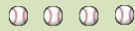


NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE



SEASON XXXVII



2020 HSL Champion
West Des Moines Cubs
Manager: Shamu

400

FROM THE BULLPEN

2021 Campaign

Edition No. 19

September 3, 2021

LEAGUE LEADER LABORING AS LABOR DAY WEEKEND APPROACHES; SAINTS SURGE TO TRY TO TRIP¹ UP CURBY'S BUMS

The story of Week 21 was the angelic rise of the **Saints**, who posted a heavenly total of 582.5 points for the week, almost 80 points more than the second-best output by the **Tribe**, and a whopping 195.5 points more than the bottoming-out **Bums**. With five weeks of play left in the 2021 season, suddenly Magpie had best be keeping his beady eyes affixed to his rearview mirror. Maybe those 40+ consecutive years of 3 a.m. Adoration at Cathedral by B.T. is finally going to pay off with more than just weekly chocolate bars and Heavenly Hugs² from Father McFeely. If Magpie is suddenly seen showing up for Daily Mass in a sackcloth with a C-note for the collection plate, we won't be surprised.

There's nothing like a good, old-fashioned September pennant race, eh fellas? Stay tuned.

Here are the standings through Week 21, and the point totals for the 21st week of the season:

¹ There is of course ample precedence for this. See, for example, the HSL *California Dreamin'* Trip in 1993.

² A well-known euphemism among Catholic priests.

**HSL STANDINGS THRU WEEK 21
ENDING AUGUST 29, 2021**

Rank	Team	Points	Pts Back
1	Bums	10243.1	-
2	Saints	9975.7	267.4
3	Cubs	9934.4	308.7
4	Skipjacks	9730.3	512.8
5	Bombers	9506.7	736.4
6	Tribe	9485.6	757.5
7	Monarchs	9336.1	907.0
8	Wahoos	9329.1	914.0
9	Bears	9184.8	1058.3
10	Redbirds	9107.5	1135.6
11	Tigers	9013.1	1230.0
12	Senators	8724.1	1519.0
13	Blues	8348.9	1894.2

POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 21

Rank	Team	Points
1	Saints	582.5
2	Tribe	502.8
3	Bears	490.0
4	Cubs	451.2
5	Bombers	429.0
6	Wahoos	426.2
7	Monarchs	426.0
8	Blues	425.3
9	Skipjacks	403.5
10	Bums	387.0
11	Senators	359.8
12	Tigers	324.9
13	Redbirds	317.5

Tirebiter's squad had the lowest point total for Week 21 with 317.5 points, dropping his **Crimson Chirpers** down into 10th place, and within striking distance of the toothless **Tigers**. Other than that, not much to report on in the standings.

Here are the individual point leaders through 21 weeks and the customary Who's Hot and Who's Not lists of starters and hitters:

TOP 25 PITCHERS

1.	Walker Buehler	Skipjacks	687.0
2.	Zack Wheeler	Wahoos	592.0
3.	Gerrit Cole	Bums	585.0
4.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	579.0
	Robbie Ray	Tribe	579.0
6.	Kevin Gausman	Saints	573.0
7.	Adam Wainwright	Monarchs	568.0
8.	Brandon Woodruff	Redbirds	563.0
9.	Corbin Burnes	Redbirds	529.0
10.	Chris Bassitt	Monarchs	527.0
11.	Joe Musgrove	Bums	507.0
12.	Charlie Morton	Cubs	499.0
	Julio Urías	Tigers	499.0

14.	Freddy Peralta	Senators	495.0
15.	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	489.0
16.	Lance Lynn	Bums	488.0
17.	Lucas Giolito	Bears	478.0
18.	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	468.0
19.	Jacob deGrom	Wahoos	465.0
20.	Dylan Cease	Tribe	464.0
21.	Tyler Mahle	Saints	461.0
22.	Frankie Montas	Cubs	460.0
23.	Carlos Rodón	Bums	456.0
24.	José Berríos	Blues	453.0
25.	Germán Márquez	Tigers	451.0

WHO'S HOT - PITCHING

1.	Dylan Cease	Tribe	68.0
2.	Antonio Senzatela	Senators	58.0
3.	Alek Manoah	Bears	46.0
4.	Nathan Eovaldi	Bombors	45.0
5.	Ranger Suárez	Bears	45.0
6.	Taylor Hearn	Wahoos	45.0
7.	Joe Musgrove	Bums	44.0
8.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	43.0
9.	Marco Gonzales	Senators	43.0
10.	Tyler Mahle	Saints	39.0
11.	Garrett Whitlock	Senators	38.5
12.	Jordan Montgomery	Saints	38.0
13.	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	37.0
14.	Frankie Montas	Cubs	37.0
15.	Brandon Woodruff	Redbirds	37.0
16.	Alec Mills	Skipjacks	35.0
17.	Adam Wainwright	Monarchs	35.0
18.	Luis Garcia	Bombors	35.0
19.	Blake Snell	Blues	35.0
20.	Logan Webb	Bums	34.0
21.	Robbie Ray	Tribe	34.0
22.	José Berríos	Blues	34.0
23.	Huascar Ynoa	Bears	33.0
24.	Erick Fedde	Blues	33.0
25.	Framber Valdez	Tribe	33.0

WHO'S NOT - PITCHING

1.	Griffin Jax	Skipjacks	-16.0
2.	Dallas Keuchel	Tigers	-13.0
3.	Jack Flaherty	Tigers	-10.0
4.	Hyun Jin Ryu	Skipjacks	-9.0
	Patrick Corbin	Wahoos	-8.0
	Vladimir Gutierrez	Bums	-8.0
	Cole Irvin	Senators	-8.0
	Josh Fleming	Redbirds	-8.0
9.	Matt Moore	Cubs	-5.0
10.	Michael Kopech	Tigers	-3.0
	Mitch Keller	Bears	-3.0
12.	Kris Bubic	Blues	-2.0
	Germán Márquez	Tigers	-2.0
14.	Anthony DeSclafani	Bombors	-1.0
	Sean Manaea	Skipjacks	-1.0
	Zach Thompson	Bears	-1.0
	Madison Bumgarner	Senators	-1.0
	Logan Gilbert	Saints	-1.0
	Adrian Houser	Wahoos	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

1.	Vladimir Guerrero Jr.	Blues	599.5
2.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	563.6
3.	Marcus Semien	Monarchs	538.4
4.	Freddie Freeman	Monarchs	528.4
5.	Rafael Devers	Saints	523.1
6.	Matt Olson	Monarchs	515.6
7.	José Ramírez	Cubs	511.4
8.	Austin Riley	Bears	509.8
9.	Juan Soto	Redbirds	506.8
10.	Ozzie Albies	Senators	498.5
11.	Fernando Tatis Jr.	Bears	492.9
12.	Trea Turner	Bums	488.1
13.	Bryce Harper	Saints	487.5
14.	Cedric Mullins	Bums	483.6
15.	Bryan Reynolds	Bears	482.4
16.	Jesse Winker	Bums	481.9
17.	Bo Bichette	Skipjacks	479.1
18.	Max Muncy	Wahoos	477.3
19.	Jose Altuve	Bums	477.1
20.	Aaron Judge	Bombers	476.3
21.	José Abreu	Cubs	474.9
22.	Carlos Correa	Bombers	474.7
	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	474.7
24.	J.D. Martinez	Blues	471.3
25.	Salvador Perez	Cubs	470.2

WHO'S HOT - HITTING

1.	Salvador Perez	Cubs	62.0
2.	Patrick Wisdom	Tribe	50.2
3.	Luis Robert	Monarchs	50.0
	Tommy Edman	Bears	50.0
5.	José Abreu	Cubs	45.7
6.	Whit Merrifield	Tribe	45.1
7.	Bryce Harper	Saints	45.0
8.	Josh Donaldson	Wahoos	43.7
9.	Aaron Judge	Bombers	42.7
10.	Rafael Devers	Saints	41.2
11.	José Ramírez	Cubs	39.8
12.	Alex Verdugo	Bums	38.7
13.	Ryan Mountcastle	Bears	38.5
14.	Will Smith	Blues	38.3

WHO'S NOT - HITTING

1.	Gio Urshela	Senators	-5.1
2.	Hunter Dozier	Redbirds	-4.4
3.	Byron Buxton	Tribe	-4.0
4.	Carlos Santana	Tigers	-3.5
5.	Kyle Farmer	Bums	-2.8
6.	Cody Bellinger	Blues	-2.5
7.	Travis d'Arnaud	Saints	-2.5
	Andrew Benintendi	Redbirds	-2.5
9.	Teoscar Hernández	Bears	-1.9
10.	Dylan Moore	Monarchs	-1.0
	Adam Frazier	Tribe	-1.0
12.	Justin Upton	Redbirds	-0.5

15.	Yasmani Grandal	Monarchs	38.2
16.	Franmil Reyes	Skipjacks	38.0
17.	Kyle Schwarber	Wahoos	36.5
18.	Austin Hays	Cubs	36.0
19.	Giancarlo Stanton	Saints	35.5
20.	Adolis García	Bombers	35.0
21.	Bobby Dalbec	Blues	34.8
22.	Cedric Mullins	Bums	34.2
23.	Joey Wendle	Blues	33.7
	Paul Goldschmidt	Monarchs	33.7
25.	C.J. Cron	Redbirds	33.2

SKIP SEZ



It's shocking--shocking, I say-- that B.T. is on the verge of another Hot Stove League title even though he has only two pitchers in the Top 25, Kevin Gausman (#6 at 573.0 points) and Tyler Mahle (#21 at 461.0 points); and only two hitters in the Top 25 with Rafael Devers (#5 at 523.1) and Bryce Harper (#13 at 487.5), and nobody on his team is currently white-hot and tearing up the pea patch, as good old Red Barber might say. Unlike their simple-minded owner, the 2021 **Saints** are, let's face it, deeper than deep.



Kudos to Underbelly for having the hottest pitcher of the week with Dylan Cease and his 68.0 points for the week, rocketing him up into 20th place on the Top 25 Pitchers list for the season. He will "Cease" to be ignored as a legitimate early draft pick, to coin a bad pun. Hey, I'm a dad, that's what we do.

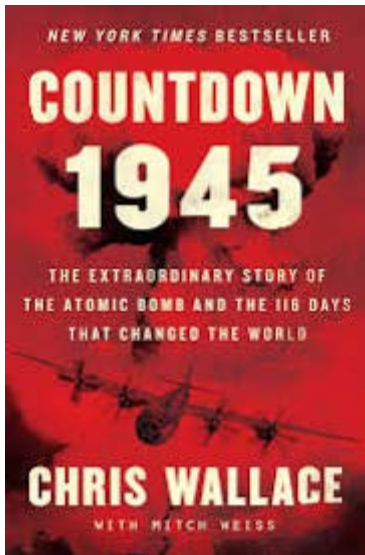


Okay, I will toot my own horn a bit as the **Senators** had the second-best pitcher in the league, Antonio Senzatela. Clearly Will--er, I mean, I--know good, raw pitching talent when I see it.



The same cannot be said about Alpha Dog, who trotted Griffin Jax out to the mound and got bloodied up to the tune of -16 points in a Michael Jackson-esque moonwalk; or about Big Guy, whose Twin Towers Dallas Keuchel and Blackjack Flaherty hopscotched his team backwards to the tune of -13 and -10 points, respectively.

BOOK REPORT:
COUNTDOWN 1945:
The Extraordinary Story of the
Atomic Bomb and the 116 Days
that Changed the World



I recently finished an outstanding book by Chris Wallace, titled as above, published in 2020 and apparently his first work as a book author. It is a superb page-turner, the nail-biting story of the final stages of development of the atomic bomb and the gut-wrenching decision by President Harry Truman to unleash this horrific new weapon on the Japanese in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending World War II.

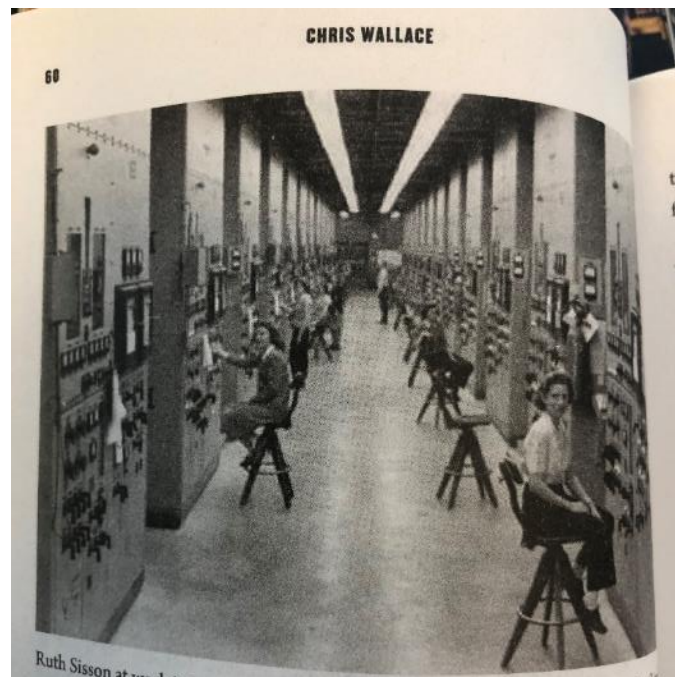
As usual, I thought I knew a lot about the Manhattan Project, Robert Oppenheimer, Tinian Island and the flight of the Enola Gay, but Wallace's book has all kinds of fascinating details of which I was heretofore unaware. Here are just a few:

- When FDR died on April 12, 1945, Harry Truman had been the vice president for only 83 days, had only met with FDR two times, and was only a decade removed from being a county court judge in Kansas City. Talk about having to learn on the fly. Fortunately, "Give 'em hell, Harry" was up to the task.
- When Truman told Papa Joe Stalin about America's secret weapon on July 24, 1945, Stalin was doubtless already aware of it because Russian spy Klaus Fuchs was working at Los Alamos, New Mexico, on the Manhattan Project--and had already turned over classified details to a fellow Commie who was a courier to the Kremlin.
- After Tinian Island was recaptured from the Japanese, American Seabees built an 8500-foot runway with great dispatch, at the time the longest runway *in the world!*
- Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr., the lead pilot of the Enola Gay³ was in **Omaha**, Nebraska, in November of 1944, visiting Omaha's Glenn L. Martin bomber plant to pick out the plane that he would fly on the mission. Tibbets advised the aeronautic engineers to modify the design of the B-29s to make them lighter and faster to improve the aircraft's speed and mobility. The bomb-bay doors were enlarged to accommodate Little Boy and Fat Man, the names of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Captain Robert A. Lewis, who occupied the co-pilot seat next to Tibbets in the Enola Gay, spent a week in Omaha in June of 1945, together with eight of his crew members, waiting for the souped up B-29s to roll off the assembly line in Omaha, described in the book as a "week of whiskey and fisticuffs and what passed for fun in rented rooms."

³ And the person who named the aircraft that would drop the first atomic bomb, after his mother.

Narrowly escaping the long arm of the law, Lewis and his crew boarded the brand-spanking new Superfortress and returned to Wendover Airfield in Utah for a few days before packing their things and heading to Tinian Island for final preparations for their mission.

- While plutonium was developed in Hanford, Washington,⁴ as part of the Manhattan Project, uranium enrichment took place at a very large facility constructed in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where young, mostly single women sat all day long in front of a machine known as a calutron,⁵ sitting on a stool for eight hours and turning the calutron knobs to keep the meters balanced. See the picture below, from page 60 of the book. Fascinating.



- The first test of the atomic bomb took place at 5:30 a.m. Mountain War Time on the morning of July 16, 1945, on a stretch of desert land about 50 miles from Alamogordo, New Mexico, famously known as the Trinity Test. While many had grave doubts that an atomic bomb would actually work, the Trinity Test confirmed the work of the ultra-secretive Manhattan Project scientists in spades. Below is a picture of J. Robert Oppenheimer and General Leslie Groves next to the charred remains of the 1,000 foot steel tower from which it was dropped. With the explosive power of 20,000 tons of TNT, the light which was described as “brighter than the noon-day sun” was seen 200 miles away, and the sound carried close to a hundred miles. A new era of death and destruction had dawned.

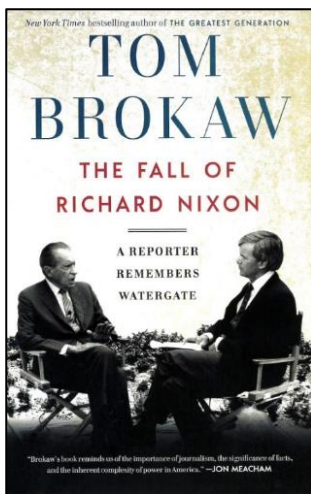
⁴ As previously reported in this rag.

⁵ Developed only months before at the University of California Berkley by Ernest O. Lawrence.



Countdown 1945 is one of the best books I have read all year. Who knew that somebody who was so awful as a presidential debate moderator could write such an excellent book? If any of you should want to borrow this outstanding and fairly short (280 pages) and eminently readable book, let me know.

**BOOK REPORT 2:
THE FALL OF RICHARD NIXON:
A REPORTER REMEMBERS WATERGATE**



I sped through *Countdown 1945* so quickly that I recently found myself on a road trip with nothing worthwhile to read, so I picked up the above-entitled book by Tom Brokaw, published in 2019. It is an interesting look back at the Watergate scandal through the eyes of a reporter who has seen a lot of political shenanigans over the course of his journalistic career, including but not limited to the Reign of POTUS 45. This book is nothing on the order of *The Greatest Generation*, the quintessential Brokaw offering, but it is an interesting and easy read, only 211 pages. Just a couple of points of interest from this book:

❖ Brokaw began his journalism career in Omaha, spending time here at radio station KMTV from 1962-1965.

❖ When Watergate was in full blossom and the great majority of Nixon's inner circle had been indicted, resigned or otherwise purged from leadership,

Nixon reportedly would sit all alone, late at night, and talk to the presidential portraits on the walls of the White House, and write words of encouragement to himself on yellow legal pads, penning such pep talks to himself such as "Be presidential" and "Be bold, new, courageous." As he was refusing to turn over the infamous White House tapes, Nixon tried his level best to take the public's mind off the Watergate scandal, going so far as to book private passage on a United Airlines jetliner (instead of flying on Air Force One) home to California for a short vacation, to show his fellow Americans how thrifty and what a "regular guy" he was during the oil embargo-induced gas crisis.

- ❖ To explain the infamous 18.5-minute gap in the Watergate tapes, Nixon distributed a photograph of Rosemary Woods having to make a reach for the tape recorder as she transcribed them, in the feeblest of attempts to explain the gap. See picture below.



- ❖ Anyway, a good read from a more innocent era, when most of us were in junior high or high school and didn't know squat about American politics.

PARTY OF SEVENTEEN

Earlier this month I had a few open dates on my calendar because of an eleventh hour settlement of a case slated for a week-long jury trial, so I hit the road on one of those days to visit a few more Nebraska courthouses. On this particular trip, I visited the Dawson County District Courthouse in Lexington, followed by a brief stop at the Pony Express Station in Gothenburg, followed by a visit to the Logan County District Courthouse in Stapleton, and then on to the village of Brewster in Blaine County, and finally to the Garfield County District Courthouse in Broken Bow, the latter of which was closed the last time I was in the area. The courthouse in Lexington, pictured below, is stately and beautiful, constructed in 1913-14 in the Beaux Arts style of architecture.



Dawson County District Courthouse

I learned from the courthouse deputy who opened up the locked courtroom for me to view that this is the courthouse where they tried the grisly murder trial of Aubrey Trail in July of 2019, which he described as an experience like no other. Although the murder committed by Trail took place in Saline County, because of the difficulty in finding an impartial jury in that county with all of the publicity, they moved the trial to Dawson County. What good fortune for Lexington, right? If nothing else, the Trail trial was probably the most famous/infamous trial ever held in that courthouse.

The courthouse in Stapleton (population 357) isn't much to look at, although it also does house the city's library. According to the small but dedicated group of employees of Logan County, they haven't had a jury trial in their district courtroom for quite some time.



Logan County Courthouse

The next leg of my trip, north and east to Blaine County (population 478), required a jog over to Arnold, Nebraska, the pride of Custer County, where I picked up Highway 40 and took this winding, two-lane road through the Sandhills until I reached the village of Dunning near the confluence of the Dismal and Middle Loup Rivers, near the doorstep of the Nebraska National Forest. From there it was a short shot east on Highway 91 to the county seat of Blaine County, Brewster, Nebraska, which holds itself out as having a population of *17 people*. That's right,

your eyes do not deceive you, the county seat of government for Blaine County has a whopping total citizenry of 17 people. However, judging by my drive through Brewster, this number may be inflated as I only saw a handful of cars and a few ramshackle buildings which might qualify as habitable residences.



Brewster, NE: Population 17

The Blaine County Courthouse, pictured below, looks much more like an old house than a courthouse, but it is in fact open for judicial business.



Blaine County District Courthouse

There were two vehicles parked outside the courthouse when I arrived in the early afternoon, and when I entered, I encountered two ladies--apparently official county employees--sitting around a big conference room table and munching from a bag of Cheetos. After introducing myself, I asked for a chance to see their district courtroom, which was dutifully opened up and made available for my observation. What I saw was a small, windowless room with a bench, twelve uncomfortable-looking, cloth-covered chairs resembling a jury box, two tables for legal counsel, and seating in the back for a handful of spectators. It has about as much charm as my furnace room. When I asked the clerk of the court when the last time was that they had a jury trial in Blaine County District Court, she paused, thought about it for a while, and then speculated that it had been at least ten to twelve years since they had assembled a jury in that courtroom, following which it was decided that they did not have jurisdiction to hear the case. Beyond that experience, she could not recount the last jury trial in that county.

With fewer than 500 people living in Blaine County, one has to wonder if they really even need to have an open, active courthouse for the sporadic amount of business done there, but that's not for you or me to decide, I guess. I would be fascinated to know the cost of keeping this courthouse open and operational, and why they couldn't consolidate operations with nearby Stapleton or Broken Bow, for example. I also ponder why Brewster was chosen as the county seat of Blaine County, instead of the at least now more populous communities of Dunning (103), Halsey (76) or even Purdum (20). There is probably a good political story behind it, and I will let you know if I am able to uncover it with a little digging.⁶

My return drive to Omaha took me smack dab through Burwell, the county seat of Garfield County, and since it was closed the last time I was in this neighborhood, I stopped in and took a look. Here's a picture of Lady Justice that adorns the entry to the district courtroom, promising equality to all who enter there.

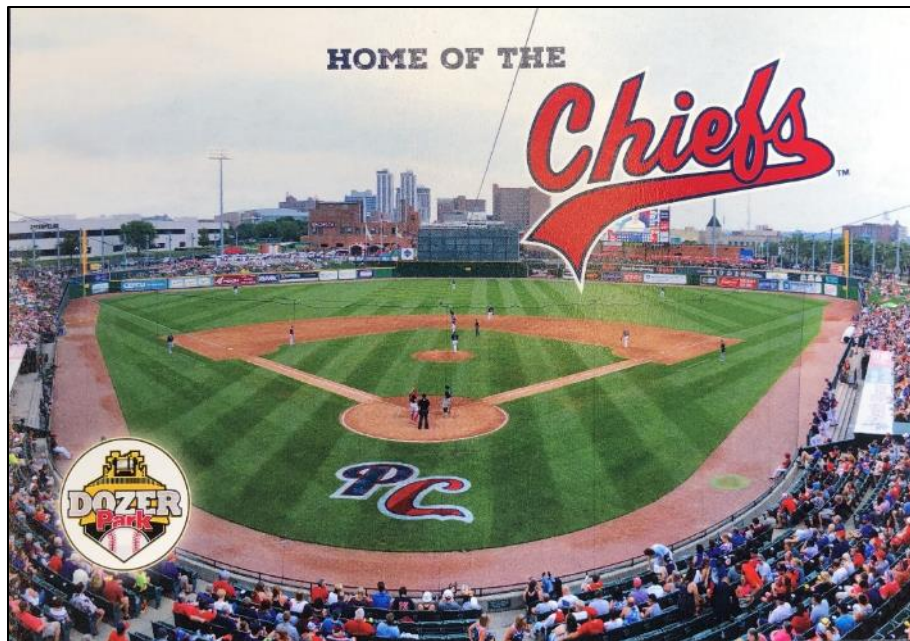


⁶ According to Wikipedia, Brewster was laid out in 1884 by George Washington Brewster, who homesteaded the land there, and named the town after one of his ancestors, William Brewster, who arrived in America on the Mayflower. The community was named as the county seat of Blaine County in 1887 after G.W. Brewster offered to erect the required buildings. According to town lore, Mr. Brewster expected the capital to eventually be located in the community because of its central location. Following the 2010 census, Brewster became the smallest incorporated county seat in the United States, replacing Amidon, North Dakota, for the title, with Brewster having 17 residents and Amidon, 20.



With this little courtroom romp now in the rearview mirror, I have now set foot in 92 of Nebraska's 93 counties, and have been inside 84 of the 93 courthouses. Like it or not, I will keep you all posted on future courthouse visits on my way to completing this particular bucket list item.

PEORIA AND DOZER PARK



After a recent trip to Iowa City to meet with a neurosurgery expert, I ignored the weather reports and headed east for the two-hour and twenty minute drive to Peoria, Illinois, for a visit to Dozer Park and a baseball game between the Peoria Chiefs and the South Bend Cubs

in a contest between these two rivals in the High A Central League. After driving through torrential rain in eastern Iowa and across western Illinois, the skies eventually cleared up for my drive into Peoria. Once at the ballpark, I settled in with the usual (hot dog, sack of nuts, cold beer) and watched as the Cubs put up a 6 spot in the top of the 6th to go out ahead by the score of 8-2, including a monster blast by the Cubs' 21-year-old center fielder Alexander Canario, who at his tender age has already amassed 43 career minor league home runs to go with his 168 RBIs and an OPS of .846.

And then the rains came, and while the grounds crew provided some terrific entertainment with their Keystone Cops display of how *not* to try to place a field tarp in the wind, the game was soon called and I was on my way to my hotel in downtown Peoria, the eclectic and quite nice Pere Marquette Marriott.



Even though the game had to be finished later, I have now added Dozer Park to my list of minor league ballparks visited, my sixth and probably last one for the 2021 season, and #87 overall.

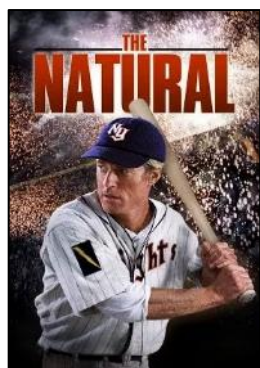
CANS OF CORN



R.I.P. Ed Asner, the lovable curmudgeon who we all know as *Lou Grant* from the *Mary Tyler Moore* show. I've seen the famous scene from the very first episode "You've Got Spunk"-- "And I Hate Spunk!" at least three or four times since his death was announced. One of my favorites.



On my drive in to work this morning, NPR was doing a feature on "Flying Cars," also known as Electric Vertical and Takeoff (or EVERTA) and so two dozen companies are now working on prototypes. Whoever thought that any of us might be living the *George Jetson* dream in our lifetimes. Sign me up.



Last night I was channel-surfing for baseball and landed on *The Natural*. While I've always been a fan of Robert Redford, and there are lots of other accomplished actors in this movie (Robert Duvall, Glenn Close, Kim Basinger, Wilford Brimley, the beloved Richard Farnsworth, Robert Prosky--the original "Let's be careful out there" guy on *Hill Street Blues*), Barbara Hershey and Don Baker) this has got to be the hokiest baseball movie of all time, and it definitely hasn't stood the test of time like, say, *Bull Durham* or *Field of Dreams*. Just one man's opinion, mind you.

* * * * *

That's it for this edition of *From the Bullpen*, Lads. Here's hoping for a Husker win tomorrow, and that each and every one of you have a restful and wonderful Labor Day weekend.

Cheers!

Skipper

