

## VIP Pass to a Pro Baseball Game Day

by Clay Latimer

“Play ball!” Baseball fans love hearing those wonderful words. A major League Baseball (MLB) game offers fans plenty of entertainment and interesting action. But a lot happens behind the scenes that the fans never see. Behind every stolen base there’s a coach that flashes signals to the players. Every relief pitcher has a great bullpen story. During the game, coaches discuss strategy in the dugouts. Grounds crews continually work to keep the field in top-top shape.

To understand the big picture you have to look beyond the field. How do teams travel? What do they do before the first pitch? How do umpires prepare for a game? There’s so much more to baseball than just the game on the field.

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## Polishing the Diamond

Groundskeepers work hard to keep the field in perfect condition. The head groundskeeper arrives at the park before dawn to inspect the field for any problems. Less than an hour before the game, grounds crew members get busy. They break down the batting cage. They water down the infield, making sure they don't create puddles. They rake the dirt around home plate. They also paint the plate so it's bright white.

Grounds crews keep working even after the first pitch. After the third inning, they rake the infield and smooth out the dirt. They repeat this task again after the fifth and seventh innings.

Their jobs aren't done even when the game is over. Crew members work for about an hour after the game is finished. They repair gouges in the batters' boxes made by players' shoe spikes. They also repaint the baselines and water the outfield. They'll be back at least 12 hours before the next game- ready to put in another day of work on the field.

## Home Away from Home

Players spend up to eight hours at the stadium every game day. But only about three or four hours are spent playing ball. The rest of the time is spent warming up or hanging out in the clubhouse.

On game day players first go to the clubhouse to change into their practice uniforms. A few players might get a massage in the trainer's room. The others head to the field to stretch and take batting practice. Then they return to the clubhouse to change into their official game uniforms.

The clubhouse is the players' home away from home. They can play cards, talk baseball, watch TV, and eat their meals there. Players stay well fed at the clubhouse. They enjoy a full buffet table loaded with pasta, ribs, and other fine foods.

Soon it's time to take the field. The players file out of the clubhouse with their bats and gloves. They're ready to go to work.

## Getting Loose

Smack! A baseball goes flying. Crack! There goes another one- right out of the park. Batting practice is the time for hitters to take practice swings. It's part of the pre-game ritual. Players hustle in and out to take their turn in the **batting cage**. When the players have each taken their turn, they gather up loose balls in front of the batting cage. Soon a coach from the other team rolls a cart full of balls toward the mound. It's his team's turn for batting practice.

**batting cage**- a screen placed behind home plate to catch balls during batting practice.

Pre-game routines include more than just batting practice. Before the game, players emerge from the dugout to stretch and jog along the base lines. Then they head onto the field to loosen up and practice their fielding skills. Meanwhile, the starting pitchers warm up their pitching arms in the bullpen.