



The View from Section 218

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One weekend,
the opening one,
at the NCAA men's basketball tournament,
getting to see six of the sixty-four games to be played
without,

as it were,
having to leave home

The poet Tom Clark once referred to baseball
as not necessarily having any extrinsic meaning,

but

being situational drama at its best

Agreed,

though

I think that the tournament
with its lose-and-go-home format
has baseball slightly beat

(At least theoretically;

I've gone to many a game
where drama

(situational or otherwise)

took the day off

I have high apple pie in the sky hopes
for this weekend anyway)

We head downtown to the stomping ground
of the local commuter college,
an arena recently re-named
for a recently-deceased 'developer'
(the kind laughably lauded as a civic leader)

(definition of civic leader

-someone who happily helps himself
to subsidies for doing
what he would have done anyway)

And

therein lies a tale, the first of the day

Hot on the heels of the commuter college's
highly improbable run to the Sweet Sixteen
(see M. Ceraolo's poem A Viking Saga)
the state university system wanted to build
a new arena that would be a significant upgrade
from the bandbox where they played most of their games,
a new on-campus jewel to rival the ones
in Lexington, Kentucky and Knoxville, Tennessee,
among others

But

the well-heeled chiselers in charge of the town
(see definition of civic leader, above)
vetoed such an ambitious plan
(They had their eyes on the prize,
another arena of similar size,
one completely in their control,
one unencumbered by any such educational use
a college arena might rightly have;

through

the rigorous string-pulling of their elected puppets
they got their wish)
One unintended consequence,
this one a good one:
contrary to the advertising pablum of the large arenas
("There are no bad seats"),
in the downsized, now mid-sized arena
there truly are no bad seats
(The college's unspoken slogan
"Plenty of good seats still available" ,
does not apply to the sold-out tournament)

The small-time chiselers are amassed outside the arena:
people hoping to sell suckers some tickets,
people charging many times the usual rate for a parking space
(the stars aligning just right for chiselers of all sizes:
thirteen thousand-plus fans for the game,
plus a hundred thousand or so for the St. Patrick's Day parade,
plus the thousands who work downtown every day,
plus the banning of street parking because of the parade,
even on streets not on the parade route)
We pay our money and go in

Coincident convergence of the computer and memorabilia industries?
Ticket takers scan the ducats for admission,
rather than rending them in two,
making for a better souvenir

The big-time chiselers operate inside the arena:
the purveyors of 'officially-licensed merchandise'
charge twenty-something bucks for a t-shirt
that probably cost a buck in materials and labor
(easy to eschew exploitation there)
The bandits behind the concession stands
tack at least a two hundred percent surcharge on their wares,
taking advantage of the captive audience:
the security apparatus search more enthusiastically
for those carrying concealed food and drink
than for those carrying concealed weapons,

and

with at least twelve hours
from the start of the first game
until the end of the fourth one,
I'll have to break down and buy something,
if only the caffeine fiend's fix

Sportswriter/sports fan mangling of language #1:
lame labeling of schools as big or small
based not on enrollment but entirely on emphasis on sports
(read: football and, to a lesser extent, basketball)
A few of the schools here today considered small
have many times as many students as some considered big,

and

one of the schools here today has a lower enrollment
than many local high schools;
this school is always deemed big
and this year is one of the tournament favorites

First game:

a tale of two coaches

The leader of the perceived underdog team
was someone who was a student assistant, not a player,
while in college,

though

he did make his tournament debut then
by pinch-hitting for the school's regular mascot
The leader of the overdog team
had played for a 'major' school
while in college,

and

had gone on the coaching fast-track
soon after graduation:
assistant at a 'major' program,
head man at a 'mid-major' program,

and,

the last rung on the ladder,
head man at a 'major' power,
his alma mater to boot

(Sportswriter/sports fan mangling of language #2:
most state universities are 'hyphenates' ,
the city after the hyphen denoting location,

yet,

due to language-mangling number 1,
certain schools have their hyphens whited out
in the mind of the sports fan)

And now,

FINALLY,

some game action
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,
one of the dreaded yet derided hyphenates,
one of the pseudo-small schools,
versus the University of Alabama
(hyphen Tuscaloosa whited out)

And

the underdog Panthers decide to press for success
The big boys react badly,
even seem to get rattled,

shocked,

shocked

that some team would have the temerity
to make them play the whole court rather than half of it:
We're the ones on TV all the time!
We're the ones with the highly-recruited players,
the ones with the high-school all-Americans!
We don't do that to each other;
it's just not done in our set!
(even though it's always successful)
Helter skelter
Easy baskets from the turnovers
A shower of threes raining down
Even in the inevitable ebb and flow
UWM is pretty much in control the whole way
One big boy is sent home early

Second verse unlike the first

(yawn)

The big boy Boston College goes up early,
stays up in the middle,

(yawn),

and

is up by twenty at the end

(yawn)

We'll need to wake up for the evening session

Intermission interlude

The arena vomits out the crowd after Game Two
in order to require a separate admission for the next session,
the better to increase our revenues my dear,

and

we are free on the streets of Cleveland
along with a hundred thousand other people
puking and pissing in public
as a way to celebrate St. Patrick's Day
Through the crush we wned our way
to the safety of a local pizza place,
packed wall to wall with partiers
(Today's business press release,

masquerading as the daily newspaper,
quoted the owner as noting the addition
of enough workers for the anticipated business;

pehaps

he'll use some of the extra money to repair
the broken pipes that have rendered the restroom inoperable
I won't hold my breath)

We catch the closing moments
of a couple of the later afternoon games;

while watching
we come to the realization
that the same-day service promised by the long lines
won't get us back to the game in time,
and
we head off in search of food
(No need for Leonard Nimoy yet)
The restaurant that was on the next corner
has gone to fast-food franchise heaven,
and
so has another one on another corner,
and another
(Maybe we do need Leonard Nimoy)
Several others still among the living
promise the same sort of same-day service
as the pizza place
We come to a corner with a hot dog vendor,
someone who had to haggle with bureaucrats
for his small space of commerce,
and
we find the only person in the city
who hasn't jacked up the prices
to take advantage of the crowds,
and
we reward his integrity

(and perseverance in the thritysome degree weather)
by purchasing hot dogs (with Stadium mustard)
and chips and a can of pop,
dining al fresco in a café of our own making,
hoping that the rain will hold off
until we've finished

Third game

Wake Forest,

one of the tournament favorites,

(so anointed by Duke Vitale

and other talking heads on the ACC network),

plays a heavy underdog,

and

plays down,

way down,

to the level

of its competition,

actually

finding itself behind at halftime

In the second half the refs get in the swing of things,

deciding

that if the players are going to play ugly,

then

they are going to ref ugly:

inexplicable calls,

calls based on the name on the jersey

rather than the game on the floor,

calls that should have been n-calls

and no-calls that should have been fouls,

calls made with no consistency,

foolish or otherwise,

calls that insure these refs won't be advancing in the tournament

This game will be erased from memory as soon as it ends

Another big boy moves on to the next round

Submitted for your consideration:

time is slowing down,

maybe even going backwards

The scoreboard flashes scores of other games;

a second scrawl shows scores advancing to the end;

then

a third scrawl shows scores going backwards,
maybe all the way to zero
Do-do-do-do, do-do-do-do, do-do-do-do

Fourth and final game of the day,
the one with the two most closely-matched teams,
at least on paper

And,

on the floor,
the game doesn't disappoint
One team starts out on a 10-0 run,

and,

like a bad song you can't get out of your head,
I hear the announcer for the ACC network screaming
Get a TO Baby!

And

the coach of the scoreless team does,

and

they go ahead

And

the rhythm of this game keeps it close
the rest of the way

Interjection-
my friend has a theory,
yet to be disproved,

that

whichever school's band first plays
Rock and Roll Part Two
will be the school that wins the game
Wisconsin-Milwaukee's band played it in the first game
and they won;

no one

played it during the next two games;

and now,

Creighton's band played it when they were way down
and they have come back

Game tied at 61

Creighton
sets up for the last shot

Second interjection-
when attending a tournament game years ago,
a game that was likewise tied at crunch time,
I said that I smelled overtime
When the good-natured ribbing started
after the game ended in regulation,
I said
it must have been pizza I was smelling instead
So again the question is asked
Overtime or pizza?

Pizza
A player from West Virginia blocks the Creighton player's shot,
and,
instead of erupting in premature celebration,
has the court savvy to leak out on the break,
receives the outlet pass,
and
throws down the go-ahead basket with just over two seconds left
I have never seen a true buzzer-beater in person,
and
tonight's game proves no exception
The Creighton player's last show,
a good look from the right wing though a slightly deep three,
goes just long,
and
another favorite survives for another day

Strange end to the day:

we turn on the radio on the ride home
to catch the completion of another game,

only

to find out the scoreboard we had been sneaking peeks at
had the score reversed for one of the games

Or maybe the game had gone back to the beginning and played out again with a
*different result

Day Two:

the fifth game we're seeing,

and

once again a team goes out by double digits
to start the game,

the favorite,

to be exact,

and

the scoreless underdog takes a timeout amid trash-talking
and taunting by a classless fan in the stands
(he will soon be slinking out)

But

pressure defense works its wonders:
the hypenate underdog comes back
with steals leading to easy baskets
and another barrage of threes,

and

they upset a second favorite by
almost the same score as their initial win
(Partly on the strength of the Gary Glitter factor,
even though old Gary was only one and one on the first day?)

Language-mangling number 3:

the laughable use of the term non-profit
I look around at the sold-out arena,
a take of a couple million at the gate
Multiply that by eight
(the number of sites this week)

Add the four sites for next week's regionals
(slightly lower ticket prices but more seats sold)

Add the windfall of the Final Four
Add the billions in media fees,
and
the sum of the equation is that sometimes
words have no meaning

Interjection:

I almost forgot

The NCAA just issued what was amusingly called
"the academic progress report" ,

that

mostly showed there was very little progress toward degrees
at the big-time basketball and football factories
(Language-mangling number 4:

student-athlete,
rather than the reverse or just the second part)

And yet,

no big-time schools lost any scholarships

and

then it was tie for the last game of the day,
the sixth game of the weekend,
a primetime extravaganza between the Wake Forest Demon Deacons
(strange that a religious school would use Demon in its nickname,
but that's topic for a different poem),

and

the West Virginia Mountaineers
The Demon Deacons have been deemed one of the teams
with a great chance to amke it all the way,

and

the first half of the game shows why
Wake's Chris Paul is several levels better
than every other player on the floor
(which will be even more evident next year
when he will go on to do just as well in the NBA),

and

he meets the accepted definition of greatness in a player,

that is,

he makes his teammates better
(just how much better will again be evident next year
when the same players,

without him,

will finish last rather than first)

And

Wake goes up by thirteen points at halftime

But

all coaches make adjustments at halftime,

and

sometimes one coach's changes checkmate the opposing coach's
(aided immeasurably by the abilities of the players),

and

that's what happened here as West Virginia came back,
all the way back,

and

the game played out with a classic rhythm,
due in large part to a player
who lent his name to a neologism:

Pittsnoggle, v. (usually intransitive), meaning
to have your team taken advantage of
by having the other team's center step outside
and hit several three-pointers; then
when your center comes out to guard him,
having the rest of the team abused by back-door cuts
Pittsnoggled, Pittsnoggling

And the clash of contrasting styles
wound up tied at the end of regulation
And tied again after a first overtime
And then the classic rhythm flowed home to a close,
West Virginia hitting a shot that Wake couldn't match,
and then another,
and then the parade to the foul line,
where the Mountaineers made most of their shots,
interspersed with an occasional make by Wake,
and
the final wound up to be 110-103

Another favorite had gone home unhappy

The arena vomited out the crowd for the final time
(laughing at those who left before the end of regulation),
and
the chisellers were conducting one last campaign,
hawking the unsold t-shirts at prices
far closer to their actual worth

But
there were few, if any, takers

The symbol * indicates that what follows should be read as
one line with the previous line of type.

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