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# Total Eclipse of the Park: The Guardians' home opener coincides with a rare solar eclipse

Zack Meisel Jan 25, 2024

108

CLEVELAND — Befuddled birds will start chirping. Drivers trapped in a boundless traffic snarl will halt their honking. The temperature will plunge. Sluggers swatting batting practice tosses at Progressive Field will pause for a cosmic intermission.

At 3:13 p.m. ET on April 8, the springtime sky above downtown Cleveland will host a total solar eclipse, as the moon's shadow sweeps across the middle of the country and eclipse chasers scramble to locate the perfect spot to witness the spectacle.

The orbits of the sun, the Earth and the moon will align so that the moon blocks out the full disc of the sun, casting darkness along a path that will extend from Mexico to Dallas to Little Rock to Indianapolis to Cleveland to Buffalo to Caribou, Maine. The phenomenon occurs every 18-24 months, but usually over vast oceans or uninhabited regions like Antarctica.

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This one is headed for the spotlight, and it's also on a collision course with the [Cleveland Guardians'](#) home opener.

For two years, Cleveland officials have planned for an event in which the ensemble carries out its performance millions of miles from the front-row seats on Lake Erie's shore. The showcase is expected to attract visitors to Cleveland from Canada, France, Ireland and Zimbabwe, plus states near and far. The city won't land in the path of totality again until 2444.

To grant the Guardians an extension for their ongoing ballpark renovations, the league booked them a three-city, 11-day trip through Oakland, Seattle and Minneapolis to start the regular season. They're one of three teams, along with the [Boston Red Sox](#) and [Toronto Blue Jays](#), following that sequence, but they're the only one with celestial complications.

The Guardians are now faced with a decision: Do they host their home opener that day, or that night, or shortly after the three-minute, 49-second phase of totality when day masquerades as night?

"Everybody talks about where they were when the Cavs won the championship," said Chris Hartenstine, an education coordinator at NASA's Glenn Research Center. "Everybody can say, 'I was in the arena,' 'I was at the watch party,' 'I was watching with friends.' This is one of those moments. It's in science, not necessarily sports. The cool thing about the Guardians is you can get a little bit of both. 'I was there on Opening Day when the eclipse happened.'"

The preparation for April 8, 2024, for many, began on Aug. 21, 2017, the date of the last total solar eclipse visible from the U.S. That's when Cleveland restaurant owner Sam McNulty first entered a reminder on his phone's calendar. Now, he's fast-tracking the completion of a rooftop bar at Market Garden Brewery to accommodate the out-of-towners who have reserved tables for April 8.

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For some, it started a bit earlier.

"I've been thinking about 2024 since I was a kid," said Mike Kentrianakis, who has witnessed 14 total solar eclipses since 1979 from Indonesia, Chile, Gabon, Australia, China, Russia, Greece, Aruba, Canada, and — while over the Scotia Sea — north of the Antarctic Peninsula.

He watched the 2017 eclipse from Carbondale, Ill., and at the end of March, he'll hop in a rental car in Queens, N.Y., and start his 15-hour trek to the same site, the rare city to fall in the path of totality in both 2017 and 2024.

"I'll do anything for an eclipse," Kentrianakis said.

Hartenstine anchored NASA's public presentation from the path of totality seven years ago in a tent on the grassy area in front of the state capitol building in Jefferson City, Mo. He wasn't sure what to expect. Hartenstine went from sweating buckets in Jefferson City's 90-degree summer heat to needing a sweatshirt. As darkness descended in the middle of the day, crickets and cicadas and birds chirped in confusion. Shadows sharpened to what Hartenstine described as "video game" levels as the moon impeded the sun's effect, before it all returned to normal with disappointing speed.

"Four minutes is a song on the radio," Hartenstine said. "You can totally miss the experience. You have to know ahead of time to know what you're looking for and then you can really embrace it."

While some embrace it, others have to plan around it. The eclipse coincides with the NCAA Women's Final Four at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse and the Cleveland International Film Festival at Playhouse Square. And, of course, the Guardians' home opener — which, in at least some capacity, will have to surrender to the quirks of science for a once-in-a-lifetime total eclipse at the park.

Over the past few months, the Guardians have consulted with everyone from local authorities to NASA scientists as they tried to determine the best Opening Day approach. The Guardians have slated seven of their last eight home openers (in which fans were permitted) for 4:10 p.m. ET, but that time will fall in the partial eclipse window, and trying to barrel a 90 mph slider while sporting solar-filtered glasses is a tall order. If they choose a late-afternoon start time, fans could potentially view the eclipse from ballpark seats that have a view of the midday sun. Even if they opt for a night game, there will still be traffic-related challenges to sort through.

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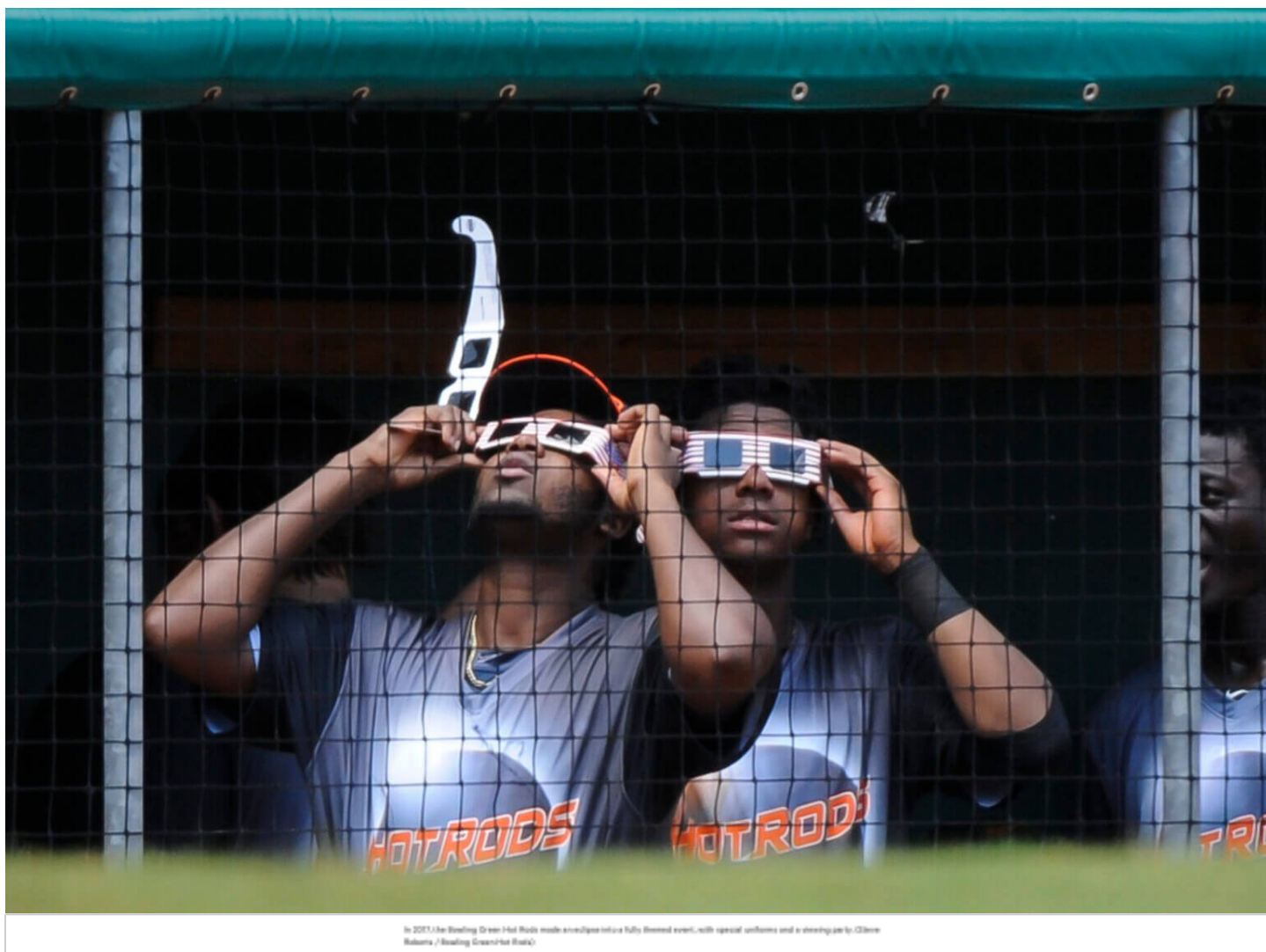
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Few baseball teams have had to consider such questions before, but there is at least one example — and they leaned hard into the eclipse festivities.

In 2017, the Bowling Green Hot Rods, the Low A affiliate of the [Rays](#), faced a similar quandary. Bowling Green, Ky., resided in the path of totality, and when an astronomy professor at nearby Western Kentucky University placed it on their radar a year in advance, the Hot Rods started their planning.

They settled on a brunch-timed first pitch, officially 10:34 a.m., as league rules prohibited them from starting much earlier. The teams, clad in black "moon" and white "sun" jerseys, breezed through the first eight innings, but just as the Hot Rods' broadcaster expressed relief about the pace of play, the West Michigan Whitecaps pieced together a five-run ninth and the sunlight started to dim.



In 2011, the Cleveland Guardians Hot Rods made eclipse-viewing a fully themed event, with special uniforms and a viewing set by Gilbane Roberts / Beating Grounds (Base)

Had the game dragged on any longer than the two hours, 38 minutes it took, the teams would have paused the action. Instead, moments after the final out, players and fans sprawled out on the outfield grass as professors explained the science unfolding overhead.

The Hot Rods attracted a crowd of 6,006, one of the largest in the ballpark's history, and certainly the largest for a Monday morning first pitch.

The Guardians have sold out every home opener since 1994, and it's fair to expect that Progressive Field will again sell out its roughly 35,000 seats, eclipse or not. In a normal year, that might qualify as a major event downtown; this year, it's got a lot of competition.

This is the first total solar eclipse over Cleveland since 1809, nearly a century before the city's baseball outfit became a charter member of the American League. Destination Cleveland, an organization charged with bringing tourism to the city, estimates that 200,000 visitors will trek downtown that day. Most hotels in the city are already sold out.

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"People are going to descend on Cleveland like we've never seen," said Scott Vollmer, VP of education and exhibits for the Great Lakes Science Center.

NASA will broadcast the day's events from outside the Great Lakes Science Center, where an expected crowd of 50,000 will gather for the grand finale of a three-day festival at the North Coast Harbor.

"It's literally once-in-a-lifetime," Vollmer said, "and all you have to do is look up to see it."

Downtown Cleveland isn't the only place expecting to be overrun with eclipse tourists. The suburb of Avon Lake, Ohio, about a half-hour west of downtown Cleveland, sits directly on the center line of totality, hence the town's new slogan, "Totality's best seat."

Erin Fach, Avon Lake's director of parks and recreation, has studied Hopkinsville, a small town in southwest Kentucky that welcomed visitors from 48 states for the 2017 eclipse. Fach and his team even dined at Ferrell's, a Hopkinsville burger joint with one stove and a dozen barstools that, five years after the landmark event, still featured on its menu an eclipse burger — a double cheeseburger with bacon and a sunny-side-up

egg.

Fach expects the town's population of 30,000 to double or triple on April 8. He has prepared the city's planners by describing the day as their annual July 4 fireworks show coinciding with the biggest high school football game they've ever hosted while another milestone event unfolds at the primary community park.

Now organizers and eclipse tourists alike are simply hoping the weather holds up and everyone can see the show. Cloud cover is a concern in Cleveland, but Hartenstine relayed cautious optimism that the temperature of Lake Erie will create a barrier of cold air that pushes a stagnant, overcast sky away from the waterfront. Colleagues at the Johnson Space Center in Houston have asked Hartenstine why eclipse chasers would venture to Cleveland on April 8 instead of Dallas or another city with a more accommodating spring forecast. Hartenstine pointed out that Cleveland has had clear skies on that date the last two years.

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"The pinnacle (is) the totality," Hartenstine said. "The last little glimmer of sunlight disappears behind the moon and then you have to take your eclipse glasses off or you won't see anything. When you take those glasses off, you can see the corona of the sun radiating across the sky.

"That was the moment for me in 2017. I still didn't get it. But once you take the glasses off and see the show, it becomes however long you have in that path of totality, whether it's 20 seconds, or 3 minutes, 50 seconds, like Cleveland has. You have to take it in.

"That's four minutes of visual phenomenon, amazement — and then it's gone."

The Guardians are expected to decide on their start time in the next few weeks. Whether they build the eclipse into the home opener or try to work around it, it will be a baseball experience with little precedent.

Kentrianakis plans to wait until 18-24 hours before the climax of the event to determine whether he'll stay in Carbondale or hightail it to Cleveland. The city with the clearer forecast will win out. It's the last total solar eclipse that will be visible in the contiguous U.S. until August 2044.

"It's an indescribable experience," he said. "It's unlike anything you could imagine.

"Everyone's gonna say, 'That was the coolest thing I've ever seen.'"

(Top image: Eamonn Dalton / The Athletic; Photos: Bill Ingalls courtesy of NASA; Tim Clayton / Corbis via Getty Images)

What did you think of this story?



MEH



SOLID



AWESOME



Zack Meisel is a senior writer for The Athletic covering the Cleveland Guardians. Zack was named the 2021 Ohio Sportswriter of the Year by the National Sports Media Association and won first place for best sports coverage from the Society of Professional Journalists. He has been on the beat since 2011 and is the author of four books, including "Cleveland Rocked," the tale of the 1995 team. Follow Zack on Twitter @ZackMeisel

COMMENTS

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R Ryder K. · Jan 25

Time for a Talking Softball and Mr Burns blocking out the sun mashup

Well Mr Burns had done it;
The power plant had won it;
With light going down all the while;

Incessant hooting made us smile;
While Smithers resigned over something so vile

59 1 ...

M Matthew T. · Jan 25

@Ryder K.

We're talking suspects, Willie and Seymour Skinner;
We're talking suspects, Homer and Waylon Smithers.

8 ...

J John R. · Jan 25

So, it's a Total Eclipse of the Park!

👍 48 ↻ 1 ...

👤 **Gary T.** · Jan 26

@John R. Bonnie Tyler certainly would like the way you 'turned around' that lyric/title of that epic song.

👍 2 ↻ ...

👤 **T J.** · Jan 25

Pretty cool stuff! Thanks for sharing.

👍 39 ↻ ...

👤 **Bob C.** · Jan 25

This is so easy. You build the eclipse into Opening Day. Hand out the proper glasses to everyone to watch the eclipse. Sing the national anthem right before it starts. When it's over, have the umpire yell, "Play ball," into the P.A. I'm sure the marketing department can work a lot of other stuff around it too, but those are the essentials.

👍 32 ↻ ...

👤 **Vincent C.** · Jan 25

Baseball's first day-night inning!

👍 29 ↻ 1 ...

👤 **Douglas K.** · Jan 25

@Vincent C.  
It would be a day-night-day inning!

👍 6 ↻ ...

👤 **Peggy F.** · Jan 25

If the Moon is in the 7th House, this must be our year.

👍 20 ↻ 1 ...

👤 **Tracy S.** · Jan 25

@Peggy F. Doesn't Jupiter also have to align with Mars?

👍 10 ↻ ...

👤 **Sherri M.** · Jan 25

April 8 in Cleveland? Every possibility of snow

👍 20 ↻ 2 ...

👤 **Paul C.** · Jan 25

@Sherri M. or even just clouds

👍 2 ↻ ...

👤 **Michael P.** · Jan 26

@Sherri M. That's why i booked an Airbnb for San Antonio

👍 ↻ ...

👤 **Rick C.** · Jan 25

Sorry, but the "performance" is not 93 million miles away, the earth's distance to the sun.. The eclipse, er "performance" is not visible between the sun and moon but between the earth and moon.

👍 17 ↻ ...

· Jan 25

For those wondering whether the hype around a total solar eclipse is worth it-- you bet your Oscar Gamble baseball card it is-- I saw the last total solar eclipse outside of Knoxville TN and it was the most magical thing I've ever seen. I say 4PM start, get the people in the ballpark, don't disrupt the game after it starts.

👍 17 ↻ 2 ...

👤 **Scott G.** · Jan 25

Yeah-once people see the eclipse, they will forget or not care about the game.

When I saw it, I had this natural energy, this drug-like high, for about 8 hours. All anyone around me wanted to talk about was the eclipse experience as well.

👍 8 ↻ ...

👤 **Josh B.** · Jan 25

@Scott G. That's why I say they ask for an alternate start time and play at 12. Then turn it into an event afterwards with the fans allowed to stay through the eclipse, allow people to buy tickets to be on the field with players, etc.

👍 6 ↻ ...

R Robert S. · Jan 25

And dumb ass Donald Trump will stare at it last he did when he was in office.

👍 15 ↻ ⋮

C Chuck B. · Jan 25

As noted, there's vastly more to experience than just the corona at totality. Anticipate bizarre shadows from a non-circular sun, weird color changes from the Purkinje Effect (ask all attending fans to wear red and green), Venus and Jupiter in the daytime sky. And Cleveland has an increased chance of clear skies over rest of the Midwest because Lake Erie is not absorbing as much radiant energy as the ground. See <https://youtu.be/WLYhoFazaGM?si=sjOVZ3fd9l9BHctJ>.

👍 14 ↻ ⋮

S Scott G. · Jan 25

We booked our campsite for April 6-10 Fredricksburg Texas back in 2019 when reservations opened.

The owners of the campground were suprised: they told us "wow, you are the 4th group in the past 2 weeks to book that week-we never get reservations that far out!". They had no idea that they are in the path of totality and likely to have a clear day, being out in the Hill Country. And if it's cloudy, we'll just drive SW toward Mexico.

I was luckily enough to be in Oregon during the 2017 event. I hopped on my bicycle and rode a gravel road 25 miles north as the roads were jam packed. It was a life changing experience: like being at the hospital for your first-born. Anyone who hasn't seen it: find a way to get to a location within the path of totality.

👍 9 ↻ ⋮

G Gord F. · Jan 25

Order your eclipse glasses NOW. They will be in short supply by early April. And make sure they are from a reputable supplier.

👍 9 ↻ 1 ⋮

· Jan 25

@Gord F. I'm betting on the team handing out glasses along with the magnet schedule.

👍 ↻ ⋮

P Paul M. · Jan 25

I would bet the farm that it will be cloudy and rainy that day and the whole thing will be a bust!

👍 8 ↻ ⋮

· Jan 25

I was present for the 2017 total solar eclipse when the now-defunct Salem-Keizer Volcanos hosted the Hillsboro Hops in Class A action of the short-season Northwest League.

The first pitch was thrown at 9:51 am. After a four-run half inning the game was suspended temporarily as the stadium went dark and the temperature dropped five degrees. Players, fans ... everyone was in awe.

<https://www.theringer.com/mlb/2017/8/22/16184140/salem-keizer-volcanoes-total-solar-eclipse>

The game resumed in a different light ... literally and figuratively.

<https://www.mlb.com/gameday/hops-vs-volcanoes/2017/08/21/504381/final/box>

Daulton Varsho homered twice ... once before the eclipse and once after.

👍 8 ↻ 1 ⋮

N Noah H. · Jan 26

I was there too! I completely forgot Daulton Varsho homering, somehow that wasn't the days highlight.

👍 1 ↻ ⋮

L Leon C. · Jan 25

How exciting! Back in 2017 I drove eight hours from central Texas to St. Joseph, Missouri to be in the path of totality. Sadly the day turned out to be cloudy and overcast, although it was cool to experience totality. Thankfully I live in the totality path for the 2024 eclipse, although I still have to decide whether I want to stay at home where I'll get just over 2 minutes of totality or if I want to drive an hour south where I can get double the totality time.

👍 6 ↻ ⋮

Y Yossi R. · Jan 25

Not sure what I liked more, the photo or the headline. Deftly done.

👍 6 ↻ ⋮

E Evan B. · Jan 25

Awesome article

👍 6 ↻ ⋮

R Robert H. · Jan 25

Nature's way of hiding the fact that the season will end in a blaze of glory. Go, Guardians!

👍 5 ↻ ⋮

B Bruce C. · Jan 25

interesting, thanks for sharing.

👍 4 ↻ ...

W Wayne B. · Jan 25

Fun story... Thanks.

👍 4 ↻ ...

D David S. · Jan 25

They're counting on a clear day in early April?

👍 4 ↻ ...

J Jim P. · Jan 27

A Day/Night/Day Singleheader

👍 4 ↻ ...

N Nathan T. · Jan 25

You have to do something with it. Too much revenue and fan / community engagement would be left on the table

👍 3 ↻ ...

P Pat R. · Jan 25

If the Guardians make opening day a night game many fans will be extremely angry. (Me included) Many of us bought opening day ticket to have the experience of a lifetime.

👍 3 ↻ ...

J Joe S. · Jan 25

Experienced the 2017 total eclipse in central Wyoming, and it was WAY cooler than I expected. The difference between 98% and 100% is far greater than one might expect (think 2% open curtains vs. 0%). We were traveling north, and southbound I-25 (heading to Denver) was a parking lot afterward.

I say go with a 12:05 first pitch...maybe 11:45. The game should be over in time to get those fans without a view onto the field for a view. That would be an unforgettable experience!

👍 3 ↻ ...

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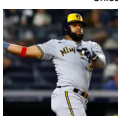
By Sam Blum

19h ago

Welcome to the Shabai! Obteniz realty and more

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