

FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division
1988 Season

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Dear Fellow Hot Stove Leaguers:

Well, the first one-eighth of the season is in the can, and I hope all of you are geared up for the remainder of what will no doubt shape up to be a fascinating campaign.

With the arrival of the first few weeks of results from Good Brother Underbelly, there are a couple of areas of concern that bear mention. First on my list is the incredible and nauseating shot-out-of-a-cannon start posted by the ubiquitous Possum. Not only do I have to answer my telephone to the Possum's cheery voice each day -- pointing out in case I missed it that his outfit had a meager output of 24 or 25 runs/rbi's the night before -- but I have to see his accursed name atop the league standings once again. The amazing Possum, with his house of mirrors and checkered sport coat full of aces, is once again leading the pack.

Year after year, in what has now become a time-honored tradition, the Possum whines and snivels his way through the draft, doing his best imitation of a Jewish mother, feigning anger, disgust and nausea, and nearly choking back tears as he laments the hapless school of carp he has hooked during the draft. All of this is of course a clever smoke screen designed to invoke sympathy and create confusion among the neophyte league members, so that the Possum can swoop down upon them like so many ravenous vultures and pick apart their bones via the trading process. Fortunately, this year's new pilots were sufficiently forewarned about the wicked ways of the Possum, and to the date that this Bullpen went to press have been able to resist the Possum's unctuous offerings.

As we all know, the Possum did not pick the worst squad to ever be assembled in this year's draft, as the Possum would have us all believe. Snickler did, but more on that later. So, Possum, you picked a decent team, and when that fact is coupled with the blazing April starts achieved by three-quarters of your team, along with your mindless and undeserving pure luck, it adds up to your present posture atop the league standings. Of course, nothing could be sweeter for the rest of us than to see a repeat of your abysmal stumble from first to fifth in the final moments of the 1987 season.

Adding to my disgust at the Possum's early good fortune is, of course, the current second place standing of last year's winner, Big Guy and his Tigers. Evidently Big Guy has become a disciple of

Possum's "If you whine, you do just fine" credo, since Big Guy offered up nothing about his team on draft day except for whimpers and sobs. Quite naturally, wouldn't you know it, Big Guy greases out and drafts Joe Carter and Oral Hershiser the year after they appear on my roster. Unless I am mistaken, Joe and Oral have already equaled their output from last year in the first 20 games. Life is often unfair.

I will point out that none of us need be too concerned about the Tigers' road-runner start, since Big Guy obviously called in all of his markers last year to eke out a one time only championship ring.

Before we proceed to the Snickler chronicles, let me say just a few words about the rest of you. Scooter, congrats on a fine early season start, but don't count on staying in the money for very long. Magpie, I'll just point out that Blongo was in fourth place for a few short weeks last year, before crashing in a crumpled heap to the league cellar. Fox, unfortunately, your Pirates aren't mirroring their namesakes in the National League. For a team that everyone thought was pretty good, you are cruising along in a very average fifth position. Perhaps like your chrome-topped chum, we have over-rated your managerial skills.

Jigger has been a rather boastful neighbor this week, talking my ear off about how his Mudhens would zoom past my beloved Royals on the wings of Keith Hernandez's big week. My response if that happens: Big aching deal. The man with the most pesos in his sombrero at the end of the year is the only one that matters. And how about Brother? Oh, Brother. It looks like you are going to be fighting an uphill battle again this year. With Underbelly nipping at your heels, you will be lucky to hold onto the eighth place spot for long. And what about them Braves. It appears that Underbelly's squadron of misfits was appropriately named this year. They, like the real Braves, are in for a long, long year. Take heart, though, Underbelly. With a good draft next year you can scratch and claw your way up to seventh and maybe up to fifth or fourth the following year after that. Then after maybe an off year in which you drop down to fifth or sixth, maybe in 1992 or 1993 you can finally be back in the money again. Thank you for your commitment to continue to invest 14 hours a week providing us with weekly results while you plod through the next four meaningless seasons.

And now, let's talk about how pathetic Snickler's team really is. And it is pathetic. For example, here are a few observations that I have made about Snickler's Chubs through the first two weeks of point totals:

- Possum's eight starting hitters have scored more points this year than the Cubs' entire 25-man roster.
- Four of Snickler's pitchers are presently in the negative numbers, with a fifth closing in.
- Roger Clemens has more points (176) than the entire 9-man Chubs pitching staff (gross total 147.5/net total 152.67).
- The composite record of the Chubs' staff is 7-13. Throw out Dave Stewart, and they are 2-13.

- Since last week's statistics came out with the aforementioned numbers, at least four members of the Snickler's staff got lit up like Three Mile Island in their last starts.
- Mel Hall is Snickler's top-rated player. Chili Davis is his second-rated player. These are both terrible players who will virtually fall off the planet by season's end.
- Mel Hall, Chili Davis, Lance Parrish, Lou Whitaker, Harold Baines and Alan Trammell are all off to career best starts.
- Eddie Murray had two dog-shit seasons in a row playing for Cal Ripken, Sr. He does not like Frank Robinson and will not play up to those standards this year.

I am truly sorry, Snickler, that a good friend such as you must endure another season of jokes and guffaws at your expense, because of the garbage scow full of players that you drafted. If it were within my power to beam you past the next seven-eighths of the season and into next year, I would. Unfortunately, you are simply going to have to survive another year of misery.

By the way, in an alcoholic haze last weekend, Snickler boldly suggested that he actually picked a fine team, and that they are simply off to a slow start but will come around starting in May. Picking up on Snickler's at least temporary absence of brain cells, Jigger and I proposed a few friendly side wagers to make things more interesting for Snickler this year. Snickler gamely slurred his acquiescence to the following wagers: (1) Snickler bets Jigger and me \$10 each that he will not finish in the basement of the league this year; (2) after a couple of more rounds of drinks, Snickler wagers \$5 that he will finish in the top three in the standings this year. In the calm of sobriety the following day, Snickler "offered" to let Jigger and me off the hook. We declined. Anyone else wishing to get a piece of this action with Snickler can call him either at work (467-2381), home (488-5982), or frequently on the Teen Gab Line (976-1000).

Snickler has also indicated to a few of us that he is really not the least bit concerned about his pitching woes since he will be drafting first (quite a distinction, Snickler) at the supplemental draft. Snickler seems to be operating under the misconception that he is going to be able to pick up a couple of real pitching buzz-saws at the supplemental draft. Obviously, Snickler has not yet pieced together the fact that pitchers will be going like shark chum at the supplemental draft. Snickler will be lucky if Steve Carlton is still available when the second round of the supplemental draft rolls around. Just remember what a shot in the arm Charlie Hudson was for you last year, Snickler. Maybe after you pick Swindell or Candiotti or Guzman in the supplemental draft they will be converted to a point-rich middle reliever like Hudson was last year.

SUPPLEMENTAL DRAFT

Enough kibitzing. The supplemental draft, due to a half dozen conflicts in scheduling the same in conjunction with Mr. Big Shot Scooter's busy schedule, will be held for the first time on a week night, and in the satellite league city of Lincoln. Scooter has generously offered to host the event on Wednesday, June 8, 1988. The draft will be held at poolside beginning at approximately 6:00 p.m. on

the 8th. The address is 6700 Old Cheney Road, Lincoln, Nebraska. Scott will be cooking up steaks on his mesquite grill, and, yes, Snickler, you can probably anticipate the availability of seconds, thirds and fourths. Bring your swimming trunks, your appetites, and your thinking caps. Supplemental draft has traditionally been a make it or break it day for the Hot Stove League.

Obviously, I assume that Brother will participate in the supplemental draft via telephonic assistance, although he is certainly welcome to make the trip. Snickler is the only league member that would presumably make a 3½ hour drive for free food and beer. Hopefully, the railroad can do without Underbelly's careful direction for one evening, and Fox will be able to get one night away from his job as assistant press man in charge of printing up Grit Newspaper.

ANNUAL LEAGUE TRIP

I am very pleased and in fact proud to announce that the annual summer trip for the Hot Stove League, Eastern Nebraska Division, has been relocated to the City of Big Shoulders, Chicago, Our Kind of Town. The trip will occur on the weekend of July 22-24, when the Padres invade Wrigley Field. Scooter will be making all of the travel arrangements, and I will be attempting to secure game tickets. We are presently contemplating the possibility of having two departure dates for Chicago, on Friday morning leaving from Omaha around 6:30 a.m., or on Saturday morning the 23rd at around the same time. Return flights for either departure will be on Sunday night. Brother will have to check out availability of flights to Chicago from Kansas City himself. This gives everyone the option of spending either three or two days in Chicago, seeing three or two Cubs' games.

Because of the need to make trip arrangements, I am enclosing for prompt return by each of you a trip designation form, upon which you should indicate which day you will plan to depart for Chicago. We will then know the number of flights to reserve for Friday and how many for Saturday, and how many baseball tickets to acquire. Please return the completed forms to me along with your deposit of \$100 (to eliminate or reduce last-second Jap-outs), and make return of the same to me no later than May 20, 1988. We are shooting for 90% attendance this year, recognizing that within the hen-pecked trio of Big Guy, Possum and Magpie, we are likely to have at least one whimpering "I can't go."

If any of you have any questions about this year's trip, contact either Scooter or myself. Speaking as a veteran of many trips to Wrigley Field, I can tell you that this is one league trip you do not want to miss. Watching the Snickler and Jigger side show of picking up girls on Rush Street should also be worth the price of admission. Go, Cubs!

I suppose I am also duty-bound to mention that Possum is the first winner of Scooter's generous monthly \$20 Runza food certificate, and to offer my heartfelt congratulations to the Possum. Maybe now I can get you to pay me back one of the seven or eight lunches you owe me with a trip to Runza. Once again, thanks to Scooter for sponsoring this monthly award.

Thanks also to Underbelly for faithfully putting out stats on a weekly basis, instead of the previously discussed bi-weekly schedule. Since Scott nearly went into defibrillation when he heard

that stats were not going to come out every week, you can consider yourself a lifesaver. We all appreciate your personal sacrifice of cutting back your wheelchair trips to the park with your invalid mother to once every other week so that you have the time to do our statistics on a weekly basis. Your actions truly exemplify the spirit of the Hot Stove League.

FINAL NOTE

Big Guy has magnanimously agreed to sponsor a Hot Stove League outing to watch the Omaha Royals take on the Pawtucket Red Sox on Saturday, May 21, 1988, game time 2:05 p.m. If you will be able to attend this optional but sanctioned league function, please let the Big Guy know so he will have an idea how many tickets to reserve from his firm's box.

Until we meet again.

Skipper