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No Baseball, Please; I'm Knitting

By SARAH HOYE The Tampa Tribune

Published: Sep 17, 2006

"Hey, wanna see what I made?" I asked a friend at work.

"Yeeeeeahhh," she said, stopping at my desk.

"Check it out," I said, displaying my half-knitted goods.

"What the hell is THAT?" she asked, her enthusiasm shifting to horror.

"It's not done, but it's a scarf."

"What, a scarf for my arm?" she said, and howled with laughter.

I couldn't help but laugh, too, and then cry, at my sad little Charlie Brown scarf. But heck, I had only just learned to knit the preceding Saturday night at the Tampa Bay Devil Rays game.

Yes, at the game, of which I saw little.

I was too focused on my six new knitting buddies, and my new teacher in particular, to watch the Rays beat the Oakland Athletics. This wasn't just a game, it was Stitch N' Pitch, the brainchild of The National NeedleArts Association. It started last year in Seattle -- folks who knit, crochet, embroider, cross-stitch and needlepoint meet to enjoy a ballgame and their favorite hobby. It has since popped up at ballparks all over the country.

A game in Phoenix attracted 1,100 needle art fans, according to Libby Butler-Gluck, a spokeswoman for the association. Seattle drew 2,500, and Los Angeles had some 600. There were 323 knitting with me at the Rays game.

"It's just another place to complete a project," Butler-Gluck said. "We are bringing our projects everywhere."

I had never knitted in my life. But my editor had a vision, and it included me. I would buy some needles and go to a ballgame, where I would create a rally scarf in Rays blue, green and white in just nine innings.

I had tried to teach myself to knit a few years back, when half the country rediscovered yarn. My mail-order instruction kit and I lasted about 60 minutes together. This time I'd learn from Laura Bryant, owner of Prism Yarns in St. Petersburg.

With three books to her name and a booming wholesale knitting business, she's a rock star in the needle arts world. So I knew I had to bring my A-game -- or just a really big smile.

After Bryant, who had learned to crochet as a child, threw out the first pitch of the game, she met up with her buddies in the quasi-nosebleed seats at Tropicana Field. Along for the fun were her husband (a retired knitter), mother and sister, and a host of close friends.

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Bryant quickly had me casting onto a needle. She patiently encouraged me through the basic knit stitch, inserting the right needle, wrapping the yarn around, drawing it through with the needle. I dropped stitches, double-teamed stitches, tied myself up in knots. Talking and knitting, knitting and talking, she finished her scarf while I longed for finer motor skills.

Some three hours later I was barely halfway through my creation, but I was oh-so-proud to be really knitting. Who cared if my scarf was oblong in shape and kept losing stitches? Besides, Bryant said I was a "real natural."

With an almost-full ball of yarn left to go, my homework was to complete my scarf.

If all goes well, I may finish by the time it gets cold enough to wrap the thing around my neck. Or my arm.

- GET STITCHED -

For the Stitch N'Pitch schedule, visit www.stitchnpitch.com

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If you want to learn how to knit or crochet, it's easiest to have someone show you (as opposed to the Sarah Hoyer-mail-order method.) Don't know a knitter? Go to www.tnna.org and click on "Looking for a NeedleArt shop near you?" Under "Select Location" click on Florida, and, under "Select Product Type(s)," choose "Classes Offered."

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