

May 12, 2008

### BASEBALL TRIP WITH GRANDSON WAS A HOMERUN

There are no two ways about it: Being a grandfather is better than a plateful of hot buttered biscuits. Nothing compares to it. Nothing comes close.

After deciding that President Peanut would be home long enough to wash his socks before taking off for Timbuktu to mediate a simmering dispute among local mountain goats, I figured that it would be safe to leave town for a few days and spend some quality time — meaning with no parents around — with my grandson, Zack Wansley.

Zack, as many of you know, is a junior at Georgia Tech, residing in a family of woof-woofing Georgia Bulldogs. But save your pity. He can more than hold his own. If Tech ever fields a football team that manages to go to some bowl beside the Pine Beetle Infestation Dot Com Bowl in East Boola-Boola, Idaho, and not get their clocks cleaned, he will be downright unbearable.

The boy is also a baseball fanatic of the first order. Zack and his friends attend many of the Atlanta Braves games and he can trot out just about any statistic for any player on any team at any time. That seems to be a common malady among baseball fanatics, although I'm not sure I need to know how many foul balls Chipper Jones hit on 3-2 pitches on Sundays in May when batting left-handed with a man on base. To baseball fanatics, that's critical information. I will take their word for it.

Therefore, it came as no surprise that for his 21st birthday, Zack opined it might be fun to see the New York Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, and then watch the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. His wish is my command.

Lest one think I am showing favoritism to my oldest grandson, let me hasten to add that the other grandboys haven't fared badly either. One has been fly-fishing in Montana with his granddad; another has toured the D-Day battlefields. The third one is scheduled to visit Scotland with his grandparents in a few weeks. But the baseball weekend with Zack will be hard to top.

First of all, to sit in Yankee Stadium was special. For those of you who keep up with such things, this is the last year of operation for the historic facility, which opened in 1923. After this season, the place will be razed and a new stadium being constructed next door will greet the team in 2009. To get to see the actual field where once stood baseball greats like Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford was awesome. To watch my grandson beam like a lightbulb was, as the commercial says, priceless.

And then it was on to Fenway Park, looking pretty much as it must have looked when it premiered in 1912, including the Green Monster (or "Monstah" as the locals say), the famous 37-foot left-field wall. In this day of electronic gadgetry, it was a treat watching a guy amble out of a door in the wall between innings, climb a step ladder and manually replace numbers on the scoreboard. Forget shooting off fireworks after a home run. This is the way God intended for baseball to be played.

As a result of our visit to Fenway, I will have to modify one of my familiar targets in future columns. I love to tweak loud-talking, know-it-all Yankees who live where it snows ten months a year and all their buildings are rusted. This zinger will no longer apply to the people of Boston. When the fans seated around us found out that this old man had brought his grandson up from Georgia to see their beloved Red Sox play, we were treated like royalty. Bless them one and all.

Our weekend trip to Yankee Stadium and Fenway Park was a resounding success and one I will remember the rest of my days. I think Zack will too. Just the two of us — my beloved grandson and me — watching baseball, eating hot dogs and enjoying each other's company immensely. Life does not get any better than that.