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Fenway Park and the Ted

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There is the old, and the new old, more stylishly termed the retro. We're talking ballparks, major league ballparks. Over the past few weeks I had the pleasure of being at one of the very oldest, Fenway Park in Boston, and the newest of the new old parks, "The Ted" in Atlanta.

Fenway Park remains one of the architectural monuments of the early 20th century. It has the feel, style and character of a time past when ballparks were made for baseball and for people.

Approaching Fenway the vendors are active on street corners, with sausage and peppers in the carts from middle aged men with their voices steeped in the familiar Boston accent. About an hour before game time the souvenir shop across from Gate A is jammed mostly with young people in their late teens, twenties, and early thirties, apparently not having been informed that baseball no longer attracts the young.

Moving through the gate one is struck by the architectural markings of a much earlier time. The steel girding visible to the eye under the grandstand, the narrow passageways between entrances, and the dingy mustiness that give the old parks their special smell. Here were the beer stands, the food stands, even yogurt on tap for the modern fan.

On entering the stands in Fenway your attention goes immediately to the Green Monster which always disappoints because it looks so much smaller and less imposing than on TV. Above it you see the latest icon of commercialism, the coca-cola bottles hugging the left field light pole just above the green monster and rivaling it for attention, a tribute to the modern commercial age.

The center of attention at Fenway remains the game. The loud rock music and artificial crowd noises that dominate NBA arenas and too many major league baseball stadia are largely absent here. People cheer the action, an organist plays between innings, you can carry on a normal conversation during the game, and you can hear bits and pieces of conversations around you. It is a human, not an electronic, experience.

During the middle innings I moved about this aging facility looking at its marvelous early 20th century construction and its odd nooks and crannies. My favorite place was down the left

field line where families congregate, enjoying the day, one another, and at times the game itself. When you get out past third base the stands jut out toward left field and are tilted on an angle, allowing spectators to look straight ahead and face the mound and home plate. The design was a stroke of genius, the effect, a marvelous false sense of intimacy.

A few weeks later it is on to "The Ted," Turner Field, "Jayne and Ted's Great Adventure," to see the Braves in the first weekend of interleague play. Sellout crowds for all games added to the atmosphere which was festive, and being Atlanta, decidedly yuppie.

The Stadium has a large plaza at the main entrance which is beyond deepest centerfield. Picnic tables, open spaces, sculpture featuring Phil Niekro, Henry Aaron, and a sliding Ty Cobb offer a place to meet, to take pictures, and even to throw a ball around before the game.

Through the gates another plaza greets you with a live band playing just in front of a big screen TV underlined by a row of small screen TVs which allow you to watch the Braves or any number of other games while you eat and drink. Moving under the stands the first sign of the old, as the steel girding is visible, but there is no sense of being crowded in a small passageway. Everything is spacious. The walkways are flanked by batting cages and pitching cages, vendors are omnipresent, and everywhere there is a TV monitor. In another area are the video games and restaurants, and of course, the sine qua non of the new old park, luxury boxes.

In centerfield is a large beer garden with umbrellas and tables where most people stand and talk and watch the game unfolding before them. Behind the bar are several TVs showing several games. This area has the feel of the roof tops at Wrigley Field and it seems most popular with the thirty something crowd. Craig Sager lingers on the fringes.

In deep left field in the upper deck is the Coke pavilion. At this marvelous location you can stand and watch the game along the railing, sit in a dugout and rest, and all the time hear the radio broadcast. Large areas are open for children to run and play and several shower heads make a mist area for cooling on a hot day.

There is an intimacy to "The Ted" and a family friendly feel as well. It all may be a bit too polished and a bit too pricy, but

it is a place for baseball, designed for fans and families,
where like Fenway you feel part of the action. At "The Ted" you
hear the many accents of the South, and you can watch very good
baseball in a very comfortable place.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you
don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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