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Spring Training 1961, Tampa Bay

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

FROM THE BULLPEN

2020 Campaign

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Brethren:

Lamentations to each of us, amigos, because, as you may recall, this upcoming weekend had been reserved for our annual HSL Trip, during which we were planning on flying into the District of Columbia and seeing games at Nationals Park and then in Baltimore at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The cancellation¹ of this year's junket because of the COVID-19 pandemic is almost too bitter a pill to swallow. Not only am I woeful about a cancellation of our Trip to the nation's capital for baseball, but now that the minor league season has been officially shelved due to coronavirus, I am in a deep state of clinical depression, knowing that I will not be able to visit any new minor league venues in the 2020 season. By the time COVID-19 rolled around, I already had something like 15 minor league venues on the calendar, most of them associated with out-of-town deposition trips, and they have all been sent to the scrap

¹ Of course, as things played out, we might not have been able get to Nationals Park in any event, if there was a church nearby that the President wanted to visit for another Holy Photo Op. "Break out the fighting 77th and the teargas, boys, and let's get these lawless baseball fans out of the way!"



The televangelist Pat Roberts criticized Trump's photo op at St. John's Church this week. Jimmy Fallon said, "You know we live in crazy times when we're all agreeing with the guy who once said gay people cause hurricanes."

heap. In addition to the planned deposition trip visits, I had scheduled an almost full week of minor league baseball park visits back east for the week of June 15, since my roommate was going to be out of town that entire week for a work conference in Las Vegas. This is what it looked like:

THE LINEUP



Monday, June 15: Wilmington Blue Rocks v. Lynchburg Hillcats
@ Daniel S. Frawley Stadium (Wilmington, Delaware);



Tuesday, June 16: Reading Fighting Phils v. Altoona Curve @ First
Energy Stadium (Reading, Pennsylvania);



Wednesday, June 17: 1:00 pm Buffalo Bison v. Scranton Wilkes
Barre Yankees @ Sahlen Field (Buffalo, New York);



Wednesday, June 17: 6:30 pm Syracuse Mets v. Rochester Red
Wings @ NBT Bank Stadium (Syracuse, New York);



Thursday, June 18: Vermont Lake Monsters v. Tri-City Valley Cats
@ Centennial Field (Burlington, Vermont).

This would have enabled me to add the states of Delaware and Vermont to my list of states in which I have been to a professional baseball game. Doggonit! I should have known it was too good to be true, and it will be a very challenging junket to reorganize in 2021 or beyond. I hear the mournful lyrics of Seals & Crofts, *We may never pass this way again*, darting through my brain. Fudge and double fudge.²

CURRENT EVENTS

Like the rest of you, I'm sure, the events of the last two weeks have been excruciating to live through, and I'm not black, I'm not poor, and I haven't been the victim of racism my entire life, or for even one minute of my life. What happened in Minneapolis last Monday was absolutely shocking and horrific and extremely painful to watch, and the protesting, rioting, looting and political gamesmanship that have followed are just downright depressing. As HQ and I were driving back from Kansas City on Sunday after having celebrated her mother's 80th birthday, I was just absolutely glum about the country that we are leaving behind for all of

² I realize that stronger epithets are probably called for here, but I think it's best to keep it clean.

our kids. I'm not sure how we could have screwed it up any worse.³ Between the coronavirus and the police brutality and its aftermath, I just have such a feeling of helplessness in terms of what I or any one of us might be able to do to make a difference. In the end, perhaps the most we can do is to listen, to help raise awareness of the issues, to encourage our children to get involved in tackling these problems, and at bottom, to just be good to each other and to *all* of our fellow earthlings.

On these subjects, I will share you with some great words from the Sunday Tom Shatel column, and from one of the deepest thinkers of our time, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Shatel's column:

Compton's voice is one that should be heard

I remember Will Compton.

He was one of Bo Pelini's first big recruits at Nebraska. Star linebacker out of Missouri. Went on to be the Huskers' defensive MVP and second team All-Big Ten in 2012. Had a six-year run in the NFL.

And while I probably interviewed Compton, I really can't recall it.

Well, Compton is speaking now. And I'm listening.

Which is exactly his point.

Compton writes a regular blog for Barstool Sports. He's become a popular figure on Twitter, with 63,000 followers.

There's no secret why. Compton attacks the platforms like he played, leading with his head, his heart and never holding back.

The horrific images of the past week have rekindled emotions in this country. Race and injustice are topics again. From the big screen in your living room to 72nd and Dodge.

They have spurred many into action, including a former Nebraska linebacker from small-town Missouri.

Compton's latest post is titled, "Listen, Be Slow to Speak and Seek To Understand."

³ And I don't mean you or me or any of us, per se, but our generation, which in my opinion has done a miserable job of installing competent leadership at virtually every level. We can only hope that our kids and their kids learn from our failures, and figure out how to get our country back to its greatness during the era in which we grew up.

He begins with a disclaimer, saying that because he grew up in a “99 percent white” town, Compton calls himself a “very discredited human when speaking on these issues.”

But then he immediately bolsters his credentials.

Compton wrote, “I have had the blessing to go from a small town in Missouri to being in a locker room with guys from all over the country at the University of Nebraska, then to NFL locker rooms where I’ve had the opportunity to learn from my black teammates about a world that I’ll never fully be able to comprehend.”

Compton said he hesitated to write the post because, like a lot of folks, he can “get uncomfortable in these conversations. That’s OK, though. You must . . . get uncomfortable to start growing.”

Here is the meat of Compton’s message, and it’s as level-headed and profound as any you’ll read on the topic.

“We must truly remove ourselves from our own bubble of life to understand what someone else might be going through or the realities they face every single day. . . .

“We all have so many opinions because we’ve lived a different life than the next person. If you think about it, we go from learning within our family to learning within a community to our town/city, to our college bubbles, to our careers, and so on. . . .

“Some of those bubbles never diversify. Some are always changing. If you take all of these different views, opinions, experiences, and put them on a social platform the potential for chaos is very high.

“As someone who tries to play the middle and tries not to get too wrapped up in politics, religion, etc., I find myself feeling a responsibility to speak up. But if there’s anything I’ve learned, it’s that you don’t always need to know exactly what to say in order to be a voice for change.”

This is my favorite part of the blog, including the opening sentence, where Compton says he felt a responsibility to use his voice and platform now “especially as a white man speaking on social justice.”

This feels different. This is different.

And from the player formerly known as **Lew Alcindor**:

What was your first reaction when you saw the video of the white cop kneeling on George Floyd's neck while Floyd croaked, "I can't breathe"?

If you're white, you probably muttered a horrified, "Oh, my God" while shaking your head at the cruel injustice. If you're black, you probably leapt to your feet, cursed, maybe threw something (certainly wanted to throw something), while shouting, "Not @#\$%! again!" Then you remember the two white vigilantes accused of murdering Ahmaud Arbery as he jogged through their neighborhood in February, and how if it wasn't for that video emerging a few weeks ago, they would have gotten away with it. And how those Minneapolis cops claimed Floyd was resisting arrest but a store's video showed he wasn't. And how the cop on Floyd's neck wasn't an enraged redneck stereotype, but a sworn officer who looked calm and entitled and devoid of pity: the banality of evil incarnate.

Maybe you also are thinking about the Karen in Central Park who called 911 claiming the black man who asked her to put a leash on her dog was threatening her. Or the black Yale University grad student napping in the common room of her dorm who was reported by a white student. Because you realize it's not just a supposed "black criminal" who is targeted, it's the whole spectrum of black faces from Yonkers to Yale.

You start to wonder if it should be all black people who wear body cams, not the cops.

What do you see when you see angry black protesters amassing outside police stations with raised fists? If you're white, you may be thinking, "They certainly aren't social distancing." Then you notice the black faces looting Target and you think, "Well, that just hurts their cause." Then you see the police station on fire and you wag a finger saying, "That's putting the cause backward."

You're not wrong — but you're not right, either. The black community is used to the institutional racism inherent in education, the justice system and jobs. And even though we do all the conventional things to raise public and political awareness — write articulate and insightful pieces in the Atlantic, explain the continued devastation on CNN, support candidates who promise change — the needle hardly budge.

But COVID-19 has been slamming the consequences of all that home as we die at a significantly higher rate than whites, are the first to lose our jobs, and watch helplessly as Republicans try to keep us from voting. Just as the slimy underbelly of institutional racism is being exposed, it feels like hunting season is open on blacks. If there was any doubt, President Trump's recent tweets confirm the national zeitgeist as he calls protesters "thugs" and looters fair game to be shot.

Yes, protests often are used as an excuse for some to take advantage, just as when fans celebrating a hometown sports team championship burn cars and destroy storefronts. I don't want to see stores looted or even buildings burn. But African Americans have been living in a burning building for many years, choking on the smoke as the flames burn closer and closer. Racism in America is like dust in the air. It seems invisible — even if you're choking on it — until you let the sun in. Then you see it's everywhere. As long as we keep shining that light, we have a chance of cleaning it wherever it lands. But we have to stay vigilant, because it's always still in the air.

So, maybe the black community's main concern right now isn't whether protesters are standing three or six feet apart or whether a few desperate souls steal some T-shirts or even set a police station on fire, but whether their sons, husbands, brothers and fathers will be murdered by cops or wannabe cops just for going on a walk, a jog, a drive. Or whether being black means sheltering at home for the rest of their lives because the racism virus infecting the country is more deadly than COVID-19.

What you should see when you see black protesters in the age of Trump and coronavirus is people pushed to the edge, not because they want bars and nail salons open, but because they want to live. To breathe.

Worst of all, is that we are expected to justify our outraged behavior every time the cauldron bubbles over. Almost 70 years ago, Langston Hughes asked in his poem "Harlem": "What happens to a dream deferred? /... Maybe it sags / like a heavy load. / Or does it explode?"

Fifty years ago, Marvin Gaye sang in "Inner City Blues": "Make me wanna holler / The way they do my life." And today, despite the impassioned speeches of well-meaning leaders, white and black, they want to silence our voice, steal our breath.

So what you see when you see black protesters depends on whether you're living in that burning building or watching it on TV with a bowl of corn chips in your lap waiting for "NCIS" to start.

What I want to see is not a rush to judgment, but a rush to justice.

Amen, Will and Kareem. Amen.

THIS, THAT AND THE OTHER

- Okay. That is all heavy stuff. Here is some lighter fare. During my spring cleaning, I came across this wonderful excerpt about Lonnie "Skates" Smith from the 1986 Bill James Baseball abstract:

He makes you wail and gnash your teeth a lot, but he really doesn't cost you all that many runs. One reason is that he recovers so quickly after he makes a mistake. You have to understand that Lonnie makes defensive mistakes every game; he knows how to handle it. I mean, your average outfielder is inclined to panic when he falls down chasing a ball in the corner; he may just give up and set there for a while, trying to figure it out. Lonnie has a pop-up slide perfected for the occasion. Another outfielder might have no idea where the ball was when it bounded off his glove; Lonnie can calculate with the instinctive astrophysics of a veteran tennis player where a ball will land when it skips off the heel of his glove, what the angle of glide will be when he tips it off the webbing, what the spin will be when the ball skids off the thumb of the mitt. Many players can kick the ball behind them without ever knowing it; Lonnie can judge by the pitch of the thud and the subtle pressure through his shoe in which direction and how far he has projected the sphere.

- I also found a printout with some of my favorite lines from *The Naked Gun*:

Mayor: Drebin, I don't want any more trouble like you had last year on the South Side. Understand? That's my policy.

Frank: Yes. Well, when I see 5 weirdos dressed in togas stabbing a guy in the middle of the park in full view of 100 people, I shoot the bastards. That's my policy.

Mayor: That was a Shakespeare in the Park production of Julius Caesar, you moron! You killed 5 actors! Good ones!

Frank: It's the same old story. Boy finds girl, boy loses girl, girl finds boy, boy forgets girl, boy remembers girl, girl dies in a tragic blimp accident over the Orange Bowl on New Year's Day.

Jane: Goodyear?

Frank: No, the worst.

Frank: Wilma, I promise you; whatever scum did this, not one man on this force will rest one minute until he's behind bars. Now, let's grab a bite to eat.

[Frank Drebin is emptying out his files after being kicked off the force]

Frank: Hey! The missing evidence in the Kelner case! My God, he really was innocent!

Ed: He went to the chair two years ago, Frank.

Frank: Well, uh ...

[Frank Drebin quickly shoves the evidence back into the file cabinet]

Ed: *[after Ludwig has been shot with a cuff link dart, fallen off a building, run over by a bus, flattened by a steam roller, and trampled by a marching band]* Oh, Frank! It's horrible. That's so horrible!

Frank: *[comforts Ed]* I know, Ed.

Ed: My father went the same way.

- And finally, I watched a classic baseball movie this past weekend, one of my all-time favorites. See if you can guess the movie from the following quotes:

"Man that ball got outta here in a hurry. I mean anything travels that far oughta have a damn stewardess on it, don't you think?"

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes it rains."

"I'm going to the Show."

First one to respond by email with the correct answer gets a lusty "ATTABOY!" next issue.

IN CLOSING

These are trying times, brethren. Be good to yourselves, and even better to your neighbor.

Skipper