There's More to Baseball than Baseball

By Mel Lavine

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The Lady Friend adopted a more enlightened view of my Boston Red Sox when Neil Diamond opened the 2010 season at Fenway singing his classic, "Sweet Caroline."

"Why is he doing it?" she said of her idol. "He must be from Boston. Is he from Boston?" I didn't know. Neil Diamond was not one of my idols.

"He must be from somewhere back there in Red Sox Nation," she insisted.

She'd never seen such fans, young and old, in pants, shoes, socks, caps and T-shirts, and with tote bags, all emblazoned with the Red Sox trademark, when we took in a few exhibition games in Florida the year before.

"I can't see their underwear but I assume that's Red Sox, too," she remarked in amazement. She'd never thought of baseball fans as groupies but spring training was an eye-opener.

It was the live presence of Neil Diamond on TV performing in Fenway Park that opening day that caused the Lady Friend to squeal like a school girl. I won't say that she became a Red Sox fan, only that there is reason to hope that my Midwestern Lady Friend will join me in Red Sox Nation.

After googling I could tell her that Diamond's enduring hit is played at every Red Sox home game before the bottom of the 8th inning.

And that in an interview with the Associated Press on November 20, 2007, Diamond recalled that "Sweet Caroline" was inspired by a photo of President Kennedy's daughter when she was a little girl in her riding gear next to her pony. Some years later he wrote the song in 1969 in a Memphis hotel room in less than an hour. Above all, he got the chance to relate all that to Caroline herself when he performed "Sweet Caroline" for her via satellite at her 50th birthday

party.

And, for good measure, I told the native daughter of North Dakota that Neil Diamond was not from Boston but Brooklyn.

However, time is short. The Lady Friend has begun to sound like a Giants fan. So I croon:

“Where it began

I can’t begin to knowin’

But then I know it’s growin’ strong

“Was in the spring

And spring became the summer

Who’d ever believed you’d come along...”

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