

FROM THE BULLPEN

The Nebraska Hot Stove League



of the Summer of '68, "The Year of the Pitcher"



Bob Gibson



Denny McLain

2018 Campaign

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Amigos!

Happy Spring, finally! It looks like a glorious weekend of weather, and a fine time to be an American, a Nebraskan, alive, sane [FN 1], sober [FN 2], and a member of the outstanding Bakers' Dozen known as the Hot Stove League!

Here are the standings through Week 5 ending April 29, 2018:

1	Cubs	2243.0	-
2	Monarchs	2149.0	94.0
3	Tigers	2148.3	94.7
4	Redbirds	2114.2	128.8
5	Senators	2113.9	129.1
6	Bums	2080.4	162.6
7	Wahoos	2075.2	167.8
8	Chiefs	2051.5	191.5
9	Skipjacks	2028.1	214.9
10	Blues	1955.1	287.9
11	Bears	1954.8	288.2
12	Tribe	1853.5	389.5
13	Bombers	1796.3	446.7

With eight teams within 200 points of the lead, this season is shaping up as perhaps the most competitive of all in our vaunted HSL history. Although injuries can change things in a hurry, and teams can sometimes catch lightning in a bottle [FN 3], this season has all the makings of a bare-knuckled brawl to the bitter end. Stay focused, stay competitive, and stay tuned.

TOP HITTERS

1.	Didi Gregorius	Tigers	171.1
2.	Manny Machado	Blues	152.5
3.	Mookie Betts	Monarchs	148.6
4.	Ozzie Albies	Chiefs	144.8
5.	Mike Trout	Wahoos	143.5
6.	Aaron Judge	Bombers	142.6
7.	Bryce Harper	Chiefs	140.5
8.	Jed Lowrie	Wahoos	137.9
9.	Mitch Haniger	Blues	136.6
10.	Freddie Freeman	Bears	129.0
11.	Javier Báez	Monarchs	125.4
12.	Carlos Correa	Skipjacks	124.8
13.	Rhys Hoskins	Chiefs	122.2
14.	Asdrúbal Cabrera	Skipjacks	121.0
15.	Mike Moustakas	Wahoos	117.6
16.	Matt Chapman	Bums	117.3
17.	A.J. Pollock	Tribe	115.1
18.	George Springer	Cubs	114.5
19.	Charlie Blackmon	Tigers	112.7
20.	Jose Altuve	Redbirds	112.4
21.	Robinson Canó	Tigers	112.3
22.	Christian Villanueva	Tribe	111.4
23.	Matt Davidson	Tribe	111.3
24.	Nick Markakis	Senators	110.8
25.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	110.3

TOP PITCHERS

1.	Corey Kluber	Redbirds	188.0
1.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	188.0
3.	Gerrit Cole	Wahoos	186.0
3.	Justin Verlander	Blues	186.0
5.	Sean Manaea	Senators	183.0
6.	Patrick Corbin	Tigers	181.0
7.	Rick Porcello	Chiefs	166.0

8.	Jacob deGrom	Skipjacks	156.0
9.	Luis Severino	Bombers	152.0
10.	Johnny Cueto	Cubs	147.0
11.	Blake Snell	Bears	146.0
12.	Carlos Martínez	Monarchs	145.0
13.	J.A. Happ	Tribe	139.0
14.	Chris Sale	Bums	138.0
15.	Carlos Carrasco	Senators	135.0
16.	Aaron Nola	Monarchs	130.0
17.	Noah Syndergaard	Monarchs	129.0
18.	Trevor Williams	Monarchs	128.0
19.	Charlie Morton	Redbirds	125.0
20.	Hyun-Jin Ryu	Cubs	124.0
21.	Lance McCullers Jr.	Bears	123.0
22.	Chad Bettis	Blues	118.0
22.	Masahiro Tanaka	Cubs	118.0
24.	Ivan Nova	Cubs	117.0
25.	Trevor Bauer	Redbirds	115.0

TALES FROM OPENING MONTH TRIP

Unfortunately, my two-week appointment with a federal judge and jury in Lincoln prevented a true *Opening Day* adventure for the Ernst boys and friend McBlunder this year, so our merry band made lemonade out of lemons and ventured to Milwaukee and Chicago the weekend before last for an *Opening Month* weekend of baseball. A few random memories, comments and then photographs from that red-letter junket:



Milwaukee received 10 inches of snow in two blasts during the week of our visit. Pretty weird to see huge piles of snow all around Miller Park. No wonder there is a bar on every block.



Even with the dome closed because of the temperatures in the high 40s and low 50s, Miller Park is a much better place to watch a game than I remember. The mass tailgating in the parking lot with the avid and thirsty cheesehead faithful was not unappreciated.



Watching the televised Huskers Spring Game from the *Who's on Third* pub in downtown Milwaukee was a special treat, especially with our new favorite Spotted Cow local brew flowing freely from the tap.



Seeing Brewer slugger Jesus Aguilera win the Saturday night game against the Marlins with an epic 13-pitch, walk-off home run was

awesome. Hearing the crowd chant, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" was remarkable, if sacrilegious. Speculation was that the headline in the sports pages of the Milwaukee newspaper the following morning would likely read, "Jesus Saves," or words to that effect.



The trip was capped off with a Sunday afternoon visit to *Guaranteed Rate Stadium* [FN 4] in the southside of Chicago, for an afternoon contest against the reigning world champion Astros. On a brisk but sunny day, premium seats behind home plate went for a paltry 25 bucks. Our merry foursome saw Astros starter Lance McCullers toss six solid innings of Quality Start ball, giving up 8 hits and 1 earned run while striking out 3. Although the Sox took an early lead of 1-0 in the bottom of the second, the 'Stros tied it up in the top of the 5th before taking the lead and then closing the door on the hometown heroes with 5 runs in the top of the seventh. Springer, Altuve and Correa all recorded hits and were plated at least once each during the game, while Evan Gattis went Yard for the Astros in the top of the ninth for the final run in a 7-1 bashing of the Southsiders.



IDs, gentlemen?



First night at Miller Park: Let the Festivities Begin! [FN 5]



A Bloody Mary Morning at Who's on Third
Now look who's smiling!



Tailgating at Miller Park
(Joe with Beesley Ernst's Betrothed)



Will The Thrill and Joe Beeson Square Off



Miller Park, Game 2: Is Everybody Happy? [FN 6]



The Famous Mars Cheese House



Comrades in Arms at Comiskey

YOU KIN LOOK IT UP!

I am currently smack dab in the middle of a wonderful new book about Mickey Mantle that Linda found for me, entitled *A Season in the Sun: The Rise of Mickey Mantle*. More on the book next issue, but for now I have to share a wonderful quote from the Ol' Perfessor, Casey Stengel. It seems that starting pitcher Don Larsen was struggling mightily in the early going in the 1956 season, to the point that Casey Stengel was considering demoting him to the bullpen. Part of that problem may have been that the legendary imbibor Larsen was then tipping the bottle with great regularity, in spite of his proclamation that spring that, "I'm through living it up," and "I'm buckling down to business. This time I mean it." [FN 7] In a classic case of actions speaking louder than his words, about a month later, at right around 5 a.m., Larsen crashed his glittering new Oldsmobile convertible into a telephone pole while still at Spring Training in Florida. While members of the Fourth Estate did not press him when he claimed to have fallen asleep at the wheel, Larsen later admitted to Stengel that he had been visiting St. Petersburg's watering holes.

According to the book, writers were surprised that the Yankees did not punish Larsen for this indiscretion. In response, the inimitable Casey reportedly said:

"Fine him?" said Stengel. "He oughta get an award, finding something to do in *this* town after midnight."

That one cracked me up.

R.I.P. MARK SEEM

I don't know that any of you will remember him, but our former pastor at Pella Lutheran Church, Mark Seem, who officiated at my first wedding way back in 1990, passed away last week at the tender age of 65 years old. A native Minnesotan with a wonderful Minne-soooaaata accent, I was blessed by Mark's friendship for almost thirty years, and I will forever be indebted to him for baptizing our first three children and officially blessing One Particular Harbor, our former family home.

After we made the very difficult decision years ago to change congregations from Pella Lutheran downtown to St. Thomas in West Omaha, I stayed in contact with Pastor Seem and had lunch with him one or two times a year, until his recent affliction with dementia. A wonderful, inspirational leader of the Pella flock, and all-around good man, he will be missed.



Pastor Mark Seem

IT'S A WRAP

To close out this issue of *From the Bullpen*, congratulations to Shamu on his retirement from the pressure-packed world of a claimbuster, and the best of luck to him [FN 8] on finding clean public restrooms in which to read the box scores.

And on a more serious note, prayers, high hopes and best wishes to Big Guy as he recovers from his extensive surgery this past week, which guarantees that he will be less of an ass than he was before. Godspeed on your recovery, Rick.

Skipper

FN 1 Although I can't speak for all of us.

FN 2 With one obvious exception.

FN 3 See 1998, when the **Blues** pulled a Ben Franklin and took a fair-to-middling squad to Stretch's first-ever Hot Stove League crown, by a flipping landslide, no less.

FN 4 Just rolls off your tongue, doesn't it? I refuse to call it anything other than *Comiskey II*.

FN 5 Stretch's thought bubble: Here come those damn mascots. Damn.

FN 6 Actually, that *is* Stretch's Happy Face.

FN 7 I wonder how many times our own Foster has uttered these same words. Countless.

FN 8 And especially, his wife and daughters.