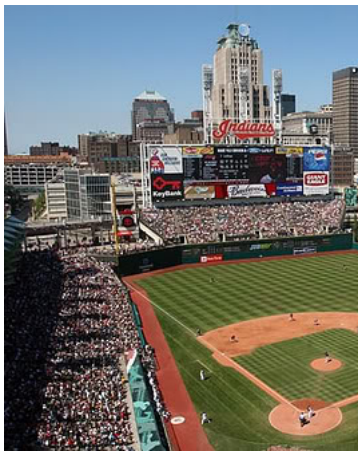
The mezzanine at Progressive Field. It's Paulie Cousineau's second home. Before we made him a rock star, he used to toil there in anonymity. Now ... he spends chunks of games kibitzing with fans and signing female body parts. But he's still there, night in and night out, as much a man of the people as ever. There's no better person to write a detailed review of the Indians ballpark, and that's exactly what Paulie C has done for us in his latest column.



After spending an enjoyable night in the Mezz last night, I figured it was as good a time as any to post a piece that I did at the bequest of **Yahoo's Big League Stew** as they run through descriptions of different ballparks throughout MLB and asked some hack to provide his thoughts on the ballpark a the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

As we go a little something like this ... hit it:

Already in it's 15th year of existence, Progressive Field (which has been known by the more familiar Jacobs Field and more familial "The Jake" prior to this season when the naming rights transferred from the former Indians' owner Dick Jacobs and his family to Cleveland-based Progressive Insurance) has maintained the luster that it brought to downtown Cleveland those many moons ago when Manny and Jimmy were just a couple of kids **batting 7th and 8th (seriously) in the Indians' lineup**
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Despite the relative age of the park (time flies when you're having fun, I suppose), the structure at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario (Clevelanders are still wrestling with the proper term for the stadium with the name change..."The Prog"?) has held up very well and has been enhanced over the years with improvements to the park that have added to the allure of visiting, long after the consecutive sellout streak of 456 games in a row has passed.

Best Way to Get There?

Unlike many other stadiums, Progressive Field is easily accessible by car from all directions as it sits where the main arteries of NE Ohio (I-77, I-90, and I-71) converge downtown. This being the case, most fans make their way down via car and park in one of the lots surrounding the stadium. Parking prices vary from around $5 to $25 and will change depending upon the day of the game (higher on the weekends) and the opponent (always jacked up for games when the Boston and New York "fans" who grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland show up). I generally park at a lot between Bolivar and Prospect, just west of E. 9th street, that has two levels and offers a quick walk to the game or to local establishments prior to the game with the price varying from $7 to $20 (those high-end contests on the weekend are the games when the RTA Rapid becomes a better option if you have easy access to an RTA station as the train lets you off in Tower City, a 10-minute walk to the ballpark) and quick on-off access to the highways to get out of downtown after a game.

While the guide is a little over a year old, the boys at **Mistake by the Lake Sporting Times did a comprehensive breakdown of parking lots** in terms of cost and distance that is absurdly exhaustive. While some of the prices may be outdated, the guide provides a nice thumbnail sketch of where to hone in on a lot and where to avoid.

Progressive Field...er, The Jake...er, whatever - here are the specifics if you're going:

Tickets Online or call 216-420-HITS

Seating Chart

Best Spots to Hit Before or After the Game

The area around Progressive Field (known as Gateway) is home to a number of nice restaurants and bars that are within walking distance to the ballpark, so figure on heading down early to hit up some hot spots in the general vicinity before making the trek over to enjoy some baseball.

If you're looking to put down some adult beverages and grab some grub prior to making the trip into the game, the area just east of East 9th Street on Prospect is

full of bars to whet your appetite for some baseball. Between **The Clevelander** and **Panini's**, which share an outdoor patio on the sidewalk, and the **Winking Lizard** (if you're more inclined to stay inside to sip some suds), there's more than enough to entertain you before you head over to the game. If you do head to Panini's, be sure to try out one of their famous overstuffed sandwiches, on par with (if not directly based on) the Primanti Bros. sandwiches in Pittsburgh.

If you're more inclined to just fill up on a liquid dinner, **Local Heroes** is right across the street from the entrance of Jacobs Field and always provides a raucous atmosphere before and after ballgames as does the **Thirsty Parrot**, which is just across Bolivar from Progressive Field and boasts an outdoor deck that fills up quickly, particularly after weekend games.

Of course, I realize that not everyone heads to the game just to get their drink on, so be sure to check out the Bob Feller Statue at the East 9th Street entrance and marvel at **the career numbers of Rapid Robert** on the base of the statue, made more incredible that he didn't pitch for three years (when he would have been 23, 24, and 25 years old) because he was serving his country in WWII.

If you head into the park prior to the game starting, head over to centerfield to check out **Heritage Park**, which recognizes those who excelled in a Tribe uniform (and, yes, there were some prior to the 1990's, smart aleck) as well as housing **a bronze plaque commemorating Ray Chapman**, the only MLB player to pass away as a result of on-field action as he died after being hit in the head by a pitch in 1920.

On Sunday, the plaza between Progressive Field and The Q (where the Cleveland LeBrons play) is filled with all sorts of kid-related activities to entertain the youngsters to wear them out before the game starts so they're not antsy and wanting to walk around the park while your stomach is in knots because Joe Borowski just came on to protect a one-run lead in the 9th with his 82-MPH fastball and beguiling mix of "veteran savvy" and "closer mentality".

Best Concession Stand Item

What trip to a baseball game would be complete without the requisite Hot Dog? In Cleveland, that requisite Hot Dog comes only with a slathering of Stadium Mustard, a brown, spicy concoction that takes you back to the days of old Municipal Stadium, when the Hot Dog was actually the highlight of the game. Of course, there's a distinction to make here as the Hot Dog one should buy is not the coney dog that is sold for $1 on Dollar Dog Night...oh no. Stadium Mustard should only grace the All Beef Hot Dog, preferably grilled at the Beers of the World stand in the lower concourse of Right Field, near the visitors' bullpen. While at the BotW stand, you can sample some of the finest local microbrews from **Great Lakes Brewing Company**
(Dortmunder Gold remains the "gold" standard).

If a Hot Dog doesn't appeal to your sensibilities, **The Market Pavilion** in Center Field has a decent selection of different types of food, as well as butting up against the popular Batter's Eye Bar, but we'll get to that in a moment.

Best Place to Sit

Speaking of the Batter's Eye Bar in Center, the most economical way to watch a game is to buy a standing room only seat or the cheapest possible seat that is available in the upper deck and heading to the Batter's Eye Bar (a full-service bar with plasma TV's and good view of the game, if you get there early enough) or to the Home Run Porch in Left Field to try to catch a HR off the bat of Victor Martinez...assuming a HR actually figures to come off the bat of Vic the Stick at some point this year.

For the most bang for your buck, I'll take the seats in the Mezzanine ($18 advanced, $20 gameday) in RF, or the Bleachers ($16 advanced, $18 gameday) in LF for unobstructed views in good seats at reasonable prices. If you end up in the bleachers, be sure to say hello to **John Adams** , who has been sitting at Indians' games, banging the drum (literarally) for the Tribe since 1973.

If price is less of a factor, the Club Seats (which hang over the lower deck on the 1B side) offer a great view of the game as well as the ticket price ($110 per seat) including all food and non-alcohol related drinks throughout the game.

What's So Great About It?

After years of trudging down to the lakefront to the dilapidated Municipal Stadium, I remember most Clevelanders' reaction upon entering (what was then) Jacobs Field. It was a feeling of "are we still in Cleveland" as everything gleamed like new and shined brightly in a city not used to bright, shiny things. Even 15 years later, that luster has not dulled as the park remains a jewel of the city and the delightful experience of going to a baseball game in downtown Cleveland on a beautiful summer night still holds that special spot in my heart. At Progressive Field, visitors are right on top of the action, privy to the best sight angles I've seen at any stadium I've visited with the convenience of an easily accessible ballpark without the obscene prices that are found at many other MLB parks.

After attending Game 4 of the Cavaliers-Celtics playoff series, I remember exiting The Q with my ears bleeding from the noise and my synapses overloaded (from T-shirts flying at me and being commanded to clap and jeer...but only when instructed to do so) longing for my perch in the Mezzanine with a frosty beverage in my hand to watch some baseball where my thoughts are my own, the accompanying denizens of the park are like-minded baseball fans.

To me, there's no better way to spend three hours of my day than watching my Tribe...and no better place to enjoy it than at the ballpark (whatever you want to call it) at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario in downtown Cleveland.