



From the Bullpen

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

Edition No. 23
September 3, 1998

BIG MAC CLOSES IN

No, I'm not talking about Mark McGwire who, as a member of the Redbirds squad, does nothing for me, even as he is about to break the most coveted record in sports. I am of course talking about the once-beloved McBlunder, of whom I used to be quite fond when he was still a harmless Hot Stove League hack vying for a rare upper division finish.

Now that the Elongated One has all but put the 1998 HSL title race to a close, I find him to be a bit annoying. Not that he calls frequently to boast of his team's exploits a lá Possum in his heyday. Rather, just watching his team's nightly hoarding of the *Baseball Tonight* highlights is enough to convert friend to foe. Just knowing that on a nightly basis McBlunder must be hissing *Yessssss*, and salivating wildly at each of a Baker's Dozen highlights tends to raise my blood pressure to dangerous levels.

I wish I was big enough to rise above it and simply be happy for the perennial pessimist McBlunder, but by golly, winning my second HSL crown last year has done nothing to diminish my insatiable thirst for another drink from the Cup.

But alas, it will apparently have to wait another season. Through twenty-two weeks of the year, McBlunder's lead has reached near-mythical proportions, as he heads into the tail stretch with a commanding 8288 to 7825 bulge over the second-place Senators and the rest of the pack. Through twenty-two weeks, the standings are thus:

WEEK 22 STANDINGS

1. Blues	8288
2. Senators	7825
3. Tigers	7749
4. Bronx Bombers	7743
5. Chiefs	7682
6. Redbirds	7640
7. Cubs*	7502
8. Red Sox	7295
9. Skipjacks	7232
10. Reds	6791
11. Tribe	6731
12. Pirates	6376

McBlunder's squad led the pack during Week 22 with a whopping total of 437 points, ahead of the torrid Tigers with 400, who supplanted the Bombers as the third-place team, with the Senators squarely in their sights. The rejuvenated Red Sox posted the third-best week with 399 points, followed by the Chiefs with 394. Round-

ing out the league for the week were the Cubs* with 373, the Senators with 357, the Bombers with 347, the Reds and Skipjacks with 346 apiece, Redbirds with 329, the Pirates with 305, and the fast-sinking Tribe with a pathetic total of 221.

The top batting team for the week was the Chiefs with a powerful 316-point week, ahead of the Reds with 300. The anemic Tribe hitters trailed the pack, again, with 177 points.

The top pitching squad for the week was the Cubs* with 167, led by the hard-charging Sterling Hitchcock with 57 points. The Blues, led by the scorching Roger Clemens (97 points) were a close second in pitching with 166. At the other end of the universe, the slumping Tribe staff could muster only 44 pitching points for the week, just a titch better than the 46-point total posted by the Reds.

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

Hitters

1. Mark McGwire	687
2. Sammy Sosa	680
3. Alex Rodriguez	676
4. Ken Griffey	633
5. Albert Belle	620

6. Vinny Castilla	614
7. Chipper Jones	613
8. Moises Alou	612
(T) Craig Biggio	612
10. Derek Jeter	595

Pitchers

1. Greg Maddux	608
2. Kevin Brown	590
3. Pedro Martinez	544
4. Roger Clemens	521
5. Trevor Hoffman	510
6. Curt Schilling	504
7. Robb Nen	493
8. Tom Glavine	478
9. Tom Gordon	463
10. John Wetteland	450

SIZZLERS AND FIZZLERS

Each season brings with it its share of pleasant surprises and unpleasant disappointments. Not merely coincidental, two of the teams at or near the top – the Blues and the Tigers – have had more than their share of surprising overachievers, while two teams near the bottom – the Reds and Tribe – have had more than their share of busts. Here are my picks for this year's biggest flops and flukes for 1998:

Biggest Flops

Player	Team	Round	Pts.
1. Frank "Big Tub of Goo" Thomas	Reds	1	469
2. Chuck Knoblauch	Cubs*	1	469
3. Robbie Alomar	Reds	2	422
4. Larry Walker	Red Sox	2	472
5. John Smoltz	Tribe	2	330
6. Chan Ho Park	Red Sox	3	318
7. Bobby Higginson	Tribe	3	449
8. Mark Wohlers	Pirates	6	—
9. Darryl Kile	Pirates	7	141
10. Brad Radke	Tribe	8	241

Tricko had the misfortune of having picked the Big Hurt in the 1st and the Always-Hurt Alomar in the 2nd. Possum's pick of Chan Ho in the 3rd has proved to be the most foolhardy pick in the early going of the draft, as projected by the eleven other managers on draft day. SloPay's pick of Darryl Kile in the 7th round got exactly

what it deserved, given his relocation to Coors Field.

Biggest Flukes

Player	Team	Round	Pts.
1. Sammy Sosa	Bombers	7	680
2. Moises Alou	Blues	9	612
3. Ray Durham	Blues	8	564
4. Vladimir Guerrero	Red Sox	8	559
5. Jose Offerman	Tigers	20	539
6. Jason Kendall	Blues	11	509
7. Fernando Vina	Bombers	19	501
8. Matt Stairs	Tigers	15	488
9. Carlos Delgado	Tribe	FA	473
10. Bret Boone	Blues	24	468
11. Tom Gordon	Tigers	17	463
12. Mike Jackson	Redbirds	18	409
13. Alan Ashby	Blues	16	441
14. David Wells	Bombers	9	441
15. Kerry Ligtenberg	Blues	FA	396

As one can readily discern, McBlunder had the Midas touch this year, picking up Alou, Durham, Kendall and Ashby in relatively late rounds, each of whom is having a career year for the benefit of McBlunder. The Tigers, with Jose Offerman, Matt Stairs and Flash Gordon overachieving, have avoided a near-bottom finish by virtue of what can only be described as blind-ass luck.

Apart from the above anomalies, all Hot Stove Leaguers should be congratulated on their remarkable judging of talent. Of the twenty top hitters in the league, thirteen were picked in the 1st, 2nd or 3rd rounds, and fifteen out of the twenty went in the first five rounds. Only Sosa, Alou, Greg Vaughn, Ray Durham and Vladimir Guerrero of the top twenty hitting scorers eluded selection in the first five rounds.

Similarly, of the top ten pitchers, seven were selected in the first four rounds of the draft, with the top three pitchers all going in the 1st round and the fourth-best hurler going in the 2nd. Only Flash Gordon out of the top ten pitchers was not taken in the first five rounds of the draft.

BALLS AND STRIKES

™ Blues aces Roger Clemens (521) and Randy Johnson (433) have both been blast furnace hot since the All-Star break,

coming out of nowhere to now be the fourth and ninth highest scoring starting pitchers, not including their bonus points for strikeouts. According to our Week 22 printout, McBlunder's pitchers have a total of 124 bonus points. I suspect that 20 or 30 of these are for All-Star appearances for Blues pitchers, which means that 94 or 104 represent bonus points for strikeouts, probably about evenly divided between Clemens and Johnson. If these bonus points for strikeouts were added to their totals, they might be ranked No. 3 and 4 on the list of top starters.

™ How has that Chipper Jones (No. 6 in the league among hitters with 613 points)-for-Benes and Sele swap panned out for you so far, Shamu*? Ouch.

™ Not that I would ever play Monday-morning quarterback, but I do wonder why SloPay has white-hot Juan Gonzalez and Shawn Green (476 points, 39th best hitter) in his *minor* leagues, at least as of last Sunday. Hell-o! Is anyone out there?

™ Not only did Senator ace Greg Maddux get thumped again last night in his head-to-head duel with Randy Johnson, in his two previous outings, Maddux gave up 16 hits in 12 innings and had a 7.5 ERA for those two starts. What in Hell's Bells is going on?

™ I'm guessing that when the Tribe GM traded Kevin Brown to Rube, he had higher expectations for the rest of his starters, and he was not planning on Bartolo to get a weekly Colonoscopy like last night's beating by the Angels (11P, 7ER). You can never have enough starting pitching, Blunderbelly, never.

SKIPPER'S WHINE LIST

WARNING! *If any of the readership is tired of hearing about Skipper's second-half woes, skip past this section to avoid being intensely nauseated.*

I've got plenty to bitch about this week, my friends. Hear me out.

First of all, *Baseball Tonight's* anti-Senator theme continues. First they tease me by showing Jason Giambi hitting a flare into the gap, only to have it snagged by a diving outfielder. The same night, Maddux was on his way to win No. 18, when Blues closer Kerry Ligtenberg sacrifices a solo home run (minus 3 points) to take away 6 points from the Senators. The next night, Blues third-sacker Alfonzo takes Cub* reliever Shaw downtown in the 9th to steal away a win from Senator starter Brian Bohanon. The night before, *Baseball Tonight* shows Senator stopper Troy Percival throwing cheese to fan a Yankee in the bottom of the 9th, preserving a 7-to-6 win, but only after Percival gave up three runs to tighten the game up.

I could spend the rest of this issue and six or seven more talking about more *Baseball Tonight* assaults on the Senators, but you get the point.

I am loathe to lapse into Possum-like whining about the bad breaks that my team has had of late, but some things are not best left unspoken. Here's my grievance this week. The Senators pitching staff has a composite ERA of 3.74, not shabby at all and fourth best in the league. So why the hell do my pitchers have a composite won-loss record of 72-and-70, barely breaking even? The Tribe, with a similar but worse team ERA of 3.79, has an 87-68 record. The Bombers, with a 4.09 ERA, have a record of 81-and-51. The Tigers, with a 4.17 ERA, are a collective 72-and-66. And the positively ugly Cubs* pitching staff has a bloated ERA of 4.40, third worst in the league, but a sparking won-lost record of 84-and-74. Waaaaaa. I can't get a break in this league.

And finally, how about a Week 22 Shell Game Report for the Senators. Though it pains me to relive this nasty business, I am hopeful that it will be cathartic. Let's start with Senator pitcher Steve Woodard. After two or three consecutive starts in which Woody did an impressive imitation of a self-igniting Molotov cocktail, he was of course banished to the Senator farm system. He promptly responded with a 22-point outing. And then take Rolando Arojo. After being similarly banished to the minors after being

similarly *en fuego*, Rolando similarly responded with a 27-point positive outing last Sunday. And Senator arsonist Dave Burba? Twenty-three points for the Senators' farm club.

What about the Senators hitters, you ask? All right, so you didn't ask. I'm telling you anyway. Luis Gonzalez, a permanent fixture in the Senators minor league constellation, couldn't be hotter. Forty-seven points in the last ten days while down on the farm. And how about Maglio and Jose Hernandez since their recent promotion to The Show? Virtually hitless, and moonwalking the Senators backwards on a nightly basis.

'Nuff said.

THIS AND THAT

I see from last week's transaction report that Possum finally promoted Omar Daal, possibly the hottest pitcher in baseball since adopting Satchell Paige's delivery. The question is, how many points did Possum leave in the minors by being so slow to pull the trigger?

In the same vein, Rube finally promoted the torrid Roberto Kelly, whom I quite frankly thought had been out of baseball for two or three seasons. Not only that, but Buser promoted him while demoting Mark Clark to the minors, going against his word and thereby avoiding Clark's most recent implosion.

And while we're on the subject, I see that B.T. likewise went back on his word and promoted the scalding-hot Andruw Jones, only about two weeks after swearing to me that Jones would never see his starting lineup again. Fibber.

Congrats to McBlunder on making the Bill James Top 15 for Week 22. Do us proud, Big Mac.

Senator Never-Evers. Three more for the list: David Segui, Brian Hunter, and Luis "Circus Geek" Gonzalez. And while you're at it, throw Burba Shave on the list.

NOTES FROM IRON CITY

Most of this week's issue was penned while I watched a rather lackluster 2-1 Pirates loss to the Diamondbacks at Three Rivers on Wednesday night. A few random scratchings from Three Rivers:

-- My last visit here was on a rainy night in April of 1992, as B.T. and I saw the Pirates best the Montreal Expos as Omahan Tim Burke was torched during a late-inning relief appearance.

-- Only 12,010 people here for Wednesday night's game. There is no doubt that this *is* a football city. I really wonder whether Pittsburghers will embrace the team when their new ballpark – tentatively dubbed *Pirate Park* – opens in 2001.

-- Andy Benes had a perfect game broken up in the bottom of the 4th when Tony Womack lined a triple into the gap. Senator antagonist Jason Kendall then hit a sacrifice fly to score the Pirates' only run. The game went into extra innings when the Diamondbacks tied it in the top of the 9th, which the Diamondbacks won with a single run in the top of the 11th. If there were 3,000 people left at the end of the game, I'd be surprised.

-- According to the banners in the outfield, the Pirates have been World Series champions five times, in 1909, 1925, 1960, 1971, and 1979. The Pirates, of course, were also in the very first World Series in 1903, falling to the Boston Beaneaters of the upstart American League.

-- It's definitely time for a new ballpark in Pittsburgh. About the only redeeming characteristics are the fact that it is located at the confluence of the Allegheny, Ohio, and Monongahela Rivers, and that you can get a cold micro-brewed beer at the Bullpen Lounge in left field. On the other side of the ledger, among other things, are the horrible cookie-cutter design, the plastic turf, and the Nazi ushers who repeatedly Turked me from the Field Box area in spite of scores of open seats all around me.

From the Bullpen
September 3, 1998
Page 4

Next week: It's looking like more Beef Stew, the way this week has been going for my squad. 1999? Get here.

Skipper