

FROM THE BULLPEN



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*Our
216th
Issue*

NOVEMBER 28: IT'S A DATE

You are all cordially invited to the Ernst home on Friday, November 28, 1997, for a post-Thanksgiving combination Buffalo Bash Viewing/HSL Awards Banquet. For those of you who can make it over to watch the game, we will be open for business at 2:00 p.m., priming for a 2:30 kickoff. For those of you who have other commitments, please plan to come at halftime or after the game, at which time the real festivities will begin.

Following the game, after handling preliminary business and engaging in a mock draft or two, B.T. will initiate the moment you have all been waiting for, the presentation of The Cup to the 1997 HSL Champion Senators. After a short and humble acceptance speech, Skipper will present the customary middle finger salute to the unlucky pilot of the second-place team, as well as the usual party favors customarily issued by the League champion.¹ And please note, Possum: **MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN.**

We are flexible about post-awards ceremony activities, although I will

¹ But don't expect a \$40 polo shirt from this year's winner -- I don't own a damned sports apparel business like my predecessor. You'll be lucky to get a \$4-stovepipe mesh baseball hat with a photocopy of J. J. Exon (a beloved ex-Senator) stapled to the bill.

mention it's about time for my annual trip to the boats, so I can throw away \$250 in ten minutes and then curse the wickedness of the Bluffs gambling casinos for another year. A proud tradition.

THIRTEEN YEARS

Now that the 1997 season is in the jar, I am providing you with a revised summary of team finishes in the Hot Stove League. And of course, no statistical summary would be complete without a bit of editorial comment from the publisher:

- The six-year dry spell between **Senatorial** championships (1990 and 1997) marks the longest stretch between victories among repeat winners of The Cup. Previously, the longest dry spell between championships was Itchie's two-year hiatus between his 1992 and 1995 crowns.
- While we're on the subject of repeat winners, the Senators join the Tigers (3), Red Sox (2), Reds (2) and Skipjacks (2) as repeat winners in the HSL.²
- Of the initial quinquvirate that founded this league in 1985, only the **Cubs*** and the **Chiefs** are without multiple

² If the Dead Ball Era is included, although there is a movement afoot to expunge all Dead Ball Era records from the record books.

crowns. And of course, only the **Cubs*** have an asterisk by their name for winning in a strike-shortened season.

➤With their third consecutive second-place finish, the **Redbirds** have equaled the Senators' franchise ('86, '87, '92) for most times finishing in second place. Thus, these two teams are virtually even in terms of accomplishments in the Hot Stove League -- if you ignore the Senators' two crowns.

➤1997 marked the tenth year in the history of the **Reds** franchise in the Hot Stove League. Incredibly, the Reds have finished in the upper division in **each** of those ten years, keeping the streak alive this season as Magpie edged Big Guy out for the No. 6 slot.

➤1997 also marked the tenth year of the **Skipjacks** franchise in the Hot Stove League. Itchie added a second consecutive fifth-place finish to go with his three sixth-place finishes, two seven-place finishes, one tenth, one eleventh, and two titles. In other words, Itchie's teams are either mediocre as hell or they win it all. Not a single second, third or fourth-place finish in ten years.

➤Much as it pains me, I feel duty-bound to point out that Possum has added yet another finish *in the money* to his resume, to go with **Red Sox** championships in 1985 and '86, his second-place finishes in 1988 and '89, and his other third-place finish in 1995. In all, **six** money finishes in

thirteen years of competition. A remarkable achievement, and second only to the Senators' **seven** money finishes in those same thirteen years (first place in 1990 and 1997, second in 1986, 1987 and 1992, and third in 1985 and 1993).

➤ In Shamu's* thirteen years in the league, the **Cubs*** have occupied just about every position at year's end. There was, of course, his asterisk-laden championship of 1994; a second-place finish in the inaugural year of the league, 1985; third place in 1991; fourth in 1992; fifth in 1986; seventh in 1987; eighth in 1996; ninth in '88, '89 and '97; tenth in 1990 and 1993; and dead last in 1995. Only the sixth- and eleventh-place positions have eluded Shamu.*

➤ What does one say about the **Tigers**? Way back when, when the ball was dead and before fielders wore gloves, Big Guy's fearsome Tigers actually won this thing three years in a row. But that, and Tales from the Acropolis, are ancient history. In modern times, under modern rules, it can only be stated that the Tigers are an average team with an average pilot, with evidence of six straight finishes between fifth and tenth place the irrefutable proof of same. Not since 1991 has a Tiger team had teeth and claws sharp enough in September to challenge for the title.

➤ The **Blues**, after spending their early years in the bowels of the league (finishing last in 1987 and 1989), have challenged for a money finish in two of the last three seasons. I have always heard that McBlunder learns slow, but when he learns, it sticks. If he ever gets over his fatal attraction to Kansas City Royals players, he might even be a force to be reckoned with in this league.

➤ The **Bronx Bombers**? Still paying their dues. While Mouse is obviously still learning the trade, if he ever has a year in which his star players are not crippled by injuries, the Bombers might even challenge for their first upper division berth.

➤ The **Tribe** slud back into sub-mediocrity with yet another lower, Lower Division finish. Not to pick on this inept franchise, but 1997 marked the ninth time in twelve years of competition that Underbelly's charges have finished the year in the bottom half of the league standings, including dead-ass last fin-

ishes in 1986 and 1988, next-to-last in 1990, and next-to-next-to-last (8th out of 10 teams) in 1991 and 1992. U-belly's only ventures into the Upper Division occurred in 1987, when he finished third, in 1989 when the Tribe finished fourth, and last year, when the Tribe again finished in third. Since all five of the founding fathers have their names inscribed on The Cup, U-belly has the distinction of competing in this league the greater number of years (now 12) without winning it all. Or finishing second, for that matter.

➤ As pathetic as the Tribe franchise has been, no team has dominated the league bowels like the **Pirates** the past six years. After enjoying moderate success immediately upon entering the league in 1987 (five consecutive finishes in the upper division), the Pirates' fortunes went south in a hurry beginning with a ninth-place finish in 1992. Then, upon changing formats and becoming a twelve-team Bill James league in 1993, things went from bad to worse. Since that time, SloPay's squad has finished last, last, ninth, tenth, and last again this year. Whether the BJFB rules and scoring system are simply too demanding for SloPay, or whether being on-line with the Puppetmaster these past several years explains the sad demise of the once-proud Pirates franchise, we may never know.

MORE NUMBERS

Being fascinated with numbers, and having very little else to do with my spare time, I thought it would be interesting to see whose team has scored the most points, on a gross basis, over the years. You may recall that Possum did a similar analysis a year or two ago.³

The following are updated numbers, showing gross total points for each team in comparison to the competition:

1993-1997

1. Redbirds	40,271
2. Red Sox	40,231
3. Reds	39,714
4. Chiefs	39,100

5. Skipjacks	38,850
6. Blues	38,646
7. Senators	38,172
8. Tigers	38,101
9. Tribe	37,973
10. Cubs*	37,829
11. Bombers	35,554
12. Pirates	34,617

1988-1992

1. Tigers	67,959
2. Reds	67,732
3. Red Sox	66,495
4. Senators	66,385
5. Pirates	64,918
6. Cubs*	64,517
7. Skipjacks	64,505
8. Chiefs	64,301
9. Tribe	62,890
10. Blues	61,515

1985-1997

1. Red Sox	153,375
2. Tigers	151,885
3. Senators	150,361
4. Cubs*	146,909
5. Chiefs	146,850
6. Tribe	129,326
7. Pirates	114,096
8. Blues	113,454
9. Reds	107,446
10. Skipjacks	103,353
11. Redbirds	40,271
12. Bombers	35,554

Depending upon which criteria is used (i.e., most titles, most points, most consistency, no titles, fewest points, lowest finishes), the argument could be made that the Tigers, with their three crowns, are the greatest HSL team of all time; or that the Red Sox, with two crowns (albeit in the Dead Ball Era, with one of his two winning teams picked for him) and six "money" finishes among their accomplishments, are the best-ever HSL franchise; or that the Senators, with two crowns and seven "money" finishes, are the crème de la crème; or that the Reds, with two titles and nothing but Upper Division finishes, are King of the Hill; that the Pirates, with three last-place finishes and no first or second placements in the league, are the saddest HSL franchise ever; unless, of course, you consider the ignominious record of the Lincoln Tribe, who, despite having a manager with an IQ off the charts, cannot figure out how to crack the Upper Division of this tenaciously-competitive league.

³ Although he obviously "cooked" the books in some way to show his managerial superiority.

But enough of my unbiased observations. How do each of *you* vote on the issue of who owns the greatest HSL franchise of all-time? Please provide me with the benefit of your thoughts on the enclosed metered and addressed post card, with results to be tallied and disclosed at the November 28 meeting. And, remember, Possum, no voting for your own team, and no stuffing the ballot box.

AROUND THE LEAGUE

For those of you who have not heard, Magpie has taken a position as in-house counsel with California Energy, and has left the law firm of Taylor Kluver Drews & Pirnie. Expect that Big Guy's billable hours will increase manifold without Magpie next door to talk baseball and play computer golf with.

Shamu* has settled into his new job at Allied in Des Moines, and is pleased to report that he and Jan were successful in selling their home in South Lincoln. This despite the fact that Shamu* went six years without taking a mower, trimmer, weed-cutter or fertilizer spreader to the lawn, leaving the naive purchasers to believe that Shamu* had intentionally patterned his yard after the Australian Outback.

After several days without electricity following the freak snowstorm, SloPay is pleased to announce that his household is once again fully energized. Which is fortunate for the Pirate pilot, since SloPay was beginning to develop eye strain from his nightly preparation for the 1998 HSL Draft by candlelight. By golly, next year SloPay will not be surprised by someone else taking a promising but relatively unknown rookie star. Like that Griffey, Jr. fellow.

The current whereabouts of U-Bob of the secretive Hurlbut family (have you ever tried tracking him down by calling his house and getting one of the kids on the phone? Holy Toledo, Earth to child, Earth to child!) have finally been determined, and the Tribe helmsman is pleased to report new and gainful employment in sanitation engineering (title: Head Turkey-Dust Spreader) with the telephone company in Lincoln. While details are sketchy, U-Bob's compensation package is rumored to include a new set of tinted cataract goggle/eyeshields, boot spikes for ascending telephone poles, an a capella version of the timeless Glen Campbell hit "Wichita

Lineman," and a lifetime of free calls to the 1-900 pervert and psychic hot lines. In other words, an offer he simply could not refuse.

Speaking of the eclectic Underbelly, I recently called him to inquire as to his availability to attend the Skipper's celebration, and also to ask him why he had not yet called to congratulate me on winning the league. I was greeted with an angry and no doubt histrionic diatribe about how the primary qualification for winning the Hot Stove League is having a boatload of luck. In a thinly-veiled effort to salve his own injured pride at having failed miserably in yet another Hot Stove League campaign, Underbelly's thoughtless comments immediately put me on the defensive, and a bitter exchange of opposing viewpoints ensued. "Sure, Bob, I guess it's only a coincidence that I put in more time preparing for this year's Draft than ever, and came out on the winning end." And "I guess guys like Magpie, Possum and Rube, who always finish high up in the standings, are just plain lucky year in and year out, is that about it?" To which the facile-minded U-Bob quickly retorted, "I spent *more* time than *you* did this year getting ready for the Draft, and see where it got me?" To which I said, "Did not." U-Bob's response: "Did, too."⁴

Our energetic discussion ended with U-Belly vowing to pick up not a single book, newspaper, or other written word in preparation for next year's Draft, after which I double-dog dared him to do just that, together with my assertion that "If you think you can not prepare at all for next year's Draft and win the title, you're out of your damned gourd." To which U-Bob responded, "Who said anything about winning? But I can at least match this year's 10th place finish, and I can always finish ahead of the Pirates!"

Good point.

And so it goes, fellow Hot Stove Leaguers. Fill out your cards, send them in, and I'll see you on the 28th, if not before.

Skipper

Draft, what is the explanation for his drafting of Ellis Burks in Round 3, Jack McDowell in Round 8, Greg Vaughn in Round 9, etc., etc., other than pure doltism?

⁴ And if U-Bob truly spent all of this alleged time preparing for this year's