

Settle down and get comfortable, this is going to be a long one.

A co-worker and I arrived two hours early to the 1:05 game, just as the doors were opening. This gave us plenty of time to look around, as he is also a baseball fan and plays rotisserie.

I was immediately reminded of the Astrodome as I entered the bathroom and saw all of the troughs lined up against the wall. The difference was that these were porcelain and an uninformed visitor could immediately understand their purpose, as opposed to those metal cattle troughs they use for this purpose in Texas. There were also a whole bunch of framed ads along the wall in the strategic location above the troughs. When the same ads appeared over a similar strategic location in a San Francisco restaurant later that evening, I decided the mafia must be in a new business.

There is a big, huge collection of seats and windows in center field, so there are two identical scoreboards with diamond vision such that my seats in short right field (right on the extended line from the pitching mound to first base) were pointed right at it. Despite this being an older stadium, the seats had drink holders, although the seats were pointed to left-center field and I constantly had to look left to see home plate.

I bought a program, and decided I was going to score the game. As I got to my seat, though, I realized that I had a program, a news sheet of team events, and a one-sided Oakland Athletics Scorecard photocopied sheet. That was for the visitors, so I figured the home team sheet was printed in the book. When I didn't see it, I went back to the stand and told the man that I only had one scoresheet to cover one team. He said that was just how they did it, but then he gave me a second identical sheet.

There was a pretty good assortment of food, with one notable exception – I'm sure I didn't see a single hamburger for sale in the entire stadium. But that didn't matter anyway, as all everyone talked about was getting a "big dog". I was starting to think this was something special, so I asked one of the concession guys if it was some kind of sausage or anything, and he just said it was a footlong hot dog. I wasn't all that hungry, but I figured it would fill me up so I didn't need anything else, so I got one before I realized it cost \$6.75. First of all, it was AT LEAST sixteen inches long. It was pretty big around too, so I figured it was all bread. WRONG! It was smaller than knockwurst, but bigger around than most anything I could think of. The game went into extra innings, but I was just fine until dinner.

Nobody took batting practice, as the two teams had played a 13 inning game until midnight the night before. But 30 minutes before game time, there was a big ovation, and I saw Eric Byrnes trotting out to center field, then trotting back into the dugout. He's the one that hit the walk-off homer the night before, but I didn't find out if that's some kind of ritual or curtain call from the night before, or if he's just some kind of ham. I didn't see any other A's players until the pregame stuff started.

Speaking of the pregame, that was a little weird. The national anthem was sung before the home team took the field, which I found unusual. Then, there was the diamond vision. Now, I realize that it's quite a distance from the speakers in various locations and that the sound and images aren't always the same...but in Appomattox County High, they taught me that light travels faster than sound. They forgot to mention that the laws of physics are different in the state of California, because the sound was coming at least half-a-second sooner than her lips were moving on the diamondvision.

I did get to see one of those unusual characters, as there was this girl with purple hair and cat ears wearing a sparkly black outfit walking along the front railing, presumably looking for attention. I pointed her out to my friend, but he said that growing up in Allentown PA, he didn't think of her as being anything weird.

I got a kick out of some of the stats they showed. Once the teams took the field, the diamondvision cameras would focus on one of the A's infielders, and the caption would mention that Scott Hattieberg was batting .400 in the month of May (in 15 at bats), or that Bobby Crosby was leading all major league rookies with three home runs. Evidently Ken Macha wasn't as impressed with that stat as the stadium folks were, because he pinch-hit for him in the tenth when the team was down a run.

The seventh inning stretch was something of a downer, as they just played the background music and showed the words, leaving folks to sing on their own – which not many did. In fact, it was then that I noticed that in a tight 2-2 game, the crowd wasn't very lively. That all changed in the ninth inning, though. With Nick Punto on second and no one out against what we thought was a tiring Tim Hudson, the crowd really came to life as Hudson struck out first Jaques Jones, then Lew Ford, and everyone was on their feet yelling as Jose Offerman hit a sharp liner into the glove of Crosby.

I was dreading the bottom of the ninth, worried that they were going to do the Hoosiers speeches or something again and spoil what was a good stadium experience, but it was nothing cheesy at all. Just the yell of "Are You Ready to Rumble" followed by that upbeat NBA-ish song that has someone doing the Are You Ready For This.

The crowd was up but the A's weren't, and Crosby dropped a two-out pop-up allowing Sammy Stewart to score from first base. Now, with two outs and the tying Oakland run on first base in the bottom of the tenth, Marco Scutaro is up, and we knew it was over when the best thing diamondvision could mention is that Scutaro batted over .290 in spring training games.