



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

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

FROM THE BULLPEN

2020 Campaign

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Brethren:

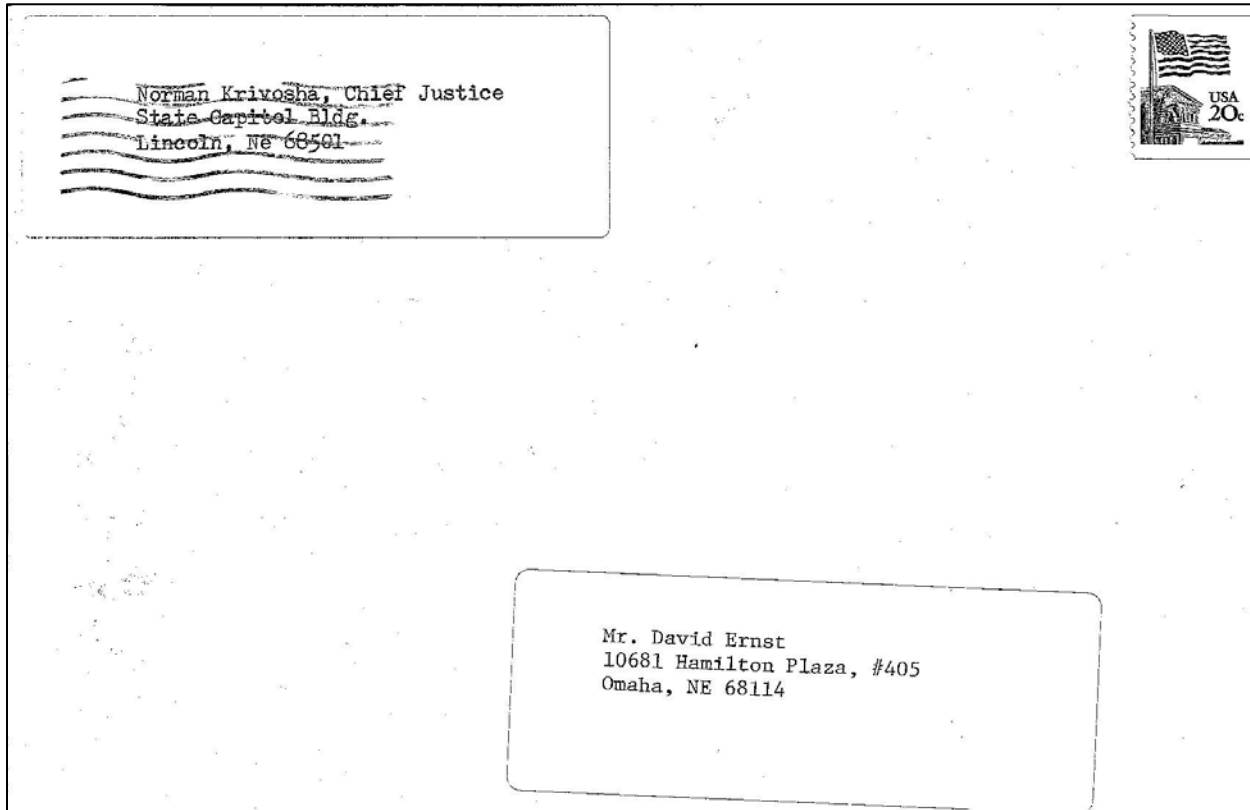
While cleaning out my desk drawers at home this past week--which in my case, merely means shuffling papers from one place to another--I found the evidence of Underbelly's magnificent hoax from way back in September of 1983 when I was nervously awaiting the results of the State Bar examination that I took, along with Shamu, Big Guy and PAwesome, in late July. Most of you have heard the story, but I don't know that any of you have seen the letter, so I thought I would share it with you now.

To set the stage a bit, after graduating from law school at UNL in May of 1983, most of us began studying for the Bar exam right away, even as we worked as law clerks for the firms that we would join. Speaking from my personal experience, I probably studied for the Bar exam for 15 to 20 hours a week while I was still working, and then about two weeks before the exam, I took leave of my employment for full-time study in preparation for the exam.

Back then, the Bar exam was two full days, the first being multiple choice, and the second being essay. There were probably 200 of us in a room together taking the Bar exam for the State of Nebraska, mostly students from UNL and from Creighton. Because most of our pending jobs were dependent on passing the Bar exam, the stakes were high, and the tension in the air was so thick that you could practically cut it with a knife. It was the most difficult test I have ever taken in my life, or ever hope to take. Afterwards, over beers, many of us shared our thoughts on our answers to the multiple choice questions--which was strongly discouraged by veteran test takers--and of course, we all began second-guessing our individual performances, and most of us, at least those who ran in my pack, were certain that we had failed.

The following week it was back to work at Gaines Otis, still as a law clerk, while we waited for our results. We had been told that it would likely take around six weeks for all of the examinations to be graded and the results available. So after about four weeks or so, I started going home for lunch every day to my apartment so I could check the mail box for the results. After doing this for a week or so, one day I opened up my mail box and found the below

envelope, ostensibly sent to me by Norman Krivosha, who was then the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court. Note that stamps were only 20 cents at the time.



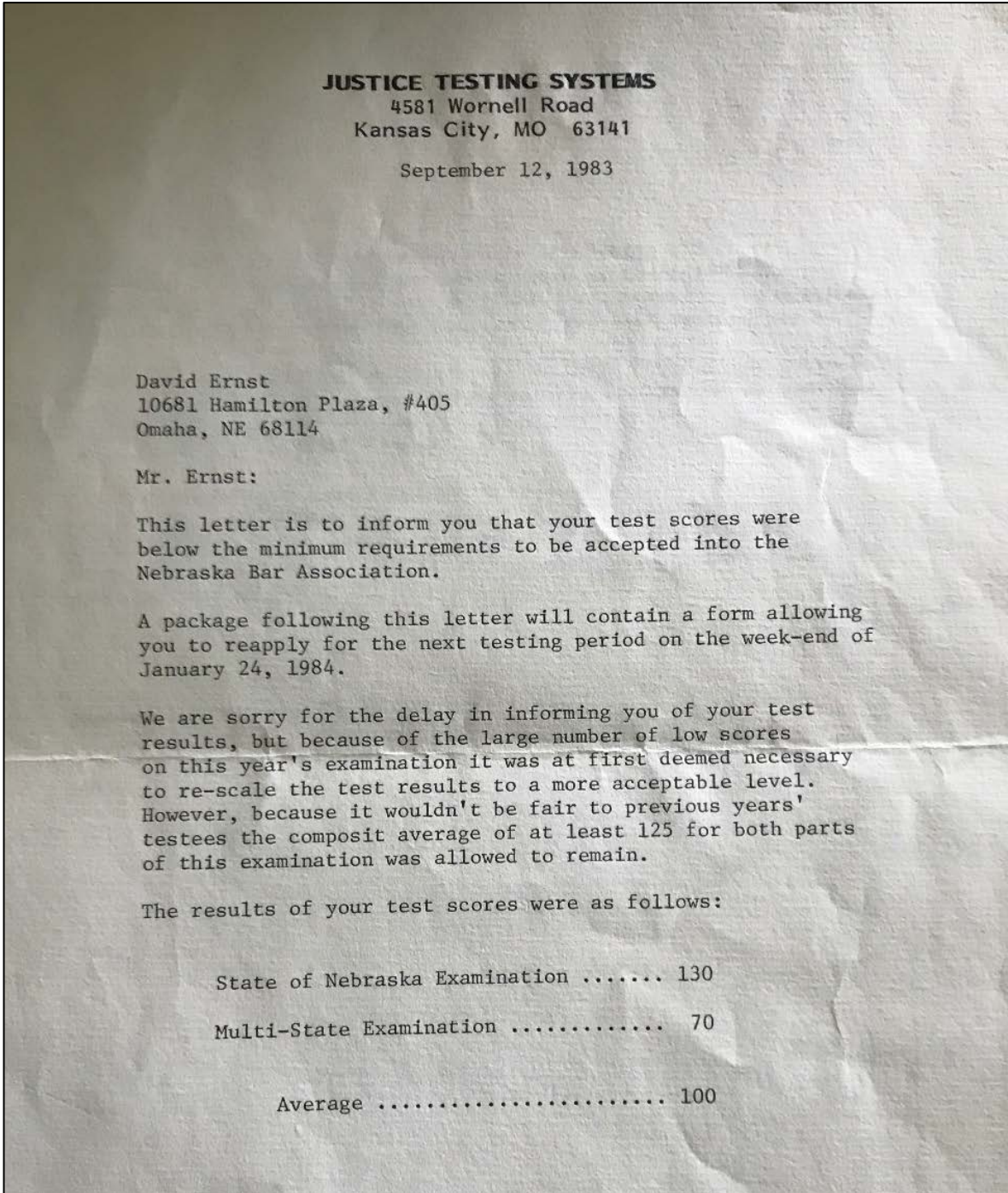
My heart racing, I grabbed the envelope and quickly went inside my apartment to open this envelope containing my Bar exam results in the privacy of my individual rental unit, not wanting to let anyone else see my anguish should the results not be favorable. Once inside, I quickly ripped open the envelope to find the below letter from *Justice Testing Systems of America*, informing me in the very first paragraph that my test scores were *below the minimum requirements to be accepted into the Nebraska Bar Association*. Ugh. Double ugh. Without reading more, I proceeded to smack my forehead against one of the walls of my kitchen with increasingly injurious force, three times, as the shame of flunking this most important exam of my life coursed throughout my body. Certain that I would be a ditch digger for N.L. Cole Construction Co. (my summer job throughout college, and after my first year of law school) for the rest of my life, I immediately called my mom to pass along the bad news, and also for a sympathetic ear as well as words of comfort. I don't remember her exact words, but it was probably something like, "I'm so sorry, honey," or a similar mom-like phrase.

As I poured out my woes and my disappointment to my mom, I read further through the letter, including the penultimate paragraph which invited me to participate in a *six-month corn detasseling program* just outside of Mead, Nebraska, and the last paragraph, which chastised me for "cohorting around with seedy women and being the village sot," . . . ,¹ at

¹ Hey, I didn't say that he was wrong.

which time I began to realize that this letter was likely a hoax. Here is the full body of the letter:

THE PERFECT HOAX



JUSTICE TESTING SYSTEMS

4581 Wornell Road
Kansas City, MO 63141

September 12, 1983

David Ernst
10681 Hamilton Plaza, #405
Omaha, NE 68114

Mr. Ernst:

This letter is to inform you that your test scores were below the minimum requirements to be accepted into the Nebraska Bar Association.

A package following this letter will contain a form allowing you to reapply for the next testing period on the week-end of January 24, 1984.

We are sorry for the delay in informing you of your test results, but because of the large number of low scores on this year's examination it was at first deemed necessary to re-scale the test results to a more acceptable level. However, because it wouldn't be fair to previous years' testees the composit average of at least 125 for both parts of this examination was allowed to remain.

The results of your test scores were as follows:

State of Nebraska Examination	130
Multi-State Examination	70
Average	100

David Ernst
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Since the results of your test may have an adverse effect on your present employment and employers, such as the inevitable termination of your job, we are at liberty to suggest a few alternatives in which to help you bide your time until the next testing period.

One of our more exciting programs that we have for the "not so sharp lawyer to be" is the 6-month corn detasseling program which operates just outside of Mead, Nebraska, which allows you to be close to home and also earn a "modest" income.

Let this whole ugly experience be an example to you. Cohorting around with seedy women and being the village sot may have cost you a career as a lucrative ambulance chasing lawyer. Maybe during the next 6 months you'll be able to find the time to study, at least an hour or two.

Justice Testing Systems of America

AD/bc

While still on the phone with my mom, now fully aware that I had *not* failed the exam and that this letter was in fact a cruel hoax, I began laughing like a madman, and was just so darned relieved that I hadn't flunked that I wasn't even mad at the clever perpetrator, although my mom had a few unladylike comments about him. When she asked me if I knew

who would do such a thing, I told her that I didn't have a clue, but I thought that it had to be one of my law school classmates, since the author of the letter clearly knew a lot about the exam and the scoring system that was used.

Later that same day, back in the office and about 20 pounds lighter, I began calling around to try to find out the identity of the devious chap who had pulled off this flimflam deviltry upon me. I don't remember for sure, but I think it was likely that I called both Big Guy and Shamu, and probably others, but nobody was claiming responsibility, and everyone I spoke with disavowed any knowledge of this. The unifying theme from everyone that I talked with about it was that "Oh, man, that's cold!" or "What an A-hole!" or words to that effect.

I could be wrong on this--Bob will probably remember--but I don't think that I found out that it was Bob who authored this letter until months later, long after I had found out that I really did pass the Bar exam. It was probably at a Houston Fleetwood softball game, or at *Sweep Left* bar or some other tavern after a softball game, that Bob asked me something like, "So how'd you ever come out on that Bar exam thing," or words to that effect. When he asked me that, you could have knocked me over with a feather, I was that surprised. I remember asking him how he knew so much about the Bar examination, such as the details that there was a multi-state examination portion and a State of Nebraska part, the number of points assigned to each part of the test, and the fact that retesting would take place in January of the following year. What I learned was that Bob had been cleverly pumping me for information about the Bar exam during the summer when we were having a few beers together at the *Sweep Left* bar, likely after a Fleetwood softball game in July or August.

Anyway, there you have the full story and the details on one of the best hoodwinkings that I have ever been victimized by or even heard about. For the record, there was a payback hoax, but it frankly paled by comparison to *The Sting* administered by Sir Robert. A tip of the cap to you, old friend.²

JORDAN RULES



For those of you who read it, you will remember that I mentioned last issue that there is a terrific documentary on ESPN/Netflix about Michael Jordan and the Bulls entitled *The Last Dance*. I am sure that many or most of you have watched at least part of it. HQ and I just finished up watching the final episode, #10, this past Wednesday. Although I don't really consider myself much of a pro basketball fan these days, and haven't been for many years, may I say this is one of the best

² And a word of advice, friend. Watch your topknot. There is no statute of limitations for a counter-hoax.

sports documentaries that I have ever watched.

I won't ruin it for any of you who have not yet watched the whole shebang, but I will say that I think they did a phenomenal job of going back and forth between seasons to give perspective for that last season, that last dance; and that they did a terrific job of providing some very interesting background information and perspective on not only Jordan, but also about Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman, Steve Kerr and Phil Jackson, among others. I for one had no idea what a superlative coaching career Phil Jackson had, between the Bulls and the Lakers, or what a good guy he seems to be. To my way of thinking and remembering him, he was just a very tall flaky dude who was into Zen and who had the great good fortune of coaching really good players in both cities. But as the documentary shows, there is so much more to the legacy of Phil Jackson, and I for one thought that he was the most likeable guy in the whole menagerie.

So after trading a few emails with Linda about *The Last Dance* (she is still working from home), she asked me if I had ever seen Michael Jordan play, and my response was that I remembered seeing him once in Portland against the Trail Blazers, and at least once in Chicago at their old basketball arena, where my friend Brian Hennings' employer, Union Carbide, had plum seats. However, this was indeed all I could remember about seeing Michael play in person, and back at that time I wasn't in the habit of printing off box scores. Luckily for me, Linda put on her Super Assistant cap and cape, and quickly found box scores for both games, both of which involved a Bulls-Trail Blazers matchup.

On December 4, 1992, I saw a Bulls team throttle the Trail Blazers by a score of 111-99 in a game at the old Chicago Stadium, which was in its final season of a long and proud history of hosting sporting events. I don't remember the game itself, but I do remember Jordan and his teammates being introduced individually and running out onto the court through a cloud of vapor and spotlights to great fanfare, the first of such grand introductions that I had seen at the time, but which are now fairly commonplace. Anyway, according to the box score from that game, Jordan played 38 minutes, was 15 of 25 from the field, scored 38 points and had 13 rebounds. Scottie Pippen almost had a triple double with 28 points, 11 rebounds and 9 assists, and Scott Williams, Bill Cartwright and D.J. Armstrong chipped in 14, 8 and 8 points, respectively. For the Trail Blazers, reserve Clifford Robinson was the team's leading scorer with 27 points, while Terry Porter sank 17 and Kevin Duckworth had 16.

The game that I saw in Portland was on February 8, 1993, and in that game Jordan scored 28 points in the first half en route to his fifth consecutive 30-plus scoring performance, leading the Bulls to their fourth straight road win in a 101-91 whipping of the Trail Blazers. For the home team, Cliff Robinson had 19 points and 10 rebounds, while Rod Strickland scored 18 points for the Blazers.

Anyway, enough about MJ and his legacy. I hope that you all enjoy watching *The Last Dance* as much as I did.

WRAPPING UP

I guess that's it for this issue. I hope that all of you are staying healthy and being careful, and that you all enjoy the long holiday weekend, and let's all hope and pray that we will be back to watching baseball again soon.³

Skipper

³ At lunch with B.T. on Thursday, we decided that he will likely host the Draft on the last Saturday of June, on June 27, if in fact baseball is going to start up right after the 4th of July. Details to follow.