



FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Publication of The Hot Stove League

Eastern Nebraska Division

1999 Season Edition No. 19

July 28, 1999

ITCHIE'S SLEEPING GIANT AWAKES, JAX RIDE BELLE TO 504-POINT WEEK

CUBS SINK TO 4TH AFTER DISASTROUS TRADE; HARD-CHARGING REDS NOW IN THICK OF PENNANT RACE

Wow. If your team wasn't scoring 500 points in Week 16, you were losing ground. For the first time ever, not one but *two* Hot Stove League teams surpassed the magical 500-point level for a single week of play.

No, your eyes don't deceive you. Both Magpie and Itchie somehow managed to manage their teams to 504-point weeks. Itchie's **Jax** took advantage of the awakening of their sleeping giant, Albert Belle, who cracked out three homers on Sunday and finally showed signs of meeting Itchie's expectations. Magpie, on the other hand, managed to pilot his team to a 504-point week without the benefit of any bonus points, and looking at his team roster, I'm still not quite sure how they did this, but they did, and in so doing sailed past the **Cubs*** and into 3rd place.

Here are the standings and point totals for the week:

WEEK 16 STANDINGS

1. Chiefs	5883
2. Jax	5848
3. Reds	5772
4. Cubs*	5741
5. Tigers	5498
6. Tribe	5436
7. Senators	5377
8. Redbirds	5209
9. Pirates	5185
10. Blues	5034

11. Red Sox	4944
12. Bombers	4829

WEEK 16 POINT TOTALS

1. Reds	504
(T) Skipjacks	504
3. Blues	445
4. Senators	423
5. Tribe	398
6. Chiefs	397
7. Bombers	379
8. Tigers	363
9. Redbirds	361
10. Cubs*	354
11. Red Sox	353
12. Pirates	323

Amazing. The **Blues** post their second-best total of the year, an eyepopping 445 points, and still lose almost 60 points to two teams. The **Chiefs**, with a 397-point week that would ordinarily titillate management, gave ground to five teams. The **Red Sox**, with a 353-point week that during at least one or two weeks of the year would be the top team total, had only the 11th best point total for the week. And even the **Pirates**, with the lowest weekly total of 323 points, didn't threaten to score less than 300 points, much less make a run at the Mendoza line. Go figure.

Jeff Bagwell, now with the **Bombers** – as if Shamu* needs another reminder of this – continues to be frontrunner for MVP recognition with 562 points; while the lame-shouldered Pedro Martinez, now of the **Cubs*** -- as if Shamu* needed a reminder – continues to lead the arms race with a total of 483 points.

BALLS AND STRIKES

X Suddenly, the **Chiefs** hitters are in a deep and desperate funk, one which could threaten their prospects for winning the title this year. For the week, the

Chiefs totaled only 141 hitting points, well below the next-lowest total of 232 by the **Redbirds**, and the Chiefs' top hitter for the week was Rondell White with only 20 points. While the Chiefs had an impressive 256-point pitching week, if their hitters don't wake up soon, this team will soon be in Itchie's rear-view mirror.

X Not only has Albert suddenly come to life for Itchie, it looks like Jim Thome, who has been mired in mediocrity this year, is about to bust out. I had the serious displeasure of personally seeing Thome jack a monster shot out of Jacobs Field on Tuesday night, the third-longest blast ever at Jacobs Field. And then more of the same last night by Thome, who may soon justify Itchie's 3rd round selection of him. If the Merry Mex ever gets rolling, the **Jax** could soon be long gone from the rest of the field.

X Not that there is any suggestion that Itchie is a genius, or anything. In fact, the opposite would be closer to the truth. Not only did Itchie leave two 30+ point outings by recent call-up Joe Mays in his minor leagues, but the Bill James data suggests that Skipjacks management has been underperforming all year, witness Itchie's hitters' active PPG of 3.5 versus their total PPG of 3.7. Granted, the **Jax's** active pitchers are averaging 8.9 PPG to their "total" PPG of 7.4, but we can chalk up this anomaly to luck.

X Last year at this time, the **Senators** were still leading the pack with 5860 points, only 23 points off the pace of this year, while the **Blues** were in 2nd with 5707 and the **Bronx Bombers** in 3rd with 5632. The last-place **Pirates** had a total of 4595 points at this stage last year, so it is apparent that there has been superior management this year versus last all the way up and down the line. Big Mac was our points leader last year with 574, while Greg Maddux was leading all pitchers with 487 points.

X This week's monster point totals of 504 by the **Skipjacks** and **Reds** narrowly topped the 503-point Week 13 posted by the **Reds**, all three of which are now in the all-time HSL Top Ten, behind the **Blues'** high-water mark of 551 in May of last year, the **Senators'** total of 527 for the week ending August 24, 1997, the **Reds'** total of 526 for the week ended July 3, 1994, the **Reds'** total of 520 for the week ended June 30, 1996, and the **Redbirds'** total of 505 for the week ended July 26, 1998. In sum, this year we have seen three of the eight total 500+ point weeks. Remarkable.

X The top hitting team for Week 16 was the **Blues** with 358 points. The top hitting team for the season is still the **Tribe** with 4227 points, more than 300 points better than the second-best **Cubs*** with 3916. The worst-hitting team for the season is still the **Bombers** with 3064. The top pitching team for the season is, sigh, the **Jax** with 2245, while the **Red Sox** bring up the rear with 1098, although the **Pirates'** staff had the lowest total (45) for Week 16.

X HOORAY! I finally have hitting warnings showing up on my Stats sheet. My sticks are finally producing. About time.

BRUSHBACKS

☞ Rubella, plagued by managerial miscues from Week 1, continued to make all of the wrong moves in Week 16. Rip remained on the **Redbirds'** bench through his recent torrid hitting streak, including his career jacks No. 397, 398 and 399 over last weekend; Tony Phillips remained in the starting lineup while producing a meager 15 points; and Harold Baines showed his gratitude for finally being promoted (after leaving about a jillion points in the minors) by packing up the whopping stick and eking out a sickly 5.5 points for the week. Don't ever try to time the stock market, Boose, because you're a loser. If it wasn't for the preposterous overachievement of one Freddie "Crime Dog" McGriff, this team would be fading as fast as Magpie's hopes for a cover shot on GQ.

☞ Rubella is not the only HSLer to demonstrate feet of clay insofar as his recent managerial moves go – far from it. One need look no further than to our fear-struck leader to see a hand that has been quaking violently at the helm. A look at this week's transaction list shows that the **Chiefs'** promotion of Jason Giambi on Sunday last was just a titch late. You see, Jason had a Reggie Sanders-like run in the Chiefs' minors that culminated with three home runs on Friday and Saturday and a two-day point total of 31, running Jason's 10-day point total prior to promotion to 66 points. Ouch. What's a guy in B.T.'s employ got to do for a promotion and raise?¹ Not that those 66 points would have been much help, and not that B.T. had any slackers (Troy O'Leary, 12 points in ten days) in need of demotion. For a pinch of sodium in the gaping wound, add to the list that Luis Castilla had 49 points and Marvin Benard 44 during their recent ten-day stints down on the Chiefs' farm, and consider whether

¹ U-belly may be well to ask this very question.

this team's owner has emptied his Smith and Wesson into his foot.

☞ If Big Guy wasn't already violently ill with trader's remorse after Week 1 of what has become known as the Big (Unit) Debacle, Monday night had to send him to the porcelain bus. That very night, Big Guy's **Tigs** were already trotting backwards faster than Possum's latest stock churnings (Omar Olivares, -14; Scott Sauerbeck, -3; Justin Thompson, -13.5); but then recent acquiree Jeff Shaw came in to try to close out the Reds and preserve my man Ishmael's 3-to-1 win. Two innings, five hits, four earned runs, one blown save and one loss later, the Tigers were 11½ notches farther back on the old cribbage board. Between the four negative outings, the Tigs' staff had 42 negative pitching points. Wonder if Rick would like to turn the clock back a week or two. And thanks for blowing Ishmael's win, as well.

☞ And wouldn't Shamu* like to do a little backwards time travel as well. As it turns out, his trade with Mouse was a bona fide disaster. Not only is Big Mac now red-hot for the **Bombers**, showing no signs of a sore back, and not only is Bagwell continuing his MVP-type season, but Mo Vaughn is playing like someone on a squad that has lost 13 of their last 14 games, and of course Pedro is on the D.L. with a wrenched shoulder. It wasn't broke, Shamu, but now it is.

☞ Possum's **Red Sucks** continue to underperform his expectations, though not the rest of ours. With his pitching staff continuing to flounder, the entire staff has accrued only 1098 points to date, well behind the dreadful staff of the **Tribe**, and less than half of the point total of the top pitching staff of the **Skipjacks** with 2245. It may be that the recent infusion of pitching talent with the trade for Russ Ortiz will help, Possum. Oops. I see that Russell had a bit of a rugged outing against the Cards the other night, pitching two innings and giving up four hits, seven runs, and walking six while striking out one. What is a fella to do?

☞ I still haven't figured out how the vanilla **Reds** scored 504 points last week. No matter how many times I look at his lineup, I just don't see it. His top hitter for the week was Johnny Damon with 59 points, which is terrific, but not what one would expect for a team that scored 504 points for the week. His top pitcher was Jason Schmidt, with 34 points, which again is a lot less than one would expect. For the week, Magpie had seven different hitters who scored at

least 24 points, and eight different hitters who scored 20 or more points, so it appears that it was a matter of everyone pitching in just a little, but nobody except for Johnny Damon tearing the cover off the ball.

☞ I continue to be amazed by the number of transactions being made by management in the league this year. One such move was U-belly finally giving up on Darryl Kile and releasing him to the wolves, picking up rookie Octavio Dotel in return. Whether Octavio will be his next staff ace is something that we will have to wait on to see.

☞ It will be interesting to see how Mr. Ashby does during his next outing for the **Redbirds**. In his last start, on Sunday, Ashby ticked off Craig Biggio by throwing at his head in the 1st inning. Apparently Ash was rather upset about being supplanted by Biggio on the **Skipjacks'** championship contender roster, and being relegated to a Lower Division team like the **Redbirds**. In any event, Biggio responded by having a multi-hit day, and Ashby was knocked out of the game early and finished with -13 points. But for the horrible trades made by Big Guy and Shamu*, the Ashby incident would certainly have a legitimate crack at this distinction.

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

Looks like it's going to be one heck of a pennant race. See you all next week.

Skipper