

I had a fascinating trip meeting friends in the USBL to go see Yankee Stadium.

The day started on the subway, which has a stop right at the stadium. We arrived behind the center field wall, but we understood that there was this bat sculpture over behind the home plate side of the ballpark. After wandering through the crowd, we just saw this tower with an extended top about a hundred feet high that looked like a platform for armed guards or something, but seeing the bottom we realized that it was supposed to be a baseball bat. As Don and I were both Detroit guys, we were expecting crossed bats or something like there is at the entrance to Comerica. Personally, I thought the wind gauge over the center field flag that was in the shape of a bat and ball was more interesting.

We were actually in the bleachers, which is a no alcohol section. This isn't by the honor system or anything like that, it's a completely segregated area with no access to the rest of the stadium, so we didn't get to see the monuments or anything like that. We entered through a different entrance and everything. I imagine that the rest of the ballpark has access to some kind of food other than a hot dog, but that was our only option, as that was the only food this side of pretzels, yogurt, and dipping dots available in our little section of the unwashed masses.

Our seats were in the right-center field area, 500 feet from home plate. I say this distance with complete confidence, as that's the distance that the announcers kept mentioning the week prior in the home run hitting contest of the all-star game. Because if Josh Hamilton had been there, we would have caught about six of those balls where we were sitting. There were little skinny scoreboards opposite us above first and third bases, but they had trouble. The computer kept thinking Richie Sexson was Ross Ohlendorf, and it had no idea who Wes Bankston was. They usually were manually typing in Bankston's name by the third or fourth pitch each time he came to bat. We had the diamond vision and scoreboards behind us, and couldn't begin to read them in the sun. And speaking of the sun, it was some 98 degrees and the sun was beating down on us terribly. My friend Don had the best line of the day, as he set his coke down for a while and was worried it was going to be boiling if he picked it up again.

Anyway, it's time to start the game and here we are in the major entertainment capital of the east coast, where they play a record of an orchestra playing the national anthem. I was shocked at not having a live anthem, and also annoyed that a few folks didn't remove their caps, but then I heard the thunder overhead for a flyover at just about the end of the song. It turned out not to be the military though, just a jetliner taking off overhead trying to get altitude at that exact time and space. After the seventh inning, they played God Bless America – again on a record, and it was just the first chorus done by Kate Smith – not even a grand finale or anything, they just stopped the record at the end of the chorus. The only live music of the day was the organ playing Take Me Out To The Ballgame afterwards, and I couldn't hear anyone singing along.

The game started with a bang – as the first pitch started, a whole bunch of people in the bleachers in front of us started clapping and chanting. Oh great, I figured we were in some kind of weird fan club section, but I realized they kept moving from player to player. I really picked it up when they had to yell for Bobby Abreu (the closest player to us) several times, then finally between pitches he turned around and waved. Then they moved on and chanted Wilson (I guess that problem with pronouncing Betemit is more universal than I realized) through the next pitch, then he turned around and waved his glove at the crowd. They immediately moved on and were quickly saluted by Cano, Jeter, and A-Rod. Evidently there's some ritual where the players have to pay homage to us second class citizens in the bleachers during the first inning. And this is between live pitches, mind you. The bleacher folks didn't require this of the pitcher and catcher, and generally sat and were quiet for the remainder of the game.

After the sixth inning, the YMCA music was cranked up as the grounds crew was smoothing the infield. During the chorus, it was fun to watch the crew stop dragging and form the Y-M-C-A before finishing and bowing to the applause of the crowd at the end of the song. The bathrooms were really loud and thumping, but that's just because the subway train was coming by overhead at that exact moment.

We were tied 2-2 after eight, and before the ninth inning I happened to notice that everyone in the two-or-three row section in front of the monuments all left their seats and ran down to the field and crowded at the gate. I wondered what was going on, then I realized they were all trying to greet Mariano Rivera as he walked onto the field. The crowd exploded and got really excited for the first time all day when he came in. He wasn't exactly sharp, allowing a run on two hits. The diamondvision behind us showed something exciting and motivating between innings although we really couldn't tell what it was, and the stadium was rumbling with excitement as Giambi came in to lead off the bottom of the ninth. The rumbling quickly subsided though, as that was just another subway train going by. The Yankees tied the game, and then eventually won it in the 12th when Bengie Molina was too hot and miserable to make the effort to avoid getting hit by a pitch with the bases loaded.

In closing though, I feel obligated to mention the strangest part of this entire day at the ballpark. I honestly didn't notice this for a while, but by the end of twelve innings I finally realized what was wrong. After all, even the most happily married of men knows that summer baseball games are always full of the prettiest women you will see anywhere, often wearing skimpy outfits in the heat. Hey, my wife often points them out to me if she thinks there's one I might have missed. Here in Yankee Stadium, not so much. There was only one teen-or-twenty something girl in the area that I noticed looking nice, but in an oversized black T-shirt with 24 CANO on the back. Lots of the women seemed to be wearing those uniform-type T-shirts. Not all that many were busy howling at the moon or anything, but it was really unusual. Just to drive the point home, I was listening to the Orioles game while driving back home on Sunday and the announcers felt it necessary to point out that it was 96 degrees in Camden Yards, and it was a fine tank-top and spaghetti strap day.

So no monuments, no live music, 12 innings in the relentless heat, and no spaghetti straps in sight. If I wasn't such a happily married baseball nut, I might have had something to complain about. Instead, I'm pleased that I made it to see Yankee Stadium before it gets bulldozed. It still doesn't mean I have to like the Yankees, though.