



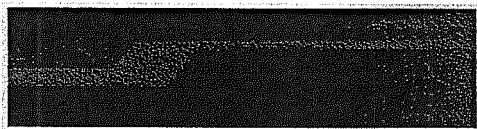
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From The Baseline

Comment: Gushing at Flushing

Tuesday September 11, 2007

by Enette Ngoei

I cupped my hands together as if to receive Holy Communion.

My friend Nick handed me our hard-won tickets to the U.S. Open men's semi-finals. They were not the two rectangular paper strips that I had imagined would go into my keepsakes collection. They were 8-inch by 11-inch computer print outs and not even in colour!

"Oh well, as long as they get us in," I said.

How much did I want to see Roger Federer in the flesh? Well, enough to pay \$200 for tickets that originally cost \$99. (On ticketsliquidator.com, Nick had actually found tickets for \$150, but was then refused sale when last-minute demand drove prices upward.) For someone who doesn't even have a sports channel, it was a lot.

Nick was my New York connection. During our ride on the 7 train to Flushing Meadows, he helped me blend in with the natives by handing me the lifestyle section of the Wall Street Journal. But I couldn't read beyond a sentence. It was far more interesting to observe my fellow travellers and pick out which of them were heading to the same place I was.

The couple opposite were a no-brainer, decked out in grand slam gear - the man, in a Roland Garros shirt, and the woman in an Australian Open version, both wearing U.S. Open 2007 hats. Then there was the obvious Mets fan, or was he a Yankees fan? His hat said one thing and his shirt another. The Mets' Shea Stadium

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At the age of 26, after twelve Grand Slams, just how many will Roger Federer end up winning?

- He will end up with over twenty, a record that will never be beaten
- He'll pass Pete Sampras' record of 14 and then quit
- He'll take up table tennis next week and beat everyone at that instead

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is just across the road from Flushing Meadows whereas Yankee Stadium is up in the Bronx, a 45-minute subway ride away.

As the train door opened at Willets Point, the travellers instantly parted ways with tennis fans leaving through the right door and baseball fans through the left.

Inside the competition grounds, a giant poster with life-sized pictures of all the top players was wrapped around one of the fences. Past the U.S. Open greeters was an enormous assortment of al fresco dining and memorabilia shops. Up the stairs and we were finally in our seats at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

I think I forgot to breathe when I saw Federer walk on court.

We were much closer to the last row than the first, but it didn't feel as if we were that far from the court, although I eventually resorted to zooming in on my guy with binoculars, pointing my camera lens into them to get as close-up a shot as I could.

My fellow spectators were a curious bunch. There were the intense fans, some who had come alone, and there were those who only seemed interested in the food and drink concession stands. Every second there seemed to be someone climbing the stairs with an assortment of bright-orange deep-fried foods and ice-cold beer. I understand the beverage can be in the incredible heat, but for the life of me, I will never get the fascination with shoving down the hot food.

The stadium was packed but the crowd wasn't cheering nearly as much as I had expected. Perhaps, like me, they were screaming in their heads for the R-Fed. In the third set though, they finally got really rowdy, but for Davydenko.

I hypothesized it was so the match would go on a little longer, knowing Federer would eventually win. But the match ended like it was meant to. The defending champion swiftly defeated his opponent with his signature serves in the 12th game of the third set.

I didn't catch the sweatbands he threw after the match. But my day with Federer ended on a satisfying note—him winning (surprise, surprise) and me snapped with a 2-D version of my hero, as I planted a kiss on his cheek.

The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ESPN STAR Sports.

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