



FROM THE BULLPEN

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1997 Season

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*Our
214th
Issue*

Brethren:

HERE'S TO ME, FELLAS

Since last October I provided you with my postmortem on the Chiefs' championship season, there is precedent for this issue's analysis of the Senators' 1997 season, and it is hoped that this will not be viewed as a self-serving, hornblowing tribute to my managerial acuity. But on the other hand, let's face it: It was a sublime season for the Senators, and there were, in fact, many managerial decisions made which cannot be sneered off as mere luck.

The Senators' championship season had its underpinnings, of course, in the initial Draft. As previously recorded here, I put in so much time preparing for the '97 Draft that I have to believe this was largely responsible for this year's outcome, notwithstanding B.T.'s repeated proclamations that this league is all based on luck. Dame Fortune certainly plays a hand in the game, to be sure, but thorough preparation, keen drafting strategy and insight, and swift and decisive managerial decisions are the foundation upon which a championship team is built.

I HAD A DREAM

My earnest preparation for the Draft was complimented by my epiphany of sorts which occurred as I was driving down Dodge Street toward the office, only minutes before the Draft. As I passed the Burger King at 114th and West Dodge Roads, it came to me as clear as crystal: Randy Johnson *had* to be my first pick of the Draft, followed by another starting pitcher in the 2nd, and then Mariano Rivera in the 3rd. Although I previously had planned on taking Knoblauch, Piazza or Sheffield in the 1st round (in that order, depending on availability), my vision about the Big Unit immediately erased those thoughts of others. Obviously, then, the Draft was not a matter of luck, but of divine intervention.

ROUND 1

Despite the vision thing, it wasn't necessarily easy to choke out the name *Randy Johnson* when it came time for my 1st round pick, and the stunned silence in the room which followed my selection did nothing for my confidence. Fortunately, I was able to maintain composure and continue following the master plan so carefully laid out beforehand.

ROUND 2

Round 2 of the Draft was not quite as fortuitous for the Senators, as draftee Hideo Nomo failed to live up to expectations this season. However, Nomo turned out to be good trade bait, if nothing else, as I was able to later swap him to the Chiefs for Juan Gonzalez (whom I later frittered away in the foolhardy Gonzalez-and-Shaw for Lofton-and-Cora trade with Mouse).

ROUND 3

Round 3 went as planned with the selection of Mariano Rivera, whom I was reluctant to take that early, but whom I feared would not likely be available in Round 4 or 5.

While I would like nothing better at this point than to devote three or four more pages to my brilliant draft strategy and picks, realizing that the rest of you may not be willing to devote that much time to reading this, let me give you the abbreviated version:

Round Name; Points, where available, excluding bonus points;
Comments

1Randy Johnson (641): Brilliant, gutsy pick.

- 2Hideo Nomo (355): Underachieved, but good trade bait.
- 3Mariano Rivera (502): As Underbelly says, relief pitching is *everything*.
- 4Sammy Sosa (517): Never, never, never, never. Ever.
- 5Vinny Castilla (599): Top-rated 3rd baseman; stellar pick despite my first half whining about him.
- 6Jim Edmonds (455): Fun to watch – on another team. A near-wasted pick.
- 7Andy Pettitte (516): The quintessential bait-and-switch maneuver.
- 8Nomar Garciaparra (717): This year's Alex Rodriguez. Simply brilliant.
- 9Ryne Sandberg (338): Less than brilliant.
- 10Paul Molitor (427): Still solid at age 40, good trade bait.
- 11Dan Wilson (474): Durable, good numbers, a solid pick.
- 12Brad Radke (470): Although a defensive maneuver, Radke in the 12th was a steal.
- 13Mike Fetters (NA): Young enough to be Doug Jones' grandson.
- 14Jeff King (482): Great June and September, mediocre rest of year.
- 15Chili Davis (483): The Chili-Man can still hit. Buser's bane.
- 16Jeff Shaw (575): What can I say? I had another vision.
- 17Todd Hollandsworth (NA): Wasted pick.
- 18Orlando Merced (NA): See Round 17 comments.
- 19Alan Benes (NA): Did great for the Senators, waited until trade to Pirates to get hurt.
- 20Wilton Guerrero (NA): Didn't pan out.
- 21Greg McMichael (341): May have cut him loose too early.
- 22John Flaherty (328): Nonfactorial.
- 23Brett Butler (NA): Time to hang up the spikes, Brett.
- 24Shane Andrews (NA): The 24th round was about right.
- 25Terry Mulholland (239): Consistently mediocre all year.
- 26Scott Erickson (417): A stroke of genius, if fortuitous.
- 27Bob Abreu (NA): Nothing to write home about.

28Matt Lawton (348): Senator career short-lived.

Although it didn't exactly look like a team for the ages when I drafted them, the 1997 Senators had enough core talent that, coupled with season-long managerial acuity, they were able to take the title. Sparkling if not career-best performances from R.J., Rivera, Castilla, Pettitte, Garciaparra, Radke, Shaw and Erickson didn't hurt, either.

FREE AGENTS

I would be remiss if I didn't pat myself on the back for a few of the shrewd free agent moves that were made throughout the course of the year. Let's take a look at a few of them, week-by-week:

- Week 3 Damion Easley - good filler material.
- Week 7 Garrett Stephenson - Did great until injured.
- Week 8 Jeremy Bernitz - what can I say? The vision thing again.
- Week 12 Jeff D'Amico - solid while healthy.
- Week 13 Jason Schmidt - several quality starts for the Senators.
- Week 19 Chad Curtis - the final piece of the puzzle.

FREE AGENTS

The Skipper benefited from a few early trades this season, and then nearly shot himself in the foot with the final transaction with Mouse:

First Trade: Alan Benes to the Pirates for Rafael Palmeiro.

Second Trade: Hideo Nomo and Paul Molitor to the Chiefs for Juan Gonzalez.

Third Trade: Juan Gonzalez and Jeff Shaw to the Bombers for Kenny Lofton and Joey Cora.

The first two trades could not have worked out better for the Senators, especially after Alan Benes went on the DL and Hideo Nomo continued to smell things up. If not for the panicked point caps-driven bartering of Shaw and Gonzalez for the (allegedly) high average hitting Lofton and Cora, the Senators would have been able to coast home the last three weeks instead of sweating it out.

SEASON IN REVIEW

I am enclosing a nifty summary of the 1997 Hot Stove League season, providing you with the weekly and running totals for the entire year. Of note:

- After the Chiefs and Redbirds occupied 1st place in the standings for the first and second weeks of the year, respectively, the Blues moved into 1st place for weeks 3 and 4, McBlunder's longest string of appearances atop the leaderboard in HSL history.
- Buoyed by a banner 456-point week, the Senators leapfrogged the Blues to take over the top spot through five weeks, a presage of things to come.
- Not yet ready to give up the mantle, McBlunder's Blues outscored the Senators during Week 6 to retake the league lead.
- Week 7 was a watershed week for the Senators, as they rallied to blast past the Blues and reoccupy the throne, edging McBlunder's boys to the tune of 2518 points to 2499.
- The Senators would not look back, running the table from Week 7 to Week 26. As previously reported here, the Senators spent the middle part of the season building an insurmountable lead (615 points

through the end of 21 weeks), and then held on for dear life while the insufferable Redbirds and the intolerable point caps teamed up to elevate my blood pressure to heretofore unseen heights.

- Remarkably, there was not a single change in the placement of the top four teams (or the cellar dweller, I might add) from Week 11 on. For the last sixteen weeks of the season, it was the Senators-Redbirds-Red Sox-Blues, in that order, despite some wide variations in the weekly point totals of these teams from time to time. And while there was some vigorous competition at times for the 5th through 11th positions in the league, for the most part it was the Reds and the Skipjacks battling it out for 5th and 6th, the Tigers and Chiefs fighting it out for 7th, and the Chiefs, Tribe, Cubs* and Bronx Bombers scrapping for positions 8, 9, 10 and 11.
- The top weekly overall performance was produced by the Senators during Week 21, the 527-point outburst that shall forever serve as the league standard.
- The low water mark for the year was established by the Pirates during Week 5 – 131 points.



Enjoy. See you next issue.

Skipper

Next Issue: *Why the Rest of You Clowns Didn't Win; Individual Point Totals.*