

PLAY BALL

Some new ballpark memories

My dad took me to my first major-league game at Crosley Field in Cincinnati. I got a foul ball hit by Willie Mays.

Since then, I've been to 23 baseball parks, including the giant 80,000-seat Cleveland Municipal Stadium and the world's largest garage, otherwise known as the Kingdome in Seattle.

I remember the smells and dark, crowded concourses of Wrigley Field; the old Comiskey Park, Tiger Stadium; Sportsman's Park; the former Busch, Shea and Yankee stadiums; County Stadium in Milwaukee; and Municipal Stadium in Kansas City.

Someone wisely decided we needed parks built solely for baseball.

Open concourses. Few, if any, restricted views. Wider seats. Cup holders. Big, clean restrooms and grass playing surfaces.



KEN HAMBLETON
Journal Star Staff Writer

Touch 'em all

Mr. Sportsknowitall ranks the current major-league parks he's visited, from best to worst:

Wrigley Field (Cubs)
Dodger Stadium
Oriole Park
Busch Stadium (Cardinals)
Coors Field (Rockies)
Kauffman Stadium (Royals)
Safeco Field (Mariners)
Citizens Bank Park (Phillies)
U.S. Cellular Field (White Sox)
Angel Stadium
Progressive Park (Indians)
Nationals Park
Chase Stadium (D'backs)
Metrodome (Twins)

New parks are pretty, usually framing downtown in the background of the outfield—Safeco Field in Seattle, Coors Field in Denver and even U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago.

After a 15-day driving trip to

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How'd they score?

Ken and Ryly Jane Hambleton compare Busch Stadium (St. Louis), Progressive Field (Cleveland), Citizens Bank Park (Philadelphia), Oriole Park at Camden Yards (Baltimore) and Nationals Park (Washington).

Tickets

Prices: No matter where you go, you will spend from \$18 to \$200 a seat.

St. Louis has Margaret at the ticket window on the third-base side, who said, "We'll get you these seats because it might rain and you'll be under some cover, but it won't cost you what the under-cover seats cost."

At **Nationals Park**, you call up and ask when the game will start, and they ask, "When can you get here?"

At **Baltimore**, there's not a bad seat in the house.

Call ahead or check online at **Philadelphia**. Tickets sell fast, with the Phillies coming off a World Series title.

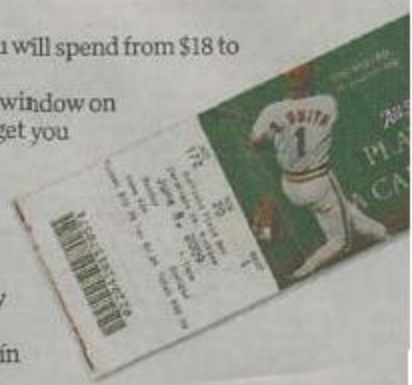
Cleveland? See Nationals.

Tip: Of the parks where I've bought tickets from the "I've got tickets, who needs tickets?" guys, I've saved lots of money at Wrigley Field (Cubs), Kansas City, San Francisco and U.S. Cellular Field (White Sox).

Don't forget, almost all major-league parks are set up so the sun is in the faces of the fans on the first-base side at the start of the game.

Food

Philadelphia had incredible food, from Rick's Philly Cheese Steaks to the crab fries (didn't get to taste them because those lines were three innings long).



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see friends and family, play golf and watch baseball, my wife Ryly Jane and I reached some conclusions:

■ There isn't much difference between Nationals Park, built in 2008, and Oriole Park at Camden Yards, built in 1992, and all those in between. The new parks were built with baseball and fans in mind.

■ Philadelphia has something against signs. There's a dearth of signs for motels. Signs for how to tour Independence Hall. Signs for how to get in and out of Citizens Bank Park. Signs for how to use the subway.

■ Albert Pujols, Todd Helton and Ryan Howard make you want to watch every pitch.

■ Baseball pleasure reaches a peak when Baltimore's Felix Pie and Nolan Reimold rip shots off K-Rod of the Mets.

■ Major-league short-stops are so good. The impossible is routine every game. Brendan Ryan of the Cards, Marco Scutaro of Toronto, Jimmy Rollins of Philly, Troy Tulowitzki of Colorado are some of the best.

■ You can have a lot of fun if you go in disguise. I wore a Cardinals shirt to the Washington-Toronto game and a Phillies shirt at the Orioles-Mets game.

After the Nats game, on the Metro, a guy in a Ryne

Sandberg Cubs jersey nodded at me across a crowded rail car. I nodded back and smiled. We knew real baseball was played in the NL Central.

At Baltimore, Orioles fans consoled me for the Phillies' loss that night to Toronto. "Hey, we beat the Mets for you," one guy said as he slapped my shoulder.

■ The essence of cool is the inner harbor in Baltimore and Camden Yards with Eutaw Street along right field. Boog's Bar-B-Q, pretzel dogs, the plaques noting home runs in the right-field concourse (one is on the B&O Warehouse, where Ken Griffey Jr. hit a homer in the 1993 All-Star Game).

■ Old-time baseball is alive in Philly's Ashburn Alley (named for Nebraskan Richie Ashburn) and the statues of Stan the Man and Ozzie Smith in St. Louis.

■ If you want to meet people, keep a scorecard of the game and ask what's the best food at the ballpark.

■ Being a Nebraskan, I know to put my wallet in my front pocket in big cities. But on the way out of the ball park, it seemed unnecessary because after the game there was nothing left.

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■ Ballparks

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Washington had a thing called "half-smoke," kind of a bratwurst, only more sausage. With the works, it's a mess, but very good. Pretzel dogs at Baltimore are very good.

Cleveland used to have crummy food but great mustard. That's still the case.

Tip: You can usually bring in your own water or pop (unopened) or peanuts or other food. They'll check, but don't get nervous. A bottle of water outside the park is \$1 or \$2, while inside the park, it's up to \$5. Peanuts outside the park are far cheaper.

Fans

Cardinal fans know baseball. Philly fans lived up to their reputation as the loudest complainers. You can guess how the big mouth near us reacted when the Phillies gave up five runs in the top of the 10th.

Baltimore fans were friendly and solid. Nationals fans were puzzled as to why they were there.

Cleveland fans wondered if Eric Mangini can make the Browns winners and if LeBron will win it all now that he has Shaq.

Getting there

You'd think cities would make this easy. Ha ha ha.

St. Louis has the Metro rail that is cheap, easy to ac-

At JournalStar.com: Rlyly Jane Hambleton's journal of the ballpark visits.

cess from outlying free parking and drops you off at the stadium.

Baltimore is reportedly good but trains running from Baltimore back to Washington, D.C., don't exist unless you pay big bucks to ride Amtrak.

Traffic is a mess in Philly.

Washington's Metro rail hadn't had a deadly crash (until a couple of days ago) for many years.

Parking is pricey in Cleveland, but you can get in and out onto the major roads pretty easily.

Amenities

Philly had the best scoreboards, but had the crummiest "find the ball in the hat" type of stuff.

Cleveland had the worst scoreboards. Too junky.

The Nationals handed out free Miller Lite beach towels, and you got a free program and scorecard.

At Philly, you buy a scorecard, but also need a \$5 program to get the rosters.

Tip: Many parks offer free T-shirts and the like for signing up for a credit card. Read the small print, because you could endanger your credit rating and you could end up with a lot of subscriptions to Sports Illustrated.