

FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division
1990 Season

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Dear Fellow Owners/Managers:

Welcome to another year of the Hot Stove League and more incisive and fair-minded commentary from the staff at From the Bullpen. Please accept my apologies for the passage of time since the last issue of From the Bullpen, but it was hard for this reporter to muster up much enthusiasm about extending plaudits to the manager of our three-time defending champion Tigers, WhiteSot. As they say, if you have nothing good to say about someone

I hope that you all enjoyed this year's draft as much as I did. Hopefully, you all had more time to prepare than yours truly. Not that I am suspicious by nature, but does anyone else share my curiosity about WhiteSot's motive for moving draft day up to March 31, 1990, on about two hours' notice? I am sure that all of you, like me, had time to drop everything (in my case, the trial of the biggest case of my career) and devote substantial time to whipping yourself into shape for the draft.

In retrospect, I think that my complete dearth of preparation occasioned by WhiteSot's arbitrary rescheduling of the draft probably worked to my advantage. Instead of being influenced by the oft-inaccurate conclusions and opinions of the media and other self-proclaimed baseball mavens, I was forced to rely on my razor-sharp instincts and my vast reservoir of baseball knowledge. Consequently, the 1990 Senators, while collectively adjudged by all of you to be a likely cellar-dweller, may be a force to be reckoned with in the pursuit of the league crown this year.

The mere mention of the name Senators in the same breath as the words league crown has no doubt piqued your interest in this issue of From the Bullpen, and as you might guess, I have again chosen to share with you my thoughts about the teams selected by each of you at this year's draft, and about how things are likely to shake out during the course of this year's campaign. What follows is my annual post-draft state of the union address.

1990: BUCCANEERS SWASHBUCKLE TO TITLE

After laboring for several seasons in the considerable shadow of his league mentor, Underbelly, Pipsqueak seems destined to taste the sweet fruits of victory this season. Once again employing his premeditated tactic of remaining utterly silent during the draft as others talked a good game, the calculating Pipsqueak was able to quietly assemble a first-rate squad.

Unshaken by his marginal fifth place drafting position, Pipsqueak proceeded to draft the best players in the first four rounds, Sierra, Carter, Saberhagen and Langston, of any manager. This was followed up by additional savvy selections by the sagacious, gray-haired one. The 1990 Pirates will be difficult to displace from the top spot.

SECOND PLACE: REDS

Congratulations, Bart. Not for picking a good team, but for shedding your unwanted nickname, Magpie (at least for now). All it took to accomplish the switcheroo was your willingness to wear that ridiculous haircut for six months, and to otherwise emulate Bart Simpson in all phases of your life.

Old Bart's picked a pretty good team here. Of course, if I made my living by humping Kermit's leg for twenty minutes each day and then studying baseball statistics and jabbering with WhiteSot for the next eight hours, I, too, would be capable of putting together a crackerjack squad.

Look for good things from Bart's stellar infield of Joyner, Sandberg, Larkin and Pendleton, and his solid outfield corps. With decent pitching and a rejuvenation of Matt Nokes, look for the Reds to be in the thick of things come September.

THIRD PLACE: TRIBE

Sorry, Possum and WhiteSot. Not yet.

Masterspeller has put together a pretty respectable crew for the 1990 pennant race. The 1990 Tribe looks pretty good on paper, except for the paper on which Underbelly woefully attempted to affix the spellings of his players' names. But don't feel too bad, Underbelly. The league secretary only caught six misspellings on your draft sheet while preparing the official league roster: Berryhill (Barryhill); McGwire (McGuire); Guillen (Quillen); Kunkel (Kunkle); Magrane (Magrene); and Gullickson (Guilkson). We were pleased that you did not misspell Fisk, Davis, Ray and Evans again this year.

Underbelly has put together an outfield with some real punch this year, what with Canseco, Gwynn, Evans, Henderson and Parker. But then Underbelly has always liked the big, burly types. And Underbelly has always been partial to hillbillies, which explains his selection of John Kruk.

The 1990 version of the Tribe is strong at the corners with McGwire and Gaetti, but flacid up the middle with Oquendo and Guillen. The Tribe pitching staff is no bargain either, and Underbelly will need to pick up a solid pitcher at the supplemental draft to have serious hopes of piloting a contender this year.

OUT OF THE MONEY FOURTH PLACE: SENATORS

While the 1990 Senators have been picked to share the cellar with the hapless Mudhens, there is no question but that the Senators have a legitimate shot at some prize money this year. It's quite clear that the post-draft prediction process was tainted by some unfortunate bitterness directed at the old Skipper because of his frank and sometimes painful observations about other league members. It's really rather sad that a few thin-skinned league participants allow their views to be so obviously colored by their reactions to a few deserving comments in From the Bullpen. I thought that you were all bigger than that.

Nonetheless, while the Senators have again been selected for a lower division finish, with even a whit of good fortune, the old Skipper will see his Senators right in the hunt. With the best outfield in the league, a top notch infield and a solid catching tandem, the Senators will surely be able to compensate for what might be described as a mediocre pitching staff. And one thing is for sure this year: No matter where the Senators finish in the league standings, it will be atop that dreadful pack of losers known as the Mudhens.

FIFTH PLACE: DREAD SOX

After five years I have learned my lesson. Despite the fact that Possum has selected what most of us believe is a truly lousy team; despite the fact that the great and mighty Possum himself has been lamenting each and every one of his draft picks from the moment that the draft was over; despite the fact that on paper the 1990 Red Sox look like one of the more pathetic teams ever drafted in this league, and could easily pass for a Shamu-drafted team; despite all of these factors which militate towards a predicted ninth or tenth place finish, I refuse to place the Possum's squad in that enviable position. Instead, this year I dub his team as simply "average," and likely to finish in the middle of the pack.

The book on the Red Sox this year is: average infield, average outfield, average pitching, average catching, and about as much depth as Shamu's last three dates combined. How will Possum be able to pull off any of his patented "bait and switch" maneuvers when he has nothing to bait the hook with?

Query: What do they call the basement at the Bridges home where Possum watches replays of his hapless Red Sox? The Whine Cellar. That's right, Possum's already at it this year, whimpering and sniveling about the unfortunate physical condition of Paul Molitar, Possum's starting third baseman. My only response to the Possum is: Count the number of seasons in which Molly has played in more than 150 games. You get what you pay for.

Bait and Switch Bulletin: For those of you who didn't make it down to the Scorecard last Wednesday, the first official "bait and switch" was implemented by the Possum. For the record, Possum offered up Will Clark and Jim Eisenreich in exchange for Don Mattingly and Barry Bonds, in an effort to beef up the unimposing Red Sox outfield. During the millisecond that my body was trying to force enough air through my vocal chords to utter an unequivocal "Done," the phony bull-oney "offer" was retracted by the unctuous stockbroker. What followed was a nauseating series of modified settlement proposals by the Possum, which fell upon nothing but deaf ears. Ahh! It's great to have another season underway.

SIXTH PLACE: CHIEFS

Tsk, tsk, tsk, Baby Trumpetfish. Although once again I'll be cheering for my gregarious brother-in-law to finish at the top in the event that the Senators cannot muster up a pennant; and, although once again Baby Trumpetfish began the draft with a bang, with stellar selections in the first five rounds (Henderson, Burks, HoJo, Viola and Belcher); once again Baby Trumpetfish followed up the early rounds by shooting himself in both feet. How can the Chiefs seriously be expected to contend in this cutthroat league with a couple of has-beens in the infield (Guererro and Trammell), and a couple of never-will-be's patrolling the outfield (the Smith brothers)? Add to the equation an untested rookie behind the plate (Todd Ziele) and a potential head case at second base (Gregg Jeffries), and the 1990 Chiefs are a doormat looking for a pair of feet to crawl under.

Despite the fact that Baby Trumpetfish has assembled perhaps his worst team ever, he should be able to avoid a cellar finish. Thank goodness for small favors like Shamu and McBlunder.

SEVENTH PLACE: CUBS

It is evident that Shamu has gone to a youth movement this year, in that he has only drafted six or seven players who are in their late 30's or early 40's. The old Shamu raised a few eyebrows when he started off the draft with Greenwell, Bell and Clemens. The unspoken question on everyone's mind was "Had Shamu finally caught onto this game after only five years?" That question was answered

with a resounding "No" with Shamu's selections in the next four rounds (Ozzie Smith, Devon White, Kelly Gruber and Jose DeLeon). A collective sigh of relief filled the room. There is a certain feeling of warmth and comfort to know that the sun will always come up in the east, girls will be girls, we'll always have Casablanca, and Shamu will always take a Jack Morris or a Jesse Barfield.

EIGHTH PLACE: TIGERS

Let's cut right through the B.S., WhiteSot. For a guy who drafted first, you sure picked a shitty team. I really mean that. While Wade Boggs in the first round is certainly a defensible selection, things went in the toilet in a hurry for the Tigers after that. With the possible exception of Hershiser in the third round and Cory Snyder in the twenty-second round, all the rest of your players were picked at least three or four rounds early. Many of them should not have been picked at all.

While I recognize that a manager who has won back-to-back-to-back crowns can pick just about whoever he wants and have some idiot conclude that he is a genius, nobody has bestowed that superlative upon you yet as far as I know. Let's face it, WhiteSot, you blew it this year. You had better stop by my office and pick up The Cup in a hurry, because if it's in your possession after this October, I'll kiss your backside at 72nd and Dodge Street and give you thirty minutes to gather a crowd.

NINTH PLACE: BLUES

Sorry, Stretch. After the draft, I thought that your team might actually have a chance at escaping the lower division this year. But then I remembered who was picking the team.

While you've picked a decent infield, a good catcher, and your pitching could be worse, I fear that your outfield is going to keep you in or near the cellar again this year. While Bo knows diddley, the rest of us know that Bo hasn't yet figured out how to score big points in the Hot Stove League. Strawberry is still Strawberry, no matter how you slice it. Earl Anthony should have stuck to bowling.

Look at it this way, McBlunder, you could be managing the Mudhens.

TENTH PLACE: MUDHENS

As I perused the Mudhens roster, I was confused by one thing. Is Jigger's starting infield really his starting infield, or everyone else's reserve infield? P.U.

Is there any doubt that my side bet with Jigger on our head-to-head competition this year will result in Jigger's money in my pocket? I think not. And how about that outfield? Conventional wisdom, thy name is not Jigger. Picking Yount and Mitchell after career-best years is suspect in and of

itself. Picking the not-yet-ripe Ken Griffey, Jr., and overripe Murphy, Winfield and Vinnie Coleman only adds gas to the fire.

Not unlike Jigger's career path, the road open to the 1990 Mudhens leads to nowhere. Of course, there is a silver lining in every cloud. As early as the 1990 Mudhens will be out of contention, my boisterous, balding neighbor to the north will have time to try to work his golf handicap down to the number of chins that Jigger came back with from his last sales trip (27).

LEAGUE TRIP

As you are all aware, the league trip to Arlington, Texas, to see the Rangers play the Red Sox is scheduled for July 5-8. Tentative plans call for us to fly out of Kansas City on the 5th to arrive in Dallas in time for the Thursday night game. We will also see ballgames on Friday and Saturday, and return home on Sunday. As you know, there is a monumental sports memorabilia convention in town on this weekend, and we will be boarding in close proximity to the convention center.

As I understand it, we have our usual definite no's, Possum and WhiteSot. I understand that Pipsqueak is "iffy," and that Bart is a probable. McBlunder is to be checking on plane fares and should report his findings as soon as possible.

SUPPLEMENTAL DRAFT

Although we have not yet picked out a date for the supplemental draft, it is customary to hold it in early June. Because of other commitments, I am unable to participate on June 2 and 3, and so it is my proposal that the supplemental draft take place on June 9 or 10. Although I have not yet spoken with him about it, I am sure that Baby Trumpetfish will be pleased to host this year's event at his spacious Lincoln estate. Shamu has already been inquiring about the size and quantity of the T-bone steaks.

MISCELLANEOUS

Enclosed is the official 1990 Hot Stove League Draft Rosters. Please report to me any changes in the rosters as the season goes along. Also enclosed for each of you are a couple of Player Trade Sheets, to be used whenever a trade is made to apprise Masterspeller about any roster changes. When a trade is made, please provide Underbelly with a copy of the Player Trade Sheet, and please also send one to my attention.

PREDICTED FINISHES

As is the tradition in the Hot Stove League, each of you has predicted the order of finish of your own team and the teams of your co-managers. Assigning a point value of 1 for a predicted first place finish, 2 for a predicted second place finish, and so on, the following is the league consensus on this year's teams:

Reds	27
Pirates	30
Red Sox	40
Tribe	43
Chiefs	50
Tigers	54
Cubs	73
Blues	77
Senators	78
Mudhens	78 (what a surprise!)

EPILOGUE

So much to say and so little time. The best of luck to all of you, and keep reading the box scores.

Affectionately yours,

The Skipper

DEWARS PROFILE

Name: Dennis Bontrager
Nickname: Pipsqueak
Team: Pirates
Team Motto: Walk softly and carry a big stick.
Education: Grammar school.
Favorite Subject: Spelling. (Did Underbelly write this?)
Favorite Movie: The Quiet Man.
Least Favorite Movie: The Sound of Music.
Last Book Read: The Joy of Silence.
Favorite Song: The Sound of Silence (Simon and Garfunkel).
Boyhood Idol: Zamfir, Master of the Pan Flute.
Secret Ambition: To tell the world he wears black lace panties.