

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

● ● ● ●

SEASON XXXVII



2020 HSL Champion
West Des Moines Cubs
Manager: Shamu

400

FROM THE BULLPEN

2021 Campaign

Edition No. 8

May 12, 2021

WESTWARD HO

Brethren:

Late last month I had a meeting with a new client (farmer) in Holdrege, Nebraska, to discuss a lawsuit filed against his farming operation by a biker dude who wiped out on his Harley while driving it on a gravel road adjacent to my client's cornfield, allegedly because the road was wet due to a negligently-operated center pivot irrigation system. I know just what you're thinking. First, is there *anything* that people won't sue over nowadays? Answer: Not really. Your second question might be: How is it that *I* am qualified to handle such a matter, being a city boy and not a farm kid. Well, I will have you know that this is my second alleged negligent center pivot irrigation-caused accident that I have defended in my career, the first one being about four or five years ago up in Creighton, Nebraska.



Phil Niekro

But I digress. I was merely going to point out that I had to be in Holdrege for business anyway, so I decided to extend my trip and drive out to McCook, Nebraska for a visit to the Red Willow Court-house, and to see the town where Phil Niekro once pitched for the 1959 McCook Braves; as well as to view the baseball field described by Pat Jordan in *A False Spring*. Ever since reading that book for the first time back in 2009, I have been fascinated by the prospect of a future Hall-of-Famer like Niekro and a former high-school-super-star-turned-bonus-baby like Jordan cutting their teeth playing on a team in the lowest of low minors in McCook, Nebraska. Having never before been to McCook, I had only the images in my mind's eye that were forged from reading *A False Spring*.



After arriving in McCook, I first went to the Red Willow Courthouse to get a gander at it, and as I reached the district courtroom on the top floor, a stern church lady type with a menacing scowl admonished me that court was in session and that I should not actually enter the courtroom. Not wanting to cause a stir, I stood for a minute or so and peered through the glass window into the courtroom to examine it from front to back, all the while with the church lady very close by and ready to spring into action if I disobeyed her orders. In any event, my curiosity as to the makeup of the courtroom satisfied, I was on my way, no doubt much to the relief of the church lady.

The Red Willow Courthouse was built in 1926 and was designed by architect Marcus L. Evans in the Classical Revival style, with symmetric arrangement, monumental proportions, smooth stone surface, prominent columns, unadorned parapet, rusticated and ashlar finish, and such classical elements as acroteria, fluted Doric columns, rosettes, and triglyphs. It has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since July 5, 1990. The good people of McCook have done an above-average job of keeping it up over the years, and it is clearly a source of community pride.



In the next block over from the courthouse is the tallest building in McCook--and possibly the tallest building between Lincoln and Denver--the former historic Keystone Hotel, where Jordan and Niekro and most of their teammates on the McCook Braves stayed while they were playing for the team. It is no longer a hotel, but instead a *Home Instead* business office, which is certainly a better alternative to simply tearing it down, as there probably hasn't been a need for a six-story hotel in McCook since the McCook Braves went poof in the night with the abandonment of the Nebraska State League.



George Norris home on Norris Avenue

While in McCook, I also paid a visit to the baseball field where the Braves played but it appears to have been modified several times over and is now used by the McCook Legion Baseball team. I also meandered up and down Norris Avenue, and took a quick gander at the outside of the Norris home in McCook.

As an aside, I doubt that anyone in Red Willow County really cares, but if there are any overly sensitive Native Americans in that county, they have much to be sensitive about. For example:



A FEW WORDS FROM YOUR COUNTY ASSESSOR

While in that neck of the woods, I also paid visits to the courthouses in Trenton (Hitchcock County), Hayes Center (Hayes County) and Stockville (Frontier County) (see photo on page 10), which, frankly, are some of the less beautiful and least impressive of Nebraska's 93 courthouses¹, but here are a few of the fun facts I learned while on this exploration:

¹ Of which I have now set foot in 80 of them, and have now been in 91 of our 93 counties, all but Blaine and Keya Paha.



Hitchcock County Courthouse



Hayes County Courthouse



While driving into Hitchcock County, I came across several signs advertising *Mas-sacre Canyon*, a site of historical significance of which I had not previously been aware. Turns out that there was a bloody massacre there in 1873 between the Sioux and Pawnee tribes.





The Massacre Canyon Monument was dedicated on September 26, 1930. It was the first historical monument erected in Nebraska by federal grant. It stands on a three-acre plot, three miles east of Trenton off U.S. Route 34, after having been moved from its original location overlooking the Republican River valley. The monument was constructed from Minnesota pink

granite from a quarry in St. Cloud by R.P. Colling, Indianola, Nebraska. The shaft of the obelisk is 35 feet high. The entire monument weighs 91 tons.



Further along in my drive, I came across this historical marker



which informed me that in 1871, a young Russian prince was invited on a buffalo hunt. This exercise in foreign relations evidently helped pave the way for our purchase of the Alaskan territory from Russia. Who knew?



The village of Stockville, population 25, is about as dead as a county seat could possibly be, with only a handful of livable dwellings still in existence, and no other apparent businesses other than the courthouse, which looks more like a house than a courthouse.



The Frontier County courthouse courtroom, however, seems viable enough, although one has to wonder when the last time was that they actually had a jury trial here. There are barely enough people in the entire town of Stockville to constitute a jury pool. The courthouse is notable for its stairwell full of portraits of the Stockville graduating classes, including this remarkable portrait of the class of 1954 with its one graduate with the unfortunate name of *Jim Crow*.

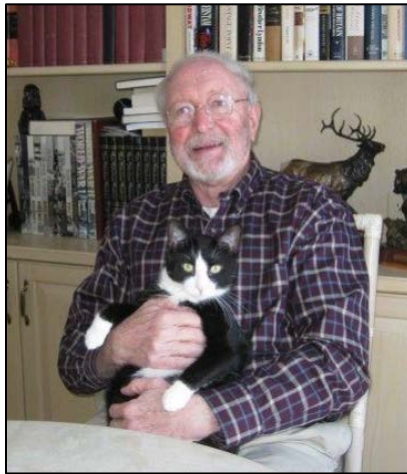


I'm not sure why Stockville is the county seat of Frontier County, however, since the city of Curtis (population 939) is much larger and also the former home of the Curtis Agricultural School².



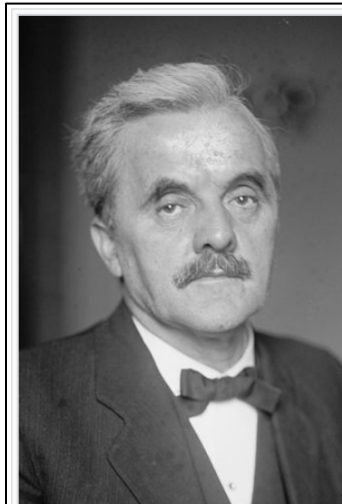
² Super fun fact: How many of you knew that our beloved Underbelly once matriculated at the Curtis Agricultural School? I'm not sure I know why the city slicker from Lincoln dropped out of the Curtis Aggie program, but it could be that their initiation program involving barnyard animals wasn't his cup of team. Or maybe he was just homesick.

The Harry Strunk Reservoir in Frontier County looks like a lovely spot for boating, fishing, camping and such. However, how many of you know that it was the repository for the grisly remains from a spectacular homicide which shocked the town of McCook in 1973? My former employer and mentor during my law clerkship with the NEBCO organization, the inimitable Jim Hewitt, wrote a book on the subject titled *In Cold Storage: Sex and Murder on the Plains*. When I met Jim for lunch in the Haymarket a couple of years ago, I told him I had read the book and enjoyed it--to which he glibly replied, "That makes 3 of us."

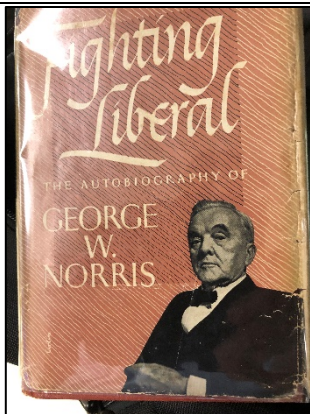


Jim Hewitt and Mondo

THE FIGHTING LIBERAL



George W. Norris, US
Representative from Nebraska.



My trip to McCook and to the George Norris home on Norris Avenue inspired me to dig out from my pile of books-to-be-read an autobiography written by Norris in 1945, a few years after his political career ended in 1943 and just shortly before his death. I don't usually read political autobiographies because they are--in my opinion--usually not very well written and mostly full of hot air. For my money, biographies of presidents and other politicians are usually much better.

Nevertheless, having committed to reading Norris' autobiography, I actually enjoyed it very much, and learned a lot about him and his accomplishments:



Born and raised in abject squalor in York Township, Sandusky County, Ohio, Norris' father died when he was just an infant, leaving his mother to raise 11 children on her own. It was a hardscrabble existence to say the least, and Norris had to enter the labor workforce at an early age, and worked at hard labor for many years, clearing fields, chopping wood and harvesting wheat and other crops.



It took Norris many years to complete his education, as he would work for a few months, then go to school for a few months, then go back to work to earn more money for tuition, room and board. He eventually graduated from Baldwin University, and then from law school at the college that later became known as Valparaiso University in Indiana.



Borrowing \$300 from his sister who earned it selling eggs and butter, Norris formed a partnership and started a law practice in Tecumseh, Nebraska, which utterly failed. He later started another practice in the village of Beaver City, and established a reputation as an able attorney and developed a law practice which had clients in many southeastern Nebraska counties, as well as in Kansas just over the border. He later became a trial judge, and became well known for establishing a practice of delaying farm foreclosures for a specified time so as to allow a farmer to wait for his next crop to come in to pay the bills.



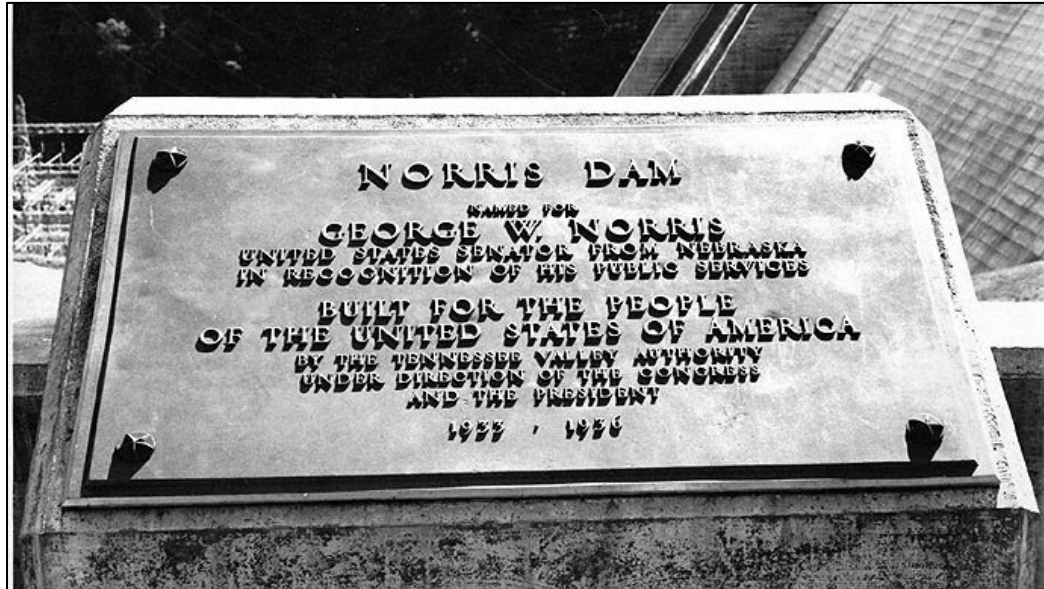
He became involved in Republican politics, and was elected to the House of Representatives of 1903 where he served five terms. While he considered himself a rock-ribbed Republican from head to toe, he soon developed a reputation as someone who was independent-minded and would rise against the tide on certain issues, rankling Republican leadership.



After his stint in the House of Representatives, Norris was appointed/elected to five six-year terms in the Senate, the last as an Independent, so many enemies had he made among the rank-and-file Republicans. He ran for a sixth term, again as an Independent, but this time his former party mustered up enough votes to affect his ouster.



Among his greatest legislative achievements was the Tennessee Valley Authority, providing flood control and electricity to the state of Tennessee and surrounding areas. Indeed, he became known as the "Father of the TVA," and there was a township and a large dam in Tennessee that was named after him.



Norris Dam and Lake



Other jewels in Norris' legislative crown include the Rural Electrification Act (REA), which brought electricity to the vast rural regions of this country, including his beloved western Nebraska area; the legislation to curb the Yellow Dog contracts which effectively enslaved miners to the coal companies and their company stores; and the disarming of House leader Joe Cannon, truly an ingenious and ballsy--no other word for it--House floor maneuver which ended up stripping Cannon of much of his great power.



On more than one occasion, Norris teamed up with one of his fellow "insurgents" to take on a faction in Congress, the wonderfully-nicknamed "Fighting Bob" La Follette of Wisconsin. Another of his fellow insurgents was the great William Borah of Idaho, a legendary congressional brawler.



Norris urged that all states reform their legislatures from two houses to one, but was only successfully in persuading the Nebraska Legislature to become a unicameral system, which happened in 1934. Hence, Norris is generally referred to as the "Father" of the Nebraska Unicameral.



So desperate were his fellow Nebraska Republicans to oust him from office, a grocer from Broken Bow, Nebraska--also named *George Norris*--was recruited to run against him, with the hope that this trickery would dilute the votes and result in the defeat of the "McCook George Norris" by "grocer George Norris." It didn't work.



A 1957 advisory panel of 160 scholars recommended Norris as the top choice among the five best senators in U.S. history.

Imagine that: a born and bred Right Winger who became *the Fighting Liberal!*

If any of my Hot Stove League brethren who bleed Republican Red want to access this How To Manual on how to modify your hearts and minds toward the arcs of Humanity and the Common Good, let me know and I will send it all over.

A MINOR INTERRUPTION



This past Tuesday night I was lucky enough to be able to attend a minor league baseball game in Lakewood, New Jersey, just about 18 months since my last minor league ballpark visit in September 2019³. It seems that there was this minor inconvenience known as COVID-19 which interrupted all of our lives, but most importantly, my minor league ballpark quest.

In any event, on Tuesday night I joined about 100 other fans and saw the season opener for the Jersey Shore BlueCrabs (a High A Affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies) take on the Hudson Valley Renegades (Yankees) on a gorgeous spring night at FirstEnergy Park. I felt absolutely reborn. Baseball, brats, salted peanuts and cold beer = Happiness to the Nth degree.

³ With Itchie in Memphis for the AAA National Championship. See *FTB* Edition 21 from 2019 to read all about it again.



FirstEnergy Park



My hotel in New Jersey on the Joisey Shore

STANDINGS

Oh, yeah, the standings. I guess some of you might be interested in that. Sorry, I got caught up a bit in singing George's praises, and regaling you about my return to minor league baseball.

**HSL STANDINGS THRU WEEK 5
ENDING MAY 9, 2021**

1	Bums	2740.0	-
2	Saints	2672.7	67.3
3	Skipjacks	2604.6	135.4
4	Cubs	2560.3	179.7
5	Tribe	2455.4	284.6
6	Monarchs	2406.9	333.1
7	Tigers	2395.0	345.0
8	Bombers	2390.8	349.2
9	Redbirds	2349.9	390.1
10	Senators	2332.1	407.9
11	Wahoos	2323.3	416.7
12	Bears	2274.0	466.0
13	Blues	2024.9	715.1

POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 5

1	Skipjacks	593.9
2	Tribe	530.3
3	Wahoos	512.7
4	Monarchs	494.1
5	Redbirds	458.7
6	Senators	437.3
7	Bombers	429.5
8	Saints	426.4
9	Bums	418.3
10	Bears	408.1
11	Cubs	402.1
12	Tigers	378.0
13	Blues	212.1

TOP 25 PITCHERS

1.	Gerrit Cole	Bums	215.0
2.	Tyler Glasnow	Bears	210.0
3.	John Means	Cubs	206.0
4.	Trevor Bauer	Tribe	204.0
5.	Jacob deGrom	Wahoos	199.0
6.	Shane Bieber	Bombers	196.0
7.	Kevin Gausman	Saints	186.0
8.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	181.0
9.	Brandon Woodruff	Redbirds	180.0
10.	Yu Darvish	Blues	178.0
11.	Jack Flaherty	Monarchs	173.0
12.	Clayton Kershaw	Senators	168.0

13.	Carlos Rodón	Bums	166.0
14.	Huascar Ynoa	Bears	163.0
15.	Zack Wheeler	Wahoos	160.0
16.	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	159.0
17.	Aaron Civale	Monarchs	157.0
18.	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	155.0
	Aaron Nola	Tribe	155.0
20.	Trevor Rogers	Bums	151.0
21.	Julio Urías	Tigers	146.0
22.	Danny Duffy	Blues	145.0
23.	Corbin Burnes	Redbirds	144.0
24.	Sean Manaea	Skipjacks	142.0
25.	Anthony DeSclafani	Bombers	141.0

WHO'S HOT - PITCHING

1.	Huascar Ynoa	Bears	61.0
2.	Tyler Anderson	Bears	53.0
3.	Cole Irvin	Senators	52.0
	John Means	Cubs	52.0
5.	Adam Wainwright	Monarchs	47.0
	Wade Miley	Senators	47.0
7.	Vince Velasquez	Skipjacks	46.0
	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	46.0
9.	Zack Wheeler	Wahoos	45.0
10.	Adrian Houser	Wahoos	44.0
11.	Taijuan Walker	Tribe	40.0
	Frankie Montas	Cubs	40.0
	Nick Pivetta	Skipjacks	40.0
14.	Tyler Glasnow	Bears	39.0
15.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	38.0

WHO'S NOT

1.	Charlie Morton	Cubs	-11.0
2.	Johnny Cueto	Cubs	-10.0
	Nate Pearson	Bears	-10.0
4.	Germán Márquez	Tigers	-8.0
5.	Dylan Bundy	Saints	-7.0
6.	Jeff Hoffman	Monarchs	-5.0
	Luis Castillo	Monarchs	-5.0
8.	Justus Sheffield	Monarchs	-4.0
	Logan Webb	Bums	-4.0
	Luke Weaver	Wahoos	-4.0
11.	Kohei Akihara	Redbirds	-3.0
12.	David Peterson	Cubs	-2.0
13.	Erick Fedde	Blues	-1.0
	Julio Urías	Tigers	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

1.	J.D. Martinez	Blues	182.1
2.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	Senators	168.7
3.	Mike Trout	Skipjacks	158.0
4.	Kris Bryant	Tigers	156.1
5.	Vladimir Guerrero Jr.	Blues	154.3
6.	Justin Turner	Wahoos	148.9
7.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	148.4
8.	Shohei Ohtani (Batter)	Skipjacks	148.0
9.	Rafael Devers	Saints	143.4
10.	Nate Lowe	Bombers	138.1
11.	Yuli Gurriel	Bombers	135.6
12.	Nick Solak	Saints	134.1
13.	Byron Buxton	Tribe	134.0
14.	Nick Castellanos	Cubs	133.9
15.	Isiah Kiner-Falefa	Redbirds	132.8
16.	Jared Walsh	Senators	132.5
17.	Yordan Alvarez	Tribe	130.5
18.	Bo Bichette	Skipjacks	130.0
19.	José Ramírez	Cubs	129.0
20.	Cedric Mullins	Bums	127.6
21.	Trevor Story	Cubs	127.5
	Chris Taylor	Saints	127.5
23.	Nolan Arenado	Tigers	127.2
24.	Marcus Semien	Monarchs	126.3
25.	Giancarlo Stanton	Saints	126.0

WHO'S HOT - HITTING

1.	Adolis García	Bombers	56.7
2.	Miguel Rojas	Tigers	46.6
3.	Yordan Alvarez	Tribe	46.0
4.	Giancarlo Stanton	Saints	44.0
5.	Brandon Crawford	Senators	42.4
6.	Andrew McCutchen	Redbirds	41.6
7.	Marcus Semien	Monarchs	40.9
8.	Brandon Belt	Wahoos	39.2
9.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	36.6
10.	Robbie Grossman	Wahoos	36.5
11.	Nolan Arenado	Tigers	35.9
12.	Joey Gallo	Skipjacks	35.5
13.	J.T. Realmuto	Tigers	35.1
	DJ LeMahieu	Tigers	35.1
15.	Shohei Ohtani (Batter)	Skipjacks	34.5

WHO'S NOT - HITTING

1.	Eugenio Suárez	Wahoos	-4.2
2.	Jon Berti	Blues	-3.1
3.	Yadiel Hernandez	Bombers	-3.0
4.	Mike Moustakas	Wahoos	-1.9
5.	Maikel Franco	Tribe	-1.7
6.	Ty France	Blues	-1.4
7.	New Aaron Judge	Bombers	-1.0
8.	Lourdes Gurriel Jr.	Bums	-0.8
9.	Joey Votto	Tigers	-0.4
	Eduardo Escobar	Cubs	-0.4

SKIP'S PIX 'N' PANZ (CONT'D)

And oh, yeah, I guess I didn't get around to finishing up with my assessments of each of your Hot Stove League teams picked at our Draft. So here we go, Chapter 2:

BEARS

OVERVIEW: A pretty typical SloPay team. Several early flyers and "gotta have him," resulting in another fairly lackluster **Bears** team. That said, the **Bears** have a sparkling infield with Tatis, Báez, Biggio, Hoskins and Bohm. The outfield? Not so much.

FIRST AND WORST GAFFE: A tossup between Giolito in the second (*I must have him, I must have him, I must have him*) and Randy Arozarena in the fourth round.

SAVVIEST SELECTION: Tyler Glasnow in the third round, hands down. I wanted him bad for my team, just not bad enough, it seems.

POF: The cream rises to the top, the sediment finds its way to the bottom -- **12th place**.

CUBS

OVERVIEW: So, so old. A classic Shamu team. Nelson Cruz at age 50, Rich "Over The" Hill not far behind, and Jay Bruce so old that he just decided to retire--this team is long in the tooth. But with José Ramírez at third, Trevor Story at short, Anthony Rendon at third (can you say "mockery"?), and José Abreu at first, this may be an infield for the ages.

FIRST AND WORST GAFFE: Not taking a superstar pitcher in the first three rounds, or any pitcher whatsoever until round 7, and then making Max Fried the ace of your staff.

SAVVIEST SELECTION: This is a no-doubter--John Means in the 19th, he of the recent no-hit, one wild pitch (or passed ball) from a perfect game John Means. Let's see, I took Jared Walsh of the Angels earlier that same round. Where, oh where, was Will when I needed him?

POF: While Shamu picked an above-average team on Draft Day, through his usual devotion of 16/7 (the other 8 hours are for sleeping and eating), Shamu looks destined for another money finish--**2nd place**.

TIGERS

OVERVIEW: This team has some star power with Freddie Freeman, DJ LeMahieu, Nolan Arenado, Charlie Blackmon and Kris Bryant, but Big Guy's pitching is as suspect as his memory of the van incident in Eastern Ohio. There, it had to be said.

FIRST AND WORST GAFFE: After drafting Mad Max in the second, essentially flipping the bird at starting pitching until it was too late to get anyone else worth a darn.

SAVVIEST SELECTION: Kris Bryant in the 8th. Shocking that this former first-rounder lasted so long.

POF: This will not, I repeat *will not*, be the year that the **Tigers** end their 33-year dry spell in the Live Ball Era--**9th place**.

And there you have it, guys and gals, Skipper's Pix 'N' Panz, Installment #2. See you next issue.

Skipper