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My First Hockey Game

With 4.7 seconds on the clock I jumped up so fast to cheer that I lost track of my phone for the first time in years.

It was difficult to imagine such enthusiasm as I drove through 45 minutes of rush-hour traffic from Austin to Cedar Park. On Friday nights I prefer my couch and Netflix to the leather seats of my Subaru and confusing Texas roadways, but I had a game to watch.

The Texas Stars faced the Ontario (California) Reign at the Cedar Park Arena. I was there to watch my first hockey game in person.

My initial impression was that the arena was chilly. Not such a shock. After all, everyone crowds around a large block of ice. The game was not a surprise either. I am somewhat familiar with hockey. My dad encouraged me to join him in watching some Los Angeles Kings games a few years ago when they were good. What I did not expect is how I felt watching the game.

Whooshing and sliding on frozen water creates a beautiful soundtrack to accompany football players dancing in Ultimate Fighting Swan Lake on Ice.

Or at least this is what I felt I was watching while my professor, John Lowe, made comments like “it’s a combination of a ballet and a riot.”

I am a sports fan and have seen my fair share of live games, but only a few times in my life have I attended my first game of a new sport. It took a moment for me to warm up both mentally and physically. My college student blasé attitude primed, I initially focused on how tired I felt and fretted the long drive home. For the first minute, watching the puck whizz back and forth felt burdensome. How could people focus on a black speck for hours? But then the Stars scored. Derek Hulak put in the first goal on a night promoting awareness of the same breast cancer that took his mother’s life.

The horn freed me from my distracted mind. I was not a 22 year-old journalist sweating writing about a sport with rules I barely understood. I became Annie the 8 year-old Tomboy who used to wear a full Lakers sweat suit to her dad’s basketball games and coach from the bleachers. Like the children in the front row banging on the glass when players slammed into one another, I embraced every moment.

From the edge of my seat I cringed at every hit, held my breath during every power play. I cheered along to “TEXAS—STARS,” chair danced to the eclectic musical selections, and laughed at clips from “The Simpsons” and “Animal House.” It frustrated me that there were two long intermissions when I was ready for more game action. At one point I found myself cheering on a fight.

I even began to make note of strategies and could genuinely assess that the Stars' goalie, Maxime Lagace, was keeping the team alive despite the fact Ontario was dominating the game. I was engaged for all 48 of his saves and felt the pain of the three goals that snuck past his clutches. When Jason Dickinson shot on goal with 5 seconds to go I was not thinking about how tired I was or how long the drive home would be. I forgot that I was supposed to be taking notes for my game story. I even managed to leave my cell phone idle on my lap without a second thought.

He made it. I leaped into air like I do when the Texas Longhorns score. I felt the magic that only sports can bring, run through my veins. I was a hockey fan for the evening, one of 4,142.

The Stars did not win. They lost 3-2 in overtime, making their record 32-20 for the season. But for the first time in my career as a sports fan, I did not care. The score did not matter beyond adding excitement. My first hockey game was a real barnburner, and it will not my last.