and more, causing real harms to public health (and public coffers). Collectively, these harms have cost the state and its taxpayers billions of dollars in response costs, and those costs are climbing.

So why are the Dodgers sullying their brand with big oil? It turns out that the association between the Dodgers and 76 goes way back to the team's move to Los Angeles. According to an MLB and Dodgers press release in 2019, when the 76 advertisements were reinstalled at the stadium,

> It's a connection quite literally built into the history of the park and the memories of many players, fans and other Los Angeles Dodgers greats.
>
> The relationship between 76® and the Dodgers began when the brand stepped up to provide Walter O'Malley with the funding needed to construct the stadium following the move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles. For many years, it was the only brand visible at Dodger Stadium.
>
> "76® has been part of the Dodger team since the earliest days in Los Angeles. We're beyond thrilled to extend this historic sponsorship and return the iconic 76 logos to their original positions on top of both scoreboards, just like when the stadium opened," said Michael Wandell, Dodger Senior Vice President, Global Partnerships. "Through the years, the Dodgers and 76® have created collectible pins, player portraits and unforgettable memories – as fill-ups turned into game tickets – forming a legacy relationship that is embedded into the fabric of both brands."

It's clear that 76 is excited to continue this partnership in part because of the good PR it provides to the gas company brand. "We are thrilled to continue to fuel Dodger baseball and provide the opportunity for current and future generations of baseball fans to learn the history between Los Angeles Dodgers and 76®," said Rod Palmer, a marketing specialist for Phillips 66 Company, when the current signs went up. But lots has happened since the 1960s when this partnership was formed, and we know much more than we did then about the harms of fossil fuels.

Just this month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave a fiery speech in New

York calling on governments to ban fossil fuel advertising and imploring creative agencies and media outlets to stop greenwashing for Big Oil. He referred to these advertisers as “Mad Men fueling the madness.” Many have noted that sporting events remain one of the biggest arenas for fossil fuel sponsorship.

For their part, the Dodgers and MLB have acknowledged the need to act to address climate change, and in fact in other contexts they tout their green credentials and climate efforts. (Interestingly, it turns out that alongside the many tragic harms of climate change, there’s one that even diehard skeptics should care about if they are baseball fans: Extreme heat makes baseball less fair by worsening umpires’ accuracy in calling balls and strikes.) By associating the team and its players so prominently and proudly with 76, the Dodgers are lending sorely-needed credibility to brands that don’t deserve it. I’d call strike three on the whole relationship.