



Hey there. It's Larry and you're listening to *Disability Nation*, an audio magazine by and for people with disabilities. And as always, thanks again for tuning in again this week.

It's almost the end of August and Labor Day is right around the corner. And that also means that summer is just about over as well, believe it or not. It also means that this year's baseball season is rapidly drawing to a close. Fans, players and teams alike are thinking about the postseason and getting things together and making a run for it, but there's still time to get out there and enjoy a game. And this week on *Disability Nation* we're going to talk to two guys from the Boston area who are doing just that. They're about to embark on what they're calling the Seeing Eye Single Tour so we'll visit with them on this episode.

As always, if you want to get in touch with me here at *Disability Nation* there's a couple of ways to do that, whether you have a comment or a show idea or just have something you want to share. You can call the *Disability Nation* phone portal at (480) 302-9300; that's brought to you by PhonePortals.com. Again, (480) 302-9300. You can listen to past episodes of the show and leave voice mail. You can also e-mail to contact@DisabilityNation.net, and we're on the Web at www.DisabilityNation.net. Thanks for listening and "play ball."

Larry Wanger: For many people the perfect summer day might involve a trip to the local ballpark to watch their favorite major league baseball team play a game, enjoy a hot dog, maybe a cold drink, kick back and have a good time. Brian Charlson and Rick Morin are two gentlemen from the Boston area who are about to embark on something they're calling the Seeing Eye Single Tour. This tour will take them throughout the Northeast to several ballparks in that area, including Yankee Stadium, Shea, Fenway, Camden Yards, and some others for an experience that many people never get to have. I had a chance to sit down with Rick and Brian to talk with them about the trip and how they experience baseball.

First of all, thanks both of you, Rick and Brian, for joining me here on *Disability Nation* to talk about this Seeing Eye Single Tour. To start off, if I could just have you guys take a few seconds to introduce yourselves. Rick, why don't we start with you? Just tell us whatever you want

people to know about you, and obviously you're a baseball fan so whatever you want to share with people.

Rick Morin: Sure. Thanks, Larry. Thanks for having us on, by the way. I'm Rick Morin and I live in Waltham, Massachusetts, originally from the western part of the state. Been a Red Sox fan all my life. Been visually impaired all my life, legally blind; I've got some usable vision. In the last few years started using a white cane because I was taking headers off of stairs and that kind of thing so my vision is declining a little bit.

And I've become involved in advocacy stuff as a result of some work I was doing with the Red Sox and so I got to meet Brian about three years ago and things have really taken off from there. So a series of events has happened which led to this trip, along with a whole bunch of other things that I'm sure we'll talk about later in the call.

Brian Charlson: And I'm Brian Charlson. I live in Watertown, which is just the next town over from Waltham and both of those towns are quite close to Boston. And it's hard to live anywhere in the greater Boston area without becoming a serious Red Sox fan. I was originally born and raised out in Oregon where baseball is not a big sport. But when I moved out here about 25 years ago I learned very quickly that if I was going to be able to interact with people like bus drivers and cab drivers and all the other people that I associate from day to day, I better be able to talk a little bit of baseball.

So I got involved in the Red Sox a bit; got to go to a few games. Enjoyed that and bumped into Rick who somehow or other was as interested in the Red Sox as I was, but also because he was dealing with being a fan with low vision and I was dealing with being a fan who was totally blind. We had some crossover interests and some that were very unique to our particular disabilities. And we ended up getting a chance to speak with the Red Sox front office people a bit about making things more accessible for us.

One other difference between Rick and myself, he's a cane user -- as he said -- and I'm a guide dog user. I have a beautiful female German Shepherd from the Seeing Eye in Morristown, New Jersey and that presents its own set of difficulties, if you will, especially at Fenway Park where the seats are so close together that you get to know the person next to you whether you want to or not.

Larry Wanger: Exactly.

Rick Morin: It's not even set up for humans at Fenway.

Larry Wanger: Yeah. I've noticed those older ballparks -- having just been at Camden Yards and a few others -- that apparently people were smaller years ago or something, because those are tight seats.

Rick Morin: In fact, Larry, one of the claims of fame at Fenway is that the grandstand seats are the narrowest seats in all of major league baseball. The seat is actually 15 inches across.

Larry Wanger: Wow.

Rick Morin: So think about that. Fifteen inches.

Larry Wanger: That's pretty small.

Rick Morin: I don't think there are very many people that qualify that can sit in those 15 inches. That's a fact.

Larry Wanger: Right. Were both of you guys -- I assume you've been in the Boston area for quite some time. It must have been pretty exciting to be there back in 2004, I suppose, when they finally won the series.

Rick Morin: It was tremendously exciting. I got to go to Game 2 and got to sit right behind home plate, right behind the Fox cameraman.

Larry Wanger: Tell folks a little bit about this Seeing Eye Single Tour. From the name to what you're doing, just kind of fill people in on this; it's pretty exciting.

Brian Charlson: Well, we're going to spend our summer vacation and both of our wives have pretty much given up and realize we're going to do this. I'm not sure at what point they just resigned themselves to the fact we were going to pull it off.

Rick Morin: We didn't give them much choice, actually.

Brian Charlson: Yeah. Well, we did it and then said it's better to ask forgiveness than permission, so we went with that premise. And we looked first to see what teams in our neck of the woods up here were playing at home and how we could piece together a series of games close enough together that we could both get to them and do so without having to use up every ounce of our vacation time. Rick did the bulk of the work in that respect and went out and checked with Amtrak, so we'll be jumping onto an Amtrak train here in Boston on the morning of the 22nd and we start going to ball games that evening, don't we, Rick?

Rick Morin: Yeah. We sure do. Friday we hit Shea and then we go from Shea to Philly to Baltimore to DC, back to New York to see the last two

Yankee-Red Sox games, which are going to be pretty exciting. We're kind of hoping Joba Chamberlain is going to be pitching, but I don't think he's going to be, but -- see him bean Youkilis.

The whole premise of the -- the reason we're calling it the Seeing Eye Single Tour is there's an expression in baseball called seeing eye single. And when I first heard that I kind of took exception to it recently when I got to know Brian because of the whole notion of seeing eye, and I spend a lot of time thinking of is this really something that I ought to be upset about? And I finally concluded, hey, it's just an expression and, gee, it'd be kind of cool if we used it to brand something we're trying to do.

So we're calling it the Seeing Eye Single Tour and what we're trying to do -- we're trying to have a good time; this is our vacation. But we're also at the same time trying to mobilize the people in the blindness community to get out to ball games and to enjoy these types of experiences, and also to demonstrate to folks in the blindness community how we're going about doing it.

I mean, there's going to be a lot of mobility type issues that we're going to be facing on this. It's just the two of us going. We're going to be pretty much navigating the cities using GPS devices provided by HumanWear. And in terms of the amount of prep and the amount of time we're spending worrying about the mobility stuff, we're really not spending a lot of time worrying about it because we're very confident in the technology. So we're going to be using a lot of technology to help us get around.

And the other thing we're trying to do is to -- and we have tee-shirts and we want to be noticed. We've got a logo that is based on the international symbol of a blind person and my wife then took it and did some work to it where she put a baseball on the symbol's head, put dark glasses on the baseball, and that figure is holding a seeing eye dog in one hand and a baseball bat in the other. And we'd like people to notice us.

And the thing that I'm constantly asked is, "If you're blind, why do you go to baseball games?" Why would a blind person want to go to baseball games? So the answer is simple. For the same reason that everybody else wants to go to a baseball game. I mean, a sighted person can watch it on TV, so why do you want to go to a baseball game? We go to a baseball game because we like the community aspect of it, the excitement, the food, the sights, the sounds, and just spending a day in a very relaxing environment. We enjoy that as much as anybody, so we just want folks to understand that -- I mean, drop those stereotypes. Stop thinking about blind people as these folks that

have an existence that's somewhat recluse and stuff and watch us have a good time. I hope all of you will interact with us. We'll have radios and we often find ourselves the center of attention. If there's a play that people don't really know what happened, they see our radio and turn to us and ask us what happened because we're looking for the play-by-play, that type of thing.

Brian Charlson: A couple of things that come to mind and what's going to be fun about this -- because if this wasn't fun, Rick and I wouldn't be doing it. It's taken on an advocacy kind of feel to it because of who Rick and I are and what we've been doing over the years. This is our vacation. So first thing that anybody does when you're doing something like this, you have to figure out where the games are. So Rick went online -- so he was using a computer using screen magnification to look up the schedules of the different teams and the like.

And then Rick is a spreadsheet nut. Up comes Excel and he starts pumping dates and the like on the spreadsheet to see what would work. Once he worked that out, then it was back online again to find the best tickets for Amtrak. And then it was back online to check out what hotels are in the different cities and availability and that kind of stuff, and that was arranged online. So a lot of online stuff there.

And while he's doing that part of things, I set up a website called -- well, actually, it's my personal website which we've redirected a more memorable name for. So it's seeingeyesingle.com. And on that website, I've set it up so it's a blog-based product and we'll be blogging our activities. I also set up a Twitter account so that while in the park I can pull out my accessible cell phone and text message everybody to tell them how great a time I'm having and how jealous they ought to be because I'm having such a good time there in the park. Oh, and by the way, how the score is going at that point.

And we're also, like Rick mentioned, using GPS to get from point A to point B. Since I work as director of a computer training center -- one of services of a place called the Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, Massachusetts -- I have access to a lot of this technology. So we'll kind of showcase how that is useful in the hands of a knowledgeable user. While I'm a guide dog user and Rick is a cane user and we talk about GPS, that GPS would be pretty useless to us if we didn't already have skills in the use of those two non-technologies.

So it's putting that all together in a community story that hopefully our blind and visually impaired friends -- and sighted people who always wanted to take this kind of tour and couldn't imagine doing it in the first place, let alone doing it as blind or low vision -- might enjoy it a little bit vicariously as well.

Larry Wanger: So you kind of alluded to this, but most people when they go to a game obviously it's a visual experience. And people do wonder -- I have that same experience. I go to hockey. I go to baseball. I get a lot of the same things that happen; people ask you what happened because you've got a radio on, or, "Is he safe?" or whatever. But specifically how -- kind of tell people who may not know, how does a blind person take in what's happening at the ball game and enjoy it and participate?

Brian Charlson: Well, in a good experience we of course take a radio with us. I've traditionally used a one-ear earpiece but I found at Fenway one ear is not enough; I've got to have something pumping in both ears because the crowd noise can get so loud I can miss a play. But you take a radio with you and you tune it into the local broadcaster. You adjust your way of dealing with the events on the field based on the audio delay that occurs. We especially found that during playoff games. Heavens, there are sometimes that the pitcher is one pitch ahead of the play-by-play. So you've got to accommodate to those kinds of things.

But my wife who comes with me to a game every once in a while -- she'll be joining me when we get back here to Boston to see the final game on the 29th between the White Sox and the Red Sox that day; the final game of our tour, anyway -- she is busy quoting statistics to the rest of us from the guys on the radio and other fans are leaning forward and saying, "Who's this new pitcher coming up here?" And she's busy spouting off statistics like she's an [inaudible] baseball fan and it's all from her being able to absorb the audio content of the play-by-play from Joe Castiglione and whoever else is sharing the booth with him that day here in Red Sox land.

We'll be doing the same thing in all the other parks, but of course enjoying the difference between the play-by-play guys in these different parks compared to our home teams.

Rick, you do it from a low-vision perspective with your aids.

Rick Morin: From a low-vision perspective, what I have is I use a telescope. And I don't see very much of what's going on at any given point in time, but what I can see, I can see quite well through the telescope; very limited field of view. I'm very susceptible to people standing up in front of me because I lose the contact with whatever's going on that takes quite some time to get it back, so part of what I'm constantly trying to advocate for on behalf of low-vision people is unobstructed sight lines so that we can take advantage of the vision we do have.

But I rely on the radio. The radio is what queues me where to look and I probably catch 30 to 40 percent of the plays. But Brian and I make a

good pair because I'll start looking around and stuff and I'll notice things that maybe other people would never have seen because I can only focus in on a very few number of things at a time. And what I see I might see quite well and I'll describe to Brian what I'm seeing. We talk a lot about the dimensions of the ballpark and how it's really laid out and that type of thing.

Brian Charlson: Oh, yeah. That has made such a difference since Rick and I have been watching games together. Unlike virtually any other sport -- in fact, I think it is -- or maybe it's different in cricket; that might be an exception to that. But ballparks are not all the same. Not like football, not like basketball, not like hockey with very specific dimensions and angles, etc. that have to be done. Ballparks in baseball, they're just plain different.

Larry Wanger: Right.

Brian Charlson: And the other day, on the 29th of June, we were lucky enough to put together a really great tour of Fenway Park, a hands-on tour. And I think everybody in baseball knows that the Fenway Greens, the people responsible for the field, are just jealous of that space. They don't want anybody touching their precious field.

Rick Morin: You're being so kind.

Brian Charlson: Oh, big time. But we got a chance to get down there and take a look at the things and I had no idea a number of things that were true about baseball at Fenway Park. And they may be in fact true about some other parks as well, but I simply have no idea.

For example, the white line that runs from home base toward third and towards first, at Fenway that's plastic. I thought of it as a chalk line. The warning track -- I had no idea how wide the warning track really is. The triangle out at the corner of center field and right field fence where the bullpens don't quite complete that -- they call it the triangle. It's not quite a triangle, but I guess it's as good as anything else to describe it.

But until I actually went out and experienced it, until Rick gave the opportunity when I asked him all kinds of pesky questions -- how much distance between the back of the catcher and the net behind him? Because that changes from ballpark to ballpark. Is the dugout protected by a screen so the balls don't go whistling to the dugout? Well, here in Fenway they do go whistling into the dugouts from time to time; they're pretty wide open. So Rick's been able to describe those kinds of things to me as well.

One other thing he gets a chance to describe to me -- and he's probably not going to share it with you but I think it's part of the fun. When you go to the ballpark do you look at the other fans?

Larry Wanger: I do. Sure.

Brian Charlson: Everybody does. Part of it is a people-watching experience. So Rick will share with me descriptions of some audience members so that I get to enjoy that.

Rick Morin: Oh, don't tell me secrets now.

Larry Wanger: I bet you get some interesting ones there at Fenway.

Brian Charlson: Yeah, absolutely.

Rick Morin: Yeah. We have the pink hat syndrome at Fenway, so those are all the women that come to the game that really aren't there to watch the game; they're there to be seen and typically wear pink hats. We get a little bit. The Fenway crowd is like nowhere else.

Larry Wanger: Sure.

Rick Morin: And I've been to games at Yankee Stadium and Brian, this will be his first time at Yankee Stadium as well, and that's something that I'm very much looking forward to because they're crazy in a different way. And I think we're going to have to keep it pretty low key that day that we're Red Sox fans.

Larry Wanger: I wouldn't wear any Red Sox garb.

Rick Morin: Yeah, we'll play it by ear. Part of what we're also doing here is cataloguing the different parks we'll deal with and the type of accommodations that we're offered and what we found worked particularly well and what not. Because part of what we're also involved with is at the American Council of the Blind we passed a resolution this last year at the convention in July to come up with some model policies that we'd like to have that we can present to operators of venues to say, given that the regs are fairly wide open in terms of what constitutes appropriate accommodations for folks that are visually impaired -- blind and low-vision -- here is a set of policies that we as the ACB have put together that we think meet what the regs intended and we'd like you to adopt these. So we're going to be kind of gathering best practices along the way as well.

Larry Wanger: You mentioned doing some advocacy with the Red Sox front office. What types of things have you worked on with them and how receptive has the management been to working with you?

Brian Charlson: I'll mention the things that happened to me as a guide dog user. We had mentioned earlier how tight the seats are and yet the only way a blind Red Sox fan can go there who uses a seeing eye dog is to make arrangements to leave their dog somewhere. So sometimes that means you have to go all the way back out of town, drop your dog off with a friend, and take Paratransit back in, because if you're a guide dog user you're probably pretty rusty as a cane user. But you still pull out the cane and you do what you can with it. And you usually miss the first few innings of the game because the game starts at 7:05.

Rick Morin: Yeah. Or most people just don't bother to go.

Brian Charlson: Exactly. So what we now have arranged with the Red Sox is wheelchair accommodation seating areas are now available for guide dog users to purchase a ticket in that section 48 hours before a game.

Larry Wanger: And some parks would be willing to do that. I obviously go to a lot of Diamondback games. It's a newer park and they've always been willing to do that, so it's good that the Sox have come along with that too.

Brian Charlson: But it's not in the regs, see? They're not required to do it in the regs.

Larry Wanger: They're not required, yep.

Rick Morin: Right.

Brian Charlson: And so we're talking about those kinds of policies we're trying to have some impact on at the same time that the Department of Justice is re-writing regs on virtually everything. One of the areas they're talking about reducing is the number of accommodation seats like that. So we want to make it clear to them before they start reducing those numbers that if they broaden the definition in the regs, rather than relying on individual parks to make those decisions, that they might find that they need those seats.

Rick Morin: It's interesting, Larry, you brought the Diamondbacks up. A lot of what the Diamondbacks do we're very familiar with. I've been out there to the park and just was absolutely impressed with the various things they do there. I don't know if they're still doing it, but at one time they had a club that if you were disabled and wanted to identify yourself as disabled you could join this club voluntarily and then not be challenged later on if you wanted to buy disabled seating as to

whether or not you were disabled. The whole point of that was not to challenge anybody's civil rights; it was to protect people from fraud.

I mean, one of the huge issues that's going on in all these ballparks, in particularly the ones where the demand is real high, is you get these really slimy, unscrupulous people that will buy tickets that are for the disabled because they're usually in good locations, and either resell them or use them themselves. And that has the effect of denying people who those tickets were intended for to be able to use those tickets.

And I've been involved with the new Yankee Stadium. They've been doing some outreach programs which I've been attending all the meetings for that and have gotten to know quite a few Yankees folks and Yankees fans. And I have to say, I wasn't exactly embraced the first time I showed up there when they found out I was from Boston, but we won over their confidence and now they're great friends.

But part of the problem that they experience with fraud in New York is these people that buy the tickets -- there have been instances of abuse where they have physically and verbally abused the people that are disabled. The fraudsters who bought the tickets were actually pretty nasty to other disabled people in the area, that type of thing.

So fraud's a big issue so we've been talking to the Red Sox and other teams about how to do that. It's a slippery slope. We know all the arguments pro and con. We're looking for something very pragmatic to do. To do nothing, though, is only going to hurt the community more and more, so we're educating both people in the community and the venue operators on the issue and why the issue is important to address.

And the current draft of the DOJ regs that are coming out, they start to address the whole fraud issue. They had ignored it in the past. They said they weren't going to deal with it in the past because of potential civil rights violations. But now they recognize it as an issue, so we'll see what happens.

Brian Charlson: Now, because a lot of the sale of tickets these days is done online, we've been watching the MLB.com website and all of the team websites that are built on MLB.com's, if you will, structural backbone and there are some problems. Not all teams handle ticketing the same way but the primary wholly owned subsidiary owned by MLB that deals with ticketing utilizes a system online called a CAPTCHA. This is where you're shown kind of a fuzzy, blurry picture of letters and numbers and you're expected to type those in in order to verify that you're a human being and not some kind of automated program

somebody's written to log in and log and log in and log in and buy up all the tickets.

We really appreciate the fact that there has to be some way to keep that kind of -- again, kind of electronic fraud from happening. But the end result is those of us who are blind or visually impaired have a much, much harder time -- if we can at all -- accessing that CAPTCHA information.

Lots of places have added to their website an audio CAPTCHA capability. Click here and you hear -- albeit, distorted to keep it from being able to be broken by voice recognition type software. But nonetheless, able to go through the CAPTCHA process independently using our screen readers on our computers.

Or if you can imagine if you're looking at something times eight magnification, you're seeing about one-sixty-fourth of the screen or so and you're having to deal with issues of blurriness just as a result of your vision impairment, let alone the blurriness that's built in. So we need those kinds of alternatives.

However, the vast majority of MLB teams utilize CAPTCHA, so I can't buy tickets online independently and if it's first-come first-serve, including those who are doing so online, it leaves me being discriminated against as a result of that method that MLB is using. MLB and many, many other companies.

It hasn't stopped us -- all of this -- from being great baseball fans, enjoying the idea of going out and enjoying some great baseball. Hopefully we'll come back with some positive stories. We'll continue to Twitter and blog our experiences at our website, SeeingEyeSingleTour.com, and invite all your listeners to come enjoy it with us. Even if it is online, we're going to be putting up audio, video, still pictures with alternative text captions, as well as the blog entries themselves, and invite them to tell their stories about baseball as well.

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