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# The ghost of football seasons past

It came back to me when I watched the last couple of scenes in the movie *Silver Linings Playbook*, which was filmed in Delaware County and Philadelphia. The view of the lobby of the old Ben Franklin Hotel brought back the memories. It was 1961, a year after the Eagles' championship season. I was 13, and old enough to accompany my Uncle Pete to watch the Eagles play at Franklin Field.



**Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence in a scene from “*Silver Linings Playbook*,” which was filmed at Delaware County’s Llanerch Diner.**

Driving up from Wilmington, we made our first stop at the Ben Franklin Hotel, having no trouble parking on Chestnut Street. We had breakfast at the hotel and then sat in the lobby and read the Sunday

Bulletin until game time. That lobby floor, with its distinctive checkerboard pattern, was what hit me so hard when the movie captured it with an aerial view. I remember it clearly.

We drove to Franklin Field, arriving a couple of hours before game time, parked across the street from the stadium (again, not a problem), and waited on the sidewalk by the west entrance as the Eagles began to show up, either walking or getting out of taxis. They all wore suits, and they all signed autographs and chatted with the small crowd assembled there on the sidewalk. Tom Brookshire, Pete Retzlaff, Tommy McDonald, Don "The Blade" Burroughs — to name but a few.

It was an entirely different experience from an NFL game today. Then, most of the seats were sold on game day, and the weather had a lot to do with attendance. Today, of course, games are sold on a season-ticket basis, and the waiting list for season tickets extends several years. On game days, players are a protected group, with no pregame chats and autograph signings — probably just as well, given the fan behavior today.

In the early 1960s, we sat in the top row of the east end of the stadium. The crowd always seemed congenial. I don't recall bad language or drunken behavior. I'm sure there was some, but I don't remember seeing it.

Time has passed. I have had my own season tickets since 1975. Newly married, my wife would go with me to a few games, and I would take friends to others. As the children were born and grew to be about the same age I was with Uncle Pete, they started to take turns as my game companions. It was always a great day, win or lose. Some seasons were frustrating; others were exhilarating.

At 65, things have changed for me. I still have those two tickets but only attend a couple of games each year. There is too much to deal with — clogged traffic or jammed subway cars, long lines for security checks, way too much drinking and foul language, nonstop high-decibel loudspeakers, fights breaking out inside and outside the stadium, and games scheduled for the benefit of TV ratings rather than for the fans in the stands. Who wants to attend a December or January game at 8:30 at night in the frozen confines of Lincoln Financial Field? I certainly don't.

Others do, and the Eagles have that waiting list, so I guess all is

reasonably well for them. But then I see games being played in Tampa, Jacksonville, San Diego, and other locations and notice how many empty seats there are. Could it be that the NFL is finally arriving at a tipping point, that the large screen HD television is beginning to look better than the actual stadium experience?

Time will tell. For now, it has been pleasant to think back to that lobby at the Ben Franklin Hotel, getting autographs from my football heroes — and spending a really nice day with my Uncle Pete.