



FROM THE BULLPEN

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*Our
215th
Issue*

ANOTHER BLESSED EVENT

Brethren:

For those of you who have not yet heard, the date of this issue coincides with a second blessed event for the Skipper this season: The birth of **SAVANNAH JANE ERNST**. After a record eighteen-month gestational period (or maybe it just seemed like it), at 3:05 a.m. on October 21, 1997, Cheryl gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, christened Savannah Jane Ernst.

For those of you interested in statistics, Savannah Jane weighed in at 8 lbs. 1½ oz., was 20 inches in length, and has a beautiful head of dark, curly hair. Pictures to follow. Mother and daughter are doing very well, thank you.

Perhaps more than a coincidence, Savannah Jane was born on her father's 41st birthday. The best birthday present a dad could ask for.

But now on to business, before you soft-hearted lugs are reduced to tears.

Although I would like to devote another issue to singing my own praises about the fortunes of the 1997 Senators, I resist this urge and provide you herewith my postmortem on the eleven teams that

did not win a Hot Stove League title this year, in reverse order of finish:

12. ***Pirates***. SloPay's 1st round in the Draft was a microcosm of his season. *Gary Sheffield*. Everybody wanted him, but only SloPay was unlucky enough to get him. Toss in Rafael Palmeiro in the 2nd (who got off to perhaps his worst career start) and Matt Williams in the 3rd, and it's not hard to see why the Pirates finished where they did. Despite some stellar later round picks and some marvelous free agent moves by the Puppetmaster, the Sheffield/Palmeiro/Williams trifecta was simply too much to overcome.

11. ***Bombers***. After a solid if not spectacular first three rounds of the Draft, things went sour for the Bombers in a big way beginning with Round 4 in the form of one Jeff Brantley. Possibly selected a smidge early to begin with, Brantley's early season-ending injury quickly rocked the Bombers' manager back on his heels. Of course, picking up the Caveman (Rod Beck) in Round 15 offset a bit of this damage.

It should be pointed out that Mouse made one of the shrewdest free agent drafts of the season, picking up catcher Charles Johnson in Week 14 just after he was released by the trigger-happy

Chiefs, and right before he went on a hitting tear. Mouse also made mincemeat of yours truly in the previously-mentioned Lofton-and-Cora for Shaw-and-Gonzalez trade. And still finished in 11th place.

10. ***Tribe***. If you only looked at U-belly's first seven picks from the Draft (Frank Thomas, Chipper Jones, Ellis Burks, Mark Wohlers, Jay Buhner, Denny Neagle and Steve Finley), you would probably assume that he finished quite high in the standings, possibly even taking the championship. But you would be wrong. Not only did things absolutely fall apart for Bob after the first seven rounds (his next eight picks in the Draft, respectively, were Jack McDowell, Greg Vaughn, Luis Castilla, Andy Ashby, Alex Gonzalez, Vladimir Guerrero, Tim Worrell, Mike Timlin and Armando Benitez), but several of his blue chippers (Frank, Chipper, Ellis, Bone and Finley) got off to horrible starts, causing U-belly to push the panic button early. First, there was his knee-jerk release of 18th round draft pick David Wells (destined for stardom with the Redbirds) and then his trade of possible Cy Young winner Denny Neagle to the Reds.

Contributing to the Tribe's downfall was U-belly's stubborn refusal to

acknowledge that starting pitching is the key to success in this league, electing to wait until the 6th round and then picking a pitching staff that only a mother could love. While U-belly made a few crafty free agent drafts of starting pitchers which provided his team temporary relief, shortly after the All-Star break, it became clear that this was nothing more than a stopgap measure, and the aching holes in the Tribe pitching staff ultimately assured the Tribe of yet another lower, Lower Division finish. Hard to believe that I predicted the Tribe to finish 3rd this season, and that they were the consensus around the league as the team most likely to prevail in 1997.

9. **Cubs***. Lack of preparation and bad luck teamed up to sink the Cubs* ship this season. Taking John Smoltz in the 1st round after a career year was chancy, although Smoltzie's end numbers (550) were nothing to be embarrassed about. Taking Mo Vaughn in the 2nd seems like a good move, but the injury and attitude bugaboos bit Mo and resulted in a subpar season. The Big Cat in the 3rd round was a terrific pick, but things really fell apart for Shamu* in the rounds that followed. Shane Reynolds in the 4th and Troy Percival in the 5th were, for all practical purposes, wasted selections, and Mel Rojas, Terry Steinbach and Jose Valentin in Rounds 8-9-10 were nothing to be proud of. Shamu* may have set a league record for fewest transactions during a season, attributable not to a lack of interest in the league but more so to a judgment call that, after the Cubs*' abysmal start, his allowance for entertainment expenditures was more prudently allocated toward alcohol and chewing tobacco than Bill James transactional fees.

8. **Chiefs**. Although the Chiefs failed to defend their crown and had what could only be characterized as a bust of a year, it certainly wasn't for lack of enthusiasm or effort. In fact, although I haven't bothered to confirm this, I would wager that B.T. eclipsed his own previous

mark for most transactions made in a single HSL season.

B.T.'s problems began on Draft Day, when he fell asleep at the wheel beginning with the 6th round. After a solid if not championship quality first five rounds, B.T. drafted Jose Rosado, Jeff Cirillo, John Jaha, Tony Batista, and Tony Phillips in Rounds 6 through 10. Sounds more like Rounds 21 through 25, doesn't it? It didn't get much better the rest of the Draft, although David Justice in the 12th and Jay Bell in the 18th were a couple of bargains. Following B.T.'s mediocre draft, he further compromised his position by a couple of bonehead moves — releasing Charles Johnson outright just before he went on a hitting tear, and trading Juan Gonzalez just as he was about to heat up — and did himself very little good in the free agent draft. The effort was there, but it just wasn't in the cards for B.T. this year. Consequently, for the first time in five years, B.T. will be greasing my palm with a Ben Franklin come Draft Day instead of the converse. Get used to it, pal.

7. **Tigers**. This autopsy could be done by a first-year medical student. The Tigers' gruesome death in 1997 was caused by Big Guy's inexplicable indifference to pitching. After taking Tom Glavine in the 3rd round, Big Guy didn't take another pitcher until Round 7 when he selected the Vesuvian-tempered Juan Guzman, who rewarded him with 68 points for the year. This pretzel logic was followed up with Big Guy's next pitching selection being Jeff Nelson, the Yankee middle reliever, in Round 12, followed by Antonio Osuna in the 14th. As bad as this pitching staff was from day one, if Big Guy had been in a boxing ring, the commissioner would have invalidated the fight because of the loser's obvious dive.

Of course it didn't help that Big Guy's 1st-round pick, Albert Belle, went into the tank early and stayed there for most

of the season; or that 2nd-round pick Barry Larkin, true to form, missed half the season with injuries. In fact, looking back over Big Guy's Opening Day roster, it's a surprise that this stinking bunch of flotsam and jetsam didn't finish the year snuggled up next to the Pirates at the bottom of the mine shaft.

6. **Reds**. About all that can be said about Magpie's team this year is that it again avoided a Second Division finish. After a stellar first six rounds of the Draft, Magpie must have crawled into the cups with Rube, because there is very little evidence of conscious thought in his Draft selections from that point on. Magpie's pick of Piazza in the 1st round proved to be shrewd indeed, as did his selection of Pedro Martinez in the 5th. His selection of Jared Wright in the 28th Round shows that Magpie did his homework, but for some reason all of the middle rounds of the Draft proved to be lackluster for the Reds, and ultimately spelled their undoing. This season also lacked the spectacular free agent draft or two that normally mark the Reds' roster. Sorry to say, Magpie, but I think that now that the rest of us have caught up to you on the learning curve for the BJFB system, your days as a perennial top dog are over.

5. **Skipjacks**. Looking back I see that I projected the Skipjacks as finishing firmly in the cellar this season. Six months later, I'm not quite sure why I was so down on Itchie and his boys at that time, but it probably had something to do with what appeared to be an utter dearth of preparation for the Draft. But then things fell into place for the wise-cracking pilot of the Skipjacks, and he managed to squeeze career years out of several of his players, the most noteworthy among them being Tim Salmon, Curt Schilling, Tino Martinez, Jason Kendall, Tom Gordon, and — how could we forget — Tony Gwynn. The combination of these career anomalies proved to be enough to overcome some obvious drafting blunders (Wilson

Alvarez in the 3rd, Ken Hill in the 5th) and the inexplicable discarding of free agent standout Justin Thompson, who was subsequently picked up by Possum in Week 7 and ridden to a 465-point year.

All in all, well done, Brother Itchie. For what you wanted to accomplish.

4. **Blues.** High praise to Stretch McBlunder and his '97 Blues squad, which overcame tall odds to finish in an undisputed 4th-place position for the year. Once again, Barry Bonds justified his status as a 1st-rounder in the Hot Stove League with another 700+-point year. With Bonds, Ramirez, Hoffman, Williams and Caminiti in the first five rounds, McBlunder picked a competitive corps that kept his Blues in contention all year long. If only McBlunder had tapped into the wealth of talent available through free agency (if I'm not mistaken, the only players that he added during the year were Butch Huskey, Lee Stevens, Tom Candiotti, Scott Radinsky, Rich Rodriguez and Matt Karchner — ugh), he might even have had a crack at a finish in the money. One day at a time, McBlunder, one day at a time.

3. **Red Sox.** As projected here, Possum once again drafted a competitive team. A superior first five rounds of the Draft were complimented by late (read: greasy) pickups of Rusty Greer, Geronimo Berroa, Randy Myers, Tony Clark, Delino DeShields and John Olerud, all of whom performed well above their respective talent levels. In fact, with all of these pleasant late-round surprises, it's a wonder that the Red Sox didn't win it all this year. But for Alex Rodriguez's injury and a bit of underachievement by Jim Thome, John Wetteland, Marquis Grissom and Marty Cordova, we might be crowning Possum as the 1997 HSL champion. What an unpleasant thought that is. In any event, congratulations to the wily pilot of the Red Sox for another outstanding, competitive year.

2. **Redbirds.** What more is there to say that hasn't already been said? A

third, consecutive 2nd-place finish for the implacable Iowagean. In the April 1, 1997 issue of *FTB*, Rube's predicted order of finish was Bridesmaid, Revisited. Despite career years from Larry Walker, Mike Lansing, Sandy Alomar and Jaime Moyer, and despite stumbling into Doug Jones, David Wells and Livan Hernandez in the free agent draft, Rube's squad still couldn't shake the label of second best.

But have heart, Rube, and look at it this way: The owners of the Tribe, Blues, Pirates and Bombers would give their firstborn children for a 2nd-place finish in this league. So even though you are again a loser, you are less of a loser than some. Congratulations on a terrific year, and have a happy and thought-provoking off-season.

With the postmortem out of the way, let us now move to take a look at how individual hitters and pitchers performed in the HSL during the 1997 season.

INDIVIDUAL POINT TOTALS

The following are rankings of the top individual batters and pitchers for the 1997 Hot Stove League season, and the round in the Draft in which each was selected:

HITTERS

Player	Round Picked	Points
1. Larry Walker	3	862
2. Mike Piazza	1 (6th pick)	785
3. Ken Griffey, Jr.	1 (1st)	773
4. Craig Biggio	4	736
5. Nomar Garciaparra	8	717
6. Barry Bonds	1 (7th)	711
7. Jeff Bagwell	1 (12th)	710
8. Frank Thomas	1 (3rd)	692
9. Andres Galarraga	3	673
10. Mark McGwire	5	658
11. Tino Martinez	9	654
(T) Edgar Martinez	2	654
13. Tony Gwynn	12	635

14. Chuck Knoblauch	1 (11th)	621
15. Ivan Rodriguez	3	602
16. Rusty Greer	10	599
(T) Vinny Castilla	5	599
18. Jim Thome	2	598
19. Tim Salmon	4	596
20. Jay Bell	18	594
21. Dave Justice	12	585
22. Bernie Williams	4	583
23. Raul Mondesi	7	582
24. Manny Ramirez	2	575
25. Juan Gonzalez	5	573
(T) Alex Rodriguez	1 (4th)	573
27. Jay Buhner	5	572
(T) Jeff Kent	24	572
29. Paul O'Neill	13	571
30. Tony Clark	14	568
31. Chipper Jones	2	566
32. Derek Jeter	6	563
33. Mo Vaughn	2	561
34. John Valentin	6	559
35. Ray Lankford	14	558
36. Eric Young	3	557
37. Delino DeShields	15	550
38. Bobby Higginson	11	540
39. Jeff Blauser	26	534
(T) Mike Lansing	15	534
41. Moises Alou	11	531
42. Damien Easley	FA	529
43. J. T. Snow	FA	527
44. Todd Hundley	6	526
45. Albert Belle	1 (5th)	525
46. Rafael Palmeiro	2	520
47. Dante Bichette	2	517
(T) Sammy Sosa	4	517
49. Brady Anderson	6	516
50. John Olerud	20	511

PITCHERS

1. Roger Clemens	5	746
2. Pedro Martinez	5	706
3. Greg Maddux	1 (2nd)	655
4. Randy Johnson	1 (9th)	641
5. Curt Schilling	7	636
6. Darryl Kile	17	601
7. Jeff Shaw	16	575
8. Denny Neagle	6	567
9. Kevin Brown	2	551
10. John Smoltz	1 (8th)	550
11. Mike Mussina	5	516
(T) Andy Pettitte	27	516
13. Doug Jones	FA	511

14. Tom Glavine	3	509
15. Mariano Rivera	3	502
(T) Trevor Hoffman	3	502
17. Roberto Hernandez	5	495
18. Randy Myers	13	479
19. Brad Radke	12	470
20. Justin Thompson	FA	465
21. David Cone	2	464
22. Shawn Estes	FA	460
23. Rod Beck	15	454
24. Pat Hentgen	6	453
25. Rick Reed	FA	448
26. John Wetteland	4	445
(T) Alex Fernandez	4	445
28. Jeff Fassero	4	434
29. Rob Nen	4	429
30. John Franco	21	418

With bonus points included, Larry Walker was the first-ever HSL player to exceed 900 points, finishing with 902. With or without bonus points, he was the only player to exceed 800 points this year.

Last year, Alex Rodriguez and Ellis Burks both cracked the 800-point barrier.

Three hitters, including Walker, exceeded the 750-point barrier. A total of seven had more than 700 points. Twelve hitters exceeded the 650-point standard, while fifteen batters topped 600 points.

A total of thirty-five batters scored more than 550 points this year, meaning that there were twenty different hitters that finished between 550 and 600 points. By my way of thinking, this defines the 600-Plus Club as the elite for the hitters.

On the pitching side, with bonus points included, three players (Clemens, Martinez and Johnson) topped the 700-point mark, six pitchers were in the 600-Plus Club, and a total of 16 pitchers scored at least 500 points for the year. For pitching, it appears that the 500-point mark defines the cream of the crop.

As is customary, let's play Monday morning quarterback and take a look at how each manager did with their first three selections in the Draft:

Round 1 (Ranking Among Peers)

1. Chiefs	Ken Griffey	773 (3)
2. Redbirds	Greg Maddux	655 (3)
3. Tribe	Frank Thomas	692 (8)
4. Red Sox	Alex Rodriguez	573 (25)
5. Tigers	Albert Belle	525 (44)
6. Reds	Mike Piazza	785 (2)
7. Blues	Barry Bonds	711 (6)
8. Cubs*	John Smoltz	550 (10)
9. Senators	Randy Johnson	641 (4)
10. Pirates	Gary Sheffield	437 (*)
11. Skipjacks	Ch Knoblauch	621 (14)
12. Bombers	Jeff Bagwell	710 (7)

Round 2

1. Chiefs	Roberto Alomar	446 (*)
2. Redbirds	Edgar Martinez	654 (11)
3. Tribe	Chipper Jones	566 (31)
4. Red Sox	Jim Thome	598 (18)
5. Tigers	Barry Larkin	243 (*)
6. Reds	Kevin Brown	551 (9)
7. Blues	Manny Ramirez	575 (24)
8. Cubs*	Mo Vaughn	561 (33)
9. Senators	Hideo Nomo	355 (*)
10. Pirates	Rafael Palmeiro	520 (46)
11. Skipjacks	David Cone	464 (21)
12. Bombers	Dante Bichette	517 (47)

Round 3

1. Chiefs	Ismael Valdez	415 (*)
2. Redbirds	Larry Walker	862 (1)
3. Tribe	Ellis Burks	466 (*)
4. Red Sox	Ivan Rodriguez	602 (15)
5. Tigers	Tom Glavine	509 (14)
6. Reds	Eric Young	557 (36)
7. Blues	Trevor Hoffman	502 (15)
8. Cubs*	A. Galarraga	673 (9)
9. Senators	Mariano Rivera	502 (15)
10. Pirates	Matt Williams	494 (*)
11. Skipjacks	Wilson Alvarez	387 (*)
12. Bombers	Kenny Lofton	421 (*)

* Not in top 50 hitters or top 30 pitchers.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

➤ Can you believe that it's an Indians-Fish World Series? Since I was hoping for a Mariners-Giants West Coast Classic, and then for an Orioles-Braves matchup, I am obviously a bit disappointed with how things

worked out. However, it is noteworthy that we will either have a brand new winner of the World Series if the Marlins stay hot, or a team that has not won the Fall Classic since the 1950s if they do not.

➤ It's a damned good thing that post-season performances do not count toward the HSL race, or Jim Ed undoubtedly would have raced past the Senators by now. With the commendable post-season performances of former Redbirds Sandy Alomar, Jr., Mike Mussina, Bobby Bonilla, Livan Hernandez, Rob Nen and Greg Maddux, to name a few, and the lackluster play by ex-Senators Randy Johnson, Dan Wilson, Mariano Rivera, Kenny Lofton and Rafael Palmeiro, the Crimson Chirpers clearly win the battle of the post-season. So at least Rube has that going for him.

➤ Is it just me, or is anyone else just itching to have that first pre-'98 campaign Mock Draft? Hmmm. Will I take Junior, Maddux, R.J. or Piazza as the overall first pick, and will it be Albert, Biggio, Knoblauch or the Rocket for me in the 2nd? And who will take Larry, and when? Time for a Winners' Circle Lunch?

➤ I eased up on Big Guy a bit on the Bell watch toward the end of the year, but it should be noted somewhere, and why not here, that Jay Bell (he of the 18th round) finished with 69 more points than Albert Joey Belle (he of the 1st round, fifth pick, overall). So where will Joey be drafted next season?

➤ For those of you who have not yet heard, HSL founding father Shamu* has once again returned to gainful employment, after a lengthy sabbatical to "find himself." (With his fire-engine red hair and goatee and expanding girth, how the hell did he ever lose himself to begin with, you might ask – and a good question it is.) Shamu* is now working in the Des Moines office of Allied Group Insurance, working in the hazardous

waste high-risk claim investigation department while selling Whole Life policies on the side. He may be reached at 1-800-532-1212, Ext. 8288. Until a new permanent residence is located, Shamu* can be found in the nonwork hours (he is now reportedly working the grueling 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift) in his luxuriant and spacious Chevy Nomad station wagon, parked in the Taco Bell lot adjacent to the Allied headquarters.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS, NOVEMBER 14 AND 21

On Friday, November 14 or November 21, 1997 (depending on which date works best for the most of you — let me know), Skipper invites all of you to a fête to celebrate the Senators' championship season. Please plan to meet one of those two Fridays — site to be announced — for food aplenty and copious quantities of frothy libations, to be followed by multiple toasts and salutes to the guest of honor, a mock draft or two, and then a possible junket to the nearest navigable stream to watch me toss my 1997 winnings away to the proprietors of a smoke and dirtbag-filled casino.

It's not that I'm sexist, and no offense to your spouses, but Boys Only for this function, please. I've been around enough female hormones this month for a lifetime. Maybe two.

Thanks again to B.T. for sponsoring the golf outing at Firethorn a couple of weeks ago. Despite a few last-second bags by several of you Promise Breakers, a good time was had by all. The weather was beautiful, the golf and beer on B.T., and praise for the Senators' season free-flowing. Many thanks, B.T.

See you on the 14th or the 21st.

Skipper