



FROM THE BULLPEN

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FRETMEISTER'S 'JAX INCREASE LEAD; WAHOOS IN 2ND BY A C-NOTE; CHIEFS STILL IN 3RD

Brethren:

On the strength of Pedro's masterful win over the Rocket and his Yankees on Sunday night, Mr. Much-Ado-About-Nothing and his sterling **Skipjacks** have widened their lead on the field and now hold a 3262 to 3147 edge over the 2nd place **Wahoos**. With his expanded 115-point margin, the Fuhrer of Fret will have one less thing to fuss and worry about this coming week as he works himself up into a lather over the perceived inadequate detail for our league excursion to Houston on Saturday. Relax, Itchie. Take a Valium with your nightly Schlitz Malt Liquor this week, and things will be just fine, I promise.

The **Skipjacks** had yet another huge point performance during Week 8, coupling a league-leading 283 hitting points with a league-leading 173 pitching points to crank out a whopping 456 points for the week, best in the HSL by a bunch. This team is so good that Itchie can't even find spots in the starting lineup for Andres Galarraga and Dave Justice, both of whom were averaging more than 4 PPG recently, and both of whom would be not just starters but team superstars if members of the **Senators** squad. Some guys have all the luck. And I do mean luck.

Let's take a look at the standings through eight weeks:

STANDINGS THRU WEEK 8

	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>Total Pts.</u>
1.	Skipjacks	3262
2.	Wahoos	3147
3.	Chiefs	3047
4.	Reds	2878
5.	Bombers	2830
6.	Blues	2757

	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>Total Pts.</u>
7.	Tigers	2731
8.	Senators	2576
9.	Redbirds	2544
10.	Pirates	2484
11.	Tribe	2437
12.	Cubs*	2138

After the **Skipjacks**, the second-highest scoring team during Week 8 was, incredibly, the torpid **Senators**, who checked in with 396 points without any contribution whatsoever from No. 1 pick Derek Jeter, and even with the Skipper getting sucked into The Great Shell Game of such magnitude that it puts the 1982 Manhattan Experience (ask Bob) to shame. With this sudden burst of enthusiasm from the miserable pack of miscreants who call themselves the 2000 Senators, my thoroughly hatable team managed to slip past both the **Redbirds** and **Pirates** and into 8th place. Big deal, so what, who cares.

The third highest scoring team of the week was the **Chiefs** with 372 points, allowing B.T.'s squad to close the gap with the 2nd-place **Wahoos** just a bit, as the Wahoos struggled to a subpar 319-point week. Did somebody prick Possum's bubble? Is Possum's wild fantasy ride over? And I'm talking about his Hot Stove League performance, not the Bridges Investment Fund, mind you. Those of us who are entrusting our retirement and college savings accounts with him hope that the BIF ride is far from over, even if Possum's HSL hot streak is over.

On the other edge of the galaxy, Shamu's* HSL 2000 woes continue. Even with Kevin Brown back on the job, the **Cubs*** could manage only 240 points during Week 8, with a league-worst hitting total of 167 and a mere 73 pitching points for the week. With this meager output for Week 8, the Cubs*' overall total now stands at 2138 points, more than 1100 points off of the leading **Skipjacks** and almost 300 points behind the 11th place **Tribe**, which has 2437 points. I would venture to say that never has a team fallen this far behind, this quickly, with the season not even one-third of the way over. Barring a miracle—like Shamu's*

players suddenly becoming good at what they do—the year 2000 will most certainly go down in league annals as the Summer of Shamu’s* Discontent.

And now the composite totals for Week 8:

WEEK 8 POINT TOTALS

	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>Pt.Total</u>
1.	Skipjacks	456
2.	Senators	396
3.	Chiefs	372
4.	Tigers	371
5.	Reds	355
6.	Bombers	340
(T)	Blues	340
8.	Redbirds	336
9.	Wahoos	319
10.	Tribe	285
11.	Pirates	267
12.	Cubs*	240

TOP HITTING TEAMS, SEASON

1.	Wahoos	2396
2.	Skipjacks	2143
3.	Reds	2058

WORST HITTING TEAMS, SEASON

12.	Cubs*	1437
11.	Senators	1669
10.	Redbirds	1865

TOP PITCHING TEAMS, SEASON

1.	Skipjacks	1139
2.	Chiefs	1038
3.	Bombers	962

WORST PITCHING TEAMS, SEASON

12.	Tribe	450
11.	Pirates	566
10.	Redbirds	679

TOP HITTING TEAMS, WEEK 8

1.	Skipjacks	283
2.	Senators	273
3.	Reds	268

WORST HITTING TEAMS, WEEK 8

12.	Cubs*	167
11.	Tigers	200
10.	Pirates	212

TOP PITCHING TEAMS, WEEK 8

1.	Skipjacks	173
2.	Tigers	170
3.	Senators	122

WORST PITCHING TEAMS, WEEK 8

12.	Pirates	55
11.	Tribe	57
10.	Cubs*	73

BALZ AND STRYKS¹

◆ Since we had a special issue of *The Bellyflop* last week, I did not have the opportunity to congratulate Possum for piloting his **Wahoos** into 1st position through six weeks, by a margin of 2828 to 2806 over the **Skipjacks** (never mind the projected totals). By finally finishing a week in 1st place in the Hot Stove League, Possum has finally eradicated the unwanted distinction of being the only HSL team to never lead the pack at the close of the week since we moved into our 12-team Bill James Fantasy Baseball format in 1993. Well done, Possum. We will no longer consider changing your nickname from *Possum* to *Total Loser*.

◆ As you may know, Hayden recently returned from a lengthy fishing trip to Canada, where he was without access to telephone lines, the Internet, or newspapers. He may not even know, then, that Bobby Higginson had consecutive 4-RBI nights for his **Redbird** farm squad, or that benchwarmer Ramiro Mendoza spun a nifty shutout in his absence. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, Hayden, but if you want to compete in this league, *you’ve got to pay attention!*

◆ If there’s a worse pitching squad in the history of the HSL than the 2000 version of the **Tribe** staff, somebody’s going to have to prove it to me. U-belly’s “ace,” so-to-speak, is his prized bottle blonde, Chuck Finley, who through seven weeks (I haven’t received the Week 8 Stats

¹ Sorry. Linda’s spellcheck feature on her computer is still reeling from last week’s issue of *The Bellyflop*.

sheet yet) had a total of 105 pitching points, scoring at an 11.7 PPG clip. To put this in perspective, the league's top hurler, the Big Unit, had almost three times as many points with 276. Finley is the only pitcher on U-belly's staff with more than 100 points through seven weeks. Closers Jeff Shaw and Rick Aguilera are averaging 5.4 and 2.7 PPG, respectively, which is astounding given the fact that the Tribe team had the most saves of any team through seven weeks with 25, four more than the second-best **Cubs*** and **Senators**. In other words, these two slugs are somehow racking up saves with regularity, in spite of giving up multiple hits and runs. When their luck runs out, it won't be pretty.

As Vince Lombardi might have said, Bob, *Pitching isn't everything, it's the only thing*. Get that through your Neanderthal skull, and maybe you'll be able to compete in this league. Maybe.

◆ But not to be too hard on U-belly, let me at least take this opportunity to thank him for his superb effort in last week's hilarious edition of *The Bellyflop*, which met with rave reviews from all members polled. There is nobody who views the world quite like U-Bob, and even though he is to grammar and spelling what Oprah is to weight-loss maintenance, we all benefit from his acute sense of humor and incisive commentary. Thanks, Bobaloo.

◆ I see that Mouse recently signed some pitcher by the name of Jerry Spradlin, undoubtedly Jerry's first foray into the Hot Stove League. I'm not sure who Jerry pitches for or exactly what he does, but he sounds more like a performer at Branson than a major league baseball player. We'll have to ask U-Bob if he saw him while he was down there during his annual migration.

◆ I can't believe that Itchie released Tim Wakefield. Itchie's fate has been yoked to the soft-tossing knuckleballer for the past decade, it seems.

◆ I see that the Pirates recently released Kevin Young (believe me, I understand, Denny), and signed Jeff Fassero, former **Senator** he. May God be with you, my son.

◆ After spending the better part of the past two years on the **Senators'** roster, flirting with the Mendoza Line and averaging about 2.0 PPG, Todd Hundley is averaging 5.1 points per contest for the **Tigers**. Life ain't fair.

◆ And another ex-**Senator** and current **Tiger**, A-Rod, was averaging 7.1 PPG through seven weeks.

Hmmm. Yeah, I think that's about what he averaged for my team last year. Did I mention that life ain't fair?

BEEF STEW

I've got more than a few beefs, and you're darned right I'm stewing, over my pathetic team's offensive performance. Or more accurately, it's malperformance. Through seven weeks, my hitters were batting a collective *.256*. *This is not a misprint*. A collective, stinkin' *.256*. If an individual player's *Mendoza Line* is *.200*, a team's *Gonzalez Line* should be set at about *.270* in this league, because not only are we playing in an era of inflated batting averages and other statistics, we are allegedly picking the cream of the crop in our annual draft.

I would like to hire someone to calculate the odds of selecting twelve players in today's market who are batting a collective *.256*. The league average must be about *.295* or *.300*, maybe even a titch better, if you look at the composite averages in the Sunday newspaper. If somebody set out to draft a team on draft day which would have a *.256* collective average after seven weeks, he could not do it. But somehow, I did it. Of course, it's more than just drafting good players having bad years, it's jerking them up and down like a yo-yo and allowing the Shell Game of the baseball gods to play into the mix. Everytime I demote Johnny Damon after three or four consecutive 5000s, he goes a crisp 3-for-4 in my minor leagues. Ditto for Juan Gonzalez, Roger Cedeno, Mark Quinn, and every other slug outfielder on my team. So I suppose the answer is to leave them all in my starting lineup, ignore short-term performance, and bank on them in the long haul. But let's see *you* do it. *You* watch Damon click off a single hit in five or six games in your starting lineup, and *you* show me that you have the discipline to leave him up in the majors night after night after night. I can't do it. I can't. I can't.

And while I'm bitching and moaning, allow me to point out that somehow I was crafty enough to draft the top two point-getters in the league last year, with Jeter in the 1st and Alomar in the 2nd. Was that so wrong, he asked rhetorically? Well, yes, evidently it was. The two of them are determined to keep their averages well under *.300* for the year, and to avoid hitting home runs, doubles and triples. And don't even get me started on Scott Rolen.

One more thing. Through seven weeks, the **Senators** didn't have a single player averaging more than 4.0 PPG. Possum's **Wahoos** had ten of them, including six players averaging more than 5.0 PPG. Including a couple on his bench who would be superstars on my roster. Looks like another long, long year for the **Senatros**.

THE TRIP

For those of you heading south with me on Saturday morning for The Trip, buckle up your chin straps and get ready for a simply fabulous time. In the recent *Sports Illustrated* issue with Bobby Knight on the cover, there is a terrific article about Enron Field. Looks like this new jewel may have a shot at making it onto Skipper's Top Ten. Hope it doesn't disappoint.

For those of you who still aren't entirely clear on the details of the trip, I enclose yet more information in the form of *Fretmeister's Personal Itinerary/Guide to the Year 2000 HSL Trip*.

See you Saturday morning, men, and you ladies, later.

Skipper

FRETMEISTER'S PERSON- AL/ITINERARY GUIDE TO THE YEAR 2000 HSL TRIP

Itinerary for June 3-4 weekend trip to Houston:

Saturday, June 3

12:01 a.m. Shut down computer for night after fretting and fussing over Skipjacks' starting lineup for weekend; check, recheck, and re-recheck DOP kit, travel bag, and wallet.

1:00 a.m. Gulp down Valium/Schlitz Malt Liquor cocktail.

1:01 a.m. Set alarm clock for 3:30 a.m. wake-up.

1:02 a.m. Set second alarm for 3:35 a.m. wake-up.

1:03 a.m. Set third alarm for 4:00 a.m. wake-up.

1:04 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. Fitful sleep.

2:00 a.m. Wake up and fret and stew about whether alarm clocks are working, wake up Anne to ask her to check same and make sure they have been properly set and are functional. Check on stuffed pheasant. Consume second Valium/Schlitz Malt Liquor cocktail.

2:30 a.m. Wake up and recheck computer to make sure proper promotions/demotions have been made.

3:00 a.m. Wake up and repack DOP kit and duffle bag for trip. Check on Propecia prescription bottle to ensure ample coverage for weekend. Fret, fume and stew about alarm clocks.

3:05 a.m. Open left eye and check to see if alarm clock is working.

3:30 a.m. Get up. Shower. Shave. Gulp down six Krispy Kreme low-fat doughnuts. Check oil and gas in car.

4:00 a.m. Start car. Make sure blinkers and brake-lights are working properly.

4:15 a.m. Stow duffle bag and DOP kit into trunk of car. Consider calling Skipper to make sure he is awake and will be ready to be picked up. Check pheasant. Fret and stew about kids not picking up toys in living room. Check wallet to make sure that all nine credit cards are loaded up.

5:00 a.m. Leave for Skipper's house. Drive two blocks. Sit in driveway with engine running. Consider throwing rocks at Skipper's bedroom window to make sure he is awake. Fret, fume and stew.

5:30 a.m. See Skipper's garage door open, whine and fret about making it to airport on time.

5:40 a.m. Arrive at Eppley Airport. Check, double-check and triple-check tickets and departure times. Fret about other league members being late.

5:45 a.m. Carp at airline employees about plane delays, concern about whether stewardesses will be serving libations during flight to Houston.

6:15 a.m. Board plane. Fret about whether Tony will be at airport in Houston with rental car, whether rental car will be fully gassed and oiled.

6:30 a.m. Continental Flight No. 206 departs *on time* for Houston. Snap at stewardess over delay in serving cocktails. Consume first, second, third and fourth beers on way to 100-beer weekend.

8:50 a.m. Arrive Houston, greeted by Tony at gate, question Tony about adequacy of vehicle, how long it will take to get to hotel, whether hotel has adequate accommodations for trip participants. Consume beers five, six, seven and eight on way to hotel.

11:00 a.m. Demand departure for Enron Field for 12:15 p.m. start time.

12:15 p.m. Attend game. Consume beers nine through fifty.

4:15 p.m. Return to hotel. Hole up in hotel lounge. Consume beers 51-75.

6:15 p.m. Demand departure for Houston Ballet. Consume beers 76-91.

Sunday, June 4

4:00 a.m. Return to hotel. Fret and fume about tomorrow's game and getting there on time, flight home, etc.

8:00 a.m. Wake up all other trip participants, demand breakfast at Lenny's.

Noon—demand departure for stadium so as not to be late.

2:15 p.m. Attend baseball game at Enron Field. Consume beers 92-100 at game.

4:30 p.m. Fret and worry about being late to airport for flight home. Demand early departure from game in 6th inning.

8:34 p.m. Continental Flight No. 558 leaves Houston for Omaha.

10:44 p.m. Flight No. 558 arrives at Omaha.

11:15 p.m. Drop off Skipper at home, return to house and check on computer for Sunday games, fret, stew and fume, pet pheasant, go to bed.

END OF TRIP