

## Reflections on the 2003CWS John Pinkman

With a Name Like Rosenblatt...It Has to Be Good. Thank you, Smuckers. It fits perfectly.

Have you ever thought of going to the College World Series in Omaha? Well, get off the dime and go! I know it's not easy. There is so much to do. But, trust me on this...you have to go! There are a thousand reasons not to go to Omaha. But let me give you a few reasons to make plans to attend next year.

To begin with, tickets ARE available but you must make plans in January. You can buy a block of tickets to all games through TicketMaster at 402-422-1212 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

The stadium seats 25,000. Fifty percent of the seats are purchased by local fans. Don't be fooled by the empty seats on TV. I'm told they were all sold and are no shows for that game. Buy your tickets early in January

Hotels fill up fast with just the 8 teams alone. There are 3 hotel zones:

- 1) At Rt. 80 at 72<sup>nd</sup> Street – 5 minutes from the stadium
- 2) The casino district across the river in Council Bluffs, Iowa – 10 minutes
- 3) Downtown in the Old Market – 10-15 minutes (very cool!)

Plan to take a shuttle to the field. Parking is very limited and consequently, very expensive - \$20 a day. Even on some local lawns!

Everything is easy to get to in Omaha. At 9am heading into downtown I had 4 cars in front of me and 5 in the rear view mirror.

You may not realize this was Lou Pavlovich's 32<sup>nd</sup> year at the CWS. How's that for a streak?! As usual, he was excited and happy to be there this year. And he had me, a rookie, to tuck under his wing. For the media these are long, hard days. Usually 8:00am to midnight. The environment is so exhilarating you don't feel it until your butt hits the car seat on the way back to the hotel.

Omaha *IS* the CWS. The townspeople, the coaches, players, media, and fans all blend into one celebration. It's happy. It's wholesome. The town is alive, becoming a university town - times 8. The spirit of baseball, the pride of school, the honor of alumni and the joy of family combine to create an excitement and enthusiasm that is expressed in the CWS logo "...Where Dreams Come True".

If you are at all cynical about the game, attend one week in the Heartland in Omaha. You will be renewed and refreshed as if you took a dip in a clear mountain stream. The spirit of baseball is infectious here. The highs are higher, the lows are lower. But everyone knows that. It's the fabric of the game.

However, everyone gets nicer when they come to Omaha. I think it's the law. From the minute you get off the plane at Eppley Air Field (you'll notice it's not called an airport... It's very old time) you'll be hit with helpful people with an obvious and conscious effort to make you feel welcome. The term "tourist" seems inappropriate in Omaha.

Yes, Omaha is plain. It's a little dusty and not much new happens here. At all times you can see a train rumbling through town with a load of coal or "such as that". Omaha is a sleepy Midwestern town of very old brick buildings that just discovered it's 2003. And that's ok for most.

"Plain" stops at Rosenblatt. By the way, what's a Rosenblatt? Rosenblatt Stadium was named after Johnny Rosenblatt, who was the mayor of Omaha between 1954 and 1961. A former ballplayer, a diminutive left hander with a vision, Rosenblatt was the pioneer, salesman, and driving force behind the stadium's development, which began in 1947 with a \$150,000 budget. Today with its AAA Kansas City Royals affiliation, and multi-million dollar, state of the art, field drainage system, the stadium lives as a legend each year. It truly is a monument to what is best in baseball...and Omaha keeps it that way.

The bright red, yellow and blue stadium sparkles atop one of the rolling hills south of town. It is only fitting that you must climb the mountain to enter. On a sunny day the huge geodesic dome in right field reflects an actual 100 foot tall star. The dome and adjacent pyramid house the Omaha Zoo. Together they provide a surreal and out of this world setting as well. But yet, you can't forget you're in the Heartland.

Rosenblatt even has an RV park in the left field parking area with full electric hookups. The surrounding neighborhood is just as much a part of the event. Some neighbors pitch tents and sell everything from souvenirs to food. This year, some even tried to sell their homes and cars.

### **But What About the Baseball Teams?**

It is amazing to watch the coaches and players during the CWS handle the spotlight of the media. These guys either are extremely well-trained or genuinely sincere in sustaining a consistent positive attitude. You need to realize that all of these folks are under intense pressure from the minute they arrive. They are pulled left and right to respond to media questions. And everyone makes you feel that your inquiry is very important to them at that moment. Draped in esprit de corps, they patiently respond in full candor to every question posed to them. Well maybe ducking one or two here and there.

In defeat, they are gracious. In victory, they are humble and complimentary. Especially in light of this year's many controversial and disputed calls by umpires. As you probably saw on TV, numerous calls were blatantly WRONG. Rice's Coach Graham was tossed in a very inappropriate and bush league move by the home plate umpire. Remarkably during his post game press conference Coach apologized for his admittedly *unknown transgression*. (Do you have any idea how hard that is to do for a native Texan?!)

There is no whining in Omaha. Truer words were never spoken than "it is an honor to be here."

Whether you are listening to or reading articles by one of the youngest old timers in college ball, Lou Pavlovich, Omaha celebrates the history of the game. History is a vital part of the Omaha experience. So much so, that Fan Fest, a local outdoor block party organized to celebrate the CWS in the Old Market section of downtown, was infused with a vintage baseball game. This was a full in-costume reenactment of 19<sup>th</sup> century baseball. It commenced at where else but...the railroad yard. Here is the play by play...

“The home 9 ballists began the game by singing a welcome song to the visiting match 9, accompanied by their band.

The cranks gave the hurler a lot of muckle as he took the mound.

The hurler began his five step motion and threw his homemade and handmade ball to the behind.

The umpire warned the hurler because his pitch was not strikable.

The striker then, as the rule indicated, instructed the hurler as to where he wanted the next pitch to be located. The hurler complied. The striker smacked a knocker over the 3<sup>rd</sup> base tender's head. It was a cloud hunter that echoed off the train station into the outer garden. The short scout proceeded to relay the ball from the left scout to the behind on a single bug bruiser. But the behind was guilty of loose fielding. Subsequently, several tallies were reported to the scorer's table after the tally bell was rung.

Shortly, the umpire began to receive chaffing from the visiting 9 from Ord. The umpire fined them 10 cents on the spot. Serious boyo was yelled by the cranks and they, in a fit of rage, tarred and feathered the umpire. When last seen, the umpire was running down the Union Pacific tracks chased by the ballists waving their ashes and willows; while the band played on.”

Yes sir, I tell you no lie, I was there myself. I saw it personally. It was me, Shoeless Joe, Ray Kinsella, Billy Chapel, Roy Hobbs and the Whammer. Yes sir, we were all there. For love of the game.

Omaha brings into reality the American tradition of rooting for the underdog. Remember, 50% of the fans are local unless there is a Midwestern team in the running. Only 2 people in Omaha are routinely booed. The umpire of course (and especially this year) and the ball girl who fails to catch the ball rolling off the backstop netting. Now you know why and where those off-camera boos you heard came from.

It is true that pitching decides most post-season championships. The new game format will definitely cause CWS contenders to truly deepen their pitching staff. It becomes more of a reality than a cliché. The four, five and six starter becomes the lifeblood of a team in Omaha. But anything can happen here. That's the excitement. The coaches and players know that better than anyone. Anyone can win...even a school with less than 3000 students enrolled, like Rice.

Teammates come to play at Omaha. There are few – if any – individuals. Players rely on each other....just the way you'd want them to. They sprint on and off the field. Often one is rewarded in a compassionate celebration in the jubilation of the moment.

But one thing was crystal clear – no one person ever loses a game in Omaha. Time after time, players and coaches publicly locked arms in defeat, consistently deflecting media attempts to place game-losing responsibility on one error, one missed pitch, or one strike out. They share the joy; they share the sorrow....just like you'd want them to.

On our business cards we elicit a call: "Honor the Game". Omaha - the town, the team, the experience - does just that. You cannot leave this earth without going to Omaha. It's that important. It's doable. Do yourself a favor. Lou and I will see you there next year.