



# *From the Bullpen*

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

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- 1. BLUES WIN HSL TITLE!**
- 2. TRIBE VAULTS TO INSURMOUNTABLE LEAD IN 1999 CAMPAIGN**
- 3. ITCHIE REBUKES CASINO OPERATIONS, DECLARES GAMBLING TO BE FOR "SICKOS, PSYCHOS AND SINNERS"**
- 4. RUBE SWITCHES ALLEGIANCE TO CORNHUSKERS, STATES TIRED OF "BACKING HAYDEN AND HIS LOSER HAWKEYES."**
- 5. SHAMU REFUSES FREE "ALL YOU CAN EAT AND STUFF IN YOUR BACKPACK"**

**BUFFET, CREDITS NEW-FOUND SELF-DISCIPLINE**

**6. TRICKO ON COVER OF *GENTLEMAN'S QUARTERLY*, FLAT-TOP COIFFURE SAID TO BE LATEST RAGE IN MEN'S HAIR**

**7. B.T. VOWS TO GIVE UP COMPUTER, PAGER, TELEVISION, FAX MACHINE, ALL OTHER TECHNOLOGY, SITES DETERMINATION TO WIN HSL CROWN THROUGH BASEBALL ACUITY ALONE; WIFE AND CHILDREN SCOFF**

**8. POSSUM OFFERS FAIR VALUE FOR FAIR VALUE IN TRADE; PASSES POLYGRAPH**

**9. MOUSE DEFENDS CLINTON'S RECORD, CALLS STARR REPORT UNFAIR, UNBALANCED, PORNOGRAPHIC SMEAR CAMPAIGN BY LOATHSOME NAZI DISCIPLE**

**10. SLOPAY CALLS THREE-HOUR PRESS CONFERENCE, SPILLS GUTS IN EMOTIONAL DIATRIBE ABOUT LIFE, MARRIAGE, THE TRAVAILS OF A PERENNIAL LOWER DIVISION HOT STOVE LEAGUER, AND UNDERBELLY**

In case you haven't guessed it, the above is, in reverse order, a Top Ten List of least probable *From the Bullpen* head-

lines, culminating with: **"1. Blues Win HSL Title!"**

Hats off and a hearty Bronx cheer to McBlunder, who has persisted and prevailed through year after year after year of Hot Stove League shame and torture, not to be confused with fame and fortune, to take the 1998 crown. This brave little soldier defied the greatest of odds in bringing Kansas City its first HSL championship, overcoming other managers with greater baseball acuity (Skipper), vast personal fortunes (B.T.), unfathomable luck (Shamu\*, Itchie), bad hair (who else?), and incomparable moral turpitude (Possum). He withstood annual skirmishes to avoid league doormat status. He read quietly about his failures in *From the Bullpen*, the league organ. And all the while, he astutely built a base of baseball knowledge and reservoir of managerial strength and character that served him well in the 1998 season, carrying the Blues to their first-ever crown and a record total of 9787 points, exceeding the previous league high (last year's 9484 by the Senators) by a whopping total of 303 points.

Next issue we'll take a look at how McBlunder built his 1998 championship team. But for now, Stretch, there's only

one question on our collective minds:  
When do we get our damned shirts?

## FINAL STANDINGS

1. Blues	9787
2. Chiefs	9096
3. Senators	9083
4. Cubs*	9058
5. Redbirds	9035
6. Tigers	8986
7. Bronx Bombers	8860
8. Red Sox	8816
9. Skipjacks	8347
10. Tribe	7963
11. Reds	7962
12. Pirates	7352

## WEEK 26 TOTALS

1. Redbirds	435
2. Tribe	394
3. Red Sox	346
4. Cubs*	333
5. Blues	318
6. Chiefs	316
7. Bombers	283
8. Reds	262
9. Senators	250
10. Tigers	228
11. Skipjacks	220
12. Pirates	175

## BALLS AND STRIKES

™ I suffered enough grief the last two weeks of the season I could write a tome that would make Tolstoy look like a short story writer by comparison. But so as not to tarnish the Blues' victory or dim his time in the spotlight, I will save these bitter musings for future issues. Note that it's issues, plural. Dang, I got screwed.

™ Of course, some of the pain – probably most of it – was self-inflicted, as I have assured that nobody will ever mistake me for actor Tom Cruise in one of his early Hollywood successes, entitled *All the Right Moves*. And similarly, our affable Des Moines-ite league member, one Charles Dwight Sinclair, shan't be remembered for pulling all the right switches and pushing all the right buttons during the final fort-

night of the '98 campaign. But more on that later.

™ Some may still argue – stubbornly and foolishly – that pitching ain't everything in this league. As Exhibit A, I give you the Elongated One from the great state of Kansas. Though McBlunder's batters were only the third best hitting team in the league at 5980 points, the Blues ran away with the league title precisely because of McBlunder's dynamite pitching staff, with the Big Unit and the Rocket forming its very core. While going with Randy and Roger in the first two rounds caused a lot of heartburn for McBlunder in the early going, in the end it proved to be the work of a master.

™ Apparently, my little joke last issue about the Redbirds and their team logo lit a fire under Rubella's squad, as they pounded out an unthinkable 26-week total of 435 points to keep things interesting during the final days of the season.

™ Truth be known, while I would much rather have been in McBlunder's shoes and coasting to victory over the past several weeks, the tenacious dogfight for second place was also about as good as it gets. I can't remember any other year in which five teams were in legitimate contention for the runner-up and third-place positions heading into the final weekend. Never before has so much management and mismanagement gone on in the waning moments of the campaign, and in the end, the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> place teams were separated by a mere 110 points, only a promotion here or demotion there, a triple or home run here, a penalty cap there. I was darned glad to have a dog in this fight.

™ If nothing else, Rube's final charge toward the finish line was worth it for the fear which it struck in the heart of at least one HSL member, who nearly required counseling to get him through the stretch run. When I returned from Chicago last Sunday afternoon, I called B.T., desperate for information. After a series of unsuccessful phone calls, I finally got through to the man, who breathlessly announced that he and I were "neck and neck," but apparently fighting it out for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place. Apparently B.T. worked himself into a

lather by spending the final day watching baseball games on computer, and convincing himself that brothers Shamu\* and Rube were having red-letter days that would propel them into the two money spots behind McBlunder. I spent the better part of the next hour calculating points from his computer statistics, playing part psychologist and priest, and assuring B.T. that barring a miracle finish for Shamu\* or Rube, the Chiefs were looking at a 2<sup>nd</sup> or at worst 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish, indeed.

™ Overheard at airport bar in Albuquerque last Thursday: "So when will this Home Run Race be over?" And no, it was not uttered by a confused little blue-haired senior citizen or some ditzy blonde, but by a WASPish, 40-ish, fairly normal looking man. Huh? Where has this guy been living his whole life, on Mars?

™ In that same Albuquerque bar I saw several innings of the Astros' second playoff game against the Padres. Fat Tony had another one of his falling-out-of-his-shoes-to-reach-an-outside-pitch hits, not unlike the opposite field poke he managed against the Big Unit on Tuesday. The guy is a professional hitter. Beer-keg-on-legs that he is, the guy can hit.

™ Speaking of post-season hitters, how about a guy who *isn't* one, one Barry "Mr. April" Bonds, that is. For all of his trash talk to reporters, he surely doesn't back it up in the post-season.

™ How about Big Mo's seven RBIs in game 1 against the Indians? Where were those kinds of 1-game stats during the season, when they really counted?

## POST-SEASON SUMMARY

Mark off Saturday, November 28, on your calendar, boys, for a celebratory fete in honor of this year's HSL champion. Rube has generously offered to host the function this year at his new home at Standing Bear Lake Point, I think they call it. More details to follow, but for now, keep the date open on your calendar. If any of you cannot make it that night, *please let Rube or myself know right away.*

Great season, boys. 1999 Draft, get here soon.

Skipper