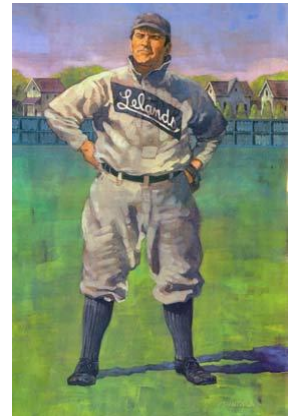


# FROM THE BULLPEN

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2001 Season

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### SKIPJACKS PACE FIELD WITH 416, BRILLIANT MANAGER SNAPS REINS ON TEAM TO CAPTURE 4<sup>TH</sup>

Brethren:

So I get this voice mail message the other day, and there's this whining, sniveling HSL manager, whose identity I probably need not mention, who wants to know, "Why are you giving Big Guy all of the good press?" or words to that effect. "How about talking up *my* team every once in a while?"

Talk about self-absorption. Boy, it's hard to keep everybody in this whole darned league happy all the time, but I'll try.

The **Skipjacks** used a league-best team total of 416 points during Week 18 to surge past the **Tigers**, **Pirates** and **Blues** and into 4<sup>th</sup> place in the overall league standings, as if anyone gave a rat's butt about 4<sup>th</sup> place. Be that as it may, *good job, nice work, kudos, congrats, well done, attaboy, we're sure proud of you*, Brother Itchie. You are one helluva fine manager.

In spite of a lackluster 325-point week, the **Yahoos** remain in 1<sup>st</sup> place, on top of the heap, with 6673 points. However, the **Senators** were able to trim the **Yahoos'** lead to 127 points by posting a 383-point week.

Here are the Week 18 standings from alpha to omega:

### WEEK 18 STANDINGS

1.	Yahoos	6673
2.	Senators	6546
3.	Reds	6266

4.	<b>SKIPJACKS</b> <sup>1</sup>	6013
5.	Tigers	6004
6.	Tribe	6975
7.	Pirates	5965
8.	Blues	5958
9.	Cubs*	5919
10.	Redbirds	5801
11.	Bombers	5498
12.	Chiefs	5055

After those awesome, fabulous, lovable **Skipjacks**, the second-best team during Week 18 belongs to Tirebiter, whose squad posted a 406-point Week 18 to vault the **Weenie Wedbirds** up into the northern part of the Lower Intestines, where they can at least catch a fleeting glimpse of the 9<sup>th</sup> place team before they roll back over and reenter the fray with the **Bombers** for 11<sup>th</sup> place. It was somewhat of a down week for the Hot Stove League, with only four teams out of twelve scoring more than 325 points, and with exactly half of the teams scoring fewer than 290 points.

The Middle Six teams continue to jockey for position in the upper half of the Lower Division and the lower half of the Upper Division, with these six squads flip-flopping and changing places on a weekly basis. You will note that this week the Middle Six teams are all within a total spread of 100 points, with the **Skipjacks'** 6013 being the top and the **Cubs\*** 5919 being at the bottom. It's going to be one blockbuster of a race for 4<sup>th</sup> place, which, see above.

### WEEK 18 POINT TOTALS

From ying to yang, here is how the twelve league teams fared during Week 18:

<sup>1</sup> Fine, fine managing, oh oracle of the Hot Stove League.

1.	Skipjacks	416
2.	Redbirds	406
3.	Tribe	394
4.	Senators	383
5.	Wahoos	325
6.	Chiefs	302
7.	Blues	289
8.	Cubs*	286
9.	Reds	282
10.	Bombers	269
11.	Pirates	252
12.	Tigers	219

The top hitting team for the year is the **Wahoos** with a whopping total of 4425, more than 200 points ahead of the second-best **Pirates**. The scorching bats of Bonds and Boone continue to keep the **Wahoos'** boat afloat.

The **Bombers**, on the other hand, are sucking this year because of pathetic hitting. The **Bombers** have a total of 3211 hitting points, more than 100 fewer than the 11<sup>th</sup> place **Chiefs** batsmen, and more than 300 points fewer than the 10<sup>th</sup>-best hitting team, that superlative **Skipjacks** squad and their talented and hard-working manager.

On the pitching side of the ledger, the **Senators** hurlers continue to lead the fabled HSL with 2803 points, a mink stole<sup>2</sup> ahead of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-place **Skipjacks** with 2473. The **Bombers** have the third most pitching points with 2287, followed by the **Wahoos** with 2248. At the other end, the staff of the **Chiefs** trails all comers with 1720 points, an eyelash behind the **Pirates'** total of 1742 points.

The top hitter through 18 weeks is Luis Gonzalez, still, who maintains his pace to threaten the mythical 1000-point figure. Randy Johnson, the sage first pick of the Bald Tactician<sup>3</sup>, leads all pitchers with 568 points, well ahead of the No. 2 man, Curt Schilling, who was 489.

### Individual Leaders<sup>4</sup>

#### Hitting

1.	Luis Gonzalez, Cubs*	626
2.	Barry Bonds, Wahoos	588

<sup>2</sup> Fur piece.

<sup>3</sup> Isn't that what they called the legendary Connie Mack? I mean it only as a compliment, Itchie.

<sup>4</sup> Excluding bonus points.

3.	A-Rod, Reds	586
4.	Todd Helton, Senators	562
5.	Lance Berkman, Pirates	542
6.	Sammy Sosa, Tribe	538
7.	Manny Ramirez, Bombers	525
(T)	Robby Alomar, Tigers	525
9.	Ray Floyd <sup>5</sup> , Blues	504
10.	Rich Aurilia <sup>6</sup> , Tribe	497

#### Pitching

1.	Randy Johnson, those fabulous Skipjacks	513
2.	Curt Schilling, Senators	480
3.	Mariano Rivera, Senators	427
4.	Greg Maddux, Tigers	425
5.	Chan Ho Park, Chirpers	407
6.	Tim Hudson, Skipjacks <sup>7</sup>	381
7.	Robb Nen, Skipjacks <sup>8</sup>	379
(T)	John Burkett, Tigers	379
9.	Roger Clemens, Chirpers	369
10.	Mark Mulder, Senators	355

You may note that not a single **Chiefs** player makes either list. Henceforth, B.T.'s Summer of Discontent.

### BIG BUSTS

Speaking of discontents, or malcontents, if the shoe fits, let's take a look at the biggest busts of 2001, in Skipper's opinion:

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>PPG</u>
C	Jason Kendall, Tigers	255	2.3
1B	Mark McGwire, Chiefs	175	2.9
2B	Edgardo Alfonzo, Cubs*	217	2.6
SS	Barry Larkin, Tigers	121	2.7
3B	Matt Williams, Tribe	164	2.7
LF	Ben Grieve, Skipjacks	241	2.3
CF	Darin Erstad, Chiefs	289	2.6
RF	Tim Salmon, Wahoos <sup>9</sup>	227	2.5
SP	Mike Mussina, Blues	289	12.5
CL	Derek Lowe, Senators <sup>10</sup>	242	4.8

<sup>5</sup> Or Curt Floyd or Floyd Smoot, whatever his damn name is.

<sup>6</sup> You've got to be kidding.

<sup>7</sup> Possibly the greatest team of all time, certainly the most well-managed.

<sup>8</sup> Need I say more?

<sup>9</sup> Drafted by **Wahoos**, picked up recently by the **Tigers** from the **Wahoos** trash heap.

<sup>10</sup> Formerly, now a **Bomber**.

## OUT IN LEFT FIELD

♦ I was recently reminded, once again, of the abject cruelty of the baseball gods. Just when the **Senators** started to close the gap on the **Wahoos**, with a chance to actually make it darned close and maybe even to wrest the league lead from Possum, the cruel overlords of the game pulled the string on me and restored Possum's lead. The hard part was having to listen to part of it on the radio.

This past Sunday afternoon, Hardware Hank (me) jumped into the truck to head to Ace to buy more materials for our incredibly costly tree house, the mortgage on which will be something just short of Danny Tartabull's debt paper. Anyway, I was pleased<sup>11</sup> to catch the Twins-Royals game on the radio. I quickly picked up the fact that **Senators** moundsman Joe Mays was locked in a 1-1 battle with the Kansas City Royals, with one man on and two outs in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning. Cool. We're looking at a quality start and 15-25 points, whether Mays goes on to get the win or not. Or so I thought.

Before I was even to the bottom of our driveway, McBlunder's bible-thumping buddy (Sweeney) had jacked a two-run homer at the Baggydome, and after Joe Mays gave up one more hit and was relieved by some short-armed Mexican who ushered in Mays's baserunner, the Big Joe Polka Show was over and Mays is suddenly about 3 or 4 to the bad instead of 15-25 to the good. This sickening reversal of fortune happened in about a New York minute, and only started with the moment that I tuned in to the old radio for one of my favorite activities, listening to baseball on the radio while driving.

It is absolutely uncanny how bad my **Senators** players do when I am listening to them on the radio. They can be sailing along, like Mays, on their way to a quality win until the instant that I tune in the radio dial on the vehicle. Evidently, a signal from my car radio must bounce up off some satellite and then down to the player, signaling to him that it's time to "get the Skipper" and he then proceeds to thrust a dagger right through the pericardium. Uncanny, I tell you.

About two weeks ago almost the same exact thing happened. I'm out at our tree house ready to go to work, and I pull up the pickup truck next to it so I can listen to a

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<sup>11</sup> But don't really know why. When will I learn?

baseball game while we work. I pick up the powerhouse Royals, once again, being announced by Denny "Loose Dentures" Matthews, who proceeds to report on Mark Mulder's implosion which began with a walk issued to the lightest-hitting player on the Royals team, and hence the major leagues, followed by four or five other hits and then a Mike Sweeney home run. All while I listened in disbelief.

It's amazing. The Kansas City Royals are one of the worst, if not *the* worst teams in organized baseball (not limited to the major leagues), but they are probably about 24-and-0 against starting pitchers on my team, but only in games that I have listened to on the radio. I know, I know. *Stop listening to the radio.* Sure, and stop picking that scab, too.

♦ Big Guy's reign of terror has come to a painful end. Crippled by backdraft outings from Rick Helling and Steve "Watch Them Fly" Sparks, the **Tigers** limped in with a hurtful total of 219 points during Week 18, well behind the 11<sup>th</sup>-best **Irates**. Face it, Big Guy, it was only a matter of time before this pretender team of yours started drifting down to their own level.

♦ Last week Possum's hitters totaled 260 points, to go along with their meager pitching total of 61. In addition to 38 points from Jason Giambi and 36 points from Barry Bonds, which are expected, the Devil Boy got 37 points from Cruz, Jr., and 37 points from Corey Koskie. How the heck does Possum do it, continually nudging and wheedling huge point performances from players that are clearly of modest abilities? My only hope is that the points caps will soon begin pressing down on Possum from above, forcing him to the floor of the elevator as he gasps for air. And my other hope is that the rest of you patsies don't get suckered in on one of Possum's checkered sportscoat, green-light specials, and trade him a Randy Johnson or a Roger Clemens or a Tim Hudson or a John Lieber, let's say, for Konerko, Koskie or the wrong Giambi. *Don't do it!*

♦ I see that Big Guy picked up Jose Lima in the supplemental draft. Now *there's* a guy with a short memory. I guess he still loves Jose Lima, but only in a manly way.

♦ Thanks to the **Senators'** own Jeff Nelson for contributing to the Indians' cause on Sunday night when they erased a twelve-run deficit in the last three innings, thereby erasing six points from Aaron Sele's line score for the **Senators**.

♦ Remarkably, if you ask me, the **Senators** continue to head the BJFB Leader Board for pitching wins with 88, a solid four wins ahead of the second-place Lincoln Continentals of the Willie McCovey league owned by some guy named Russell Ratzlow. Not a bad category to lead in, I'm thinking. As Dizzy Dean once said, *"Them's not braggin', them's facts."*

### **LITTLE PITCHERS** **HAVE BIG EARS**

Joe Jackson is a not infrequent overnight visitor at the Thielen household, and as such, is privy to much of what goes on at House of Itchie. Not to talk out of school or anything, but here are a couple of things that were reportedly overheard during a recent overnight stay at the Thielen's:

*"Not tonight. I've got a headache."*

*"What year did you win the Cy Young award again, Dad?"*

*"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Take that, Ringo!"*

*"No, probably not tomorrow night, either."*

*"Hey, Dad, tell Joe about the year you won the Heisman Trophy!"*

*"Do you really think this Rogaine is working?"*

*"Can I get you some more wine and cheese, sweetie?"*

*"Yes, you can. But it's still NO."*

*"Can you show me the room where you stuff all the pheasants, Mr. Thielen?"*

*"What year did you win the Boston Marathon again, Dad?"*

*"I won money at the casino again, dear. About \$30."*

*"Hey, boss, I won't be in today because I'm still under the weather. (cough, cough) You've lost a few pounds, haven't you? How are those good-looking kids of yours?"*

*"Are you still in first place in the Hot Stove League this year, Daddy?"*

### **ANOTHER DAY AT THE PARK**

Tonight I am planning on seeing Cal Ripken's last game at Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City, and on Saturday, I'll be taking in a Mariners contest at Safeco Field in Seattle. I promise to pound down a cold beer and a bag of salted nuts for each and every one of you.

### **WRAP-UP**

Less than a third of the season to go, gentlemen. Keep after it.

Talk at you next issue.

Skipper