



From the Bullpen

**Official Publication of
The Hot Stove League
Eastern Nebraska Division
1998 Season**

**Edition No. 13
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Brethren:

Before turning over this week's issue of *FTB* to our guest columnist, I am duty-bound to report the:

WEEK 11 STANDINGS

1. Blues	4074
2. Bombers	3958
3. Chiefs	3878
4. Tigers	3864
5. Senators	3852
6. Skipjacks	3611
7. Cubs*	3610
8. Redbirds	3589
9. Red Sox	3418
10. Reds	3388
11. Tribe	3250
12. Pirates	3226

And the

WEEK 11 POINT TOTALS

1. Chiefs	408
2. Red Sox	396
3. Tigers	394
4. Blues	367
5. Skipjacks	342
6. Tribe	333
7. Reds	328
8. Senators	293
9. Bombers	280
(T)Pirates	280
11. Redbirds	226
12. Cubs*	163

Top hitting team for the week was the Chiefs with 265 points, while the Redbirds' 134 points lagged the pack. The top pitching team for the week was the pitching-rich

Tigers with 183 points, while the Cubs* hurlers could muster up only 14 points for the week by the entire staff, led by Doug "Grandpa" Jones with 16.

The top hitter for the year is still Big Mac, with 444 points, while Maddux continues to lead all pitchers with 333 points. The top hitter for the week was Dante "Tainted Cycle" Bichette of the Chiefs. The top pitcher for the week was Rick "Tricko Traded Me for Brian Giles!?" Reed, who notched 57 points for the week and is now the fourth best starting pitcher in the HSL.

And now, without further ado, I give you the one, the only, the fast-talking, flesh-pressing, back-slapping, baby-kissing, Persian Purveyor of Plastic, our own John "a/k/a Sandjigger a/k/a Itchie Flukemeister" Thielen.



FROM THE BULLPEN

d/b/a

TheJiggerNaut



SKIPJACKS OWNER IN DIRE STRAITS; LOOKS TO DRABEK TO SAVE SEASON

Well, it's not that bad yet. But let me help you to understand the depths of my depression. Perhaps the most succinct way to convey this is to relay a typical conversation in the everyday life of Bitchie (Bride of Itchie)* and Itchie:

BITCHIE: Sugarplum, your Fantasy Golf league fax came in on the machine.

ITCHIE: Snookems, I'm not in the Golf league this year.

BITCHIE: You must be in first place, you had four guys under par today.

ITCHIE: Give me the fax, Anne.

BITCHIE: Tom Candiotti was minus 22, Aaron Sele was minus 16, Charles Nagy minus 14, and Juan Guzman minus 13. That's a lot of birdies!

ITCHIE: Give me the damn fax, lady.

BITCHIE: You act like this is life and death.

ITCHIE: If only it were that simple.

Now, is it strictly coincidence that my invitation to be the guest scribe comes at a time when the once league-leading Skipjacks (okay, maybe it was only for twelve hours) had plummeted to the dank, musty confines of the lower division? Has any team ever had such a perfect geometric point regression, consistently scoring just a few less points than the previous week?

* Exclusive, limited permission for use of the name Bitchie in this publication has been asked for (begged for) and granted. Any further references to Bitchie are not authorized and are at your own risk, and I wouldn't go there if I were you.

Has Tom Candiotti ever had an outing greater than negative 16? Would Ron Gant dying his hair blond help to push him over the .200 mark? Is Andy Pettitte capable of producing any points, other than in those seasons in which he is an illegal pick and part of an ethically questionable league champion? On all counts, the answer is no, but no matter. The sense here is that Jigger's death spiral has run its course, and the Jax are poised for a steady climb back to the summit of the league standings. Why, in the last couple weeks, I have swiped both Greg Swindell and Mike Morgan right out from under your collective beaks in the free agent draft. What were you all thinking? I can only think of one other owner savvy enough to pull off a comparable daily double this year. Hint: (Chan Ho Park in the 3rd; Rickey Henderson in the Free Agent Draft). It's only a matter of time before the Skipjacks' gradual ascent begins, perhaps coinciding with J.D. Drews' offer to sign a contract just for the love of the game. (Is he kin of yours, Big Guy?)

But enough about my team. Nobody wants to read a publication produced by someone that alternately brags and bitches about only his own team. All eleven owners in the league fully comprehend the concept that the Official Publication of the Hot Stove League is about the league, not one myopic owner's team. What's that, you say there are twelve owners? Oh...then I guess I better make this good, since it will likely be, as the Reverend Jackson says, my last "opportunity" to make my opinion heard among the Hot Stove "community."

Since I don't make my living as a "word merchant" like the numerous barristers in this league, I'm gonna give it to you straight, Willy Loman style. You may not like it, but dammit, there's not a whole lot you can do about it. After a review of this

week's point totals, you'll have the pleasure of perusing my assessment of your respective scrap heaps.

STANDINGS THRU WEEK 11

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McBlunder's Boys get a little breathing room at the top, thanks mostly to the Bronx Bombers' one-week brush with reality. All in all, it proved to be a difficult week for the Hot Stove League, with five clubs posting sub-300 point weeks (henceforth referred to as the Burkett line, a lá the Mendoza line, in honor of that slug's perfect game between the gutters).

B.T.'s resilient Chiefs took weekly honors with 407 points, moving his pack of wild Indians (excuse me, aggressive Native Americans) into 3rd place overall. The most noteworthy performance of the week was turned in by the Cubs*, whose manager apparently demoted his entire team to the minor leagues after Wednesday's games, accounting for his paltry total of 162 points for the week. This performance was good enough for 7th worst of all time. However, let's give credit where credit is due; taking into account shortened weeks due to the All-Star game and the final week of the season, the Cubs*' effort is actually the 4th worst of all time. Nice going, Shamu.

Now, as I see it, here's what's right (jiggy with it?) or wrong with your team:

BLUES: Yes, sir, I must say I do believe this is it. Ol' Stretch has finally pasted together a club that's gonna compete. Notice the direct correlation between McBlunder's movement away from drafting Kansas City Royals and his lengthy stint in the Upper Division. So what if it took him eight years to figure it out. While his marquee picks have significantly underachieved, i.e., Big Eunuch, he's been sage enough to rely on the one variable that has consistently delivered the league hardware: Blind Luck. Look for Stretch to be in it for the long haul.

BOMBERS: I just don't get it. Somebody wake me up when Mouse moves back to 11th place and things are back as they should be. Look in the dictionary next to "aberration" and tell me if it doesn't say "Bronx Bombers, 1998." In reality, Mouse's club will be even more dangerous if Bagwell starts to put up his usual numbers, but pitching is what's brung him to the dance. Unfortunately, he's only a case of gout and a Kamikaze tantrum away from a steep descent to the middle of the pack. Sammy Sosa's homer binge will eventually be erased by an equally impressive string of consecutive strikeouts come July. Look for it to happen.

SENATORS: Anybody who would actually consider that he may have made a mistake by releasing Doug Drabek and would waste the ink it takes to write about that loser is either (a) lacking possession of cognitive skills; (b) under the influence of alcohol (but in good company with Mo Vaughn, Mondesi, and Jaha); or (c) void of any hint of ability to evaluate baseball talent. Not a bad club in general, but a smidgen too many eggs in the Bosox basket. Hang a donut on the Beantown Boys and watch Skipper fidget like a brother in Jasper. Maddux alone will carry this team to September, but 4th place will represent an overachievement.

CHIEFS: Extremely weak up the middle (Lieberthal, Baerga, and Vizcaino), but compensated for by some potential big sticks who've yet to bust loose (Dante,

Tony Clark, and Caminiti) and a solid pitching staff. I have to take exception to Chuck Finley, who, as an ex-Skipjack, makes me nauseous. The guy gets married, sticks his dome in Clorox, and all of a sudden he's Greg Maddux. Amazing what a little "trim" from the sex kitten will do for you. Look for a finish in the money from the Chiefs, and for B.T. to opt for the Surfer Boy look as a tribute to Chuckie.

TIGERS: With Godzilla on pace to hit 285 homers, the Bengals will stay within striking distance till mid August. At that point, Faceraker will be knocking on more doors than a Jehovah's Witness, looking to peddle Big Mac for a pitcher or two. Big Guy defied the smart money by refusing to draft pitching early and his strategy is working, for now. Pisses me off. I leave the draft with Schilling, Pettitte, and Nagy, proud as a peacock, and he's kicking my ass in pitching. You'll get yours, smart guy.

CUBS: CLXII. For those of you who went to school with Chuck, that's 162. Shamu's* point total for Week 11. Not exactly making a move, and now that Ramon Martinez is going down with a wing on fire, there's not a lot of optimism emanating from the Cubs* clubhouse. Look for Snickler to pull in the reins in late July and post a "Transactions Suspended" shortly thereafter as he waves the white flag for the Cubs*.

REDBIRDS: KKKKKerry Wood. Not since Steve Carlton won 27 games for the hapless Phils has one pitcher meant so much to a team. Hopelessly languishing near the bottom of the Hot Stove heap, the Redbirds' season turned around one fateful Sunday evening. The young Clemens clone has picked the Crimson Chirpers up by their bootstraps and given new meaning to this Iowegan's life. A couple prudent trades could get the Redbirds back in position for the traditional 2nd place finish. A couple blunders, and he's toast.

SKIPJACKS: Outstanding talent everywhere, solid pitching, timely hitting. Team must be a victim of a year 2000 bug in the Stats, Inc., software program, eliminating bonus points earned for three error

games by Joey Cora. Get it fixed, Oscar! Also appears that owner may have been filling up at Kwik Shop when he realized he had to draft a team that day.

REDS: A second-half rally is in the works for this club. The Big Hurt, Phlegm Alomar, Shawn Estes, Charles Johnson, and Jaret Wright have all failed to show up so far, and have got to pick it up soon. Jeter is having a breakout year (thanks, Mariah, it's the "trim" thing again), and if Mr. Tricko can work some of his magic, he just might make a move into contention. Problem is, this boy's got one big m-f ing mountain to climb.

RED SOX: When I look at the Red Sox, an image keeps popping into my head. It's Admiral Stockdale, Ross Perot's ill-fated Vice Presidential nominee, who under pressure on a nationally televised debate, uttered the famous quote: "What the hell am I doing here, anyway?" An appropriate query for the Possum.

PIRATES: Stinky fish and thin air have been the bane of SloPay this year. Salmon has yet to put up the numbers the Silent One was counting on, and Kile has found the thin air at Coors Field slightly different than the air conditioner blowing in at the Astrodome. Juan Gone has been the Pirates' lone shining star, and I sense a hamstring pull or another paternity suit will lead to his undoing come July.

TRIBE: The Hot Stove League Turk has tapped Underbelly on the shoulder, asked him to show his roster, and uttered the words that represent Underbelly's worst nightmare: "You'll have to move along, son. You don't belong here." If anyone thinks Mark Grudzielanek has potential, I suspect a phone call to Underbelly would bear fruit.

BALLS AND STRIKES

Renamed this week in honor of the Skipjacks:

ERRORS AND UNEARNED RUNS

☞ I take back what I told Buser about Ken Hill. He really does stink.

☛ I'm glad I'm not a player on Scott's team. This guy has a hair trigger for releasing erstwhile Chiefs. You don't play right, you don't stay the night.

☛ Speaking of the Chiefs, has the American League now figured Pedro Martinez out? Once through the league, and all of a sudden the magic is gone. Witness these Skipjack-like stats for the fungo bat with clothes on: 12 home runs given up in his last 20 innings; 8.63 ERA over his last four starts. B.T., is it time to pull the trigger on him?

☛ I wasn't sure until just now, but I'm going to go out on a limb and say that Juan Guzman is not going to win the Cy Young this year. Roger Clemens, you're an ass. (Scott, Guzman for Martinez straight across?)

☛ Anybody with 3610 points or less at this point in the season ought to be ashamed of themselves.

☛ Mark McGwire will hit 72 home runs this year.

☛ Why does ESPN2 always go to a break right when I need the next score on the ticker? Do any of you other idiots flip between ESPN2, CNNSI, and Headline News like me just in time to see them post an eight spot against your starter for that day?

☛ Hey, Ted, Luis Polonia and Vince Coleman are still available as free agents. Felix Martinez is in Omaha for now, so you'll have to wait a bit on him.

☛ If Curt Schilling were on the Braves, he would be 12-1.

That's it for this week. Obligatory thanks to the regular writer of *From the Bullpen* for letting me squeeze the squid this week. I'm glad I don't have to write this thing every week. (I know, so are you.) Now that I've completed this task, I can get back to being Chief Juice-Getter and Butt-Wiper in the Kenny Jenkins

household, where at least the Bride of Itchie believes I'm on the way to 1st place.

Itchie