

It's Tough to be a Fan These Days

By Mel Lavine

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A fellow came up to me this week with a word of congratulations after watching the A's and the Red Sox battling in Boston. Despite lengthy rain delays, a large number of fans waited out their beloved Red Sox. "Amazing loyalty, simply amazing," said the approving A's fan. (The Red Sox won the game at a very late New England hour.)

His remark was welcome after the mayhem involving Raiders and 49ers fans on August 20 at their preseason game. One man was badly injured in a beating in a Candlestick Park restroom and two men were wounded by gunfire in the parking lot after the game.

In recent memory, too, is the attack outside Dodger stadium in Los Angeles after the March 31 season opener. Bryan Stow, 42, of Santa Cruz, a Giants fan, was walking from the game with friends when two men wearing Dodgers clothing approached him from behind. According to reports, the two first taunted Stow, who was wearing Giants paraphernalia, and then hit him from behind, causing him to fall to the ground. Then they kicked him where he lay before fleeing in a car.

The last I heard, Stow, the father of two and a paramedic, remains hospitalized in San Francisco in serious condition with brain injury. Two men charged in the beating have pleaded not guilty. A preliminary hearing was set for September 30.

In a study of dysfunctional sport fans published in the Journal of Leisure Research in 2006, I read that the characteristics associated with unruly behavior draws “a picture of a less educated, lower income, younger, single, with no children at home, male who spends an inordinate amount of his time consuming sports media and, presumably, beer.” The profile indicates that “these individuals may lack other meaningful connections or relationships that provide direction and that promote self-control.”

The study suggests that “sport organizations might consider the practice of educating fans to place cell phone calls to security when abusive people disrupt the enjoyment of the game,” a practice, it points out, followed by the Boston Red Sox.

Perhaps other teams are taking it up as well.

I had a close call myself – or thought I did – when I was living in New York. One night I took in a Red Sox-Yankee game at Yankee Stadium. Of course I wore my Red Sox cap. About the second or third inning I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned, confronted by a pair of burly fellows. Pointing a thick finger in my face, one of them said, “You’re in Yankee Stadium. We don’t want to hear folks rooting for Boston. Got it?”

Tipping the scale at around 170 pounds, I said, “It would take a bigger man than you.” The words just tumbled out, and could not be recalled.

The worst, I imagined, the unspeakable worst would follow. But nothing untoward occurred. Nothing.

As I look back I can only surmise that these guys were as shocked as I was at my retort.

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