



FROM THE BULLPEN

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TIGERS TRADE JOHNSON! BEST PITCHER IN LEAGUE NOW ON LEAGUE LEADER'S STAFF; CHIEFS NOW A VIRTUAL LOCK FOR SECOND HSL CROWN

There you have it. In a bold, unexpected and possibly downright stupid move, Big Guy traded arguably the best pitcher of the '90s to the league-leading **Chiefs**, to the utter amazement, stupefaction and ire of other league members.

"What the f--- is Big Guy thinking about?" inquired one hot manager who considered his team a contender.

"Has Drews gone mad?" asked another, as he watched his own hopes and dreams dashed.

"So which of B.T.'s puppet companies is Big Guy now the executive vice president of? Or is this another one of those players for Coors Field tickets deals? Smells like bad tuna!" remarked one angry and suspicious manager.

"This smacks of a Hurlbut-orchestrated transaction. It's got U-Bob's pawprint all over it," postulated yet another.

We may never know all of the seamy details – short of the Warren Commission being recalled into duty – but the cold, hard fact of life is that B.T. has cleverly and swiftly unloaded the Point Cap monkey off his back and positioned his team for a perhaps unstoppable ride atop the standings for eleven more weeks.

And Big Guy? He now has Sammy Sosa for the rest of the year after his career year, and nine outraged fellow owners who have been whipped into a froth-mouthed frenzy by one muckraking HSLer who has

been fanning the flames from the moment that the trade was announced.

Oh. And he has Armando Reynoso, too.

With that backdrop, let's take a look at the standings in this thing through fifteen weeks:

WEEK 15 STANDINGS

| | | |
|-----|-----------|------|
| 1. | Chiefs | 5486 |
| 2. | Cubs* | 5387 |
| 3. | Skipjacks | 5345 |
| 4. | Reds | 5269 |
| 5. | Tigers | 5135 |
| 6. | Tribe | 5038 |
| 7. | Senators | 4954 |
| 8. | Pirates | 4862 |
| 9. | Redbirds | 4848 |
| 10. | Red Sox | 4591 |
| 11. | Blues | 4589 |
| 12. | Bombers | 4450 |

Not much of a change in the standings from last week, although it should be noted that Possum used Coney's Perfecto to leap out of 11th place and into 10th, with a precarious 2-point lead over Bongo's¹ squad.

WEEK 15 POINT TOTALS

| | | |
|-----|-----------|-----|
| 1. | Red Sox | 375 |
| 2. | Tribe | 313 |
| 3. | Chiefs | 304 |
| 4. | Tigers | 300 |
| 5. | Senators | 294 |
| (T) | Pirates | 294 |
| 7. | Skipjacks | 274 |
| 8. | Redbirds | 269 |
| 9. | Bombers | 257 |
| 10. | Cubs* | 248 |

¹ That's what Denny called him in the *Irate Pirate*. I like it. Let's use it.

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| 11. Blues | 210 |
| 12. Reds | 202 |

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| League MVP of the year – Jeff Bagwell, Bombers | 559 |
| Cy Young of the year – Pedro Martinez, Cubs* | 483 |
| Top hitting team, week – Chiefs | 220 |
| Worst hitting team, week – Redbirds | 157 |
| Top hitting team, year – Tribe | 3962 |
| Worst hitting team, year – Bombers | 2784 |
| Top pitching team, week – Red Sox | 166 |
| Worst pitching team, week – Blues | 31 |
| Top pitching team, year – Pirates | 1907 ² |
| Worst pitching team, year – Red Sox | 1013 |

TRADE WARS

I've been in this league fifteen years, and I've never seen anything like it. Weren't there like *no* trades for the first fourteen and a half weeks of the season? And since that time, we have Buser and Thielen swapping Biggio and Ashby; B.T. and Big Guy cementing the title for the **Chiefs**; we've got the all-too-quiet trade of Ortiz and Wetteland by Magpie to Possum for Piazza³; and then just the other day, I learned of the blockbuster deal between Shamu* and Mouse, wherein Shamu* traded his twin towers, Bagwell and McGwire, for a sore-shouldered Pedro Martinez and a slumping Mo Vaughn. Not that I have an opinion about who snookered who on that one or anything. Fortunately, the primary benefactor, Mouse, is in last place and a fur piece from passing the **Senators**.

But I digress. My point is, who the heck has been shaking the bushes to cause all of this trade business of late? And how come nobody's calling me to try to make a deal for some of my studs⁴? *I want some!*

Ahhh, there's nothing like a good baseball swap, is there?

BALLS AND STRIKES

² What's that you say? Who and what are the Skipjacks?

³ Talk about your bad trades. Possum gave up the premiere catcher of the '90s, just heating up, to Curby for a hot rookie with inflated numbers (Ortiz) and a grizzled veteran who has pitched too many innings in the hot Texas sun (Wetteland), and blown almost all of his last half-dozen save opportunities. Wait a minute. Did I get the sending and receiving parties mixed up? Sounds like role reversal to me.

⁴ I don't mean to exclude you, Magpie, but you've tossed out the names of so many free agent slagballs against my second-round draft pick that I tend to discount these nowadays.

☼ I had a chance to finally win some money in this stupid golf league that B.T. got me in when the Frenchman at No. 18 at the Brit fell apart like one of Possum's trade proposals. Having picked Justin Leonard to win it all, I liked my chances after *Le Idiot* carded a triple and sent the match into a playoff, but alas and alack, Leonard – he of the DiMaggio-like proboscis – proved himself unable to carry the day for the Skipper, to my great disappointment and financial undoing.

☼ My first weekend without baseball on the radio was tolerable. Actually, I was able to pick up a faint signal for a couple of the Twins' games, dreadful though they may be, and truth be known I could not resist the temptation of tuning in to catch the Royals score a time or two. To be true to myself, what I do is listen for Ryan LaFever's voice (and he's no prize) and hope that he will update me before the doddering old fool chimes in with his two millipesos worth.⁵ It's not as hard as it sounds, since it seems as if there is a conscious decision to muzzle Matthews of late, and LaFever and the third guy seem to dominate much of the recent air time. If my timing is off and Matthews starts to chime in, I merely cover my ears with my hands and yell "Yeah-yeah-yeah-yeah," until I think he has stopped. Makes the driving kind of tricky at times, but it's well worth it.⁶

☼ How about David Cone's perfect game last weekend? In Yankee Stadium, site of last year's perfect game by David Wells, and of at least three of the fourteen perfect games that have been pitched in history; Don Larsen in the stands to help pay tribute to Yogi Berra, probably his first day out of the detox center for many years; and Mike Witt and me watching on TV. So many coincidences it's downright spooky.

Anyway, back to Cone. You read, no doubt, that Cone did not even go to a 3-ball count on a single batter. From my reading about the game and seeing a couple of the highlights, it doesn't look like there were very many tough plays that had to be made by the defense.

☼ Even with Coney's humongous night, the **Red Sox's** woeful pitching staff continues to have the low-

⁵ Ain't no way it's worth two cents.

⁶ I have to confess that even employing this methodology, I happened to catch the old fool telling Ryan that when the Royals' shortstop laid down a bunt the other night, "No part of that bat was touching his hands when the bat hit the ball, I assure you." *Right.*

est total of all with 1013 points, some 63 points less than the abysmal **Tribe** staff. It will be interesting to see if Possum can use Cone's perfect game as a rallying point for his flaccid club and salvage some remnant of the 1999 campaign. If not, it is not inconceivable that the storied **Red Sox** franchise could finish the year at the very bottom of the heap, bringing ignominy and shame to the Devil-Boy.

☼ Mouse reported just a day prior to Cone's perfect game that the **Bronx Bombers** had climbed out of the cellar and overtaken the **Red Sox** – albeit only by a couple of points. While this transposition was fleeting and reverted after only one day, it is noteworthy that the Bombers have spent at least some time during this second half in a place other than the lower intestines of the league. Congratulations, Brother Mouse. And may your future victories be less insignificant.

☼ There may be no truth whatsoever to the rumor that while B.T. is down in Branson at the Mel Tillifest, Underbelly is being paid to sit at a computer terminal at Art FX during all waking hours to watch for possible injuries to **Chiefs** players, and for hot minor leaguers to promote at his discretion for B.T.⁷

☼ Has anyone noticed how communicative Tricko is this season, and particularly during the last thirty days or so? Is this a sign that Magpie's unfathomably-busy career at Cal Energy⁸ has become more manageable, and that his superiors have stopped sending him all over the globe on a moment's notice? Or that in the last thirty days his team has had a renaissance and is actually in contention for the first time in recent memory? If you guessed the latter, you get a gold star.

☼ Rubella has been darned quiet lately about his trade with Itchie (Biggio-for-Ashby and Little Mac). Trader's remorse, or conservative cautiousness?

☼ This may have been the first week all year that a **Senator** hitter has had the best hitting performance in the league for the week – Kevin Young with 43 points. Just as I was using Kevin's name in vain, he got hot, and lately has been doing his owner proud. At the plate, that is. His glove work could not ever be described as prideful. In fact, can any of you remember a first baseman having as many (15) errors as Kevvie has this year to date, booting it around at the virtually unheard-of pace of about 1 muff a week? I doubt that

⁷ We can only hope it's at Bob's discretion.

⁸ The same one that kept him from being pickpocketed in St. Louis with U-belly.

even Dr. Strangeglove himself (Dick Stuart) actually chalked up an E as often as Young.

☼ Incredibly, U-belly's hitters continue at their matchless pace, collectively averaging .307 fifteen weeks into the season. And in unwavering defiance of the Bill James hitting point caps, U-belly continues to march his hitters out on the field twelve at a time, the maximum allowed by the league rules. The **Tribe** have chalked up 1170 hits to date, far more than any other team; 229 doubles, more than any other team; 49 triples, more than any other team; 178 home runs, more than any other team save the recently-ratcheted back **Chiefs**; more RBIs than any other team, by plenty; more hitting bonus points (110) than any other team; and a higher PPG average (4.0) than any other team, possibly in history. And, I might add, a projected point total that is more than 300 points less than his actual total to date, meaning that U-Bob will soon be experiencing first-hand one of those scenes from a James Bond movie where the hero and the audience watch in stark terror as the ceiling in the room begins being lowered down, first slowly and then faster and faster, to crush and then splatter 007 like a bug. The only difference is that Bob won't have the gadget guy (what's his name?) or Barbara Bach to come to his rescue.

☼ The three guys on Bob's roster that blow me away are Dave Nilsson (4.0 PPG), B.J. Surhoff (4.4 PPG), and most of all, Henry Rodriguez (4.1 PPG). O'Henry is hitting like, what, .358 or something? Henry, you're a career .280 hitter, at best. What the heck is going on?

That's it for Week 15. Shalom.

Skipper

