

There are disadvantages to seeing new parks a day apart, because you can't help but compare them and one is going to come up short, perhaps unfairly. The day game in DC that followed the night game in Philadelphia turns out to be a good example.

I came across the river from the east, and traffic was fine until I was right on the bridge. It was really snarling there, and I hadn't really done my homework to see where I should park. For future reference, if you are crossing the bridge from IH295 you want to be in the left lane (the ballpark is visible on the right), as there is \$17 parking that ends up being caddy-corner from home plate. I don't know where all those other cars were trying to get, but they weren't going to get there anytime soon. The best way to get anywhere in DC is the Metro subway from out in the boonies, and it looks like this place is no exception. But leaving from my parking lot, I only had one right turn and I was going back across the bridge, out of traffic, and to the beltway five minutes later.

I was expecting great seats when I saw row E in section 133. I didn't realize that row E meant row 2, as there seems to be no A through C. Sitting way down there means both good news and bad. My view of home plate was very restricted by two really big men in front and to the left of me. I had to choose to see either the pitcher or home plate, I was way too blocked to see both at the same time until late in the game when several of my USBL friends left early. Home plate was more the necessity because the usher warned several folks down there that in this section it was necessary to dodge any balls that might come, since there was no shot at catching one without a glove. Just for future reference, I suggest sitting behind third base in this park since the diamondvision is in right field. I had to constantly turn away from the action to see anything there.

There was a concrete walkway between the field and the stands, this is a special VIP season ticket section that costs something like \$35,000 per year for those portable seats. It's right there where they can talk with the groundscrew (only one of them got whacked with a rake as they rushed onto the field between innings) or try to flirt with the new ballgirl. It turns out that the old one was replaced for not paying attention. I'm not sure if she got hurt by a ball or caught one that was fair, but she was recently replaced. This one let a foul ball go and had to chase it quite a ways into short right field, because she was looking for the ump to throw his hands up, and instead he pointed to foul territory with both hands. I learned this because between innings the head groundskeeper was right in front of us trying to demonstrate to her all the different ways different umpires might signal.

It's DC, so there was a character that was a cross between Uncle Sam and Michael Jackson – he wore a blue sequined suit and red hat with one white glove and seemed to know everyone; his thing was jumping the fence from the seats like mine and running back and forth through the VIP walkway high-fiving fans on both sides of him when there was a Nats home run. Twice in a row in fact, as this was the game when Jesus Flores and Strasburg went back-to-back. Speaking of Strasburg, he seems to be a much bigger deal than Bryce Harper. There were high percentages of fans in team colors, since this was Baltimore and Washington (I would guess 25 and 75%, respectively). Anyway, it seemed like at least half of the shirts the Nats fans were wearing had 37 Strasburg on the back.

Something else there was a lot of – beer. That’s not really a story at a baseball game, but this seemed different to me. It must be the congress and lobbyist thing, because there were more beer-only concession stands that I’m used to seeing, and some were for imported brands only. In fact, thinking back you expect to hear all the walking vendors – and what do they shout at every game? “Cold Beer!” Not here. There were four different beer vendors that kept coming by if memory serves, but not once did I hear the normal call – they all had their different brands, and that’s what they called out – Heineken, Miller, Busch Beer, and the most dramatic – the Amstead Light guy kept screaming “STELLA!!!” at the top of his lungs.

Although the food variety was completely outdone by Philly the night before, most of it looked like pretty good quality. They have a “taste of the majors” stand behind third base with crab cakes and bratwurst. There is a Jamaican place in right field with spicy burgers and wings that I thought about trying, then I was going to try a “half smoke” from one of the chili dog stands. At the last minute though, “Crab Pretzel” caught my eye. I’m not a big fan of crabmeat, but I had to ask what this was. It’s a footlong soft pretzel toasted and topped with crabmeat, swiss cheese, and scallions. It was quite good.

The highlight of the whole day, though, was the National Anthem. I need to see if this is taped on You Tube or something, but it’s a violinist with an electric violin that’s made from a baseball bat. Think Jimi Hendrix with a bow. It crossed my mind to wonder if the Nats had intentionally (in hindsight, I certainly would have) used instrumental anthems to get the Baltimore fans off of their game with the stupid O’s yell, but if so it was in vain – and they really fumbled it because he paused for some fancy instrumentation and they ended up yelling it a few beats before he got to that point in the song – served them right.

In the end, although I certainly enjoyed myself, there just wasn’t anything spectacular or even uniquely different about this place to really stand out and give it a unique personality as a ballpark. That’s the difference that separates a good park like this from the great ones.