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Great Fun at WBC in Miami

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - Great Fun at WBC in Miami

MARCH 15, 2017

My fellow Americans, today I want to report to you that although I have been going to baseball games for over a half-century, I have never been to a baseball game like the one I went to in Miami last Saturday night.

The atmosphere in and around Marlins Park was beyond anything in my experience. I have been to baseball games in major and minor league parks, I have been to Little League games, high school, college, and American Legion games. I have been to games in small towns in the Midwest. I have been to minor league games in the old Class D leagues, to new and modern minor league parks where the atmosphere is about fun and games and often fueled by dollar beer night. I have been to games in the late 1940s in city parks where neighborhood fans gathered on Sunday afternoon before the NFL captured that day. I have even been to the seventh game of a World Series.

Each of these venues had its own charms and atmospherics. None of them matched the scene in Miami Saturday night.

When I read that the United States was scheduled to play the Dominican Republic on the night of March 11, I decided it would be worth the four hour drive from Orlando. So I went to the website and bought tickets and noticed that a month in advance, this game was nearly a sellout. I was able to get seats in the upper deck overlooking third base. The second and first deck were sold out.

Game time was 6:30, so we decided that we should plan on getting to the ballpark by five o'clock. It was none too early. As we came off the expressway it appeared that parking might be a problem, unless you wanted to pay \$40 to park in someone's front

yard. So we went west of stadium and it dropped all the way to \$30 dollars. So working our way around we tried the parking garage but it was closed. Then just east of the stadium we came to a small area in front of some offices for ten dollars. Miracles do happen.

One of the first things that struck me was the fact that almost everyone heading to the stadium had on a Dominican jersey, a cap with the DR on the front, or was wrapped in a flag of the Dominican Republic. I would estimate that at least eighty percent of the crowd was from the Republic.

The next thing that struck me was the noise. The crowd was singing, chanting, dancing down the street towards the stadium, with drums beating and scratchers adding to the symphony of sound. The fans were all shapes, sizes, and ages; all smiling and laughing their way to the ballpark.

In front of the stadium was a stage with a group playing various tunes with a Latin Beat. Everyone seemed to know the words and were singing along and swaying and jumping up and down. It was at least an hour before the first pitch and certainly these fans would be exhausted before the game started. Many fans were also carrying blowup plantains bearing the words "Platano Power," and a few fans were carrying plantains.

Once we arrived at the third deck, the section we were in was about half-full, but it quickly filled as game time approached. The first roar of the crowd came when the night's starting pitcher, Edison Volquez, came out of the dugout and began his walk to the bullpen. More players came onto the field, and each was greeted by a loud roar. The drums and scratchers were picking up the pace, and the number of flags in evidence seemed to be multiplying.

One of the interesting things about our section and the ones adjacent was that many of the people seemed to know one another, and there was a lot of greeting and hugs and smiles. Photo ops were aplenty and selfies were being snapped. Marlins Park itself was at its best with the roof open and the windows in left field open as well. The temperature was moderate, and it cooled a bit as the evening progressed. It was a near perfect night for baseball.

The introduction of the players was of interest. Essentially these were two all-star teams, and I wondered which of the great Dominican players would get the loudest crowd reaction. Two players eliciting the highest decibel level were Robinson Cano and Jose Bautista, with Cano having a slight edge as crowd favorite.

The game started quietly with no scoring in the first two innings. In the top of the third, the U.S. put up two runs with help from poor outfield play. Meanwhile, Marcus Stroman dominated the Dominican hitters into the fifth inning when he reached his allotted pitch count. The U.S. added a run in the third inning and two more in the top of the sixth inning to make it a 5-0 game.

Tanner Roark came in to pitch for the U.S. in the bottom of the sixth inning and looked shaky. He gave up a Stanton-like home run to Manny Machado, and the roar of the crowd could be measured on the Richter scale. From this point on, the crowd was on its feet and never stopped celebrating the turn of events until sometime Sunday morning. A home run, two walks, a hit, and a wild pitch seemed to indicate that this was not Roark's night. It was 5-2 after six innings. For some reason Roark came back out to pitch the seventh and this let the Dominicans start the inning with a double. Robertson relieved Roark and gave up a run scoring double before getting out of the inning. It was now 5-3 after seven innings.

With the ever reliable Andrew Miller coming in to pitch in the 8th, it seemed as if the U.S. was still in control. It was not, and you could sense that before the 7th inning ended. Miller got pummeled. He hit the first batter, gave up a single, and then Nelson Cruz hit a three run homer that produced singing, dancing, drumming, laughing, and a massive joyful noise that went on the remainder of the night. The reaction to the Cruz home run was such that I missed entirely the fact that Adrian Beltre then struck out. So when Marte followed with a home run, I thought I had just witnessed back-to-back dingers and that it was Beltre who homered.

What a game and what a night. It was the most memorable baseball game I have ever been witness to, and the most fun I have ever had watching my team lose. As the crowd exited Marlins Park the singing and dancing continued, and in what was most interesting, there were no drunks in sight and no angry fans shouting obscenities.

Talk about fun at the old ball park.

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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