



The Voice of Reason

Mike Gastineau

CUBS AND CARDS SPARK MEMORIES

On a warm summer evening a baseball fan checks in on the Reds and the Astros from Houston, where the home team has a 5-to-3 lead in the 4th. Turn the station and it's the Tigers and the Yankees from Yankee Stadium. Change it again and Atlanta is in Philadelphia battling the Phillies. On another station, Kansas City and the White Sox are in a rain delay.

Later on the fan will catch the Cubs, in San Francisco to take on the Giants, and the Dodgers playing host to St. Louis in West Coast baseball action.

Just another night with Direct TV's satellite coverage of Major League Baseball, right? Well, that could be. Except this isn't a recent warm summer evening. It's the summer of 1971 and you're a young baseball fan living in the Midwest with a good radio, a clear night, and an imagination being grown by guys like Harry Caray, Al Michaels, Ernie Harwell, Vince Lloyd, Lou Boudreau, and others.

The M's are playing the teams of my youth this month. The Cubs. The Cards. The Reds. As a boy growing up in Indianapolis these were the teams I followed. Following baseball was different back then.

Before satellite TV, 24-hour highlight channels, and the Internet combined to make it relatively easy to follow any baseball game, a devoted fan was left with one way to instantly keep up on action from around the big leagues. Radio. Depending on where you lived you might be able to pick up one or two games. But if you lived in Indianapolis you could pull in stations from Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Atlanta. Some nights you could get Pittsburgh or Minneapolis.

Listening to live sports on the radio as a

kid tops the list of many fond memories I have from a pretty much ideal childhood.

It was fascinating. Hearing different announcers with different styles bring to life the guys I had only seen on baseball cards. The Cubs on WGN. The Reds on WLW. The Tigers on WJR. Each station and game had its own unique sound. I was already a baseball fan. I was becoming a radio fan.

My dad was a huge Cardinals fan and he'd listen to games on KMOX. Some nights it came in loud and clear. But on nights when there was a thunderstorm anywhere between St. Louis and Indianapolis the signal would be punctuated several times a minute with loud crackles and pops. It was incredibly annoying for anyone in the house who wasn't a huge fan. Eventually Mom would shoot him a quick glance and he'd turn the game off. So I'd head upstairs to my room and pull in the static-y broadcast on my radio...rushing downstairs to give updates as events warranted.

On clear nights with good weather, the radio really was a primitive version of the satellite dish. You could pull in over a half dozen different games. Here was a young Al Michaels asking Joe Nuxhall whether or not Pete Rose would try to steal with the Reds two runs down. Down the dial, Cubs announcers Vince Lloyd and Lou Boudreau would madly ring a loud cowbell whenever a Cub hit a home run. It got to the point where they didn't even call them home runs, they referred to them as "bell ringers"—as in, "Ron Santo steps in...he's got a .286 average with 9 bell ringers on the year."

I remember one night hearing a Billy Williams home run at Shea Stadium described thusly:

"Here's the windup and the 2-2 pitch," Lloyd's smooth voice set up the delivery. And then the unmistakable sound of a bat hitting a ball. CRACK. The voice of the Cubs bellowed the next three words: "GIMME THAT BELL!"

St. Louis games were done at the time by Jack Buck and Harry Caray. I remember my Dad complaining on an almost nightly basis that Caray's verbal meandering made it impossible to figure out what was going on.

It didn't end when the baseball season was over, either. Winter nights were filled with the broadcasts of Indiana Pacer basketball games from the seemingly exotic locales of Norfolk, Denver, and Oakland. And Big 10 games from Iowa City, Madison, and Ann Arbor.

I became a hockey fan by listening to Chicago Black Hawk games on WMAQ. It came in clear as a bell and I remember it seemed as if the Black Hawks played games every Sunday night. I'd look forward to it the entire weekend. I had never even seen a hockey game. But the sounds of the action crackling into my bedroom turned me into a diehard fan. Stan Makita and Bobby Hull. Chico Maki and Tony Esposito. I wouldn't know these guys if they walked in my room. But I felt as if I knew everything about them simply because of the many Sunday nights I spent glued to the radio listening to their exploits.

Mariner fans have come to treat Dave Niehaus and Rick Rizzs as if they play on the team. The duo is almost as popular as any Mariner player. And they deserve it. They're both very good at what they do. And they both grew up in the Midwest. Many sports announcers did. And almost all of them speak fondly of spending time with their radios as kids.

I'd like to think that somewhere in Indiana a young fan will tune into a Cardinals or Cubs broadcast this month while the team is in Seattle. The fan might spend time wondering what it's like in such a faraway place. They'll hear the descriptions of the ballpark, how it sits

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something crazy against Pedro like bunting every inning, running wild on the basepaths, or trying to distract him by yelling "Hey! Your shoe is untied!" from the dugout while he's pitching. Face him twice in a five-game series and you're asking for trouble.

So there you have it—everything standing between the Mariners and a trip to the World Series. No, it isn't going to be easy. But then again, it isn't supposed to be.

—Jason Michael Barker is a regular contributor to *Strikethree.com*.

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right on the water. How fans in the upper deck can see the ferry boats coming in from the islands. How Mt. Rainier is glowing pink in the early evening sun.

Seeing those things on TV is unquestionably a treat. But hearing them described on radio forces you to color in the blank spots with your imagination. And learning how to do that at a young age is a gift I've treasured my entire life.

—Catch Mike Gastineau from 3 to 7 PM on Sportsradio 950 KJR-AM.

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the Hit It Here have been pushed back so the M's can sell more café counter seats at \$40 a pop (for a table, cough up \$160 for four seats). The ticket includes \$17 of food and drink credit, but at \$23 for a hard wooden chair and sightlines worse than the bleachers, you're paying primarily for status.

Status is also the reason you're hocking up that \$5 "service charge" to sit in the Terrace Club (currently sponsored by Avaya—motto: "honk if you have any idea what the hell it is we do"). I'm still not sure what the "service charge" is for, because every item on the in-seat wait service menu is also marked up over the price you'd pay if you walked 30 feet and got it yourself. Here, the High Cheese Pizza is wood-fired, the espresso stands have chocolate fudge decadence, and the bars sell large beers. That's right, club-level patrons can purchase a 22-ounce jumbo for a cost-effective \$7.25 (\$7.75 for a microbrew). Nyah, nyah.

Also available to Club level patrons is a hand-carved sandwich, featuring a stack of the sliced meat of the day on thin bread plus a bag of Lay's for \$9. Silly Club level patrons.

A couple of new drink items now available at Safeco Field are frozen margaritas (available at the Power Alley bar and at the Bullpen

Market) and frozen "squishees," sort of a slurpee-type drink that comes in three flavors (for now only available from roaming vendors). One wonders, though, if Volume might be looking at a lawsuit from the Fox network, as the squishee has until now only been sold at Apu's Qwik-E-Mart on "The Simpsons."

We wrap up with the ever-expanding number of carts selling Dippin' Dots. Nicknamed "The Ice Cream of the Future," now that it's been here for a few years I'm beginning to wonder when they'll retire that slogan. Friends and strangers have told me that these freeze-dried ice cream beads are surprisingly good. They'd better be, at \$4 for a Dixie-cup-sized serving. Giving in for the sake of research, I tried a cup of Dippin' Dots recently and was disappointed to find it tastes roughly like hailstones with flavored centers. (Tip: allow it to melt and it's much more flavorful.)

Believe it or not, we've only scratched the surface of the cornucopia that is Safeco Field. If I've helped direct you to a few new favorites, or away from a potential disaster (like eating High Cheese Pizza without an oil pan), my work here is done.

Next month Michael Cox looks at the food and drink options available outside Safeco Field.

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