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Locals get things started at City of Palms

Cape resident throws out first pitch, while NFM man sings national anthem

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It was your average day at the ballpark for most of the 8,000 fans who came to City of Palms Park today as the Boston Red Sox took on the Cincinnati Reds. But for locals Ray Cahoon and Jay Johnson, there was a little more at stake than the game's outcome.

Pride was on the line.

Johnson, 39, who owns Bubba's Roadhouse in Cape Coral, threw out the game's first pitch, while North Fort Myers resident Ray Cahoon sang the "Star Spangled Banner." Both were somewhat nervous as they waited in the City of Palms executive office before game time.

"The more people ask, the more nervous I get," Johnson said. "I was fine this morning."

Johnson said he played catch on Monday for about an hour to help prepare him to get the ball over the plate. His hard work paid off as his pitch reached home plate without bouncing.

Cahoon was concerned about a different pitch, his voice.

"I practiced two or three times (today) Cahoon, 78, said. "I should have it under my belt, but the hardest part is getting the pitch right."

Cahoon said last time he performed the song in public, he started the song too high, which caused a crack in his voice as the notes raised. Today, however, Cahoon knocked it out of the park as fans cheered midway through the song.

"It's pretty awesome looking at everyone," he said. "Everyone's attention is on you. That's quite a moment."

This was Cahoon's eighth time performing at City of Palms. Each year, auditions are held to see who makes the cut and who doesn't. Because the Sox are heading to Japan in the middle of the month, there are less home games this year than usual, which means fewer would be selected to sing this season.

"It's a short season," Cahoon said. "And I'm not getting any younger. I (had) to compete against the young kids."

Red Sox game day operation intern Amanda Jackson said about 25 people auditioned for the 12 available spots.

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