



Bob Gibson and Stan Musial,
Spring Training 1961, Tampa Bay

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

FROM THE BULLPEN

2020 Campaign

Edition No. 10

June 11, 2020

COMMISH GUARANTEES BASEBALL IN 2020!

Gentlemen:

Hallelujah! I read in this morning's paper that Commissioner Manfred has now said it is a "100% chance" that there will be a baseball season this year, even if he has to issue an executive order.¹ Not sure he has the authority to do this, but we need baseball, so issue away.

That said, let's continue to keep our eye on Saturday, June 27, as a potential Hot Stove League Draft Day at BT's² manor in East Lincoln.

STILL TIME TO LISTEN

Following up on the last issue from the last edition of FTB, I provide you herewith an excellent article from the *Wall Street Journal* and its sportswriter Jason Gay:

¹ I don't take it as a good sign that he is starting to sound like POTUS.

² Big Treasury.

LET'S LISTEN TO WHAT IS BEING SAID

As cities boil over, pleas from sports figures to hear the voices in the streets.



Authorities in cities across the U.S. used tear gas, curfews and arrests in an attempt to contain violent protests sparked by the death of George Floyd. WSJ reporters in Minneapolis, Chicago and Los Angeles describe the worst civil unrest to erupt across the country in decades.

By Jason Gay:

A humble ask from a sports columnist:

Pay attention.

Pay attention to what's happening in America.

Pay attention to who is speaking out, and who is laying low.

Pay attention to what's happening in the streets, the fire, the chaos, the hearts that are breaking...but also pay attention to the anger.

Hear it. This anger that's playing out, it isn't new. It's built up over years, decades, generations upon generations. It's foundational.

Listen to what your neighbors are saying. Take in every word.

Also, pay attention to who is listening—and who is just talking over what is being said. See who is taking it in, and who is simply making noise.

Yes: I know I'll get bombarded with "Stick to sports!" messages, as if sports or any other part of American culture can be magically detached from the real pain people are feeling. I know folks turn to this column for entertainment, or terrible Dad jokes, and I'm grateful for that.

But "stick to sports" feels like a plea to ignore the truth.

Besides, let's be real, friends: 98% of the time this column is about cats and bikes.

This crisis, it isn't somebody else's. It belongs to all of us.

It's agonizing. And honestly, right now, I think it's preferable for me to listen to what other people are saying. So here are some words from people around sports:

"You can't tell me when that man had his knee on my brother's neck, taking his life away, with his hand in his pocket, that smirk on his face didn't say, 'I'm protected,' " Stephen Jackson, retired NBA player and friend of George Floyd.

"A lot of us growing up were taught to pray 'Let thy kingdom come,' [and] this is what I continue to pray for, in addition to so many that have been hurt/killed, or simply traumatized by how people of a different color are treated. The worst part is this is nothing new, 'it's just filmed,' " Serena Williams.

"Am I next?" American tennis phenom Coco Gauff, age 16.

"Fifty-four years ago, I was an 8-year-old boy living in rural Kentucky when the schools were desegregated. I walked into a white school where I was not wanted nor welcomed. At that time there were no cellphones to record my treatment, no cable news stations with 24/7 coverage, no social media to record the reality of the situation or offer support nor condemnation. But I can remember exactly how I felt as an 8-year-old child. I felt helpless. I felt as if I was neither seen, nor heard, nor understood. As I have watched the events unfold in the days following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, a city where I coached and once called home, I see how many people continue to feel those same feelings—helpless, frustrated, invisible, angry...

"Fifty-four years later, my son is now 8-years-old and I look at the world he is growing up in and wonder, how much has really changed?" Dwane Casey, head coach, Detroit Pistons.

"Just because it isn't happening to you doesn't mean it isn't happening at all," Naomi Osaka, tennis player.

"I feel like sitting back and being quiet, that's literally going to solve nothing, so at least get a conversation going. Even if you don't want to do it publicly, that's fine, that's not your venue. But at the same time, you can maybe take what I said and talk about it individually. Even if you disagree with me, why do you disagree? That's fine if you don't agree, but at the same time, why don't you think that those viewpoints are valid?" Brianna Turner, WNBA player.

"There are no more cheeks to turn," Jaylen Brown, NBA player.

"Many people who broadcast their opinions on [Colin Kaepernick] kneeling or on the hiring of minorities [to NFL senior positions] don't seem to have an opinion on the recent murders of these young black men and women. I think many of them quietly say that watching George Floyd plead for help is one of the more horrible things they have seen, but it's said amongst themselves where no one can hear. Broadcasting that opinion clearly is not important enough," Brian Flores, head coach, Miami Dolphins.

"We need people who aren't black, we need people who aren't brown. When you know these things are happening in your society...have a voice, a legitimate one, lock and step with us, protest with us, post with us, not just when it's convenient, when it can be uncomfortable," Jalen Rose, retired NBA player ESPN analyst.

"The black community needs our help. They have been unheard for far too long. Open your ears, listen, and speak. This isn't politics. This is human rights," Joe Burrow, No. 1 pick, 2020 NFL Draft.

"To me, this is bigger than football, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder," Colin Kaepernick, August 2016.

"Do you understand now? Or is it still blurred to you?" LeBron James, May 27.

"The bottom line is, if you stay home, your messages stays home with you. If you stand for justice and equality, you have an obligation to find the biggest possible megaphone to let your feelings be known," John Carlos, 2013, talking to Dave Zirin about a potential Olympic boycott, but a message that thoroughly applies today.

That's all I got right now.

I love you all. Pay attention. Stay safe. Listen.

COUNTING COURTHOUSES

With minor league baseball off for the entire 2020 season, I have rechanneled my energy and attention to another travel-related hobby, visiting Nebraska's courthouses. In the span of my 37-year legal career, I have had official "law business," (i.e., jury trial, bench trial, deposition, hearing), in 32 of our state's 93 courthouses, primarily in the eastern third of the state. While at one stage of my career I thought I might eventually have a chance to practice law in one form or another in maybe half of our state's courthouses, that goal no longer seems feasible since many of the more rural counties rarely have jury trials, and there are very few civil cases filed in so many of these jurisdictions. And most insurance companies are not going to pay an Omaha lawyer to handle a case in, say, Sioux County, Nebraska in the far northwest corner of the state.³

So a couple of years ago, when I had to make a couple of trips through the Sandhills for depositions out west, I decided that if I was ever in the vicinity of a Nebraska courthouse, whether I had official business in that particular courthouse or not, I would visit it. Over the span of a couple of years, I was able to pay visits to courthouses in such remote outposts as Sidney, Tryon, Mullen, Arthur, Hyannis, Oshkosh⁴, Kimball and Harrisburg, to name a few. The architecture of these courthouses is quite varied and often quite beautiful, particularly the courthouse buildings that were built between 1890 and, say, 1925, and anchor the courthouse square of their community. I always enjoy going in these county courthouses and, if court is not in session, walking in and checking out the courtroom, sitting in the judge's chair, and imagine trying a jury trial to 12 fine citizens of that particular community. Most of the courtrooms have photographs of the different judges who presided in that courtroom, some going all the way back to when Nebraska was a territory.

A couple of weeks ago when I made my visit to Niobrara, I tried to visit courthouses in Pierce (Pierce County), Hartington (Cedar County), and Pender (Thurston County), but the courthouse doors were all locked tight because of COVID-19, which I figured would probably be the case. But on the drive home I silently vowed to try to find a date after our state "opened up" to call on several of the courthouses that I have not yet visited, before my deposition and work calendars start getting filled up with commitments in another week or two.

ROAD TRIP!

So this Monday past, with unbridled anticipation, I brewed myself a pot of coffee, grabbed a couple of protein bars, fired up the Ford Explorer, and headed south on Highway 50, bound for Pawnee City, Nebraska, the county seat of Pawnee County. Once there, I found the county courthouse located in the heart of their downtown square area, looking real nice and open for business. Here is a picture of the Pawnee County Courthouse:

³ Although I have had cases as far west as Scottsbluff, Chadron, Alliance and Valentine.

⁴ I have a great story about Oshkosh. Next time you are bored and have 20 minutes, let me know.



There wasn't much business going on at this courthouse, so I was able to make my way upstairs for a peek into the district courtroom, which is adequate but nothing to write home about. While driving to and then leaving the courthouse, I noticed that downtown Pawnee City seems to be a surviving if not thriving business community, without a single vacant storefront that I could observe. When I was a little kid, we often drove home from my grandparents' homes in northeast Kansas through Pawnee City, and I remembered it to be what looked like a dying town then, so I'm not sure what has happened to rev up this community's economic engine, but it appears to be working.

GAGE COUNTY

Next on the Monday menu was Beatrice, Nebraska, county seat of Gage County. Again, no real courtroom business going on, and so the security officer from the Sheriff's Department, an affable lawman by the name of Sgt. Brian Johnson, gave me a tour of the recently-restored district and county courtrooms, both of which are quite beautiful, with 30- to 40-foot high ceilings and beautiful, ornamental woodwork. Not that I want to be a judge, because I don't, but if I was a judge, these are the kind of courtrooms that I would want to hold court in. The district courtroom had an impressive number of photographs of past Gage County judges, all the same size and carefully matted and framed, representing jurisprudence going back way more than a century. It also had two giant photographs of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington looking down at the jurors from above. Very impressive.

The exterior appearance of the Beatrice courthouse is also quite beautiful:



My parents and Kathi and I actually lived in Beatrice from 1957, after moving from California, to 1960, when we moved to Lincoln. This is the house that we lived in:



I did not have the address with me while on my trip, so I didn't stop by for a walk down Memory Lane, but to be honest, I'm not sure I have any true memories from those tender years of my youth, ages 1-4.

On my way out of Beatrice and on to the next county seat in Fairbury, I drove past a baseball field where Will's *Dirtbags* team played in a tournament back in 2008 or 2009, which included one game in which his pitching mojo was nonexistent and he got lit up like a Christmas tree, the only time I can remember that happening in his pitching career.⁵

JEFFERSON COUNTY

My next courthouse visit was in Fairbury, Nebraska, county seat of Jefferson County. Here is a picture of their beautiful courthouse, likewise located at the hub of an immaculate courthouse square.

⁵ And what I remember most is that he was getting more and more upset with the umpire, and showing it by his body language and his facial expressions. After the game one of his coaches (me) told him that if he struggled on the mound, he had to be a "sphinx" and never let the hometown umpire see him be upset with ball and strike calls. I guess it worked. Who woulda thought.



Fairbury's town leaders must also be doing something right, because there wasn't a vacant storefront all around the entire downtown area, on any of the streets facing the courthouse. Less fortunately, once inside, I was greeted sternly by a grumpy little member of the sheriff's department who quite apparently had a Napoleonic complex, and after stating my business he brusquely informed me that I could not go inside the courtrooms because they were "technically closed," because of some recent damage to the interior. When I told him that I had traveled quite a ways to see the courthouse, and didn't know when I would be in the neighborhood again--trying to appeal to his decency and sense of public service--he said he really didn't have the time to help me out for a peek inside the courtroom, because he was the only person there to attend to his station, which was as dead as the remains inside Grant's Tomb. Some people just have way too much power.

BALM IN GILEAD

After leaving Fairbury, I headed west on Highway 136. Once in adjoining Thayer County, I came across the tiny hamlet known as Gilead, population 38 in 2018 (and dropping). The sign which welcomes you when entering Gilead reassuringly tells you that "*There is a balm in Gilead*," whatever that means.⁶ Actually, Gilead is so small, you pretty much enter and leave it at the same time, and if you blink, you'll miss it.

Continuing further west on Highway 136, I decided not to stop in Hebron, the county seat of Thayer County, because I have been to that courthouse before only a few years ago, and I had a tight schedule to keep, you see.

MEMORIES OF MA STRUVE

The next town I encountered on my drive was Deshler, known not only as the home of the Deshler Broom Factory, but also as the hometown of Florence "Stump" Struve⁷, the house mother for the Theta Xi fraternity at UNL when Mouse and I were roommates. In fact, the two-man room that we had together ("The Loft") was located *directly* above Mother Struve's "apartment" in our fraternity house. On one memorable evening, we had about 15 of our brothers and about 15 lucky ladies in our room with a maximum capacity of about 8, and we had the music turned up so loud, and we were dancing and carrying on⁸ so exuberantly⁹, that the following day Mother Struve told our fraternity president that she thought that a tornado had hit the fraternity house. Belated apologies, Mother Struve. And may you rest in peace.

But I digress. The next county seat I came to was the village of Nelson, Nebraska, county seat for Nuckolls County. According to the sign just outside of Nelson, there are 488 people living there, which may be some puffery. The courthouse is quite beautiful, as shown below.

⁶ Wikipedia says the song "There is Balm in Gilead" is a traditional African American spiritual, and the "balm in Gilead" is a reference from the Old Testament, but the lyrics of this spiritual refer to the New Testament concept of salvation through Jesus Christ:

There is balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole;
There's power enough in heaven,
To cure a sin-sick soul.

⁷ Her nickname wasn't because she resembled Stump Merrill of the Yankees, but because she was quite short and liked to stomp around the house, and catching mischievous Theta Xians misbehaving, particularly with coeds.

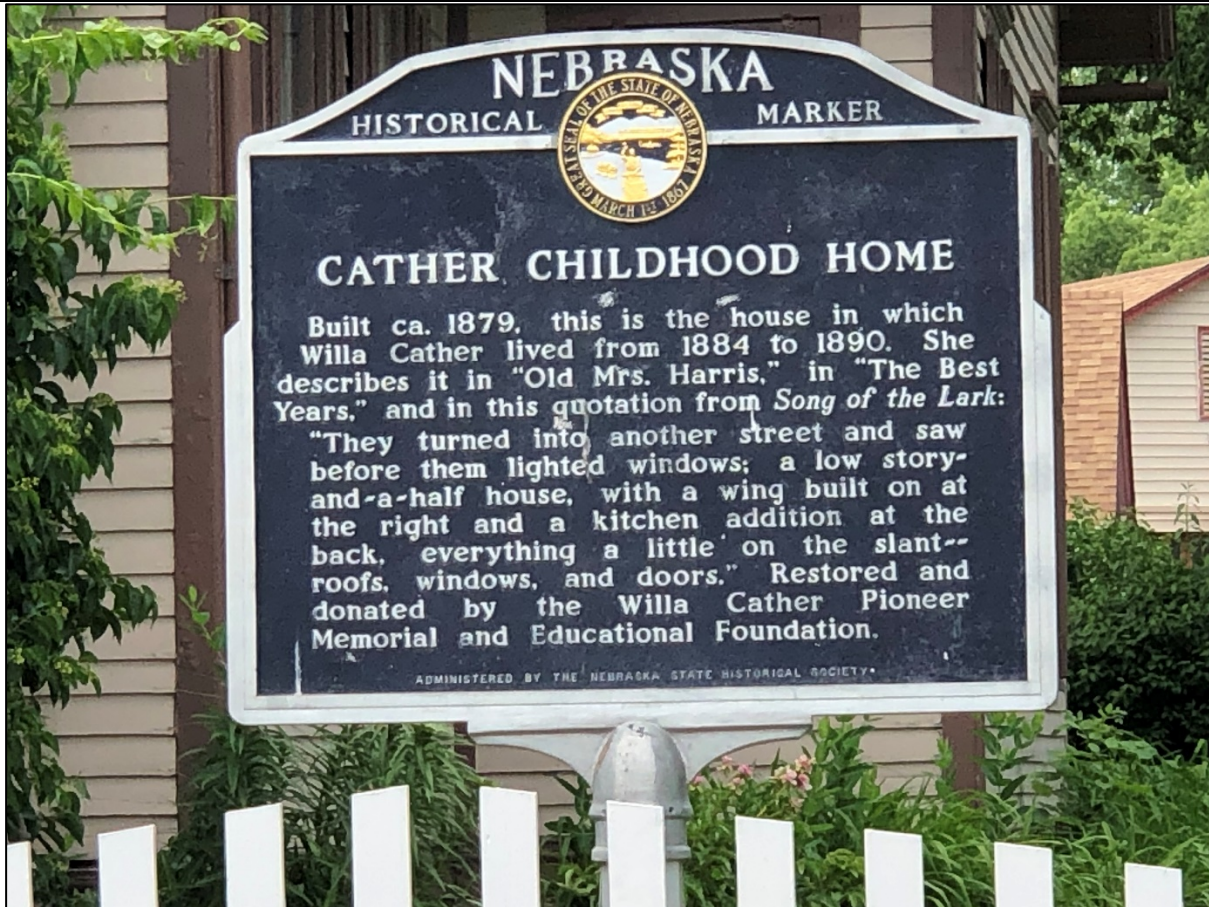
⁸ Well, Mouse was.

⁹ I'm pretty sure it was Mouse who encouraged people to jump up and down and do the *Dump Stump Jump*.



However, upon my attempt to enter the building to see the courtrooms, I was informed by a courthouse employee of apparent long tenure that the courthouse was closed to the public because of COVID-19, and would not open up until next week. Well, there must have been about 20 vehicles in the parking lot, and so I asked her would it be possible for her to make an exception and to let me in for a quick peek at the courtrooms since I would not be in that area again, possibly ever, and she said she would have to check with her supervisor. Moments later, she poked her head outside the door and told me that she was sorry, but there were no exceptions to the rule. Crap. Again, way too much power vested in some people.

Shaking the dust from the crummy little village of Nelson off my shoes, it was back on Highway 136 toward Red Cloud, which was my planned end point for this little junket. One of the little towns along the way is Guide Rock, Nebraska, with a population of 225 people and the proud home of the Warriors, the 1976 six-man football champions. After that epic event, they no doubt celebrated at Deano's Bar and Grill, a little hole in the wall which advertises its *Good Food, Good Drink and Good Times*. I'll bet.



Finally I reached Red Cloud, home of Willa Cather, and famous because of her mention of the town in several of her books.¹⁰ It is a quaint little town, population 1,020, and has several buildings and businesses which are directly tied to Willa Cather's fame. Unfortunately, the museum was closed because of COVID-19, but I did get to see the Webster County courthouse, shown below:

¹⁰ I am told. I'm not sure I have ever read any of them, although my high school English teacher, David Strange,^A might have forced us to read *My Antonia* or *O Pioneers!* right after *The Scarlet Letter*.

^A Who was very strange.



It is a quite beautiful structure, very well maintained, and a clear source of civic pride. The district courtroom is pretty rustic, but looks authentic.

On the way out of town, I noticed that Red Cloud's only hotel is named "Green Acres," which by coincidence is the name of Brother Itchie's new farming operation.¹¹

After my visit to Red Cloud, I decided to take a different route back and try to pick off a couple more courthouses, but to my chagrin, the courthouses in Clay Center (county seat of Clay County) and Aurora (Hamilton County) were closed because of the COVID-19 virus, and so I was not able to go inside these two beautiful courthouses and could merely observe them from the outside.

¹¹ I recently discovered, while golfing with Itchie a couple of weeks ago, that Annie has inherited some farmland from her mother's estate, and since Big Johnny is retired and all, he has decided that he is going to become a "gentleman farmer" and work the land to support his gambling habit. A modern-day Mr. Douglas, for sure.



Clay County courthouse



Hamilton County courthouse

I guess they didn't get the memo from Governor Ricketts.

EPILOGUE

So to sum up, it was a very good day. I didn't spend one minute of it looking at emails, and I got to see six new courthouses, three from the outside and three on the outside and inside. I got to visit Red Cloud, something that I have intended to do for some time. And I dictated enough letters and legal briefs along the way to keep us off the welfare rolls for another few weeks. I love this country.

BALTIMORE CHOP

During the pandemic, I hope that each of us has learned how to appreciate simple things, in a time of sometimes overwhelming monotony. Just last week as I was sitting out on my back deck, at about 7 a.m. on a resplendent June morning, I was reading a great book about the bombing of London in World War II, and sipping on a flavorful, piping hot mug of coffee. As I looked up from my book, our resident oriole--whom we have dubbed "Cal"--put on a marvelous, otherworldly aerial display right before my very eyes. Cal, who has the most beautiful bright orange plumage I have ever seen on a bird, was making his usual rounds in our backyard, flitting from the top of our backyard fence to the little lake behind us, back and forth, perhaps patrolling for food for his little family, or merely keeping guard. As he made one of his loops around the pond, a large crane, about ten times as big as Cal, apparently made a hostile move toward the family nest, and Cal started chasing after this foul fowl with reckless abandon. I watched in amazement as Cal frenetically chased Crabby Carl the Crane around the pond, following his every move and doing two of the coolest loop-de-loops I have ever seen, finally dispatching a disgraced Crabby Carl to another neighborhood pond. It was amazing. If I could have videotaped it, it would have gone viral. It was like watching an RAF ace fighter in his Spitfire chasing after a Nazi Luftwaffe fighter pilot in his Messerschmitt. Our Cal, protector of the pond.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

From *The Guardian*, David Smith in Washington and Dominic Rushe in New York
Fri 5 Jun 2020 15.12 EDT

Donald Trump was condemned on Friday for making the "revolting, enraging, disrespectful" claim that George Floyd, an African American man killed by police, is looking down from heaven and praising the US economy.

The president attempted to take a victory lap after a better-than-expected jobs report showed the national unemployment rate falling to 13.3% last month, with 2.5m jobs gained. But there was a slight uptick in African American joblessness.

In White House remarks that folded digressions within digressions, Trump declared: "Today is probably, if you think of it, the greatest comeback in American history."

Speaking after the 10th night of mass anti-racism protests across the country, Trump suggested that Floyd, who died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes, would be happy about the figures.

"Hopefully George is looking down right now and saying this a great thing that's happening for our country," he said. "There's a great day for him.¹² It's a great day for everybody. It's a great day for everybody. There's a great, great day in terms of equality."

* * * * *

IN CLOSING

Have a Top Ten day and a terrific weekend, Brothers!

Skipper

¹² Hmm. A great day for George? -- who is now dead, and no longer a benefactor of *any* type of economy, at least not on this earth. Brilliant adlib, POTUS.