



FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division

1999 Season

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“EARS” AND “GEEK” KEEP TIGERS ON TOP; TOP THREE PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN PACK; REDBIRDS REALLY RANCID

Brethren:

I apologize at the outset for the inordinate length of this issue of *From the Bullpen*, but I am bubbling with excitement over finally cracking the Stats, Inc. cybercode and getting online today for the first time. It is, in a word, amazing. Like a blind man being able to see for the first time. A whole new world of information. And with it, the ability to critique (*trash*) my fellow owners and managers in real-time. Cool.

I'm also excited, of course, by the anticipation of the second-holiest event on the Hot Stove League calendar. I am talking, of course, about this weekend's junket to St. Louis, splendidly organized by our own Itchmeister. That said, what better way to begin this issue than to reprint here Itchie's recent e-mail about the Trip, particularly for the benefit of those of you that are not yet online. Without further ado, then, I give you:

ITCHIE'S E-BAG

HSL'ers:

The time is upon us; only two weeks until the annual HSL trip. This year the frivolity and debauchery will take place in St. Louis, where we'll get the opportunity to see the league's most prodigious home run hitter and Big Guy's top minor leaguer (Fernando Tatis) square off against the league's most prodigious grand slam giver upper (Chan Ho Park) at lovely Busch Stadium, where the beer, brats, and busty broads (some of which might be nuns, Denny) are plentiful.

Details are complete. Your only responsibility is to show up at the airport on Saturday morning, May 15 with a valid I.D. and enough money in your pocket to plug a nickel slot machine for two hours. The attendance by league members will be fabulous, thanks to the compelling agenda composed by yours truly and Big Guy. The only fags not attending are the skipper of the Crimson Chirpers, who is anticipating having a sick child, and the Possum, which is a given. Rumor has it that B.T. may make the trip over the road, to which we all say "Meet Me in St. Louis." What I don't understand is, if he thinks the plane is going to crash, why is he going to drive there? After all, if it crashes, we won't be there to meet him.

Here's the details:

Plane leaves Omaha Sat. morning at 11:00. All the tickets are electronic, so just bring a driver's license or picture I.D. and you're on the bird.

Mouse has secured five lush hotel rooms for Sat. nite. Chuck, room service is extra.

Shamu and Mouse have also obtained ducats for both Saturday and Sunday. My understanding is that the only better seats in the house are in the dugout.

We'll use the rail system for transportation to the ballpark and hotel area, so there'll be no re-living the Milwaukee death van scenario.

Bring your HSL roster and your creativity, as early season trades will be aplenty. I am quite sure Glavine will be available for a song, and Albert Belle's recent 2 for 31 slump puts him square on the Skipjax trading block. Also, if anyone wants to give me someone for Grudzielanek before I release him, your charity would be appreciated.

Baseball, drinking, and gambling...let me think, what else would I like to be doing?? Other than a mother-in-law birthday party, I can't think of anything. See you on the 15th.

WEEK 5 STANDINGS

1. Tigers	1910
2. Chiefs	1863
3. Blues	1828
4. Cubs*	1721
5. Pirates	1667
6. Reds	1639
7. Red Sox	1600
8. Skipjacks	1597
9. Senators	1532
(T) Bombers	1532
11. Tribe	1484
12. Redbirds	1390

With 368 points for the week, the **Tigers** increased their lead on the field from last week's 34 to this week's 47-point bulge. The **Chiefs**, on the strength of a league-best 414-point week, rocketed past the **Cubs*** and the **Blues** into 2nd. The **Blues**, with a disappointing 320-point performance, dropped from 2nd to 3rd. The **Cubs***, with an even more disappointing score of 233 points for the week (the low-water mark for the league), dropped to 4th.

Even with the subpar 293-point week, the **Pirates** remained steadfast in 5th, but gave ground to the teams chasing them. With a nifty 357-point week, the **Reds** bumped the **Skipjacks** out of the Upper Division, gaining a foothold for their hopeful climb up the mountain. In the Lower Division but not far behind are the 7th place **Red Sox**, who used a season-best 380-point outburst to jump two spots from 9th.

Currently in 8th place but sinking like Tom Mees are Itchie's **Skipjacks**, who could muster up only a 292-point week and are finally starting to find their way to the right neighborhood. Tied up in 9th at 1532 points apiece are the **Bronx Bombers** and the **Senators**, with the New Yawkers dropping a spot after a 262-point week and the Capitol Hill boys moving up after a 367-point Week 5.

Which brings us, finally, to the embarrassing little matter of the league bowels, seldom mentioned in polite company. While it was heretofore believed that no team would be able to supplant Underbelly's **Tribesmen** as the League Doormats, the truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. Rubella's rancid **Redbirds**, with a second consecutive sub-300-point week due in part to some alarming mismanagement, dropped into the basement with a thud so resounding that they were looking for cracks in the foundation. Not only has the Tribe emerged from the dank league root cellar for the first time all season, Underbelly can boast a comfortable 94-

point cushion over the last-place 'Birds. When reached for comment by this reporter, Underbelly scoffed and said, "That dumb Iowegan doesn't belong on the same planet. I'd tell him to eat my dust, but in another week he'll be too far back to even see it." Mighty bold words from a former cellar-dweller type.

From best to worst, here are the point totals for the fifth week of the season:

WEEK 5 TOTALS

1. Chiefs	414
2. Tribe	388
3. Red Sox	380
4. Tigers	368
5. Senators	367
6. Reds	357
7. Blues	320
8. Pirates	293
9. Skipjacks	292
10. Redbirds	280
11. Bombers	262
12. Cubs*	233

SPOTLIGHT ON: REDBIRDS

Now that *FTB* is online and Y2000 compliant, we will begin featuring specific teams, so we can all get to know one another a little bit better. This week, by coincidence, the spotlight is on the **Redbirds**. Let's take a look at Rubella's starting lineup as of Monday morning, inclusive of Sunday's free agent draft:

<u>Player</u>	<u>Hitters</u>			
	<u>Pos</u>	<u>APW¹</u>	<u>APS²</u>	<u>TPS³</u>
Charles Johnson	C	0	0	74
John Olerud	1B	9	126	126
Mark Grace	1B	21	104	104
Mike Stanley	1B	5	23	69
Fred McGriff	1B	0	0	150
Craig Biggio	2B	26	131	131
Barry Larkin	SS	30	89	89
Ron Coomer	3B	29	29	83
Tony Phillips	LF	31	58	136
Ken Griffey, Jr.	CF	19	136	136
Paul O'Neill	RF	6	101	104
Matt Lawton	RF	14	86	86

¹ Active Points – Week.

² Active Points – Season.

³ Total Points – Season.

<u>Player</u>	<u>Pitchers</u>			
	<u>Pos</u>	<u>APW</u>	<u>APS</u>	<u>TPS</u>
Dustin Hermanson	SP	5	73	73
Kevin Millwood	SP	19	66	66
Omar Dall	SP	5	63	63
David Wells	SP	3	44	44
Roy Halladay	SP	-18	-48	17
Miguel Batista	MR	6	11	59
Matt Mantei	CL	35	70	70
Trevor Hoffman	CL	16	47	47

OBSERVATIONS

First, although I'm merely stating the obvious, this team truly stinks. Even after drafting half of the available free agent pool, this team is in the Hurt Locker. Phillips, Coomer, Stanley, McGriff, and Johnson have been hot, all right, but now that they are starting for the Redbirds they will return to their career norms and make Buser pull out so much hair he'll make U-Bob look like Porter Waggoner by comparison.

For another thing, there has to be a rule against having four first basemen in your starting lineup, and if there isn't, there should be. In the real world, most teams only play two or at most three first basemen because of the fear of blowing past home run and RBI limits. However, with the severe shortage of power in the Redbirds' starting lineup, Rubella could pick up ten free agent first basemen and have no fear of exceeding the Bill James limits.

On the pitching side of the equation, to be kind, one would have to say that this pitching staff is, well, "challenged." Challenged to find a starter who can score more than 11 points per game, that is. And challenged to find a way to get Roy "Boy I need a" Halladay out of the starting lineup. This boy Roy, who put up 65 positive points during his brief free agency stint, has been a giant dose of rat poison for the Redbirds, getting his teeth kicked in to the tune of -48 points in his three painful outings as a starting Redbird.

And finally, though I'm always reluctant to point out another manager's gaffes, in Rubella's case, I would be remiss in my duties as publisher and editor of this the league clarion to not point out a couple of Rubella's monumental miscues. According to the trusty transaction log, on May 4, Rube demoted Kevin Appier and Eric Chavez, promoting Ron Coomer and Jermaine Dye in their stead. On May 5, Rube demoted Eli Marrero and Kris Benson in favor of Dan Wilson and Mike Stanley. Thereafter Appier twirled a gem in a win over the dan-

gerous Twins at the Metrodome, garnering more than 20 points for the Redbirds farm system; and on Sunday, up-and-coming Kris Benson spun a beauty against Buser's beloved Cardinals, again contributing something like 22 points to the farm club. And finally, in what must have been a cathartic experience, on Sunday night Jim Ed pulled the plunger on poor old Jermaine Dye and Dan Wilson, whose only sins were to have been the two players that Jim Ed had promoted during the Appier and Benson demotions.

In summary, I give you the 1999 Redbirds, this year's HSL cellar-dweller.

Next week: whoever's stinking it up.

SOME WERE BORN TO LEAD, OTHERS TO FOLLOW

With Big Guy being in the lead these past few weeks, and with recent memory unable to recall him ever leading the HSL since we expanded to twelve teams and adopted the Bill James format in 1993; I asked our statistics bureau to dust off the archives and find out if the **Tigers** had ever before been atop the leader board in our league since 1993. I learned that, indeed, the Tigers had held 1st place for a total of three weeks spanning two seasons during the six HSL seasons from 1993 to 1998.

If there are any doubting Thomases among you, for the record, the **Tigers** led the HSL not once in 1993; nary a time in 1994; for an ever-so-brief moment (weeks 4 and 5) during the 1995 season; for the very first week of the 1996 campaign; and not at all during 1997 or 1998. So you can see why Big Guy is enjoying his brief time in the sun this season, before reality sets in and the Tigers drop down to wherever they belong.

"But wait," asked our statistician, "don't you want to know what I found out about the other teams in the Hot Stove League, and how they fared on the leader board?"

Well, yes.

"And wouldn't you like to know which team has spent the most time in last place (we hold this truth to be self-evident), and which other teams spent more than their share of time in the cellar?"

Indeed, we would.

So here's what I'm told.

- ◆ There were a total of 146 weeks of play in the Hot Stove League between 1993 and 1998, with a total of ten weeks being taken away because of the 1994-95 strike. During those 146 weeks, eleven different teams held the 1st place position for at least two weeks, while one hapless team has never, ever – *not even once* – been on top of the leader board. Can you guess who? (Answer to be provided later.)
- ◆ During this same 146 weeks, one team occupied the cellar for the staggering total of 72 weeks, or just about half of his Hot Stove League life. Two other teams were in the cellar only once for one week, and one team has never, ever been in last place in six seasons of play. Can you guess who, who, who and who?
- ◆ Chagrined though I am to say it, the **Chiefs** have spent the most time in 1st place during these six seasons, logging a total of 39 weeks on top spanning a phenomenal five seasons. Only in 1995 – when his medicine cabinet was as barren as Possum’s soul – did the Chiefs not spend at least one week in 1st place in the league.⁴
- ◆ It should surprise no one that after the **Chiefs**, the storied **Senators** franchise has spent the most time in 1st place, with 34 weeks spread over three seasons, including 21 weeks at the helm in that glorious ’97 campaign. Ahhhh, sweet success.
- ◆ This will come as a shocker to many of you. The team with the third-most time spent in 1st place is none other than this year’s basement tenant, the **Crimson Chirpers**. Though they have never truly been in it at the end, the Woeful Wedbirds have actually spent 16 weeks in 1st place, and, get this, in four different seasons. Kind of like the wild rookie pitcher who has great stuff but just can’t pull it all together and be a consistent winner in this league.
- ◆ You may also be surprised to learn that the **Blues** are next with 15 weeks on top during two seasons; followed by the **Jax** with 14 over two. Then it’s down to single digits for the rest of you, ending up with the **Tribe’s** two weeks on top *at the very*

start of our revamped league, during the first two weeks of the 1993 campaign.

- ◆ On the other side of the coin, after the **Pirates** (I don’t think I’m giving away any secrets), the team that has spent the most time in last place during the aforementioned six seasons is the **Bronx Bombers** with 16. And I’m not happy to admit to it, but a close third is the **Senators** franchise, who occupied the cellar for 15 tortured weeks, primarily during the gawdofful 1994 season. Never again, knock wood.

To summarize, here’s a little chart that our statistics bureau developed to show exactly how much time each team has spent in 1st or last place between 1993 and 1999. The team that has never been in 1st has not been mentioned, out of respect:

**WEEKLY LEADERS/
CELLAR DWELLERS 1993-1999**

<u>Team</u>	<u># Weeks in 1st</u>	<u># of Seasons</u>
Chiefs	39	5
Senators	34	3
Redbirds	16	4
Blues	15	2
Skipjacks	14	2
Cubs*	7	1
Bombers	7	2
Reds	6	1
Tigers	3	2
Pirates	3	2
Tribe	2	1

<u>Team</u>	<u># Weeks in Last</u>	<u># of Seasons</u>
Pirates	72	5
Bombers	16	2
Senators	15	2
Cubs*	13	1
Tribe	7	3
Skipjacks	7	1
Chiefs	7	1
Redbirds	4	2
Reds	4	1
Red Sox	1	1
Blues	1	1
Tigers	0	0

Some food for thought and grist for discussion on the upcoming trip.

⁴ And so the obvious question is, if he’s picked so many good teams, how come he’s only won this league one time? There. I’ve said enough.

FOUL TIPS

3 **Cubs*** ace Greg Maddux was a -25 over two outings during Week 5, reducing his overall total to 52 points (7.4 PPG) for the year, while Cubs* leftie Sterling Hitchcock notched 50 points for the week, about half in a head-to-head outing with Maddux. Have we seen the end of Maddux's dominance? Have other teams finally figured him out? Personally, I hope not, but his 4.5 ERA on the year says otherwise.

3 I saw in this morning's paper that Mariner David Bell celebrated his first night on the **Tribe** roster with a 5-0-0-0 performance, after being positively *en fuego* for the two weeks prior. Will Crime Dog follow suit for the **Redbirds**? Shame on you if you have to ask.

3 You will notice on this week's report that Possum finally dumped Joey Hamilton in Sunday's free agent draft, he of the -20 PPG infamy, together with Butch Huskey and Jason Christiansen. And who are the plums that he picked up this week? Ray Sanchez, Darren Oliver and Mike Williams. Is this the same Darren Oliver who used to routinely get thrashed like a Matt Stairs lookalike stepchild? The eyes of Texas are upon you, Darren.

3 And I see that Possum finally got the courage up to promote Gregg Olson on Sunday. Sit back in your La-Z-Boy recliners, my friends, and get ready to feast your eyes on some late-inning pyrotechnics, courtesy of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

3 The **Senators** were on track for a 400-plus point week and to overtake the **Bombers** and the **Skipjacks** until Black Sunday. As I watched *Baseball Tonight* on Sunday eve, I eagerly awaited the latest exploits from my red-hit Indians, as well as Magglio, Fernando, Kevin and Todd, all of whom have been hitting the cover off the ball of late. Unfortunately, the only two names that made it on Sunday night's highlight tape were UU (initials for Unbelievably Ugly?), who notched a save and his teammate O. (Oscar, Orlando, Otto? I forget) Cabrera, who went 3-for-4. Not a good sign. However, since the Phillies scored runs in double figures, and a couple of the other teams which host Senator players had big offensive nights, and since there was a full slate of games on Sunday, I figured we were looking at 40 or 50 points for the night, at worst, which would put me within striking distance of 400 points for the week. Boy, was I wrong.

I made the mistake of picking my fax up off the machine Monday morning instead of going directly to the newspaper box scores, and I paid dearly for it. Here's what it showed: Rolen, 5-0-0-0, -3; Vina, 5-0-0-0 -3; Higginson, 4-0-0-0, -2; Hundley, 1-0-0-0, -1; Justice, 4-0-0-0, -2; Young, 1-0-0-0, -1; Ordonez, 4-0-0-0 -2. Out of my twelve starting hitters, seven posted negatives for the night, and the rest had such puny numbers that even Cabrera's 6-point game could not get my hitters off the schneid. For the night, it was 41 at-bats, 5 hits, 1 double, 2 runs scored, 1 RBI, 1 BB, and 1 DP. Composite average .122, net points 0. Very, very nice.

3 This league is all luck. If Stretch hadn't made his colossal mcblunder in the 5th round, Sean Green wouldn't have been around for Itchie to pick up in the 7th round, and the **Skipjacks** would be less 164 points, and sniffing the **Senators** tailpipe even as we speak. Nevertheless, I'm doubtful that the Jewish Jay will be leading the American League in home runs (11) and every other category come year end. Call me skeptical.

3 I'll tell you what. Nomar didn't ever do the **Senators** wrong when he was on our roster the last two seasons, but on the other hand, he never went 4-3-3-10 for me either. Let's see. If I had taken Nomar in the 1st round instead of A-Rod, just where would the Senators be right now? Woulda, shoulda, coulda, mighta, maybe.

3 I nearly lost my breakfast again this morning when I read the Diamondbacks/Expos box score and saw that the Circus Geek went 4-1-2-1 and knocked in his 25th RBI last evening, raising his average to .392. I'm pretty sure he'll keep this pace up. In eight major league seasons, Geek has averaged 121 games per season, 10.5 jacks, just under 60 RBIs, and has a career average of .268. Look it up. *I did.*

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That should cover all the bases for this week. See you at Eppley (the airport, not the treatment center).

Skipper