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Mets fans finally feel at home at Citi Field

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NEW YORK — The memories Mets fans shared at Shea Stadium made that ballpark feel like a second home, they said, but with a few thrilling moments of its own this postseason, Citi Field is starting to feel a little cozy, too.

As thousands of fans waited to enter the gates at Citi Field to attend the first World Series game in its history, those interviewed said they will never forget the moments at Shea — even the heartbreaking ones — but were more than eager for new and memorable experiences at Citi Field.

“You can’t really compare to all of the memories we’ve had at Shea,” Jose Medina of Bridgeport, Conn., said as he waited outside the stadium. “But give this place a few more years and sure this place will feel just fine.”

When Citi Field opened in 2009, fans initially criticized it for not having a true Mets identity. The outfield wall was rigid, tall and black, there were seemingly no mentions of the team’s history, and it felt more like a tribute to the Brooklyn Dodgers than the Mets, fans said.

Meanwhile, Shea Stadium — while looking aged and worn by the time it was demolished — was packed with the aura of past championships and had “character,” fans said.

“When Citi Field first opened, there was just nothing to it, there was no real identity,” Bob Roland of Union said outside of the stadium as he and his son, Matt, waited to get into Friday’s game. “They did away with the different-colored tiers of seats — which was a characteristic of Shea — and there weren’t really any Mets logos throughout the stadium.”

However, over time, management changed the stadium’s look. The team added a Mets Hall of Fame next to the Jackie Robinson Rotunda, the outfield wall was changed to orange and blue, a “Lets Go Mets” sign was added to the top of the scoreboard and small Mets-related photos and murals now grace walls throughout the stadium.

All of those changes, fans said, started making Citi Field feel like home — but the electricity felt at the ballpark this season has cemented that status.

The magical moments — Wilmer Flores’ game-winning homer days after his on-field tears as he was nearly traded, a sweep of the Washington Nationals to finish off the division’s preseason favorites, the thrilling post-season series wins against the Dodgers and Cubs — have put thousands of boisterous fans into seats that have been empty come August through losing seasons since the stadium’s opening.

Citi Field finally had a beating heart: the fans.

“We stopped saying ‘Shea’ when we went to Mets games a few years ago,” Matt Roland said. “Now we say ‘Citi.’ This is home now.” Carlos Perrow of Paterson felt similarly.



MICHAEL KARAS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fans cheer at the start of the game at Citi Field on Friday, Oct. 30, 2015.



KEVIN R. WEXLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fans wait to enter the stadium before game three of the World Series at Citi Field on Friday, October 30, 2015.

“Shea was a dump, but it was our dump,” Perrow said. “But Citi is our home now, and I love it. Now that the Mets are winning, this place is a destination.”

Despite all the changes at Citi, Mets fans on Friday night agreed on one thing: To truly become home, and have the same allure as Shea Stadium, a big happening in Mets history needed to take place there — ideally, during this World Series home stand.

“What this stadium really needs is that defining kind moment — like the Robin Ventura grand-slam single,” said Daniel Addis of Brielle. “Once that happens, this place will really begin to resonate with fans. I hope that moment is tonight, then two more on Saturday and Sunday.”

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