

FROM THE BULLPEN



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SKIPJACKS TREADING WATER

With two weeks remaining in the season, the feisty Redbirds are closing the gap (72 and counting) on the long-leading Skipjacks. Through games of Sunday, September 17, 1995, here are the points for the top two teams:

1. Skipjacks	7471
2. Redbirds	7399

Led by the volcanic-hot Jay Buhner (who was traded to Jim Ed for a handful of colored beads by B.T.) and the recent shutout performance from Kevin Appier, the fast-closing Redbirds are trying to make up ground in a hurry. Can it be done? Can Jim Ed nip Itchie at the wire to capture the first Hot Stove League crown by a non-Husker? Time only will tell, but it's definitely a dog fight.

Although I made a special call to our fearless leaders to obtain the above up-to-the-minute totals for this issue of *FTB*, I will not have the other point totals until Thursday's mail, and so I provide you with the standings through Sunday, September 10:

1. Skipjacks	7182
2. Redbirds	7029

3. Red Sox	6811	7. Red Sox	294
4. Tigers	6793	8. Tigers	251
5. Tribe	6712	9. Pirates	250
6. Blues	6683	10. Tribe	236
7. Reds	6584	11. Chiefs	233
8. Bronx Bombers	6438	12. Senators (UGH)	201
9. Pirates	6405		
10. Chiefs	6145		
11. Senators	5972		
12. Cubs*	5916		

Similar to Itchie's plight, my own team's foothold on 11th place is equally precarious. Since my entire team gave up the ghost a few weeks ago, the Cubs* have been creeping up on me like a tribe of Flathead Sioux. Thank goodness Shamu* continues to make monumental managerial miscues (the trade of Jack McDowell just as he has heated up, for example) with alarming consistency. There is a whisker of a chance that the Senators might yet avoid a cellar finish.

TOTALS FOR WEEK 20

Look like this:

1. Redbirds	394
2. Cubs*	311
3. Reds	311
4. Skipjacks	310
5. Bronx Bombers	300
6. Blues	295

Mark my words, not a single Senator from 1995's team will grace a Senator roster ever again, with the possible exceptions of Hideo Nomo and Jim Edmonds. Maybe, just maybe, if they play their cards right ...

TWENTY-ONE THIRTY-ONE

Unforgettable. Electric. Awesome.
Monumental.

Or perhaps *Indescribable* is the only way to describe the events of September 6, 1995 -- the day Cal Ripken, Jr. broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive game streak.

After 4½ innings at Camden Yards in Baltimore on the evening of September 6, with the home team Orioles leading the visiting California Angels 3 to 1, it was official: Cal Ripken became the new Iron Man of baseball, having played in 2131 major league baseball games in a row. The frenzied crowd at Camden Yards erupted into a 22-minute, sponta-

neously wonderful, standing, cheering, stomping tribute to this superlative athlete, as the banner on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad warehouse wall changed from 2130 to 2131.

The response of the crowd was unrehearsed and sheer reaction as the modest Cal was pulled from the dugout by teammates Palmeiro and Bonilla and prodded into a victory lap around the field. Grown men hugged each other in unabashed joy, and fans of all ages, colors, sizes and shapes displayed tears in their eyes and goosebumps on every other part of their body. Some, like myself, were simply stunned, unable to believe that we were there for the celebration of this undoubtedly unsurpassable achievement. A moment for the ages.

Before, during, and after the game, Ripken handled himself and the event with dignity, grace, humility, and like the Iron Horse, as a true gentleman. As Underbelly might say, class with a capital K.

If I could change one thing about the evening of September 6, it would be to have my two boys sitting alongside me at an age that they could appreciate the moment of the occasion, and all my Hot Stove League brethren sitting within high-fiving distance.

The 22-minute ovation and Cal's victory lap were the unmistakable highlights of No. 2131, but a few of the other highlights from this two-day dream trip for games No. 2130 and 2131 can be described as follows:

The Game That Tied Gehrig - 2130

- The National Anthem being sung by Joan Jett.
- The first pitch being thrown out by the "Earl of Baltimore," former manager Earl Weaver.

- Great seats, 8th row, between home plate and the visitor's dugout.
- The standing ovation for Cal's first at-bat.
- The game becoming official after 4½ innings, with music and great drama underscoring the unfurling of the banner from the Baltimore & Ohio warehouse (2130) as Ripken tied Gehrig's record.
- Cal hitting a home run as the Orioles posted an 8 to 0 win over the Angels, Scott Erickson the winner and Brian Anderson the loser.
- The spectacular post-game ceremony, hosted by broadcaster John Miller, involving the following persons and events:
 1. A David Letterman Top Ten List of Reasons Number 8 Should Take the Day Off, posted on the giant scoreboard;
 2. A soap opera skit by actors from The Young and Restless;
 3. A gift of official NBA basketballs from David Robinson;
 4. A visit and gift from Mr. Baseball, Tom Selleck;
 5. Special tributes by Henry Aaron, Ernie Banks, Frank Robinson, and Johnny Unitas.
 6. The carnival atmosphere, before and after the game, with peddlers hawking souvenirs at every corner, and people scrambling to get their commemorative books and baseballs.

2131 - The New Record

- A whole day of pregame excitement, with newspaper stands selling out, a media frenzy, and more hype than a Super Bowl Sunday.

- The pregame cocktail party, where we feasted on shrimp and lobster and met the likes of Ernie Banks, Earl Weaver, Donald Fehr, Peter Angelos, Syd Thrift, Bud Selig, Don Buford, Lee MacPhail, David Robinson, the Yankee Clipper, and the attorney for the Estate of Lou Gehrig, George Pollack.
- A moving Star Spangled Banner performance by Bruce Hornsby and Bradford Marsalis.
- The roar of the crowd as Cal led his teammates out on the field.
- Cal catching the first pitch from his daughter and son.
- Cal's first at-bat.
- Thousands and thousands of camera flashbulbs going off all at once, lighting up the ballpark.
- Sitting next to Joe Six-Pack from New Jersey, who savored every single moment of the game, just like everyone else.
- Cal's center field home run blast in the 4th inning, after Bobby Bo.
- The eruption from the crowd as the game became official after 4½ innings, and the record was Ripken's to hold alone.
- Bobby Bo and Rafael Palmeiro pulling the modest Ripken out of the dugout for a victory lap around the field.
- Seeing my brother-in-law shake Cal's hand on the victory lap (he really did -- some guys have all the luck).
- Spotting Shamu* in the crowd, disguised as a juggling peanut vendor.
- Watching Bobby Bo record the events on his own video recorder.
- Watching the players fight for souvenir foul balls.

- Seeing the distinguished Joe DiMaggio, the connection between Lou Gehrig and Cal Ripken, dignify Cal's accomplishment by being at the game and paying tribute to Ripken.
- Hearing Nebraska's own Zager & Evans perform their famous song *In the Year Twenty Five Twenty Five* with a new twist.
- Being in the same ballpark with President Clinton and Vice President Gore (leading me to wonder who would lead our nation if the three of us fell victim to a madman bomber).
- Seeing this modest hero handle himself in a way that would make the Iron Horse proud.

I will never forget it.

OTHER MEMORABLE STREAKS

As I have reflected on Cal Ripken's marvelous 2131 consecutive game streak, it has occurred to me that several members of the Hot Stove League have fashioned some pretty incredible streaks of their own, to-wit:

Magpie: A victim of 2131 consecutive incidents of barber malpractice.

Itchie: Has kissed A, slapped the back, or licked the boot of 2131 senior management employees at First Data Resources to get where he is at today.

U-belly: Wunce spieled too hunnert thurtey-won kunsekative wurdz rong.

Shamu*: Has now either slept or eaten in every one of the past 2131 hours.

McBlunder: Has told wife each morning for 2131 consecutive days that he *will be going* on next year's Hot Stove League trip.

Big Guy: Has spent at least half of the last 2131 workdays talking about, thinking about, or thinking about talking about baseball.

Slo-Pay: Has managed to get away with delayed payments or has stiffed altogether his last 2131 creditors.

Possum: 2131 consecutive bogus trade proposals.

Jim Ed: Has suffered through being an Iowagean in Nebraska for 2131 consecutive days.

Mouse: Drank 2131 highballs with the Mick before they spent 2131 minutes together at the Betty Ford Clinic.

B.T.: Has now told Kathi, "If you'll just let me go on this one last trip, I'll never ask again," for 2131 consecutive guy trips.

MORE BELLYACHING

It wouldn't be a '95 FTB without a list of Senator gripes, so here's a couple for this week:

- Can Pat Hentgen get any hotter, now that he is an ex-Senator? After playing cat and mouse with me all year long, and finally ticking me off to the point that I had to release him from my squad (on doctor's orders), Hentgen did an about-face and was listed as the top Hot Free Agent for starters for last week with 45 points in two games, for a snappy average of 22.5 per. This after scoring a total of 88 points in his first 22 games, for a crackerjack average of 4.0 points per game as a Senator. And if that were not bad enough (it is), Hentgen continued his hot streak with a nine-inning 1-earned-run performance on September 16 (20-plus positive points), which followed yet another nifty performance one rotation earlier. In other words, Hent-

gen has now strung together about six solid, positive-point performances since earning his release from the Senators squad. How did that sniper miss him?

- Is there some reason that the Red Sox refuse to play Troy O'Leary more than about three days a week? What, they don't like his .300-plus batting average? What does a guy have to do?

- My apologies to Brian Givens, whose promising career I have interrupted by my recent selection of him and insertion into the Senators starting lineup. After a snappy beginning to his career in the majors after languishing in the minors for about 10 years, I put a stake through Givens' heart by picking him for my roster, and deeply regret it.

- My star relieving tandem, John Wetteland and Mel Rojas, continue to flourish. Although recognized at the initial draft to be two of the top three or four available relievers, this miserable duo has yet to crack the top ten in the list of relievers. I doubt that they're even close.

I see that John and Mel are, by ironic coincidence, each averaging a lofty 5.3 points per game, about what you would expect from a poor to middle-of-the-road middle reliever. Or Ron Davis. But on the brighter side of things, the gaping wounds left in my flesh from these two selections have taught me well for purposes of future HSL drafts. Never, never, never, never, never pick a reliever in the first 15 rounds. Just remember, this year's Jose Mesa may be next year's John Wetteland, riches-to-rags story.

- I think I now know why Troy O'Leary has been riding pine lately. Yesterday morning's fax showed that he was 1 for his last 21, with no home runs, RBIs or stolen bases, and that he had accumulated negative 9 points for me over the span of the past 10 days. *Danke*, Herr O'Leary.

- Kirk Rueter has done a nice job for me since being called up. Negative 4 in his last two outings, with an ERA of 6.75.

- Raul Mondesi has turned into a real "gamer" for me. Eight points in the last 10 days. A never, ever, ever Senator.

But enough whining already.

POTPOURRI

* How is the golf league coming, B.T.? Is Ziggy threatening to finish in the money? We need information!

* Big Guy continues to welch on our bet about where the initial HSL draft occurred in 1985, despite the presentation of proof positive that the draft took place at my townhouse at the Chalet (proof being a copy of my lease at the Chalet for the appropriate time period, and a copy of my letter giving notice of my intent to vacate my apartment at Kensington Woods in September 1984, some eight months prior to the draft!) What more will it take?

* Jim Ed reports that the crackerjack crew at Stats, Inc. recently had Todd VanPoppel listed as having pitched on Tuesday, September 12, 1995, on his daily morning fax, and slated as a starter for Wednesday, September 13, as well as Friday, September 15. Those boys are on the ball *all the time*.

* Unfortunately, the Hot Stove League is apparently dropping like a rock in the national BJFB standings, as recently noted in Matt Greenberger's newsletter. How about a big push at the end to try to move up a notch or two in the standings? Get after it.



Enjoy the pics from Camden Yards. See you next issue.

Skipper