



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

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

FROM THE BULLPEN

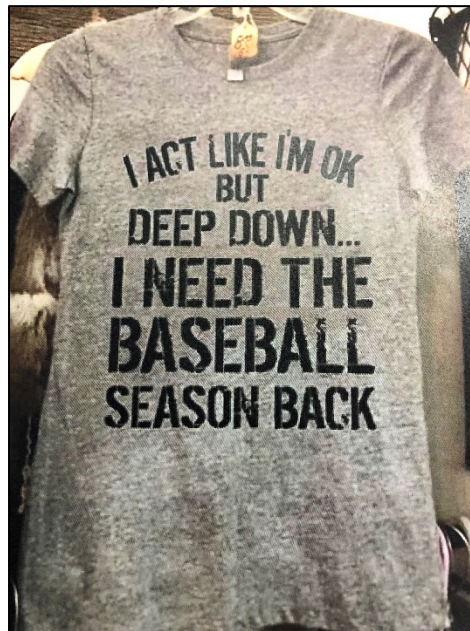
2020 Campaign

Edition No. 6

May 4, 2020

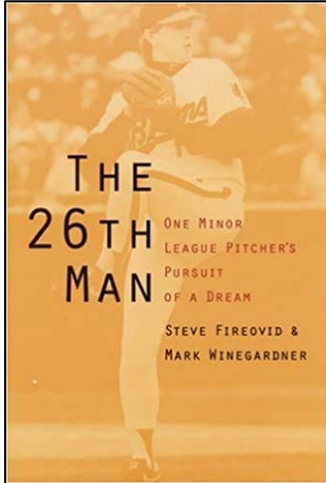
Brethren:

I hope you all had a safe, healthy and productive weekend, and I hope all of us are able to stay safe and be well as Nebraska begins to open up its economy.



To help lift our collective spirits, let's talk a little baseball. I am sure that most of you have already heard this, but the decision was made this past week to postpone the inductions of this year's Cooperstown class: Derek Jeter, Larry Walker, Sleepy Ted Simmons and Marvin Miller, set for the last week of July. Instead they will be inducted together with next year's class in July of 2021. I can think of no place I'd rather be that weekend than in Cooperstown, so I am going to do some checking into accommodations for the 2021 induction, and if any of you care to tag along, I will be most pleased to have your company.

BOOK REPORT:
THE 26th MAN:
ONE MINOR LEAGUE PITCHER'S PURSUIT OF A DREAM



I recently read Steve Fireovid's excellent tale of his pursuit to make it back to the Major Leagues with the Montreal Expos in 1990, a day-by-day accounting of his season with the Indianapolis Indians. When I saw the book advertised on an Amazon webpage, I recognized Fireovid's name from his stint with the Omaha Royals in 1988 and 1989, but I didn't know his story as a journeyman minor leaguer who by 1990 was the winningest active pitcher (112 wins) in the Minor Leagues.

The book begins with a recounting by his co-author (Mark Winegardner) of Fireovid's remarkable senior year in high school at Bryan, Ohio (pop. 7500, located between Toledo, Ohio and Fort Wayne, Indiana), where Fireovid played third base for the Bryan Golden Bears, who had a 3-10 record when the Ohio high school baseball playoffs began. After pitching in only one game out of the team's first thirteen contests that year, his coach began pitching him exclusively in the playoffs, and he was dominating, pitching every inning and winning every game from that point forward in leading his team to their one and only State Championship in any sport.

As described in the book, Fireovid pitched both games of the "Sectional," first a 3-hitter, and three days later, a 6-hitter. Two weeks later, he pitched both games at "Districts," each 5-4 wins, three days apart. In the "Regionals," Fireovid faced the Elgin Comets and their ace pitcher, Vern Wireman, whose record was 11-1. Fireovid struck out 6 in seven innings and missed a perfect game by only a bloop single in the fifth inning. A clever headline in the next day's edition of *The Bryan Times* was "Bears Clean Elgin's Clock."

In his next start, the following day against the Evergreen Vikings, Fireovid was nearly unhittable, striking out 8 and walking 1 in an 11-1 game.

Next up was State in Columbus. Against the Medina Buckeye, a team with a 20-5 record and 8 starters batting over .300, Fireovid threw a 3-hitter, striking out 7 and walking none, helping his own cause with a double and a triple in a game that Bryan won 4-0.

In the State final, which pitted Bryan High, now 10-10, against Hamilton Baden, with a 27-7 record, Fireovid took the hill on seventeen hours rest. In a storybook ending, Fireovid was terrific through five, striking out 7 and walking none, but in the sixth inning he gave up a single and a double and the score was now tied 1-1. He shut down Hamilton in the seventh inning, and the game went into extra innings.

In the top of the eighth, an obviously fatigued Fireovid gave up 3 runs and Hamilton took a 4-1 lead into the bottom of the final frame. With two out and runners on first and second, Fireovid came to the plate with a chance to tie the game up with a home run, but instead took a walk to load the bases. A double by the next batter made it 4-3, and then a single through

the hole scored Fireovid with the tying run and a teammate with the winning run, and Fireovid was credited with his eighth consecutive win for the 11-10 State Championship Golden Bears. The publicity of his accomplishment earned him a scholarship to Miami University in Miami, Ohio.

THE REST OF THE STORY



Fireovid was drafted after his junior year at Miami University, in the 7th round by the San Diego Padres. His first Minor League gig was at Walla Walla, Washington of the Northwest League in 1978, where he went 9-2 and had an incandescent ERA of 2.46. He went 13-9 in Reno (A) the following season, and then 12-6 in Amarillo (AA) in 1980.

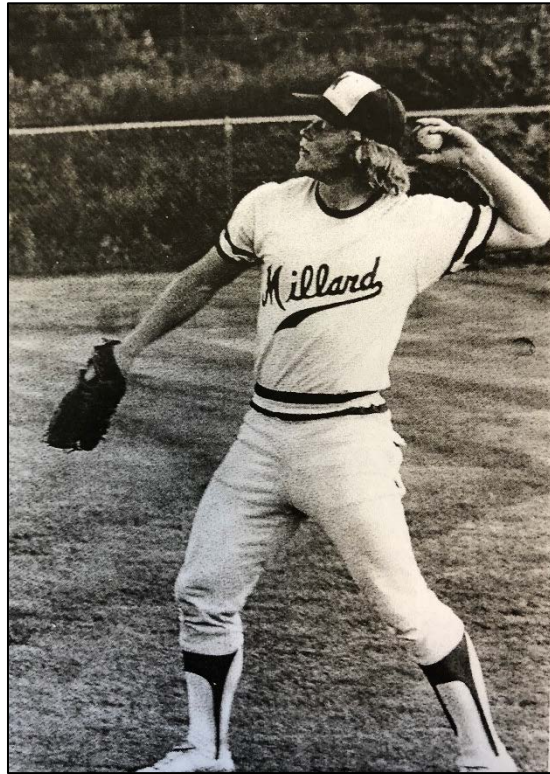
"Fire," as he was fondly nicknamed, made it up to the AAA Hawaii Islanders in 1981 when he was 24 years old and sported an ERA of 3.17 in the best hitter's league in baseball. He got called up to the Majors in September. He made his Major League debut on September 6, 1981, in relief, but then started four games and went 0-1 with an impressive 0.73 ERA for the parent club. It was expected he would make the San Diego Padres in 1982, but evidently got on the

bad side of the imperious manager Dick Williams and lost his job to somebody named Boyd Shiffers. He was subsequently traded to the Phillies and then the White Sox, then the Mariners, followed by the Blue Jays, the Royals, and then the Expos, where he mostly bounced around on their Triple A farm clubs, trying to get back to The Show.

Although Fireovid did not get called up by the Expos in September of 1990 (this was his "dream" as referenced in the title of the book), he did make it back to the Majors for a brief stint with the Texas Rangers in 1992. He subsequently suffered a pinched nerve to his neck, and decided to end his career and become a stockbroker. But he was not yet to be done with baseball.

During the 1995 strike season, Fire returned briefly to pitching as a scab in the Marlins' organization, and later on spent time pitching in Belgium and Italy, not a bad career at all.

SHAMU THE MAGNIFICENT



While recently digging through some of my baseball paperwork, I discovered a youthful picture of our beloved brother Shamu, in the prime of his athletic career, looking svelte and just a little bit cocky in his Millard baseball uniform. Looking good, Sir Charles!

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NEXT WEEK: Skipper's take on "*I Am a Man: Standing Bear's Journey for Justice.*"

Have a great week, all.

Skipper