



Ballplayers Under Glass

WHEN I was in Houston last fall reporting on its marvels, it scarcely occurred to me that fortune or some new phenomenon would bring me back so soon. But then I failed to count upon the yeasty atmosphere of Texas, which defies specific gravity, specific sums of money, and a determined chorus of runners-down from neighboring cities who look upon Houston as a cow town with an oversupply of bricks and bucks.

Well, anyway, I was importuned to return, which I was happy enough to do, this time to view a new minor miracle, nine and a half acres of sports stadium that had been entirely enclosed in a plastic dome and air-conditioned. Only moments, it seemed, after I had arrived in town and dropped my bag at Hilton's Shamrock Hotel, I was being urged by an agent for the Carrier Air Conditioning Company—he had me by the lapels, really—to hurry out to a nearby stretch of flatland to see that new marvel, the Dome Stadium, also known, perhaps in loftier circles, as the Astro-dome.

From the outside, as we approached it, the dome looked like an intricate Viennese torte that had risen nicely on top and was covered with latticework pastry like pies baked by farm wives. We ascended in an elevator and emerged suddenly in the private viewing

quarters of Judge Roy Hofheinz, a fast-talking, fact-spitting, cigar-chewing former judge and former mayor who is now president of the whole domed shebang.

While Judge Hofheinz, a man of some girth, paced the carpeted expanse of our unusual salon, chomping cigars and spewing facts, I sat in one of the giant cushy chairs that were installed in front of huge plate-glass windows. Swiveling easily, I looked out on the incredible view that stretched in front. There, where one might expect circus tanbark, was an unmistakable expanse of grass that, for texture and color, I, as a new grower of lawns, found myself coveting. Cut carefully in the familiar pattern were the unmistakable outlines of a ball diamond. It was a long hit to center field, and the shot up the right-field wall was longer than the cheap homers along the foul line that can be cashed in Yankee Stadium.

But the playing field, even if it was growing grass indoors, was really the least of the view. The stands were the most of it. They stretched in great bands, first red, then purple, then gold and yellow, black and blue, each color indicating a different caste, a different price, and perhaps a different cushion in the seat.

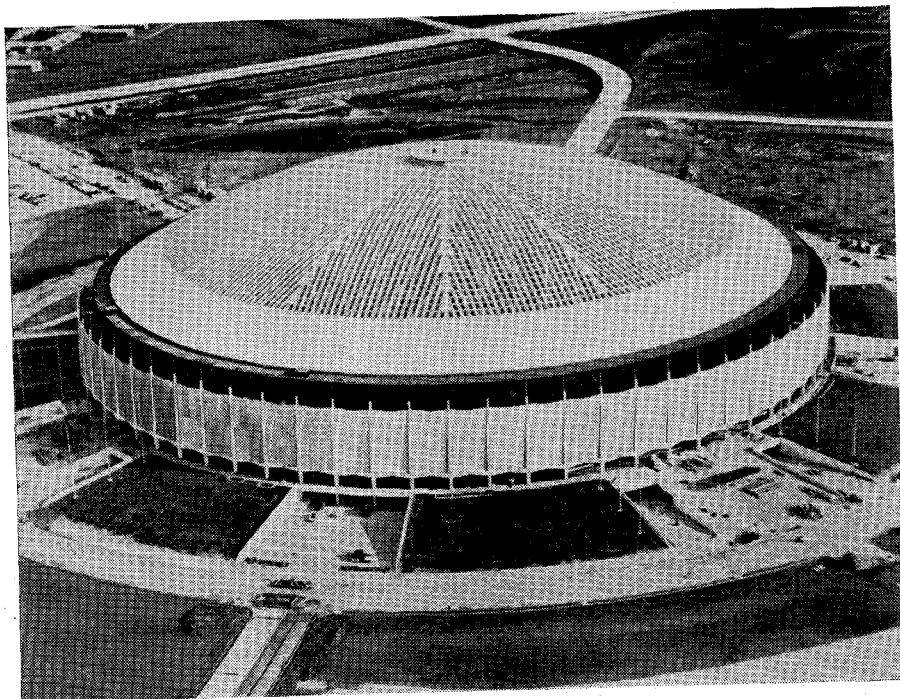
"Every seat that folds up," Hofheinz was saying, looking out on his favorite vista, "has shock absorbers to take up

the sound, so when we are partially filled we won't have a sound problem. We have installed a two-million-dollar scoreboard with its own built-in memory system so we will use less voice in the whole game than other places are liable to use in an inning. Every event played here will be recorded on sixteen-millimeter film and fed immediately into a darkroom. In thirty minutes a coach will have a complete record of a game. What's more, if you will notice how the aisles are placed, this is the only ballpark in America where no vendor ever passes in front of a seat."

There would seem to be little business for vendors anyway, for the Dome is to have three public restaurants (one of which, for reasons unexplained, is to have an Austrian beer hall look) and two private clubs. One of the clubs is to have three bars, one 140 feet long, another 90 feet in circumference. If you buy a seat at this Astrodome level, you are entitled to admittance inside the club. The cost is \$440 for the seat for the baseball season, plus an initiation fee not yet set. The other club, somewhat more expensive, requires an annual payment of \$14,800, which provides the taker with a block of twenty-four seats for all baseball games, plus a private clubroom fitted out with an ice maker, closed-circuit television for those who don't want to sit in their seat to see the game, and catered hors d'oeuvres. This club will also have a Japanese-styled tempura restaurant.

I had a look at some of the individual clubrooms, of which there are fifty-three, and found them decorated in varying motifs. One, with a Western look, had a fireplace, longhorns over the doors, and a lariat and a powder horn hanging on a wall. Another, designed to evoke memories of honeysuckle and hominy grits, is festooned with fake magnolia and wallpaper splattered with scenes of Spanish moss dripping from live oak trees. Should there be a New Englander in the crowd with the price of admission, and willing to spare it, there is a room made for him. It features a barrelhead emerging from one wall, a figurehead that never rode the bow of a ship protruding from a second, and a porthole hung on a third. At last look, forty-eight of the memberships, each of which represents a cost of up to \$90,000 over five years just for baseball, had been spoken for.

Spectators with no club to call their own can dine in the Trailblazer Restaurant, where the cuisine will equal that of the club level, although the management, hampered by the local laws, will not be able to serve anything stronger than champagne. The Austrian restaurant, located under the seats, is to be called the Domeskeller. The great unwashed will find nourishment in the



Houston's new Astrodome—a long hit to centerfield.

SR/March 6, 1965

Count-Down Cafeteria, where the décor will honor the sporting life from 500 B.C. to the present day.

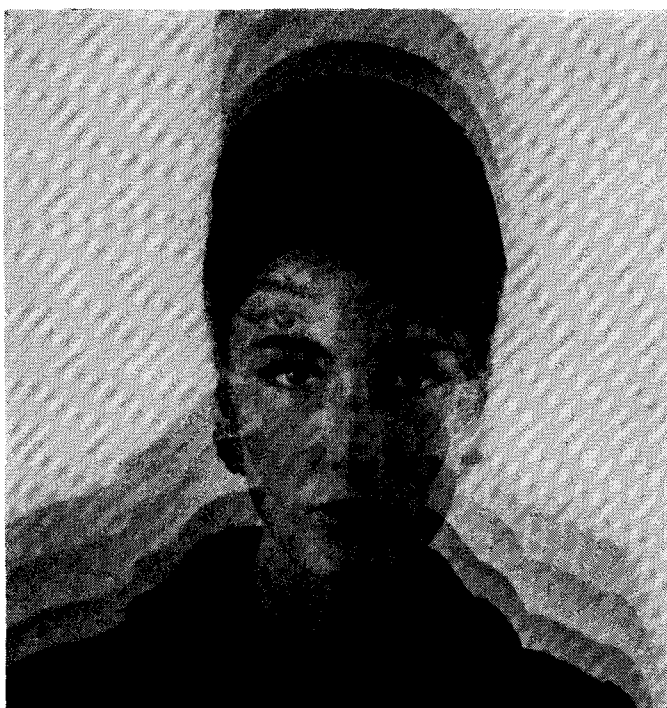
Judge Hofheinz, who fancies himself a man of strong decorating tastes, holds himself responsible for an apartment that has been hung on the outfield wall and that, so far, anyway, has been just for show. A red-carpeted spiral staircase leads from the president's viewing box to the president's apartment, decorated, as I say, by the president. It has stained glass windows, a wall full of Oriental masks, brass lamps dangling from long chains, a gold bath with a gold and white striped washbowl, and a gold six-button phone hanging over the plumbing. It's just a step from the bathroom to the paneled sauna. The centerpiece of the whole suite is a sultan-size bed, called by some the largest playing field in Houston, which rests on a dais guarded by a pair of ferocious-looking foo dogs. There is a huge gong, presumably to summon the players, TV built into a wall, in case anyone wants to see what's going on inside the dome, and an old-style white telephone on which to call for help.

The judge, who sent home 26,000 pounds of artifacts from the Orient when he went there on a visit (some of them were included in the décor), feels that the Madison Avenue people with whom he has to deal would not take him seriously if he did not put on an elaborate show. "If you just look like a tobacco-spitting venture," he says, "it won't work. Whether you like it or not you're in show business." He is just itching to put the decorative touches to the president's offices downstairs. "When I get my own stuff in there, I'm going to mix it up. I don't like too much vanilla." The office, which is being rushed to completion, already features a wall of white onyx with a hidden curtain of floodlamps behind it that can be dimmed or brightened on cue. Seated at his thirteen-foot-long rosewood desk, the judge will have immediate control of three television sets (one color), six radios, and a projection booth. He will be adjoined by his secretary, snug in a travertine-paneled gymnasium of her own, and a private dining room with its own kitchen.

Meanwhile, down on the playing field, athletes representing the Houston Oilers football team, the University of Houston Cougars, and the Houston Astros will be disporting themselves on the velvet grass. The Astros, local agents of the National League, were formerly known as the Houston Colt 45s, a name that was abandoned when the Colt firearms people got a new president who demanded a slice of the gate for the continued use of the name. The simultaneous arrival in Houston of the NASA space center inspired the new handle.

Besides the ball teams, the Dome will

The French have a word for everything



except "clickety-clack"

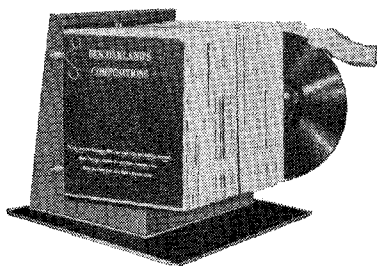
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Column Two should read: 4, 7, 8, 6, 5, 1, 9, 10, 2, 3.

also play the Houston livestock show and rodeo, conventions, Billy Graham and other religious conclaves, shows and circuses and boxing matches. A flick of a switch turns around two whole bleacher units that ride on tracks from their position along a baseball diamond to the sidelines of a football field.

Although the stadium is circular and presumably could accommodate sports-in-the-round, one whole section of wall has been set aside for the scoreboard, an elaborate affair that cost \$2,000,000, took two companies to build, and has one sponsor, Gulf Oil. It will also require eight people to operate since the board not only has a built-in "memory" but also incorporates an elaborate forty-second display that is touched off every time the Astros hit a homer. Upon a circuit blow, a gong will sound, the hitter's picture will appear in electronic image in center field, and electric cowboys will do a small schottische, then fire guns. The bullets will ricochet the length and breadth of the board. While the ballplayer is running bases, a bull appears and snorts, one cowboy comes out with the American flag and another with the Texas flag. The whole two-dollar wedding comes to a giant climax with a great crashing crescendo. Home runs hit by the opposition are to be greeted with polite silence.

The idea of an indoor ball park probably derives from the invention of air conditioning, generally credited to Willis Haviland Carrier in 1902. Thirty-seven years later, when his invention

had been considerably perfected, Mr. Carrier predicted that someday whole areas of cities will be domed over for weather control. The Astrodome in Houston is probably the biggest step in this direction. It expects to clock its best gate on days when it's raining outside and there is no golf, no tennis, no boating, and no picnics. Says Judge Hofheinz: "Then people will say, 'Let's go to the ball game.'"

To make the whole thing feasible, Carrier has installed 6,600 tons of cooling capacity, which can give off the same amount of chill air as the daily melting of a football field caked with five feet of ice. The only larger systems are in the Pentagon, the Merchandise Mart in Chicago, the Pan Am Building, and the Chase Bank building in downtown New York. Presumably all occupants of all these other buildings could survive if the air conditioning went off. On the other hand, it is absolutely vital to a stadium packed with 45,000 people. Each person gives off the same heat as a 100-watt bulb, if not the glare, and the audience would literally roast to death before it could expire from lack of oxygen. What's more, some air conditioning has to be kept on continually; otherwise the moisture from the grass would cause an indoor rainstorm when the system was turned on and the initial blast of cold air met the wet warm air. That simply can't happen in Houston. The Astrodome is the only ballpark in the country that doesn't issue rainchecks.

—HORACE SUTTON.



"Let's cut it short—I'm cold."



A Director Redeems Himself

LONDON.

HONOR, faithfulness to an accepted standard of conduct, and the codes of what is assumed to be civilized society are hardly matters that concern today's novelists, who, more often than not, pursue wispy trails of negation through morasses of existential misery. Yet the work of Conrad, who dealt probingly with such themes, retains its freshness and fascination, and a new film, *Lord Jim*, based on the novel written sixty-five years ago, shows not the least hesitation in stating that a man's conscience is still a powerful motivating force in his actions. There are other opportunities, too, for those willing to undertake the challenge of bringing Conrad to the screen, among them that of dealing with the picturesque and the exotic. Then there is that solitary, outcast hero, undeniably romantic, and at the same time displaying obsessive, and enigmatic qualities. The peril, for the film-maker, is that this kind of hero, taken out of Conrad's stylistic context, can appear all too simple and, as a result, unreal.

Richard Brooks, who adapted the novel and directed the film, has managed to skirt the peril and take advantage of his opportunities. Some years ago he tackled *The Brothers Karamazov* and met defeat. Unable to go to Russia, he made the movie on the motherland of MGM, used actors not altogether suitable for their roles, and presumably learned a hard lesson.

This time he has looked over his ground much more carefully, prepared far more thoroughly, and has done far, far better. It took him two years to carve a screenplay from all the quotation marks within the quotation marks of the convoluted novel and to scout the tropic backgrounds that might best convey the Conrad quality. He also got himself a first-rate cast.

Luckily for someone as dedicated as Brooks, in this case he had Peter O'Toole, an actor for whom the playing of the dedicated hero seems easy and natural.

The Jim of the novel is a simple fellow on the surface. But what makes him intriguing is the depth of his conscience. He made one step in his young life that struck him as wrong, false, and cowardly, and from that time on he devoted himself to the job of recovering his own sense of honor. O'Toole suggests both the simplicity and the complexity, and if at times the essence of

what Conrad's narrator, Marlow, found in Jim seems beyond him, it may be that the motion picture form itself is incapable of that degree of subtlety.

And probably it is just this nagging, subtle pursuit of the ineffable indulged in by Conrad that proved to be the great obstacle faced by Brooks, who was forced to convey through actors what a great writer was able to convey through language. Not that Conrad was wholly without fault, by the way. There are passages in *Lord Jim* that strike us now as wordy and windy. Sometimes his enthusiastic sketching of tropical atmosphere is too florid and purple for full belief. Here the film-maker has an advantage, if he does his work well, or is lucky enough to find a few corners of the world that still look like what Conrad was describing. Brooks used the docks of Kowloon to suggest the turn-of-the-century Eastern seaports, and he went to Cambodia in search of Conrad's symbolic jungle paradise of Patusan.

Brooks makes use of the Marlow narrator device, but hardly to the degree employed by Conrad. As Marlow, Jack Hawkins sketches in Jim's early experience as a youth being trained for leadership at sea and the way he was imbued with roseate visions of heroic behavior during times of stress. Jim was "one of us," says Marlow, meaning that he was one of those who could be trusted to do the right thing at all times. But when the time came to demonstrate his tra-

Daliah Lavi in *Lord Jim*—pleasant surprise.

ditional breeding, Jim did the wrong thing: He turned his back for just a moment and instinctively jumped to safety. The occasion was the dire plight of an old rusted heap of a ship carrying 800 Moslem pilgrims on a pious voyage. The ship's name was the *Patna* (Patusan without the "us"), Jim was its first mate, and when it began to take water and seemed about to burst at the seams in the midst of a squall, he followed the vile captain and the seedy officers into a lifeboat that managed to get free. He had never dreamed that he would forsake his duty, but he did.

Tried by a court of inquiry and dishonored, he eventually heads into the mysterious depths of the Malay Archipelago, there to become legendary as he leads the natives against an oppressive warlord and greedy, exploiting white traders. In these passages Brooks is at his best and worst. On the one hand, he fills the screen with visually exciting photography that makes use of the ruins of Angkor Wat without making it seem like a jungle tour courtesy of Cook's, and on the other he turns into melodrama what in the book was a much more fanciful and elaborate story of native-white man intrigue. But every now and then, breaking through the well-staged melodrama is a clear sense of what Conrad was getting at. Jim is not fighting for his physical life, he is fighting for his essential life, and if this means accepting his death, then he will accept. Given the chance not to flinch in his critical moment, he remembers the *Patna* and makes his choice. The simple man of faith and action is now one following an ideal that only he seems to be aware of.

Here, obviously, is unusual motion picture material, and Richard Brooks (like Columbia Pictures, the company that backed him with a high budget and unlimited freedom) deserves great credit. It seems clear that if he had tried to express more through words he would have run the risk of a static motion picture. As it is, he weights his dialogue just to a point short of becoming sententious, then heads briskly back to the vivid goings-on. His actors all struck me as splendid. James Mason's portrait of Gentleman Brown is magnificent in its villainous appropriateness, Eli Wallach is fine as an Arab officer, and Paul Lucas, Curt Jurgens, and Akim Tamiroff have the look of Conrad characters about them. Daliah Lavi, playing the Malay-Dutch girl Jim marries, is surprisingly better than the types one usually expects to find in such roles. If the film doesn't have the classic stature of its progenitor, it is a beautiful one to watch and Richard Brooks can now, in good conscience, claim his place among the important American film-makers.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.