



# FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division

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## WEEK 20: CHIEF CRUSADE CONTINUES; REDS SURGE PAST AILING SKIPJACKS; TIGERS MAUL BABY BEARS

Gentlemen:

I use the term loosely. Week 20 of the Hot Stove League brought two significant changes in the standings, and two significant trades. First the Week 20 standings:

### WEEK 20 STANDINGS

#### Upper Division

1. Chiefs	7420
2. Reds	7331
3. Skipjacks	7330
4. Tigers	7163
5. Cubs*	7086
6. Senators	6847

#### Lower Division

7. Tribe	6673
8. Pirates	6525
9. Redbirds	6372
10. Red Sox	6326
11. Blues	6292
12. Bombers	6070

In an unanticipated move, the **Reds** used a 416-point week to sashay past the lukewarm **Skipjacks**, who could muster up only 335 points for the week. However, since the Reds are only 1 point ahead of the Yaks in actual points, and a whopping 292 points behind in projected points, Itchie is presumably taking a "who cares?" approach to Tricko's recent advancement into 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The other major move last week was by the **Tigers**, who used a whopping 493-point week, best in the league, to rocket past the downward-bound **Cubs\***, whose emasculated hitting corps was able to score a mere 124 points

for the week, far and away the worst in the league for the week.

While the Upper Division experienced the aforedescribed position changes, it was business as usual in the Lower Division, which had an extraordinarily ordinary week. The top-scoring Lower Division team for the week was the **Pirates**, who forged a 388-point week to inch ever closer to the 7<sup>th</sup> place **Tribe**, and will probably soon be in a position to pass the Tribe even if U-Bob follows through on his deranged plan to kidnap Bill James' preschool age children and hold them hostage until relief from the point caps is granted.

Here are the totals for Week 20:

### WEEK 20 POINT TOTALS

1. Tigers	493
2. Reds	416
3. Pirates	388
4. Tribe	356
5. Senators	354
6. Chiefs	350
7. Skipjacks	335
8. Blues	334
9. Cubs*	328
10. Red Sox	327
11. Redbirds	273
12. Bombers	266

Top hitting team, week – Reds	307
Top hitting team, year – Tribe	5156
Worst hitting team, week – Cubs*	124
Worst hitting team, year – Bombers	3918
Top pitching team, week – Tigers	209
Top pitching team, year – Skipjacks	2775
Worst pitching team, week – Bombers	82
Worst pitching team, year – Red Sox	1447

### AROUND THE HORN

## A. CRÈME de la CRÈME

∪ The **Chiefs** continue to lead the way after twenty weeks in spite of having what sounds to be the most mediocre everyday lineup in Hot Stove League history. Imagine a starting lineup with Lieberthal at catcher, Jason Giambi at 1<sup>st</sup>, Ray Durham at 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mark Loretta at short, Dean Palmer at 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Troy O'Leary, Carl Everett and Brian Jordan starting in the outfield. Yowza. And this is the best and brightest that the Chiefs have to offer? I could get more excited about a new Mickey Rourke movie.

Anyhow, this is the team that is leading your league this year, fellas, like it or not. And as weak as this everyday team sounds on paper, in point of fact they have done it on the field as well, cranking out 236 home runs and batting in 849 runs to place this team in imminent danger of hitting the caps and dropping like Tricky crossing an L.A. street. Like Tricky, it won't be pretty.

Oh, yeah, the Chiefs were led during Week 20 by Carl Everett (34 points), who is focused this year on beating out hits instead of members of his own family, and the Big Unit with a magnificent 60-point week, *sans* bonus points. On a less happy note, recent Chief call-up Rickey Bottalico pulled a human torch act (minus 13 points) over the weekend, and Troy O'Leary managed to accumulate a total of negative 7 points for the week, or the Chiefs' lead over the **Skipjacks** would have been widened further.

∪ As mentioned above, the **Reds** are in 2<sup>nd</sup> by a nose through twenty weeks, but the 336-point gap between the Reds' actual total and the Reds' projected total might have something to say about their future placement in the HSL standings. With 307 hitting points for the week and 109 pitching points, the Reds continue to defy the odds, gravity and conventional wisdom with this squad. For Week 20, Tricky was led by Mike Piazza with 44 points. Brian Giles (42), Chipper Jones (40), Bret Boone (28), and Ben Grieve (27) also were major hitting contributors. From the mound, El Duque led the Reds with 43 points for the week, followed by Bobby Howry with 39. The pitching totals would have looked quite a bit better if Carpenter hadn't posted a minus 22 for the week, and if Jason Schmidt hadn't trotted backwards 6 paces. If only Tricky can figure out what to do about his team's total of 250 home runs and 818 RBIs, then all should be well with the Reds.

∪ In third place this week are the **Skipjacks**, who continue to plug away and bide their time until the point caps start boosting their stock. With a paltry 335 points for the week, the 'Jacks gave a few points away to the field. Itchmeister's pitching was led by Jamie Moyer with 34 points for the week, which more than offset rookie Joe Mays' negative 10 for the week. It seems that old Joe has finally figured out that it's not as easy as it looks pitching for the Twins and in the Metrodome. On the hitting side, Steve Finley led the Skipjacks with 36 points for the week, while most of the rest of the 'Jacks hitters were mired in a funk of mediocrity.

∪ The **Tigers** capitalized on the continued *en fuego* status of I-Rod (45 points for the week) and Sammy (44) to post a 284-point hitting week to go along with their 209-point pitching week. Just about everybody on this team was hot during Week 20, with the Circus Geek chiming in with 37, Homer Bush with 37 (doubling his season's total to date) and Neifi Perez adding 30 points and Matt Williams, 25. Shoot, Big Guy's hitters were so hot that he had the luxury of leaving Ellis Burks' 31 points and Rico Brogna's 30.5 points in the minors, together with Sheffield's lusty weekend performance. The Tigers' bountiful pitching performance came primarily from Mariano Rivera (39), Scott Erickson (32) and Eric Milton (44). Yes, *that* Eric Milton, the same one who ordinarily is posting Joey Hamilton-like numbers and heading to the showers by about the 3<sup>rd</sup> inning. In fact, in a sure sign of a manager on a roll of good luck, Big Guy left Milton in for last week's start even after he had contributed a total of minus 7 points to the Tigers' cause during his first three starts. Evidently Big Guy saw something in Eric that eluded the rest of us.

∪ Moving on down the list to the **Cubs\***, there isn't a lot good to say about this team at this point except that they somehow found a way to post a 204-point hitting total for the week to compensate in part for their 124-point hitting week disaster. And leading the way for Shamu's pitchers was not recent superstar acquisition Pedro "Oil Can" Martinez, nor 1<sup>st</sup>-rounder Greg "Bone Chip" Maddux, but Juan Guzman, who won twice for his new team and posted 49 points for the week. Shamu's\* enormous pitching week was largely achieved on Monday (71.5 points) and Saturday (93.5 points) as most of Shamu's\* starters posted two quality starts for the week. This may say something about what to expect from the Cubs\*' pitching staff during Week 21, but let's just wait and see what happens. On the hitting side, Shamu's\* prized trade acquisition Mo Vaughn finally shook off his anti-scoring virus and led the Cubs\*' hitting charges with 21 points for the week.

∪ A hoot and a holler away from the **Cubs\*** are the **Senators**, who posted a respectable 354-point week even after barely breaking the century mark through the first three days of the week. Leading the way for the Senators during Week 20 was Richie Sexson with 39 points, while Aaron Sele twirled a shutout gem on Sunday and accumulated a team-leading total of 42 points for the week, offsetting and then some Saberhagen's minus 11 total for the week. Sabes, scheduled to miss yet another start or two with his bad wing, is unlikely to see the Senators' starting lineup again this season. Enough is enough.

## B. BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

∪ Still in 7<sup>th</sup> place, for now, is the **Tribe**. Now that U-Bob has shed that underperforming Derek Jeter from his lineup, his hitting team can finally live up to their potential. Paced by a revitalized Edgar Martinez with 45 points, the Tribe was hardly even bothered by the fact that Jeff Cirillo posted a minus 2 for the week and that Nilsson Schmilsson could muster up only 9. U-Bob continued to teach B.J. Surhoff a lesson during Week 20, refusing to promote him from the Tribe's AAA farm club, even in spite of his 38.5 hitting points for the week. The Tribe pitchers were paced by Mike Jackson, again, with 26 points, but the true story from the hill is that not a single Tribesman posted a negative pitching total for the week. Remarkable. No, make that *miraculous*.

∪ The 8<sup>th</sup> place **Irate Pirates** used a 234-point hitting week and a 153-point pitching week to close the gap a bit on the **Tribe**. Led by the surging Barry Bonds with 54 points and Juan "I'm Good People" Gonzalez with 43, the Pirates are ready to make their final run toward glory if those two and Carlos Delgado can stay hot and if recent acquiree Derek Jeter can get his flame relit. On the pitching side, Pirate closer Billy Wagner had a spectacular 53-point week, more than offsetting Brad Radke's negative 20-point act of arson.

∪ Moving on down through the league bowels, the **Redbirds** remain in 9<sup>th</sup> place even though they posted a markedly subpar 273-point week during Week 20. Led by Barry Larkin with 42 points on the hitting side and Kevin Millwood with 26 from the mound, the Redbirds' totals for the week were compromised by the fact that the slumping Paul O'Neill could muster up only 2.5 points for the week, by Scott Brosius' minus 1 total for the week, and by the negative pitching performances of Kevin Appier (minus 12), Andy Ashby (minus 2) and Rich Croushore (minus 15.5). It's a good thing that relief is now on the way for this crumbling team, with Raffy Pal-

meiro now in the Redbirds' lineup and Harold Baines promoted back to starter status.

∪ The **Red Sox** had a yawner of a week with 327 points, led by Rusty Greer with 43 points on the hitting side and Yoshii Masato (I thought he was a **Red**?) with 31 pitching points. Bernie Williams went from being red hot to ice cold from last week to this, notching a total of 4 positive points during Week 20, one better than teammate Chili Davis' 3. Staff ace David Cone continues to be content to rest on his laurels, having done virtually nothing for the Red Sox since recording his perfect game earlier in the year. The good news is that the Red Sox probably won't finish any lower than 11<sup>th</sup> place this year, since Mouse seems to have all but cemented the cellar spot down. The bad news is that even the Devil-Boy cannot ply his satanic craft any higher than possibly 9<sup>th</sup> place or so, depending on how far the Tribe free-falls before the season's end puts U-Bob out of his misery.

∪ The **Blues** continue with their hangover season. During Week 20, the Blues were led in hitting by Ray Lankford with 28 points, followed by Manny Ramirez with 27, and by Pete Harnisch on the mound with 37 points. Recent trade acquisition Billy Koch contributed a negative 6 to the Blues' cause for the week. The best thing that can be said about the Blues' season at this point is that it is almost over. And look at this way, Stretch. Next year, drafting out of the No. 11 hole, you still should be able to pick up Clemens and Smoltz in the first two rounds, so there really was no big advantage to finishing 1<sup>st</sup> last year, except attaining the privilege of buying expensive golf shirts for everyone.

∪ Rounding out the report on the Lower Division, the **Bombers** were led during Week 20 by Jeff Bagwell with 35 points and Mark McGwire with 34, the once and former **Cubs\***. Mouse's top pitcher for the week was Terry Mulholland with 40 points, while Mike Morgan did his best to undermine the Bombers' pitching cause by contributing a minus 17 for the week. Of course, Mouse should be aware that Mike Morgan has a large disclaimer tattooed on his butt which says: *Warning – capable of going backwards at the speed of sound*. As noted here last week, one shudders to think how bad this team would be if not for the acquisition of Bagwell and McGwire in what one anonymous source has coined to be "perhaps the worst trade in Hot Stove League history." In fairness to Mouse, not that the object here is to be fair, the Bronx Bombers have been decimated by injuries, with Darin Erstad, Kenny Lofton, Steve Woodard and John Franco presently on the DL, and Jeromy Burnitz, Tony Gwynn and Roger Cedeno recently having spent a significant

amount of time there. If not for all of those injuries, the Bombers could possibly be in – well, they'd still be in last, but they'd be a lot closer.

## FOUL TIPS

™ Wonder how Big Guy's feeling about his decision last Friday to demote Gary Sheffield in favor of recent draftee Scott Sullivan. First Sullivan celebrates his first game in the Tigers' starting lineup by getting torched on Friday night, then Sheffield goes Yard for the Tigers' minor league farm club on Saturday, and then Sheffie outdoes himself on Sunday with more Yardwork and a half-dozen RBIs. Ouch. It really hurts when you get bitten at both ends, doesn't it.

™ Poor U-Bob. His foundering Tribe continues to be plagued by his manifold and manifest mismanagement moves as they struggle to remain afloat until their lethal doses of point cap poison are delivered and ingested, which will be all too soon. In the meantime, U-belly keeps promoting and demoting his pitchers like they were all Tigers named Ed Sprague, leaving their best stuff in the minors while underperforming in the majors. The most recent example is Joey Hamilton, who was recently demoted (and rightfully so) by U-belly after his recent tragic implosion, and then followed up with six innings of shutout ball (23.5 *positive* points<sup>1</sup>) for the Tribe's AAA farm club, the *Raging Redskinned Savages*<sup>2</sup>. The question now is will Joey ever see the light of day again?

™ Not content to sit back and watch his team blown to smithereens by point cap mortar fire, the **Reds** decided to do something about it and made trades with both the **Blues** (Billy Koch for Jeff Suppan) and the **Redbirds** (Rafael Palmeiro, but only on Sunday, for Mark Grace and Kris Benson). Don't know if Suppan will pan out, but Billy Koch took a major blow for the Blues the first night he pitched for them, allowing Tricko to dodge yet another bullet. As to Tricko's trade with Rubella, as you may have heard, there was a slight snafu with Magpie calling the trade in, resulting in Palmeiro staying on the Reds' roster one day longer than anticipated, and on that day (Saturday) Rafael cranked out 18½ positive points for the Reds that by rights should have been deposited in the Redbirds' account. Tough break for Rubella, but when you are a decomposing carcass being picked apart

<sup>1</sup> The irony of this is that Joey sent the Tribe reeling backwards by exactly this same number of points – 23.5 – while in the Tribe's starting lineup during his last outing as a Tribe starter on August 14. Sweet irony.

<sup>2</sup> Political correctness has never been a major concern for U-Bob.

by the league vultures in the Upper Division, you don't necessarily have a whole lot of leverage. However, the league is investigating the incident, and has suspended Tricko from making any more trades until the investigation has been concluded.

™ I get mad as hell when I see that the Phillies have scored 13 runs and that Scott Rolen has gone his usual 4000 with an error or – same chapter, different verse – with the Pirates and Kevin Young, so I was able to feel SloPay's pain the other night when I saw that the Yankees had scored a total of 21 runs and that the newest Pirate acquisition, team superstar Derek Jeter, had a line score of 5-0-1-0. A few of those will drive a guy stark, raving mad.

™ I was pleased to see that Andy Pettitte had yet another marvelous, quality outing for the **Bronx Bombers** night before last, pitching eight innings, giving up 3 earned runs, and notching the win. That makes about his sixth quality start in a row, after averaging negative points per outing for the **Senators** for seven or eight starts. I think I hate Pettitte now more than I did when he was on my team kicking my butt.

™ This just in: Big Guy really doesn't mind that he left Sheffield's 6-RBI game in the minors because, and get this, the **Tigers** already have plenty of RBIs. Uh-huh. And when your Powerball number was one digit off last week and you just barely missed out on winning \$40 million, it wasn't a big deal to you because you already have enough money, right?

™ I continue to be amazed at the number of transactions occurring in this league week after week. Will Butch Huskey and Marty Cordova turn the **Red Sox**' season around? Will Ramon Ortiz and Andrew Lorraine put the **Tigers** over the top? Do the **Chiefs** really need more pitching help, and is that why they signed Rolando Arrojo and Steve Loaiza? And will Kip Wells be the secret ingredient that will turn the **Tribes**' entire season around? One can only wonder.

## TRADE REPORT

Responding to inquiries from several league members, it's time to look at how the major trades have panned out this season for the participants. Brace yourself, fellas, because here goes:

Biggio for Ashby and McEwing – to date Biggio has notched 162 points for the **Skipjacks**, while Andy Ashby and Joey McEwing have combined for a total of 92

points for the **Redbirds**. Not hard to figure out who skinned who on that one.

Piazza for Wetteland and Ortiz – since this trade was consummated, Mike Piazza has scored 175 points for the **Reds** while John Wetteland and Russ Ortiz have combined for a total of 77 points for the **BoSox**. One can clearly say that Possum got positively possumized on this one.

Randy Johnson for Sammy Sosa, Jeff Shaw and Armando Reynoso – since this trade was made, the Big Unit has scored 176 points in seven starts (averaging 25.1 PPG) for the **Chiefs**, while Sammy Sosa has scored 194 and Armando has chipped in 39 points and Jeff Shaw 49, for a total of 282 points. On a gross points basis, the **Tigers** clearly come out ahead (282 versus 186), but in terms of overall impact on the teams, this trade has to be called a wash. B.T. got what he needed to seal his championship, and the Tigers probably got what they needed to finish ahead of the **Cubs\*** in 4<sup>th</sup>.

McGwire and Bagwell for Mo Vaughn and Pedro – before we even get to the numbers, one can safely say that

this trade has the “feel” of a fleecing of biblical proportion. Now let’s look at the numbers. Since the trade, through the end of Week 20, McGwire has scored a total of 203 points for the **Bombers** and Bagwell 144, for a sum total of 347 points. On the other side of the ledger, Mo Vaughn has chipped in a pathetic total of 42 points (2.1 PPG), while Pedro has added only 63 to the **Cubs\*** cause, for a total of 105 points. The totals, then: 347 for the Bombers versus 105 for the Cubs\*. Worst trade ever? Well, no, the Manhattan Island for beads and wampum deal was probably still the worst, but at least in terms of the Hot Stove League, this certainly has to head the All-Time Worst Trade List. Perhaps Shamu\* has earned himself another asterisk for achieving this notoriety.

As always, your questions, comments and contributions are heartily encouraged.

See you next week.

Skipper