

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

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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

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("Mouse")
The Huskers

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Bums

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Cubs

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Hey Howdy, Pardners!

Just a short *HeyHowAreYou* before the Old Skipper heads south to a much different latitude¹ for a few days.

TIM McCARVER: A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT

Because you are all thinking, discriminant baseball men, I thought it important to share with you all the recent Joe's Blogs ditty on the late, great, Tim McCarver, who as you all know passed away recently at the age of 81. (Mistakenly quoted as age 79 in an earlier *Bullpen*. Where is my proofreader when I need her?) As is often the case with Joe Posnanski, he often looks at things and, even better, writes about such things just exactly as I do and would. What *he* had to say about McCarver is *exactly* what I would like to have written about him, because it is *exactly* what I think about him. Here it is:

TIM McCARVER AND THE BEAUTY OF BASEBALL

Tim McCarver at age 25 had an absolutely fantastic season. This was 1967. He hit .295/.369/.452, with 26 doubles, 14 homers, he struck out just 32 times and he played fantastic defense behind the plate, throwing out 55% of the baserunners who tried to steal off his pitchers and brilliantly handling a pitching staff with titans Bob Gibson and Steve Carlton and a 29-year-old rookie named Dick Hughes.

"Oh," Gibson would remember "he could call a game."

The Cardinals won the World Series. McCarver finished second in the MVP voting. He looked at that moment to be one of the bright stars in baseball and perhaps even a baseball legend.

"The kid," four-time World Series champion Wally Schang said, "reminds me of Mickey Cochrane."

¹ 22.890533, to be precise.



As a player, alas, it wasn't meant to be. That was his last great season. McCarver kicked around the big leagues for another 13 seasons - well, parts of 13 seasons - and he had his good moments, particularly as Gibson's and Carlton's personal catcher, but he settled in as a backup and a good teammate.

And *then* he became a baseball legend.

When I heard on Thursday that McCarver had died, I reached out to some friends to ask what he meant to them. For people my age, Vin Scully was the poet, Jack Buck and Harry Caray were the heart, Bob Costas was the history, Joe Garagiola and Bob Uecker were the laughter, Tony Kubek was the friend.

And McCarver was the teacher.

"I learned 33.3% of my baseball from him," my friend Mike Vaccaro texted me. "I learned 33.3% from Buck Showalter his first year as the Yankees manager. And I learned 33.3% from my father."

Funny thing, McCarver came up at a time when Howard Cosell was furiously railing against what he called the jockocracy - the hiring of former players instead of journalists as announcers.

"I have kids all over the country writing me hundreds - maybe thousands - of letters a year," he said. "'How can I get into your field?' they ask. What do I tell them? Become a guttural illiterate and throw a football or throw a baseball? That's what it's come down to."

Cosell was rude and self-serving, but that doesn't mean he was entirely wrong. The exclusive hiring of former players to be in booths across all sports for approaching a half-century has peppered our games with a lot of cliches, a lot of one-note analysis, a lot of low-energy reliance on "when I was playing" stories, and a lot of sameness.

I think it comes down to this: Everybody hires former players - the more famous the better - in the hope that they can take us fans inside the game. And while there will be some exceptions, the results usually will be disappointing because it takes so much more than big-game experience to bring people inside.

What does it take? Right: It takes insight and perspective and curiosity and storytelling talents and a generosity of spirit. There have been many, many Tim McCarver wannabes. But there was only one Tim McCarver for those reasons.



Behind the mike, McCarver transcended his performance as a player.

He was funny, too - I loved his story about going to the mound to talk to Bob Gibson ("He said to me, 'get back behind the plate, the only thing you know about pitching is you can't hit it' ") and his insightful line "speed, ironically, slows down the game," and how he would call Dwight Gooden's fastball "Lord Charles," because it was too regal to be called "Uncle Charlie," like other curveballs.

"Have you ever watched his call of the Luis Gonzalez at-bat?" a friend asked me. I had not. I was at that game - Game 7 of the 2001 World Series - and while I certainly have seen the highlight of Luis Gonzalez against Mariano Rivera before, I had never before listened to Tim McCarver's call.

Here's what he said while Gonzalez dug into the box and Rivera took the ball and readied for the next pitch. Just as a reminder: The bases were loaded. There was one out. The score was tied 2-2.

Take it, Timmy:

"The one problem is Rivera throws inside to lefthanders, so lefthanders get a lot of broken bat hits into shallow outfield ... the shallow part of the outfield. That's the danger of bringing the infield in with a guy like Rivera on the mound."

On the next pitch, Luis Gonzalez hit a broken bat single over the drawn-in infield. The ball landed in the shallow outfield.

Incredible. That might have been the greatest broadcasting prophecy in any sport.

And, funny, you never really hear people talk about it. Tony Romo predicts a screen play correctly and people are ready to give him the Nobel Prize. McCarver perfectly called one of the most iconic hits in baseball history before it happened and ... nothing.

I suppose that's because McCarver was just around for so long. The color commentator game is not built to last; eventually, even the best of the best like McCarver start to repeat themselves, lose touch with the younger players, stubbornly cling to the way things used to be. By the end, sure, McCarver could be a hard listen.

Then again, by the end, so could the Rolling Stones.

I like what Gary Cohen says about McCarver: "He simply revolutionized what it meant to be a color analyst on a major league sports broadcast, really baseball or any other sport He was able to see things, he was a great observer, and he was able to relate those things to non-baseball people in a way that allowed us to better enjoy the games."

Yes. I want to go back to three words I used earlier: "Generosity of spirit." Of course, Tim McCarver loved baseball. That's a given and it's true for many, many athletes.

But what isn't nearly as common is this: He deeply wanted to share that love of baseball with us. He wanted to unwrap the game for us, explain to us the relationship between the pitcher and catcher, describe to us the back-and-forth mind games and reveal to us the complexities that we were not seeing. He didn't want there to be any secrets. He wanted everyone to be able to see the full-color beauty of baseball.

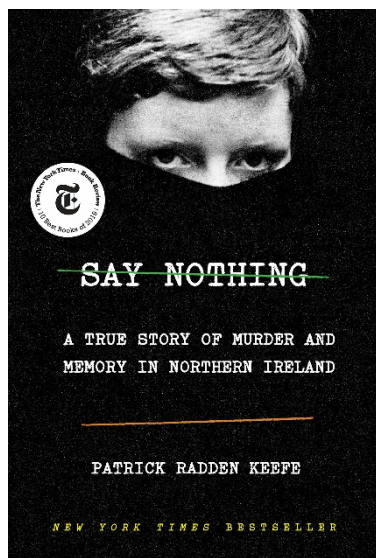
I would love to know if you all agree about how Joe and I feel about McCarver. Feel free to chime in.

VIVA SPRING TRAINING



(circa 1966) A young Mike Morris, transported into the future by the wonders of modern technology, pays a visit to his future hero, Aaron Judge.

If Norman Rockwell was alive today, this is precisely how he would have captured this beautiful moment. I just love this picture to death.



THE TROUBLES

BOOK REPORT:

SAY NOTHING,

by Patrick Radden Keefe
Published by Doubleday, 2019

I just finished reading a fascinating book about the era of *The Troubles*, which, most of you will remember, involved the murderous, undeclared war between the Irish Republican Army, of Catholic ilk, and the Protestants of Northern Ireland, chiefly in Belfast. A third arm of this Improbable Isosceles Triangle was the British Government, which was determined to keep the peace and to prevent the loss of Northern Ireland from Her Majesty's governance.

Since *The Troubles* happened so far away across the pond, if you weren't an Irish American living in Boston or somewhere else on the East Coast, it feels like the troubles seemed to be a world away, since it did not affect our day-to-day lives here in the States. But in jolly old England and in Northern Ireland, particularly, it was a bloody, brutal, sadistic war which lasted for the better part of the decades of the 1970s, '80s and '90s.

One of the signal events which contributed to the hostilities was a march which took place on January 1, 1969, when a band of student protesters assembled outside City Hall in Donegal Square in the center of Belfast. Their plan was to walk from Belfast to the walled city of Derry, some 70 miles away, a march that would take them several days. They were protesting systemic discrimination against Catholics in Northern Island. The march was patterned after the famous 1965 Civil Rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. As they marched out of Belfast, wearing duffle coats and moving arm-in-arm, they held up signs that read "Civil Rights March" and as in Selma, sang "We Shall Overcome."

Say Nothing is a story that centers around an Irish woman by the name of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of ten children who was identified as a traitor to the cause and who was kidnapped by a terrorist arm of the Irish Republican Army and driven across the border and executed and then buried; and about the impact on her young children who had already lost their father, and about their many-year battle to find her corpse and her killers and attempt to bring them to justice. One of the central characters in the book is Gerry Adams, who reportedly ordered the killing of Jean McConville but later denied having any involvement whatsoever with the IRA and violent protests, and who later denounced violence as a means of resolution and became involved as the head of the political movement *Sinn Fein*. Here is a picture of him in his youth, juxtaposed against a recent picture of him as a retired terrorist and politician.



You may remember that one of the most powerful weapons used by captured and incarcerated members of the IRA was the hunger strike, a ritual which was weaponized to try to make the British Government look bad. The most famous of these hunger strikers, of course, was the late Bobby Sands, who died of his own self-induced lack of nutrition after a strike lasting 66 days.

The woman on the cover of the book is a young revolutionary by the name of Dolours Price, who with her sister Marian may have been directly involved in the kidnapping and murder of Jean McConville, and who were involved in transporting explosive devices from northern London, to try to take the fight to the home of the Crown, to raise the level of awareness of *The Troubles*.

Because it's hard to keep the players straight without a scorecard, for your edification and nourishment, a main participant in *The Troubles* were Republican paramilitaries such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA); such loyalist paramilitaries as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defense Association (UDA); the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC); and political activists. More than 3500 people were killed in the conflict, of whom 52% were estimated to be civilians, 32% members of the British security forces and 16% members of paramilitary groups. The Northern Ireland peace process eventually led to paramilitary ceasefires and talks between the main political parties, which resulted in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This Agreement restored self-government to Northern Ireland on the basis of power-sharing, and involved a commendment to civil and political rights, police reform, paramilitary disarmament and early release of paramilitary prisoners.

The bloodiest year of *The Troubles* was 1972, with an estimated 500 people killed. To give you all an idea of how nasty things were between these fighting factions, the practice of Tarring and Feathering the captured opposition was the official policy of the Provisional IRA. Now *that* would not be fun.

HQ and I are heading to Ireland, including three days in Belfast, in April for a meeting of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and I am anxious to visit some of the places mentioned in the book. I will report back in this organ following this investigatory junket.

* * * * *

See you in the funny papers.

Skipper