

# FROM THE BULLPEN

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Fellow Helmsmen:

We have passed the half-way mark of the 1987 season, and the only surprise is that the Red Sox are not in sixth place where they rightfully belong. The Royals are cruising along in the familiar catbird seat, and the Braves and Cardinals have settled into the lower half of the upper division, where they can expect to finish. The Tigers have made claim to fifth place, and are pushing for the upper division, a remarkable accomplishment given the miserable pack of misfits drafted by Big Guy, and the staggering number of injuries to the Tigers (perhaps the last comment will quell Big Guy's incessant whining about his team's injuries). The two league rookie managers have managed to sandwich themselves around the Cub Club guided by veteran manager Snickler, although the Cubbies are gaining fast on the Pirates.

It promises to be an exciting second half, as five teams appear to have a legitimate shot at the crown. I include the Red Sox in this group, although when their bubble bursts, they will be going downward faster than the White Tornado at Scooter's stag party.

Enclosed for all you non-Omahans is a copy of the headline from last Friday's World Herald, featuring our very own Possum.

Also enclosed is a piece of pure fiction prepared by the premeditating Possum, ostensibly in rebuttal to the praiseworthy and wholly-founded allegations of skullduggery on his part in picking up back-to-back titles in '85 and '86. While the Possum's fanciful account makes for good reading while sitting on the porcelain bus, it makes for equally good lining for the cage of your diarrhea-prone parakeet.

And now, a look at things around the league, team-by-team, once again in projected order of finish.

## Royal Raves

Armed with the keenest baseball mind since Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the Skipper has no doubt built a team that would be the dynasty of the '80's under conventional baseball league rules. Ignoring the doubting Thomases of the league, Skipper has refurbished a pitching staff beleaguered by injuries and just plain bad luck with the inspirational addition of Rick Reuschel. Surprisingly enough to all league owners

save the sophic Skipper, the revitalized pitching staff has toiled its way to become the class of the league. As I have said many times, while pitching alone can't win it for you, it can lose it for you.

This year, the Royals pitching staff will nicely compliment the best hitters in the league, by coincidence also known as the Royals. With Joe Carter starting to live up to his first round selection, and other crackerjacks such as Tom Brunansky, Ray Quinones and Harold Reynolds picking up the pace, it will be no time at all before the Royals are back atop the league standings, where they so deservedly belong. And while the rest of the league owners have spent their time since the supplemental draft carping and whining about injuries and pussy-footing around the trade table, the Skipper masterfully shipped off a couple of his expendables to Brother to pick up Alan Trammell, thereby fine-tuning his already formidable infield.

Although the first two Royals teams waged a bitter fight to the end but came up just short (chiefly because of out-and-out bad luck and collusive tomfoolery among the other league owners), the third time is the charm. The Cup will look nice mounted upon the hood of my Porsche, dont-cha-know. In the immortal words of Straw Boo, the rest of you guys can't hold my jock this year.

Note: As a result of the much-maligned Hershiser trade to Scooter, made solely out of brotherly-in-law love but misinterpreted to be a managerial gaff, Royal ownership has apprised Royal management that there will be no more trading done by the Royals with league contenders this season. Each contending team owner is requested to take note of this and to refrain from proposing further trades, and the Possum is specifically requested to cease and desist all of his phony-baloney "bait and switch" trade proposals.

### Braves Ballyhoo

The once-might-Braves have fallen to third place in the league standings, beseiged by a pitching staff that has come unraveled like an old pair of Underbelly's Fruit-of-the-Looms. But then, what would you expect from a manager who has recorded videotapes of every single episode of the Dukes of Hazzard. If not for the stellar performances of Underbelly's two first basemen, it's safe to say that the crumbling Bravissimos would be elbowing with the Pirates and Cubs for a seventh-place finish.

While Underbelly's conscious decision to ignore pitching this year at draft time may turn out to be a colossal blunder and his ultimate undoing, his savvy selection of hitters should keep him in the upper division and out of the league bowels this year. If Underbelly can swap Mattingly off for a couple of hurlers to upgrade his ghastly pitching staff to merely subpar, the Braves should glide to a second-place position come season end, although well back of the Royals.

### Cardinal Chatter

If Scooter can summon up the inner strength to resist trading away the core of his still talent-laden squad to the Possum, he should finish the season only one or two rungs down from the Royals. If on the other hand, Scooter guppies up and takes the trade bait from the league sleezeball, we may all be chipping in to buy a replacement shrine to replace the Cup retired to the Possum. Scooter, we all implore you, don't do it.

Remember, Possum's baby picture bears a striking resemblance to both Rosemary's baby and Damien from The Omen.

Although Scooter initially picked a very nice team, he seems bent on dismantling it via the trading table. Not unlike a compulsive gambler who refuses to walk away from the craps table with his \$10,000 in winnings, Scooter has too itchy of a trigger finger to stand pat. Take, for example, the Joe Carter deal. Scooter picked up Joe Carter in the first round of the draft, yet dished him off like so many used prophylactics for an eighth-round pitcher. And while Mr. Hershiser may be putting a little egg on the old Skipper's face right now, come year's end, the worm will have turned full circle. Joe Carter will be polishing up his MVP trophy, while Orel will be sucking up to Tommy LaSorda at some spaghetti-bender restaurant, groveling for a starting slot in 1988.

Irrespective of where Scooter ends up in the rankings this year, he has to live with Leon-the-peon for the whole season, which is roughly akin to living with a fresh elephant turd in your refrigerator. Give up on the Bull, Scooter. He will never amount to anything more than the miserable garfish that he is now.

A quick update on the three \$20 side bets between Skipper and Scooter:

Juan Samuel	831.0	Steve Sax	577.0
Gregg Walker	676.0	Leon Durham	566.0
John Tudor	25.5	Danny Cox	205.0

### Sox Scuttlebutt

Well, after two months of guiding his Sox ship of fools over relatively calm seas, the Possum's ark is beginning to take on water. First, the unseaworthy vessel sprung a leak in the main hull when Willie Randolph decided to have knee surgery, unselfishly waiting until he had finished showboating in the Allstar game. Then, the main engine on the Good Ship Lolli-Possum flared out when Generalissimo Franco decided that he wanted to take a vacation on the disabled list. Shortly, when the rest of Possum's crew figures out that they just ain't all that good and start playing that way, Possum will be so busy plugging holes with every available appendage that not only will he be unable to phone other managers with his nauseating trade proposals, he also won't be able to follow through on his family plans.

And speaking of Possum's trade proposals, why do I constantly have this image in my mind's eye of Possum standing out on Sonny Gerber's used car lot, outfitted in one of Snickler's red, black and yellow-checkered blazers, whistling in unsuspecting grandmother-types for a "doggone good deal." Most of you probably don't realize that Possum worked his way through law school as a carnival barker at the Nebraska State Fair. That's right. He was the miscreant with the two-inch sideburns and pack of unfiltered Camels rolled up in his dirty white V-neck T-shirt, cajoling you to "win a big stuffed dog for the little lady;" and after you spent two weeks' pay to finally knock down the six lead-filled milk bottles, he told you as he was handing you a two-inch tall stuffed rat that you only had to win five more stuffed rats to trade in for a stuffed snake, six stuffed snakes to trade in for a stuffed iguana, and twelve stuffed iguanas to trade in for a soiled two-foot high panda bear. This is the man that Underbelly, Snickler and I are trusting our life savings to prudently invest. This is the same man who carefully blueprinted Leon Spinks' investment program.

By now you are all familiar with the Possum's tactic of "bait and switch" in trade negotiations. What is the "bait and switch"? Ask the Fox. The "bait and switch" is when Possum offers to trade you either one of his top two pitchers for Strawberry or Moseby. After you have had a day to let it sink in, and you've decided it's a trade you are very interested in consummating, Possum tells you with a straight face that the deal was Kelly Downs for Andre Dawson and Tony Gwynn. What is the "bait and switch"? Ask Big Guy. After Possum proposes trading you Jack Morris, Jose Canseco and Doug DeCinces for Keith Moreland, Candy Maldonado and Ron Darling, your interest has been piqued. Two hours later, when you're ready to make the deal, it has degenerated to Doug DeCinces, Freddie Lynn and Bruce Ruffin for your top three players at those three positions. What is the "bait and switch"? Ask me. After Possum has offered to trade you a shortstop and a top-line pitcher just to secure the right to draft Gary Ward at the supplemental draft, you can't wait to close the deal. When you call back the next day to finalize the swap, Possum's selective memory has conveniently discarded the notion that the offer included one of his front-line pitchers. That, my friends, is the "bait and switch."

It will be with child-like glee that we will all soon watch Possum topple from the top of the league standings. Possum, the man with all the dignity and pride of Peter Holm (soon to be ex-hubby of Joan Collins), cannot keep up his charade of having a championship team much longer.

#### Tigers Tales

At last look, the doleful Tigers were still clinging to fifth place, like a cheap suit in the rain. Although gaining on the slumping Cards and Braves, the Tigers are nevertheless destined for yet another lower division finish. Face it, Big Guy, this team has all of the charisma of Bert Convey. In fact, if our league was composed of show business personalities instead of baseball players, this is how I see your team:

C	Morey Amsterdam
IB	Bert Convey
2B	Charles Nelson Reiley
3B	Anthony Newley
SS	Wink Martindale
OF	Tony Randall
OF	Peter Holm
OF	John Davidson
P	Jim Nabors
P	George Gobel
P	Phyllis Diller
P	Al Lewis (Grandpa Munster)
RP	Howard Sprague

Sorry, Big Guy. Your team is boring.

Although Big Guy's vaunted pitching staff looks like it's beginning to make a move, it just won't be enough to make up for all of the duds in the infield and outfield. Look for the Tigers to finish right where they're at.

### Cub Comments

Although the Cubs are presently in seventh place, as of the last reporting period they were a mere 8 points behind the Pirates. Look for the Cubs to whiz past the Pirates and settle into sixth place, where they will finish. Looking at the Snickler's roster, it is difficult to understand why the Cubs are not in the upper division. Looking at Snickler, it's easy to understand why the Cubs are not in the upper division. Snickler's just too nice a guy, and in this league of cutthroats, nice guys finish last.

There have been some bright spots in Snickler's thus-far dismal season. Snickler's pitching staff, believed to be questionable at best, is presently fourth best in the league. If Snickler can keep Charlie Hudson and Dennis Rasmussen off of the shuttlebus to Columbus, the Cubs' staff may finish even higher than that. And Snickler appears to be the only league owner who is certain to have a player break a major league record. Bo Jackson is going to strike out more this season than Snickler has in ten years of going to the bars.

### Pirate Patter

Five minutes before the supplemental draft began, it appeared that Fox's trotters had an outside chance to finish in the money. Then came the supplemental draft. With Underbelly pulling the reins, Fox's entry at the horse race pulled off of the track and have been bee-lining for Ralston Purina ever since. Let's take a look at how the phenomenal four have done since the week after the draft.

	<u>Then</u>	<u>Now</u>
Ken Phelps	397.0	516.0
Don Carman	77.5	75.5
Rick Honeycutt	100.0	67.5
Dave Stewart	133.0	88.0
Totals	707.5	947.0

In six weeks' time, the fabulous four have picked up a mind-boggling average of just under 60 points per. Them 'r nice. Next year, Fox, I suggest that you make it to the supplemental draft at all costs, unless you are attending your own funeral.

### Blues Blubbering

Interesting how The Bullpen always ends up addressing the predicament of the Blues last. All I can say is, oh, Brother. With the type of performance exhibited by the Blues to date, it appears that we're going to have to seriously evaluate in the future our criteria for allowing new managers in the league. Fortunately for you, Brother, we'll have to grandfather-clause you in.

At this stage of the game, 300 points is the mark of a pitcher on his way to a good year. Brother has five players that have surpassed the 300-point mark, on their way to the 400 level. Unfortunately, Brother,

only two of your players with between 300 and 400 points are pitchers, and one of those is a reliever who won't count for a plug nickel.

By now all of you have heard about the trade that Brother and I fashioned, Schofield, Heaton and Ward for Trammell, Hall and Power. I just have one thing to say about this trade: Thanks, Brother! Seriously, though, Brother, you can count on Gary Ward getting at least two or three pinch hit appearances every week, and Dick Schofield will likely keep up his juggernaut pace if he ever gets off the disabled list. And you did get rid of that slug, Trammell, who was merely your third highest point man.

Take heart, Brother, the season will be over before you know it, and you can start mapping out your strategy for insuring that Steve Balboni, Willie Wilson and Danny Jackson find a place on your roster next year.

### League Trip Update

It appears by popular concensus that we are going to postpone our league trip to Kansas City from the second week of August until the first weekend in October. There are a number of reasons for this change. Possum has indicated that he will likely be in Chicago on business (or monkey business) on the targeted weekend in August. By business, I suspect that Possum will be plunking down my life savings on some long shot nag at the race track there. Scooter has pulled out the feeble excuse that he will be opening a new Runza restaurant and attending to the birth of his third child at about the time of our previously-scheduled trip. Underbelly and I appear destined to go down with the Houston Fleetwood shipwreck at the State Softball Tournament that weekend. Big Guy hopes that by the first weekend in October he will have accumulated enough Brownie points with his boss (Molly) to enable him to make the trip. And perhaps most important of all, if Scooter is available to go to Kansas City in October, we may have available for our use his parents' sewerage treatment plant on wheels. And so it seems, it would be best for all concerned to postpone our beloved annual debaucherous baseball trip until the first weekend in October. The Twins will be in town, and the league pennant race should then be in full fury.

Enough said. This is your friend, your amigo, your spiritual guru, your collective idol, the Skipper, signing off.

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