One thought that’s constantly popped into my head over the past year and a half was “man, I really need to get out of here.” Those feelings certainly come up normally but given the monotony of pandemic life it felt more pronounced. So finally an opportunity presented itself for the first ballpark vacation I’ve taken since 2019 and I jumped at it. In years past my friends and I hit multiple destinations, this year we decided to stay in one city. We landed on the City of the Big Shoulders as our destination. We spent enough time in Chicago to see two games in each ballpark.

Stop number one was the obvious one. I had never been to a game at Wrigley Field and prior to this trip it was at the top of my bucket list ever since I crossed off Fenway a few years ago. The other big draw of the ballpark is the neighborhood around it and Wrigleyville lived up to the hype. Despite the fact that the team sold off their big names and are in full on tank mode, Wrigleyville and the Friendly Confines were still very much alive. The team itself on the other hand was a different story.

While I wasn’t expecting much out of a Cubs team that just sold off the likes of Anthony Rizzo, Javier Baez and Kris Bryant I still expected them to be somewhat competitive and at least put up some kind of a fight against a Milwaukee Brewers team that is running away with the NL Central. Those expectations were dashed quickly as the Brew Crew would go on to outscore the Cubbies 27-4 in the two games I attended. In the first game it was over before it started due to Cubs starter Jake Arrieta coughing up seven runs in the top of the first. The game ended 10-0 in favor of Milwaukee highlighted by their starter, Corbin Burnes, striking out ten batters in a row. Which was the third time in history that happened, second time this season and both of those I happened to be in attendance (first was Aaron Nola on June 25 vs the Mets). The downward spiral continued the next afternoon as Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks got roughed up (4IP 11H 9R) and the bullpen was worse as the Crew took home a 17-4 victory sweeping the overall series. While I expected the Brewers to take care of business, I was hoping for more fight out of the Cubs despite their standing and that to me was the biggest let down of the trip.

Due up next was a trip down the red line to the south side where it just so happened the New York Yankees were visiting the White Sox after their game at the Field of Dreams. Now I had been to that ballpark previously but that was many moons ago, July, 6, 2007 to be exact. That night the White Sox hosted the Minnesota Twins and got shellacked 12-0 highlighted by Justin Morneau hitting three home runs. I know you see things differently as you grow up but I remember not particularly caring for what was at the time called US Cellular Field but I had a hard time remembering why. On my return trip, I definitely was reminded why I didn’t like it.

First of all, the name Guaranteed Rate Field has to be one of the worst stadium names in the country, maybe even the world so I don’t blame Sox fans for still calling it Comiskey. Also, unlike its counterpart on the north side you don’t exactly want to wander the area around the stadium looking for a bar. Getting into the stadium is nightmarish due to the way the gates were designed making the lines stretch to all areas of the parking lot and once you got in you go up ramps to the concourse you had tickets to, we had tickets in the upper deck and we couldn’t wander the main concourse because you had to have tickets for that area to access the level. When we reached our level it was impossible to move because of lengthy concession lines and the concourse being too thin. Which is something you expect out of an older park, not one that opened in 1991.

Outside of the stadium factors the games were fantastic. Both games featured sell out crowds and great atmospheres, which is to be expected when the home team is a perennial contender. The first game on Saturday night was a back and forth battle that had me on the edge of my seat the whole time. In the bottom of the 9th with 2 outs Yankee pitcher Chad Green had a 3-2 count on Jose Abreu to tie the game and send it to extra innings where Joey Gallo would put the Yankees ahead for good, the bullpen made me sweat but the Bombers came out on top 7-5. The Yankee bullpen making me sweat was a common theme because the next day they had a 5-1 lead heading into the bottom of the 9th, gave up two runs and brought the tying run to the plate before Wandy Peralta got Cesar Hernandez to ground into a game ending double play clinching a 5-3 win for the pinstripes. It had been a very long time since I saw the Yankees play a road game that wasn’t in a place like Baltimore where Yankee fans hold the majority in numbers and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of being a road fan.

One of the things I missed the most in 2020 was being able to explore the country and checking off ballparks off the list. This trip to the Second City was needed in more ways than one and it feels great to leave the tristate area for a few days. It had been a long time since I was last in Chicago and it helped me remember why I enjoy it so much,but now time to look forward to the next sporting venue venture.