



FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Publication of The Hot Stove League

Eastern Nebraska Division

1999 Season Edition No. 20

August 3, 1999

Brethren:

With seventeen weeks of play in the jar – almost exactly two-thirds of the official HSL season – the **Skipjacks** have posted notice that they plan to make a mockery of the 1999 campaign, not unlike McBlunder’s runaway performance in the 1998 pennant race. Backed by more solid pitching from his talented¹ pitching staff, and with the coming of age of rookie Joe Mays, the Jax used a 443-point week – tops in the league – to vault past the stagnant **Chiefs** and into 1st place, ending B.T.’s ten-week hold on the top spot. The King is dead. Long live the King.

And without more, I give you the:

WEEK 17 STANDINGS

Upper Division

- | | |
|--------------|------|
| 1. Skipjacks | 6291 |
| 2. Chiefs | 6226 |
| 3. Reds | 6150 |
| 4. Cubs* | 6046 |
| 5. Tigers | 5859 |
| 6. Senators | 5787 |

Lower Division

- | | |
|-------------|------|
| 7. Tribe | 5600 |
| 8. Redbirds | 5496 |
| 9. Pirates | 5495 |
| 10. Blues | 5344 |
| 11. Red Sox | 5248 |
| 12. Bombers | 5183 |

There is definitely a new look to the league this week. As aforesaid, Itchie’s boys are now on top, but if you look closely, you will see that there has been another major move in the standings this week, to-wit,

¹ If I knew how to spell somebody coughing the word “bullshit,” same would appear here.

the **Senators’** reemergence in the Upper Division and the **Tribe’s** reintroduction to the league’s subterranean subdivision. In part due to a superior 410-point week for the Senators, but more so because of the Tribe’s horrifying 164-point week, the Capitol Hill Gang supplanted the once-proud Indian Nation as the final occupant of the U.D. But it’s okay, U-belly – nothing that a government subsidy check and a bottle of Ripple or Mad Dog can’t cure.

Week 17 was largely a week of mediocre and/or underperformance. Here’s how all of you did during the seventeenth week:

WEEK 17 POINT TOTALS

- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| 1. Skipjacks | 443 |
| 2. Senators | 410 |
| 3. Reds | 378 |
| 4. Tigers | 361 |
| 5. Bombers | 354 |
| 6. Chiefs | 343 |
| 7. Blues | 310 |
| (T) Pirates | 310 |
| 9. Cubs* | 305 |
| 10. Red Sox | 304 |
| 11. Redbirds | 287 |
| 12. Tribe | 164 |

The top hitting team for the year is still the **Tribe** with 4382, although they obviously gave some ground to the rest of the league this week, and now are a mere 256 points better than the second-best hitting team, the **Tigers** with 4126. The top hitting team for the week was the **Tigers** with 324 points.

The top pitching team for the year remains the **Skipjacks** with 2398 points, ahead of the second-best **Chiefs** with 2127. The top pitching team for Week 17 was the **Senators** with 169 points.

The worst hitting team for the year is still the **Bombers**, now with 3287 points. The team with the fewest hitting points for the week was the **Tribe**, with 155.

The **Red Sox** continue to have the fewest pitching points as a team with 1142. However, in a pitched battle for this distinction, U-belly notched a league-worst pitching total of 8 points for the week, and threatens to soon take over the distinction of the worst hitting team with an eleventh-best total of 1218 points.

AROUND THE HORN

☞ It looks like there's no stopping the **Skipjacks**, particularly if Albert Belle and Jim Thome continue to sizzle, if Hampton and Reynolds continue to kick tail, and Shawn Green and Jeff Zimmerman continue to overachieve. Will Itchie be insufferable with a third title under his belt, or what? On the other hand, one cannot yet write off the **Chiefs**, particularly with a pitching staff that includes Randy Johnson, Mike Mussina, Kevin Brown and Jose Lima. If Mike Lieberthal and Shawn Casey can heat back up again, this team is definitely still in the running. Unless, of course, they are overtaken by the surging **Reds**, who ignore injuries and the traditional requirement of talent to win an HSL title, and are certainly poised to make a run at things. But good Lord, Magpie has Ron Belliard, Tony Batista, Ricky Henderson, Jeff Jenkins, Brian Giles, and Ben Grieve in his starting lineup, and a starting pitching rotation of Tim Hudson, Orlando Hernandez, Chris Carpenter, Hideki Irabu, and Jason Schmidt. Would anyone have thought that this squad sounded like a contender on Draft Day? I think not.

☞ For my money, you can put a pitchfork in the **Cubs***, because they're done. Even though Pedro may soon be back and will likely pitch well during the second half, the disemboweling of this team by trading away Twin Peaks McGwire and Bagwell will cost this team its chance to shed the hated asterisk, particularly if Jay Bell continues to cool and Shamu's* pitching staff continues to perform the way it should (badly). In fact, it's only a matter of time before the **Tigers** or **Senators** catch and blast past the Baby Bears, although Big Guy certainly can't count on I-Rod staying as hot as he has been, and the Tigers' pitching staff could easily post a huge negative-point week with the trio of Justin Thompson, Armando Reynoso and Scott Erickson. As for the Senators, it appears that their jets have cooled just a bit and that the injury bugaboo is taking its toll, but if Scott Rolen, A-Rod and Andruw Jones can get it going and Robby and Magglio can stay hot,

this team certainly can keep going in the same direction.

☞ Which brings us to the Lower Division, of all places. The **Tribe** tops the L.D. for now, although with Dave Nilsson, David Bell and B.J. Surhoff cooling down a touch, and Hideo starting to remember that he ain't that good, this team will drop in a hurry once the point caps start having their way with Bob. Which, unfortunately, means that the **Rancid Redbirds** are likely to move up a notch to 7th, although Rubella's continued mismanagement may leave the door open for the **Pirates** to skip right over the 'Birds. More later on that. As for the Pirates, if Curt Schilling would ever decide to pitch again, and with Brad Radke and Bartolo Colon (Bart's not really still in the minors, is he, Slo-Pay?) heating up, this team has some "potentia."

☞ And now to the lower intestines. The **Blues** cling desperately to 10th place, essentially by default. Other than John Jaha and Jermaine Dye, I don't see anybody on this team's roster that has done much lately, nor for that matter, do I see anyone who is likely to do anything special from here on out. Yet the Blues maintain almost a 100-point cushion over the putrid **Red Sox** who, despite remarkable overachievement from Brady Anderson and Bobby Abreu, simply cannot get off the snide this year. Then again, take a look at this team's infield, *sans* Piazza. Yeesh.

☞ And finally we have the beloved **Bronx Bombers**, who continue to scratch and claw and fight to inch their way out of the cellar, and now have a mere 66 points to climb to do so. Go, Bombers!

BRUSHBACKS

★ With Pedro on the shelf and his team in freefall, Shamu* has to be feeling like the dumbest guy in the league right now. Every time I look at an Angels box score and see that Mo Vaughn had another oh-fer night, I wince for Sir Charles. When I took a look at Mo's ten-day statistics (-2, -2.5, 4.5, 2, 9.5, 2, DNP, -2, -2, 1), and see that he netted a total of 8.5 positive points during that span, my heart goes out to him, particularly when I glance over to the Cardinals box score and see that Big Mac's swelter at the plate continues. But then again, I am reminded of an episode just five or six weeks ago when Shamu* found it necessary to ask me how I liked being more than 500 points behind his team, to which I had no good response. But if Pedro remains on the shelf much longer, there may be

others soon asking Shamu* precisely the same question.

★ I see that Jeff Shaw blew yet another save opportunity for Big Guy, enhancing his credentials for being named as The Most Disgusting Player Received in Any Trade, although the aforementioned Mo Vaughn would appear to be a lock for this distinction. If Sammy was not positively *en fuego* right now, Big Guy would be positively suicidal.

★ Poor Rubella. I can't remember a season when one man timed his moves so badly, unless it was the year that Ed Sprague nearly drove Big Guy stark, raving mad, whatever year that was. In any event, Buser's handling of Ripken has been positively Cal-feasance, as Ripken always seems to be down when he's up and up and when he's down. Currently, he's hurt, yet remains in the **Redbirds'** starting lineup. The same might be said for Kevin Appier, Kris Benson and Dustin Hermanson, who are positively thriving in the Redbirds' minor league system, but once promoted will promptly revert to form and start kicking Buser's ass once more. It's called *The Shell Game*, Jimmy,

★ Boy, did the **Tribe** stink last week. Of course, that goes without saying when your team has scored a total of 164 points. On the pitching side of the equation, where the Tribe netted 8 points for the week, U-belly took a 18.5 negative-point beating from recent call-up Octavio Dotel; twin -14 point beatings from Yumpin' Jimenez; a -3 point performance from Sidney Ponson; a -7 bruiser from Hideo; and a -1 outing from Rick Helling. If not for virtuoso performances from his relief corps of John Johnstone, Danny Graves and Mike Jackson, U-belly would have threatened the all-time worst pitching week in the league. Things weren't much better on the hitting side, with Nilsson, Surhoff, Walker and Jeter in a funk, and only Dante Bichette topping 20 points for the week. This hitting slump was enough to drop the Tribe's collective batting average down to .306, their lowest mark for months. Can this team rebound? No.

★ I am duty-bound to report here that about two weeks ago Magpie made me an e-mail offer of Jason Schmidt and Hideki Irabu for Tom Glavine, as I recall. He was accused of plying Possummetrics. I see from my computer that Jason Schmidt is coming off 33 and 25.5 point performances, while the Fat Toad scored 24.5 and 29 points in his last two starts. I take it all back, Tricko. Well, most of it, anyway.

★ To make things worse for the **Senators**, I recently demoted Bret Saberhagen because of a couple of lackluster performances, and with the knowledge that he was about to face the powerful Yankees. Naturally, Sabes throws one of his best games of the year, and throws a gem to beat the Yanks. The very next night, former Senator Andy Pettitte twirled a 3-1 victory for the Yankees, no doubt enhancing his free agent value. But if you take Andy, my friends, take him with your eyes wide open.

ACCORDING TO MY RESEARCH

Statistics are amazing. According to the numbers, this week the twelve teams of the Hot Stove League averaged a total of 330.75 points per team for the week. Just one week ago, these same twelve teams averaged a total of 400.33 points per team. What was different about last week? Same teams, same managers, same approximate number of games, presumably the same number of pitchers going, the same hot weather all across the nation, no rainouts that I'm aware of. So why were the averages so much higher last week? Because when you're hot, you're hot, and when you're not, you're not. What goes up must come down. That is the nature of the beast, and that is why statistics are so fascinating, in my opinion.

SAME TIME, LAST YEAR

After seventeen weeks last year the **Senators** remained in the lead with 6276 points, only 15 points fewer than the **Skipjacks** have through seventeen weeks this year. In 2nd at this time last year were the **Blues** with 6151, followed by the **Bombers** with 6010, and the **Chiefs** with 5852. There's plenty of time, fellas.

TRANSACTION UPDATE

There is still plenty of activity in the Hot Stove League on Sunday nights, even though we are seventeen weeks deep into the season. By my count, six different teams picked up free agents in last week's draft, including three each by the **Senators** and **Blues** and two by the **Pirates**. Attaboys!!

LISTS

Since there are several new entries to add from the past couple of weeks, let me share with you now new, improved and updated lists of the best and worst scor-

ing weeks in the Hot Stove League, from 1993 to last Sunday:

ALL-TIME TOP 10

1. Blues 551 Week ending 5/31/98
2. Blues 537 Week ending 8/16/98
3. Senators 527 Week ending 8/24/97
4. Reds 526 Week ending 7/3/94
5. Reds 520 Week ending 6/30/96
6. Redbirds 505 Week ending 7/26/98
7. Reds 504 Week ending 7/25/99
- (T) Skipjacks 504 Week ending 7/25/99
9. Reds 503 Week ending 7/4/99
10. Redbirds 497 Week ending 8/13/95

BOTTOM 10

1. Pirates 131 Week ending 5/4/97
2. Tigers 136 Week ending 5/22/94
3. Senators 138 Week ending 5/1/94
4. Blues 145 Week ending 5/16/99
5. Tribe 149 Week ending 9/26/93
6. Pirates 153 Week ending 10/3/93
7. Cubs* 159 Week ending 9/26/93
8. Blues 162 Week ending 9/12/93
- (T) Skipjacks 162 Week ending 4/13/97
10. Pirates 164 Week ending 6/5/94
- (T) Pirates 164 Week ending 6/22/97
- (T) Tribe 164 Week ending 8/1/99

See you next week.

Skipper