



From the Bullpen

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Eastern Nebraska Division
1998 Season

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(Editor's note: Because of vacation schedules and other technical difficulties, last week's edition of *FTB* is going out this week, as part of a Week 15-16 Double Issue. Pardon the inconvenience, but a few of us here are trying to get a life.)

SENATORS STAY COURSE; RED HOT REDBIRDS RISE THROUGH RANKS; TRIBE TUMBLES

Brethren:

The red-hot Redbirds led the way during the All-Star shortened 15th week of the season, chalking up 316 points, including All-Star bonus points, if indeed Rube has any All-Stars on this team. Oh, yes, that Griffey fellow. Led by the scorching Albert Belle (44 points during Week 15, and just wait to see what he posts this week), and arguably the best pitcher in the American League these days, David Cone (32 points), the Crimson Chirpers not only seem entrenched in the Upper Division, but are now within hollering distance of the 5th place Chiefs and the 4th place Tigers. Can the 'Birds step it up a notch and compete at the next level? With 1-2 draft picks Junior and Joey now in full stride, don't bet against it.

The second-highest scoring team for Week 15 was the Cubs* with 290, almost

all of which (264) came from hitting. More on this team's pitching woes later. With Palmeiro, Olerud, Knoblauch, Chipper, Rondel and Manny all wielding hot sticks, the Cub* hitters averaged 66 points a day for the shortened week, which would cipher out to 462 *hitting* points during a full week. Wow. If they can only keep that pace up for the rest of the year, the Cubs* might be in contention in spite of what might be the worst pitching staff in the league.

The third-best total for Week 15 was posted by the now-cooling-off Senators, whose 289-point week left them only a promotion short of leading the league scoring for a fourth consecutive week. Translation: If I'd only had the foresight to promote Bob Tewksbury, his 29-point pitching performance last week would have boosted the Senators past the 'Birds, instead of being wasted in the minors.

The only other noteworthy (mal)performance was that of the Lincoln Tribe, whose teepee apparently caught fire when a still-smoldering Brad Radke returned home from his mega-negative post-All-Star game performance. Even with recent Tribe acquisitions Carlos Hernandez

(C), Aramis Ramirez (3B), and Carl Everett (CF) firmly in the Tribe's starting lineup, the punchless Tribe hitting attack could muster up only 114 points for the week, inclusive of Darin Erstad's 10-point All-Star bonus.

WEEK 15 TOTALS

1.	Redbirds	316
2.	Cubs*	290
3.	Senators	289
4.	Blues	284
5.	Tigers	280
6.	Bombers	262
7.	Chiefs	259
8.	Skipjacks	249
9.	Red Sox	226
10.	Reds	221
11.	Pirates	204
12.	Tribe	170

STANDINGS THRU 15 WEEKS

1.	Senators	5461
2.	Bombers	5361
3.	Blues	5263
4.	Tigers	5172
5.	Chiefs	5139
6.	Redbirds	4979

7. Cubs*	4940
8. Skipjacks	4902
9. Red Sox	4611
10. Reds	4582
11. Tribe	4564
12. Pirates	4237

You will note that 100 points or less separate the 2nd through 5th place teams from the team directly above it in the standings, after which the gulf widens a bit. There is one helluva skirmish going on between the 6th through 8th place (Redbirds, Cubs*, Skipjacks) teams, and then quite a chasm before the next tier of teams is reached. With less than 50 points separating the 9th through 11th (Red Sox, Reds, Tribe) place teams, it is a tenacious battle to avoid the penultimate position directly above the perennial cellar occupant.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

The top hitter for the week was Ken Caminiti of the Chiefs, whose 3-bagger on Sunday earned him 30 bonus points and a total of 56 points for the week. One has to wonder if Ken played in any other games that week.

The top-scoring hitter for the year is still Mark McGwire of the Tigers with 555 points. An impressive total at this stage of the season, but clearly within reach of Junior and A-Rod.

The top pitcher for Week 15 was Randy Johnson of the Blues, who totaled 53 points for the week on the strength of his 15-strikeout performance after whaling on the Senators' own David Segui for motivation, in what must have been a sight to behold.

The Cy Young leader continues to be Greg Maddux of the Senators, now with 453 points after a mediocre post-All-Star contest performance in which Maddux's own two errors led to his third loss of the season against 11 wins.

TOP HITTERS

1. Mark McGwire	555
2. Ken Griffey	476
3. Alex Rodriguez	451
4. Sammy Sosa	448
5. Chipper Jones	429

6. Greg Vaughn	413
7. Jim Thome	411
8. Juan Gonzalez	397
9. Craig Biggio	395
10. Ivan Rodriguez	391
11. Darin Erstad	386
12. Vinny Castilla	385
13. Rafael Palmeiro	381
14. Andres Galarraga	372
15. Damion Easley	368

PITCHERS

1. Greg Maddux	453
2. Robb Nen	400
3. Curt Schilling	359
4. Pedro Martinez	357
5. Kevin Brown	356
6. Andy Ashby	355
7. Trevor Hoffman	324
8. Rick Reed	311
9. Todd Stottlemyre	310
10. Tom Gordon	307
(T) Ugueth Urbina	307
12. John Wetteland	300
13. Bartolo Colon	299
14. Tom Glavine	291
(T) David Cone	291

BALLS AND STRIKES

□ Having been up at Eagle's Nest all week with my boys, I am a bit short of information on how the Senators are doing during Week 16, but it appears that my month-long hot spell has ended. With the Bombers and Blues now apparently heating up after experiencing a couple of cool spells, it will be interesting to see how long the Senators' lead will last. Possibly not even through the week. The longer I am in this league, the more I realize that each season is a journey of peaks and valleys, and that the team with the most and biggest peaks and fewest and flattest valleys will prevail. In other words, if your team's been up, they're going to come down. And if they've been down for a while, things are about to start looking up, unless your team is the Pirates, of course.

□ Let me be the first to say it here: Releasing Eddie Taubensee in knee-jerk disgust was a monumental blunder, and one that I hope will not cost the Senators a repeat title, especially since Eddie was

picked up by one of my main competitors, the Blues, and has been En Fuego this week. Here's what happened. After I picked Ed up in the free agent draft a couple of months ago, he initially played and scored well for the Senators before going into a three- or four-week skid in which he hardly scored any points at all. Though at the time he was still the 5th-highest rated catcher, I dumped Ed in favor of part-time Red Sox catcher Scott Hattenberg, while Eddie spent a couple of weeks as an available free agent before McBlunder picked him up. To compound my blunder, I must confess that I put in for Eddie as my second choice in the free agent draft the week before McBlunder picked him up, behind Brad Ausmus of the Astros, who was my initial starting catcher. Now Eddie is on a tear, and hindsight being 20/20, I plainly muffed this one. My only hope is that Eddie will give McBlunder the shell game business as he contemplates whether to promote him to play with or in place of his All-Star catcher, Jason Kendall.

□ And speaking of recent free agent acquisitions, I see that Possum signed former Tribesman David Ortiz, who finished his injury rehabilitation and immediately had an impact game for the Sox. The question is, how did Underbelly miss this one?

□ And speaking of Underbelly misses, I see that Bob recently re-signed Reds reliever Danny Graves. You may know that Underbelly signed this same Danny Graves several weeks ago, spoke highly of him, released him after a couple of weeks of doing nothing, and then signed him again last Sunday after several consecutive bruising relief outings. Apparently, Bob knows something the rest of us don't.

□ I also noted from last week's transaction report that Underbelly demoted Kevin Elster in favor of Mark Grudzielanik, after which Elster celebrated his demotion by hitting a three-run homer for the Tribe farm system. I have not noticed particularly, but my guess is that Grudzy has gone in the tank since his promotion by Underbelly. This is, after all, the Season of Underbelly's Discontent.

□ Did Itchie demote Charles Nagy because of his disgust over his newly-

peroxidized dome, or because of his three or four consecutive mug-bashings, or both? Chuck Finley doesn't look half bad as a bottle blond; Chuck Nagy does. In fact, Nagy looks *all* bad.

□ I must have been sleeping when Underbelly's Kevin Brown-for-Mariano Rivera trade to Rube was first reported, or I would have been in Bob's face about it a long time ago. Why, pray tell, would you trade your No. 1 draft pick, a buzzsaw who is having a great year and is now the fourth best starting pitcher with 356 points, for a closer (now with 276 points) who never gets a chance to close because his team wins every game by 8-12 runs? Especially when you already have closers Billy Taylor and Todd Jones at your disposal – or have I answered my own question?

□ As long as we are on the subject of fleecings by Rube, who the hell traded him 3rd baseman Travis Fryman? The guy has been red-hot lately, and I doubt that whoever Rube unloaded for him has done much for his new owner. Maybe Rube finally has this thing figured out. Pick yourself a crappy team, lull the rest of the owners to sleep, and then trade yourself into contention.

□ With Ramon Martinez on the shelf for the year, Shamu's* starting pitching rotation consists of Kirk Reuter, Kevin Tapani, Mark Gardner, Sterling Hitchcock and Dennis Martinez. Double Ugh. I wonder if Shamu* wakes up some mornings in a cold sweat, and races to the mirror to see if he is really SloPay, in the throes of a macabre *Twilight Zone* episode.

1999 HSL TRIP

Those of us in attendance on this year's Trip voted unanimously on a 1999 HSL junket to Seattle to visit the Mariners' new stadium, scheduled to open in July. Details and exact dates to be announced, but probably in mid to late July and coincident with the grand opening of this new ballpark.

Recognizing that we may have had less than a quorum present for the voting on next year's trip, if any of you has a better idea, let's hear it.

WEEK 16: BLUES ON THE MOVE; RED SOX ON ROLL

In this abbreviated version of this week's *FTB*, I will merely point out that McBlunder's Blues have as predicted picked up the pace, and posted a nifty 444-point total during Week 16, blasting past the Bombers into 2nd place. Accordingly, the league standings through sixteen weeks are as follows:

WEEK 16 STANDINGS

1. Senators	5860
2. Blues	5707
3. Bombers	5632
4. Chiefs	5478
5. Tigers	5443
6. Skipjacks	5335
7. Redbirds	5331
8. Cubs*	5225
9. Red Sox	5061
10. Tribe	4963
11. Reds	4901
12. Pirates	4595

The point-scoring leader for Week 16 was – gasp – the Red Sox, whose rose above their collective mediocrity to post a season-best 450-point total during Week 16, extending their lead over the 10th-place Tribe and 11th-place Reds. The Red Sox's league-leading total was their first of the year, after posting weekly placements of 7th, 3rd, 10th, 7th, 6th, last, 11th, 10th, 9th, 8th, 9th, 8th, 6th, 10th, and 9th during the first sixteen weeks of the season, respectively. Here are the Week 16 totals:

1. Red Sox	450
2. Blues	444
3. Skipjacks	433
4. Senators	399
(T) Tribe	399
6. Pirates	358
7. Redbirds	352
8. Chiefs	339
9. Reds	319
10. Cubs*	315
11. Bombers	271
(T) Tigers	271

That's all for this double-issue. Next week: (1) All-Star game highlights; and (2) book review on *Ol' Pete*.

Skipper