



FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division

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SKIPJACKS OUTLAST CHIEFS, TAKE 1999 HSL TITLE

Jax Owner Declares Squad "Team of the '90s," Himself "Owner/Manager Of the Decade"

It's over, boys. For the first time in 26 weeks, you can relax, let down your guards, and not worry about promotions, demotions or Sunday night free agent drafts. Brother Itchie, proving himself up to the test, fought off the fierce challenge waged by the 2nd-place Chiefs and brawled his way to the 1999 Hot Stove League title.

Never one for false modesty or understatement, the cocksure but not unlikeable owner of the Omaha Skipjacks quickly declared his beloved charges to be the "Team of the '90s," and followed that up with the observation that "I guess dat makes me the Owner of the Decade!"

Questioned by this reporter as to whether this judgment might be a bit premature if not boastful, the never-strapped-for-an-answer Thielen retorted, "Gidouttaheah! Facts is facts, pallie. You tink dere's anyone in dis league dat's got more brains than me? Fageddaboutit!"

That said, let's take a look at the final standings for the Hot Stove League season, and a peek at how each team did during the final week of play.

WEEK 26 - FINAL STANDINGS

1. Skipjacks	9484
2. Chiefs	9417
3. Cubs*	9357
4. Tigers	9206
5. Reds	8961
6. Pirates	8652

7. Senators	8608
8. Tribe	8507
9. Redbirds	8464
10. Blues	8190
11. Red Sox	8143
12. Bombers	7860

WEEK 26 POINT TOTALS

1. Pirates	361
2. Senators	357
3. Blues	338
4. Bombers	302
5. Skipjacks	280
6. Cubs*	279
7. Redbirds	276
8. Chiefs	259
9. Tribe	218
10. Tigers	218
11. Red Sox	215
12. Reds	115

Due to some negative comments from the rank and file of league membership, *From the Bullpen* has chosen to eliminate the Upper and Lower Division dichotomies previously utilized in earlier editions as a service to the readership. It seems there were concerns by some that this practice might cause a division in the ranks, and while I question this concern, the fact of the matter is that the Hot Stove League has never been an elitist league giving credit to only winners at the expense of losers, and on that basis we have chosen to eliminate this distinction – at least for the time being.

1999: THE YEAR THAT WAS

1999 was another year of milestones for major league baseball. Among them:

- ... Tony Gwynn and Wade Boggs reaching 3000 hits
- ... Cal Ripken reaching 400 home runs, and getting to 2991 hits before ending the season with back surgery

- ... Mark McGwire reaching 500 career home runs
- ... McGwire (65) and Sammy Sosa (63) hitting more home runs in one season than in any year but 1998
- ... Manny Ramirez knocking in more runs (165) than anyone since 1938 when Double X drove home 175
- ... Randy Johnson striking out 364 batters, the fourth highest total this century behind Nolan Ryan (383 and 367) and Sandy Koufax (382)
- ... The closing of the Kingdome (yay!), the DisAstrodome (hurrah!), the 'Stick (about time), and Tiger Stadium, the latter of which was necessary but nonetheless a cause for sadness.
- ... The entry into the Hall of Fame of Nolan Ryan, George Brett and Robin Yount.
- ... The ill-fated umpire's strike and the end of Richie Phillips' campaign of terror (sorry, U-belly, but not all union activities are for the greater good).
- ... The end of Bobby Valentine's career-long playoff drought, and with it, the possibility of a replay of the 1986 Mets-Red Sox series, or better yet (or worse yet), a subway series between the Yanks and the Mets.

FROM LEFT FIELD

When Tony Gwynn reached the magical 3000-hit plateau earlier this year, I meant to toss out this little trivia question, but forgot, so I'll run it up the flagpole now and we'll see who was paying attention. Most of you were present when Fat Tony got his milestone 2000th hit in San Diego on our 1993 *California Dreamin'* trip. Of course, most of you were also three sheets to the wind and Mouse was still recuperating from his Grande Gringo meal the night before, but who among you remember who threw the pitch that Tony hit for No. 2000?

The first one to e-mail me with the correct answer will win his choice of: (A) One of Itchie's prized stuffed pheasants; (B) a videotape of highlights from this year's Hawkeye football wins, or if you'd like something a bit longer in duration, a video of Shamu* running from 1st to 3rd clad only in his red mesh jersey and white nurse's/golfing shoes; (C) dinner with Possum at Chez Chong; or (D) a possum dinner with Cheech and Chong. Answer in next week's issue.

LIAR, LIAR

No, I'm not referring to the Jim Carey movie, but to some recent veracity problems with one of our own that I feel duty-bound to report. Some of you already know the story; others merely suspect it. Last Friday, October 1, as a planned plurality of HSL members gathered at Woodland Hills near Eagle, Nebraska, for an afternoon of golf,

talking baseball, hijinks, but most of all for a surprise tribute to our own beloved Underbelly to celebrate his 44th birthday, one of those who had promised to be in attendance, the very guest of honor, wasn't.

The rest of us gathered as scheduled around the noon hour for our early afternoon tee times, and as the first foursome of golfers teed off, Brother Itchie and I obeyed instructions from B.T. to wait for U-belly to show up. "Oh, he'll be here," said Scott. "I guarantee it. I talked to him this morning, and he told me he was leaving work at 10:30 a.m. to head out to the course."

So we waited. And waited. And waited. Soon, it became evident that the beloved league participant and council chief of the Tribe tribe was, in his own words, "*Not gonna make it.*" Naturally, the rest of us feared the worst.

"Heart attack?" suggested Big Guy. "Bob looks a bit overweight, and I've never seen him exercise anything save his right not to."

"Doubtful," proffered Mouse. "I don't think he has a heart. He's never once told me that he cares for me."

Sound of eyebrows collectively being raised as other league members scowl glances at Mouse.

"Maybe he got in a horrible car accident, and is laying out in some field splayed open like a freshly-gutted sturgeon," offered Hayden (Rubella), the fisherman of the group.

"I bet he caught his wife with the pool boy *in flagrante copulitus*, again, killed the whole family with the fireplace tools, and is headed south for Juarez," offered Itchie, vividly describing the carnage.

The point is, we were all worried sick about Brother Bob, and had a miserable day on the golf course worrying and fretting about what horrible fate he must have met to miss this Hot Stove League meeting. Not to mention pissed about blowing the money on the hookers for U-belly's birthday surprise.

But on with the story. As it turns out, U-belly later informed B.T., the streetwise owner of the Tribe claims to – get this – have gotten lost while driving to Woodland Hills, offering up the explanation that the highway out of Lincoln to Woodland Hills is "poorly marked." As the story continues, U-belly allegedly drove around aimlessly for quite some time, apparently concluded that there was no way to get to Woodland Hills from the city of Lincoln,

and then turned his craft around and headed back to work for the day.

There is one, and only one, response to this proffered explanation of U-Bob's absence: **BULLSHIT!** We didn't fall off the turnip truck yesterday, U-belly. We all know your personal credo, and that you are the master of the stone-faced prevarication. If you don't want to golf with us, next time just say so.

Meanwhile, the Subcommittee on Owner Ethics, chaired by a man who has spent the better part of his adult life studying ethics – for the purpose of avoiding same – is investigating the situation and will make a finding and a recommendation for a penalty, be it league expulsion, a hefty fine coupled with the loss of draft position, or mere censure and public humiliation.

And by the way, Big Guy was the medallist in the golf outing. Congrats on a fine display of golfing by all.

AWARDS CEREMONY

Itchie is reportedly busy at work designing his championship logo for the Skipjacks, which will be presented at our annual meeting featuring the awarding of The Cup from McGloom to Itchie. While the meeting is often held in the winter months, Itchie is reportedly attempting to advance the process so that he might possess The Cup for a longer period of display in his basement shrine. As to the championship logo and the wearing apparel to be distributed at this year's awards banquet, The Master of Self-Promotion¹ has been mum on details, but an anonymous source at Art FX who is involved in the artwork layout has suggested that all articles of wearing apparel will have to be sized 2XL in order to accommodate all of the patches, artwork and lettering that Itchie has in store for this year's article. You won't want to miss this meeting. Dates and details to follow.

Skipper

¹ Not unlike his personal hero, Rickey Henderson, when Itchie calculated that the Chiefs were finally mathematically eliminated from winning the title last Sunday night, he reportedly launched into an exuberant Icky Woods-type dance, holding his Stats sheets over his head and loudly proclaiming, "I am the greatest of all time!"