It was like having the golden ticket. I mean, this was something that they hadn't done before, and there we were participating. All we had to do was apply. It's all part of the social media, and if you don't embrace it, you'll get left behind.

How true that is, I really don't know; even as recently as Saturday, I referred to Twitter as a necessary evil.

That statement was met with a lot of agreement, and not countered with strong arguments for the new-age phenomenon.

This was, after all, the Social Suite, and our thumbs were supposed to do the talking all day.

You can call me Scrooge on Christmas Eve.

I understood the concept for the day, and I really had no problem with it. In fact, I've come to like Twitter, even if I don't see it as a replacement for Facebook, which is an argument I think younger people make to keep their life on the World Wide Web, you know, private from the older folks in their life.

I see Facebook as a place to keep in touch and share memories, whereas Twitter is a place to share opinion; different, but same, as Mr. Miyagi would say.

Our day of Social Suite-ness was geared more towards Twitter than anything else, and my 33 years on the earth would make me a senior citizen in this realm.

We had to be at the ballpark at 9:30 AM, and I'm ashamed to admit that it wasn't a problem for

us to wake up and get there in time. I swear it was just yesterday that I'd wake up on Wednesday, play cards for three days, drive to Vegas, and sleep for the first time in the Hoover Dam parking lot Sunday night. The seasons pass, the years will roll, I suppose.
Despite being up at eight, and ready to roll at nine, we still managed to
get there late
have our own creative interpretation of punctuality.

We thought maybe we'd missed the opportunity to join the tour of what we thought would be the Reds facilities, and I already had that Black Bear Diner that all the Indians scribes talk about on my mind.

However, the Black Bear Diner would have to happen another day because we found the rest of our tour waiting for us. There were four other guests waiting for the morning tour, two college aged girls and their fathers, who turned out to be old friends from back when.

My "plus 1" was my wife, who commented as we boarded the golf carts to the practice facilities, "this is like Willie Wonka and The Chocolate Factory", which drew a couple laughs from the tour guides/ballpark employees, even though she didn't say it to be funny.

The Indians Let Us In

Because we were all Indians fans, the good people in charge of our random bunch made special arrangements to take us through the Indians private compound. I can't compliment the coordinators enough for making things happen for us throughout the day; it was really some

white glove type service.

Now, I'd driven past the Indians facility in the past, but in the same way you drive past a prison.

The place is generally locked down, which is in great contrast with the fan-friendly digs the Reds have down the road.

Keep in mind, Saturday morning was all about fan-mode for me, so I was actually quite disappointed when we were told that they promised the Indians we wouldn't be rowdy as a condition of allowing our tour to come through.

The first thing I person of note that I saw was Chris Perez, finishing up his stretches outside the weight room. It would have been inappropriate for me to yell "RAGE!" or something else dumb just eight seconds after being told not to be rowdy, so Perez was gone before I could do as much as snap a picture. I tend to wonder how long it will be before I see Perez again. We walked over to the practice facility, and I was up-close and personal with the Indians as I had ever been, at least since the days at the old stadium. Mike Sarbaugh was running batting practice on one field, while Manny Acta roamed between batting practice and fielding drills on the adjacent fields. I don't know, I may not be analytical or nostalgic enough to really enjoy watching a professional practice like I'm supposed to, but this doesn't really do anything for me.

But, I was right there with Manny Acta, who does himself a lot of favors in putting himself out there on Twitter. He's responsive, he's funny, and he seems like a guy you wouldn't mind being around all of the time. That persona plays out in real life, too. With the date on the calendar being the 17th of the March variety, many spectators are dressed in green.

Manny quips, "Is there anything going on today that I see so many people wearing green?" Of course, per my Social Suite participant obligation, I Tweet it out.

And I see that one of young ladies has beaten me to the punch, and that's so 26 seconds ago.

[redacted]

A Very Red Tour

Anyway, the Reds were prepared for us. Though they have a more hands on type of operation there, things were a lot more official, a lot more structured in those parts.

We had to be credentialed with little luggage tags, and we met briefly with Cincinnati's Arizona Operations Manager,
Mike Saverino
.

He handed us off to a younger guy that gave us Indians fans a guided tour of the Reds Goodyear operation.

We did spend some time at the Major League practice fields, which have identical dimensions to Cincinnati's Great American Ballpark according to our guide.

That's where I somehow ended up in a conversation with Ellis Burks, who is now coaching the Reds, about green hats.

I offered him black and green Indians hat, possibly in trade for his 1st base coaching helmet, but no dice.

After that, they took us over to the batting tunnels. The younger guide was constantly fending off questions about the Indians facilities, which he knew nothing about (because he's a Reds employee). It must have been quite the task showing off the Reds stuff to Indians fans that didn't care, or should I say it was quite frustrating for him. As it turns out, the six tunnels they have in Goodyear doubles what they left behind in Sarasota.

He gave us good information about how they can cue up any MLB pitcher to the pitching machine with video, so if you wanted to face Bronson Arroyo (his example), your pitching machine would look like it's coming from the arm of Arroyo himself.

It was really good information, and I have to commend this young man's patience with us for allowing a little bit of rowdy with the photo session that offered a lot of laughs.

The Reds gave us some parting gifts on the way out, which included some various knick knacks, but was a very nice gesture that they didn't really have to do. At this point, we are just having an all-around great time.

There are plenty of laughs to be had, but it was time to head over to the ballpark about a half mile north of the team facilities.

The actual Goodyear Ballpark essentially just hosts the games themselves, there's really nothing permanent about it, even the clubhouse is just an empty office with a lot of empty lockers.

The fridge is stocked in both the Indians and Reds locker rooms, but the stainless steel hot tubs don't look like they've ever been used, and were seemingly only there as a jumping off point for my Lou Brown, "this old body could use a soak" line, which I of course Tweeted.

A young couple with a 9-month old daughter joined us in the clubhouse. Having missed the

tour of the practice facilities, they were given the opportunity to meet Marty Brenneman.

Kudos goes out to mom and dad for exposing her to the baseball life at such a young age.

My father took me to Cleveland Municipal Stadium when I was very young, and probably terrorized the grandstand, but I have loved everything about the game my whole life.

I saw that mom was carrying and awesome baseball bag that they received at a Kids' Day promotion at
Jacobs
Progressive Field.

I didn't realize it in my youth, but kids get all of the cool stuff; therefore, parents of those kids also get all the cool stuff.

Play Ball; I Don't Tweet Quickly Enough

After that it was upstairs to the Social Suite itself, the one on the end. On the other end, you had the writer's room, which is separate from the press box itself, and then the suites begin as you head from home plate towards third base.

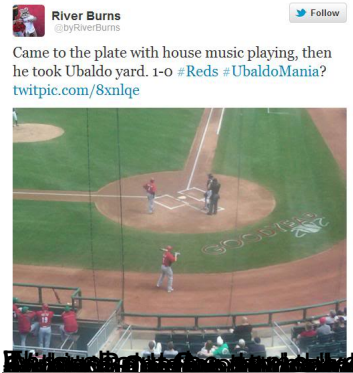
There were
gift bags waiting for us in the suite
, this one from the Indians that included programs, schedules, autographs, hats, bobbleheads, and the requisite Bertman's Stadium Mustard.

The spread in the hallway included mostly ballpark fare, chips, burgers, dogs, and pulled chicken.

It was already a great day, and the game hadn't started yet.

It started with Ubaldo Jimenez on the hill, and Brandon Phillips coming to the plate accompanied by house music. Just as I was about to Tweet about the house music, and how Phillips couldn't possibly have any control over his soundtrack, he clubbed a Jimenez pitch halfway to Flagstaff. So, I revised my Tweet to talk about the home run, and I used the halfway to
Flagstaff comment later because I thought it clever
.

So 16 seconds ago!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