



# From the Bullpen

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

Edition No. 22  
August 26, 1998

## BLUES PAD LEAD, HSL TITLE WITHIN GRASP; REDBIRDS JOIN RACE FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PLACE

When you're hot, you're hot. To everything, there is a season, and this is the season of McBlunder's Blues.

McBlunder's ecclesiastical quest was furthered with yet another magnificent week during the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the 1998 Hot Stove League season. Even after absorbing two severe beatings by members of his pitching staff on Sunday night (Andy Ashby and Carlos Perez must have lost something like 40 points between them, if my guess is right), the volcanic Blues posted a 389-point total during Week 21 to increase their lead on the 2<sup>nd</sup> place Senators and hence the field to a virtually-uncatchable 383 points. Led by the white-hot Jason Kendall at the plate and Roger Clemens on the mound, the Blues served notice that they do not plan to give quarter

to the field during the stretch run, no pun intended.

Apart from the Blues' happy news during Week 21, the Senators' woes continue, as they appear determined to push the envelope for the greatest post-All-Star slide ever by a leading HSL squad. With a moribund pitching total of 94 points and team total of 325, the Senators continued to slide down the slippery slope. With the Chiefs (468), Tigers (432), and Redbirds (425) all gaining by three figures on the Senators during Week 21, it is now conceivable – gasp – that the Senators could fail to place in the top three for the season, an unthinkable proposition just a few weeks ago before the Senators' monumental collapse.

But enough negative thinking. Let's take a look at the standings through last Sunday:

### WEEK 21 STANDINGS

1. Blues	7851
2. Senators	7468
3. Bombers	7396
4. Tigers	7349
5. Redbirds	7311
6. Chiefs	7288
7. Cubs*	7129
8. Red Sox	6897

9. Skipjacks	6886
10. Tribe	6510
11. Reds	6445
12. Pirates	6072

And now, the

### WEEK 21 POINT TOTALS

1. Chiefs	468
2. Tigers	432
3. Redbirds	425
4. Skipjacks	393
5. Blues	389
6. Reds	349
7. Bombers	347
8. Cubs	336
9. Senators	325
10. Pirates	316
11. Red Sox	250
12. Tribe	231

The top hitting team for the week was the Tigers with 278 points. In that department, the Tribe brought up the rear with a hurtful total of 153 points. The top pitching team for the week was the resurgent Chiefs with 252 points, while the Red Sox arms could manage only 64 points for the week.

The top hitting team for the season is the Tigers with 5019 points. The Tribe

trails with a woeful total of 3744. The top pitching team for the season is the Blues with 2993, just ahead of the Redbirds' total of 2984. The Pirates staff trails the pack with 1693 pitching points for the year.

The top hitter for the week was Craig Biggio of the Tigers with 56 points. The top pitcher was Pedro Martinez of the Chiefs with 58.

## INDIVIDUAL TOTALS

For the first time since the third week of the season, Mark McGwire is not listed as the league MVP of the year. Instead, Sammy Sosa is listed as the league MVP, with 683 points, including bonus points. It seems to me that McGwire probably has more points than this with bonus points included, but perhaps he has dropped from the lead because he has been traded to a different team. More on this staggering transaction later.

In spite of last Sunday's brutal shelling by those always-tough Dodgers, Greg Maddux continues to be the league Cy Young leader with 604 points. However, with Kevin Brown's stellar performance of the other night, and with Roger Clemens coming on like gangbusters, I look for a change here very soon.

## TOP HITTERS (excluding bonus points)

1. Mark McGwire	659
2. Sammy Sosa	643
3. Alex Rodriguez	635
4. Chipper Jones	608
5. Ken Griffey	594
6. Moises Alou	583
(T) Vinny Castilla	583
(T) Craig Biggio	583
9. Albert Belle	569
10. Greg Vaughn	561
11. Derek Jeter	554
12. Rafael Palmeiro	536
13. Juan Gonzalez	542
14. Barry Bonds	537
15. Andres Galarraga	533

## TOP PITCHERS

1. Greg Maddux	594
2. Kevin Brown	553
3. Pedro Martinez	516
4. Trevor Hoffman	488
5. Curt Schilling	483
6. Robb Nen	480
7. Andy Ashby	456
8. Jeff Shaw	445
9. Roger Clemens	443
10. Tom Glavine	439
(T) Tom Gordon	439
12. David Wells	438
13. Rick Reed	424
14. David Cone	413
15. John Wetteland	407

## BALLS AND STRIKES

™ Most of you by now have heard about the big trade, one of the more significant ones in memory. Big Guy, heavy on hitting points, swapped Big Mac to Rube for the hottest pitcher in the National League, Kevin Brown. On the day that the trade was consummated, Big Mac broke out of his slump with two home runs, both of which accrued to the Tigers' bank account. However, Big Mac smacked a couple more taters later on in the week, all for the benefit of the Redbirds. Last night, Kevin Brown hurled yet another quality start for his 17<sup>th</sup> win. So far, both Rube and Big Guy look like geniuses on this trade, but *FTB* will reserve judgment on this until a bit later in the season.

™ Can McBlunder's boys be any hotter than they are at present? Every stinking night, *Baseball Tonight* is a series of Blues highlight plays. Last night it was the Rocket with a 18-strikeout, 3-hit, no-walk performance against the Royals. By my calculations, Clemens tallied 61 points for the Blues via this effort, including his 18 bonus points. The night before, it was the once-hapless Moises Alou going 3-for-3 with a home run. And seemingly every night, Ray Durham and Jason Kendall and Eddie Alfonzo go 3-for-4 with a couple of runs and RBIs. When will this incredible roll end?

™ In fact, the Blues' team fortune has been so good that I suspect that McBlunder has been doing some bargaining with the devil, sensing that this may be his one

chance to win this thing. As suggested in his guest column a few weeks ago, I look for McBlunder's professional career to further crumble, as well as his personal life. I won't be surprised to find McBlunder's name in the personal bankruptcy filings; to hear that his spouse has run off with a female golf pro named Hilda; or that A.J. has opened fire on a crowded classroom with an AK47. But if this is the price that he has to pay for the 1998 HSL title, so be it. Lucky stiff.

™ Not that each of you are closely following my team's woes on a daily basis, but I imagine that you are at least aware of the severe beating that my ace, Greg Maddux, took on Sunday night at the hands of the Dodgers. With an otherwise-miserable pitching week to that point, and secure in the knowledge that Maddux was 9-and-3 lifetime against the Dodgers, and had always fared well at pitcher-friendly Chavez Ravine, I looked forward to Sunday night's televised game with unfettered anticipation. I missed the first inning while swimming with my boys, but came in to find that Maddux already had a 4-to-0 lead over the Dodgers, with know-it-all broadcaster Joe Morgan predicting another Maddux victory. Well, at least on that point, he was correct. I then proceeded to watch Gary Sheffield hit a bullet off Maddux's first pitch in the second for a line-drive home run to left field; followed by Eric Karros' crushing opposite-field home run; followed by a walk on four pitchers to Bobby Bonilla; followed by a greasy infield hit by Grudzielanek; followed by yet another Dodger hit. Five consecutive baserunners without an out. Back-to-back jacks against Maddux for the first time in his career. Disgusted, I went outside to do some chores.

Twenty minutes later, curiosity having gotten the best of me, I turned my vehicle radio to the station which broadcasts ESPN games, only to hear the announcer boldly announce that "**GREG MADDUX IS GETTING LIT UP!**" With a certain amount of satisfaction, it seemed. I then learned that Maddux had given up another home run to Eric Karros (whom, I might add, sucks), and that the score was now 6-to-5 in favor of the Dodgers. Enough, already. (Not being able to take anymore, I

didn't learn until the following morning that Maddux actually got the win, after giving up 7 earned runs in five innings, raising his season ERA from 1.65 to 1.91. Even with the win, Maddux ended up with a negative one-half point for the night.)

™ I have to quit watching Maddux pitch. For about the last six outings, each time I have tuned in, Maddux has been cruising along with a shutout or a low-run, low-hit performance. Then, under the pressure of the angry glare from his HSL manager, Maddux promptly does something very un-Maddux, walking a batter here, giving up a jack there, and generally fouling in his mess kit.

™ What exactly have I done to anger the baseball gods anyway? Okay, so I forgot to mention to my wife that I went to the Red Sox game in Boston last week, when she asked how my Wednesday evening went on the phone or that the Pirates will be in town next week for my deposition trip to Pittsburg. Like Bill, I didn't volunteer information. No reason to let the wife think that these business trips are anything but grueling, pressure-packed and involuntary.

You see, it's not just Maddux. My entire pitching staff has gone to hell in a handbasket, and I have never seen the likes of the Shell Game that is going on with the Senators right now. Ausmus is batting a buck-twenty for the minors, demote him to the minors. Ausmus goes 4-for-4 with five RBIs. Promote Ausmus, demote Ordonez. Ausmus sits out the next couple of games, Ordonez goes on a tear. Demote Jose Hernandez, Jose goes 4-for-4. Demote Jason Christiansen, Christiansen racks up two holds and two saves. Demote a slumping Luis Gonzalez, Gonzo goes 3-for-4 with a couple of runs and RBIs. Promote Hunter, Hunter goes back into the deep freeze. Bottom line? This is my last season. I can't take it anymore.

™ Big Mac and Big Guy ventured to Wrigley Field last weekend to see the Cubs play the Giants on Friday, and the Astros on Saturday. McBlunder got to watch the Big Unit throw a gem for a win on Saturday, even while the wind was blowing out. That same day, as I watched helplessly on

TV, I saw Derek Bell pop up a pitch off Trachsel, and head toward 1<sup>st</sup> in obvious disgust, only to see the wind carry the ball into the stands for yet another Blues home run. Bully for you, McBlunder.

™ I picked up the Omaha *World-Herald* the other morning, and broke into an immediate ear-to-ear smile as I read the headline, "Giambi slams three home runs." Eager to look to the box score and see just how many points Jason had scored for the Senators, in addition to his 30 bonus points: He didn't. Scanning down the page, I found that it was really Jason's younger brother Jeremy Giambi who had hit three home runs for the Omaha Royals, leading them to victory. Like I said, why are the baseball gods doing this to me?

™ Bulletin: McBlunder took Moises Alou as the ninth pick in the 9<sup>th</sup> round. Earlier in that same round, Denny took Jose Cruz, Jr., Blunderbelly took Al Osuna, Big Guy took Jose Mesa, and Itchie took Steve Finley. One round earlier, Denny took J.T. Snow, Shamu\* took Neife Perez, Big Guy took Nomo, Magpie took Jaret Wright, and Itchie took Charles Nagy. My point: Don't you all feel silly now?

™ One final sour grape from the Senators. I see that Kerry Ligtenberg, the stellar closer for the Blues, now has 383 pitching points, ranking him 7<sup>th</sup> on the list of closers, just ahead of Mariano Rivera and Troy Percival. Few of you know this, but the Senators actually picked up Ligtenberg in the free agent draft about one or two weeks ahead of McBlunder. However, this was the week that there was a computer glitch or some damned thing Skokie, Illinois, and Bill James scrapped the entire draft, even though I had picked up Ligtenberg fair and square. Bottom line? If McBlunder wins this thing, there's a foul stench of taint to it. Maybe not enough for an asterisk, á la the Cubs\* in 1994, but at least enough for an obelisk.

## BOOK REPORT

I just finished reading a pretty fair baseball book authored by Roger Kahn, better known as the author of *The Boys of Summer*, a baseball literature classic from

the 1970s. Kahn's new book is known as *Memories of Summer*, and is a mish-mash of the author's memories of boyhood, baseball, and baseball journalism. A pretty good read, and one which I recommend, with the caveat that the book gets off to a slow start as Kahn revisits his childhood and his relationship with his father in a couple of early chapters which border on maudlin. Eventually, though, Kahn provides some terrific stories of his dealings – first as a beat writer for a New York newspaper, and later as a contributing author to several different magazines – with Leo Durocher, Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays. Good stuff.

Kahn's book contains a couple of priceless baseball quotes about former Indian pitching great Early Wynn, which I repeat here:

*(Early) Wynn seemed to enjoy knocking down hitters, watching them dive into dirt. When an interviewer wondered if he would throw at his own mother, Wynn had a quick reply. "I'd have to," he said. "Mom was a pretty good curve ball hitter."*

*Casey Stengel once said of Wynn: "If there was one ballgame that I had to have and I could pitch anybody in our league, it would be the big, mean feller that pitches for Cleveland and which is named ... wait ... I got it ... Wynn."*

Having completed *Memories of Summer*, I am now reading a marvelous book by one of our nation's preeminent baseball writers, Tom Boswell of the *Washington Post*, known as *The Heart of the Order*. More on this book later. For now, I will whet your appetite a bit by including with this issue of *FTB* a copy of one of Boswell's recent articles in the *Washington Post*, called *When Moose Comes Calling*, dealing with the Mike Mussina versus Ken Griffey, Jr., pitcher versus hitter, relationship. The best part is Boswell's inclusion of a great story about a great pitcher from yesteryear, Steve Carlton:

*Every baseball era has its matchups that fans circle on the calendar well*

*in advance. Ted Williams dreamed about facing Bob Feller. Don Drysdale dreaded Willie McCovey. Almost nobody can hit Greg Maddux – except Tony Gwynn, whose career average against him is over .400. And Johnny Bench read Steve Carlton’s mind. Once, in a duck blind in the offseason, Carlton aimed at the empty sky, fired a shot and said, “That one’s for Bench.”*

## **SAME TIME, LAST YEAR**

For frame of reference, last year at this time, the Senators held a 615-point lead (8070-7455) over the Redbirds. Over the next three weeks, the Redbirds were able to narrow that margin to about 200 points, before the Senatros were finally able to wrap it up during the final few weeks of the season. My point? It ain’t over till it’s over. Just ask Yogi.

Skipper