



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. 23

November 17, 2020

ONLY 135 DAYS UNTIL OPENING DAY!

In this grim season of the COVID, we all need something to look forward to, and for this group, what better than Opening Day! By my calculations, we are a mere 135 days away from the start of next year's baseball season, which is Thursday, April 1, 2021. With this date now on the calendar, let the counting begin!

Now that our 37th Hot Stove League season of competition is just around the corner, we should begin making plans for next year's Draft. Let's hope and pray that all 13 of us are still vertical next March, and fully-vaccinated so that we can again gather in person once more for the best day of the year. I will throw out Saturday, March 27, as a proposed Draft Day, and I ask any of you who have a conflict with this date to let all of us know as soon as possible so we can do some gerrymandering and get this blessed date on the calendar.

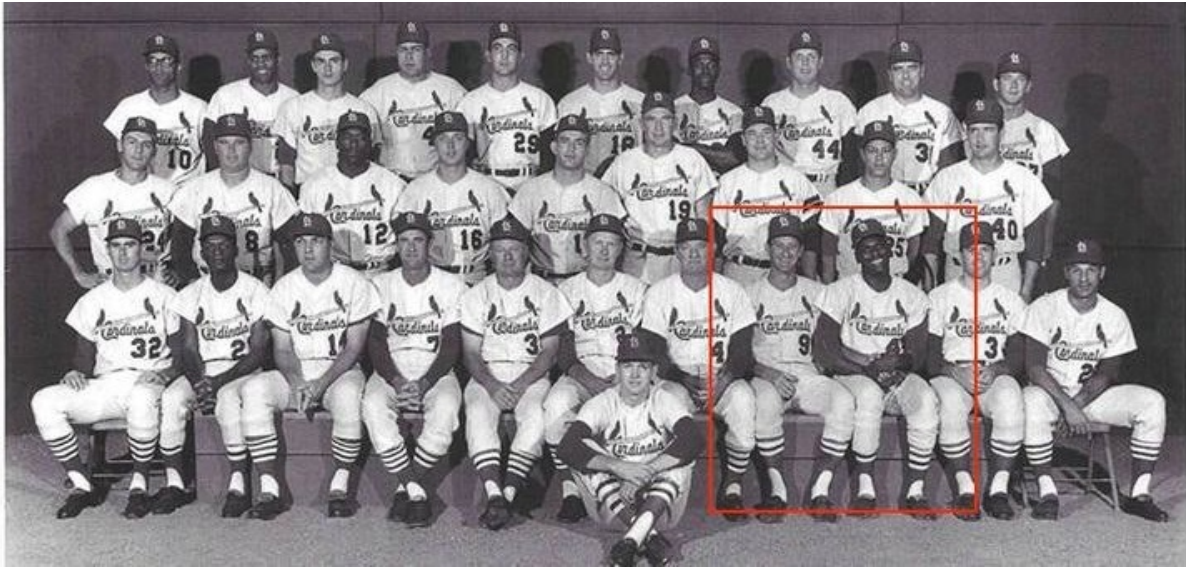
POSTSEASON AWARDS

It seems like there was very little fanfare over this year's postseason awards, and so if any of you missed them, here they are:

AL MVP:	José Abreu
ML MVP:	Freddie Freeman
AL Cy Young:	Shane Bieber
NL Cy Young:	Trevor Bauer
AL Rookie of the Year:	Kyle Lewis
NL Rookie of the Year:	Kevin Williams
AL Manager of the Year:	Kevin Cash
NL Manager of the Year:	Don Mattingly

UEK AND GIBBY

In recent issues of this organ, I have mentioned the great Bob Uecker and the late, great Bob Gibson. Linda recently came up with the below team photograph of the Cardinals from 1964, which Bob Uecker once showed to Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show. Check out the square box showing Uecker and Gibson in the front row, holding hands and grinning from ear to ear. Classic!



JUST FOR FUN

Since our man Itchie has been so darned quiet this season, let's see if we can rile him up a bit by reprinting a Top Ten from the February 19, 1997 edition of *From the Bullpen*, featuring JT's new home amenities:

ITCHIE'S TOP TEN LIST OF NEW HOME AMENITIES/FEATURES

10. Taxidermy and showroom for stuffing and exhibiting pheasants.
9. Computer Yahtzee room with life-size Ringo playing partner.
8. Simulated ticker-tape machine with infinite strand of ready-to-use insincere compliments for customers and FDR superiors.
7. Lazy Susan toupee holder in dressing room.
6. Guest house for Kato Kaelin or Carl McPipe or any of Anne's other "special friends."

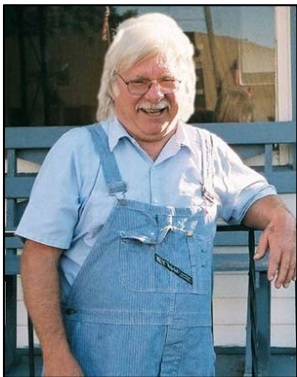
5. Central sound system to pipe Bread's Greatest Hits through every room of house.
4. Personalized talking vanity mirror which tells him "You 're the coolest" and "What a handsome dude" and "Knock 'em dead today, Tiger!"
3. Big screen TV room where he can watch idol Rusty the Bailiff on reruns of People's Court.
2. Central liposuction vacuum.
1. Pyramid-shaped shrine in basement to house Cub Scout certificates, bronze medal from 6th grade track meet, and photo of dead heat finish with Subby Anzaldo at Corporate Cup race.

Some things never change.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

With nothing on my work calendar last Friday to keep me in town, I ventured out on the road for another Nebraska county courthouse tour. As the COVID-19 pandemic has now spilled over into its tenth month, and is tightening its grip on all of us as we head into the holiday season, my go-to mental therapy has been to jump in the car and to follow the highways and byways to discover and rediscover the underappreciated beauty of this wonderful state.

On a beautiful, sun-splashed, late fall morning, I loaded up on caffeine and headed west to Grand Island on boring old Interstate 80, but once in G.I. I headed north on Highway 281 for the destination of Loup City, the county seat of Sherman County. But as I ventured north toward St. Paul,¹ where I would head west on Highway 92 toward Loup City, I was beguiled by a road sign telling me that the village of Dannebrog was just ten miles away, if I were to divert onto Highway 58 instead. I have always wanted to visit Dannebrog--home of Nebraska poet Roger Welsch, who was a very good friend² of our old neighbor, Bill Kloefkorn, and known to have a special affinity for consuming certain spirits in the company of Wild Bill and my dad while swapping a few tall tales in the warmth and glow of the Kloefkorn fire pit. I distinctly remember meeting Mr. Welsch when I was just a lad, and thinking that he was a very funny fellow, but a bit on the odd side, or to be more charitable, an eccentric--and home of the annual Liar's Contest. Upon reaching Dannebrog, widely advertised as the "Danish Capital of Nebraska," I found that the main artery through town is named *Roger Welsch Avenue*, an appropriate homage to their famous native son.



¹ The county seat of Howard County, which I visited for the first time just a few weeks ago, most well-known for being the home of the Nebraska Baseball Hall of Fame, and even more so for being the village where the great Grover Cleveland Alexander lived out his final days, sadly, as a rum-soaked panhandler.

² And a professor colleague of Bill at Nebraska Wesleyan University.

Dannebrog is a quaint little village of 303 people³ in the middle of the vastness of greater Nebraska, dwindling like most small Nebraska hamlets, but plainly still proud of its Danish heritage and determined to keep itself kempt and relevant. Worth the short detour.

LOUP CITY -- REVISITED

After my approval of Dannebrog, it was back on the road for the remaining 20 or so miles to Loup City, county seat of Sherman County. A town of 991 people, I recalled that I had been in this rock-ribbed Republican outpost once before during the summer of 1980 when I was living and working in Grand Island and playing on a softball team with a bunch of the locals. One weekend, we played in a softball tournament somewhere in Sherman County, and then spent an evening camping out at the Sherman County Reservoir, which included a visit to a Loup City saloon, where we were treated to a magnificent accordion solo by some old overall-clad Bohemian⁴ farmer, who clearly had been overserved and was drawing daggers from a woman whom I would presume was his wife. He no doubt had a rolling pin to the head in his future.

But I digress. And as we all know, I love to digress. So back to the courthouse.

Loup City can be proud of this beautiful courthouse building, which was built in the Beaux Arts-style and designed by Henningson Engineering Company of Omaha in 1920-1921.

Pictured below, the Sherman County Courthouse is a fitting edifice for a county that is named after William Tecumseh Sherman, the Civil War general who took over the Army of the West from General Grant and proceeded to kick the living daylights out of the Confederates in Georgia and elsewhere in the Old South, laying torch to Atlanta in the process.



³ According to the 2010 census, of which 97.62 are white, with no blacks, 1 Asian, and 1 Native American. That is your Greater Nebraska Diversity Program at work.

⁴ I'm both assuming and stereotyping here, since Loup City is largely populated with people of Bohemian descent, and, well, he just looked like an old Bohunk.)

Although the district courtroom was locked when I got to the courthouse, the court clerk was kind enough to unlock it for me once I took off my Biden/Harris lapel pin, and allowed me to see the heavily-wooded, well-preserved courtroom inside.

After my very satisfying tour of the Sherman County Courthouse, I hopped back into my vehicle for a quick--it probably took about a minute--survey of the village of Loup City, and discovered that there were more Trump signs still up in this town than once stood proudly in the front yards of all combined Hot Stove Leaguers of a certain persuasion⁵, even though the election was over some ten days earlier. See, for example:



⁵ You know who you are.

I guess they don't have access to newspapers or the internet in Loup City. But they do have lots of beer, more than enough to be cried in.

I probably shouldn't have been, but I was mildly stunned when I drove past this lovely little abode not a block away from the courthouse:



This proud Nebraskan and proud American who lives at 419 "N" Street in Loup City has decided that he's not going to allow the Deep South to have a corner on ignorance and racism, and so he proudly was flying the Confederate flag colors right along with the flag of his Commander-in-Chief. I was tempted to knock on his (okay, it could be a "her") door and ask him if he had a facemask that I could borrow for my next courthouse visit, but I fought off the urge. Good people on both sides.

On a cheerier note, on my way out of town to the next town, I passed the Loup City cemetery, and noticed that they have a "Bohemian" section dedicated to those of Bohemian descent⁶ which includes headstones bearing scores and scores of vowel-challenged surnames, such as: Vrbek, Slavicek, Novak, Cerny, Svoboda, Dvorak, Krejci, Smrz and Mottl.⁷

ONWARD TO ORD (HOME OF THE MIGHTY QUINN)

Upon exiting the incandescent enlightenment of Loup City, I ventured north on Highway 58 toward Ord. The first few miles of this drive is roughly parallel to the beautiful Middle Loup River, but then as one proceeds north into Valley County, the vast cornfields and grazing fields begin giving way to the Sandhills, as there is definitely a change in elevation and terrain. To the best of my knowledge, this was my first time setting foot into Valley County, and this is a drive that I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone. Many of the area farmers

⁶ We get it, Captain Obvious!

⁷ Frugal people that they were, these Eastern European descendants must have saved a pretty penny on tombstone-inscribing fees.

were still finishing up with their seasonal harvest, and there were large bales of hay everywhere the eye could see, and lots of farm machinery still on the road, hauling said bales of hay from place to place.

As I pulled into the town of Ord, I remembered that it was the hometown of former Husker quarterback Jeff Quinn, who as I recall was very good under center for the Big Red, but never quite good enough to get T.O. to the top of the heap. Anyway, I don't know if Quinn still lives in the area or not, but I did not see a single sign with his name on it, so perhaps he is not as beloved there as I would have thought. Or maybe more in an understated way.

In any event, the Valley County Courthouse, shown below, is another comely courthouse-square structure that bespeaks immense community pride. Built in the Beaux Arts-style and designed by architect William F. Gernandt, this courthouse is a 60-by-74-foot building, topped by a cornice, and above that, mutules and a parapet. It was completed in 1919, opened to the public in 1920, and has been kept in marvelous condition. Unfortunately, because district court was in session and the courtroom door was locked, I wasn't able to get a glimpse inside the courtroom. But I enjoyed walking around the rest of the building, which was festooned with many black and white photographs of the village and people of Ord from over the years.



NEXT STOP: BURWELL

Leaving Ord, my trusty roadmap informed me to get on Highway 11 for the short shot (17 miles) north and west to Garfield County and its seat of government, Burwell. The scenery on this segment of the drive was exquisite, following the north branch of the Loup River for several miles, and reaching higher and higher into the Sandhills. My visits to Burwell, home of the famous Burwell Rodeo, and Garfield County were both firsts for this wide-eyed so-journer. The town of Burwell just looks and feels like a cowboy town, and I definitely would

like to make it back someday for the Burwell Rodeo and to catch a few hours of bronc-busting and calf-roping, and to tip back a cold glass of beer or two at a local watering hole. Burwell just looks like it has a whole lot of character.



Although the courthouse appeared to be open, to my chagrin--and even though the sign on the door said it was open, and I could see lights on inside--the Garfield County Courthouse was locked up tighter than a bongo drum, and so all I have to show is a photograph of its exterior.



As you can see, it's not much to look at. So after thumbing my nose in the general direction of one of the apathetic courthouse denizens who couldn't be bothered by my visit that day, it was on my way to the next stop, the village of Taylor, some 13 miles away.

THE MISSING PEOPLE OF TAYLOR

To get from Burwell to Taylor, I found the best route to be Highway 91 in a westerly direction, just a few miles south of the Calamus Reservoir, which I was tempted to visit, but did not. In about four or five miles, I crossed over from Garfield County into Loup County, and soon was in the very small Sandhills village of Taylor, population 186, and 99.5% white per the 2010 census. However, I'm not sure there's actually *any* population in Taylor, because I didn't see a single live person during my short trip there.

I parked my vehicle just outside the Loup County Courthouse



and was glad to find out that the spartan little courthouse, built in 1957⁸ was unlocked and open for business. I went in and quickly was able to see the very little that there was to see inside, including the tiny little courtroom, paid a visit to the men's room, and then ushered myself out. Although I could hear someone inside the janitor's closet banging a mop bucket

⁸ In about a week, I assume.

around, I did not ever see this person, or any other person in the courthouse. I then left, and took the 37-second drive through downtown Taylor, and realized that I didn't see a single live person, but instead, a whole bunch of painted plywood cutouts of people, of all sizes, shapes, ages and ilk, including a presumed attorney at the courthouse. Here are a few of them of which I took pictures.







I think it is entirely possible that the village of Taylor was visited by extraterrestrials at some point in the last half century, and all the residents of the village of Taylor were taken away

by the E.T.s, and secreted away to Mars or sold to sex traffickers at a pizza parlor in Manhattan or some such thing, and the plywood cutouts installed in their place to cover their tracks until they completed their mission. I'm almost sure that I saw something on the QAnon website about this, but I will have to go back and take another look at that.

AND THEN IT WAS TIME TO GO HOME

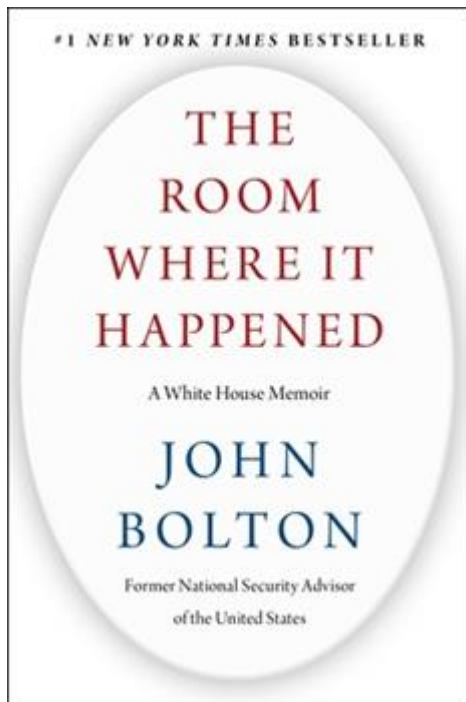
After leaving Taylor without seeing or talking to a single live person, I headed south on Highway 183 toward I-80, although for a fleeting moment I thought about extending my junket westward to the village of Brewster, home of the Blaine County Courthouse, and then on to Stapleton for a visit to the Logan County Courthouse, but decided to save these for a future pandemic boredom-breakup trip. This leg of my journey took me through the tiny villages of Sargent (pop. 506), Westerville (pop. 39), Ansley (pop. 423), Mason City (pop. 170), Litchfield (pop. 252), Hazard (pop. 67), Ravenna (pop. 1,369) and Cairo⁹ (pop. 795), spanning the distance and the ever-lower elevations of the glorious Sandhills to our flat-as-a-pancake I-80 corridor. The drive east on I-80 from GI to Omaha was anticlimactic, to say the least, but it at least allowed me the means to safely dictate this issue of FTB.¹⁰ All in all, another great day on the road.



⁹ No, Underbelly, not *that* Cairo, where I not only saw you ride a camel, but ride a camel with a fez on your dome.

¹⁰ Just don't tell HQ, please.

BOOK REPORT:
The Room Where It Happened



I just finished reading the John Bolton book about his explosive 17-month stint as the National Security Advisor to our outgoing POTUS. Coincidentally, I saw that a certain someone who shall remain nameless lashed out just this past Sunday via a tweet, calling Bolton “one of the dumbest people in government” after Bolton urged GOP party leaders to accept the 2020 election results and encouraged their support of the presumptive incoming President.

Like him or hate him, I would say that “dumb” is about the last adjective that any informed person would use about Bolton, the son of a Baltimore fireman who grew up in a working class neighborhood, went to Yale, and graduated summa cum laude. And this is particularly lacking credibility when it comes from someone who paid others to write his college papers and take his exams for him; and someone whose former Secretary of State referred to him as a *flipping moron*¹¹.

I have never actually liked Bolton and have always thought him to be a very dangerous man. But reading *The Room* has given me a certain amount of respect for him, because he is manifestly quite intelligent, and has held numerous positions in national security operations in numerous administrations. Whether you agree with his positions on North Korea and Iran or not, they are well thought out and well-articulated. So when he dubbed his former boss to be “unfit for office,” his words are of moment, and should be listened to.

SHORT HOPS

- How about Alex Cora getting his old job back as Red Sox manager, and A.J. Hinch going back to work as the manager of the Detroit Tigers. I guess these two teams have never heard of the maxim “Cheaters Never Prosper.”
- Plaudits to the Marlins for hiring the first female General Manager in a major men’s sports league in North America, Kim Ng, and by all accounts, a great choice. It will be interesting to see how she competes in this bastion of male whiteness. I wouldn’t bet against her.
- Is anyone making book of when our outgoing POTUS will call to congratulate his incoming counterpart? Give me the “overs,” as in “over his dead body.” Pure class.

¹¹ Although he didn’t say *flipping*.

- I hereby predict that our outgoing commander will first attempt to pardon himself, his two idiot sons, Ivanka and Jared, and/or crazy Rudy, before leaving the Oval Office kicking and screaming, whining and lying. Any takers?
- How 'bout them Huskers on Saturday? It wasn't always pretty, but against a better-than-their-record Penn State team, the Huskers competed on both sides of the ball, and finally pulled out a close one. I really believe Frost that they are approaching a turning point.
- Does anyone else have a better half whose hearing is so acute that she can pick up the sound of a basement bathroom fan being left on (by me, of course) when she is a block away from the house? Holy mostaccioli. I guess I'm a slow learner.
- We got so bored being shut-ins this past weekend that we bought a couple of 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzles, and spent hours piecing them together. So, what are the rest of you doing for fun these days? We all need to be thinking outside of the box.

THAT'S ALL, FOLKS!

That's about enough blither-blather for one issue. Have an awesome COVID-safe Thanksgiving and stuff yourselves silly. We all have so much to be thankful for this year, and I am so thankful for all of you.



Skipper