

I had heard parking was bad at Wrigley Field, but I also heard waiting for an Uber was worse, and I didn't want my first experience with mass transit in Chicago to be with my wife late on a Friday night in an unfamiliar city. So I scouted out and settled on what they called the Camry lot, which was a block or two from the stadium and the internet blog on where to park said it was \$40 (the approximate cost of an Uber one way from where we were staying). All of the parking areas seemed to be named after Toyotas. I pulled my Versa into the lot, and learned that it cost \$60 to park. The lady must have correctly interpreted the look on my face, because she congratulated me. Since I was one of the first 25 Toyotas there, I could park in one of the primo spots against the fence. I didn't have the heart to explain that I was actually in a Nissan, so I just started going to one of the other spaces. She then ran towards me and hollered that no, my special space was over there. I gave up and parked in the special spot.

Now I realized something very different about this park, I couldn't find it without a GPS from a block away. I looked for light posts in the direction I thought it was in, and there weren't any. I asked some folks and was assured that we were starting off in the right direction. Then they looked at my car. I said yes, the lady needed some help identifying Toyotas. They laughed and said it was OK as long as I was rooting for the Cubs. I actually own three Marlins in Strat-o-matic leagues, but Zach Davies of my USBL team was the starter so I assured them I was a fan for at least the first six innings.

By height, the stadium is actually one of the smaller buildings around. And there are no light poles. I really don't know how the outfielders identify line drives, because there are no light sources behind them – they're all sitting on top of the infield grandstands. There is a courtyard in front where families play catch right in front of the entrance, which was pretty cool to see. But what really struck me is that this ancient stadium looked newer and nicer than any building around it. And it's not a shabby neighborhood either.

We got there plenty early and found our seats, and the ushers overheard that it was our first time there as I was talking about wandering the stadium. One gave us directions as to where the bullpens were and how far we could get without bleacher passes, and the other showed us to the desk where we were given our certificates as first time guests, then took our picture posing with them. The whole night the ushers did a great job as a team, interacting with all the fans in the area and not just their little assigned areas.

As we wandered in the top levels of left field, Victoria got a real kick out of all the stadium seats on the top of the buildings across the street. In left field, they even have their own foul pole. The real one is 359 feet, but there is one behind it across the street with 460 on it. As for the rest of the park, it struck me as surprisingly modern. There were multiple elevators, and it just didn't feel old. Even in the bathrooms, there was a stark contrast of old and new. They had electric eye flushers and sinks, but troughs as well as urinals – maybe just as a tribute to old ballparks. The only things that struck me as old fashioned about this park were the poles (behind us) that could obstruct views and the manual boards in center field. They even had two HD quality screens in left and right field that showed every single play on replay.

We looked for food before the game started, and there was really nothing unusual. There were hamburgers, pretzels, pizza and nachos to be found, but no crazy novelties. That surprised Victoria, although she really didn't care because she had already figured that the ballpark was her place to get a Chicago Dog. While there were several different brands of concessions selling mostly the same things, one had something a little extra – after all, it was called Chicago Dog. She got a smoked sausage and I

got kielbasa, but what set it apart was the fixings. Usually there are pump bottles for mustard, ketchup, and maybe relish. Here, you had a buffet of diced tomatoes, onions, peppers, and this crazy green relish. Now I realize pickle relish is normally green, but it's like there were subtle shades of blue and neon giving it this surreal look that jumped out. For all that, it tasted like regular sweet pickle relish...

We settled down for the game to start, and the pressbox announced the umpires. Normally this is ignored, but I perked up when they announced Angel Hernandez behind the plate. And I wasn't the only one who heard that, because 32,000 fans loudly booed him. This was followed by the National Anthem. This is when I was surprised. We were behind the Marlins dugout, and they were all lined up with their caps off. The Cubs, though, were nowhere to be found. They hadn't taken the field, and they weren't even in the dugout.

Once they eventually came out (in dark blue "Wrigleyville" uniforms - one team was in black with gray pants, the other in solid blue – no white pants or anything). Joc Pederson led off with a home run. In humble baseball tradition, he proceeded to run with his outstretched arm pointing to the stands the entire time, except when he approached third base. He suddenly froze, did a reverse step and a dap, then resumed rounding the base. Someone has been watching too many college games. He homered again his second time up, and did the exact same thing.

Pederson had the only two Cub homers, but they were far from the only ones as a grand slam highlighted the ten runs for the Marlins. But even besides that, the outfielders spent the whole game with their backs rubbing ivy. The folks behind me pointed out something that I hadn't noticed. The air was completely still. The flags looked like they were pasted to the poles, which just doesn't happen at this park the way they tell it, and the balls were flying.

Victoria was also surprised at the between innings entertainment. There was none. They briefly did a shell game video to find the ball under the cap, but other than that all they did were un-themed crowd shots. So the seventh inning comes, and in this blowout I was wondering who would do Take Me Out to the Ballgame in the seventh inning stretch. It's corny, but I will admit that it really is a cool Wrigley tradition the way they go all out for it. I was sort of worried it would be Ryan Sandberg, as he had been recognized on the board between innings (and I've heard him try to sing before, it wasn't pleasant...). Instead, they announced that the singing would be led by Ernie Banks! I was pretty excited, moreso than most of the fans around me, until I thought for a second and was pretty sure that he died a few years ago. This was just a video, and it was even taken during a day game. When did they stop doing that?

The only other game highlight was a line drive double off the wall... well, in any other stadium. In this one, it bounced ten feet in front of the wall and disappeared. The Marlins fielder wasted no time holding up his arms and it was an ivy double. The Cubs pulled most of their starters after five innings, and in the ninth Ian Happ extended the game by dropping a pop-out at second base that was so easy he didn't even have to move. At that point, the folks behind me told their guests, "I knew we should have taken you to a White Sox game instead, they win."