

FROM THE BULLPEN

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Hot Stove League
Eastern Nebraska Division
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Dear Owners/Managers:

At long last, enclosed are the final statistics for the 1986 Hot Stove League. Final standings and point totals, although unaudited, are as follows:

<u>Team</u>	<u>Manager</u>	<u>Total Points</u>
Omaha Red Sox	Ted Bridges	15,368.58
Omaha Royals	Dave Ernst	4,973.67
Omaha Tigers	Rick Drews	14,776.67
Lincoln Cardinals	Scott Krause/Craig Dietz	14,186.75
Cedar Rapids Cubs	Charles Sinclair	14,017.75
Lincoln Braves	Bob Hurlbut	13,813.50

The fact that the league devil-child, the fiendish Possum, finished atop the standings can only mean one thing: There is no God. By the same token, the fact that the feeble-minded Snickler escaped a cellar finish is infallible proof that supernatural forces were at work during the 1986 campaign.

Now for a look at the 1986 season, team by team.

Red Sox:

Who would have believed at the conclusion of the draft that the hapless assemblage selected by the Possum would claim the spoils of victory? Nobody, which is why this baseball charlatan was able to moan and whine his way to the title. By lulling the ingenuous Rookie into believing that his Red Sox were nothing more than harmless pretenders to the throne, this wretched reprobate of a man, this shameless demagogue, this unctuous huckster, this devil-child they call the Possum, was able to clean the Rookie's cupboard bare. While knowing full well that two of his own players, Hubie Brooks and Tim Wallach, had met with probable season-ending injuries, the shrewd and contemptible Possum dialed the number of the newest member of the league, Rookie Bob, and cajoled and charmed him into accepting these two cripples into his fold, for the mere asking price of Wade Boggs. Oh yes, while the Possum told every other manager in the league that he would magnanimously allow Rookie to rescind the trade after the injuries were made public -- allaying all fears that the trade was not above-board -- Possum curiously forgot to relay the generous offer to Rookie. So much for the honor system.

Notwithstanding the chicanery employed by the Possum in steering his ship to the front of the pack, congratulations are in order for a second consecutive league title. One more title in the next ten years, and the Cup will be in the Possum's den for perpetuity.

Royals:

The 1986 Hot Stove League version of the 1983 Football Huskers. The best team does not always end up at the top of the stack at the end of the year. But for the blind luck of the Possum, the Royals would have been your champions for 1986. If not for the untimely and devastating injuries to George Brett, Juan Samuel, and Rich Gedman, things certainly would have been different. Then too, if Rookie had not fallen prey to the untoward skullduggery of the Possum, the Royals would have been able to overcome the injuries and finish at the top.

It pretty much goes without saying that the Skipper made a few of the sleeper picks of the year. Who but a genuine baseball savant would have had the foresight and intellectual wherewithal to select such heretofore unknowns as Joe Carter, Kirby Puckett and Jesse Barfield. When our illustrious group of baseball mavens unites this April to select our 1987 teams, I suspect that more than one manager will be looking to the Skipper to set the tone for the 1987 season.

Tigers:

Once again, Big Guy has maneuvered a team built upon a pack of Detroit Tiger squids into an upper-division finish. Of course, once again he has also finished out of the money. Perhaps in 1987 Rick will finally accept the fact that light-hitting speed merchants are not the ideal outfielders under our league's point system. Naturally, for years to come Rick will whine that his third-place finish was due to injuries to Lance Parrish and the Tin Man (Chris Brown), but we all know that the real reason for the Tigers' place in the standings is that Big Guy choked like Mama Cass on a ham sandwich when the time came to name his starting players. Dipsomaniac Drews managed to select not one, not two, not three, but four players as starters who finished with lower totals than his reserves at the same positions. While Big Guy was busy crowing about his players and whining about their injuries, he evidently forgot to manage them. Fortunately, Big Guy is the owner and manager of the Tigers, or there would likely be an abrupt change in management.

Cardinals:

The owner/manager duo of Scooter and Craig quietly piloted the Cards to a respectable fourth-place finish, no small feat given the intense competition. But for a couple of minor strategic errors, this team could have landed an upper-division finish. Calling to your attention the supplemental draft, you will recall that Scooter tried to fleece his brother-in-law with a couple of ill-advised trade propositions. Well, instead of the proposed deals, somehow Scooter managed to trade away Keith Hernandez and Charlie Leibrandt for two of the Skipper's real gems, Tom Brunansky and Ernest Riles. Then, Scooter opted to take Penitentiary-Face Leonard in the first round of the supplemental draft, while the Skipper calmly waited until the third round to snatch up super outfielder Joe Carter. A hard lesson for Scooter: When you attempt to match wits with the Skipper, you gonna get burned.

Cubs:

Just as Joe Paterno used mirrors to guide his Penn State team to the National Championship this year, the Snickler was able to pull off the coup of the season by keeping his pathetic corps from occupying the position of league underbelly. If there were ever any doubts at the end of the draft as to where the Cubs would finish this year, those doubts were seemingly eradicated through the process of the supplemental draft and interleague trading. With a good deal of circumspection, the Snickler cleverly picked up Moose Haas and Mike Smithson in the supplemental draft, and then followed up that stroke of genius by trading off Steve Sax and Jose Canseco to the Big Guy. Only the slipshop

managing of Rookie and the double-dealing trickery of Possum kept the woeful Cubs from bringing up the rear of the pack. In 1987, with another year of experience under his belt, the Snickler should have no trouble finding his way down to the bottom of the barrel.

Braves:

The Rookie was welcomed to the Big Leagues rather harshly. With thirty years under his belt and a wealth of life experience from chasing hobos out of Burlington Northern boxcars, Robert doubtless thought he could waltz into the league and swashbuckle his way to the championship. While the rest of the league owner/managers realized that the Braves would not be a threat after the eighth round of the draft, Rookie evidently did not come to grips with reality until after his pocket had been picked by the wiley Possum in the Brooks/Boggs debacle. The 1986 campaign proved one thing with certainty: While Rookie might be the tops at the mindless game of Trivial Pursuit, he is the proverbial butt of the Hot Stove League.

Epilogue

The 1987 Draft is tentatively slated for April 4, 1987, which is a Saturday, at either the Skipper's house or at Big Guy's. We are welcoming into the league two new managers this year, Jon Blongewicz of Kansas City, Missouri, and Dennis Bontrager of Lincoln, Nebraska. Enclosed is a revised list of addresses and phone numbers of the 1987 Hot Stove League owners and managers. Rumor has it that Chuck Sinclair will be moving to Lincoln very shortly, with the hope that a change of scenery will help him pilot his 1987 team to a respectable finish. As soon as Chuck's new address and telephone number is obtained, I will pass it on to each of you.

At this writing, I am not aware of any proposed changes in the rules which governed the league last season. I would suggest that if anyone has any proposed rule changes, they should send them out in written form to all managers for review prior to draft day on April 4. Please be apprised that the one-minute draft rule will be strictly enforced this year against all managers. Big Guy has also proposed that the Possum be limited to 45 seconds per draft instead of the one minute allocated to all other managers, both as a penalty for his flagrant abuse of last year's one-minute rule, and to drive home to the Possum that this year his flouting of the letter and spirit of the league rules will not be tolerated. We will vote on this proposal on draft day.

Be sure to mark down April 4th on your calendar. I will endeavor to send out a bulletin prior to draft day, informing everyone of the exact time that the draft will begin. Tentatively, we will probably plan to start at around noon.

Also enclosed is an anonymous article entitled "Championship By Chicanery," which pretty well sums up everybody's feeling about the 1986 campaign. This article does not necessarily reflect the official view of this publication -- but it's very close.

Welcome to the 1987 Hot Stove League, Jon and Denny. May the wind always be at your back, and may you keep the Possum away from your door.

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Skipper

P.S. Finalized 1986 statistics, corrected and fully-audited, will be sent in the next few weeks. Thanks to Possum and Big Guy for putting the final 1986 statistics together.