

NFL superfan ranks the Superdome as one of the best places for a 'football experience'

By **Doug MacCash, The Times-Picayune**

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Chris Granger / The Times-Picayune

Superfan Hans Steiniger on the verge of completing his quest to visit all 31 NFL stadiums.

A superfan completes his quest to compare all 31 NFL stadiums

Attending a **New Orleans Saints** game in the Louisiana Superdome is among the top 10 experiences in the National Football League, says Hans Steiniger.

He is in a position to know.

In the past four years, the 34-year-old Detroit resident has cheered for the home team in all 31 National Football League stadiums from coast to coast. The Dec. 27 game against Tampa Bay in the

Dome completed his crusade to visit every NFL field.

Steiniger said he especially admires the "intensity, energy, rowdiness and support of the home team" that he observed among the "incredible" Crescent City fans. In the costuming department, he said Saints supporters approach Oakland Raiders fans in outlandishness. He marveled at a fan dressed as a Halo video game warrior, another dressed as an alien from "Star Wars," and another as a Transformer robot. He was amused by a fan wearing whistle-shaped headgear, and two other fans dressed as popes.

"I was pretty impressed," he said. "That really adds to the atmosphere."

Above all, he admired the roaring Saints audience's adroit use of the noise-amplifying Dome to inspire the boys in black and gold and torment the opposition. Lots of teams have closed stadiums, he points out, but not all crowds know how to use them to influence the game.

St. Louis Rams fans, he recalled, seem to maintain a certain Midwestern stoicism, no matter what. Ironically, Steiniger himself was labeled the "loud guy" by neighboring fans when he visited Edward Jones Stadium in St. Louis.

"It's refreshing to see how you guys have it down pat," he said of



the Saints fans' use of volume as a weapon.

He also admires the New Orleans crowd's enthusiastic scoring celebrations. "When you guys score, it's like a mini-Mardi Gras in the stands," he said. "It's infectious."

Steiniger, who witnessed the Saints dominate the first half of the game and the Buccaneers' stunning victory in overtime, said New Orleans fans were gracious in defeat.

"The Saints fan is knowledgeable enough to know their team will bounce back," he said. "They will lock up home-field advantage."

He said that despite the loss, Saints fans remained cordial, even to visitors cheering for the Bucs.

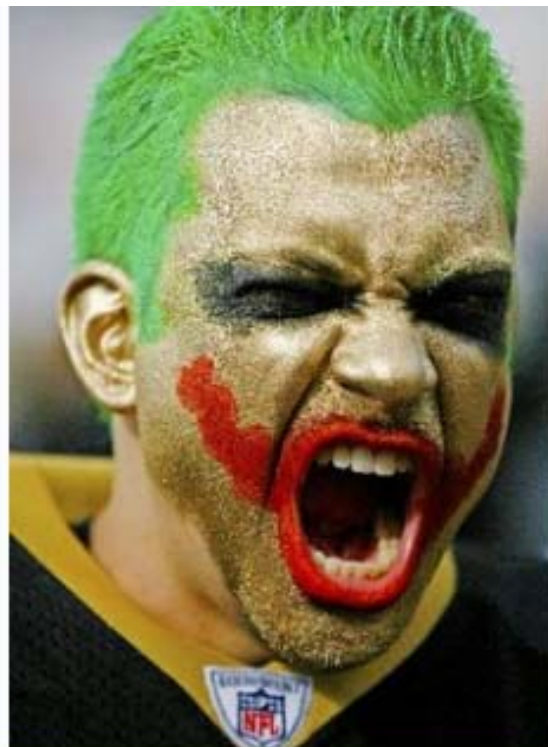
"They maintain camaraderie," he said. "They show a respect for visiting fans. It's a characteristic of the South; it's refreshing to see. They never get to a juvenile or obnoxious level."

Such is not always the case in other stadiums. Speaking of Oakland Raiders fans, Steiniger said: "They are a great bunch of guys if you're wearing silver and black. If you're wearing enemy colors, you can expect a tongue-lashing like no other in the NFL. It's the most hostile environment; lots of four-letter expletives. They enjoy intimidating (fans of the opposing team)."
Dome 'better than fair'

In the same vein, Steiniger, father of a 9-year-old daughter, dug what he called the family-friendly atmosphere in the Dome. He said he saw more children at the Saints game than at most other NFL contests.

The steep-sided bowl-shaped interior of the Dome, which was completed in 1975, afforded excellent sight lines, said Steiniger, who rates each stadium at his Web site, www.nflfootballstadiums.com. He said he felt the overhanging mezzanines caused the sections below to be a bit shadowy. There were plenty of restrooms and concessions, he said.

"Your stadium is good, better than fair," he said, "but it's older, and it's tough to measure up to the newer stadiums."



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St. Louis fans dubbed Steiniger "the loud guy."

As an electrical engineer, Steiniger was especially smitten with the barrel-cactus-shaped University of Phoenix Stadium where, he says, a convoy of high-tech conveyors can move the entire natural grass field outside the building into the sunlight.

A connoisseur of pregame activities, Steiniger said tailgating in New Orleans is fair by national standards. He enjoyed the live music on the plaza outside the Superdome before the game and was enchanted by the Southern hospitality he experienced among New Orleans tailgaters.

But he hoped to sample more of the legendary local cuisine he'd heard so much about. After all, Miami tailgating had its Cuban barbecue, San Francisco had its seafood boils and Green Bay had its bratwurst. In the pregame cuisine department, the Crescent City let him down.

"There were some sausages and hot dogs and things," he said. "But I thought there'd be more stews (such as jambalaya), more fresh seafood. It looked like a good time, but I thought there'd be more cooking in the parking lot."

Steiniger admits that he wasn't able to visit far-flung tailgating spots where the cooking might have matched his hopes.

"I wish I'd had more time to get around to the lots," he said.

New Orleans' lack of a national-class tailgate custom might have to do with architecture. The Superdome's indoor parking makes the tailgate-friendly asphalt ocean that surrounds other stadiums unnecessary. But Steiniger has another theory. He believes that Saints fans aren't big tailgaters because they don't have to be.

"With Bourbon Street so close, people have access to a bar district," he said. "À"

In a way, Steiniger says, he's like a fly on the wall, inconspicuously observing game-day goings-on. But in another way, he's right up there with the most conspicuous fans. It certainly wasn't hard to spot him taking a pregame stroll down Poydras Street on Sunday. His close-cropped hair was Joker green, his mouth a red Heath Ledger gash, and his face was painted a dark, glinting gold that matched well with his Marques Colston jersey and the skin of the Superdome behind him.

As game-time approached, he strode among the tailgaters and meandering fans, bathing in the notoriety of a morning television appearance. He welcomed handshakes and paused for photos and videos, occasionally breaking into a practiced sports-announcer patter as he described his much envied hobby.





NFL quest is born

Steiniger was a dedicated football fan long before he began his quest to visit every NFL venue. Born in Buffalo, N.Y., his first loyalty is to the Bills and snowy Ralph Wilson Stadium. When he's on the road to distant football cities, he records Buffalo games for replay on the wide-screen TV in his memorabilia-adorned football room.

Steiniger might have remained a stationary Bills devotee if he hadn't taken a job with a Detroit firm that builds experimental military vehicles. His move to the Motor City in 2000 introduced him to Ford Field and put him within reasonable driving distance of Chicago, Cleveland and other football destinations.

In time, Steiniger became fascinated by the differences in the crowds and customs from one city to the next and came to realize that the character of what he calls "the home team experience" is always unique.

As his 31st birthday approached, Steiniger formulated a plan. He would attempt to attend a home game with each NFL team. Since the Giants and Jets share Giants Stadium, that would mean 31 destinations in all.

To cover the costs of his four-year pilgrimage, Steiniger set aside his annual tax refund. He kept the quest overhead as low as possible by shopping for cut-rate tickets. Two-hundred dollars is the most he has paid for a seat. At least once he waited until just before kickoff to get the best bargain. He rooms with family and friends in NFL cities whenever possible and drives to avoid airfares. Steiniger recently retired his trustworthy 1997 Ford Explorer after 240,000 miles and purchased what he calls his "first big boy car," a

