

## Truist Park

Atlanta's stadium has a limited access with just two or three ways to get into the "battery," which is sort of a self-contained little town of baseball shops, restaurants, bars, and hotels that give plenty of options both before and after the games. This was the site of the 2024 USBL Ballpark outing.

Well, it was the whole site for some of us. Don and his friends made the drive from Michigan, and stopped halfway in Cincinnati. And oh, by the way, saw a no-hitter by Nate Snell. Now since we are in a little baseball exclusive section of Atlanta, as he's walking in his new tie dyed Grateful Dead Reds jersey someone comes up to him and asks if he was there to see the Reds last night too. There's no lack of interest in baseball to be found here.

Our seats are behind third base, and the main entrance is in right center field. I normally like that as I get to explore, but it was a little confusing in this case as Ron and I got split from Don's group of six at some point. The upper seats are sectioned off, so if we had gone right up to the next level we would have been in the wrong place. Our confused journey did, however, lead us to a little Braves walk of fame with some really nice pictures and trophies from the hall of famers and world series champs.

When we saw the seats, I was reminded of third base at Cincinnati, and I would recommend the first base line in the future for this park. Avoid left field, as even with a 7:20 start folks were baking in the sun. Plus, you have to be where you can see the center field video board, as the entertainment was creative and not to be missed. In fact, I was very pleasantly surprised that the Atlanta Braves, who owned the AAA Richmond Braves (baseball sells itself, fans don't want gimmicks – there's a reason why the AA Flying Squirrels, in the same dilapidated ballpark fifteen years later, sell four times as many tickets), had so many creative ways to keep fans entertained (flex-cam, dance cam, and more).

For the pregame, they featured "Selfie Cam." There was a scan code on the videoboard, and when you scanned it with your cell phone it connected and showed everyone's selfies. This went on for probably ten minutes, and three phones were in sight – the couple to the left of me, a lady and her kids a couple rows down, and the young ladies in Don's family. But this thing was real popular - because at around ten seconds each, none made their way on the big board.

I will mention that we were really impressed by a local choir of around twenty that did an excellent and very harmonic version of the National Anthem. That's always a good start for me. And there were fireworks as the Braves took the field. Not that everything was perfect, as the "Make Noise" sign after the second pitch to the first batter was a little over the top.

In the post-covid world there was no kissing, but they had a "Hug Cam" after the first inning. Of course, they missed one when one couple was shown – and upon seeing herself, the lady immediately turned the wrong way and hugged some guy off camera. The intended guy just looked embarrassed, as there was an empty seat next to him.

Every time someone left the Marlins dugout for a mound visit, the guy way up in left field started beating the big kettle drum and the tomahawk chop started. Some thirty years later, they still do that. And when the starter came out of the game, the stadium lights were dimmed and everyone did a cell phone light vigil to mourn the departed pitcher. They did the same thing for the lead-up to the bottom of the ninth too, which was more creative and fun than the ones that almost everyone imitated twenty years ago. But no, it didn't work – the braves went down 1-2-3 and lost by a run.

But that wasn't the whole game, as I have long heard about one of the great features of Atlanta's ballpark – they still have an organ. And even now in the days of over-inflated egos and agents insisting on perks, somehow this guy gets away with things you can't do anywhere else. When Nick Fortes left slowly to discuss the high and wide strike three (a common strike during this game that upset a lot of batters), the organ started right up with "Big Girls Don't Cry."

That's when I started paying more attention and taking notes on some of the selections for the Marlins batters. Xavier Edwards was the leadoff batter, who walked up to "Mr. Ed" and "Pink Panther." Then there was "Jesus (Sanchez) Is Just Alright With Me," "Rolling Down the River" for Emmanuel Rivera, "Sister Christian" Pache, and "Wash that Man Right Out of my Hair" for Vidal Brujan (it took me a minute to put that one together, I have to admit it was a creative stretch). But the big one was Jonah Bride. He got "White Wedding" and "Goin' to the Chapel."

I didn't look hard for food since we met at a pub a couple blocks away, but I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. But this was an enthusiastic crowd, lots of entertainment for the family (especially music buffs) and a really good baseball experience.