

Richard Silbar
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El Fuego de Santa Fe

I am not what one would call a baseball fan. Before last night, the last game I saw was back in 2010, when the husband of the Best Lady in our wedding took us to an Albuquerque Isotopes game. What I recall was that it was noisy, not who played, much less who won. This changed yesterday morning, when my friend Jere said she would take me to the Fuegos game at Fort Marcy Stadium at 6:00 PM that Thursday evening. The Santa Fe Fuegos (“Fuego” is Spanish for “fire”) were hosting the Colorado Springs Snow Sox.

A disclosure: I *have* watched a lot of movies in which baseball played a major role. My favorites are “Bull Durham,” “Field of Dreams,” and “Damn Yankees.”

Jere and her husband Harry are/were established and enthusiastic Santa Feans, and they went to a lot of the Fuego home games. The Fuegos are a team in the Pecos League, whose six teams are in the nearby Southwest. I had originally assumed the players would be local boys who had regular day-jobs, but not so. A look at their roster shows their players are professionals who come from all over the country. And, they are all young, the oldest being about 26.

We arrived about a half hour before the start-time of 6:00 carrying a bag with the hot dogs we had ordered up from the Brookdale kitchen, together with cans of Dr. Pepper and mandarins. As Jere was buying the \$8 tickets, a security guard told me I couldn’t bring food into the stadium. We had to retreat to a picnic table elsewhere in the Fort Marcy Park to eat the dogs, which of course were still a bit warm. How can one go to a baseball game without having a hot dog and a beer? I later discovered that the reason for “no outside food” was because there was an official Dos Amigos concession truck behind the third base dugout. They didn’t want the competition.

The stadium, if we can call it that, has a lot of uncomfortable concrete row-seats. Jere remembered, too late, that when they came there in the past they had brought lawn chairs. Many of the nearby fans had done just that. We survived anyway. The field, however, looked very professionally well-kept, about as good as in the “Field of Dreams” cornfield. As we sat down, I felt about 15 drops of rain, and then there were none. We sure *could* use some rain here.

The game finally started with an organ rendition of the Star Spangled Banner at 6:15. Not much happened in the first two innings, unless you don’t count the two or three times batters got hit by pitches. And several wild pitches. And the two or three errors made by the Snow Sox third baseman on grounders. And a lot of walks given up on 3 balls & 1 strike, often with the bases loaded. Mostly, nobody hit the ball out of the infield. That is, error-filled baseball with a bunch of unearned runs.

There *were*, however, a lot of foul-ball pop-ups. When that happened, the announcer usually said one or two things: 1) “If that ball cracks your windshield, you can get a special deal at Discount Auto Glass and Glazing.” Presumably, that is one of the team’s sponsors. Or, 2) “Kids, if you return a foul ball to the ticket booth, you will get a photograph of the Fuegos team autographed by *four* of their players!” I assume any reasonable kid would prefer to keep the baseball.

At the end of the third inning the score was Fuegos 3 – Snow Sox 1, mostly on unearned runs. There were, however, three long-ball hits for the Snow Sox, which were caught on the fly in the Fuego

outfield, once in a rather spectacular way. At the halfway point through the fourth inning, the Snow Sox were leading, 9-5. Again, a lot of these runs were unearned. But, this was the time when a passel of about 40 or 50 kids were invited to run around all the bases.

The other half of that fourth inning, the Fuegos had tightened up the score to 9-8 and had the bases loaded. This was when a Fuego southpaw hit a grand slam home, on the first pitch, over the right field fence. Which was followed immediately, after the crowd calmed down, by a bases empty single by a right-hand hitter over the left field fence. Fuegos were now ahead, 13-9.

An interesting tradition that I had never heard about was that, after a home run, a someone came around with a hat in which you were expected to contribute \$1 for the guy who hit it.

It was now 8:45, the field lights were on, and there were five innings to go. Our rear ends were a bit sore from sitting on the concrete seats. And it was getting dark, and nowadays I don't like driving home in darkness. So we left for home. Jere was relieved, she said, to see that no errant foul ball had further cracked my Prius's windshield.

This morning, Friday, I looked in vain to find a write-up in the Santa Fe New Mexican which would tell us how the game ended. As I write this, I still don't know who won.

Addendum, June 12: There was a story today, Sunday, in the New Mexican. The reason why there was nothing about the game on Friday morning is because it lasted for five hours and 35 minutes, i.e., well past the newspaper's deadline. So, I am thankful that we left after sitting on the concrete for only two hours. I don't imagine all the families with the kids that ran around the bases wanted to stay much later than we did. In the story we learned that the final score was 24-23, in favor of the Fuegos. I guess I should remind you that this was a baseball game, not football.