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# OTHER OPINIONS

## Rooting for the home team — Hampton Roads

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Like most people in Hampton Roads, I didn't have a ticket to the big baseball game between the Washington Nationals and the Baltimore Orioles at Harbor Park.

So I was somewhat shocked that during a brief encounter with an old friend the day before the March 30 game, I was offered a ticket. And not just any ticket, but a seat in a sky box belonging to the Norfolk Department of Development, a sky box first for me.

On entering Harbor Park, you could sense something different — that it was more than just a regular baseball game. Some of that feeling came from the major league franchises playing to a sold-out crowd. But, to a larger extent, there was a prideful excitement permeating the park. As if a celebration were underway, and not just because we were taking the afternoon off from work.

It was a brilliant, picturepostcard type of day, sunny and cool with vibrant colors entwined with baseball chatter. And outside the stadium, a tableau caught the eye of my host Chuck Rigney, with the Norfolk Department of Development.

Looking up from the stadium toward the Elizabeth River, with the shipyards in the background, we could see four tugboats guiding a large white ship into its berth. Simultaneously, an inbound Norfolk Southern coal train was crossing the Campostella trestle, a passenger jet on its approach to the airport, two news helicopters buzzing overhead, a small private airplane and, of all things, an osprey carrying a fish in its talons.

"Look at that," said Chuck pointing, "what a great picture — business and commerce in Hampton Roads on the move."

Trust a development guy to note industry in action.

The sight reminded me of one of those large wall-to-wall murals you used to see in old bank buildings depicting local industry through the ages. A Capra-esque montage mixing "A Wonderful Life" with "Field of Dreams" against a backdrop of Hampton Roads industry.

I half expected to see Capt. John Smith in his shallop sailing vessel running a close reach while surveying the shore, or a British frigate coming about to fire another broadside into downtown.

Could it be that the buzz in the bleachers was partially due to our emerging pride as a region? The recent publicity of our predominate place in American history made me wonder if other venues were experiencing this self worth also.

"Absolutely" said Dana Dickens, president of the Hampton Roads Partnership, when I reached him on the phone. "We're seeing this from Harbor Park to Harborfest, from the Peninsula to Town Center. We're becoming regional citizens. People used to pay attention to city lines but not today; 52 percent of people work in a city where they don't live. We take pride in our history and strength in our ability to compete as a region."

A lot of this feel-good regional recognition has to do with the Jamestown anniversary.

Locally, when the English first arrived at Cape Henry on April 26, 1607, they sailed around the lower Chesapeake, studying its geography before settling in Jamestown on May 14. They established the region we know and honor today as Hampton Roads, an area rightfully and correctly promoted by the Hampton Roads Partnership as “America’s First Region.”

Back at the ballpark, things couldn’t have ended better. The home team won; the local boy, Ryan Zimmerman, did well; and although we spectators were from different parts of Hampton Roads, we had all “come home to Norfolk” for an afternoon of baseball.

It almost made me want to move back to Ghent from Chick’s Beach ... but not quite.



STEVE EARLEY/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT



BRIAN CAMDEN A capacity crowd at Harbor Park in Norfolk watches last month’s exhibition game between the Orioles and the Nationals.