



# From the Bullpen

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

Edition No. 18  
July 28, 1998

## SENATORS STAVE OFF COMPETITION, REDBIRDS, CUBS\*, RED SOX AND BLUES ALL EN FUEGO; SKIPJACKS AND REDS GOING SOUTH

Brethren:

Despite another red-hot week from the Blues (445 points) during Week 17, the Senators continue to top the Hot Stove League standings as we enter the final trimester of the season. Through seventeen weeks, the Senators hold a modest 125-point-lead (6276 to 6148) over the Blues, although on a projected total basis, the lead is a mere 51 points. To my way of thinking, though, projected totals are for projected losers, and I'll take points in the can any day of the week.

### STANDINGS THRU 17 WEEKS

1. Senators	6276
2. Blues	6151

3. Bombers	6010
4. Chiefs	5852
5. Redbirds	5836
6. Tigers	5801
7. Cubs*	5727
8. Skipjacks	5665
9. Red Sox	5522
10. Tribe	5358
11. Reds	5193
12. Pirates	4896

By way of comparison, through 17 weeks of last year's campaign, the Senators held a much more comfortable lead of 254 points over the Redbirds, with the Senators at 6293 points to the 6039-point tally of the Redbirds. It's worth noting that the Senators' seventeen-week total of 6276 points this year is only 17 points off the league-leading total of the Senators last year.

The insufferable Redbirds led the league in scoring during Week 17 with an eye-popping total of 505 points, including a jaw-dropping 299 point-pitching total for the week, led by Kerry Wood's 54. And to think that the slug manager of the Redbirds was only able to pick up Wood because his stinking team was in last place at the time that Wood was promoted to the majors. Where is the fairness in that?

Since he'll squawk if I don't mention it, let it be recorded here that the Redbirds may have posted the best all-time point total for a single day of games last Tuesday, July 21, 1998. On that fateful day, the Redbirds posted an incredible total of 192 points. This is *not* a misprint. The Redbirds scored 192 points for the day, 80 in the hitting department and 112 from the 'Birds' pitchers. And all of this with Sandy Alomar and Walt Weiss riding pine, and Rube leaving Roberto Kelly's 15-point total in his minors.

Because we may never again see such an incredible performance in a single day, protocol suggests that I should include a bit of detail about the 'Birds' record performance. First, the point totals recorded by his hitters, in descending order:

Travis Fryman	18
Albert Belle	16
Ken Griffey, Jr.	14
Omar Vizquel	13
Brian Jordan	10
Tino Martinez	4
Mike Stanley	3
Tony Fernandez	2
Tony Gwynn	2

And by his pitchers:

David Cone	29
Kerry Wood	29
Kevin Brown	24
Jamie Moyer	22
Mike Jackson	9

Rube's nine hitters batted a collective 23-for-45 for the night (average .511), with 8 runs scored, 5 doubles, 4 home runs, and 15 runs batted in, with only 1 base-on-balls, 3 stolen bases, 1 caught stealing and 1 error. His pitchers were a collective 4-and-0 with a 1.39 ERA, with one save, giving up 20 hits, 7 runs, and 5 earned runs in 32-1/3 innings, while walking 10 and recording 38 strikeouts.

All I've got to say, Rube, is if your team's so damned good, how in hell's bells are they sitting in 5<sup>th</sup> position? Over, under or just plain old mismanagement?

But enough about Rube. Close behind for the week were the surprising Des Moines Cubs\* with 472 points, on the strength of Jeff Shaw's 56 relief points and Neifi Perez's 76-point week, courtesy of his weekend cycle. The next highest scoring team for the week was the Red Sox with 461, followed by the Blues with 445, followed by the Senators with 416. In all, five teams scored better than 400 points for the week, including all four of the teams (Senators, Blues, Redbirds and Cubs\*) in the highly-competitive Central Division.

The weekly totals, from top to bottom, are as follows:

### WEEK 17 TOTALS

1. Redbirds	505
2. Cubs*	472
3. Red Sox	461
4. Blues	445
5. Senators	416
6. Tribe	395
7. Bombers	379
8. Chiefs	374
9. Tigers	358
10. Skipjacks	331
11. Pirates	301
12. Reds	292

The top hitting team for the week was the Cubs\* with 313 points, besting the 282-point total of the Red Sox. The top hitting

team for the year is likewise the Cubs\*, with 4014 points, ahead of the No. 2 hitting squad, the Senators, with 3931 points.

The weakest hitting team for the week was the Chiefs, with a still-respectable 197 point total, while the tepid Tribe continues to trail the pack in hitting for the year with 3030 points.

The top pitching team for the week was the aforementioned Redbirds, whose 299-point week (with the four aces of the staff each getting two starts) may have been an all-time weekly best. The second-best pitching team for the week was the Blues with 234 points. The best pitching team for the year is also the Redbirds with 2349 points, just ahead of the Senators with 2345 points for the year.

The worst pitching team of the week was the Pirates with 57 points, just behind the Reds' 72 -point pitching output for the week. The worst pitching team for the season, and this is no great surprise here, is the Pirates with 1328 points, well behind the Red Sox's 11<sup>th</sup> place total of 1609.

### INDIVIDUALS

The league MVP of the year continues to be Mark McGwire, now with 600 points through 17 weeks, 60 of which are from his home run bonuses. To put this total in perspective, Larry Walker led the pack last year through 17 weeks with 617 points.

The Cy Young of the year through Week 17 continues to be Greg Maddux of the Senators, now with 527 points. Last year at this time, Roger Clemens was leading the pack with 544 points.

### TOP HITTERS

1. Mark McGwire	600
2. Ken Griffey, Jr.	537
3. Alex Rodriguez	514
4. Greg Vaughn	498
5. Sammy Sosa	490
(T) Chipper Jones	490
7. Vinny Castilla	480
8. Juan Gonzalez	468

9. Albert Belle	462
10. Jim Thome	460
(T) Rafael Palmeiro	460
12. Craig Biggio	445
13. Damien Easley	433
(T) Ray Durham	433
15. Moises Alou	424

### TOP PITCHERS

1. Greg Maddux	517
2. Pedro Martinez	435
3. Robb Nen	426
4. Kevin Brown	425
5. Curt Schilling	408
6. Andy Ashby	395
7. Trevor Hoffman	392
8. Jeff Shaw	375
9. Rick Reed	351
10. Tom Glavine	343
11. Tom Gordon	342
12. Bartolo Colon	338
13. David Cone	331
14. Ugueth Urbina	327
15. Kenny Rogers	326

### BALLS AND STRIKES

™ Congrats to Shamu\* on having his star shortstop, Neifi Perez, hit for the cycle last weekend. There are a few other players that I probably thought were more likely to accomplish this, but hey, you take what you get.

™ It is hard to believe that Jose Offerman, Big Guy's 20<sup>th</sup> round draft pick and star infielder, has exactly the same number of points through 17 weeks as Mike Piazza: 379. I'm sure Big Guy knew that Jose was in for a huge year. It is also noteworthy that Fernando Vina, Mouse's gift-packaged second baseman, is just 3 points behind at 376.

™ It is sad but true that the Big Hurt, Frank Thomas, is no longer among the top ten scoring first basemen, tallying 343 points at a 3.3 PPG clip. In addition to the ten first sackers listed in the point rankings, Frank is also behind John Olerud (357) and Will Clark (346), and just an eyelash ahead of Mark Grace (340), Kevin Young (332) and Carlos Delgado (342). How the migh-

ty have fallen. And I seriously thought that Big Hurt was in for a huge year.

™ I see that McBlunder finally promoted Eddie Taubensee on July 23. I feel your pain, McBlunder. Get used to the shell game.

™ Was the trade between the Cubs\* and the Skipjacks on July 24 the most hush-hush transaction ever? I didn't hear a word about it until reading in this week's report that Shamu\* had traded Chipper Jones and Pedro Astacio to Itchie for Aaron Sele, Andy Benes and Todd Zeile. If Shamu\* was willing to trade a top hitter like Chipper Jones to obtain a top pitcher, why did he trade for Sele and Benes? Major fleecing.

™ In another Shamu\* move, I see that he released the injured Rondell White and signed up Fletcher the Catcher in last Sunday's draft. What is Fletcher, anyway, about 45 years old?

™ Ouch! It took Big Guy until July 26<sup>th</sup> to promote the hottest hitter in baseball (Jeromy Burnitz) to his major league club? How many points did this "asleep at the switch" episode cost the Tigers?

™ The Chiefs signed Royce Clayton in last week's free agent draft, for at least the third or fourth time this season. I love him, I hate him. I love him, I hate him, eh, Scott?

™ And did I miss something? Why did B.T. release Antonio Osuna? Is he tired of having the world's ugliest Mexican on his team?

™ I'm sure that the Tribe will get a lot of mileage out of recent free agent signees Gary Gaetti (age 57) and Lenny Webster (age unknown, but broke into the majors with Baltimore in 1951). And I can't believe that he released his promising rookie, Aramis Ramirez, he of the 1.1 PPG average.

™ You may also note that the Senators recently demoted Scott Brosius, in favor for pitcher Mike Hampton. Why would I demote my All-Star third baseman, you ask? Because *Brosius* rhymes with

*atrocious*, as in fielding. The guy has more errors than Itchie has sales lines.

## THE 1998 ALL-STAR GAME: A RETROSPECTIVE

Now that I've had a few weeks to reflect on our trip to Denver for the All-Star game, allow me to share with you a few memories, observations and random thoughts.

Not ever having been to the Biggest Show before, or even having talked to someone who had been, it was hard to know what to expect as the Elongated One and I drove westward on the morning of Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup>. Yet the feeling of excitement was palpable as we neared the Mile High City. When we arrived at about noon, the city did not disappoint, decked out in full regalia, downtown Denver abuzz with excitement, the LoDo district taking on the atmosphere of a carnival.

Excitement aside, both McBlunder and I had a bit of uneasiness about us since we still did not have our tickets in hand, but were scheduled to rendezvous with the seller at the Westin Hotel early that afternoon. To put this in historical context, it might be remembered that a few years back during an HSL trip to Chicago, we questioned McBlunder's judgment when our fearless leader allowed that the trustworthy African-American entrepreneur standing across the street was not only standing across the street, but was holding *our* tickets and *our* money across the street. Amateur hour, McBlunder. In my case, the seller not only held our precious tickets and my bank-certified funds, he held them in an entirely different state.

In any event, McBlunder and I pulled into town and parked our vehicle, and the first thing we see not 30 feet away is Jim Thome bopping down the streets of downtown Denver with his parents, clad in a godawful floral print shirt, looking every bit like Jon Voight stepping off the bus in Manhattan in *Midnight Cowboy*. I mean, this boy is so country-looking he might

very well be from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, or some such place. Rather than to give him a bull rush for an autograph, McBlunder and I just stood and stared, wondering how many other stars we would be able to see up close.

It was a tiny bit unsettling to arrive at our appointed meeting place at the Westin Hotel, the concierge's desk, only to learn that Madam Concierge had not only never heard of the person I sent the money to for the tickets, but her name was something quite different than that which had been told me by the putative seller. Do you suppose Underbelly would have been a bit nervous about this transaction? Yes, and so were we. However, after anguishing for something like thirty minutes about how the seller could be late for such an important meeting, he eventually arrived and the precious ducats were soon in hand. After a brewskie or two to calm our jangled nerves, it was off to the ballpark for the celebrity hitting contest, workout day, and of course the much-anticipated Home Run Derby.

The celebrity contest was a bit of an oddity, in which four so-called celebrities with seemingly little or nothing in common with the All-Stars or each other teamed up with a current and former major leaguer to hit batting practice baseballs. Well, okay, I guess I can see Kevin Costner being invited, as the star of two of the best baseball movies ever made, *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams*. And I could probably even be persuaded that having Tim McGraw there, as the son of former major leaguer Tug McGraw and the spouse of the country chick who sang the National Anthem, made sense. But why they had the Jewish guy who has the lead in *The Single Guy* on the ticket, and the fourth guy, whom I can't even remember, is beyond me.

Tell you what, though. It was fun seeing Dave Kingman knock a few out of the park during this celebrity contest, even if it was against batting practice pitching. The guy might be 50 years old or so, but he's in such great shape he looks like he could step right back in and throw fear into one or two of today's pitchers. Watching him take a few of his monster cuts, it's not hard to see how this guy hit 400-and-some career din-

gers, even with a career .250 batting average.

After the celebrity contest, the real major leaguers took batting practice, which was good for lots of oooohs and ahhhhs. During BP, Big Mac (McGwire, not McBlunder) lifted one entirely out of Coors Field, traveling an unmeasured distance of at least 500 feet.

The Home Run Derby was terrific, although it failed to live up to its billing since McGwire did not survive the qualifying round. Nevertheless, there were plenty of thrills as the contestants (Javy Lopez, Chipper Jones, Moises Alou, Vinny Castilla, and Mark McGwire in the NL; and Damien Easley, Alex Rodriguez, Rafael Palmeiro, Jim Thome and Junior in the AL) tried to outdo each other with their mammoth blasts. Thome and Griffey hit some awesome blasts into the right field upper deck, and Vinny hit some monster shots into the left field bleachers which quite naturally thrilled the home town crowd. McGwire hit one to center field that nearly made it into the Rock Pile, and was estimated at something like 510 feet.

Although a bit overblown and stretched out a bit longer than necessary, the Derby was definitely an event to see. Perhaps the funnest part of watching it was seeing all of the celebrities milling around on the field – people within the game and without – as they schmoozed the players and each other. Some of the notables, besides Costner and McGraw (I don't consider *The Single Guy* to be notable), were: Stuart Scott, Chris Berman, and Charlie Steiner from ESPN; Keith Oberman, formerly of ESPN but now of *The Big Flop*; Tim Russert, host of *Meet the Press*; the black chick from ER who has AIDS (who, by the way, sang a stirring rendition of *Oh Canada* the following evening which would have sent shivers down Itchie's spine); Bob Costas; Joe Garagiola; Gene Budig; Leonard Coleman; democratic strategist James Carville (even more frightening in person than on TV, but damnit, a good Democrat); and many more.

I almost forgot to mention shaking Costas' hand on the escalator at the Westin Hotel during our ticket rendezvous and the

proud moment when he told me I really wasn't such a "schmuck."

And I almost forgot to mention what was perhaps McBlunder's favorite event of the pregame festivities, the tug-of-war between the players' children and the collective team mascots, won by the children, to McBlunder's great surprise and chagrin. When I commented that, "It doesn't get any better than this," as the mascots took the field, McBlunder's response – "You got that right" – said it all.

## THE GAME

The game itself was not anticlimactic, as one might imagine, although the last couple of innings dragged on a bit. Watching Senator star Greg Maddux facing the best and the brightest of the American League was as big a thrill as any baseball fan could hope for. Seeing him work his way out of a jam and his coolness under fire only added to the experience.

I can't honestly say that watching David Wells throw for the Junior Circuit gave me the same sort of thrill, although watching HUB (short for "The Human Unmade Bed") pitch in such a setting had its own attraction.

Seeing Roger Clemens pitch, just a few days after recording his 3,000<sup>th</sup> career strikeout, was exhilarating.

Watching Cal almost go yard (settling for a double) after being dissed by the press, and seeing Bonds go Upper Deck were awesome.

The game itself, recorded in the box score which follows, was a see-saw contest if not a pitcher's duel. The 13-to-8 final tally in favor of the Junior Circuit was the largest combined score in All-Star game history, which should come as no surprise since the game was played at spacious Coors Field.

About the only mar on the game was some rather raggedy fielding, although it should be noted that the official scorer recorded but one error, which I attribute to a

serious case of superstar butt-kissing or orders from the Commissioner's office.

After the game, our brush with celebrities continued at the Chophouse next to the stadium, as I had the good fortune to use the urinal right next to Dutch Dalton. And yes, his ex-playmate, ex-wife did love him for his money.

All in all, well worth the price of admission.

## OL' PETE

I recently completed a splendid biography on the life of native Nebraskan Grover Cleveland Alexander, a Hall-of-Fame pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies, St. Louis Cardinals and Chicago Cubs in the early part of this century. The book, entitled *Ol' Pete*, was written by Jack Kavanaugh and published by Diamond Communications. It is an excellent read.

If any of you should care to borrow my copy of *Ol' Pete* to read for yourself, let me know. However, since I do not anticipate a stampede from you-all to secure my copy for your own reading, allow me to share with you a few nuggets of factual information and a few of the highlights from this book about Nebraska's finest native baseball son:

\* Grover Cleveland Alexander was born on February 26, 1887, to William and Margaret Alexander on a farm near Elba, Nebraska, which is near St. Paul, Nebraska, which is near Grand Island. Grover was named after the then-sitting president, Grover Cleveland, by Ol' Pete's dad, a staunch and fine Democrat.

\* After graduating from high school at St. Paul High, Alexander went to work for the Howard County Telephone Company, playing town ball on the side. His considerable pitching talents were noticed, and he was asked to play on a touring team known as the Nebraska Indians, a team which had a few Native Americans on it but which mostly was composed of Anglos. While pitching for the Nebraska Indians in Canton, Illinois, he was noticed by

a scout, and invited to try his hand at professional baseball.

\* After a swift climb through the minor leagues, Alexander quickly became a star for the Philadelphia Phillies, debuting in Boston against the Braves on April 15, 1911, and achieving a stellar record of 28 and 13 in his rookie year (1911). He won 30 or more games for three consecutive years (1915-1917).

\* After serving as the ace of the Phillies staff for his first two years in the majors, Alex gave way to another Nebraska native for the role of staff ace in 1913. Few people around here seem to know this, but that year a tall, lean knuckleballer by the name of Tom Seaton, who was born in Blair, Nebraska, led the Phillies and the National League with 27 wins that season. Between Seaton and Alexander, the two Nebraska natives tallied 49 of the team's 88 victories that season. After his spectacular 1913 season, Seaton jumped to the fledgling Federal League and played for the Brooklyn Tip Tops, and his career ended in the Pacific Coast League.

\* Alexander served his country in World War I during 1918. Alexander was injured during the War to End All Wars when he was sent to the front with the 342<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery for seven weeks of action, leaving him permanently deaf, and his service was later blamed for the epilepsy and rampant alcoholism that plagued Alexander all his life.

\* Although Alexander achieved 373 lifetime wins, mostly as a starter, and 90 career shutouts, second only to the great Walter Johnson, it was Alex's role as a relief pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1926 World Series against the Yankees for which he is probably most famous. After pitching the Cardinals to a 10-2 victory in Game 6, Alexander was reportedly out on the town that evening, celebrating in grand style. The following day, Game 7 of the Series, the Yankees loaded the bases in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning against the starting Cardinal pitcher, Jess Haines, and manager Rogers Hornsby called in a reportedly bleary-eyed Alexander from the bullpen. Ol' Pete struck out Tony Lazzeri to preserve the Cardinals 3-2 lead, and then retired the

Yankees in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> innings as well to clinch the Series.

\* When Alexander first began playing organized baseball, his nickname was "Dode." His secondary *nom de plume* reportedly came from an incident while on a hunting trip with buddies between seasons. After falling out of a wagon and landing face down in a puddle, one of his companions said that, "You look like alkali peat," and the nickname was shortened and became his career moniker.

\* After his major league career ended in 1930, short on money and long on thirst for spirits, Ol' Pete signed on with the famous bearded *House of David* touring baseball team, and pitched scores of exhibition games against the ageless Satchel Paige.

Having finished with Ol' Pete, I am currently listening to George Wills' new book, *Bunts*, on tape. Do yourself a favor and buy the book or the tapes. I exaggerate not a bit when I tell you that it is nothing short of poetry.

That's all for Week 17. Mazel tov.

Skipper