

As much as I hold the Astros organization in high esteem for the good way they treat customers, their website sure does give lousy directions to get to the stadium. I was coming from the north, but the directions told me to basically pass the park by (you can't see it from the interstate coming from the north), then exit in a lousy part of town to approach from the southeast about two miles away. We did eventually get there, and it instantly reminded me of Detroit where the park is right in the middle of town and surrounded by everything except parking lots.

I was further reminded of Comerica as I walked in, because there was a brick walkway with sponsors (but no players) etched in the bricks. As we arrived and looked around, our ears were violently assaulted by the WORST sounding salsa music (we separate salsa from tejano down here, because tejano is basically similar to old time polka tunes, while salsa is more modern dance music) that I've ever heard. After a minute or two, I suddenly remembered where I had heard the lead singer before – on a Casa Ole' commercial. I suddenly decided I liked it, because it was Jose Lima's album. Lucy (the 5 year old who still talks about him kissing her hand last winter) thought it would be OK if we got the album (hmmm...who owns him, anyway – I could envision that if the rally dice don't work, we resort to the rally CD...). The eardrums are safe so far, though, as I didn't see it anywhere, and so far he doesn't need it because he is 3-0 in three ABL starts, including wins over Don Leigers and Charles Allen.

Anyway, I digress.

The stadium had a kids section where they had baserunning tracks and radar guns and stuff, and the Enron Easter bunny was on hand to give free pennants to the girls. Our seats were right behind home plate, and they were excellent seats until the sun moved overhead and baked us. I would recommend behind third base, where you are always in the shade and have excellent views of the diamondvision and all that stuff, although too far down the line and you won't see the out-of-town scoreboard on the left field wall. We actually moved about 20 rows higher after the fifth inning, and our view as well as our body temperatures improved.

The girls were real excited at the start of the game, as the (again, TV quality) diamondvision started off showing the legs of the players boarding a train, which started off at warp speed and plowed through exploding roadblocks in the shape of the opposing NL Central team logos. For that matter, I was pretty impressed too. Unfortunately, that was the Aramis Ramirez 3-homer game, so the game itself wasn't real exciting or close. The Astros did manage two homers, though, and the girls got a kick out of seeing the train run across the left field wall. My wife was disappointed because this is the second game in a row we've been to (including Comerica last year) that Brad Ausmus sat out. She's got this thing for him, and I surprised her by not telling her ahead of time about the trade.

With all four of us going, we stopped at McDonald's on the way to the park, so I don't have any big reports on the food. I did use the bathrooms, though, and this place actually had real live urinals just like they use in the rest of the world (if you didn't understand that last sentence, check out the astrodome article).

My favorite feature of the park is rather unpopular, the center field hill. You can't really appreciate it from TV, but in person you realize just how steep that mound is. One ball was almost hit there, but it just missed. It's a very long way, and the smart outfielder stops at the warning track and lets the ball bounce right back to him. I still laugh about Andruw Jones trying to climb it at full sprint, and the ball nearly falling on his head as he stumbled miserably.

The afternoon provided us with one of those uniquely Texas moments, though, at the seventh inning stretch. Victoria turned to me and said, "Well, this might be one of our last real live Texas experiences" after the SECOND song, which is much more enthusiastic than the first. As soon as the last note of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" is halfway over, they crank up the sound and put up the words to "Deep in the Heart of Texas." They only can get through half of it before the umpires ask for the first pitch, though, and some of the die hard Texans still boo, even though the same thing happens every game.

As we left, we saw a sparse section of left field monuments (again, this team just doesn't have much history). We then started the three-hour drive home, and it just seemed appropriate that we stopped for dinner in Brenham...at Casa Ole', with a booth in sight of the life-size cut-out display of Jose Lima.