



FROM THE BULLPEN

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Eastern Nebraska Division

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Brethren:

I said it before, and I'll say it again: It's the funnest darned day of the year! Thanks again to all of you for participating in the 16th Annual HSL Draft.

With the niceties out of the way, let's get right to what all of you are so anxiously waiting for, Skipper's Annual Draft Analysis – my thoughtful, incisive, candid and cerebral scrutinizing of this year's draft, and my predictions for this year's final order of finish. Without further ado, then, I give you:

SKIPPER'S PICKS AND PANS

1. SKIPJACKS

- TS:¹ *Starting battery* with Pedro and I-Rod rivaled by no other tandem.
- TW:² *Center field* is a disaster, with Preston Wilson and Marquis Grissom making one wonder why Itchie even drafted at this position.
- BP:³ The Big Cat in the 13th may make Itchie look like a genius—something that nothing else has been able to accomplish.
- WB:⁴ Taking Solly Green in the 4th may prove to be a waste of a high draft pick, now that the Joltin' Jew is playing in the spacious confines of Dodger Stadium. Are you sure you didn't mean to pick Shannon Stewart, Itchie-one?
- SS:⁵ Despite the vast odds against repeating in this cerebral league, Itchie's 2000 squad may have the right stuff to do it. Though the Skipper is pained to say it, it looks like Itchie picked himself one heckuva good team—one that looks better each time I read the names. The *pitching staff* may even give B.T.'s moundsmen a run for

¹ Team Strength.

² Team Weakness.

³ Best Pick.

⁴ Worst Blunder.

⁵ Skipper Says.

their money, if Neagle continues his comeback to career form, and if Sele likes pitching at Safeco Field. Looks like that fifteen-minute chat with Jugdish at the Quik Shop on the way to the draft may pay huge dividends.

POF:⁶ You heard it here first: **REPEAT.**

2. CHIEFS

- TS: You had to ask? *Starting pitching*. As in the Big Unit, El Duque, and Bartolo. As in WOW.
- TW: You had to ask? *Outfield*. Not only is B.T.'s outfield bad, it's bad deep.
- BP: Bartolo in the 3rd. This bruiser's going to have a big year, I can just sense it.
- WB: All but ignoring *relief pitching* by taking Troy Percival and Paul Shuey as his stoppers, and Steve Karsay and Greg Swindell as his set-up men. It's not *just* the starters, you know.
- SS: With a solid if not spectacular *infield* to go with his buzz-saw *starting pitching*, the Chiefs will be in the thick of things come September with a few prudent free agent picks along the way, like a whole new *outfield*, for example. Looks like drafting under the influence of sobriety may be a good thing for B.T., although I'm not about to adopt it as a practice of my own, come what may.

POF: **BRIDESMAID, REVISITED.**

3. CUBS*

- TS: *Right field*, in case you hadn't noticed, and overall team balance.
- TW: *Starting pitching*. After Kevin Brown, the quality tails off precipitously.
- BP: Might be Albert Belle in the 3rd, since Joey's due for a monster year, but Dante Bichette in the 15th might make the rest of us look like fools.
- WB: Billy Wagner in the 4th, if the Astros' new home is as hitter-friendly as they say.
- SS: Once again, Shamu* has picked a solid, competitive team that will definitely be in the hunt for postseason

⁶ Predicted Order of Finish.

honors if his charges stay healthy and if Shamu* scores a couple of free agent plums. While Shamu* was at one time considered a weak sister in this league, and someone you could almost always count on to finish behind you, his unprecedented devotion to preparation (basically all day, every day at work in February and early March) has elevated him to a new stature in this league, akin to a North Carolina or Duke competing for a Final Four berth every year. Well done, my crimson-cropped friend.

POF: 4th.

4. TIGERS

TS: *Shortstop*. By taking A-Rod first and Larkin fifth, Big Guy has assured himself that he will get solid production from the shortstop position, while threatening to make a mockery of the draft process.

TW: Just about everywhere else, but most acutely in the *outfield*, at the *infield corners*, and *behind the plate*.

BP: Armando in the 4th, if he can live up to the mantle of team "stopper."

WB: Putting too many cracked eggs (Clemens, Radke, Woods, Milton) in his pitching basket, at the expense of just about every other aspect of this team.

SS: Big Guy picked a truly awful *outfield*; an average or even subpar *infield*, even with Rodriguez and Larkin; and he has some huge question marks *on the mound*. Other than that, I just love this team. Look for the 2000 Tigers to revisit the Lower Division.

POF: 9th.

5. REDS

TS: *Starting pitching, second and third base*.

TW: *Outfield, SS, C*.

BP: Maddux in the 1st will probably end up being a great call. The guy is only 34 years old, and poised for a big comeback year.

WB: Taking Giles in the 4th and Moyer in the 5th were both way too early, and these two selections could have been used to pick a couple of big-time players.

SS: It's a good thing that Trisko had a good time at the hockey game in Detroit on Friday night, so at least he has something to show for last weekend. After a return to respectability in 1999, it looks like the Reds franchise is headed back to Lower Division status. In spite of a decent *pitching staff*, there are simply too many soft spots on this team, and the competition too

fierce in this league for the Reds to contend in the 2000 campaign.

POF: 8th.

6. PIRATES

TS: Killer *outfield*. SloPay's right-field tandem of Ramirez and Sosa is rivaled only by the Cubs'* RF duo of Walker and Belle. Only trouble is, the Pirates may be pushing the home run limits by the All-Star break.

TW: PPP syndrome.⁷ In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd say that U-Belly actually drafted this unfortunate collection of pseudo-*moundsmen*. The cruel Geppetto surfaces.

BP: As long as he can live with himself for selecting an avowed racist, John Rucker in the 5th was bona fide grand larceny.

WB: Making Omar Daal his staff ace as the first starting pitcher selected (Round 6). Ugh.

SS: Your brief flirtation with the Upper Division is about to come to an end, SloFriend. Your inability to mutter the name "Millwood" in the 1st round as planned has undoubtedly sealed your fate for this baseball season.

POF: 10th.

7. SENATORS

TS: *Middle infield, relief corps*.

TW: I'm not willing to admit that there are any, but for the sake of argument, let's just say that one could engage in supposition that this team could be statistically challenged at the *1st base* and *catcher* positions.

BP: Strange as it may seem, I suspicion that taking my arch-nemesis, Tom Glavine, in the 5th round will end up making many of you weep at this lost opportunity.

WB: I'm not sure this really classifies as a true "blunder," but I am second-guessing my decision to take Tony Clark in the 12th over Paul Konerko, whom U-Bob snapped up immediately thereafter.

SS: For being totally unprepared at the draft, and worried about being made to look the fool by my colleagues, I'm actually fairly darned tickled about this team. I was actually able to get guys that I had targeted in Rounds 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 18, which means that either I'm the worst judge of talent in the world, or the rest of you don't know a danged thing about how to rate and draft in this league. I choose to accept the latter explanation. It's gonna be a great year.

POF: Way up there. (3rd. At least.)

8. TRIBE

TS: To-die-for *infield*.

⁷ Piss-poor pitching, if you'll pardon the vulgarity.

TW: This will shock you: *Starting pitching*. Unless Kip Wells and Rick Ankiel both have Kerry Wood-ish rookie seasons, this team is on a bullet train to Disasterville.

BP: Nothing here really jumps off the page at me, and I'm not just saying that to yank Bobbaloo's chain. I like Cirillo, but not necessarily in the 3rd. I like Thome for a big year, but 4th round was probably about right. Let me get back to you on this one.

WB: On the other hand, I am able to provide several candidates for this award, including taking Junior in the 1st instead of Millwood; taking Finley in the 6th⁸, even though he ought to win 15 by default for the Injuns; and the winner is: Ishie Valdez in the 8th, who will make the Grucci Brothers look like small change with all of the fireworks he will be responsible for at Wrigley Field this season.

SS: *You're not listening, Mr. Bob!* It's pitching that wins this thing, and taking Chuck Finley in the 6th and Yeschmael Valdez in the 8th ain't gonna cut the mustard. Skipper predicts another season of hell for Krippendorf's Tribe.

POF: 11th.

9. REDBIRDS

TS: Decent *starting pitching*.

TW: A positively pathetic *outfield*, one which might even rival the Chiefs in terms of pure badness.

BP: Jose Offerman in the 14th was a pearl.

WB: Picking two average *first basemen* in the 4th and 5th rounds (Delgado and Casey) is not just questionable, it's downright stupid.

SS: While Hayden definitely picked a better squad than last year—probably due to his relative temperance at this year's draft—it's not likely one that is going to compete for postseason honors. At best, Jimmy's Crimson Chirpers might compete for an Upper Division berth.

POF: 5th.

10. BLUES

TS: I'm looking, I'm looking. Okay. *Right field*.

TW: Lousy *infield*, crappy *pitching*. But hey, who says you can't still have fun this year, Stretch.

BP: If he stays healthy all year, taking Moose in the 1st was a stroke of genius. If not, utter foolishness.

WB: Taking leave of his senses from Rounds 6 through 25. *Hello, anybody in there?*

⁸ But at least Bob finally got some proxide in a bottle.

SS: This is one really horrible team. If this team *doesn't* finish in the cellar, my friend Itchie will be glad to kiss Stretch's behind at 90th and Dodge Streets during rush hour traffic. Or any other time or place, for that matter.

POF: **DEAD-ASS LAST.**

11. WAHOOS

TS: *Catcher, outfield, closer*.

TW: *Starting pitching*, left side of *infield*.

BP: I'm loving Jeff Kent in the 7th in that new hitter-friendly park, and if Jim Edmonds can make a comeback, getting him in the 12th round was incredibly brilliant.

WB: Appier in the 10th. A totally wasted pick, when good players were still available.

SS: This team may be deceptively good. If Schilling can make a decent comeback, and if guys like Sheffield and Burks can have decent seasons, this team can actually be in contention. By changing his team name to the **Wahoos** and displaying a whole new attitude on Draft Day, Possum looks to turn this disheveled franchise around. Look for the Wahoos to celebrate their inaugural season under this moniker with a very respectable 6th place finish.

POF: 6th.

12. BRONX BOMBERS

TS: *First base*. With Bagwell and McGwire, how could you be any stronger at any one position?

TW: *Starting pitching* is a mite thin.

BP: Getting Vinny Castilla in the 8th and Magglio Ordonez in the 9th were both terrific late picks. I also like Pokey Reese in the 13th and Scott Williamson in the 14th.

SS: Mouse done himself proud with this year's draft. Although there were a couple of hiccups along the way (Shannon Stewart in the 5th, David Wells in the 6th, Russ Ortiz in the 7th—tough three rounds, Mouse), by and large this is a team that is going to be poised to compete for an Upper Division berth. For now I rank them 7th, but there's no doubt that the Bombers could easily finish in the top half of the standings.

POF: 7th.

RECAP

1. Skipjacks
2. Chiefs
3. Senators
4. Cubs*
5. Redbirds

6. Wahoos
7. Bombers
8. Reds
9. Tigers
10. Pirates
11. Tribe
12. Blues

EPILOGUE

What a draft! What a league! I'm totally impressed with the teams that were selected by all of you (with one unfortunate exception), and I can honestly say that this was the toughest year I've ever had in trying to rate the teams and predict orders of finish. In

fact, I may not even be close on these, but if you're a betting man, you can bet that I've hit the nail on the head on at least a few of this year's squads.

Good luck to each and every one of you, and most of all, have a great season!!

Skipper

Enclosures:

1. 2000 Hot Stove League Draft Roster
2. Updated Hot Stove League 2000 Owners/Managers Roster