

First Time

BASEBALL, AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

Andrew Surgo sees the Mud Hens play Durham ... and meets Muddy, has some ice cream, and sees some fireworks

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This is the fifth in a year-long series offering a look at various "firsts" for people around the region.

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Sure, it was hard to watch the Mud Hens lose their second home game of the season to the Durham Bulls. But for 5-year-old Andrew Surgo, it was harder to watch ketchup lose the hot dog race on the scoreboard.

He really wanted ketchup to win, way more than that dang chili dog. Jumping up and down and screaming as the animated hot dog rounded the bases- "Ke-tchup! Ke-tchup! Ke-tchup!" - it's hard to believe he ever wanted anything more in his young life.

Except ... maybe that pizza he needed earlier in the game. And perhaps the "cold dog," an ice cream concoction made to resemble a hot dog, that he got just after the National Anthem. And the cotton candy he got during the seventh-inning stretch.

See, baseball isn't always about the game.

This was Andrew's first ever professional game and it took him a good seven innings to comfortably settle into his seat, feet dangling freely over the edge, quietly enjoying America's national pastime.

Before that he was a blur of activity, eating and fidgeting and curling down the slide at Muddy's Marsh play area and petting the police horse at the stadium mounted by his Aunt Sue. There was a trip to the gift shop and even a reticent visit with Muddy himself.

Occasionally, an adult would interrupt Andrew and his playmates with a game update: "In case they care, we're losing."

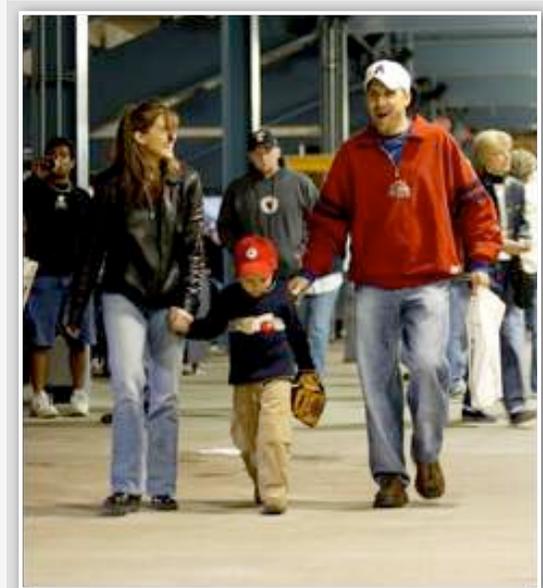
They didn't.

Even when he was in his seat with his new red ballcap worn fashionably backwards, Andrew had plenty to distract him - like the 22 people he came with, including aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and grandparents.

On this warm, sparkling day, the last two rows of Section 114 were filled with Surgos, who moved around freely to joke and pass around the family youngsters from one to another - so much so that at one point Andrew's 2-year-old brother, Kyle, was passed to a stranger briefly before the family realized that the woman holding him wasn't part of the group.

This was Kyle's first game too, and he spent much of the night laughing and dancing as his parents moved him to the beat of the music blaring throughout the stadium.

They chose this particular game because of the fireworks show scheduled afterwards. Kyle has an extremely rare genetic condition called congenital disorders of glycosylation that prevents his body from turning food into energy, impairing his development and vision. As a result, they knew he probably wouldn't be able to follow the game, but the fireworks were a different story.



Andrew Surgo and his parents walk around the ballpark during a Mud Hens game. (THE BLADE)

"Kyle loves fireworks, and that's one thing that he can see," said his mother, Lisa Surgo, 25. "It's one of my favorites, too. I'm still a kid at heart."

For the boys' father, Todd Surgo, 30, this game represented a chance to pass on something important. He comes to baseball with a different generation's love, reflective of a time when the national pastime didn't have to compete with so many video games and other amusements.

"I wish it would mean more to them," he said. "Now, it's not like baseball games are the No. 1 priority any more."

Todd, a branch manager for KeyBank, doesn't remember his first game, but an early one does stand out. It was a trip to Cleveland to see future Hall of Famer Phil Niekro flutter pitches across the plate in the old, cavernous - and often empty - Municipal Stadium.

"Me and my brother, we'd kill to go to an Indians game," he said.

This is not to say Andrew is neutral about the sport. Before hopping in the family minivan to head to the Mud Hens game, he took some batting practice in the back yard of their West Toledo home. With his eyes set with determination, he swung away at ball after ball that his father plucked from a red bucket full of them - whiffle balls, cushy balls, all kinds of balls - and making contact more often than not.

Just before leaving, he belted out "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and slipped on his baseball glove. ("So I can catch a ball," he said.) Even after they got to the downtown stadium - "Look how high that building goes! Awesome!" - he wouldn't take the glove off even to hold his mom's hand. (She had to grab his other hand.)

As the game progressed, Andrew got more into it. When it was time to scream at the "strikeout player of the game," Andrew obliged. When a girl with an orange ribbon in her hair turned around and said, "You can do louder than that," he didn't let her down and, in fact, even added some quacking from a duck whistle someone bought him.

When some music came on and someone told him, "Get down, Andrew! Get down!" he got downright funky. He waved his arms, shook his legs, and in a fit of sugar-fueled ecstasy even did a split as he held onto the seat in front of him.

Behind him another relative called out: "Andrew, do the Sprinkler!" On cue, he did, using one hand to imitate the jerky, rotating motion of a lawn sprinkler before snapping back to its original position.

The signature moment of the night, though, may have come in the eighth inning with the Mud Hens still trailing 6-3. When a Durham player hit a foul ball deep into the stands, Andrew's mouth dropped in amazement.

"Whoah! Home run!" he shouted.

His 6-year-old cousin sitting next to him corrected him: "Andrew, we don't want them. We want the white team, not the gray team!"

"Oh, sorry."

Then he quietly turned to the person sitting on the other side of him.

"Which team do we want?"

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