



FROM THE BULLPEN

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TIGERS TOPS THROUGH 4, CUBS* CHARGING, CRIMSON CHIRPERS CHALLENGE TRIBE FOR CELLAR

Brethren:

Through four weeks of the season, the **Tigers** inexplicably continue to lead the pack with 1542 points, followed closely by the **Blues** with 1508, the hard-charging **Cubs*** with 1488, and the **Chiefs** with 1449. At the other end of the spectrum, the **Tribe** still proudly occupies the cellar position, ever vying for the top free agent draft spot, but is in danger of being supplanted in the league bowels by the never-popular **Redbirds**. From top to bottom, I give you the league standings through four weeks:

FOUR WEEK STANDINGS

1. Tigers	1542
2. Blues	1508
3. Cubs*	1488
4. Chiefs	1449
5. Pirates	1374
6. Skipjacks	1305
7. Reds	1282
8. Bombers	1270
9. Red Sox	1220
10. Senators	1165
11. Redbirds	1110
12. Tribe	1096

WEEK 4 TOTALS

1. Cubs*	435
2. Pirates	387
3. Blues	381
4. Tigers	380

5. Chiefs	362
6. Skipjacks	353
7. Red Sox	353
8. Bombers	332
9. Reds	327
10. Tribe	286
11. Senators	255
12. Redbirds	214

Top hitting team, week	Blues	314
Worst hitting team, week	Chiefs	163
Top hitting team, season	Cubs*	1056
Worst hitting team, season	Senators	727
Top hitter, week – Larry Walker	Tribe	100
Top hitter, season – Jeff Bagwell	Cubs*	165
Top pitching team, week	Chiefs	200
Worst pitching team, week	Redbirds	-23
Top pitching team, season	Pirates	524
Worst pitching team, season	Tribe	188
Top pitcher, week – Shane Reynolds	Skipjacks	54
Top pitcher, season – Pedro Martinez	Bombers	146

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

Hitters

1. Matt Williams	Tigers	143
2. Derek Jeter	Tribe	137
(T) Sean Green	Skipjacks	137
4. Jeff Bagwell	Cubs*	135
5. Manny Ramirez	Blues	134
6. Tim Salmon	Cubs*	130
7. Fernando Tatis	Tigers	127
(T) Troy Glaus	Red Sox	127
9. Jay Bell	Cubs*	126
10. Roberto Alomar, Jr.	Senators	124
(T) Shannon Stewart	Blues	124
12. Brian Jordan	Chiefs	120
13. Ray Durham	Chiefs	118
14. Ken Griffey	Redbirds	117

(T) John Olerud Redbirds 117

Pitchers

1.	Pedro Martinez	Bombers	146
2.	John Smoltz	Blues	125
3.	Curt Schilling	Pirates	120
(T)	David Cone	Red Sox	120
5.	Shane Reynolds	Skipjacks	118
6.	Randy Johnson	Tigers	109
7.	Robb Nen	Cubs*	102
(T)	Roberto Hernandez	Chiefs	102
9.	Kent Bottenfield	Cubs*	99
10.	Andy Ashby	Skipjacks	97
(T)	Jeff Shaw	Chiefs	97
12.	John Franco	Bombers	95
13.	Rick Aguilera	Tigers	94
14.	Jason Schmidt	Reds	94
15.	Billy Wagner	Pirates	88

AROUND THE HORN

∪ The **Tigers** lead the way for the second week in a row, with a total of 1542 points, posting a fourth-best weekly total of 380. The Tigers are well balanced between pitching and hitting, with the third best hitting total and the third best pitching total. Led by third-sacker Matt Williams (Round 9), third-bagger Fernando “Ears to You” Tatis (Round 19), and Luis “The Neck” Gonzalez (Round 22), the Tigers have benefited by a torrid if unsustainable start from lower-round picks.

∪ The **Blues** are a close second with 1508 points, in spite of a bitterly disappointing start from top overall draft pick Roger Clemens (38 points, now on the DL). The Blues’ second-best hitting squad is led by the En Fuego Manny Ramirez with 134 points, followed closely by McBlunder’s DMW¹ pick, Shannon Stewart, with 124 points. However, Stretch has also benefited by overachieving starts from the mediocre trio of Lee Stevens (115), Todd Zeile (93), and Mike Sweeney (3.9 PPG). The cradle will fall.

∪ On the strength of a blistering 435-point week – tops in the league so far – the white-hot **Cubs*** surged into the 3rd place spot with 1488 points. With three hitters in the top ten (Bagwell 4, Salmon 6, Jay Bell 9), the Baby Bears lead the circuit in hitting points with 1056, or just slightly less than the overall point total of the **Tribe**. However, with staff ace Greg Maddux taking a 4 IP, 8 ER pummeling this Tuesday night past, the morale

¹ Dead Man Walking.

of the Cubs*’ already fragile pitching staff may take a serious hit.

∪ The **Chiefs**, its batsmen in the Hurt Locker, dipped to 4th place after Week 4. With Mike Lieberthal, Sean Casey and Carl Everett cooling down to their normal levels of mediocrity, and with Sammy Sosa yet to heat up, the Chiefs hitters are relying on Jason Giambi and Ray Durham to keep them in contention. Jeepers. However, with solid outings from Lima and Mussina and the continued prowess of his two closers, Jeff Shaw and Roberto Hernandez, B.T.’s pitching staff is showing signs of living up to expectations.

∪ The 5th place **Pirates** continue to hold their own in spite of the hurtful loss of team leader Barry Bonds. However, the Buccos’ loss of Bonds has been offset by the torrid starts from Raul “Eating” Mondesi, Jeff Kent and Carlos Delgado, and SloPay’s selection of Curt Schilling in the first round continues to look like a stroke of genius. With Juan Gonzalez heating up, it is even conceivable that the Pirates could stay in the Upper Division for a while longer.

∪ To our utter amazement, the dreadful **Skipjacks** continue to prosper and remain in the Upper Division, using a 353-point week to slide past the **Reds** into 6th. With another big week from Sean “I’m Kosher” Green (48) and Shane Reynolds (54), the Skipjacks had a balanced week of 177 batting points and 176 pitching points. With Thome, Castilla, Albert and Bone yet to heat up, it might be said that this team has a shot at moving up. However, with Itchie’s putrid pitching staff, the more likely movement is downward. Way down.

∪ In 7th place through four weeks, the **Reds** continue to seek their own level. Whether a team with Jason Schmidt as its top starter and Bob Howry as its top closer can actually compete in this league is open to debate, but if Chipper Jones gets on a roll and Nomar Garciaparra puts up the numbers he’s capable of, the Reds have a crack at some time in the Upper Division, even with Canseco back on the walking wounded list.

∪ The **Bombers** remain in 8th place for the second week in a row, led by a lukewarm Mo Vaughn (33) and by league ace Pedro Martinez (28 for the week, a league-leading 146 for the season). The overachieving Bombers have been kept afloat by red-hot starts from Kenny Lofton (115), Tony Gwynn (103), Jeromy Burnitz (103), and Randy Velarde (104), all averaging more than 4 points per game. When they cool off, look for this team to drop. A team with Kelly Stinnett, Randy

Velarde, Russ Davis, Kevin Stocker, and Tom Goodwin in the starting every-day lineup, and John Snyder, Mike Morgan, and Steve Woodard in the starting rotation, cannot be considered a force to be reckoned with. But then again, they are ahead of the **Senators**.

∪ The **Red Sox** rose from 11th place last week to 9th place after four weeks, using a 353-point week to surge past the flagging **Senators** and **Redbirds**. Led by Troy Glaus (40) and David Cone (30) during the fourth week, the Red Sox also continue to benefit from hot starts from Chili Davis (117) and Bobby Abreu (97). As to the Red Sox's pitching staff, after Cone and Sean Bergman, this staff gets real bad real fast, although it must be noticed that Chan Ho finally climbed out of the negative-numbers neighborhood. Put it this way: Any team desperate enough to draft Gregg Olson (yes, he did) is a team with some serious pitching woes.

∪ The **Senators** dropped by from 9th place after three weeks to 10th place through four. While the Senators' hitters are finally starting to near their potential (255 for the week), the pitching staff had a serious breakdown and actually posted a negative total (-1) for the week. Watching Bobby Jones, Aaron Sele, Charles Nagy, Andy Pettitte, Calvin Escobar, Armando Benitez and Ugueth Urbina all absorb punishing outings during Week 4 was not my idea of a good time. And watching Scott Rolen continue to go 4-0-0-0 in the face of Phillies run-fests is also sticking in my craw just a bit. And by the way, does anyone have a good backup shortstop for sale?

∪ And how 'bout those **Redbirds**? During Week 4, the hapless Chirper staff posted a -23 (this is not a misprint) total for the week. This is even more remarkable when you note that staff ace Kevin Millwood had two stellar starts during the week totaling 45 points, third best in the league for pitchers during the week. This means, of course, that the rest of Rubella's crackerjack staff (Dustin Hermanson, Omar Dahl, David Wells, Roy "Death Takes a" Halladay, Kevin Appier, Chris Benson, Miguel Batista, Trevor Hoffman and Matt Mantei) managed to collectively lose 68 points for the week! Yeeouch. If Rubella can keep this hapless team out of the cellar come season's end, he may just be nominated as Manager of the Decade.

∪ And last, and possibly least, is the **Tribe**. With a 286-point week, the Tribe picked up considerable ground on the **Redbirds** and **Senators**, but not enough to climb out of the cellar. Even with Larry Walker going Yard three times in St. Louis one evening, and

posting a league best 100 points for the week, the Tribe was unable to crack the 300-point barrier during Week 4. This, in and of itself, must be alarming for the Belly. Even with second-best hitter (Derek Jeter) on his squad, and with a solid start from Jose Offerman (107) and Walker's hot bat, this team still occupies the league bowels. When one considers that the Tribe has Woody Williams, Darryl Kile, Dave Mlicki, Rolando Arrojo and Rick Helling in the starting rotation, one can begin to see exactly why the Tribe staff has the lowest pitching total with 188 points for the year. If this team ever climbs out of the cellar, it will only be by default of the **Redbirds'** even more pathetic pitching staff.

BALLS AND STRIKES

┌ Every time I see a Luis Gonzalez highlight on *Baseball Tonight*, I long to puke. I stayed with The Geek all last season when he was supposed to shine in Tiger Stadium, and he stunk it up. Big Guy picks him up in Round 22 as an afterthought, and suddenly he's got a higher slugging percentage than his Mexican cousin, Juan Gonzalez.

┌ Get out your pencil and write this one down: I will never, ever take a nonpitcher in the first round. By taking A-Rod in the first, I was saddled with Tom Glavine in the second, and now my life is sheer misery. If only I had taken the Big Unit, or Pedro, or Schilling, or Smoltz, or even Mussina in the first, it would all be different, I assure you.

┌ And speaking of taking A-Rod in the first. Quite naturally, I would not have done this had I known that A-Rod actually injured his knee in spring training, although there wasn't a single report of the same until after the season started. What the hell were Peter Gammons and his cronies doing during that last week of spring training, following Jose Canseco around to see if he was shacking up with Madonna again? Nice reporting, fellas. At my freakin' expense.

Someday, when we've all had a few drinks, I'll sit down with you guys and pour my heart out about my shortstop disaster. In fact, when we're down in St. Louis next week, after we're properly lubricated, just ask me about it. Please. It's too painful to talk about, *sans* inebriation.

SAME TIME LAST YEAR

Through four weeks last year, the **Skipjacks** were leading the way with 1374 points, almost 200 points behind the **Tigers'** total this year. A close second were the **Blues** with 1371, followed by the **Tigers** with 1354. The league MVP last year through four was Mark McGwire with 169, and the Cy Young was Curt Schilling of the Skipjacks with 164.

THE TRIP

Just one short week away from our junket to St. Louie. And allow me to whet your appetites by informing you that our very own Itchmeister will assume the job of being the official reporter for our weekend of mayhem, monkeyshines and tomfoolery. See you next Saturday!

Skipper

