



FROM THE BULLPEN

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Brethren:

Man, it's a drag without baseball, ain't it? When the high point of your week is the announcement of Rafael Furcal as the National League Rookie of the Year, you know that times are tough.

Hence, to give the rest of you losers something to do in the miserable winter off-season, I thought I should put out a short *Bullpen* to bring a little sunshine your way.

THE CATCHER WAS A SLUG

With apologies to the author of one of my favorite baseball books, *The Catcher Was a Spy*, it was the catcher position that absolutely killed me in the 2000 HSL campaign. Somewhat ironic, since I wore the tools of ignorance myself in high school and city rec baseball. I can snare a nasty knuckleball, but I can't pick a catcher to save myself in this league.

I want you to know, again, that I really, really, really¹ did plan on drafting Posada in about the eleventh or twelfth round this year, not because I thought he was all that damn great, but because he is young and a Yankee and ought to score 400 points by default. However, I somehow took my eye off the ball when all of those gems I drafted in Rounds 10 through 14 were strangely still available, and ignored my own carefully-crafted draft list. Mouse picked up Posada in eighteenth, and after cursing and muttering silently to myself, I picked up Ben Petrick of the Rockies in the eighteenth instead. "No matter", I probably thought, "Ben too is young and playing at Coor's Field and will probably double up on Posada in points scored. Hmmm. Did Pet Boy even make the Rockies roster

from spring training? I am not sure he ever played a down.

So the first week of 2000 competition, I had Ben in my starting lineup for the first part of the week, and when I realized he wasn't even playing, I demoted him and brought up John Flaherty, my backup catcher, just in time for him to score two points in three games in my starting lineup, leaving behind the twenty-six points he scored in the first two games of the season while on the Senator's bench.

Meanwhile, just fifty miles down the road in Lincoln, Charles Johnson was scoring forty-seven points (9.4 PPG) as the Tribe's starting backstop, making him the fifth highest scoring hitter in the league for Week One of the campaign. U-Bob must have been beaming. More on Charlie later.

With Flaherty in my starting lineup, I had sixteen catching points in week two, seven in week three, and eighteen in week four. I don't know how many points Flaherty scored during week five because Bill James never sent me my damn week five report, but it was pitiful enough that I decided to trapdoor his sorry ass and hit the free agent wire. And guess who I picked up during the fifth free agent draft? None other than Charles Johnson, who had the rug pulled out from under him by U-Bob, for some reason.

Sadly, Charlie only lasted two weeks on the Senator's team before being cut loose at free agent draft no. 7. I can't frankly remember if Charlie was injured and not playing; just not playing; or playing and just plain sucking, but I must have had some darn good reason for sending him packing. Or not.

In any event, I ditched C.J. and picked up the superbly dependable Darren Fletcher to take his place, and after a sparkling twenty-three point debut for Darren during week eight of the campaign, he followed this up by scoring five, six and then zero points the next three weeks. Time to ash-can Fletcher the Catcher.

¹ REALLY!

Next up on the list was Brad Ausmus, who played three weeks for the Senators and pitched in a total of forty-four points.

After Brad it was Brent Mayne, who scored thirty-six points during the next three weeks.

Enter Damian Miller of the Diamond Backs, who contributed seventy-one points over the course of the next seven weeks, including one week in which he netted minus seven for the week. Nice.

And to finish off this tail of misery, I picked up Ben Molina for the last two weeks of the season, and Ben chimed in with thirty points in the last two weeks.

Because I am missing a couple of the reports, I am not exactly sure how many points were scored for the Senators at the catcher position during the 26-week season, but appears that it was about 275 to 285 points, and certainly no more than 300 points. Considering that Charlie Johnson ended up being the third highest scoring catcher with a total of 539 points, you can see that the one false move in dropping C.J. from my team after the seventh week of play was determinative of the season's outcome. Bummer.

The catcher was a slug. They all are, expect for Piazza and IRod, and it is just too damn hard for me to take a catcher in the first round. In fact, ever since I stroked out a few years ago and took Micky Tettleton in the third round, I have been reluctant to pull the trigger early for a catcher. In most years, this has served me well, as I was able to win the glorious 1997 campaign after waiting until the eleventh round to pick up Dan Wilson, and I was able to finish third in 1998 after drafting my first catcher, Brad Ausmus, in the eighteenth round. And even this year, while waiting until the eighteenth round to draft my first catcher, I was able to finish in a tie for fourth with Tirebiter, so why mess with success? Because of the frustration of having John Flaherty, Darren Fletcher, Brad Ausmus, Brent Mayne, Damian Miller and Ben Molina as my "catcher by committee" corps, that's why.

Whether I am drafting fourth or fifth next year, it will be interesting to see whether I am able to pull the trigger on IRod or Piazza and actually take a first-line catcher in the first round, or whether the allure of an ARod or a Jeter or a Nomar or even a Helton will be too great to resist. We will just have to wait and see, my friends.

A HILLBILLY AMONG US

Most of you may not know this, but one of our own is thinking about a move to some godforsaken place called Mountain Home, Arkansas. Don't laugh, because it is true. U-Bob is apparently seriously considering pulling up stakes, flipping up the skirts on the trailer home, and hauling his family and all of their worldly possessions to Hillbillyville, USA.

Memo to Bob: *Its Arkansas*, Bob. You know, dueling banjos, inbreeding, close set eyes. Have you thought this through? I know that you'd save on dental bills since they don't have dentists there, but hey, money isn't everything.

Because I imagine that the rest of you will be just as dumbfounded as me to learn of Bob's thinking on this, I am sharing with you here *The Top Ten List of Reasons Why U-Bob is Considering a Move to Mountain Home, Arkansas*:

10. Sick and tired of Scott referring to him as his "sidekick Tattoo".
9. Understands Arkansas has state law against being "Turked" at possum races and other Hillbilly sporting events.
8. Thinking of mounting grass roots campaign for revote to help Gore capture Arkansas.
7. Heard rumor that Arkansas has decriminalized bad spelling.
6. Wants to be as close as possible to the new Clinton Presidential Library.
5. If he doesn't go, Jody plans to leave him in Nebraska with the three young 'uns.²
4. Branson and Dollywood only a few hours drive away.
3. Can get in on the ground floor with Billy Bob, Jethro, and Bubba in forming *R-kin-saw Hawt Stoav Leeg*.
2. Ticked off that nobody around here calls him "Peppercot".

And the No. 1 reason that U-Bob is thinking about moving to Mountain Home, Arkansas:

1. ITZ THUH EYE-CUE FAKTER, STOOPUD!!!³

² Adolph, Frank and Bubbles.

³ U-Bob's 84 will put him in the top 1 percent among Arkansans, and give him a fighting chance at a Bill James title.

HUSKER IN SEMINOLE COUNTRY

I am finishing up this issue of FTB from Tallahassee, Florida, home of the Florida State Seminoles. Neat place. Nice stadium. Wouldn't want to see the Huskers have to play the Seminoles on their home turf, though, as they have not lost a game here since 1984.

Tomorrow night is the Florida – Florida State game, and the town is abuzz with excitement. It would definitely be an event to see.

Speaking of events, this town is crawling with reporters, news station trucks, politicians and lawyers, as the Florida Supreme Court is expected to make a ruling today about whether the recounted votes from three different Florida counties are to be considered by the Secretary of State in determining the winner of Florida's electoral college votes. As I walked into my hotel yesterday, I was interviewed by a NPR (National Public Radio) reporter, who assumed I was part of Bush's or Gore's high-powered legal team, or else the waterboy for the Gator football team. This morning when I was leaving my hotel, I ran into Warren Christopher, Clinton's former Secretary of State, who is staying at the same hotel. Recognizing me as a good and loyal fellow Democrat, Warren asked me to get on board with their efforts to derail Bush's apparent win in Florida, but when I told him that I crossed over and voted for Junior, he kneed me in the groin and called me some very bad names.

In any event, an exciting trip for several reasons. Today it is over to Gainesville for a deposition of a toxicologist, and then back home to Huskerland tonight.

POST SEASON AWARDS

Was anybody surprised by the post-season awards? Even though the Big Unit deserved his second in a row and third overall, I thought that Glavine would probably get it on the basis of his twenty wins, undeserving as it would have been. Did anybody see Pedro's post-award speech? The guy couldn't be more modest and nice. That's why I am drafting him next year.

I was a little bit surprised the Giambi got the AL MVP, although his numbers were certainly deserving. I thought the Big Hurt would probably win based upon the White Sox winning their division so handily and the great comeback year that Frank had, but I don't

think that Frank is exactly a favorite of the baseball writers.

As for Jeff Kent winning the NL MVP, here again he was quite deserving, but I thought it more likely that Barry Bond would win his fourth MVP based upon his magnificent season.

For your reading pleasure, I am enclosing a list of the Cy Young winners and MVP recipients through 1999, as included in the last addition of *Baseball Digest*.

See ya,

Skipper