

Aug. 9, 2001---

DULUTH, Minn.--Baseball's best singing skipper is sitting in his tiny office in the dusty recesses of Wade Stadium on the working-class west side of Duluth. It is several hours before manager Ed Nottle's Duluth-Superior Dukes host the St. Paul Saints in an independent Northern League game.

Most high schools have better locker room facilities than the Dukes, whose stadium was built in 1941 by the WPA (Works Progress Administration). "Singin' Ed" Nottle's brick office doesn't even have a window.

There's a mildewy smell that dates back to 1963, when Denny McLain pitched for Duluth-Superior. Nottle shares his cramped quarters with his hitting coach, Greg Jelks, and his pitching coach, former Baltimore Oriole great Mike Cuellar.

The name of this tune is "You Gotta' Have Heart."

The only thing brightening up Nottle's dank workspace is a bouquet of yellow roses which are bunched in a plastic water bottle. Earlier in the day, Nottle retrieved the flowers from the funeral of Wayne Langley, a veteran Dukes season ticket holder who died after a long bout with emphysema.

Nottle looks at the roses on his desk and says, "I'm going to sing 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' tonight in honor of him. I've known him since I came here as a visiting manager."

Sure enough, before the game Nottle leads his entire team to the pitcher's mound. He carries the roses in his left hand. Nottle sings a stirring rendition of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' before the Langley family. And what happens next is unbelievable.

Dukes leadoff batter Ruben Cardona hits a home run in the game's first at-bat. The Dukes jump out to an inspiring 4-0 lead before skies darken. The game is halted by rain in the bottom half of the second inning. After a 55-minute rain delay, play resumes.

A double rainbow appears over the left field fence.

There isn't a dry eye in the house. And it isn't because of the rain.

"I'll tell you why there was a double rainbow," says Eileen Langley, who was married to Wayne for 43 years. "My brother Ray was the Dukes' groundskeeper. He died suddenly last year at 52. His funeral was in Wade Stadium. The hearse went from base to base to base to 'Take Me Out To the Ball Game' and out the back gate.

"My brother and my husband used to get into a lot of mischief together. That is why there was a double rainbow. The last time Ed came to the house was the week before Wayne died. They had a game at 2. Ed came at noon. He was in his whole baseball outfit. He took off his team jacket and laid it on Wayne. I will treasure that jacket. What can I say?

"Ed is a friend whom I will never forget."

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There are songs and there are stars and Ed Nottle has had a great ride between the two. "The only reason I sang is because I hitchhiked through ball," says Nottle, who brings his Dukes to Schaumburg for a four-game visit starting Aug. 10. "I never made any money in baseball. I made \$200, \$1000 a month. Then I found out I could go to piano bars and get free beer and free food. I never got in any trouble. I've had a cigarette and a microphone in one hand and a beer in the other. I've always treated baseball good off the field."

Nottle, 61, is a baseball lifer. He spent three years managing Class AAA Tacoma in the Oakland Athletics organization and five years at the helm of Class AAA Pawtucket in the Boston Red Sox farm system.

He is the second winningest manager in Northern League history, and has been part of the league since it was reinstated in 1993. He is a skinny man with a big heart. He still hates to cut players as he will have to do on this day, just hours after attending his friend's funeral.

Nottle spent a decade pitching in the Texas Rangers and Chicago White Sox minor-league systems. He has achieved major-league status twice: in 1963 he was placed on the White Sox big-league roster--although he never got in a game--and in 1983 he was bullpen coach for the Athletics.

When Nottle was with the Athletics, he cut a 10-song 'To Baseball With Love' album (available on CD) with the Oakland Symphony. Players such as Dwayne Murphy and A's coaches helped finance the project, with proceeds going to charity. Nottle took a second mortgage out on his house.

"It was a damn good CD," Nottle says. He pauses and takes a drag from a cigarette. "Of course, I lost my house with it. My wife still doesn't like the album very much. But I'd put that album up against anything done by anybody in sports. Denny McLain? He was like a church organist. He was brutal. He couldn't entertain. I'm an entertainer."

In 1969 McLain released "Denny McLain at the Organ" on Capitol Records, featuring his cheesy interpretation of Donovan's "Hurdy Gurdy Man" and others.

Nottle dedicated a smooth, swinging version of "Welcome To My World" to Billy

Martin, an entertainer in his own right. Nottle gave the first copy of "To Baseball With Love" to Martin. Nottle once turned down a Yankees coaching job offered to him by Martin, which earned Martin's respect. "With our personalities, we wouldn't have lasted two months," Nottle says. " So I hand delivered the album to him. He cried in the clubhouse of Yankee Stadium."

Nottle was singing when he met his wife, Pat, in 1966. He was pitching for Evansville (Ind.), then a Class AA White Sox affiliate. They were married in 1967. On his album Nottle dedicated his lounge version of the Elvis Presley hit "Always On My Mind" to her.

The Nottles still are based out of Evansville, where Pat is completing cancer treatments. She visits her husband when his team comes to Schaumburg. Next season when the Northern League expands to Joliet and Gary, Ind., Nottle hopes to land a job that would put him closer to Evansville.

During the 1990s, Nottle had 3,700 extra copies of his records stored in the garage of his Evansville home. His wife threw them all in the city dump. "There was nowhere to park her car," he says. "I don't blame her. Singing has definitely been a minus in my career.

"Its 'Singing' Ed' this, 'Singing' Ed' that," he says in somber tones. "Every farm director I've known, it's 'Singin' Ed, how ya' doin?'" Well, they never heard me sing in their life. I'm not a guy who sings karaoke. I don't sing 'Auld Lang Syne.' A couple years ago I did a 24-song salute to Sinatra and Tony Bennett at the Northern League all-star game with the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra at the Iowa Convention Center.

"I can sing."

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Nottle was born and reared in a Philadelphia row house that was built over a garbage dump. His 5-foot-2 father, Clarence, shoveled coal and worked in a Pennsylvania slate quarry. His mother, Dorothy, was a homemaker. Clarence came from a family of 16 children. "Towards the end they ran out of Bible names," Nottle says. "They told me they took the few names that were left, put them in a hat and that's how I got Uncle 67/8."

Rim shot, please.

When Nottle was 17 he was arrested for stealing a car. The judge gave him a choice of enlisting in the armed forces or going to reform school. "The day I went into the service is the best thing that happened to me," he says. "I became a paratrooper. They made me into a decent human being. And I ended up signing a baseball contract because I pitched in the service. Singing is the only other talent I

have. I've sung at fans' funerals and weddings. But it's killed me in baseball."

Nottle looks around his office. The memories start to fall like quarters in a roadside jukebox, the kind that still has Dean Martin's 1964 hit "Everybody Loves Somebody" on vinyl. "Come to think of it, singing got me in trouble with the White Sox," Nottle says. "I thought I was going to make the '64 club. My manager was Al Lopez. I was the last cut three years in a row. In '64 I was in the outfield. All you did back then was shag."

Nottle's other brush with big-league fame came in July, 1988 when John McNamara was fired as manager of the Boston Red Sox. "I was managing Pawtucket," he says. "They told me to stay by the hotel. They were going to hire either me or Joe Morgan. Then they called back and said Red Sox owner Mrs. Yawkey wanted to name Joe interim manager."

The Red Sox immediately won 19 of Morgan's first 20 games.

Nottle never got the job. That's life.

"One time I got fired (from baseball) and I was working two or three jobs," he recalls while reaching for another cigarette. "I was tending bar. My daughter came into the place and I was wiping off tables. It kind of embarrassed her. I remember sitting down with her that night and I said, 'You worry about your Dad, but your Dad has been in the big leagues. I've jumped out of airplanes. I've had holes-in-one, I've made an album. I'm a qualified scuba diver. We're all healthy and we're all still together. I haven't been to a doctor for 40 years, I smoke four packs a day and I've never coughed in my life. It helps me hit the low notes. I'm kind of goofy, but I've had a neat life,' " and then I told her, "You know, I never made it, but I came close."

Actually, Ed Nottle made it in a big way.

Just ask Eileen Langley about baseball rainbows.