

## Monday's Commentary

## Stadium renovations gets boos from the bleachers



Mike Scanlon

Down at Tiger Stadium on 78 different days this year you will find a considerable number of disgusting, sloppy, totally inexcusable actions that are a lot of fun to watch. And you don't even have to worry about listening to any disco music.

If you happen to hit a slow day, you can usually rely on the game to provide at least mild amusement. But what we're mainly talking about here is the bleacher section, Ron LeFlore's favorite part of the ballpark.

The Detroit Baseball Club is the corporate front for a man named John Fetzer. He owns what everybody else calls the Tigers, when they're not calling them something even worse. This summer, the baseball club has turned the bleachers into a sort of pay-as-you-go Stalag 17.

A misguided move that is only a small part of the larger, even more misguided reconstruction that has been dragging on for the last couple years, this bleacher renovation has squeezed thousands into a tiny section enclosed by cyclone fencing.

Much of the reconstruction stadium-wide consists of ripping out old, green wooden seats and replacing them with new, blue plastic seats. These seats have aluminum tags numbering them, and from a distance it creates the effects of polka dots.

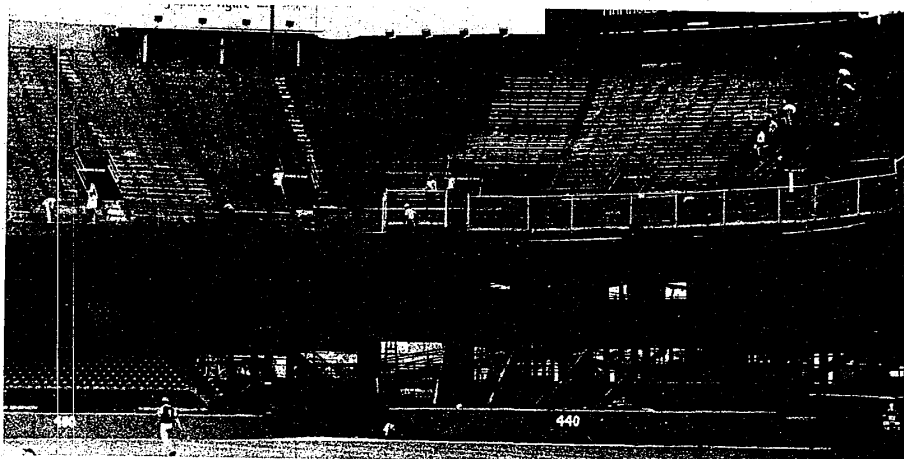
I have nothing against new seats at the ballpark. But they shouldn't be blue.

There used to be things you could count on in life — things like the American flag. It is red, white and blue. Tiger Stadium is green.

Not anymore. Now the stadium is well on its way to being polka dots, and I've been a mite afraid lately to check out the flag.

THE STADIUM was sold two years ago for one buck to a corporation established by Detroit. In return, the former owners acquired a 30-year lease and renovation financing of about \$13.5 million. Some of this financing came through federal grants awarded because of the city's involvement, but \$8.5 million took the form of bonds.

Somewhere, the bondholders are clipping their coupons in security and comfort. Maybe they worry about the problem of hiring good help, because they sure don't worry about the bonds — upwards of 1.5 million people continue to push through the ballpark turnstiles, rain or shine, pennant or cellar, year in and year out. Each of them ponies up 50 cents to pay off the bonds every time they enter the park, a sum included in the ticket price and called a surcharge.



The scattering of workmen renovating the upper deck Tiger Stadium bleachers are occupying the space usually taken by 11,211 screaming fans. The fans have to wait.

Oh yes. The baseball club has that lease. You should have seen a lease.

The club pays the city's corporation a sliding scale of rent, based on how many people attend during the year. Club officials are very coy about telling you just how much the rent is, but that doesn't really matter.

IT DOESN'T MATTER because none of that money is going anywhere. Right now, the rent money helps pay off the bonds, but when they're retired it will go into a fund. The fund will be around awhile — the 30-year lease has three 10-year options to renew. By the time they all expire, the patina of age may have given Ron LeFlore the same misty glory as Ty Cobb.

All that while, the rent fund will be used to fix up Tiger Stadium in whatever way the baseball club and the city's corporation decide is nice.

This is like paying rent to the landlord who uses the money to build a pool in the backyard that you use to sell tickets to the neighbors so you can get money to pay your rent. Nice work, if you can get it.

Still, Tiger Stadium is an aging structure and this arrangement just may have saved it from the scrap heap.

Fetzer's organization will never threaten the Little Sisters of The Poor when it comes to benevolence. Ask Willie Horton. Ask Les Moss. If it was

cheaper to tear down the park than to fix it, the wrecking ball would be on the scene so fast there would be a parade of cops writing speeding tickets in its wake.

AND IT SEEMS to me a better than even bet than when the time came to build a replacement stadium, Coleman Young would have twisted enough legislative arms to get the same sugary deal for the Tigers that the Lions made a baseline for in building the taxpayers' \$34 million Silverdome. The current arrangement is chicken feed by comparison.

But back to the bleachers. Some structural renovation is taking place, but the noticeable work will be the replacement of the old wooden benches with new, aluminum benches. They will be — blech! — blue. They will probably also be very cold in the spring and fall.

The ball club says workers refuse to expose themselves to winter weather in the unprotected upper deck bleachers, so the replacement of those bleachers has to take place in the summer.

I have my doubts about that. A lot of construction workers would be on their way to the dentist if their eyeteeth would get them a job in the usually unemployment-filled winter.

COINCIDENTALLY, it is also during the summer that most people say, "Hey, let's go see a ball

game." Not many drop everything for a two-night doubleheader on Christmas Eve.

When your father wasn't old enough to have a mustache, there were 11,211 bleacher seats. That's how many there were last year, too. This year, because of the renovation, there are 3,428.

But wait — it's worse than it sounds. Of those, only 1,385 are in the upper deck. Now, anybody who attends Tiger games knows that the upper deck bleachers are the place to be. Retirees and a very strange man named Dirty Dinky Davis are about the only people who sit in the lower deck by choice.

This means that while the Tigers are selling no more than 3,428 bleacher seats per game, about an even 3,400 of those ticket holders end up packing themselves onto upper deck benches that supposedly hold only 1,385 people.

You can easily wait an inning and a half in the beer line, and no more concession stands are included in the renovation.

The bleacher renovation is supposed to be finished in September, so maybe everything will be back to normal for the World Series.

This will give you a lot of happiness as you watch it on your television — but look at the bright side. At least the beer at home doesn't cost a buck, and you don't have to wait in line in the restroom.

## From our readers

## 'Ignorance is bliss,' rabbi charges

Editor:

The Observer & Eccentric column, Crackerbarrel Debate by Steve Barnaby, was indignant when he takes Detroit area rabbis to task on the issue of freedom of speech and everyone's right to be heard. It is always simple to get up straw men and then to knock them down.

Mr. Barnaby exhibits a familiarity with the letter of Jewish law written by Rabbi Wine but chooses to ignore its content. After all, as the cliché goes, ignorance is bliss.

The Detroit area rabbis, in speaking to Rabbi Wine, stated "while respecting the right of organizations and individuals to espouse any viewpoint, (they) also reaffirm the responsibility of the rabbinate . . . to preserve the dignity of the Jewish people and to protect the welfare of the State of Israel."

Neither Barnaby nor Wine, by omission or commission, can refute the fact that an irresponsible, people-acting establishment of a second Palestinian state (remember Jordan?) on the border of Israel as a threat to the Israeli people and their quest for peace with security.

Had L.F. Stone come to Detroit, rented a hall and spewed out his message to whomever cared to listen, the rabbis might have responded to his misstatements but would have respected his right to be wrong. The objection is to an institution which calls itself Jewish inviting an individual to a platform knowing in advance that the individual's position is antithetical to that of the vast majority of the Jewish community.

Will Rabbi Wine now provide a platform to every kook and demagogue since, as he says, " . . . We firmly believe in the value of open inquiry and free speech." Is the inference supposed to be that other rabbis do not believe in open inquiry? It is like the John Birch Society taking as its own the slogan, "support your local police." The inference there is that if you are not a member of the John Birch Society, you do not support your local police. Again the rabbi, like Barnaby, sets up a straw man, the easier to knock it down.

I close with one more note to Mr. Barnaby. Saying that Mr. Stone should not have a Jewish platform from which

to espouse his opinions is no more an attempt to stifle free speech than is denying rabbis the right to criticize even when it is one of their own colleagues. It is indeed much simpler to write an emotional editorial page column than to explore both sides of an issue.

RABBI ISRAEL I. HALPERIN, Rabbinical Commission President

## 'Angles' item draws ire

Editor:

It was reported in the Observer's Inside Angles column, Monday, June 25, that "more programs come and go before the class starts" at the Farmington Community Center.

Fact: The summer schedule features 40 classes and only four have been cancelled by the center or the teacher. The column also stated that "the trip to see Mel Torme at Meadowbrook was canceled before it was publicized." Fact: All events and classes are publicized in the summer brochure which was mailed to 28,000 Farmington area residents May 16.

The Mel Torme trip was canceled because of poor response on June 19. The

## READERS'

## FORUM

Letters must be original copies and contain the signature and address of the sender. Limit letters to 300 words.

## Indians fish for livelihood

Editor:

I am a Bay Mills Chippewa woman, residing in Southfield. Needless to say, I was somewhat upset when I read Tim Richard's article ("The White Man sheds a tear," July 5).

It is too bad he did not get some of the facts before he wrote the article. The attitude of many whites over this fishing issue is one of racial hysteria. Judge (Noel) Fox has considered the earlier decision, as has the Michigan Supreme Court, in an earlier decision on similar issues.

THESE ARE the facts: The Bay Mills Chippewas are descendants of a group of Indians who lived at the Sault and fished for their living. Periodically they would travel about and fish in other parts of Lake Superior, the Straits and Lake Michigan. Because they had lived that way for hundreds of years, they insisted on retaining the right to fish when the whites took away all their land and other rights, in the treaties of the 1800's. Since these treaties were signed, the way of life has remained the same. Bay Mills is a community of less than 1,000 people, many of whom depend on the fishing industry for their livelihood. They go out to fish the same way your readers go to work at Ford or Allstate or NBD. How would it be if someone said your readers couldn't do that anymore?

Another fact not considered by hysterical white sportsmen is that Indians are not responsible for the depletion of lake trout. The culprit in this case is the sea lamprey, a voracious salt water

eel introduced to the lakes by the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950's.

The Seaway, of course, was an invention for the profit of whites — if we must get racial. In addition, the reproduction of all lake creatures has been hampered by the addition of massive doses of chemical pollutants to the lake waters — again, by whites.

Mr. Richard states that there is "evidence to the contrary" that Indians will conserve this resource. Yet, neither he nor his beau ideal, Tom Watson, are forthcoming with any factual evidence.

Judge Fox's decision gives fishing rights which may not be limited by the state, but limits have been set by the tribe. It is in the tribe's best interest to preserve the fish, after all. Whites are often guilty of fishing without a license or over the limit, as any conservation officer can tell you.

Regarding Mr. Richard's parting shot about the Indians drinking white man's blood in 1763, if that has anything to do with the fishing issue I'd like to see him explain it and, at the same time, tell the truth about the provocation offered by the whites.

I'd like to see him prove that anyone's blood was drunk.

Paleface history, and more of it is in the making in your newspaper. I think we deserve equal time in your newspaper, in the interest of fairness, and to keep this hysteria from getting somebody hurt.

ELAINE LEBLANC SCHUSTER, Southfield

## Coverage commended

Editor:

You are to be commended for the excellence of volume 90, number 74 of the Farmington Observer. It reflected the highest qualities of the finest tradition of American journalism. The composition, layout, photography, and research-reporting was most impressive.

I should like to express my esteem especially for your two headline articles: "Rabbi rapped. . ." and "Solicitor General. . ." It is somewhat disturbing, of course, that both articles reflected so negatively upon our northwest metropolitan area Jewish community, but then you allowed the "chips to fall where they would" and that is important to a free press.

The former of the two articles was a powerful assertion of the rights of free speech and was astonishing in its indication that our community of Jewish rabbis, of all people, should be taking communal action to censure Rabbi

Wine for his insistence upon freedom of ideas and balanced discussion. That is especially disturbing when one considers that the issue involved, Israeli and PLO, could very well be so badly mislabeled by either Israel or the PLO as to precipitate a world destroying Armageddon.

When one adds to all that the import of the second lead article on the hunting of Nazi affiliates in the USA 35 years after the demise of Hitler's regime, one gets the feeling of a new fanatic abroad today championed by our Jewish community. That is intolerable, and certainly our rabbi friends are bright enough to know that if it "gets loose" in our world again, whether fostered by the Israeli, PLO, or Germans, everybody loses — and minority groups most.

J. HAROLD ELLIENS, PhD, Pastor, University Hills Church, Farmington Hills

## Views draw applause

Editor:

Please let me applaud you for writing such a beautiful editorial supporting free speech and open inquiry and denouncing the censorship of Rabbi Sherwin Wine.

Yours is a refreshing rational voice that makes me proud of the field of journalism. I also am very proud that I had the opportunity to meet you personally several times in your office.

My first impression of you was that you were indeed a sensitive, astute, open-minded, fair and beautiful human being. My impression has been proved over and over again.

Thank you for your continued support.

MARILYN ROWENS, drama director, Birmingham Temple

A Division of  
Suburban Communications  
Corporation

Philip H. Power  
Chairman of the Board  
(on leave of absence)

Richard D. Agnifino  
President  
Chief Executive Officer

## Farmington Observer

"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"

Steve Barnaby  
Editor  
23332 Farmington Rd.  
Farmington, MI 48324  
(313) 477-5450

John Reddy, General Mgr.  
Thomas A. Riordan, Executive Editor  
George J. Hagan, Advertising Director, Fred J. Wright, Circulation Director