



FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Publication of The Hot Stove League

Eastern Nebraska Division

1999 Season

Edition No. 22

August 17, 1999

WEEK 19: CHIEFS CLING TO LEAD, PRAY FOR MORATORIUM ON POINT CAPS

Brethren:

Forget about those Pro Life rallies that he used to march at, B.T. has a new grass roots cause that is hitting much closer to home: Ridding the world of the dreaded Bill James point caps. Followed in lockstep by his sidekick and perpetual yes-man U-belly, B.T. recently trekked first to City Hall for a planning meeting with long-time nemesis Mayor Don, then to the Governor's Mansion for a powwow with the honorable Mike Johanns, and finally to the State Capitol for a rally and candlelight vigil with fellow Abolitionist Mitch "Magpie a/k/a Curby a/k/a Tricko a/k/a Bad Hair Life" Pirmie. Standing in sole opposition to the movement was John "The Itchmeister" Thielen, who, by coincidence, stands to gain the most by defeating what has become known as "The Cause." Interestingly enough, while Itchie has always been philosophically opposed to the idea of point caps, this year he is taking the polar opposite view. When asked about this curious change of position, Itchie responded that, "My first question is always 'What's in it for me?' You got a problem wit dat, pally?"

Expected to be at the rally but conspicuous by his absence, former point-cap freedom fighter Charles "Shamu" Sinclair was rumored to be positioned squarely atop the fence, not sure if it was more advantageous for him to have point caps applied against the **Chiefs** and **Reds** in the **Cubs*** futile battle against them, or to avoid having the caps applied against his own team, in a desperate ploy to avoid sliding further down the slippery slope toward the Lower Division. Not to worry about point caps, Shamu, your disastrous trade of McGwire and Bagwell will see to that.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, B.T. was heard to be brainstorming with first mate Gilligan at the War Room that they have set up at ArtFX, plotting their next move in their assault on the dreaded point caps. While B.T. was thought to favor a Two Man March on Washington for a lobbying campaign, his sinister sidekick was heard to be lobbying for a papal visit to seek holy dispensation from the application of the point caps, scheduling a ring-kissing visit with Archbishop Breskowitz as a preliminary step in the process. "That's what I like about being a converted mackerel snapper," commented U-Bob. "I get to use their goofy rules to get around little problem areas like original sin and no prime rib on Friday, but that doesn't mean that I have to believe in it!" Well, that's true.

Well, enough joshing and spoofing, already, let's get to the standings and point totals for Week 19, shall we?

WEEK 19 STANDINGS

Upper Division

1. Chiefs	7070
2. Skipjacks	6995
3. Reds	6915
4. Cubs*	6758
5. Tigers	6670
6. Senators	6493

Lower Division

7. Tribe	6317
8. Pirates	6137
9. Redbirds	6099
10. Red Sox	5999
11. Blues	5958
12. Bombers	5804

WEEK 19 POINT TOTALS

1. Skipjacks	453
2. Tigers	423
3. Chiefs	421

4. Bombers	394
5. Senators	393
6. Red Sox	384
7. Tribe	377
(T) Reds	374
9. Pirates	356
10. Cubs*	332
11. Redbirds	301
12. Blues	253

Top hitting team, week, Red Sox	316
Top hitting team, year, Tribe	4917
Worst hitting team, week, Redbirds	169
Worst hitting team, year, Bombers	3734
Top pitching team, week, Skipjacks	185
Top pitching team, year, Skipjacks	2052
Worst pitching team, week, Blues	12
Worst pitching team, year, Red Sox	1325

AROUND THE HORN

A. CREAM OF THE CROP

⊖ I understand why the **Chiefs** are leading this thing, because they have a tremendous pitching staff, far superior to all others with Randy Johnson, Mike Mussina, Kevin Brown and Jose Lima – by far the top starting rotation – and with Roberto Hernandez leading the world in saves. So how does it figure that the **Skipjacks** have more pitching points by a couple of hundred, and the Chiefs are leading this thing because of their hitting totals, which continue to threaten the point caps? You got me on this one. Somehow, some way, this patently subpar group of Chiefs hitters continues to chalk up mega points, with major contributions this week from Rondell White (ugh), Carl Everett (yeesh), and Jason Giambi (where were you last year when I needed you, turncoat?).

⊖ The 2nd-place **Skippyaks** continue to make the rest of us want to yak, with their nauseating overachievement and abundant good luck. Now that Paul Byrd is wussing out with a sore back, rookie Joe Mays has caught fire to anchor this dismal but point-scoring staff. On top of that, Thome and Vinny have heated up just enough to fill the void left by a cooled-off Shawn Green, so that our league’s version of Clark Griswold (“Greeze-Ball”) is actually in a remarkably good position to win this thing, given B.T.’s point cap woes. In fact, if not for the Blackjack debacle¹, Egypt Boy would probably be leading this thing.

¹ Not a losing night at Bluffs Run, as you probably suspect, but Itchie’s colossal gaffe of picking up Jack McDowell and

⊖ The **Reds**, on the strength of a 314-point hitting week, second best in the league, maintained their 3rd-place position in the standings but gave ground to both the **Chiefs** and the **Skipjacks**. This team’s fabulous infield (Piazza, Palmeiro, Chipper, Nomar) is keeping the Reds in the hunt, but its outfield and pitching staff are leaking some oil. It remains to be seen whether this team has the “right stuff” to compete at the end.

⊖ In a week when the eighth best performance was a whopping 374 points, the **Cubs*** 332-point week didn’t cut the mustard, and this tenth-best team point total has put the **Tigers** within striking distance of the Cubs*. Still feeling the aftershocks of the disastrous McGwire and Bagwell trade to Mouse, this team is dropping like a World Trade Center elevator with a snapped cable. Though the starting pitching has finally reached an acceptable level with Pedro back in the rotation, the relief corps must be driving Shamu nutty, with Jose Mesa chalking up save after save in the minor leagues and starter Robb Nen continuing to get trashed by the opposition.

⊖ The **Tigers** used a banner week (423 total points, 298 hitting points) to close the gap with the 4th-place **Cubs*** and the 3rd-place **Reds**, chiefly on the red-hot bats of Ivan Rodriguez and Miguel Tejada. Although J.D. Drew continues to pull the string on the Tigers and give Big Guy the Ed Sprague treatment, in most other respects, the Tigers are performing at or above expectations. With the addition of an *en fuego* Pedro Astacio and the recent stellar performances of Eric Milton, this team might even be able to stay in the hunt when the calendar page flips to September.

⊖ The **Senators** have firmed up their foothold on 6th place in the Upper Division, and with the **Tribe**, **Pirates** and **Redbirds** now safely back in my rear view mirror, the Senators can look ahead to the No. 4 and 5 holes as their next targets. With A-Rod now justifying his first-round selection, and Brian Daubach finally meeting the Senators’ rigid expectations, this team has a chance to leave a few more teams in the dust if Young, Rolen, Andruw Jones and Magglio can ever get it going again. Speaking of Andruw, I’m not yet prepared to write him off as a Senatorial never-ever, but it’ll be a cold day in Cairo before this guy is pegged as an early draft round by the Skipper. I’m

then putting him into his starting lineup. Two disastrous implosions later, Blackjack gets released from the Skipjacks squad and from major league baseball in general. Brilliant call, Swinestein!

sick to death of watching him make a stellar catch on the highlight films and then to read his 4-0-0-0 box score, which explains his stinking 3.2 PPG average. Grrrrrrrrr.

B. LOWER INTESTINES

⊖ The lowly **Tribe** still occupies 7th place with 6317 points, following a 377-point week with 300 hitting points. The gap between the Tribe's actual total and projected total is now 320 points, virtually assuring the Tribe of a tumble down the basement steps when September arrives. Predicting exactly where the Tribe will wind up is no small task, however, since there is no telling what additional foolhardy trades U-Bob might make between now and the end of the season. If a guy is willing to trade his best player (Derek Jeter) for a sore-armed pitcher on a noncontender (Curt Schilling), there's no telling what else he might do. Still haven't figured out why U-Bob demoted B.J. Surhoff, either, since the guy continues to overachieve at a remarkable clip.

⊖ In 8th place after nineteen weeks are the **Pirates** with 6137 points, within shouting distance of the **Tribe** and actually ahead of the Tribe on a projected point basis. While SloPay has always considered U-belly to be his mentor in this league, it looks like 1999 will be a classic case of the pupil teaching the teacher, since the Pirates' overtaking of the Tribe will be primarily because of SloPay's attention to detail (drafting pitching ahead of hitting) and the Tribe's ignorance of same in favor of drafting hitting glitz and sizzle. With malcontent Juan Gonzales back in the starting lineup ("I don't like those futuristic uniforms – they don't do justice to my quadriceps." Waaaaaaaah!), and if his recent draft of Jose Canseco pans out, look for the Pirates to finish this season in 7th, their highwater mark since the 1993 switch to BJFB and expansion to twelve teams.

⊖ Currently in 9th place, but poised to drop even further, are the **Raggedy-Ass Redbirds**. This poor team, and their poor pilot, don't know which way is up at this point in the season. With a paltry 169-point team hitting total for the week during a week with multiple doubleheaders and double-digit scores, the Crimson Chirpers continue to lose ground on the field. With Rubella's team conspiring to make 1999 the Year of the Shell Game for the Redbirds, it would be best for Jimmy to fold up his tent, cut his losses and start preparing for Year 2000.

⊖ The **Red Sox** used a 384-point week to blast past the **Blues** and into 10th position. With Bernie Williams absolutely on fire, Rusty Greer off the schneid, and Russ Ortiz avoiding negative-point performances for the week, the Red Sox see a bit of light at the end of the tunnel, and have even focused on the task of catching the ailing **Redbirds**. Shouldn't be that tough, Possum, if you can avoid getting absolutely flimflammed by Tricko at the trading table again. Talk about the pupil besting the master, which rhymes with disaster, which is what the Piazza-for-Ortiz trade amounted to.

⊖ As for McGloat and his bolemic **Blues**, the last part of the last sentence of the blurb about the **Redbirds** applies in equal measure here. Despite drafting pitching one-two, which is the way to win this thing, underperformance, bad luck and failed free agent opportunities have cost Stretch any hope of avoiding total shame and embarrassment this year after his championship finish. "First to worst" is still a distinct possibility.

⊖ Poor Mouse. I shudder to think what this team would be like if he hadn't raped Shamu* of Bagwell and McGwire for an uninspired Mo Vaughn and a crippled Pedro Martinez. Despite oodles of home runs and points from Bags and Big Mac, this team continues to flounder along in last place. Even a 394-point week during Week 19 could only bring the **Bombers** within eyeshot of the 11th place **Blues**. Oh, and by the way, thanks for picking up Andy Pettitte and letting him throw three consecutive stellar games for your team after the **Senators** had had enough of his act and placed him on the scrap heap. At least you kept him out of the grimy grasp of Shamu*, Big Guy and anyone else who is directly in my path of a money-spot finish this year.

BONUS BONANZA

Does anyone else, like me, feel that you simply aren't getting your fair share of bonus points in this league? Does anyone else, like me, feel that disproportionate amounts of bonus points are serendipitously going to largely undeserving squads? Well then you would be thinking right, my friends. The week before last Slo-Pay joined the rest of you finks who have notched 30-point bonuses for three-HR games when Carlos Delgado went Yard thrice in one game. For the record, that makes at least five or six different teams who have profited to the tune of 30 points in one eve through a hitter's 3-jack night, not to mention the 20-

30 points that the three taters alone gathered for your teams.

On top of the homers, both R.J. and P.J. have feathered the nests of their respective owners by exceeding the magical total of 15 strikeouts in a single game, and Possum had the granddaddy of all bonus games with Cone's perfecto.

Meanwhile, the **Senators** scored a measly 40 points through All-Star appearances, and despite fielding superior batsmen and moundsmen have experienced none of the ecstasy that goes hand-in-glove with bonus-worthy performances. For those of us who have not been on the receiving end of one of these for a while, we can only continue to pray to the god of averages. And that Johnny Oates won't pull Senator Sele out of the game after seven innings when he has 13 strikeouts and needs but two more to earn his manager a bonus. Thanks, Johnny.

BALLS AND STRIKES

☞ After a couple of *en fuego* weeks for the **Senators**, I was prepared for a letdown and got one. In fact, with the dismal way the week started it looked like the Senators might be flirting with the Mendoza line during Week 19. Fortunately, a ball-buster Saturday took care of Mr. Mendoza, but wasn't enough to keep the Senators from losing ground to the accursed leaders this week.

When I look at the hitters in my everyday lineup, it's hard for me to believe that my batting totals are so mediocre, ranking 9th in the league. Of the twelve hitters I have been recently starting, six (Rolen, Young, Ordonez, A-Rod, Daubach and Millar) are all batting cleanup for their respective teams, and I have one hitter (Alomar) batting third, three players batting in the six-hole (Joe Randa, John Flaherty and Richie Sexson), and two batting seventh (Andruw Jones, David Justice). With all these guys supposedly cleaning the plate and batting in the meat of the order for their own teams, one would suspect that my hitting squad is about the best in the business, and knocking out home runs and bringing in ducks off of the pond with the best of them. In point of fact, I don't have anyone on my roster among the top leaders in home runs or RBIs in either league, and as aforementioned my composite hitting totals are less than spectacular. Go figure.

☞ B.T.'s big hitting week featured 40+-point weeks from Jason Giambi, Carl Everett and Rondell

White, 32 points from Troy O'Leary, and 20+-point weeks from Lieberthal, Durham, Castilla, Greg Vaughn, and Brian Jordan. Only Mark Loretta and Dean Palmer failed to crack at least the 20-point barrier for the week. I would kill for such consistency. On my squad, I get a couple of guys red hot, like A-Rod, Daubach and Alomar, and the rest of the team is struggling just to break even. Oh, for a 300-point hitting week.

☞ Talk about your market timing. Perhaps aware that the Expos were about to play five games in three days at Coors Field, B.T. promoted Rondell White effective Friday the 13th. B.T.'s savvy was rewarded with a 31-point performance during Saturday's doubleheader, and 13-1/2 more points on Sunday. Not a bad weekend of work.

☞ Itchie's timing – other than the Blackjack incident – has also been good. He promoted a Person named Bobby on the 15th just in time for a stellar performance, and has been likewise blessed in this department on a host of other occasions. Contrast this with Rubella's mismanagement of Appier, Hermanson, Benson and others, Shamu's* problems with Salmon, Vaughn and Darryl Hamilton, McBlunder's recent mcblunder with Suppan, and Big Guy's season-long yo-yoing of J.D. Drew.

☞ While U-belly's hitting totals for the week were padded significantly by the Expos' five-game visit to Coors over the weekend, including Friday and Sunday doubleheaders – **Tribesmen** Vladimir Guerrero, Larry Walker and Dante Bichette were part of an offensive scoring explosion – the Tribe hurlers were less fortunate during Week 19. While Sid Ponson was in the Tribe minors for his 29.5-point performance on Tuesday, U-belly wasn't as fortunate with Joey Hamilton, who lasted only a third of an inning on Saturday night against the *en fuego* Oakland As. Despite the brevity of his stint, Joey still managed to do plenty of damage to the Tribe's pitching week, doing the Bonaparte Retreat to the tune of a negative 23.5 points².

BELLYFLAP

My initial, cursory review of last week's Special Edition of *The Bellyflap* caused me to titter, then snicker, followed by a chuckle and then a knee-slap, leading to a side-splitting belly laugh, followed up by a

² By coincidence, this is exactly the amount (but positive) left in the minors by U-belly's buzzsaw pitcher Woody Williams on Tuesday night. Ouch.

full-fledged guffaw, and crescendoing with a Possum HA! that would send shockwaves through the retirement community.

However, having now had time to re-read, absorb and digest U-belly's newsletter I see his sarcasm-spiced and anger-laced pontifications as a Clarion call for help.

It is as obvious to me as the glare from atop Itchie's dome that U-belly has begun to take this little game of ours a bit too seriously, and that his overworked brain is now so infected with ardor to succeed in this league that he is no longer able to distinguish between perception and reality. Throw in a touch of Germanic single-mindedness-of-purpose and his inherited Danish stubbornness and we have a recipe for a veritable powder keg about to explode, another shooting spree in the offing that could make the Atlanta massacre look like a minor disagreement at the office.³

The problem is, despite having picked yet another godawful HSL team – for about the fourteenth consecutive season, or however long he admits to having been in the league – on Draft Day, after a few dismal weeks at the bottom, U-Bob's charges began overachieving at a heretofore unheard of pace. And U-Bob, as one can understand, began believing in them. This is where the perception versus reality notion comes into play.

You see, Bob, while B.J. Surhoff gave the perception of a .350 batter capable of driving in 150 runs, the reality is that he is a career .278 batter who has never had more than 21 home runs or 92 RBIs in a season. His fall to Earth, which is happening even as we speak, had to be expected.

And then there is Dave Nilsson. While you perceived this gritty Aussie to be someone capable of out-pointing Mike Piazza on the basis of early returns, in reality the guy is a career .280 hitter who has never had more than 20 home runs or 84 RBIs in one season, and who scored 228 points last season.

Need more? Certainly. Take Henry Rodriguez, a .253 career hitter who a month ago was batting .350 for the **Tribe**. Or Take Hideo Nomo. While that first glorious month after you shrewdly snapped him up from

³ Lucky for the day-trading outfits around here that Jody pissed away all of U-Bob's inheritance and other disposable income on the cement pond out back, preventing him from even opening up his own account, losing same, and then snapping like a dry chicken bone.

off the Free Agent wire he performed like the Hideo of old, in reality he is still the Hideous of New, and currently, and rightly so, in your minors preparatory to future release.

But the point of all this is that U-belly was fooled – and badly – into believing he had a far superior team than he has, or will ever have, for that matter. And I theorize that this may be why U-belly seems to be at a near boiling and/or breaking point, as evidenced by his recent ranting rag. U-belly bought into the idea that his team is actually as good as his hitters hit, for about twelve weeks in a row, and their recent maddening free-fall culminating in the **Tribe's** recent 164-point week came as a true shock to the Tribe chieftain, though certainly not to the rest of us.

And while this gay little band of caballeros that the Tribe has piecemealed together may have another good hitting week or two or three in them, it's a dead-cinch lock that the Tribe hitters won't be batting a collective .307 for the last third of the 1999 HSL campaign. In fact, I'm so sure of this, if the Tribe hitters bat .307 from this point forward, I'll meet Bob at 180th and F Streets and . . . oh. Never mind.

There is a happy ending to this story, however. Although U-Bob was burned by getting sucked in as aforementioned, the painful demise of the Tribe team was a *fait accompli* once those point caps began doing their damage. As they say, you can pay me now, or pay me later, but you'll be paying me, one way or the other.

So now you should have a better understanding about why U-belly was forced to put out his special edition of *The Bellyflop*, and you also know why ArtFX recently installed a new metal detector at the front door.

OCTOBER 1 GOLF OUTING

For those of you not getting my e-mail, B.T. is sponsoring a league golf outing during the last week of the season, so that we all may share together in the excitement of what promises to be a tight race to the finish. Tentatively set for October 1, a Friday, we are shooting for complete attendance, meaning that somehow, some way, we must find a way to get Possum on board for this event.

In any event, as to this event, the RSVPs have been slow in arriving. Please let me know by e-mail or air

mail if you *are not* able to participate on October 1, and if not, when you would be available to golf that week.

FROM THE STORK CLUB

I have saved the best for last. *From the Bullpen* is proud to announce the birth of Emily Ann Ernst, fourth in succession to the glorious Senators franchise. Ms. Ellie was born on Monday evening, August 16th, at 10:22 p.m., within hours of A-Rod's home run in a fifth consecutive game and Brian Daubach's 3-run double, not to mention Pokey Reese's 3-run jack that

same evening. Thank God for television and ESPN in the birthing rooms. Oh, yeah, the tale of the tape is that Emily Ann weighed in at 9 lbs., 6-1/2 ounces, and measured 21 inches. A genetic carboncopy of Will, Emily weighed in at a full pound more than Will's birth weight, and by the looks of things from her early eating habits, the Burr may have met his match at the old Ernst training table.

See you next week.

Skipper