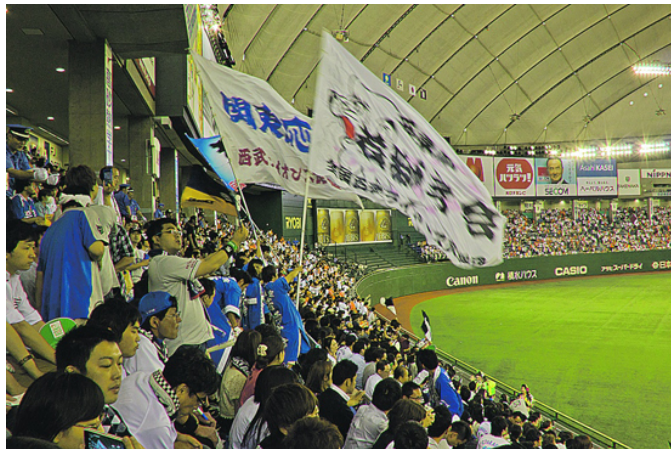


Published August 15th, 2012

Local Travel Stories Baseball Fanaticism High in Japan

Submitted by Tom Rizza



Fans at the Yomiuri Giants vs. Saitama Seibu Lions game Photo Michael Maly

The bleachers were split, three-quarters for the home team and one-quarter for the visitors. We crammed into our section and noticed that we were the only fans to not have flags and robes of blue and white, the Lion's colors. Just a few rows over a group of fans made up a horn section with drummers and flag-wavers standing on their seats. From across the field we saw the Giants had their own band and group of rabid baseball fans.

And just like that, the battle began.

Every moment that the Giants or Lions were up to bat, their fans stood with them and cheered for each player with their personalized chant, anticipating the big hit.

A run caused the fans' section to go wild and broke into their team's fight song. A home run was like a house party. It was complete chaos, but an organized chaos.

The game ended a 6-5 Lions win and the fans of the visiting section all stood and sang their praise for the team as we shuffled out of the stadium. I've been to hundreds of American baseball games, but the atmosphere at the Tokyo Dome made me feel as if the game was different entirely.

Don't get me wrong, the vibe of a Giants vs. Dodgers game is something to behold. Some of my fondest memories are screaming my lungs out at Tommy Lasorda blowing kisses from the Candlestick outfield. But that night at the Tokyo Dome, a foreigner felt a level of camaraderie from the Japanese fans that cannot be emulated.

They can, however, keep the takoyaki (fried squid balls.)

Tom Rizza will be continuing his studies in journalism at SF State this fall. His mother, Laura, is a well-known salesperson at McCaulou's in Lafayette.

A Nippon Professional Baseball, or more commonly referred to in America as the "Japan league," game is as much of a contest between the fans as it is between the players.

When my friends and I purchased tickets for the Yomiuri Giants vs. Saitama Seibu Lions game in June at the Tokyo Dome, the attendant told us we were sitting in the bleachers and asked if we were "visitors." We thought she was asking if we were tourists, so we said yes, bought our tickets and got in line.

Pushing through the turnstiles, we found out what our attendant meant by "visitors." Security checked our tickets to point us in the right direction, and the guard balked at our attire.

A few of my friends were wearing Yomiuri Giants hats. I showed up in full San Francisco Giants regalia: the shirt, the hat, and a pair of Giants noise makers. But we were sitting in the visitors section where only Lions fans could sit.

My friends and I were told take off our hats and stow them in our packs, along with our noise-makers and fans. They asked me to turn my shirt inside out. I asked the security guard "Do the fans get crazy?" and he smiled and told me "Hai (yes), crazy."

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