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From Today's Editions Of The News-press

Boys of Spring add to area's lore Twins, Red Sox leave, but tradition endures

By [Glenn Miller](#)

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More than a quarter-million tickets were sold. On some days, nearly 16,000 fans crammed into Lee County's two spring-training ballparks. About 31,000 hot dogs and 13,000 sausages were sold at City of Palms Park.

Those numbers tell part of the 2006 spring training story. But not all. Neither does the sale of 25,000 hats and 20,000 T-shirts in the Red Sox gift shop.

The focus on the field is preparation, getting the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins ready for the season. In the stands, it's an outing, an afternoon at the ballpark, a tradition.

Cape Coral resident Robert Harrison, 70, has tickets in Section 119, Row 8, Seats 1 and 2 every year.

"I'll be here every year until I die," Harrison said.

Harrison was very much alive this spring, watching his beloved Red Sox from his seats not far from the team's third-base dugout.

"I see the same people every year," Harrison said. "It's like a class reunion."

The players come and go but fans such as Harrison are as permanent as the 105-year-old franchise itself. Harrison has followed the Red Sox since 1946.

Games were played under blue skies in 2006. Except, of course, for the night games. No games were rained out.

Fans watched a new Red Sox center fielder, Coco Crisp, steal eight bases and light up City of Palms Park. They watched a familiar center fielder, one of the game's best, Minnesota's Torii Hunter, who has been playing in the Lee County Sports Complex since 1993.

The Red Sox came to camp with their team set and encountered no significant off-field issues. Oh, there was an on-field donnybrook against the Tampa Bay Devil Rays instigated by Red Sox pitcher Julian Tavarez.

The Twins, though, had jobs up for grabs and



Andrew West/news-press.com

Red Sox outfielder Coco Crisp joined the Red Sox this year after an offseason trade.

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BY THE NUMBERS

Here's a look at the food and beer consumed by fans at a typical, sold-out Minnesota Twins spring training game. These numbers are from this spring's season opener:

- 112 cases of 16-ounce beer. That's 2,688 beers, or 43,008 ounces of bottled suds.
- 30 kegs of beer. That's 1,923 ounces per keg, a total of 57,690 ounces of beer.
- 720-plus pounds of hot dogs
- 900-plus pounds of bratwurst
- 150-plus pounds of hamburgers
- 168-plus pounds of chicken
- 360 pounds of giant turkey legs

Note: On opening night, 7,528 bags of free Sun Harvest grapefruit was given away. There's two grapefruit per bag, for a total of 15,056 grapefruit (approximately 15,000 to 20,000 pounds of grapefruit).

— Source: Andrew Seymour, the Fort Myers Miracle

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profound off-field issues.

The most popular Twin of all time, Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett, died March 6 at the age of 46. A highly rated Twins pitching prospect, Francisco Liriano, was charged with a misdemeanor DUI after a traffic stop in Cape Coral on Thursday.

The focus, though, for all those fans remained on having a good time. Cape Coral resident Pete Levinson, 49, recalled sitting in the left-field seats and hearing a fan hollering good-natured advice to Red Sox outfielder Manny Ramirez.

"Somebody said, 'Manny, pay attention, this one is coming to you, be ready,' " Levinson said.

The next one came to Manny and he snagged it.

Now, Ramirez has gone north. Another spring training is in the books. The teams combined for about 254,000 fans.

"I'm one of them," said Patrick Fay, a 46-year-old Red Sox fan from Winchester, Mass.

He comes down every spring.

"I'll be back next year," Fay said.

See you next March, Patrick.

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