

CUBS 7, RED SOX 6

Best Seats in House Are Outside Wrigley

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CHICAGO, June 11 - Baseball's fantasy fraternity house comes loaded with an air-conditioned bar, five flat-screen televisions, surround-sound speakers, a two-story deck, eight rows of aluminum bleachers and a panoramic view of Wrigley Field.

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The Red Sox' Trot Nixon, who homered in the first inning, fouled out to end the game.

The bouncer at the back door holds a reservation list longer than the Cubs' 40-man roster. The hostess at one of three bars wears a tank top that reads "Wrigley Field Hottie." The patrons get all the beer they can drink, often in the first inning.

"Where better to watch the best game of the year?" said Tommy Walsh, a New Yorker so taken with this stadium that he gave his first-born the middle name Wrigley.

Thirteen rooftops surround Wrigley Field, forming a full-scale frat row, but the Sheffield Baseball Club, smack behind the right-field fence located on Sheffield Avenue, advertises the biggest deck and the best views. For \$380 a ticket, Walsh and 60 of his friends stood on their tiptoes to watch the Cubs beat the Red Sox, 7-6, on a sunny Saturday afternoon, taking the second straight game of their first series since 1918.

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Aynsley Floyd for The New York Times

Fans paid \$380 a ticket to watch the Cubs take on the Red Sox from the roof of the Sheffield Baseball Club, which is behind Wrigley Field.

The group formed only a fraction of the rooftop crowd. Anyone who goes to San Francisco's SBC Park can kayak during games in McCovey Cove, behind right field. Those who visit Arizona's Bank One Ballpark can relax in a hot tub. But the main attraction at Wrigley Field, beyond its outfield bleachers, is the set of rooftops that opened shortly after the first game was played here in 1914.

"More than being a fan of any team, I'm a fan of Wrigley Field," said Dave Hostetler, a cousin of the former Giants quarterback Jeff Hostetler. He

flew from Cleveland on Saturday morning for the game and commandeered his favorite bar stool for the 13th year in a row. "Being here is exclusive and expensive and your view can be obstructed sometimes, but it is the essence of this place."

A cook in a chef's hat prepares bratwursts, burgers and chicken sandwiches. Smoke blows off the grill in the cool breeze. Cases of Miller and Old Style, Midwestern staples, are stacked six feet high in the corner. Some spectators monitored the game, others watched the antics in the stands and a few turned the wrong way to look at Lake Michigan. No one kept score. No one booed.

"If you're a die-hard Cubs fan and you're really here for the game, there is nothing like the energy in the stands," said Sharon Sikkema, a Cubs fan from Grand Rapids, Mich. "But this is a great party."

The eight rows of rooftop bleachers were filled by the first pitch, but seats were available at blue picnic tables and the bar downstairs. To gauge whether Chicago's starting pitcher, Carlos Zambrano, was throwing fastballs or sliders, hardcore fans had to stand side by side at the railing in front of the bleacher seats and crane their necks. From that point, the distance to home plate is 454 feet, closer than some of the

seats inside the stadium.

"I like Fenway Park a lot," said David Gavin, a Red Sox fan who used to sell souvenirs at Fenway Park and flew from Boston to Chicago for the weekend. "But this is hard to beat. I feel like I'm watching a game at a cookout."

The spirit of Wrigley Field may have less to do with following the action than being a part of it. Tom Gramatis, the 36-year-old owner of the Sheffield Baseball Club, has become a rooftop mogul peddling nostalgia and charm. He owns the Ivy League Baseball Club down the block, the Waveland Baseball Club behind the left-field fence and is developing two more rooftop buildings.

Gramatis, who lives in the Ivy League Baseball Club, has a bedroom window that looks onto Wrigley Field and is often awakened from naps by the national anthem. "I'll sometimes go to sleep late in a game, and I can tell from the noise outside if we're winning or losing," Gramatis said.

The Sheffield Baseball Club, which first charged \$5 for admission when the Cubs played the Yankees in the 1938 World Series, now plays host to weddings, bachelor parties and five-star corporate events. But Gramatis could not remember a date with more demand than this Saturday afternoon. As Cubs fans mingled with Red Sox fans, one neutral observer named Greg Lindeman said, "I just hope the beers don't kick in and the battle starts."

The Red Sox fans took over the rooftop when Trot Nixon hit a three-run homer in the first inning. But as the Cubs rallied from a 4-0 deficit, they were eventually shouted down by veteran roof-toppers who have learned to tolerate out-of-town curiosity-seekers.

At the end of the day, after the Cubs survived a ninth-inning rally and had received three hits from the former Red Sox second baseman Todd Walker, the defeated Bostonians climbed down seven flights of stairs and spilled out into the alley behind Sheffield Avenue. Though Zambrano left the game after five innings because of an awkward slide while running the bases, X-rays on his sprained left big toe were negative, and Cub fans were in a mood to celebrate.

This sort of scene is what Jim Murphy envisioned when he founded Murphy's Bleachers, the bar behind the center-field

fence, and then became president of the Wrigley Field Rooftop Association. Murphy rallied rooftop owners when the Cubs sued them in 2002 for lost revenue and threatened to expand the bleachers, thereby obstructing rooftop views. The association agreed to give the Cubs 17 percent of their annual sales, but they still brought in a reported \$17 million last year.

The Friendly Confines have started a major cottage industry around these three-story buildings, most of which have liquor licenses and liability insurance. If the city would allow it, the Sheffield Baseball Club would install a lap pool for summer days and a hot tub for autumn nights. Just wait 'til next year.