

2.The first baseball game you attended or the first game you took a son/daughter/nephew etc to. Describe the experience in detail.(Can sub another sport if needed)

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Identifying which game to describe was easy for me. The first major league game I ever attended was also the first one I took my son to.

Growing up, baseball was always very special to me. While I never had the opportunity to play anything other than “backyard ball”, the thrill of making a diving catch or hitting a home run were still the same. My son had recently started playing tee ball and seeing him in his uniform and hat brought back all those great feelings. While his first shortstop grounder resulted in bonking heads with the third baseman and many tears, I figured Ripken probably did something similar! The opportunity to go to the game was provided by his baseball league. We'd be going to see the Baltimore Orioles play in person!

The Pirates were the team of my youth...along with bell bottoms and feathered hair, “We are Family” was a constant presence at my home. The TV always seemed to have a game of some type on and I used to run home during playoff time to catch the remainder of the game on TV. Sadly the times for my son were different. No one plays much afternoon baseball anymore...and with World Series games beginning well after his bedtime he'd never had much exposure to the excitement of the game...and the thrill for me was mostly gone as well. The state of the Orioles was also a major difference we were facing--- the '70's Pirates were a playoff team and World Series champs. The Orioles hadn't been in the playoffs since 2 years before my son was born (some things don't change I guess) but they were the hometown team and to a 6 year old that made all the difference. We packed our gloves, hats, snacks and put on all of our Oriole gear for the big day.

When we arrived we grouped up with our team and were told that we'd have an opportunity to go on the field prior to the game! Since our team attendance only consisted of the coach and his son and us I was able to assume the “assistant coach” role for an hour so I could go on the field as well.

They walked us into the back entrance to the stadium and we waited for the line to move through ahead of us. The day was perfect. Not a cloud in the sky and warm—perfect baseball weather. As we approached the entry to the stadium the sun shone down on us as we emerged from the shadows. Blaring on the loudspeakers was Fogerty's “Centerfield”. I looked down at the anticipation in my son's face and knew it was reflected in my own. The moment couldn't last forever but the smell of the grass and the warmth of the sun as we waited come flooding back to me whenever I hear that song played.

Finally we made our way onto the field and proceeded around the stadium. The feel of the warning track surface and the padding of the wall along with the vast open space of the outfield made the job of being an outfielder seem impossible. We soaked up every view of the field as we made our way around Camden Yards. Soon the line split into two-- one line for the kids so they could walk by the Orioles players and get a closer look and one for the adults who could only watch from afar. It wasn't the first time I wished to be young again! The faces and names are mostly a blur but pitcher Daniel Cabrera, all 6' 9” of him, was a smiling occupant on the edge of the dugout-- he made a special point of

acknowledging my son and letting him high five his gigantic hand. He never quite made it as one of the best pitchers in baseball but he'll always be an all-star to my son and I for that moment. Funny how the little things can be so memorable.

Batting practice was next. We stood alertly in the outfield section hoping for that home run ball to come our way. It was incredible to see major league players standing mere feet from us. Hearing the crack of the glove when the pitcher and catcher were just warming up made us both realize how tough it must be to crowd the plate in the major leagues!

Funny thing is the game itself is long gone from my memory. I think it was against Tampa Bay but other than the fact that the Orioles won, not many details remain. The highlight of the game was the awesome view. Now our seats were high, not 1970 Topps high either...full flat out 787 card 1972 Topps high!! But within this awesome stadium there is honestly not a bad seat---the sun kept shining on what looked to us to be the "field of dreams"!

My son chose to write a story for school about the experience. He could have written about anything—the moment he chose was a funny moment between us in the stands when I ate an entire lollipop in one bite. It made me realize that it was these things he will remember for many years—not where he sat or who hit a home run.

My favorite food moment was during our nacho course. We had made it through the hot dog, popcorn and pretzel courses so that was the obvious next step! He slyly stole a jalapeno from my side of the plate and popped it into his mouth. It wasn't long until the firehose of coke was required to stop the burning!

The game changed my outlook on baseball. It had gone from a favorite sport to something I watched in October. Once again the ups and downs of each of the 9 innings was important. The inning ending double play mattered again. We cared if the #9 hitter laid down the bunt or not. We thrilled in seeing the closer set them down 1-2-3 to end the game. And every game started 0-0 so the chance of winning was always there—

That day made baseball special to me again.....

"Oh put me in coach, I'm ready to play today".....