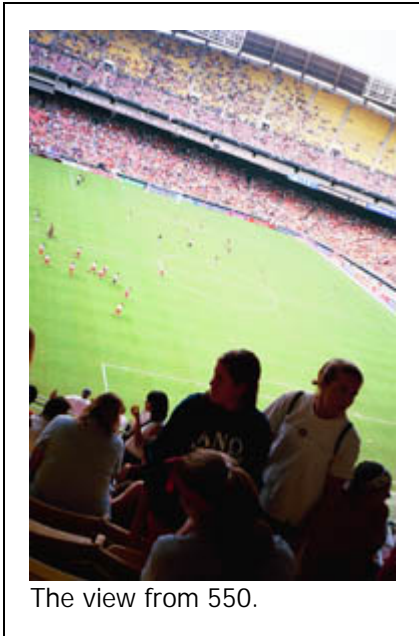


Women's World Cup diaries, day 1 | Isabel's cleaning work, on the side

Washington, 21 September 2003, 12:30 p.m. | Identifying those who visit **RFK Stadium** regularly, supporters of **D.C. United**, the **Washington Freedom** and the one-time occupants, the Washington Redskins, became second-nature soon after arriving in section 550. They arrive with paper towels, dampened in the restrooms, to give their seats a good scrubbing.



Despite the cleansing action of **Hurricane Isabel** just two days earlier, the peeling yellow paint that covers the upper-tier seats has, over four decades, become encrusted with gum and guano. On my seat was a rather large footprint—about a size 10. Still, a little buffing does help, at least psychologically.

I could not help but become nostalgic at seeing what *Washington Post* sportswriter **Thomas Boswell**, in one of his books on baseball, calls that "first slash of grass." It was 1972, the season of the Redskins' first Super Bowl, when my father brought me to RFK to see the Redskins play the Philadelphia

Eagles. The Redskins won that day, 14–7, in a titanic NFL clash, language that brings to mind **Lisa Simpson's** reference to the sport as the "savage ballet." (For more on RFK and the "Washington Hall of Stars," see **George Vecsey**, "**Hamm's Name Belongs in Her Home Field**," *New York Times*, 22 September.)

Redskins crowds were loud, rarely louder than on my last visit to RFK, the 1992 NFC Championship Game between the Redskins and Minnesota Vikings.

Redskins coach **Joe Gibbs**, a man of faith, knelt in prayer during a late goal-line stand and—who knows?—lent Washington the winning edge. Yet, for its size, I wonder if RFK has experienced anything comparable to today's six sections of South Korean supporters, who brought the zeal of the **2002 World Cup finals** and their choreographed, rhythm-stick-aided shouts that did not end until the final whistle of the match with Brazil.

"This is really getting annoying," said a girl behind us.

The supporters sat high on the west side of the stadium, opposite us. Perhaps the drumbeats carried even better over distance. The supporters wore red—the shirts said "Go Reds!" and were endorsed by Washington's Korean American association—although the South Korean women wore what my wife speculated might be fuchsia.

The girls behind us yelled, "Go pink!" and, in truth, the kit was pink, or had been bleached by mistake the night before. In short, the Korean supporters did their side proud. I've never seen a happier group leaving a stadium after a three-nil loss.

We did a lot of eavesdropping on the groups behind us, mostly girls from youth soccer clubs. And their moms. One mom in particular maintained a cellphone conversation in which she narrated goals—"Did you see that? **Kristine Lilly** just scored. It was right in front of us, under the Jumbotron. Can you see us? No, we're under the Jumbotron. We can't see the Jumbotron."

It's true, we lacked Jumbotron access. Still, the view was lovely, a tactician's dream. Lilly fired her magnificent goal directly toward us, **Cindy Parlow** the same. With the pregame flag procession, mumbled public-address announcements and canned anthems, we felt we were attending a world event of significance, although, truly, I did not read until later that **Dick Cheney** had been sharing the moment. I hope he stayed to watch both games from his perch among the FIFA elite. But he probably left early.