

UNL graduate to stay on in baseball office

By Stew Magnuson

Bob Wirz wanted to be involved in baseball even if he had to sell popcorn in the ballparks, or so says his father.

But Wirz isn't selling popcorn now. The UNL graduate is director of information for major league baseball, working as Commissioner Bowie Kuhn's spokesman.

Besides setting up interviews and press conferen-

ces for the commissioner, Wirz works with public relations people for the 26 major league teams, and answers questions about such issues as drug problems among players and the end of Bowie Kuhn's term as commissioner this fall.

The road from Halsey, with a population of 141, to New York City began after Wirz graduated in 1959 from UNL with a degree in speech. Before graduation, he worked for the journalism department's KNUS radio station and the Lincoln Journal. Wirz was one class short of double majoring in journalism, he said.

"Without the education I received at UNL, there's no way I could have made the success I have today," he said.

After graduation, Wirz worked in Hastings at KHAS for one year before accepting a position at the Wichita Eagle as Sports Editor. From Wichita, Wirz moved to take a sportswriting position for the Denver Post where he worked for six months before finally spotting an opportunity to get involved with his "fascination," baseball.

Wirz was hired as the Publicity Director for the Denver Bears, a Triple A farm club. In 1968, Wirz made the move from the minors to the majors when he accepted a position as an information director for the newly-formed Kansas City Royals.

Wirz spent six seasons with the Royals until Bowie Kuhn asked him to fill an opening for his newly-created Director of Information position.

But Kuhn's term as the Commissioner of Baseball comes to an end this summer when Peter Victor Ueberroth, presently chairman of the Olympic committee, takes over as commissioner.

Wirz said Ueberroth has indicated to him that he will remain as director of information after Kuhn steps down. But Wirz might not be the only person to remain after September.

"Ueberroth said he (Kuhn) may have a continuing role in baseball. With more than 15 years of experience, no one knows more about the game today," Wirz said.

From what Wirz knows about Ueberroth, he said, he will be an excellent choice for the new commissioner.

But Kuhn has been a "tremendous leader," he added. One of the services Kuhn has introduced to baseball is the Amnesty Program for players with drug abuse problems. Under the Amnesty Program, players with a drug abuse problem can come forward to get help to control the problem. Since the program's inception in 1981, Wirz said many players have come forward to get rehabilitated.

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Two Huskers top NFL picks

Former Nebraska football players Irving Fryar and Dean Steinkuhler became the first players from the same college team chose first and second in the National Football League draft Tuesday.

Wide receiver Fryar signed a \$2.65 million, four-year contract with the New England Patriots almost three weeks ago. The Patriots acquired the choice from Tampa Bay in a trade.

The Houston Oilers, who signed lineman Steinkuhler to a \$2.6 million, four-year contract Monday, picked another

blocker for All-Pro running back Earl Campbell.

Atlanta picked Oklahoma defensive tackle Ricky Bryan No. 9 in the first round. Other first round Big Eight picks: Miami chose OU linebacker Jackie Shipp, Washington chose OU defensive end Bob Slater, Atlanta picked OU safety Scott Case and linebacker Thomas Benson, Dallas chose Colorado defensive back Victor Scott, and Cleveland chose Oklahoma State defensive back Chris Rockins.

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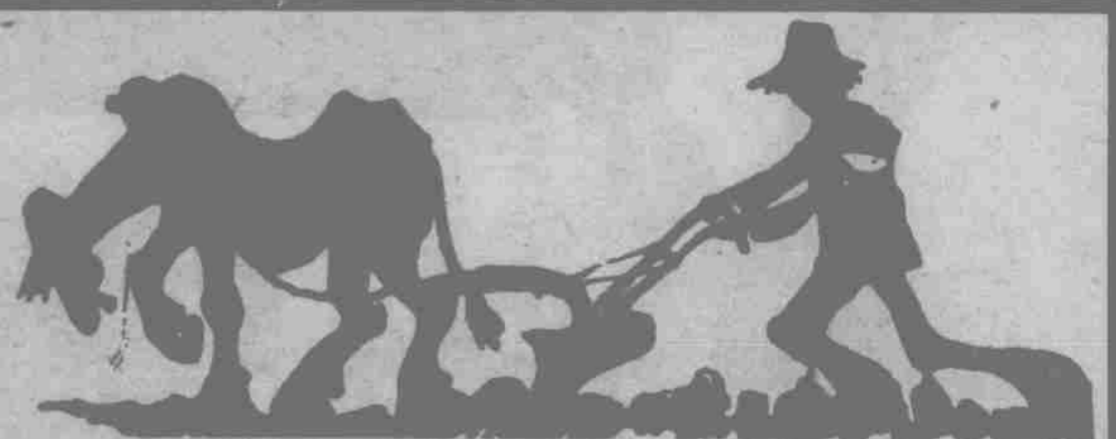
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