



# FROM THE BULLPEN

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## REDBIRDS REIGN

Five weeks into the season, and the upstart Redbirds and their brash manager, Rookie, are making a mockery of the venerable Hot Stove League. The white-hot Redbirds already have 1821 points, a daunting 153-point lead over the field, and an insurmountable 584 cushion over the luckless Senators. Last year at this stage, the then first-place team (the Senators -- ah, those were the days, my friends) had totaled only 1617 points. It is fair to say that the spunky Redbirds are out of the box in a hurry.

## FIVE-WEEK TOTALS

Here's how it looks through games of May 8, 1994:

1. Redbirds	1821
2. Chiefs	1668
3. Cubs	1647
4. Reds	1568
5. Skipjacks	1522
6. Bronx Bombers	1519

7. Red Sox	1497
8. Blues	1470
9. Tigers	1463
10. Tribe	1442
11. Pirates	1319
12. Senators	1237

The top-scoring team for the fifth week was the Reds, with 336 points; the lowest-scoring squad was the Red Sox, with 193. The top pitching team was the Chiefs, with 135, and the top hitting team was the Reds, with 262. The League MVP through five weeks is Gary Sheffield, with 176 points. The Cy Young leader is still Greg Maddux, with 173 points.

## INFORMATION GRIDLOCK

### LINCOLN

There are grumblings from Lincoln, as several of the Lincoln HSL owners have reported they did not receive their statistics for Week Four, placing them at a severe disadvantage in terms of participation in the Free Agent Draft. One owner, Underbelly, tried to get some answers

by calling the Bill James Live Line, only to reach a busy signal ten times in a row. The persistent Underbelly then tried to call the 24-hour Message Line, to leave a message concerning the absence of statistics, but, again, he was met with a busy signal for another ten or eleven attempts. The resourceful Underbelly then attempted to fax a message to the apparently under-equipped Bill James office, only to be met with -- you guessed it -- another six or seven busy signals. Like the song says, Underbelly may have to deliver his message per-son-ally (I can't phone it in, I can't call it in, I can't fax it in). With no new information coming into the Star City and no ability to transmit information out, Underbelly has theorized that there is an information-impermeable dome which is encapsulating Lincoln.

There have been more than a few times lately when I wished that the same protective dome was in place over my office building, shielding me from the incessant, exasperating telephone calls from you-know-who. Read on.

## BUT I DON'T WANT ED SPRAGUE, POSSUM

Circle the wagons, bolt the door, and load the muskets. Possum is on the trade warpath. Ever since the Senators hit rock bottom several weeks ago, I have had more phone calls from Possum than from the guy selling light bulbs for disabled Viet Nam veterans. I don't mean daily. We're talking early-morning, mid-morning, late-morning, early-afternoon, late-afternoon, and right before and after ESPN Baseball Highlights. Enough already! If Possum paid this sort of attention to the stock market, the Bridges Investment Fund might start beating the passbook rate at the bank.

Like a shark smelling blood, Possum has been relentless in his pursuit of a trade. Not unlike a vulture, hovering over a dying victim in the desert, Possum is waiting for Skipper to gulp his last breath so that he might begin picking his carcass clean. And, of course, Possum isn't interested in picking up Lance Johnson or Paul Sorrento or Chuck Finley. He wants Molitor and he wants Ventura. Only the best for Possum.

What is remarkable about all of this is not simply that Dr. Churn-and-Burn is trying to fleece Skipper; it is the boldness with which he has attempted to snatch away the Senators' only superstars; his assumption that the last-place standing of the Senators has caused an IQ-drop of 100 to the Skipper; and the uncanny level to which he has taken his calling card, the Bait-and-Switch technique, in the process. Let me demonstrate.

After Week 1, when it became apparent that there were a few holes in the Senators' outfield (some would

argue that it was apparent well before Opening Day), I received a cheery phone call from Possum, offering to help me out by trading me a couple of his surplus superstar outfielders. Of course, despite his warm feelings for the pilot of the Senators, Possum could not just *give* away these outfielders, but they would be available at bargain basement prices. Molitor and/or Ventura, I was advised. For some inexplicable reason, I feigned interest. Sort of like picking at a scab -- you just can't help it.

Sensing a crippled sheep near his treacherous lair, Possum skillfully laid out the tempting bait:

"Why, Skipper, my friend, you can have your pick of *any two* of my outfielders, Phil Plantier, Bo Jackson, Kenny Lofton, Deion Sanders, Reggie Sanders, or Paul O'Neill. Your choice, mi amigo."

Knowing full well that the unctuous rug merchant had no intention of living up to this offer, I indicated slight interest in a Robin-Ventura-for-Kenny-Lofton-and-Phil-Plantier swap.

"Oh," replied the Possum, "I certainly can't give up Kenny Lofton as part of the deal, he being my fourth round draft choice and all, but *any other two* of my outfielders are available."

In that case, I responded, I would probably be interested in a Robin-Ventura-for-Phil-Plantier-and-Deion-Sanders.

"Oh my," said the Possum, in mock surprise, "did I fail to mention that Phil Plantier cannot be a part of this deal? But other than Phil, and Kenny Lofton, my friend, take your pick from *any two*," said the jackal.

You get the idea. After this initial set of "negotiations" (the word must be used loosely), I received

several (I stopped counting when it got to double figures) calls from H.P. (Honest Possum), attempting to cement the transaction. But, as we know, a deal with the Possum is not a deal until it shows up in black and white on the STATS report.

## BAIT & SWITCH PART III

The Possum B.S. (Bait & Switch) saga continued. I advised Possum that perhaps I would be interested in obtaining Paul O'Neill and Deion Sanders for Robin Ventura, if he would throw in his reserve third baseman to fill Ventura's spot in the Senators' starting lineup.

"I think we can make that deal, my friend," responded Possum, now heavily salivating. "Just to help you out, I'll be happy to trade you O'Neill, Sanders and Sprague for Ventura *and Molitor*."

When Possum was reminded that *only Ventura* was offered, and that the deal could never involve a trade of both Molitor and Ventura, he recoiled in mock surprise. "Well, in that case, it'll have to be Paul O'Neill and Ed Sprague for Robin Ventura," came the words from the Possum. "It helps you more than it helps me, bosom buddy, but I'm willing to make that deal."

Well, the phone calls continued, and they continue to this day. And know this: The trade terms for the Senators have gotten no better, and each new deal involves Possum trading his lukewarm Ed Sprague to the Senators. If I have heard Possum mention Ed Sprague and his attributes once, I've heard it fifty times. I've heard Possum call him "the next Mike Schmidt"; I've heard him compare him to George Brett; I've heard Ed Sprague likened to Matt Williams, "with a little less power"; I've heard his name used in

the same sentence with the Pope. **READ MY LIPS, POSSUM. I DON'T WANT ED SPRAGUE!** I'm sure he's a nice family man; he has a pretty wife; he did well in school; he serves as a deacon in his hometown church; **BUT I DON'T WANT HIM, CAPECHE?**

If the Indians (the real ones, not the tribe in Cleveland) ever have a chance to negotiate with Possum, in retrospect they will be absolutely convinced that they came out okay on the beads-for-Manhattan deal. But enough about the Possum.

## MY SEASON IN HELL: CHAPTER II

Based on the way things are going, I have decided to make this a regular feature of *From the Bullpen*. Many of you have been able to empathize with my sorrowful ordeal, and we all know that misery loves company. So allow me to tell you about my miserable team.

Brian Anderson: How about this guy? I pick him up in the Free Agent Draft, and before I can get him in my starting lineup, he tosses a gem, which is wasted. I then stick him into my starting lineup, and he gets his butt kicked, losing me 21 points. I am forced to leave him in my starting lineup and, in his very next outing, he pitches one inning and then breaks his hand, after losing another point or two for the Senators. Bad enough on its own, right? But, it so happens that Brian Anderson was the second major league "reliever" on my squad, and both Steve Farr and Kent Mercker are ineligible to replace him because of the ten-day rule. So I have another non-scoring stiff in my starting lineup. Nice.

Bobby Jones: How proud I was to see my No. 1 free agent draft of last week, Bobby Jones, spin his first career shutout and chalk up 30+ points. Unfortunately, those points all went into the Redbirds' savings account, thanks to last week's snafu with James Mouton (see last issue of *FTB* for any necessary explanations).

To that I say, thank you very much, BTBT. Nice.

Dave Weathers: The newest member of the *Red Sox* squad, Dave Weathers of the Florida Marlins, picks up his fifth win. (Again, remember the failed Free Agent Draft? Dave Weathers was my second round pick. Possum picked him up in his third round. HE SHOULD BE MINE! (Thanks again, BTBT.) Very nice.

Bobby Witt: This former Senator just picked up his second consecutive win (6 innings, no earned runs, 20 points) for the beloved Chiefs manager, after mounting losses of -12, -14, and -9 in three of his starts for the Senators. (But hey, at least I got James Mouton and a queered Free Agent Draft out of the deal.)

Alex Cole: One of my latest free agent selections, Alex Cole, who has been hitting like a house-a-fire of late (a salty .344 when picked up by the Senators) managed to pick up his second error of the season and lose a point in his Senatorial debut. The next night? His *third* error of the year. Very nice.

Ricky Bones: My "ace" spins 7-2/3 innings against the Blue Jays, leaving the game with a secure 2 to 1 lead; only to have some goofball reliever named Brnky come into the game, light himself with rocket fuel, and give up Ricky's win. Very nice.

David Nied: After giving up 20 some points in his last outing as a Senator starter, and then receiving a demotion to the minor leagues, David straightened himself out and

threw eight innings of shutout ball on Sunday, earning another 29 points for the Skipper's *minor* league.

Chris Hammond: The David Nied Story, Part 2. After getting his butt kicked and losing points for the Senators two outings in a row, Chris had to be taught a lesson and was thus demoted to the Senators' minor leagues. He responded nicely with a shutout on May 5, earning a nifty 31 points for the Senators' *minor* league squad. Very, very nice.

Which brings up a good point. While the Senators' major league team is floundering in the cellar, the top farm club is thriving.

I could go on to whine and bitch and moan some more, but that's just not my style. So let's move on.

## RANDOM THOUGHTS

- Has any other team ever been 679 points behind the leader one month into the season? That was the gap between the Redbirds and the Senators through games of May 7. Grim. Very grim.

- I wouldn't worry about Joe Carter, Rookie. That minor medical problem of vertigo didn't really affect Nick Esasky or Ken Daley.

- Pudge Rodriguez is supremely overrated. (And please lose that goofy earring.)

- Why won't Lou Piniella play Rich Amaral every day -- the guy goes 2 for 4 with a run one day, and Lou sits his butt on the bench the next. What gives?

- Is Possum really as unscrupulous as he appears to all the world?

- Would you guys be willing to start the '94 season over? I'll reserve the War Room at Gaines Mullen for May 14.

- It's time for Ozzie Smith to hang up the spikes. You had a fine career, Ozzie, but let's be moving on.

- Is Underbelly really getting married, or is the announcement simply a cover for his recent arrest at the Antelope Park's men's room?

- Lance Johnson can't really keep scoring less than a point a game, can he?

- Is there really a loving and caring God; or did we really evolve from apes who could care less about the fate of the '94 Senators?

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT!

Skipper