

Nottle puts Sioux City back in film

On various occasions, in the company of friends who recognize the irony, Ed Nottle will make light of his limited formal education.

After visiting a college campus, he once remarked, "If I'd known college was going to be this much fun, I'd have gone to high school!"

Self-deprecating humor is what it's called. And, you can't use it as effectively as Nottle does without a total fix on both your shortcomings and the redeeming qualities that make them almost incidental.



Terry
Hersom

Whatever he might have learned after eighth grade, growing up in a tough Philadelphia neighborhood, he has grabbed tenfold on the fly through his passion for reading and a sharp mind that borders on genius.

Much of this, you may already know about the man who has returned after a five-year hiatus to manage our Sioux City Explorers baseball team.

You also know, most likely, about the alter ego, "Singin' Ed Nottle," who once cut an album with the Oakland Symphony, lost a house when the vinyls wouldn't sell and still found a way to turn that little catastrophe into something remarkable.

For more than two decades since, after all, the instrumental outtakes from those recording sessions have enabled Nottle to entertain brilliantly for countless fund-raisers that have reaped hundreds of thousands of dollars, possibly millions, for some of the best charities known to man.

He was the pied piper of Lewis and Clark Park, milking one sellout crowd after another from one of Northern League baseball's smallest markets.

And, convinced in the fan base that exists beyond the city limits, he'll be back on the trail in months to come, drumming up fans from Brunsville to Ponca as the X's begin life in the newly formed American Association.

This isn't an easy task. Declining attendance, which began before his departure in 2000, has only grown worse. Foremost of the defectors, luckily, were those who stopped coming because Ed was no longer there. Their loyalty, alone, should make a difference.

Contrary to popular belief, it has never been about winning, although Nottle's teams did their fair share of that (343 wins against 318 losses). The only bona fide clunker in his eight seasons here was a 1996 team that finished 26-58 while averaging 3,587 fans per game, still a club record.

"Winning is an icing on the cake in this business, especially in independent ball," said Nottle, who spent more than eight seasons managing the top farm clubs for Oakland and Boston, both of which nearly gave him a shot at a big-league managing job.

"You've got to make the cake by 12 months of hard work," he said. "You've got to make the cake by getting out and meeting with people. You've got to meet with the organizations. You've got to meet especially with youth."

Wherever he's been, the recipe has always been the same, including the last four years in Brockton, Mass., where his teams were attendance leaders all four seasons in what is now the Can-Am League.

In the meantime, the tale of this colorful baseball vagabond attracted the attention of film producer Julie Campbell, whose independent film company is currently casting a feature motion picture that follows Nottle's life from the time he was 9.

The movie, with a tentative working title "The 26th Man," should begin filming in May or June. And that process will now involve Sioux City, one of five venues the story line will include.

"We will be filming here early in the season because it was always going to end with where I was at the time," said

Nottle. "I think that'll be good for the ball club and the community. If you didn't know anything about me up to now, you'll find out a few things. I think my wife will, too."

Nottle said Bill Murray, part owner of the team he managed in Brockton, has been reading the script, considering the lead role, and the website "baseball-reference.com" already suggests the 2003 Oscar nominee (*Lost in Translation*) will take the part.

"That would be kind of fun," said Nottle, whose contract with Mark Campbell Productions includes a percentage of the film's gross. "And if he does, then my great-great grandkids will go to college."

Come what may, the return to Sioux City has Nottle's adrenalin running high.

After so many stops since first signing a minor league contract as a pitcher in 1959, eight years in Siouxland established roots he'd almost never known.

It was a bond sufficient to lure him back for visits once or twice every off-season after leaving the X's.

And, it was this love both for Siouxland and for baseball that told him how to handle his awkward departure from a job he once believed would be his last.

This is the Ed Nottle who takes a little more time to know – the singular individual whose instincts have told him so often which road is the best one to take, less traffic or more.

Paradoxically, this is also the navigator most likely to get you lost, lacking all sense of direction beyond the rote memorization of which turns to take from one or two familiar points or origin.

And yet Nottle knew back on Nov. 29, 2000, that dignity was his only viable exit mode after contract talks with the X's went south. He couldn't simply slip out of town and let the club announce his resignation. Nor could he sound off publicly, seeking retribution for his fate.

The bridge, instead, was left unburned. And, Wednesday, he crossed back over it, graciously as ever.

This is a very good thing. Sioux City Journal sports editor Terry Hersom can be reached at (712) 293-4214 or by e-mail at