

2-06-22 Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum

As soon as it was announced that NASCAR would be running the Clash in a temporary quarter mile track built inside the LA Coliseum I knew I had to go and immediately planned my trip. It's still kind of amazing that something like that could actually happen and I knew I had to experience it myself in person. LA also happens to be the perfect place for me personally because I have a good friend who I can easily stay with and it's just a metro ride to get to the stadium.

I left with my friend and my brother (who flew cross country just for two days in order to attend the race) at about 7:30. We parked at a parking structure and took a short metro ride to Exposition Park and wandered around the grounds for a little while. The Coliseum sits right across the street from USC campus and right next to a number of museums, such as a science center (which holds the shuttle Endeavor), an aerospace museum, an African American museum, and the under-construction Lucas Art Museum. Unfortunately none of them were open early enough to visit while we waited.

It was unclear when gates were actually going to be opened, I had assumed 9 but it turned out to be 10 so we had to spend a while in line, but once it hit 10 they opened right on time. They were actually checking vaccination cards, including IDs, which I was impressed by. It is in LA and they're pretty strict about these things so I'm not surprised but I was glad to see it. The only unfortunate thing about it being in a stadium is it meant I couldn't bring my camera in.

We went immediately to the front area where the merchandise haulers and fan festivities were set up. I bought an event pin and shirt as is my tradition for new exciting events like this. There weren't a ton of booths but there were a decent number. Doordash was giving out legit free food for showing that you have the Doordash app installed on your phone, the three of us got a full 9 inch sandwich between us for free. The driver merch haulers were there as well and the lines for all the merch quickly got very long, people seemed to be really interested in it and only had a small window in which to buy things. It was a bit strange that the festivities were inside the gates instead of outside like at most tracks but it's probably a Covid thing.

We made a lap around the Coliseum to see everything we could then walked to the top of the grandstands overlooking the side that the car haulers were parked on to see the layout of things. The haulers were actually parked a decent ways off and the cars would then drive down a blocked off street and into the tunnel to get into the track.



The track itself looked really nice, I was very impressed. The straights had a bit of a curve to them to align with the layout of the stadium and it was nicely painted with a full SAFER barrier around the entirety it. The broadcast booth was set up in turns 3 and 4 and they blocked off the seats that would have been obscured by it. There was a stage set up under the peristyles where the musical performances would take place. It was really awesome to see the facility in person, there's something so exciting about a racetrack built into a stadium. I have a fascination with stadiums in general so mix that in with racing and I'm all in for it.



We got to our seats about half an hour before heats were scheduled to start. I think pretty much everywhere would have a good view but we definitely had a good one, and were able to see everything without an issue. The seats actually had a decent amount of legroom and were fairly steep which I appreciated.



There were four heats of 9 cars each, determined by single car qualifying that had taken place yesterday, 25 laps each. The racing was fairly tame to start with but good. It's definitely a single line track but the top could hold on for a lap or two off the restarts. With the exception of a few backrunner cars it was fairly competitive and there were names near the front that I don't normally expect to see there, and some bigger names really struggling.

The crowd was alright for the heats, it looked kind of empty but it's still a 70,000 person stadium and people were clearly trickling in as things went on. I know parking can be terrible at that Coliseum so if someone wasn't aware of that it could easily significantly delay their arrival.

They started within 5 minutes of the advertised time and kept things moving, as one heat finished they moved in the cars for the next heat and were able to prevent the tunnel from becoming a bottleneck. The LCQs started right around their scheduled time as well. The first one was fairly tame, but the second got wild. There were a bunch of crashes, including Kurt Busch being forced hard into the outside wall and Aric Almirola getting turned into three and into the wall. I was rooting for Ryan Preece and he kept climbing up only to lose spots from starting on the outside on the next restart. There were a bunch of crashes and cautions and some really wild racing, lots of contact and beating and banging into the turns. Austin Cindric slammed into multiple drivers entering the turns and spun a few out. I had a scanner and was listening to the radio of various teams and multiple commented on Cindric's very aggressive driving, with one spotter telling his driver "beware, the bulldozer is behind you." Ryan Preece ended up getting second

to Ty Dillon, but we later found out that Dillon was disqualified for jumping the final restart and Preece was credited with the victory!

With all the cautions they ran about 15 minutes over schedule and the Pitbull pre-race concert that was scheduled for 45 minutes only went 30, I suppose they had a hard commitment to the 3pm start time for the TV broadcast. I'm not a particular Pitbull fan so I didn't really care about it that much, but I will say that with the location of the stage up in the peristyles it was hard for anyone in attendance to actually see the concert. I had expected that they would bring the artists out on the center of the track and perform there. I mostly watched on the video boards.

The pre-race ceremonies started right on time. They introduced the drivers and had them walk down the concrete steps below the peristyles and onto the track and to their car which was staged on the front stretch. There were apparently some big audio issues so we didn't actually have sound in the stadium for most of the driver intros but they figured it out eventually.

23 starting on the quarter mile track looked like a ton of cars. The racing was surprisingly clean for most of the race. There were cautions and there was a lot of people using the bumper, but it did stay relatively clean throughout, more so than I'd expected after seeing the LCQ 2. I actually really liked the new number placement on the cars, moving it forward on the side panel. I didn't think it was going to be great seeing the renders online but in person it worked just fine and I had no problem with it whatsoever. Some of the paint schemes were really nice too, such as Brad Keselowski's purple car.



Tyler Reddick had a really good run, and was actually leading when he had a mechanical failure and unfortunately had to pull off. It turned out that he had a drive train failure of some kind, which was surprising to see. Ryan Preece also had an unfortunate brake failure and had to retire as well.

Joey Logano and Kyle Busch ended up being the dominant cars at the end. I was hoping for Busch to make a run at Logano and he was close but couldn't track him down. The almost full lap burnout Logano did was neat to see.



Once it finished we were able to get out on a train and back home within an hour, the best time I've ever had leaving a Cup race. The experience overall was fantastic, and at multiple points I just looked at the track and tried to absorb the fact that NASCAR was actually running a Cup race inside a stadium, and one with a ton of Olympic history at that. It was kind of wild, taking a step back, to realize that this actually happened. They ran a good show, the racing was great without being caution marred, and it was an exciting on track product and a well produced show overall. The sightlines were excellent and I had a great time. And, I think they made a lot of new fans out of the whole thing, which is really what's important for NASCAR. I would definitely go back again, I think it proved that stadium races really can work and work well.