



From the Bullpen

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

Edition No. 21
August 18, 1998

R.I.P.: 1998 SENATORS

Holy freight train, Batman! Did anyone get the license number of that 150-car coal train that just steamed over me?

It seems like it was just a couple of weeks ago that the Senators were leading this thing somewhat comfortably, with hitting and pitching clicking on all cylinders, and the Senators forging something like a 200-point lead on the pack. In fact, it *was* just a couple of weeks ago. And now, not only have the Blues juggernauted to a commanding 319-point lead, the Senators are in the fight of their life with the Bombers, Chiefs and Tigers for a money spot in the 1998 campaign. How quickly the proverbial worm can turn.

I guess everybody has to take a few licks sometime during the season, but mine have all come during the past few weeks. Not only have several of my charges (Hunter, Gonzalez, Giambi, Christianson, Mantei and Osuna, to name a few) been kicking my carcass in the ol' Shell Game, but several soon-to-be former Senators pitchers have been getting their eye teeth kicked in on a regular basis. In addition to

my obvious problem with Rolando, the Senators have experienced beatings so severe from the Half Monty, Burba, Osuna and Christianson that there may be permanent internal organ impairment.

This Senatorial malfeasance would be bad enough if the status quo was still the status quo. However, coinciding with my team's death plunge has been the Blues' exhilarating climb to the very peak of Mt. Everest. Not only is the Big Unit back on track after the perfect trade, the rest of the Blues team – hitters and pitchers – are all absolutely scorching. For McBlunder's sake, let's just hope it's not too early.

In sun, it looks like Big Mac just about has this thing wrapped up. Just about. And now, without further delay, I give you the

WEEK 20 STANDINGS

1. Blues	7462
2. Senators	7143
3. Bombers	7049
4. Tigers	6917
5. Redbirds	6887
6. Chiefs	6821
7. Cubs*	6793
8. Red Sox	6647
9. Skipjacks	6494

10. Tribe	6279
11. Reds	6096
12. Pirates	5756

WEEK 20 POINT TOTALS

1. Blues	536
2. Redbirds	445
3. Red Sox	411
4. Reds	380
5. Tigers	379
6. Chiefs	364
7. Cubs*	330
8. Tribe	311
9. Pirates	298
10. Skipjacks	280
11. Senators	277
12. Bombers	273

The top hitting team for the week was the Blues with an improbable 305 points. McBlunder's arms also led the way with 232. The feeblest hitting team for Week 20 was the Tribe with 152 points, just behind the Skipjacks' anemic total of 167. Unlikely as it may seem with my stellar staff, the Senators' pitchers again trailed the pitching field with an unacceptable 59 points.

INDIVIDUAL TOTALS

Hitters

1. Mark McGwire	655
2. Alex Rodriguez	618
3. Sammy Sosa	609
4. Ken Griffey	577
5. Chipper Jones	576
6. Moises Alou	555
7. Vinny Castilla	552
8. Rafael Palmeiro	540
9. Albert Belle	530
10. Craig Biggio	527
11. Ray Durham	518
12. Greg Vaughan	517
13. Derek Jeter	515
14. Barry Bonds	505
15. Vladimir Guerrero	502

Pitchers

1. Greg Maddux	572
2. Kevin Brown	528
3. Robb Nen	475
4. Andy Ashby	463
5. Pedro Martinez	458
6. Trevor Hoffman	457
7. Tom Glavine	449
8. Curt Schilling	447
9. Jeff Shaw	436
10. Tom Gordon	413
11. Roger Clemens	408
12. Rick Reed	406
13. David Wells	405
14. David Cone	394
15. John Wetteland	389

BALLS AND STRIKES

™ It was a painful, hurtful week for the Senators. Take last Saturday, for example. With three starting pitchers (Burba, Rogers, Hampton) slated to take the hill, hopes were high for a rally which might close the gap with the Blues. Mid-afternoon, I clicked on Channel 31 to catch the early line scores, only to find that Cleveland had lost to Baltimore by a score of 9 to 8. So much for a good start. When I next checked the line scores at around 8:30 p.m., I found Hampton losing 4 to 3 and the Athletics locked up in a 7 to 7 tie with whoever they were playing, meaning another bad outing for Kenny "You Got To Know When To Fold Him" Rogers.

My gloom deepened when I clicked on *Baseball Tonight* at 9:30, as the program's theme this evening was highlights of the Blues: Clemens' 15 strikeouts; home run by Jason Kendall; home run by ex-Senator Taubensee; three-run dinger by the Big Cat; a pair of jacks by Moises "I Used To Hang It Up By This Time of Year" Alou; and so forth and so on. Pretty much taking away my incentive for getting up on Sunday morning.

™ Not to intentionally beat a dead horse (I just can't help myself), but I am amazed at how personal McBlunder's Blues' assault on the Senators has been. One night it was his pitcher, Andy Ashby, putting a thumping on Senator ace Greg Maddux. The next night it was shortstop Guterrez hitting a three-run triple off one of my alleged aces. And so on, ad nauseum.

™ To give you an idea of how bad Week 20 was for the Senators, the ESPN Hair-Raising Play of the Week was actually two plays involving Senators. The first depicted Ken Griffey, Jr., going deep over the center field fence to snag a home run away from Luis "Gonzo" Gonzales of the Senators. The second play involved an outfielder from another team (I've blocked out who it was, possibly as a defense mechanism) going deep over the right field wall to snag another Gonzo home run out of the stands. Very nice. Even ESPN is focusing on negatives on the Senator team.

™ As long as we are on that theme, the only *Baseball Tonight* highlight I caught on Monday night of this week was of the Yankees-Royals game. First I saw Blues star Bernie Williams going Yard in the early innings, and I'm thinking it was a three-run jack. The cruel ESPN highlight editor then flashes to Senator Scott Brosius taking a ball deep, only to be snagged off the wall in an acrobatic catch by yet another Senatorial antagonist. What can a guy do when all the forces of the universe are working against him?

™ I failed last issue to mention that during Itchie's grim Week 19 he had a rather unpleasant experience with one Steve "Blood on the Trachsel." It seems that

Steve laid down some sanguinous discharge on Itchie's tracks, running – not walking – his Skipjacks backward to the tune of 28 points. I believe Stevie's line score was 1/3 IP, 5 H, 9 R, 7 ER, 3 BB, and 0 K. Trachsel's game ERA was a whopping 189.00, raising his overall ERA to 4.29. Ouch.

™ If I'm not mistaken, two of Trachsel's pitching colleagues on the Skipjacks, Charles Nagy and John Lieber, may have done a bit of blood-letting of their own for the Skipjacks during Week 20. Am I right, Itchie?

™ No matter how many times I analyze it, I can't for the life of me figure out why Dunderbelly traded his 1st round draft pick, Kevin Brown, to Rube for Mariano Rivera. Wasn't this the same Kevin Brown that U-belly so badly wanted that he snapped him up in the very first round? Isn't this the very same Kevin Brown that had developed a new split-finger pitch and was destined to win at least 20 games for the known contender Padres? And isn't this the same Kevin Brown that is now breathing down Maddux's neck for the lead in HSL pitching points? In case you haven't figured it out, the answers are yes, yes and yes. I wouldn't be nearly so bitter about the whole deal if Rubie's Redbirds weren't starting to make a case for a money-finish in the league, but they are, so I am.

™ My team's pitching malfeasance last week included negative or nearly-so performances from Rolando Arojo (-12), Dave Burba (-15), Matt Mantei (-8), Antonio Osuna (-3), Jeff Montgomery (-4), Steve Woodard (1), and Greg Maddux (1). What a staff!

™ Couple of random thoughts. What happened to Juan Gonzalez in his quest to set a new RBI mark? He has something like five post-All-Star break RBIs. Can Greg Maddux win yet another Cy Young? Does anyone realize that David Wells is 15-and-2? He may well be the AL Cy Young this year. And does anyone realize that the Yankees are on pace to win an astounding 120 games? History in the making.

FENWAY

During last week's business trip to Boston and Syracuse, I had a chance to sneak out to God's place – Fenway Park – to catch most of the Royals-Red Sox game. Arriving in the 3rd inning, I picked up a ticket cheap from a disheveled and possibly intoxicated scalper outside, and once inside was delighted to find myself sitting in Section 22, nine rows behind the home team dugout on the first base side. I was closer to Mo Vaughn than Mo was to Garciparra. What colossal luck.

The best way to describe my Fenway experience is exhilarating. Truly a great place to watch a game and the people. New Englanders everywhere, recognizable immediately by appearance if not by accent. L. L. Bean apparel for protection against the cool August night. Floppy hats. Ruddy complexions. George Plimpton look-alikes. And of course, Bawwwssstunn accents.

Ahh, Fenway Pahk. The comfort of the orange and blue Citgo sign. The irreplaceable Green Mahnsteh. They can only build a new one – they can never replace it.

Although my trip to Fenway did not prove to be a boost to the Senators hopes – Nomar, Vaughn and Valentin were a combined Oh-for-11, Hattenberg sat on the bench, and the Royals scored a boatload of runs in the 9th to take Monty out of a save situation – it was still a great night to be at the ballpark. A few of my random thoughts and observations:

☞ It's time for the Eck to hang it up. When he entered the game in the 7th or 8th inning, the fans cheered wildly. When he immediately loaded up the bases, the fans started to turn on him. "Geez, Eck. It's Luis Rivera, for God's sake. Anybody can get him out!"

☞ Greg Swindell seems to be building up a nice base of enemy fans in Boston. Must be that union versus scab mentality in Beantown. When Swindell gave up a couple of hits, the character sitting across the aisle from me yelled, "Get Joe Sambito out of there!" Cracked me up.

☞ Jim Corsi is a body double of Roger Clemens. They love their big, burly pitchers in Beantown.

☞ It seems to be a bit of a tradition in Boston to yell "Umpy" when the man in blue blows a call. At first this annoyed me just a bit, but I found that this handle soon grew on me. Just demeaning enough.

☞ Since he is now playing third base, I didn't have a chance to watch John Valentin go for another unassisted triple play. But I'll never forget the first one!

☞ Next year the All-Star game is at Fenway. Can you imagine what that will be like? Man, do I want to be there!

TWO IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

For those of you that have not heard, Itchie is once again gainfully employed after being run out of a second First Data Company in as many years. His new employer: Sitel. I'm not clear on whether Itchie will be one of those annoying telemarketers who call to interrupt your dinner each evening to try to sell you light bulbs or tickets to a V.A. fundraiser and such, or more suitably, one of the company's many lap-dog vice-presidents who spend their workweek shining apples, buttering up, and browning up their noses. Whatever the case may be, please join me in wishing good luck to our brother Itchie in his new employment, and may your telephone sales commissions be bountiful.

Our second announcement is one of congratulations to B.T., the affable, voluble and apparently virile owner of the Lincoln Chiefs. For those of you who have not yet heard, B.T. parlayed the case of Viagra that he bought through the Internet black market into another pregnancy. At around Christmas time this year, B.T. will have the distinction of having sired the youngest and oldest children among his Hot Stove League peers. Congratulations!

TRIVIA QUESTION FOR MR. BOB

Who played Sonny Drysdale on the *Beverly Hillbillies*? Answer next week.

GOING TO KANSAS CITY

McBlunder, Buser and I are planning on attending an afternoon game in Kansas City on Tuesday, September 15, 1998, where we will watch the Royals hook up with the Athletics, and pay homage and tribute to the soon-to-be-crowned HSL Champion. Who else wants to go? Let us know.

See you next week.

Skipper