



# From the Bullpen

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The Hot Stove League  
Eastern Nebraska Division  
1998 Season

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## U DA MAN, BIG MAC!

No, not *McGwire*, but our own Stretch *McBlunder*. To the slack-jawed amazement of all, *McBlunder*'s long-suffering Blues had a volcanic 551-point week. No, that's not a misprint. I said, the

## BLUES POST ALL-TIME HSL MARK OF 551 POINTS

What a week. What a manager.

Funny thing about it, *McBlunder*'s team isn't good enough to have even a 451-point week, much less a cool hundred more. If, before the season started, somebody told you *McBlunder*'s starting lineup would include Ray Durham, Brett Boone, Edgardo Alfonzo, Rich Aurilia, Moises Alou, Cliff Floyd, and Derek Bell; and that his top four pitchers would be Cordova, Ashby, Hersheiser and Perez; you'd probably be wondering how many points the Blues would need to catch the Pirates and climb out of the league cellar. But rag-tag bunch that they are, Stretch has managed them superbly, molding them into a selfless, cohesive unit that just happened to have each player experience his career-best week during Week 9 of the HSL.

Congrats, Big Mac. You are *da man*. For this week at least.

## WEEK 9 STANDINGS

1.	Blues	3331
2.	Bombers	3321
3.	Tigers	3250
4.	Chiefs	3156
5.	Senators	3071
6.	Cubs*	3070
7.	Skipjacks	2982
8.	Redbirds	2920
9.	Reds	2727
10.	Red Sox	2706
11.	Tribe	2676
12.	Pirates	2575

## WEEK 9 TOTALS

1.	Blues	551
2.	Cubs*	424
3.	Tigers	386
4.	Bombers	381
5.	Senators	368
6.	Chiefs	348
(T)	Reds	348
8.	Pirates	335
9.	Red Sox	333
10.	Tribe	272
11.	Skipjacks	264
12.	Redbirds	252

The HSL League MVP is still Mark McGwire of the Tigers, now with an eye-popping 402 points, averaging more than 44 points-per-week. Curt Schilling, despite his recent shelling by the Cubs in Chicago, continues to lead the Cy

Young race with 252 points. However, Greg Maddux is hot on his heels with 248 points.

The top hitter for the week was Bernie Williams of the Blues with 58 points, just ahead of Rondell White's 58 points for the Cubs\*. Yes, *that* Rondell White. The top pitcher for Week 9 was also a Blue, the reinvigorated Oral Hersheiser, who only recently made *McBlunder*'s starting rotation.

The top batting team for the week was none other than the atomic Blues with 350 points. Scoring a similarly scorching batting total for the week were the Cubs\* with 302 points.

The top hitting team for the year is still the Tigers, with 2214 points. The least proficient hitting team for the year remains the Tribe, whose 1571 points is almost 200 points less than the second-worst hitting squad, the Reds.

The top pitching staff for the week was – you guessed it – the Blues, who cracked the 200-point mark with 201 points from his moundsmen. The worst weekly team pitching performance for last week was from the Tribe, who were only able to muster up 34 pitching points for the week.

## SAME TIME, LAST YEAR

Ahhhh, those were the days, my friend. After nine weeks of the 1997 campaign, the Senators were leading the Hot Stove League with 3215 points, a lead of 130 over the Tigers, never

to look back. Surprisingly, the Pirates occupied the cellar spot through nine last year with 2205 points. Larry Walker was the leading batsman with 358 points, while Roger Clemens led the pitchers with 270 points.

## INDIVIDUALLY SPEAKING

Big Mac's nine-week total of 402 points projects to a season total in the 1100s. While we can't expect Big Mac to keep up his current pace for the entire season, it is not unrealistic to think that he could be the first HSL'er ever to best the 1000 mark. Of course, with the news from the other evening that he will be sitting out a few games with back spasms, it is dangerous to make any predictions on McGwire's season total.

Below are lists of the top ten hitters and pitchers through nine weeks:

### HITTERS

1.	Mark McGwire	402
2.	Chipper Jones	293
3.	Alex Rodriguez	292
4.	Ivan Rodriguez	287
5.	Juan Gonzalez	274
6.	Ken Griffey, Jr.	266
7.	Derek Jeter	263
8.	Damien Easley	262
9.	Andres Galarraga	259
10.	Craig Biggio	253

### PITCHERS

1.	Curt Schilling	252
2.	Greg Maddux	248
3.	Tom Gordon	244
4.	Robb Nen	238
5.	Pedro Martinez	231
6.	Kevin Brown	214
7.	Jeff Shaw	211
8.	Ramon Martinez	208
9.	Francisco Cordova	206
10.	Chuck Finley	205

## BALLS AND STRIKES

™ I see that Possum recently upgraded his crackerjack pitching staff by picking up twin Hispanic terrors Jose Silva and Jesus Sanchez. Possum's current starting pitchers now consist of Tom Glavine (199 points), Brett Saberhagen (77), Chan Ho Park (76), Joey Hamilton (61), and John Burkett (33); with back-up starters Jose Silva (112), Jesus Sanchez (94), Jack McDowell (40), and Bobby Witt (13). Yowwwwwch. Team ERA? 5.26. With this collection of pigs, Possum

has to be damned glad he's not already in the cellar.

™ Ex-Senator Doug Drabek recently won his fourth game in five May decisions, his third or fourth consecutive quality start. Where was this golden arm when he was in my starting lineup? I hate him. And apparently everyone else does, too, since he remains and will continue to remain a free agent.

™ You may have noted that Itchie recently deep-sixed Bobby Ayala, his spectacular relief man. I wonder if a recent (1 IP, 5 H, 4R, 4ER, 1 BB, 0 K) minus 16-point performance had anything to do with it? Whatever the reason, great decision, Itchmeister, just a little late in coming. I see that old Bobba Lu recently absorbed another late-inning bashing for the Mariners, inflating his already bloated ERA and earning him a fifth loss against nary a single win.

™ Not to be a whiner – it's not in my nature – but the DL and I are getting to be much too familiar with each other. First Nomar goes down for almost a month after initially being projected to miss only a few games; then three of my starting pitchers (Tewksberry, Mercedes and Key) jump on the DL bus for a ride; and now Senator sensation Rolando Arojo is probably soon to get on board after injuring his biceps in a recent game. In the midst of all this misery, my brave and loyal charges have managed to keep a stiff upper lip and pick up the slack. But how much more can one man take?

™ Who has Danny Darwin on their roster? I thought sure that Magpie or somebody picked him up in the free agent draft just shortly before he returned to form and had his lights punched out two or three starts in a row. Was this the aborted free agent draft of a few weeks ago that also resulted in the Senators *not* picking up Kerry Ligtenberg? Hmmmmmm.

™ I am just guessing on this one, but I imagine that Carlos Delgado's recent decision to go with the blond coif (blond always looks so good on Hispanics and African Americans) is merely adding to Underbelly's perpetual HSL heartburn. It's not bad enough that Lansing and Grudzielanek are having career-worst years on Underbelly's dime, but he has to have an underachieving first baseman decide to become the Dennis Rodman of baseball?

™ It appears we are now a two-Possum rotisserie league. When recently confronted about the undeniable fact that his is a One-Man (Mark McGwire) team, Big Guy reportedly lashed back with a vengeance that his team also could boast of the top second baseman (Biggio), top left fielder (Bonds), and top reliever (Flash), so that the Tigers are as balanced as balanced can

be, and not merely riding the coattails of Big Mac during the '98 campaign. Wow! Calm down, Possum, Jr. Thou doth protest too much. With McGwire on the shelf for a few days, we'll see soon enough.

## 7<sup>th</sup> INNING STRETCH

In Chicago last week on business, I was fortunate enough to have time to catch most of last Thursday's Cubs-Phillies game at Wrigley. 85° weather, 37° Old Style, a \$10 lower box seat courtesy of a panicky scalper, Schilling against Clark, the wife unawares, and not a damned care in the whole world. Heaven on Earth. If it gets any better than this, it's a felony in some countries.

Contributing handsomely to my euphoric afternoon outing at the ballpark was the opportunity to personally witness the misfortunes of my adversaries. I can't speak for the rest of you, but there is a certain perverse pleasure derived from watching the travails of my fellow owners' players, almost equal to the high which comes from watching my own players' successes.

With no Cubbies on the Senators' roster this year (or ever again, thanks to Sammy), and only Scott Rolen of the Phils to root directly for, I quickly set my sights on star players from opposing HSL teams playing at Wrigley that day, and particularly players from those teams in the hunt. Imagine my ecstasy as I arrived at Wrigley in the 3<sup>rd</sup> inning, immediately to learn that the Cubs had posted a 5-spot against Itchie's ace (Curt Schilling) in the 1<sup>st</sup>. Yesssssss!

My pleasure only intensified as I watched Scott Rolen record two hits on the afternoon, with one run scored. My heart became tachycardic as Redbirds hurler Mark Clark began hurling up on himself, giving up multiple runs and leaving the game with the bases juiced and none out in the top of the 7<sup>th</sup>. A dangerous arrhythmia then set in as Tribe middle reliever Terry Adams doused himself with paint thinner and made like a human Molotov cocktail, ushering in all three baserunners on Clark's nickel.

Near hysteria overtook me as Chief reliever Rod Beck promptly blew the save and then took the loss when Tiger first-sacker Mark Grace booted a routine grounder, botched the throw, and was charged with two errors on the same player. Ahhhhhh. It couldn't get any better without a roller coaster and a team of hookers involved.

Of course, I know that the rest of you are capable of rising above such perverse behavior and are able to root for everyone's players, and

may the best man win. Not me. Give me a 4-0-0, 3 E game for an opponent's starter or a trip to the sixty-day DL for the opposition any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

## **RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM THE SECOND CITY**

— They will never replace Wrigley Field. Ever. Even if they tear it down someday, they will never replace it.

— Chicago seems to be the tattoo capital of North America. And I don't mean cute little butterflies or *I Love You Mom* inside of a heart. I saw more snakes, skulls and dragons at Wrigley Field than you would find at a Hells Angels rally.

— I was sitting at an outside pub near my hotel in Chicago, enjoying a frosty libation, when I noticed that the four chaps sitting at a nearby table were all gesturing wildly with their hands, and conversing in French, all apparently of French descent. Though I couldn't understand a single word that was said, and to the best of my knowledge, there was nothing directed at me, I had an almost irresistible urge to walk over to their table and slap them each silly. Why are the French so easy to detest?

— Sitting across from me at the ballgame was a human-like mammal with more strikes against him than a doubleheader of Sammy Sosa at-bats: Long, unkempt hair; multiple earrings (one of my personal favorites); multiple unsightly tattoos; goofy sunglasses (I know what you're thinking, but, no, it was not B.T.); cruddy goatee; tattered tank top; shorts and biker boots; and a doll all over him at the game. All I could think was, *No, Savannah. I said, NO!*

## **IT'S A WRAP**

Thanks again to Underbelly for serving as guest correspondent last week. Having a breather from the weekly publisher's deadline was nice, and having the benefit of Mr. Bob's semi-jaded curmudgeonish perspective is always enriching. The only downside to having U-belly guest write is the beating that our office computer system took in doing spelling, grammar, and syntax checks and corrections on U-Bob's working draft. Linda, our trusty assistant publisher and keypunch operator, reportedly had to don asbestos gloves to enter Bob's letter into the word processor, her machine was so far into spell and grammar-check overload.

Having said that, I must concede that Mr. Bob's spelling and grammar have improved dramatically as compared with a letter (copy en-

closed) that *From the Bullpen* recently received from an inside source at the Denver Post, responding to a certain column appearing there last year. Judge for yourself.

See you next week.

Skipper