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NFL odyssey: 32 teams, 31 stadiums

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Sterling Heights' Hans Steiniger is near the end of his quest to see every NFL team play a home game, becoming a home fan for a day. (RASHAUN RUCKER, DETROIT FREE PRESS)

He has colored his hair green and painted his face white in Oakland. He has worn a Cheesehead hat in Green Bay. He has donned a Dolphins jersey in Miami (no small thing for a Bills fan). He is Hans Steiniger, 34, of Sterling Heights, and he is about to finish an epic journey |

By day, the Buffalo, N.Y., native is a program manager for a vehicle prototype company. By weekend, football trip after weekend football trip, Steiniger is quite possibly the NFL's biggest fan. When he watches the Saints play the Buccaneers on Dec. 27 in the Superdome at New Orleans, Steiniger will have completed a four-season quest to watch all 32 NFL teams play a home game in all 31 NFL stadiums (the Jets share Giants Stadium).

Steiniger describes himself this way on his Web site, nflfootballstadiums.com: "Hans Steiniger is your average, moderately paid, tailgating, beer-guzzling, hot dog-eating, fantasy football-playing, road-tripping, technically savvy, DirecTV NFL package-purchasing, lover of this great American pastime that we have dubbed the National Football League."

Steiniger kicked off the whole thing Oct. 15, 2006, when he watched the Lions play his Bills at Ford Field. He has five stadiums left this season, not including the new stadiums of the Cowboys and Colts, which opened after Steiniger began his quest but which he still plans to visit this year. Free Press sports writer Carlos Monarrez recently spoke with Steiniger about his quest.

QUESTION: Some people might call you crazy for doing this, while other people might call you really crazy for doing this. What do you call yourself?

ANSWER: A visionary. I am a visionary. I've taken it upon myself to identify the NFL culture. The NFL has placed these organizations in cities across the nation, and I don't know how much they expected this to happen, but the fan base, the city, the local culture embraces the team and makes it their own ... Anyone who appreciates the NFL should get an understanding for what it's like to be in the other guy's shoes, at least once. ... I dress in home-team garb, I buy a jersey, I become a Kansas City Chiefs fan for the day, I become an Oakland Raider fan for the day.

Q: As a born-and-bred Bills fan, how hard was it to become a Dolphins fan for a day?

A: It was so difficult, man. I really had a lot of trouble with it. The Dolphins are a hated rival. In keeping with this theme of mine, I went and got a Ronnie Brown jersey. I walk the parking lot and approach any and everybody. So I talked to a bunch of Dolphin fans, and the first thing I always say is, 'Hey, I'm a Bills fan and I'm just here to take it in, to understand what you guys do on game day, to understand what you guys are like.'

Q: No waffling. Hands down, who's got the best NFL stadium?

A: Bar none, the best place to watch an NFL game is Seattle. Qwest Field has this really unique, interesting design where it's almost like two massive headphones, so they're almost like half-domes on each side of the field. ... The variety of food there is unparalleled, and I'm talking about inside the stadium. There's like pad Thai noodles, there was sushi, there were bread bowls with clam chowder, gourmet burgers, any matter of hamburger and hot dog and sausage you can find, garlic fries.

Q: Which is the worst stadium?

A: I'm going to say Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego. ... The scoreboard/flat screen looks like an LCD TV in someone's home. I mean, they were just postage-stamp size. They were tiny. Because it's an older stadium, the concourses are real tight. In some of these stadiums, the concourses are tight, but it's a quaint tightness. But at Qualcomm it was just obnoxious. You're in these massive lines and they're winding all over the place and no one knows where to go. The fans are good. I think it's really just the facility.

Q: What's the best thing you've ever eaten in a stadium?

A: In Green Bay they have a brat pizza. It was really a fantastic piece of pie.

Q: Which team has the best fans? And you can't count Buffalo.

A: No Buffalo, then I would say Green Bay. It just appears there's something unique about Green Bay. It's like the macca that any football fan should aspire to go to at least once in their football-watching career.

Q: What has been your strangest experience at a game?

A: When you go to Oakland, you pull up to this parking lot and it's really like you've entered an Qzzfest. There are people walking around on stilts. There are midgets driving around on little keg-sized scooters. There are lots of people who are dressed up.

Q: What is the weirdest tailgate tradition you've seen?

A: Pinto Ron's tailgate in Buffalo, N.Y. This is a guy who drives his red Ford Pinto to every (Bills) game, home and away. He has a streak that goes back over a decade. The hood of his car is rusted and just full of grease and slime and grime, because what he does is he sets up pans of charcoal on top of his hood and he cooks the entire meal for the day using garden implements, office supplies -- any nontraditional cookware you can think of. He has a rake that he cooks hot dogs and hamburgers on. He fills an old toolbox with charcoal. An old army helmet is used to deep-fry chicken wings.

Q: I've actually heard of Pinto Ron. Tell about his unique ketchup ceremony.

A: He kind of emerges through the crowd -- as they all chant, "Ketchup! Ketchup! Ketchup!" -- with a naked hamburger that he holds up on high to friends that are perched on top of his truck. And he asks if they would provide him with a condiment. And they happily squirt from head to toe with the largest ketchup bottles I've ever seen. And then, when they completely cover this poor guy, he asks them for mustard and out comes the mustard.