



FROM THE BULLPEN

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SKIPJACKS ON TOP WITH THREE WEEKS TO PLAY; COCKSURE OWNER DEMANDS CONCESSION FROM CHIEF PILOT

The big news of Week 23 was that the surging **Skipjacks** used a 492-point week to blast past the **Chiefs** into 1st place, ending a virtual death-grip that the Chiefs have had on 1st place dating back to April. Reached for comment at his West Omaha compound, the never-shy Mr. Thielen expressed his view that "It's over!", and called upon the owner of the now second-place Chiefs to call it quits and concede the 1999 crown to the Jax. Pressed for comment on why he thought that his razor-thin margin of 7 points was cause for declaring himself victorious with three weeks of the season remaining, the bombastic boy wonder of FDR and sometime *Baywatch* stand-in added, "It's over because I say it's over. Got it, pally?"

Enough said. We'll alert McBlunder to start inscribing Itchie's name on the Cup, and look forward to seeing those fleece-lined trench coats with the Skipjacks logo to be passed out at the winter meeting. One word of warning, however, Brother Itchie: Does the name Jean Van de Velde ring a bell?

Here are the standings through last Sunday:

WEEK 23 STANDINGS

Upper Division

1. Skipjacks	8563
2. Chiefs	8556
3. Cubs*	8385
4. Reds	8257
5. Tigers	8253
6. Senators	7695

Those Other Guys

7. Tribe	7595
8. Pirates	7566

9. Redbirds	7407
10. Red Sox	7331
11. Blues	7276
12. Bombers	6890

WEEK 23 POINT TOTALS

1. Skipjacks	492
2. Cubs*	442
3. Chiefs	435
4. Tigers	409
5. Redbirds	378
6. Bombers	375
7. Red Sox	325
8. Tribe	270
9. Reds	270
10. Pirates	264
11. Blues	236
12. Senators	229

AROUND THE HORN

The **Skipjacks** continue to score points in every way imaginable, including last week's three-jack outburst by Steve Finley, leading Finley to an 88-point week, including his bonus points. About the only place that Itchie isn't getting much production from these days is his top three draft picks, Belle, Castilla and Thome, who continue to experience subpar years. My point? Some years – this being one – it's all about who is the luckiest.

The **Chiefs** are bemoaning the ill-advised trade of Greg Vaughn to the **Redbirds**. Even without his three-tater night last week, Vaughn has scored a ton of points since B.T. ditched him. With the Big Unit now nursing a tender shoulder and the Chiefs sure to lose at least some points to the caps, it appears that the Chiefs are destined for another bridesmaid finish, their second in a row.

The **Cubs*** continue to burn red-hot, with Pedro doing his best to help Shamu* save face over the Bagwell/McGwire episode. As far-fetched as the idea would

have seemed even two weeks ago – when the Cubs* were at their nadir – there is a chance, albeit remote, that Shammy’s* boys could overtake both the **Chiefs** and the **Skipjacks** and erase the memory of the asterisk from the Cubs’* place in HSL history.

In 4th place, at 8257, are the free-falling **Reds**, who scored 270 points for the week. At this point in time, it’s hard to tell if the Reds’ low output was the result of poor performance or the punitive point caps, although it really doesn’t matter. Either way, the Reds are headed in a southerly direction to a spot somewhere behind their arch rival **Tigers**.

The **Tigs**, with 409 points for the week and a total of 8253, were led in nauseating fashion by Eric “Lost Paradise” Milton, whose no-no earned him 86 points for the week. With this jaw-dropping performance from the perpetually-underachieving Milton, Eric threatens to become the ace of the Tigers’ staff. With 253 points for the season earned at the nifty clip of 8.4 PPG, Milty is only a few points back of Tiger topguns Pedro Astacio (281) and Omar Olivares (274). Yeesh. And you mean this team is ahead of the **Senators** with *that* for a starting pitching corps? Can’t be.

The **Senators** are in 6th place with 7695 points. And mad as hell. This is definitely my last year.

The Lower Division

Like evacuation holdouts from Hurricane Floyd, the **Tribe** is hanging in there in 7th place, against all odds, but now only 29 points ahead of the **Pirates** and their slow-minded, slow-talking manager, Slow-Pay. In spite of U-Bob’s multitudinous prayers and supplications, the dreaded caps will continue to take their toll next week and the one after, until the Tribe nestles into its final resting place for the long winter of 1999 – probably 9th or 10th place. I feel your pain, U-belly.

The **Pirates** remain in 8th place through Week 23, but with a keen eye on slipping past the **Tribe** into 7th place, where they can finish out the season gazing longingly at the big boys up in the Upper Division. Finally showing some independent thinking after being tethered to the cruel Gepetto for the last half-dozen years, it appears that SloPay is just a season or two away from making his own run at an HSL title.

Thanks to the benevolence of B.T. in the form of the Greg Vaughn trade (89 points last week), Rubella finds himself solidly in 9th place through Week 23, and in danger of regaining the swagger in his step and moving upward. Now ostensibly within striking distance of the **Se-**

natros, the smirking visage of our resident Iowagean was recently seen outside the Skipper’s door, a not-so-subtle reminder that the **Redbirds** have not yet breathed their last breath in the 1999 HSL campaign.

The once-fearsome Transactions Suspended, previously known as the **Boston Red Sox**, lay in 10th at 7331 points, a whisker ahead of the 11th place **Blues**. In spite of the hitting overachievements of Fletcher-the-Catcher (3.8 PPG), Omar Vizquel (521 total points, 4.1 PPG), Brady Anderson (4.0 PPG), and Bobby Abreu (602 points, 4.5 PPG), the Red Sox’s pitching staff is so pathetic that this team will be fortunate indeed to finish as high as 10th. Let this be a lesson to you, Possum: *It’s pitching, stupid.*

Which brings us down, and I mean way down, to the **Blues**, who with 236 points for the week trailed only the **Senatros** for fewest points scored during the week. Interestingly enough, according to the projections, this team stands to lose 121 points in point caps. How can a team as crummy as this one threaten any point limits, one has to ask. Sorry, McGloom, it had to be said.

And finally, the **Bombers**. Despite Jeromy Burnitz being back in the lineup and cranking out 52 points last week, and despite the team scoring a total of 375 points for the week, the Bombers are in no danger of escaping the cellar this year. What happened to those good ol’ days, Mouse, when you could always rely upon the **Pirates** to finish lower than you in this league, no matter how inept your drafting and management? Those were the days, my friend, those were the days.

More Misérables

Query: When did the alien spacecraft descend upon the city of Seattle and pluck my beloved Alex Rodriguez from Mother Earth, replacing him with a lookalike android programmed to post 5000 one-error performances on a thrice-weekly basis? Every time I look, the guy goes 5000, so I’ve stopped looking and in fact missed last evening’s granny. Up until last night’s salami, A-Rod had been as cold as cold can be over the past two-three weeks, steadily lowering his batting average and PPG. Just one month ago, through Week 19, A-Rod was batting .318 and averaging 6.0 PPG. Fast forward to September 12, and A-Rod’s batting average is down to .292 and his PPG to 5.4, a meteoric plunge in performance. During that four-week span, A-Rod played in 25 games, had 100 official at-bats, scored 12 runs, had 21 hits, 2 doubles, 6 home runs and 14 runs batted in. Through Wednesday night’s performance this week, his average had dropped further to .287, and over the course of the ten days leading up to last evening’s grand slam, A-Rod

had netted a total of 9.5 points and was batting a buck-eighteen for that ten-day time frame. This from my first-round draft pick.

In fact, in all respects, the last two weeks of watching the **Senatros** have been sheer frikking misery. In addition to A-Rod being on the biggest schneid of his career, I offer the following on certain gutless members of the Senators team:

Glavine – 8.4 PPG. Hate him.

Rolen – embalmed four weeks ago, death to be announced.

Williamson – apparently arrested in same sting as former Husker wingback, which would explain his change in status from *stopper* to *stopped*, as in playing.

Reese – went 1000 in last Sunday's 13-5 romp, replaced after hurting himself by some other slug, who promptly went 4-3-4-3 or some damned thing.

Keith Foulke – Foulke you, pal.

Magglio Ordonez – freaking maggot.

Jeff Conine – likes 5000s almost as much as A-Rod.

Kevin Young – nothing like having an 85-RBI man at 1st base.

This pack of misfits has made my life so damned miserable for the last two weeks that my hatred for this team has reached a level ordinarily reserved for Arab-Jew dealings, internecine squabbles, and only the most bitter of white trash domestic disputes. Fair to say that there may be 28 never-evers on the Senators' squad.

But other than that, and the fact that I'm now living at 1700 Postpartum Raginghormones Lane, things just couldn't be better for the ol' Skipper. Stop by and see me sometime, but only if armed with a 5th of Old Granddad.

OCTOBER 1 GOLF OUTING

On. Two weeks from today, in fact, we will gather at Woodland Hills in Eagle, Nebraska, in celebration of the October 1 birthdays of Mark McGwire, my brother, Dan, and our own beloved U-Belly, while cheering on our respective favorites (Itchie, B.T., possibly Shamu*) in the final days of the HSL race. Unlike last year when McGloom ran away from the field (seems like about ten years ago, eh, McBlunder), this year we have a pennant race of potentially biblical proportions. Don't miss your chance to play a little stick, drink a little beer, and cast your lot with your favorite team. See you then, if not before.

Skipper