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Baseball Stadiums:Wrigley Field, Tiger Stadium, Skydome

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It is clear why Philip Lowry chose the title Green Cathedrals for his book on the ball parks of America. Over the past two years I have had the good fortune to visit five of them representing three distinctly different eras in baseball history.

Wrigley Field is my favorite of all five. Its intimacy and appointments, along with the fact that it remains a park where mostly day baseball is played, all contribute to its charm. It is a place where the comfort of the fan is a very high priority, a fact that is deeply rooted in Wrigley operations from the Thirties.

The setting is also important. It is in a residential and commercial neighborhood of ethnic diversity and late Twentieth Century yuppieness. This is a great mix. Going to the game on the "L" with all manner and shape of other Cub fans, adds to the total experience. If you drive parking is a problem, but only a few blocks from Wrigley Field there is a large convent that supplies parking for the game. The sight of a nun in full habit wearing a Cubs helmet directing traffic is a memorable one, and the idea that the cost of parking is a free will offering, defies the concept of greed in modern sports franchise operations.

The beauty of Wrigley Field with the vines on the outfield wall, along with a family atmosphere in the stands (most of the time), makes Wrigley Field the nearly perfect place for baseball.

Last year I was at Fenway Park for the first time and it too has all of the charms of a ball park from the early part of the century. It shares with Wrigley the intimacy that makes you feel so much more a part of the game. And it has the famous landmark, The Green Monster, which oddly looks much less imposing in person than it does on TV. But regardless of its charms it does not match Beautiful Wrigley Field. I am not sure what it is, perhaps my mid-western upbringing, that left me not as comfortable with Fenway as I am with Wrigley.

This summer I was in Tiger Stadium for the first time. Its style, with the double-deck outfield and overhang, and intimacy of the old park makes it a great place for baseball. The sight of the light standard in right center field that stopped Reggie Jackson's All-Star home run from leaving the park entirely, was

amazing to see. It is hard to believe that anyone could hit a ball that far. But then that same day I saw Cecil Fielder hit the facing of the roof down the left-field line, just a few feet foul.

Tiger Stadium is probably not going to last, largely I suspect because of where it is located. The immediate surroundings resemble a bombed out landscape of open space, and the nearest neighbors in one direction are winos and derelicts, with sub-standard housing in another direction. The Stadium itself needs renovation and some redesign to eliminate the obstructed seating. Clearly these problems need to be solved, but tearing down such a charming facility is not a solution, nor is it progress.

Two days before seeing Tiger Stadium I spent two days at Atlanta Fulton County Stadium, a place I have been several times, although never with as many other people in attendance. Both games were sellouts and the crowd was frenetic.

I have never much liked this Stadium. It may have been the first of the cookie-cutter stadia and it has always been more suited to football than baseball. Even sitting in the lower deck you are a long ways from the action. There is nothing really distinctive about the Stadium, and the field shows no peculiarities of character, except sterility.

Atlanta does display one of the major downsides of the modern ball park. It plays extremely loud music before the game, between innings, and at any other break in the action. As a result an atmosphere of relaxed conversation and discussion of the game that is one of the best parts of baseball, becomes extremely difficult. But I guess I am showing my age, as loud music seems to permeate the society.

Just a week after being in Tiger Stadium I headed to Skydome, the technological wonder of the sportsworld. I am sorry that I did not see it with the top down, but weather conditions did not permit. It is an overpowering building, and I viewed it from several angles. The carpet is one strike against it, the roof is the second strike, and the fact that it has 20,000 seats from which you can not see the entire field is strike three.

It shares with Atlanta the constant distractions of replays and changing scoreboards. The most peculiar thing may be the fans themselves, who are eerily quiet most of the time. They will politely applaud a strike, and they do get excited about hits

and runs. But most of the time, unless the wave is going, it is very quiet.

The interior appointments are mindboggling. The lounge, restaurant, and hotel rooms in the outfield, as well as the McDonald's concession stands, give Skydome the air of anything but a ball park. It is clearly a modern sports Stadium, and as such it is a success. Its size and its architectural appointments make it an engineering achievement, but as a place for baseball it leaves much to be desired.

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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