

# FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

## NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 2

January 18, 2023

### OWNERS:

**Ted Bridges**  
("PAwesome")  
Wahoos  
Returning Champion

**Jeff Bechtolt**  
("Screech")  
King Billies

**Jon Blongewicz**  
("Sunny")  
Blues

**Denny Bontrager**  
("SloPay")  
Bears

**Jim Buser**  
("Tirebiter")  
Redbirds

**Rick Drews**  
("Big Guy")  
Red Ball Jets

**Dave Ernst**  
("Skipper")  
Senators

**Bob Hurlbut**  
("Underbelly")  
Tribe

**Scott Krause**  
("BT")  
Saints

**Mike Morris**  
("Mouse")  
The Huskers

**Mitch Pirnie**  
("Magpie/Tricko")  
Bums

**Chuck Sinclair**  
("Shamu")  
Cubs

**John Thielen**  
("Itchie")  
DFL

### STAFF:

Publisher and Editor  
Dave Ernst

Webmaster and  
Assistant Editor  
Linda "Chief" Koftan

Gentlemen:

On this cold and wintry day, I can think of nothing better to lift my spirits than to talk a little baseball, so gather around the old Hot Stove and let's have at it, shall we?

For starters, let me answer for you now the question that was posed in the last issue of *From the Bullpen*, to-wit, who are the only set of brothers to face each other as pitcher and hitter in a postseason major league baseball contest? The answer is the Nola brothers, with pitcher Aaron Nola of the Philadelphia Phillies facing brother Austin Nola in Game No. 2 of the National League Championship Division series on October 19, 2022. After the Phillies jumped out to a 4-0 lead with Aaron on the mound, the Padres took over the game with five runs in the fifth inning. Austin Nola drove home the first run with a base hit to right on an 0-and-2 count, and after that the bottom dropped out for Aaron, who was chased when the Padres pushed across their fourth run to tie the game. Aaron went on to record the loss for the Phillies.



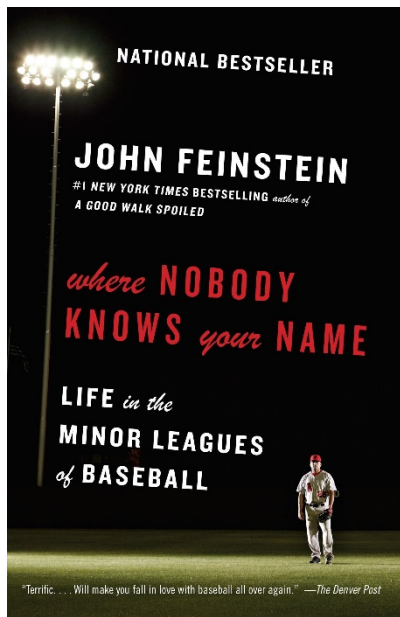
Next, let's take a look at some of the crazy contracts that have been signed in the major leagues thus far this off-season:

Aaron Judge, Yankees: \$360 million (2023-31)  
Rafael Devers, Red Sox: \$331 million (2023-33)  
Justin Verlander, Mets: \$86,666,666 (2023-2024)

Jacob deGrom, Rangers: \$185 million (2023-27)  
Carlos Correa, Twins: \$200 million (2023-2028)  
Julio Rodriguez, Mariners: \$210 million (2023-2029),  
could max out at \$470 million

Absolutely crazy funny money. It will be fun to look back in ten years to see which of these players are a bust and which of them lived up to their new contracts.

### LIFE IN TRIPLE A



One of my favorite things to read about in baseball is the stark difference between life as a AAA baseball player and life as a major leaguer, which is pretty much night and day. In the major leagues, it is big salaries, 4 and 5 star hotels, travel by private jet and generous daily meal money. In AAA, the general rule is modest salaries in five figures, travel on commercial airlines or even buses, 2 and 3 star motels, modest meal money, and relative anonymity. And yet, there are many, many AAA "lifers" who come back year after year, living the AAA lifestyle, just to try one more time to make it up to *The Show*, or to get back up there again if they have had a cup of coffee or more in the big leagues.

An excellent book that explores this phenomenon is *where NOBODY KNOWS your NAME: LIFE in the MINOR LEAGUES of BASEBALL*, by the prolific sports author John Feinstein. This wonderful book, published in 2014, chronicles the lives of several different major league baseball players toiling in the International League in the 2012 season, and their ups and downs as they try to figure out their next moves as their baseball playing careers, or umpiring career, in one case, near the end.

Feinstein spent a big chunk of the 2012 season following around International League players Nate McLouth, Scott Podsednik, John Lindsey, Chris Schwinden, Brett Tomko and Scott Elarton, umpire Mark Lollo and then-Durham Bulls manager Charlie Montoya as they experienced the highs and lows of a season trying to make it up or stay up in the Bigs. A few of the fun facts learned from this book:

- Major league player Adam Greenberg got his second major league at-bat seven years after being hit in the head in his first at-bat.
- Jimmy Morris a/k/a The Rookie blew out his arm as a youngster, became a high school baseball coach for many years, and then finally made it to *The Show* at age 35 and pitched 15 innings across two seasons.
- After being drafted by the Colorado Rockies in the 13th round in 1995, John Lindsey was finally called up after more than 16 years and got to play for the Los Angeles Dodgers—the longest minor league apprenticeship ever.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> His call up to the big club was in 2010, where he began and ended his MLB career by going 1 for 12 at the plate, a single, no runs scored or RBIs, an .083 batting average and a .154 OBP (he had one HBP) with 3 strikeouts. And then it was over.

- As a player, Charlie Montoya batted .400. Two hits in five career at-bats.
- Catcher Steven Vogt started out his career 0-for-25 at the plate.

More great stuff from Feinstein. You should read it.

### L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

Last week I traveled to the City of Angels for a deposition in Santa Monica and thanks to my good fortune in having the best travel agent anywhere (Linda, of course), I stayed at a hotel right on the marina at Marina Del Ray. Beautiful spot. After my deposition on Thursday, I took a walk from my hotel in Marina Del Ray north to Venice Beach and then further north to Santa Monica, on a beautiful, sun-splashed 70-degree day. Some great people-watching all along the route, but especially in Venice Beach and then on the Santa Monica Pier itself. After treating myself to a couple of cold brewskies at a place on the Santa Monica Pier, I was treated to the beginnings of a fantastic sunset, which fully matured as I hoofed the six miles back to my hotel. A couple of pictures follow which show some of the sights along the way.



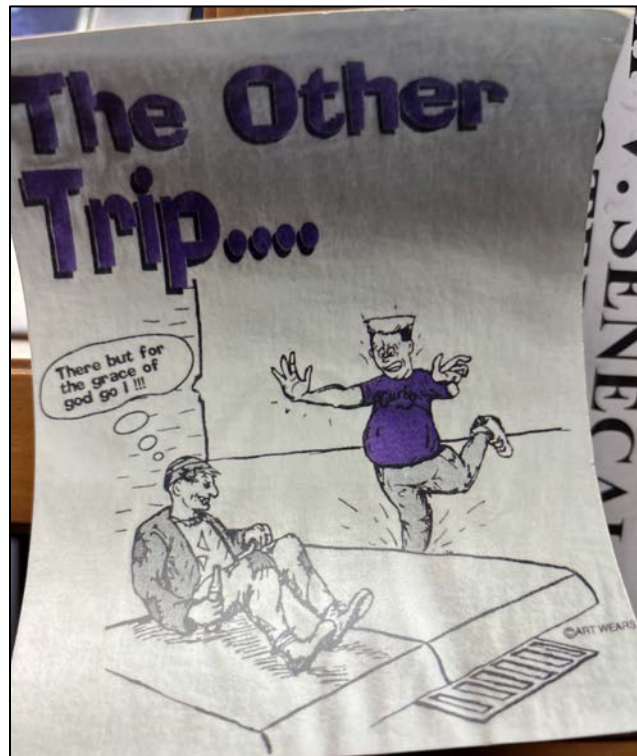




As I lurch forward toward old(er) age and its enticements and delights, I find myself reminiscing increasingly more often about previous trips and experiences. So while on this little boondoggle to L.A. last week, I thought of a previous trip that I took there with the boys for their first

experience at Dodger Stadium in 2015, our 13th year for the three of us to attend Opening Day together. On that memorable trip, we spent some time in the Venice Beach area, near Muscle Beach, and as we were having lunch at a crowded outdoor café, we saw a clearly deranged man who looked to be in his 30s or 40s riding toward us on his bicycle, shirtless, wearing a Viking helmet and riding without either hand on the handlebar but instead extended fully upward to flash “the bird” at the world with each hand. As he muttered something unintelligible while nearing our café, I admonished Joe and Will, who were not yet as experienced with nut jobs as me, to at all costs “avoid eye contact.” They did, and I did, and our bicyclist moved on past us without incident, and all was fine.

My L.A. trip also brought back memories of our famous/infamous junket there in 1993, where Tricky had his horrific, molar-loosening bellyflop on the mean streets of that city:



And this was also the trip when a young, green, naïve BT tried to talk our hotel clerk out of “comping” all of our rooms.<sup>2</sup> Man, that was embarrassing! But part of our league lore, so fair game to bring up here.

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<sup>2</sup> Nearly thirty seasons later, BT has recently been heard doing a little bit of revisionist history—outlandishly claiming that this humiliating little episode played out much differently. Of course, just because this former<sup>‡</sup> Trumper now *says* that this is true, doesn’t make it true; just like Big Guy *saying* that the epic Passing Van episode occurred in Canada, doesn’t make it true; just like Shamu *saying* that our seminal draft in 1985 happened at my first apartment in Kensington Woods, doesn’t make it true; just as *my saying* that my humiliation at the then-AL president spoof didn’t really happen, doesn’t make it true; just as Itchie *claiming* that he outscored Ron Kellogg in anything except the sale of credit cards and widgets, doesn’t make it true; and, well, I think you get the point.

<sup>‡</sup> We hope.

## FATHER, FORGIVE HIM

One more good story from my trip last week. As I was flying home from L.A., boarding my connecting flight in Phoenix for Omaha, there was a young man, maybe 25, trying to find space for his suitcase in the storage areas above in the front portion of the plane, and having no luck. After opening about his third or fourth bin and finding them all full, he uttered a swear word (but not the dreaded F-bomb), not directed at anyone specifically but just the universe in general, and just as these words emanated from his mouth, he came eyeball-to-eyeball with a priest in full Catholic garb and collar who was sitting exactly two rows in front of me,<sup>3</sup> and says "Father, forgive me." Without any hesitation and not missing a beat, the priest said, "Sorry. I'm off the clock."

Best line of the year, I thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

And that's all I got.

Skipper

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<sup>3</sup> And who, as it turns out, was Archbishop Lucas of Omaha who was attending a conference in Phoenix, and with whom HQ has been dealing of late. *Well played, Padre!*