



From the Bullpen

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BLUES EXTEND LEAD; TIGERS TAKE 2nd; REDBIRDS ON ROLL

It is now a *fait accompli*: The Blues are going to win their first-ever Hot Stove League title. With an insurmountable lead of 544 points over the 2nd-place Tigers (that's right, I said the 2nd-place Tigers), the only thing that can keep the Blues from etching their name on The Cup is – someone making off with The Cup. Say, now, that's an idea.

With three weeks to go in the season, the standings look like this:

WEEK 23 STANDINGS

1. Blues	8670
2. Tigers	8126
3. Senators	8094
4. Chiefs	8032
5. Bombers	8031
6. Redbirds	8029
7. Cubs*	7869
8. Red Sox	7680
9. Skipjacks	7595
10. Reds	7071

11. Tribe	6946
12. Pirates	6612

WEEK 12 TOTALS

1. Redbirds	390
2. Red Sox	385
3. Tigers	377
4. Blues	382
5. Cubs*	367
6. Skipjacks	363
7. Chiefs	350
8. Bombers	290
9. Reds	280
10. Senators	269
11. Pirates	236
12. Tribe	215

Actually, as those of you who are following this thing know, the above standings are old news. As the cocksure pilot of the Crimson Chirpers made manifest to me upon my return from the Labor Day weekend, the Redbirds have now catapulted past the Bombers, Chiefs and Senators and occupy the 3rd place in the standings. With yet another putrid performance from Senators so-called ace Greg Maddux last evening, it does not look like there is much chance for a late-season reversal of fortune. It appears that the Senators are destined for a 4th or 5th place finish in '98, at best.

INDIVIDUAL TOTALS

Hitters

1. Mark McGwire	733
2. Sammy Sosa	717
3. Alex Rodriguez	691
4. Albert Belle	677
5. Vinny Castilla	653
6. Craig Biggio	650
7. Ken Griffey, Jr.	648
8. Chipper Jones	634
9. Juan Gonzalez	631
10. Moises Alou	629

Pitchers

1. Kevin Brown	614
2. Greg Maddux	604
3. Pedro Martinez	559
4. Roger Clemens	551
5. Trevor Hoffman	541
6. Curt Schilling	528
7. Robb Nen	510
8. Tom Glavine	490
9. David Wells	483
10. Tom Gordon	476

Interesting to note that a shrewd Hot Stove League manager could have had the top four hitters on his team by virtue of the initial draft, since A-Rod went in the 1st, Albert Belle in the 2nd, Mark McGwire in the 3rd, and Sammy Sosa in the 7th. Come

to think of it, that *should have* been my team.

Interesting what the home run race has done for the point totals of McGwire and Sosa, who are one-two in hitting. Will this elevate their status to 1st-round draft choices in 1999, or will everyone recognize it for the one-year fluke that it is?

Tough to make that Pirates' starting lineup. Juan Gonzalez has 149 RBIs on the year, 631 HSL points to rank him 9th, and the guy can't make his way into SloPay's starting lineup. Just another example of the man trying to keep 'em down.

You will note that Kevin Brown is now the top-ranked pitcher in the league, skipping past Greg Maddux. In fact, when bonus points for strikeouts are figured in, I imagine that Pedro, Roger and Curt may all be ahead of the slumping Maddux.

BALLS AND STRIKES

™ I was anxious to catch *Baseball Tonight* Monday evening, not only to get their spin on McGwire's 61st jack but also to see how the Senators players had fared. As happens rarely, I watched *Baseball Tonight* without any inkling about how my own players were doing that day. Before a single word was spoken about any Senators player, I had to suffer through Blues highlights on Randy Johnson (shutout, 14 strikeouts), Derek Bell (solo homer in support of Johnson), and Elfardo Algonzo (two-run jack to propel the Mets to a win); and back-to-back-to-back highlights of the Crimson Chirpers, featuring McGwire, Griffey (two HR, six RBI) and Bell (HR). Then, and only then, was I able to find out that John Valentin, my wasted 4th round draft pick, hit a solo shot to beat the Yankees. Big freakin' deal.

™ It's truly hard for me to accept that this band of slugs called the Senators is the same team that had a 200-point lead on McBlunder only five or six weeks ago. Of course, it would have been nice if Greg, Damon, Rolando and Dave had told me that they were planning on taking the second half of the season off. Bastards. And as for David Segui, if ever there was

so gutless a player as him (his average game nowadays for the Senators is 0-for-1 as a pinch hitter), he hath never worn a Senators uniform.

™ For those of you who have not yet heard, our own lovable Shamu* was in the audience in St. Louis last Saturday to see McGwire hit his 60th home run. Must have been thrilling, Shamu* In terms of experiences by Hot Stove Leaguers, it probably ranks just behind seeing Mike Flannigan get torched for twelve runs in late-inning relief in Detroit. I'm kidding. What a great experience. Wish we could have all been there with you.

™ Speaking of McGwire, he broke Maris' record last evening (Tuesday, September 8). Congratulations to Big Mac for a wonderful accomplishment, and to his HSL manager, Big Guy, who had the good sense to draft him in the 3rd round, and to stick with him even when he was slumping – oh, that's right. Congratulations to Rube on fleecing McGwire away from Big Guy just in time to watch him hit 15 home runs in the next 21 days. Astounding.

I talked with Itchie today, for the first time since he began work at his new employer, Sitel. In addition to buying a *Zamfir, His Greatest Hits* CD from him as one of his first telephone sales, Itchie reported that Skipjacks pitchers deserve at least partial credit for McGwire's record. It seems that Skipjack Mike Morgan was responsible for giving up home run No. 61 to McGwire. Skipjack Steve Trachsel then proceeded to give up the record-setting jack No. 62. I loved Trachsel's quote in the paper about giving up McGwire's record homer: "So what. I've given up about a *billion* of them." Yes, Steve, so we've heard from Itchie.

™ Junior had a 26-point ballgame for the Reds earlier this week. In one night, Griffey scored more points by himself than nine of my starting players scored *in an entire week* (Hernandez minus 3, Percival minus 3, Hernandez minus 2, Maddux 1, Bohannon 2, Christiansen 2, Brosius 8, Ausmus 8, and Ordonoz 11). What a team.

FOR CUBS AND RED SOX?

I'm not referring to Shamu's* and Possum's teams, though they certainly have both suffered their share of heartache this season. What I'm talking about are the *real* Cubs and Red Sox, and their current quest for wild-card bids to the playoffs. It is ironic that both of these long-suffering teams are in the hunt for a wild-card spot, and ironic that both teams have been slipping in this quest these past few weeks. Whether it is in the next few weeks trying to get to the postseason, or in the postseason trying to get to the World Series, or in the World Series trying to win the whole shooting match, one thing is clear – the odds against them are probably insurmountable.

The Red Sox, of course, have not won at all since Babe Ruth was shipped from Boston to the Yankees in 1920. They have been oh-so close many times, though, most recently in 1986 when the Mets defeated them in seven games after the Red Sox were one strike away from winning Game 6, the same game in which Billy Buckner let the ground ball through his legs.

I was reminded of all this again recently when reading the chapter about it in Tom Boswell's book *Heart of the Order*, and enjoyed it so much that I am providing each of you with a copy herewith. Only in retrospect can one recognize the agony that the Red Sox must have been going through during this series, and which they continue to go through to this day. Read the article that Boswell wrote which appeared in the paper the day that Billy Buck made his error in game six. Absolutely prophetic.

Apart from the Red Sox's long period of suffering, the Cubs have had their own well-publicized woes. Most recently, the 1984 Cubs blew a 2-0 lead in the ALS playoffs to the Padres. They haven't been back since.

What if both the Red Sox and the Cubs made the playoffs via the wild-card, and then somehow managed to win their way to the World Series? Because the Braves, Yankees, Padres and/or Astros will be standing in their way, it seems unlikely.

MORE HEARTACHE

But in baseball, one must learn to never say never. Even the unthinkable, the ridiculous, the insane can happen in a given year. By way of example, just look at the 1998 Hot Stove League.

RANTINGS FROM A MAD MAN

I was lucky enough to catch *Baseball Tonight* last evening, not only so I could see the McGwire celebration, but also so I could catch yet another evening of Senatorial face-slaps. There were many, many such magical moments in last night's show, including McGwire's jack for more points in the Redbirds' savings account; another timely home run from Edgardo of the Blues; an 11-K, 0-BB quality win from Cone of the Redbirds; another home run by Gonzo for the Senators' minor league farm system; and a report of 17 runs for the Phillies, with nary a mention of Senator Scott Rolen. But the most hurtful comment, by far, came when Dan Patrick was reporting on the Texas Rangers-Kansas City Royals game. First Dan pointed out for me that Senator stopper Jeff Montgomery had ignited himself with jet fuel to take the loss (a nifty minus 15 point performance). Then Patrick started to report that *Jason Giambi* had a nifty 3-for-5, 1 HR performance in this game, but stumbled a bit after announcing his name. *It's Jeromy Giambi*, Dan, AND HE PLAYS FOR THE ROYALS, NOT THE OAKLAND A's, YOU IDIOT! Even good old Dan is in on the anti-Senator conspiracy, it seems.

Send those shirt sizes and color preferences to McBlunder. See you next week.

Skipper