

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

Like most American fathers, I firmly believe in two things: tracking gas mileage and passing along an appreciation of baseball to my children.



Thus, when the chance arose to take my 8-year-old son to Progressive Field to watch the Indians last weekend, I saw this as a golden opportunity to really anchor the game in his consciousness.

He'd been to games before, of course, generally for Kids Fun Day or a wicked sweet giveaway, but with him on the brink of second grade, I figured he was now at the prime age to begin to understand the game and be fascinated by it rather than just eyeing the crowd for Slider or asking how long until nachos.

We had two seats in the Indians' fantastic Social Suite (where the only requirements for entry are a Twitter account and a dream) and arrived early with soft pretzels and popcorn in tow.

Now granted, his primary motivation was sitting through whatever the hell this dog-and-pony show was to get to the *Star Wars*-themed fireworks afterward. And after Fausto Carmona allowed a 450-foot homer to Josh Hamilton three minutes into the game, that became the focus of my evening as well. Still, I tried my best to teach my young Jedi Padawan in the ways of baseball.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

I'd started on the drive up.

"You know the Indians are in first place," I toss casually toward the back seat, silently wondering how much longer I'd be able to say that.

"Oh," he replies from behind the cover of the latest *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

"Yeah," I continue, "they've been real surprising this year."

No reply – not unlike the national media.

We got downtown, parked, and then I got to experience every father's joy of explaining to his son what the guy with the funny lip is doing when he shakes a plastic cup full of change at you.

Then, as we crossed East Ninth Street, we got to listen to a traffic-light rotation of a baritone-voice prophet holding up a sandwich board with an angry picture of Jesus, telling us how we were all pathetic sinners and should be prepared to suffer on the judgment day.

As we crossed the street, both of us eager for the sanctuary of the ballpark, I realized that if I were eight years old, right now I'd either be terrified or utterly confused. But since I'm 34, I knew to save those emotions for when the Indians took the field.

Before they did, I thought I'd lay some historical groundwork.

Just after we settled into our seats, the epic full-length "What If?" ad played on the scoreboard.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

“Watch this! Watch this!” I titter like a girlish carnival barker.

“What?” asks my eight-year-old with a tone that suggests this had better be good.

“This thing,” I say, pointing at the scoreboard. “It’s the What If?...movie.” I figure by calling it a “movie,” as opposed to “commercial” or “PR campaign,” he’d be more inclined to like it.

Right around the point that Rick Manning catches the last out of Len Barker’s perfect game, I hear my son chirp up.

“What *is* this?” he says as if somebody just handed him a necklace made of toenail clippings.

“It’s the ‘What If’ thing?” I say matter-of-factly, unable to tear my eyes away from the scoreboard to look at him. “This is awesome.”

But in my head, I’m adding a new line to the commercial: “*What if your first-born son doesn’t want to like the Indians?*”

The game begins, the Indians quickly fall behind, and I desperately try to make the minutiae of the game interesting.

“Look at the pitcher,” I say. “He keeps throwing over to first to keep the runner from getting too far off the base.”

“Oh,” he replies.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

“Because he can steal the base,” I say, then pause, expecting to be peppered with questions because of how cool that sounds.

He looks out at the field for a long moment, then says, “Pencils are like magic. You can write with them and then erase what you write.”

How to respond? I’d been prepared with all kinds of details about taking leadoffs, sliding into second, and the importance of having a runner in scoring position, less so about writing utensils.

So I came back with every dad’s go-to line: “Yeah?”

Just like Josh Hamilton’s artillery shell set the tone for the Indians, this early smattering of dialogue laid the foundation for an evening of unpredictable conversation between me and my eldest offspring.

A close play at first goes against the Indians. The crowd reacts and Manny Acta trots out to argue.

“Why are they booing?” my son asks.

“Because we got hosed on that call,” I reply, muffling my own frustration for the moment. “It looked like the runner was out, but the umpire called him safe. Now the pitcher has to pitch from the stretch because if...”

“I don’t like this popcorn,” he chimes in. “It sticks to my tongue.”

And...scene.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

A small flying insect buzzed into the suite.

“Look!” I cry excitedly, since this is far more interesting and emotionally fulfilling than watching Adam Everett bat. “That’s a midge!”

I proceed to explain to my boy how midges were tiny little insects that came out of Lake Erie and only lived for about two hours before they died and their sole purpose was to help the Indians beat the Yankees in the 2007 playoffs.

“Do they bite?” he wonders. A natural question that Joba Chamberlain is still asking today.

“No, they don’t bite. They just land on you. But they can distract you on the field – make you make mistakes.”

Again it was silent for a moment, and I’m hoping he’ll ask about the Indians beating the Yankees, a story I’ll gladly regale him with since it’s right up there with his birth as a defining moment in my life.

Then the silence was broken by every eight-year-old’s go-to line: “I have to go to the bathroom.”

Over the two-hour-and-28-minute duration of the game, this kid urinated more times than I had in the past four months. To his credit, he boldly declared it each time and proved true to his word, marching back into the suite and putting that skybox thunderbucket to the test.

On Pee Trip 12, He wound up missing another Apollo launch of a home run by the Rangers. When I told him he’d missed it, he took the news well, wondering aloud if that meant the game was over.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

The Indians have the bases loaded with two out and Carlos Santana has a full count.

“Watch this!” I exclaim breathlessly. “All the runners are going to start running as soon as the pitcher starts to throw. You almost never get to see this!”

As the runners take off, I glance at my son and see he’s staring at either the scoreboard or the Terminal Tower.

Santana pounds a grounder to third and is easily thrown out. The crowd moans.

“Did they score?” my son asks, still looking out in the general direction of Euclid Avenue.

“No,” I sigh. “They didn’t.”

Nor would they, denying me the chance to point out the Super Mario Brothers coin sound effect that plays over the speakers each time an Indian scores. That only left me with the Hot Dog Race to talk about during the middle innings.

I was also robbed of another talking point when the entertainingly named Shin-Soo Choo was not in the starting lineup. Instead, I tried to interest my son in the beauty of Shelley Duncan’s fruitless flailing swings and the majesty of Austin Kearns’ pop-ups to second. Needless to say, there wasn’t much interest. And by the sixth inning, I was also staring out at the Terminal Tower with glassy eyes, wondering what was on Nickelodeon right about now.

Finally, the game mercifully ended and it was time for the kid’s payoff. We were led out of the suite and through the crystalline back corridors of Progressive Field, then marched down onto the field, where we were permitted to watch the fireworks from the visitors’ dugout.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

Now, I'd never been in a major-league dugout before, so I wasn't sure what to expect. And sure enough, in addition to the usual stuff, there were a few things you wouldn't expect to find. A couple of paint cans filled with pork chops. A steaming pile of afterbirth over by the bat rack. A llama.

But we took it all in stride. Actually my son did more than me, since I was mesmerized by being this close to the bullpen phone and being able to reach out and touch the on-deck circle.

"Isn't this awesome?" I whispered to him.

"Yeah," he said sincerely, though in the same tone I often use in response to a comment of his about anything Pokémon.

"This is where the players sit during the game!" I exclaim, trying to deliver in my tone the rarity of this situation.

He's looking up at the crowd and probably thinking, 'And that's where the fans sit during the game. And the ground is wear the grass grows, and the sky is where the clouds live. What's the big deal, you dork?'

I see what he's thinking and quickly try to find a way to explain how rare this is and how special a location this is in the landscape of baseball. More than just a place for grown men to spit all over the floor with immunity, this is the nerve center of everything that happens on the field and every reason why the 30,000 people above us are sitting there. This place is everything that I love about baseball.

But to him, it's like our patio, only dirtier. And in the grand scheme of things, he's closer to reality than I am.

Explaining the Indians to an 8-Year-Old Who Has to Pee

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, June 07 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 07 2011 12:01 PM

The fireworks began and all the awkwardness went away. The inky night sky was sketched with flaming color as the symphonic beauty of John Williams' most famous compositions swept through the ballpark. We watched side-by-side, leaning on the dugout railing with a casualness that suggested we did this every Saturday night.

He may still not be old enough to like baseball and maybe never will. And as fine as I am with that, I'm still going to keep trying.

He had fun, he would insist in the car before slipping into a rapid stream of unconsciousness known only to young boys up three hours past their bedtime. And so did I.

Just like with many fathers and sons in this 21st-century era of the American pastime, baseball isn't a connection for us right now. Not like *Star Wars*, anyway.

But it's all good. We may never connect on baseball, but we'll always remember watching fireworks from the dugout – even if to him it was nothing more than a hole in the ground.

Satisfied for different reasons, we marched hand-in-hand out into the hot summer night.

After stopping one more time to use the bathroom.