

Opinion

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Even non-fans have memories



Steve Barnaby

WELL, I GUESS avoiding this Tiger thing is impossible.

A few days back, Tully Hall was cluttered with a couple of thousand fans willing to stand in line for up to two hours. The prize: an autograph of Tiger catcher Lance Parrish.

One woman drove all the way from Lansing for this Tiger fest. She went through the line a couple of times. The rest of her day was taken up staring at this guy Parrish.

The proliferation of the Tiger baseball cap also has become an indication of the enthusiasm. Fans wear them everywhere — in the office, in restaurants, at home. My daughter — well, I can't remember the last time I saw the top of her head sans the old English D-laden crown.

NOONTIME CONVERSATION is filled with Tiger trivia. A lot of the talk surrounds "the last time."

We all know what "the last time" means. That's right: 1968. Everybody has a story about the World Series.

Now, I'm classified somewhere in the "not-much-of-a-fan-at-all" category. If Tiger players had to depend on this guy for a paycheck, the likes of Kirk Gibson and Alan Trammell would be much poorer fellows. It has been a couple of years since I graced the portals at Michigan and Trumbull.

BUT EVEN FOR ME, baseball holds a special place.

I never really believed it until — well, you know — until "the last time." I was about as far away as a person could get from major league baseball — Vietnam, to be precise.

By the time the World Series came along, combat had been a part of my life for more than eight months. Home — Detroit — seemed like a very distant memory. Baseball was absolutely the last thing on my mind.

But one night changed all that.

My unit had been pulled out of the field to give us a chance for a little light duty in a rear area.

For a week and a half, we sat around guarding oil storage tanks. From what I'll never know. It's not as if anyone were going to carry one off. But the Army is like that.

NATURALLY, AT night a guard was posted. We took turns — hourly. Around 2 a.m. I was fighting my own own personal battle — with sleep, so I turned on a transistor radio.

A chill swept through my body. There from that little radio came the sounds of Tiger Stadium.

Staring out into the pitch black night, I clutched my M-16 and intently listened to the sound of the Detroit crowd and heard the familiar names repeated by the broadcaster — Kaline, Horton, Lolich.

I could smell the hot dogs, hear the vendors, smell the peanuts and see the lush green grass that blankets the field. The sand bog on which I sat suddenly became one of those old green seats.

I was home.

NEVER HAS a baseball game ever been listened to with more enthusiasm or emotion. That night I was the biggest Tiger fan that ever walked on the face of the earth.

This year, if the Tigers get to the Series, I'll be around. Maybe I'll even be able to see a game.

But it just won't mean as much as "the last time."

Auto strike may well hurt 'Buy America'

AS AUTO CONTRACT negotiations move into the final day before a union deadline, some experts are predicting the UAW will strike against General Motors.

Indications are that a short strike — less than 60 days — may not be disastrous to the GM, UAW members or the area economy. But perhaps what the UAW and General Motors should be worrying about is the long-range effect of a strike on public confidence in the American auto industry.

THE UAW, in particular, is walking a tightrope in terms of its image.

The general public is becoming more and more non-union. Union members generally are less zealous about the union movement. Auto workers are paid in excess of \$10 an hour, excluding benefits. Even though they have made wage concessions in the last few years, their wage rate and fringe benefits make them among the highest-paid manufacturing employees in the country.

They are engaged in producing products that sell for more than \$10,000. The workers are, in fact, producing a product that people in similar occupations believe they cannot afford.

At the same time, the union is pursuing by a variety of means some kind of protectionism, up to and including federal regulations that will limit imports.

IT ALMOST seems at times that the UAW wants the government to guarantee its members will continue to earn higher wages than those in similar occupations. The UAW has a problem explaining its position and TV commercials imploring loyalty to American automobile products don't do the job.

A strike that in any way tends to make the UAW look greedy will create a portion of the buying public that continues



Bob Wisler

to "buy American" out of a sense of patriotism.

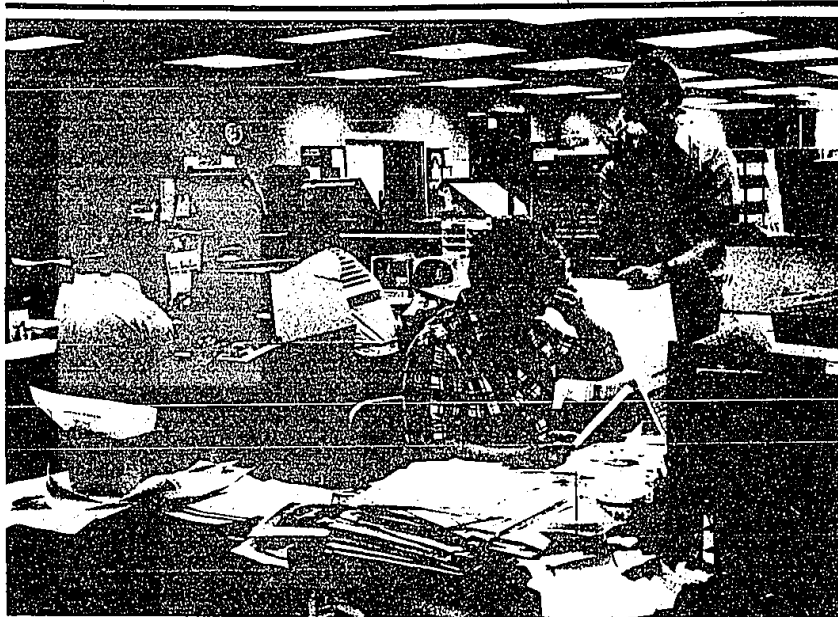
Even after all the "buy American" slogans and carapalms of the last few years, 30 percent of the new cars sold are foreign products. The percentage could be higher if it were not for the Japanese car makers' voluntarily limiting imports to 1.9 million each year.

THE AUTO company management has not made its task any easier by parcelling out sizeable bonuses to its executives during the summer. The executives should know that such an action, before the onset of contract negotiations, surely would produce the kind of mood that it has produced in auto workers. A typical auto worker says, "The company is making record profits, and the executives got their share. We want our share."

There is a question, however, of whether the management of the auto companies even cares about how such raises appear to UAW workers or to the general public.

There is an aloofness to auto industry executives that suggests they believe, as former GM Chairman Charlie Wilson once stated, "What's good for General Motors is good for the country."

An incept round of contract talks that leads to a strike neither side seems determined to avoid will damage further the sense of loyalty many feel toward the American auto industry.



Good news about newspapers

WE ALL want to believe we are brave, clean and reverent — the ideals of a good Boy Scout.

In the newspaper business, we believe we are the equivalent of a good Scout — fair, honest and objective. We know, however, that sometimes we miss the mark.

But how can we know what readers really think? We get some ideas from telephone calls, letters and our contacts in the community. But most people who approach us have a vested interest and aren't representative of our readers.

So editors look carefully at documented research. Such a study — "Relating to Readers in the '80s" — was recently completed by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Here are some conclusions so you can compare your thoughts with other readers.

FIRST, THE positive views. Most persons have far more favorable attitudes about their local newspaper than they do for newspapers in general. For example, 84 percent describe the paper they most often read as accurate, but only 47 percent believe newspapers are usually accurate.

A 1978 study of readers' attitudes found most readers believed editors were



Nick Sharkey

more interested in pleasing other editors and not readers. That gap is narrower. Today, 67 percent of the readers disagree with that statement.

An overwhelming majority, 88 percent, believe their own local newspaper really cares about the community.

Nine of 10 people have read a newspaper in the past week. Almost two of three (64 percent) believe "There is really no substitute for a newspaper every day."

AS EXPECTED, newspapers came in for their share of criticism.

Almost 60 percent believe that newspapers in general are not fair in their news treatment. Nearly four in 10 (39 percent) describe their own newspaper as being biased.

Young people, working women and members of minority groups do not believe they receive enough attention from the newspapers they read. Readers younger than 35 don't believe their gener-

ation is represented in newspapers.

Readers believe newspapers sensationalize the news (52 percent), but not nearly as much as television (81 percent). When discussing the newspaper they read most often, 42 percent say it tries to manipulate public opinion.

GOOD NEWSPAPERS are constantly changing. They have to adjust to the new interests of readers.

The newspaper you are holding has changed in the past few years. Some are obvious. About a year ago, we made several changes in our appearance. A color bar now appears on the top of page 1. We are using more color photographs. Section logos have been improved. A new headline typeface is being used.

Other changes — more concise writing and better headlines — are more subtle. "Relating to Readers in the '80s" suggests that changes in content are also needed. Readers want more "hard news" — stories about schools, transportation, taxes, waste disposal and zoning regulations. This contrasts to the 1978 study when readers said they wanted more features and how-to-cope series.

If you have any suggestions on how this newspaper can do a better job of "Relating to Readers in the '80s," please contact me.

Feikens' fundamental errors



Tim Richard

BACK IN the '50s when he was Republican state chairman, John Feikens was fond of quoting Lincoln and Eisenhower: "As our situation is new, we must think anew and act anew."

As a federal district judge, however, Feikens forgot that pearl of wisdom and relied on a pair of old, outworn ideas. The results have been bad for our sewage system and his judicial reputation.

The situation developed from the Detroit sewage treatment plant case. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency charged in 1977 — and everyone agreed — that untreated sewage from the plant was polluting the Detroit River and Lake Erie. Someone would have to do something.

FEIKENS' FIRST fundamental error was to rely on the once-valid principle of municipal home rule in the case of the megapolis. Incorrectly, he viewed the problem as one to be solved by the city of Detroit, which historically has operated the plant.

The new situation, which Feikens failed to grasp, is that the plant serves dozens of communities that "rob" each other of water against one another, so that you can't tell where one leaves off and the next begins.

Clearly, a broader, regional approach to management of the plant was and is in order.

SEVERAL STATE and national studies had addressed the question of regional governance. Feikens had access to the studies — and ignored them.

In a backward step, he made the mayor of Detroit a kind of super-administrator with power to bypass normal city contracting procedures. Unable to think anew and act anew, he relied on the outdated principle of city home rule rather than looking to the up-to-date principle of regionalism in finding a new way to operate the plant.

The results were suburban distrust and the Vista bribery-fraud case.

In his now-infamous interview with the Detroit Free Press, Feikens referred to the Vista case as "an aberration." It wasn't. It was almost inevitable.

FEIKENS' SECOND fundamental error was his out-of-date conception to blacks. "We have to give black people the time to learn . . . to run city departments, to run projects like the water and sewer

plant," he said in the interview.

Decades ago, that sentiment was fashionable in liberal circles. It is a harmful sentiment in governing a megapolis with dozens of units of government sharing a common drainage pattern.

Blacks read the interview and blew up. Feikens had the wisdom to disqualify himself from a new phase of the case.

AFTER ONE of my periodic columns on this subject several years ago, a hairy lawyer wrote me a very nasty letter saying John Feikens is a wonderful person.

I never have questioned Feikens' character. But to defend his fundamental errors in the sewage treatment plant case by saying he is a wonderful person — well, that's a shyster lawyer's argument, as irrelevant as saying he has blue eyes.

What is relevant is that our region's water-sewerage system is controlled by a city with only about 30 percent of the customers.

What is further relevant is that Detroit city government didn't pay for that system. The customers — city and suburban dweller alike — paid for it. We paid for it through our water bills, through our state taxes, through our federal taxes.

And we all deserve a proportional voice in running it through a regional water board.

Our problem is new. We must think anew and act anew.