

Wells Twombly



Somebody's lying here

The arena belongs to the bats, the owls and the spiders with no need to freeze over the floor so those foreign oafs can skate up and down dashing madly after a small rubber biscuit. All that foolishness has finally gone and, Lord, how depressing it all is. Just as soon as the regional hockey club got home ownership, the perfidious owner moved the franchise elsewhere, which obviously offended a small number of people. It has been suggested that those citizens who do not care for what happened should freeze over the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel up on Nob Hill and call in the Winnipeg Jets to meet the Houston Aeros while little old ladies from Des Moines and entertainers you have heard about since 1948 look on with terror.

One of the wisest men God ever placed on this planet during the century a fellow named Morris Frank, who was from the piney woods of east Texas and called himself the world's only living Jewish hillbilly, once made a magnificent remark. It was the complete and total knowledge that Barry Morris Goldwater, whose father was Jewish, but whose mother was a Williams and a stout-hearted Episcopalian and raised her son in that semi-Catholic faith, that Morris said: "Somehow ah always knew that the first Jewish fella who had a chance to be president would be an Episcopalian." The audience would roar and Mort Sahl would pick the line up and claim it as his own.

Somehow it always seemed that when the Oakland Seals got home ownership that they would finally be moved and that is exactly what hotel man Mel Swig did with them. They now compete, more or less, in the National Hockey League as the Cleveland Barons. It is all part of Morris Frank's Rule. The more you think you can trust something, the less you can believe. So Mel Swig says that things are fine in Cleveland. The crowds are close to 6,000, the dollar return is better than it was in Oakland, his former watchdog Munson Campbell was fired one month before the end of the season last winter because he wouldn't fire announcer Joe Starkey and because he was costing the company "thousands of dollars" and because the players didn't like him.

This is Swig's opinion and he is welcome to it. When the former Oakland Seals, now running around in red shirts and black pants as the Cleveland Barons, got off the plane in Denver, they accidentally ran into Campbell and, to a man, they lined up and shook his hand wishing that they were still with him as the Colorado Rockies. The most vocal was goalie Gary (The Cobra) Simmons, and Swig says that he may accommodate the man's desire to be with a team in the West. What's more, Swig is convinced that his former president, Campbell, is hated and that he will be successful in Cleveland.

Swig also denies that his team signed a sweetheart lease (calling for 14 per cent off the gross for rental) with the stadium. Well, he has a distinct point there. It is only 12.5 per cent up to a certain attendance figure and then it goes up to 14 per cent. You can't ever accuse Mel Swig of lying. No writer would ever dare place that in print. Oh, sometimes he has this attitude where he kind of joshes around, but isn't that what made America great? And isn't Mel a great American?

Now the question is, what will San Francisco do for a sports arena, since it is the only town larger than Muleshoe, Texas that doesn't have a civic gym? There is every indication that The Establishment in the National Hockey League will permit an existing club to switch to San Francisco if the dirt diggers ever start slamming away at the ground. In Denver last week, four members of the NHL's royal family indicated that if our beloved mayor will get off his bocce ball and start moving that ether the Atlanta Flames, the Minnesota North Stars or — heaven help us — the Cleveland Barons could be had. It simply means some hard work by Hizzonor, George (Who Deal! This Mess?) Moscone.

"I don't think the mayor would ever go to the people with the idea of a \$20 million arena," said his numero uno, Corrie Busch. "But I think he would be really hard-nosed about getting private capital out in front to pay for it. I know he'd push that."

Moscone would have okayed Swig's original plot if the money that Swig promised had been present, but Busch insists that by the time it came to the cutting, the financial support had vanished, otherwise there be people digging where the Old Mars Hotel used to be. What's more, Swig insists that he can handle the Cleveland operation all by himself with little interference.

It is a known fact that he has to make a \$100,000 interest payment on the \$2.7 million owned baseball and insurance whiz-bang Charlie Finley. That payment has sometimes been slow getting into the league office. The reason Munson Campbell was here last winter and why Swig couldn't fire him when he wanted to was because he was a watchdog and Swig was well aware of it.

"The man cost me a whole lot of money," said Swig. "He spend money like it was going out of style. I had all kinds of problems with him. He was fired one month before the season ended. Fortunately, Bill McCreary, my general manager, was there to keep an eye on him."

It has never been printed before, but one member of the Seals organization embezzled roughly \$24,000 in travel funds. It wasn't Munson Campbell, but he could have prosecuted the person who did it. It is fascinating to learn that most of the Seals' front office personnel went to Denver with Campbell, but only the players, the general manager and the public relations man went to Cleveland with Swig. What's more, the press agent calls weekly to find out if the Colorado Rockies are hiring or not. Somebody is lying here, and it certainly can't be anybody associated with the former California-Oakland Seals. Just as soon as the mayor moves, there can be an arena here for the San Francisco Flames or the San Francisco Warriors. Take your pick.