Why Is The Foul Pole Fair? (Or, Answers to the Baseball Questions Your Dad Hoped You Wouldn't Ask) by Vince Staten

You've visited the hardware store with him, stocked up at the drug store with him, bought your groceries with him, and plunked down your two bits for a shave and a haircut with him. And now the inimitable Vince Staten takes you out to the old ballgame, buys you some peanuts and Cracker Jack, and answers all the baseball questions your dad hoped you wouldn't ask. In Why Is the Foul Pole Fair?, Staten details the origins of everything baseball, including, for example, the average lifespan of the major-league ball (seven pitches; fewer if Mike Piazza is at the plate), the exacting standards of infield maintenance (chronicling the declaration of the end of bad hops in our lifetime), and the succinct, efficient nomenclature of big-league bats (Rod Carew used a C271 Louisville Slugger, so named because he was the 271st player whose last name began with a C to commission his own bat model. Simple, right?). Blending dogged research, unaffected, self-deprecating humor, and a genuine love of everything baseball, Staten covers all the bases and explains why one of them is shaped differently than the rest while he's at it. And though Why Is the Foul Pole Fair? is, of course, about radar guns and box seats, it's also about how a middle-aged father and an eighteen-year-old son hell-bent for college spend an easy, quietly meaningful afternoon together. Enjoying a day at the ballpark with his son, who is soon departing for school, Staten fondly illuminates how baseball has been color and context in their relationship and, by extension, how it's been the same for everyone who thrills to the notion -- or memory -- of dads and kids having a twilit catch in the backyard. Part anecdotal history of the sports tableau, part demystification of baseball's tools and storied playing grounds, and part valentine to fathers and sons, as well as to the game that welcomes them both, Why Is the Foul Pole Fair? is chicken soup for the baseball lover's soul.
My Personal Review:
I picked this book up at a clearance/used bookstore for $3. Having read it, I think I would've paid full price. (But don't tell the store owner.)

At first blush, it looks like a book that would appeal to a baseball fan, like myself. And one would (somewhat, but not entirely) surmise that it is full of trivia. But this book is largely not about the game, but moreso about the things that surround the game.

In the book, Staten chronicles a Reds game that he and his college-age son attended, but that game is mostly a framework around which the book is built. The book is mostly about the origins/evolution of everything around the game. Staten even spends 3 pages on the origin of the turn-stile (after noting his trip through one at the ballpark) -- and **makes it interesting!** I don't even particularly like history, and I still found this book fascinating.

Staten covers the history of the tools of the game -- ball, bat, glove, uniform, catcher's equipment. He also describes the evolution of baseball cards, vendors (both stationary and those that roam the stands), and press coverage -- just to name a few of his topics. He even spends a bit of time on queueing theory, a passage the Reds may want to read, as they apparently do it wrong when you pick up tickets at will call.

Several of the passages also recall the days of his youth -- either as he played the game or the pro stars that he admired. This part especially appealed to me, as one of many curmudgeons out there that feel that pro sports have changed a lot -- and not for the better -- "since I was a kid".

Baseball fans and history buffs will definitely enjoy this book, but I think many others would, too.

By the way, the answer to the titular question is found on page 223 -- the foul **pole** is on the foul **line**, which is actually **fair**. Why the foul line is fair is left as an exercise for the reader.

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