



FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division

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Brethren,

My jury trial is over, the pregnancy hormones are in mid-trimester dormancy, and Opening Day is now weeks, not months, away. In other words, life ain't just good, it's great.

DRAFT DAY CONFIRMATION APRIL 3

Since no conflicts have been reported, I can now confirm that the Reddest-of-All-Red-Letter-Days will take place in just a little over three weeks, on **SATURDAY, APRIL 3**. On that holiest of days – the mere thought of it causes me to quiver with anticipation and excitement – the twelve redoubtable members of the Eastern Nebraska Hot Stove League will meet for the fifteenth consecutive spring for the purpose of placing their well-earned reputations as baseball virtuosos – yea, oracles – on the line. For the twelfth consecutive year, the draft will occur within the cerebral and yet battle-scarred confines of the Gaines Mullen War Room. And war it is, my compadres.

Good God, April 3, get here already. It's been a long, hard winter.

YEAR OF THE BELLY?

Just as the bounds of reason were stretched last year when McBlunder claimed his first crown, some HSL bleeding hearts (you mean there *are bleeding hearts in this league?*) are thinking, however wishfully, that 1999 could be the Year of the Belly. Snickers, titters, guffaws, and downright belly laughs aside, there is a body of thought out there that if McBlunder can win it all with the Blues' dismal past, there may be hope even for the heretofore hopeless and rudderless Tribe.

Or not. Skipper's inside sources indicate that U-belly – Crown Prince of Pessimism that he is – has already crafted his top ten list of excuses for not ever having won the Hot Stove League crown:

U-BELLY'S TOP TEN LIST OF REASONS FOR NEVER HAVING WON THE HSL CROWN

10. That damned McBlunder must have copied off my draft list last year.
9. Having to baby-sit that bleeping SloPay's team is dragging me down.
8. Can't compete with B.T. when he spends more on draft services and technology in one season that I made the whole decade.
7. I spent so much time in my bachelor years just loving my life, I just plain lost focus.
6. Those lawyer a-holes in Omaha are rigging this thing, I just know it.
5. I would have won it in 1997 if the Burlington Northern hadn't cut me loose from the umbilical, and made me beat the streets to find a real job.
4. This damned marriage is sucking the life out of me – how can I expect to succeed at anything?
3. I've got bigger damned fish to fry. Just don't ask me to name one.
2. I'm still waiting to win the freaking Powerball lottery, too.
1. While I talk a good game, when you get right down to it, I'm really dumb as a post.

OPENING DAY – KANSAS CITY

Several league members have already committed to heading south to Kansas City for Opening Day on Monday, April 5, 1999. With a 1:00 game against the Boston Red Sox, the plan is to meet in Omaha for an 8 a.m. breakfast, with a 9 a.m. departure for parts south. Please let me know who else will need tickets, so I can alert our booster club president in Kansas City.

THE TRIP

Our usually garrulous and loose-lipped trip co-chairmen, Big Guy and Itchie, have been mysteriously quiet about this year's HSL Trip. Last I heard, things were pointing toward mid-May for a trip to Wrigley, but I have heard nothing in the past couple of weeks and do not know where this is at. I will report back as soon as there is information to report.

ATTACK BY GAY ACTIVIST LEAGUE

The other day I received an unsolicited and unwelcome letter from Stuart Dornan, an Omaha lawyer generally held in low esteem, containing an unprovoked attack on our beloved Hot Stove League, the very bedrock of baseball in the Cornhusker state. For some unknown reason, Mr. Dornan has taken a yellow-bellied rabbit punch at our autonomous sect of baseball swells.

Because I know that you are all too busy to read Dornan's entire offering – which would make any elementary school journalism student proud – I am instead providing you only Door Knob's laughable potshot at our unassailable fraternity of baseball purists:

The Hot Stove League is of Double A quality and prides itself on its newsletter in order to hide its sandlot nature. Even though the Hot Stove League fields two dummy teams full of scrubs to boost the scores of their teams and egos of their owners, the Omaha Fantasy League teams routinely outscore their Hot Stove counterparts.

Having now thrice read his maniacal ravings, I am not at all clear whether Doorstop is serious in his assessment of our league (in which case I recommend a team approach to his psychiatric treatment); or whether his offering is a well-intentioned but thinly-veiled at-

tempt to spur interleague communication with our twelve-headed fountain of baseball knowledge and acuity. In other words, does Doorstop so thirst from his incarceration in the Death Valley Desert that is the Omaha Fantasy League that he uses his letter as a canteen to partake from the baseball oasis that is the Hot Stove League? Indubitably.

Mindful that any response to this heresy might only be dignifying, lest silence be confused with acquiescence I am duty-bound to respond to Dorfman's pitiful cry for help with just a couple of comments:

... If our league gave a rat's ascot about showing up as one of the top leagues in the Bill James system, we would have jumped over the cliff with our lemming brothers in the Omaha Fantasy League and diluted the competition by adding three new owners who don't measure up to league standards.

... Any league that would base its draft order on a couple of skirts pulling numbers out of a hat (probably a red and white striped "cat-in-the-hat" chapeau) instead of a merit system based on the previous year's rankings is better suited for something a titch less competitive, like a fantasy crocheting league.

... And what's with letting the females invade the sanctity of the draft chamber, anyway? What are these men, these Omaha Fantasias, some of those frigging politically correct Nineties' men? Sissies!

... As to Dorkman's reference to the HSL being of "Double A quality," on what basis does he make this comparison? From what I can gather, this pack of wombats known as the OFL (Omaha Fantasy League) would have to overachieve to compete in the Sally league.

... If this Dornan character ever won a chance to compete in the Hot Stove League (relax, HSLers – it's only for the sake of argument), he'd have to go some to finish ahead of our *three* dummy teams, judging by his ciphering and spelling (does he have *two* kids or *too many* kids) disabilities. On the other hand, he and Underbelly would probably get along famously.

I could go on and on, believe me, but all you really need to know about the Omaha Fantasy League and how it compares with *the* league is shown in the national Bill James standings the last time the Hot Stove League was an eligible twelve-team league member among all other twelve-team leagues, which was at the end of the 1996

baseball season. The BJFB top twenty leagues from that season's end are posted here:

Skipper

Top 20 Leagues

League	Tot.Pts.	Pts/Tm
Christy Mathewson	101,725	8,477.08
Hack Wilson	101,070	8,422.50
Gaylord Perry	100,910	8,409.17
Pete Alexander	100,885	8,407.08
Rod Carew	100,883	8,406.92
North Club	100,724	8,393.67
Hot Stove	100,713	8,392.75
Kevin Grady	100,668	8,389.00
Pee Wee Reese	100,616	8,384.67
Willie Mays	100,518	8,376.50
Carl Yastrzemski	100,376	8,365.67
Joe DiMaggio	100,317	8,359.75
Don Drysdale	100,267	8,355.58
Juan Marichal	100,251	8,354.25
Joe Cronin	100,191	8,349.25
Reggie Jackson	100,055	8,337.92
Harmon Killebrew	100,034	8,336.17
Mickey Mantle	100,015	8,334.58
Lou Gehrig	99,989	8,332.42
Eddie Collins	99,930	8,327.50

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Where did you say the Omaha Fantasy League finished during *that* last year when we were comparing apples and apples, Stu?

The defense rests.

If any of the rest of you have any comments that you would like me to communicate to commissioner Dornan, please don't hesitate to let me know.

PINCH HITS

- I had no idea that Itchie was such a Juice Newton fan. Why else would he take all three kids with him to Bluffs Run on a Sunday and drop them off with a casino caregiver.
- Now that Shamu is living in Des Moines, there is a one in six chance that we will have an Iowegan's name on the Cup this year. Hmmm. Make that one in six million.

Enclosed is a revised and corrected 1999 roster, containing e-mail addresses for Shamu, B.T. and U-belly, and other miscellaneous updated information.

NEXT WEEK

Numbers, statistics, food for thought.