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My Baseball Quest Has Taught Me About America, Slowing Down — and Myself

By Fernando I. Rivera
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Marlins Park with its retractable roof, home of the Miami Marlins.(Photo by Fernando I. Rivera)

I am on a quest to visit every Major League Baseball stadium.

For me, baseball is more than just a game, it is a continuous source of life lessons and reflection. Plus, I've learned a lot about this great country in my travels.

For instance, baseball has taught me that part of life is about failure and how to react to that failure. Baseball is a game in which the batter can miss the ball 7 out of 10 times and still be an all-star. It's a matter of putting the last turn at bat behind and pushing forward to the next turn.

Baseball allows for redemption without time constraints. A team can be losing in the last inning of a game with only one strike to go, and make a comeback that is not hampered by a game clock but fueled by determination and perseverance.

But most importantly, baseball is about slowing down, enjoying a beverage and delighting in the sounds of the crack of the bat and pop of the catcher's mitt.

For all these reasons, I want to see, feel, and experience baseball – and that is why my goal is to visit every baseball stadium and region of the country.

My journey started when I attended my first game in Kansas City in the summer of 1996. The Royals were playing the Baltimore Orioles and I had a chance to see future hall of famer Cal Ripken Jr. Sitting in the upper deck seats at Kauffman Stadium started my more than 20-year journey.

A combination of business, personal travel, and relocation has allowed to visit stadiums all over the United States and Canada. After Kansas City, I traveled to St. Louis to catch another game. In the old stadium you might catch a glimpse of the Gateway Arch. Thankfully in the new stadium, home plate was repositioned and now there is a glorious view of the monument from every corner of the stadium. At that time I was in graduate school in Nebraska, so my stadium visits concentrated mostly in the Midwest.

Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs, is one of my favorite stadiums. Great pre- and post-game atmosphere and a great baseball tradition in one of the oldest MLB stadiums.

After graduate school, I moved to the Northeast and that allowed me to visit several stadiums in that region. A longtime Mets fan, I visited old Shea Stadium frequently. The most memorable feature of this stadium was the loud noises of incoming airplanes landing at LaGuardia Airport. In the upper deck seats you felt that the airplane was going to land on top of you.

The Mets' new stadium is a fantastic venue with every food option you can imagine, from fresh sushi to hometown BBQ. The old Yankees stadium had the aura of baseball greatness and any baseball fan could feel the presence of all those great Yankees championship teams. I'm looking forward to visiting the new stadium in the near future.

Each stadium in the region has its own unique charm: Baltimore is a great venue close to the Inner Harbor; the Pittsburgh stadium, the house that Roberto Clemente built, overlooks the city and is a blast to walk to via the bright yellow bridge from downtown; and Boston features the Green Monster outfield fence.

When I moved to Florida to join the faculty at UCF I was able to attend games in the Southeast. The Atlanta Braves' downtown Olympic stadium was one of the hottest games I ever attended. I look forward to checking out the new Braves' facilities in Marietta, GA.

In Florida, the Marlins have upgraded their stadium to a baseball-dedicated facility with a retractable roof and a comfortable 70-degree temperature. Tropicana Field, the home of the Tampa Bay Rays, features a water tank with actual manta rays that you can touch.

Visits to just six of the 30 MLB stadiums – Oakland, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Houston, Minnesota and Arlington, Texas – will end my quest.

And once I finish, I will begin my next quest – to visit all Spring Training facilities in Florida and Arizona!

Plenty more opportunities to do the seventh-inning stretch, sing “Take Me Out the Ballgame” and continue to reflect on the lessons baseball provides me and how to apply them to my everyday life.

Play Ball!

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