



From the Bullpen

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HALFWAY HOME: BOMBERS CLING TO LEAD OVER SURGING SENATORS, BLUES SING- GIN' THEIR OWN SONG

The season is officially half-way over, with 13 weeks of play in the jar. The bodacious Bombers continue to be fueled by the En Fuego Sammy Sosa, but also received a much-needed shot in the arm when Ismael Valdez nearly recorded the Bombers' second Perfecto of the season. How does Mouse keep coming up with these miracles? It truly appears to be shaping up as the year of the Bomber.

Despite a second-straight league-leading total, the Senators picked up little ground on the Bombers, who posted a 436-point week to end the half-way point of the season at 4789 points, a 45-point margin over the Senators' 4744 total. The Blues are a fairly distant third, with 4630 points through 13 weeks.

From top to bottom, the standings through 13 weeks look like this:

STANDINGS THRU 13 WEEKS

1.	Bombers	4789
2.	Senators	4744
3.	Blues	4630
4.	Tigers	4596

5.	Chiefs	4532
6.	Cubs*	4380
7.	Skipjacks	4370
8.	Redbirds	4276
9.	Red Sox	4091
10.	Reds	4088
11.	Tribe	4019
12.	Pirates	3829

In what must have been the top overall scoring week of the year, four different HSL teams bested the 400-point mark for the week, and all twelve league teams were above 300 points for the week. For the second consecutive week, the Senatros paced the field, this week with 456 points, followed closely by the Tigers, who managed 443 points even with a lukewarm Mark McGwire. Here are the

WEEK 13 TOTALS

1.	Senators	456
2.	Tigers	443
3.	Bronx Bombers	436
4.	Cubs*	424
5.	Redbirds	391
6.	Red Sox	369
7.	Skipjacks	346
8.	Tribe	342
9.	Chiefs	332
10.	Reds	325
11.	Pirates	311
12.	Blues	309

The top hitting team for the week was the Tigers with 301 points, while the Pirates trailed

the field with 169. The top hitting team for the year is also the Tigers, with 3044 points, while the Tribe occupies the bottom spot with 2305.

The top pitching team for the week was the team known for great pitching, the Senators, with 206 points. The Tribe, whose hurlers rang up an incredible total just one or two weeks ago, trailed the field with only 95 points, led by the oh-so-mediocre Billy Taylor with 32. The top pitching team for the season is the Bombers with 1923, while the Pirate staff trails the field with 1039 points, just barely worse than the Red Sox's total of 1074.

The MVP of the year is still Mark McGwire, now with 499 points, while Greg Maddux continues to pace the pitchers with 408 points. The top batsman for the week was – ugh – Jeromy Burnitz of the Tigers, who put together a 48-point week. Rube owns the worst best hitter this week, Travis Fryman, with 32 points. The best pitcher for the week was Todd Stottlemyre of the Chiefs with 61 points, while Ugie of the Reds was the worst best pitcher with a paltry 25 points for the week.

SAME TIME, LAST YEAR

At the half-way point last season, the Senators were dominating the field with 4847 points, well ahead of the 2nd place Redbirds with 4538 points. The last place Pirates had a total of 3257 points through 13 weeks last sea-

son. Larry Walker was the top point-getter with 515 points through 13 weeks, and Randy Johnson was the top scoring pitcher with 428 points.

Going back one more year, in 1996, the Chiefs led the field through 13 weeks with 4981 points, again ahead of the bridesmaid Redbirds with 4724. The Bronx Bombers (what a difference two years makes!) were in last place with 3888 at the half-way mark. In 1996, Edgar Martinez led all hitters with 419 points through 13 weeks, while John Smoltz scored 376 points through half a season.

And just for the heck of it, let's take the old time machine back one more year. In 1995, the Skipjacks led the way through 13 with 4651, ahead of the Tigers with 4510, the Bombers with 4507, and the Red Sox with 4468. Now *that* was a pennant race. The last place team through 13 weeks in 1995 was the Chiefs with 3813 points. Frank Thomas was the top hitter that season at the half-way mark with 425 points while the Big Unit led the pitchers with 405.

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

TOP HITTERS

1.	Mark McGwire	499
2.	Alex Rodriguez	424
3.	Sammy Sosa	408
4.	Ken Griffey	396
5.	Juan Gonzalez	373
6.	Jim Thome	370
7.	Craig Biggio	368
8.	Ivan Rodriguez	360
9.	Greg Vaughn	361
10.	Chipper Jones	353
11.	Darin Erstad	342
12.	Vinny Castilla	337
13.	Rafael Palmeiro	335
14.	Barry Bonds	334
15.	Andres Galarraga	333

PITCHERS

1.	Greg Maddux	408
2.	Robb Nen	364
3.	Curt Schilling	319
4.	Pedro Martinez	315
5.	Todd Stottlemyre	313
6.	Andy Ashby	302
(T)	Kevin Brown	302
8.	Trevor Hoffman	298
9.	Rick Reed	295
10.	Tom Gordon	291
11.	Bartolo Colon	281
12.	Ugueth Urbina	279
13.	Al Leiter	277
14.	Tom Glavine	275
15.	Rolando Arrojo	270

BALLS AND STRIKES

™ It is more than remarkable that the Bronx Bombers are leading the league in overall pitching with 1923 points, without a single pitcher in the top 15 as ranked above. Mouse's top pitcher is John Wetteland with 266, followed by David "Imperfecto" Wells with 250, Woody Williams with 241, Denny Neagle with 224, Tim Wakefield with 206, Hideki Irabu with 205, and John Franco with 195. Note that Mouse's first-drafted starting pitcher, Ismael Valdez (Round 5) – he of the near-perfect miss the other night, is only the Bombers' eighth-best pitcher.

Also remarkable is that the Senators hold down 2nd place in this league, even though they don't have a single hitter in the top 15 (see list above), and only one pitcher in the top 15 (albeit No. 1, Maddux). In other words, *IT'S BALANCE, BABY!*

™ To me it's not so much amazing that Mouse is *leading* this thing half-way through, but that he's *not* leading by 500 points. With Sosa's 20 HR June, Jim Thome putting up killer numbers, Wells' perfect game, Valdez's near-perfecto, and Wetteland's hot start, why aren't the Bombers just flat-out running away with this thing? Must be a few flat tires around the horn that are dragging him down.

™ Big Mac hit his 37th home run last night, tying Reggie Jackson for the most home runs ever before the All-Star break. If Big Red's apparently fragile psyche doesn't snap, he looks like a lock to have 50 jacks by September 1. If so, he'll definitely be in the hunt for 62. On the other hand, he may be equally likely to go haywire after a stupid question from a reporter during batting practice, put the poor sap in a headlock and crush his vertebra to powder, thus bringing a premature end to his quest.

™ Despite some rigorous cross-examination by Oscar & Co. at the Bill James Free Agent Hotline, B.T. is determined to either catch lightning in a bottle and win this thing or make the '98 Florida Marlins organization look like a bastion of stability by comparison. Can new Chiefs Gabe Alvarez, Matt Anderson, Scott Elarton, Juan Guzman, Brad Fullmer, and Miguel Tejada help the sagging Chiefs turn the corner? What do you think?

™ Don't know if you've noticed, but there has been quite a mano-a-mano battle going on between the Reds and the Red Sox this year. One week the Red Sox take over 9th, and the next week it's the Reds in this position. Which of these two teams will win bragging rights

between them for the year, and can either of them catch their crimson brethren (the Redbirds) in the lower division for the coveted Red Lo Di Award?

™ I see that Billy Taylor had another nice pitching outing for the Tribe. If my calculations are correct, even though Billy managed to get the win after blowing the save, he netted a negative 4½ points for the Tribe for the night. Not exactly a quality win.

™ The Senators' 456-point week came about even with a minus 10 performance for the week by Brian Hunter, my marvelous center fielder. And Rube thought he had problems with Bobby Bonilla.

™ Of course, I could cut Brian Hunter and redraft Tom Goodwin. But he stinks just as bad.

™ Is there some particular reason why nobody wants to say a word about why Mo Vaughn hasn't played the last four games, and whether he will ever play again? Talk about a vacuum of information. Nobody knows nothing. Another wild night out on the town by Vaughn?

Enough for now. Good luck in the second half.

Skipper