

FROM THE BULLPEN



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AUGUST 9, 1995: A RED-LETTER DAY FOR SKIPPER

Yesterday is a day I will never forget. August 9, 1995. That's the day I received Matt Greenberger's Stats, Inc. newsletter which featured the Eastern Nebraska Hot Stove League, and made mention of my life's work, *From the Bullpen*. It was also a day which yielded 81 points for the Senators during my morning pleasure cruise through the box scores. And, as if that weren't enough, my wife gave birth to our second baby boy that morning:

THE THRILL IS NOT GONE

William David "Will" (to you guys,
"The Thrill") Ernst
Born August 9, 1995, 6:59 a.m.
8 lbs. 1 oz., 20½ inches

Strapping, healthy, and bearing no resemblance whatsoever to Vince Coleman.

Of course, I am kidding about the order of priority. Little Will's birth early in the morning on August 9 was not only another of God's great miracles, but the

best thing that will happen to me this year, and until No. 3 is born. Having the Stats, Inc. newsletter hand-delivered to me at the hospital, and receiving my morning fax indicating 81 points from the Senators (including positive-point pitching outputs from two -- count 'em, two -- pitchers) was only icing on the cake. But hey, what a day!

For those of you who give a rat's posterior about such things, Will was born two weeks and two days early, since our ultrasound yielded an August 25 projected date of delivery. Fortunately, only the evening before we finally narrowed the list of baby names down to three (William David, Cooper Thomas, and George Louis), and when we got our first glimpse of the little guy, it was obvious that it had to be Will (he gave me the same look that I've seen Will Clark give a teammate who is dogging it a hundred times). Between Will and Joe Jackson, one of these two boys has got to make it to Cooperstown.

SECOND PLACE BEHIND JUAN MARICHAL LEAGUE?*&@#!&*&#

According to Greenberger's August 7 newsletter, the Hot Stove League is trailing the Juan Marichal League 55,493 to 55,202 points, or on average, about 24 points per week. What happened to our hefty cushion from the earlier reported standings? (Greenberger's newsletter of June 19 showed us on top by a total of 242 points.) Apparently a few of you guys are dragging down the rest of us by over- or under-managing your teams. Let's all knuckle down and stay on top of this by watching the free agent list and your hot and cold team members. And it wouldn't hurt for each of us to send a ten-spot or so to the manager of the last-place team, Shamu*, to help him fund those all-important Stats, Inc. transactions.

AN OUTSIDER ON THE TRIP?

Staying with Greenberger's newsletter of August 7, what about his anxious plea for a spot on The Trip? Well, maybe, maybe not. He *is* from our neck of the woods, after all, and his qualifications, if verified, seem to meet our admittedly rigorous standards. After we confirm the dates for next year's junket to Jacob Field and Three Rivers, I say we put it to a vote on inviting old Mattie along on the trip.

Your thoughts, suggestions, and concerns about opening this revered holiday up to others (no matter how impeccable their credentials) are encouraged.

WEEK 15: SKIPJACKS SKIP ALONG

Despite mediocre personnel (excluding Greg Maddux -- I'd trade my whole pitching staff for Maddux, and fill it in with whatever's left in the free agent market) and limited (to be kind) managerial cerebral firepower to draw upon, the indomitable Itchie not only remains on top of the heap after Week 15, but actually expanded his lead significantly because of the embarrassingly-poor performance of last week's No. 2 (Tigers - 260), No. 3 (Red Sox - 272), and No. 4 (Redbirds - 254) teams. Through last Sunday's games, Itchie had a 253-point lead on the field. Here are the standings through Week 15:

1. Skipjacks	5394
2. Tigers	5141
3. Red Sox	5105
4. Redbirds	5080
5. Bronx Bombers	5027
6. Blues	4923
7. Pirates	4914
8. Reds	4909
9. Tribe	4904
10. Senators	4705
11. Chiefs	4582
12. Cubs*	4470

To my amazement, after the Skipjacks, only 232 points separate the next eight teams. In other words, almost everyone has a chance to finish in the money this year. Keep pushing those buttons and pulling those strings.

FOR THE WEEK

The Chiefs, with their questionable personnel and even more questionable personnel manager, managed to crank it up to the tune of 440 decibels last week to

lead all HSL teams (led by Gary Gaetti and Bill Pulsipher? Ugh!). The week's totals:

1. Chiefs	440
2. Pirates	408
3. Tribe	380
4. Senators	364
5. Skipjacks	352
6. Blues	339
7. Bronx Bombers	329
8. Cubs*	293
9. Red Sox	272
10. Tigers	260
(T) Reds	260
12. Redbirds	254

Although we managed to have two teams in the 400s, we also had an ugly number (5) of teams in the 200s. We cannot keep that up and hope to have a chance to overtake the boys in the Juan Marichal league.

Regrettably, while the Senators put together two nice weeks (424 and 364), the only teams that seem to be hotter are those right above and below me on the standings ladder. Slo-Pay's Pirates, on the backs of Mo Vaughn and John Valentin, are hotter (but not wetter) than Shamu's* armpits on a 103°-day jog. Underbelly's Tribe, by virtue of plenty of smoke and mirrors, continues to be ablaze. Criminelly. What's a guy got to do to get ahead in this world?

WHO'S WHO

It's been a few weeks since I last listed the top individual players and their point totals, so here you are:

1. Greg Maddux (Skipjacks)	462
2. Edgar Martinez (Red Sox)	458
3. Frank Thomas (Redbirds)	456
4. Tim Salmon (Pirates)	436
5. Craig Biggio (Skipjacks)	432
6. Mo Vaughn (Pirates)	422
7. Barry Bonds (Reds)	420
8. Dante Bichette (Tribe)	417
9. Jim Edmonds (Senators)	412
10. Manny Ramirez (Reds)	408

11. John Valentin (Pirates)	397
(T) Albert Belle (Chiefs)	397
13. Barry Larkin (Tigers)	388
(T) Hideo Nomo (Senators)	388
15. Tino Martinez (Tigers)	384
(T) Larry Walker (B. Bombers)	384

Remarkably (or maybe not), not a single Cub* or Blues player makes the Sweet Sixteen listed above, although three Pirates, two Skipjacks, two Tigers, two Senators, and two Reds made the grade. You would have to go down to the 17th-highest scorer (Carlos Baerga) to find a Blue. I'm not sure how far you would have to go to find a Cub*, but doing down 25 names doesn't do it. Youch!

TRAVELS WITH UNDERBELLY

You all know that Underbelly's passion in life -- after the Hot Stove League -- is travel. And of course you all know that Underbelly has traveled virtually around the globe, from England to Germany to France to India to Japan to Thailand to Australia and many, many other places. But for all of his world travels, Underbelly now has a new favorite vacation spot, right here in *this* country and not all that far away. Of course I refer to that little pocket of glamour, excitement, fun and exotica hidden away in the Ozarks and known as **BRANSON, MISSOURI**. That's right, fellas, although he has been keeping it a secret so that the place is not overrun by tourists and spoiled for country purists such as himself, Underbelly recently made the drive to Branson with the wife and family for a fun-filled vacation which may never be rivaled in the annals of Hurlbut Traveldom.

And now, from the Home Office in Hoboken, New Jersey, for your edification and enjoyment:

The Top Ten List of Reasons That Underbelly Went to Branson for His Vacation:

10. Four words: Those Crazy Kountry Kloggers.
9. Can now say he has seen John Davidson in concert in 29 different cities.
8. Needed a dose of Perry Como to be reinvigorated.
7. Hadn't seen Boxcar Willie since the Dawson County Fair in 1987 -- and missed him!
6. 120,000 white-haired men and blue-haired ladies easy mark for wife's Herbal-Life sales.
5. Loves M-m-m-mel T-t-t-tillis like an uncle.
4. Suicide still illegal.
3. Wanted to see John Kruk working the Tilt-A-Whirl.
2. Where else can you see 36 has-beens and never-will-bes all in the same city block.

And the No. 1 reason that U-belly trekked to Branson with the family:

1. Jody said he had to or no more "Me Batman; you Cat Woman" for Bob.

I should point out that Underbelly has now violated yet another of his personal "never-ever" pledges. The list continues to grow, as I count at least the following:

- I will never ride a camel.
- I will never wear a fez.
- I will never, ever marry.
- I will never go to Branson.

When will it all stop?

And that's all for now.

Skipper