

I didn't actually watch the movie, but just who do you root for when it's Jason vs. Freddy?

On the one hand, I was excited about going to Minnesota to see the new stadium in my second opportunity to get together with some of the guys from the USBL. On the other hand, I attended the Braves-Twins game as a very conflicted baseball fan. It's a given that I can't root for Minnesota, as they are in first place in the AL Central, ahead of the second place Tigers. Even my wife will admit that the Detroit Tigers were my true first love. The problem is that I'm from the Richmond area. Not that anyone here is bitter about the AAA Richmond Braves skipping town after 42 years or anything, but lets admit it. This place didn't need Steven Strasburg to suddenly make it loyal Nats territory. The Nats are now broadcast on the station that used to be part of the Atlanta Braves radio network, and our local team is now the AA affiliate of the San Francisco Giants.

So I arrived at the park forcing myself to root for the Atlanta Braves, but wearing a Richmond Flying Squirrels T-shirt. The first thing I noticed was the wall to wall people. I wondered what was going on, and at first decided that it was because I was using a center field entrance, when there was a pregame home run contest. The tarp was still on the field because it had been raining lightly all day, and the home run contest was taking place starting behind second base and they sure looked like tennis balls, but I couldn't really get through the walls of people to find out. Some of the guys in my group hit the bathrooms right at the entrance, but I figured with all the crowd I was better off to just start walking towards my seat behind first base and pass another one on the way. A funny thing, though...I didn't pass any. I thought people considered that kind of thing in new parks. In fact, even though I had left the contest area, there were still wall-to-wall people. I did pass a women's bathroom in deep right field, but didn't notice a men's one. I finally passed my seat and was halfway to home plate when I saw a sign for both men and women. It turns out that they were hidden between two vendors, not very well marked. And there really do seem to be more women's facilities than men's. Granted that's a good thing in society in general, but this is a baseball game. The men's lines are never supposed to be longer than the women's - that's just somehow not natural.

Another thing about all the people I saw – Aside from the one big bald guy wearing a Dale Murphy jersey, it was shocking to see how many people were wearing Minnesota Twins shirts, jerseys, jackets, hats, whatever you can think of. I noticed this right away of course, but it took me this long to mention it because I don't just mean at the ballpark. I had a couple hours to kill at the Mall of America earlier in the day, and I saw a higher percentage of the people there wearing Twins gear than I usually see in any ballpark for a game. I suppose that's how a small market team survives, but it was very striking. I'm not joking

that I would estimate 75% of the crowd at the game was wearing Twins gear. Look around at your next ballgame, that's a huge percentage. You usually notice when people are wearing team clothes, here you noticed when people walked by who weren't.

The crowd continued to be a consistent theme of everything that happened in this park. I never found much breathing room the whole time. Since when is there ever a line for the men's bathroom? I had an experience that has never before happened to me – I missed the national anthem (which took place more than ten minutes before the announced game time – I confess I wasn't planning on that or would have planned better) because I was still in that stupid line to use the bathroom. It at least sounded pretty nice from my inconvenient location.

I guess I'm showing my age because I still think of it as diamondvision, but the huge screen in left center (our location in short right field, halfway between first base and the foul pole was perfect) was dazzling and unmistakeably HD quality. There was no traditional scoreboard, as this big thing showed lineups with updated batting averages, pictures and replays, game summaries, everything – like a busy cable channel. On the right field wall was the more traditional and imperfect diamondvision, and it showed a small version of the pictures and announcements along with an out of town scoreboard whose details went completely beyond expectations. It had score, inning, and indicated how many outs there were along with a little diamond showing how many were on base for each game – not rotating, this was constant for every other game. This was, to me, the most impressive thing about the park itself.

One thing I didn't see live was the mascot. They have some happy looking bear that I saw once on the video board between innings, but he wasn't doing much of anything. That wouldn't have bothered me, except that as the game kept being exciting late, the board would call for noise, clapping, standing, you know the drill – and instead of just printing "clap, clap, clap" while you hear the beat over the PA, you had the video of the bear clapping next to it – again, in ridiculously high quality HD. Somehow you can handle that sort of thing when it's coming from a rally monkey better than some jerk in a bear suit. After the third or fourth time the bear implored the crowd to do something or other, I was really sick of it and happy to root for the Braves just so I didn't have to see him anymore.

If I were the GM, I would have some issues, because there are multiple bright screens in every direction showing the radar gun, and even a pitch count showing the balls and strikes by each pitcher. Something in me thinks it's wrong for the guy on the mound to see that without at least having to make a special

effort to look. These were very hard to avoid, and fantastic from my perspective as I'm still a numbers freak when it comes right down to it.

We had eaten before getting there, but I was ambivalent to the variety of what I saw. It covered the basics, and the only unique food I noticed was a "Murray's Cheesesteak" that the guy next to me ate. I don't think of Murray's as being quality meat, and this looked like pressed beef on a bun with white cheese, nothing else. At first glance it looked different and interesting, but the more I saw and smelled it...I don't think I missed anything. Apart from the concession stands though, there were multiple tabled concessions stuck in the middle of the walkways. If I had been hungrier, I would have liked one of the grilled sausages (Polish, not the pepper and onion Italian ones familiar in the east coast).

Granted, the only reason I knew it was there was that the insane line for the bathroom was so long that I was standing right next to it for several minutes and they smelled great. One of the guys explained to me that this was a new downtown stadium, not replacing the Metrodome (actually in a different part of downtown), and the footprint of the building was so small that they were squeezed out of many stadium amenities.

It was cold and wet, so even more folks were standing behind our handicapped zone (the back rows of the lower deck), making it difficult for anyone to get to their seats. I assumed that this was because of the cold and wet part at the start of the game, but when it cleared up nobody left. It turns out that many of the folks who buy seats choose to stand in the crowded walkway and just watch the whole game from there. Some of them even had kids, and there's just no way they could see anything, because we're talking three and four deep around the whole stadium.

They were attentive though, because I can't remember the last time I was at a game of any level where no one even tried to start a wave. I suppose that could have something to do with the back and forth game, but let's face the facts – two injured and beat up teams, and two starting infielders playing between them – Prado for Atlanta and Morneau for Atlanta. Punto was playing, but had moved over to second since Hudson was hurt for the Twins. I'll play the optimist on this one, though, since I've been whining too much already. The fact is that it was a fine game and an entertaining park and I was really struck by the enthusiasm of the fans. Come to think of it, I'm almost sorry to hope they're disappointed in October when Detroit beats them for the division title. They were even polite and good natured in the top of the ninth when the guy with the Murphy jersey was alone among the entire set of fans down the first base line standing in celebration following the suicide squeeze that scored Blanco in the top of the ninth to give Atlanta the lead and the win.