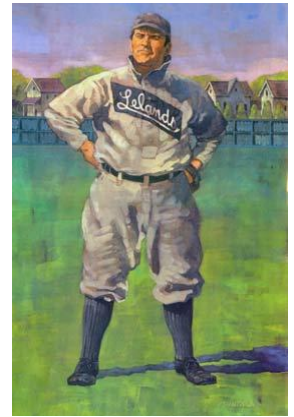


FROM THE BULLPEN

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2001 Season

Edition No. 5

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Brethren:

And now, at last, the issue that all of you anxiously await, biting your nails down to your knuckles as you stand on pins and needles waiting for Skipper's careful, reasoned and insightful analysis of your drafted teams for 2001. My apologies for the slight delay in getting this issue completed and out to you, but there was this little matter of a jury trial followed by an Opening Day junket to the City by the Bay. More later on Opening Day.

As in the past, I am setting forth my assessments based on draft order, and am listing your team strengths, your team weaknesses¹, your best pick of the Draft, your biggest blunder, a "You Heard It Here First" feature, and then the predicted order of finish for each team. This draft analysis is for the sole purpose of internal Hot Stove League use and enjoyment, and may not be rebroadcast, republished, redistributed, reprinted, or relied upon in any way without prior approval and payment of royalties.

And now, drum roll please,

SKIPPER'S PICKS AND PANS FOR 2001

1. WAHOOS

Strengths (S):

Best pitcher in the Majors – hell, maybe the best pitcher of our generation – and a solid overall rotation with Vazquez, Ortiz, Pettitte and Morris.

Weakness (W):

Outfield is a bit old in the tooth with Bonds, Salmon and O'Neill. Lots of 5-game weeks for this team.

Best Pick (BP):

Since Pedro was a no-brainer, we'll say it was last year's AL MVP (Giambi) in the 4th. How did he last that long?

Most Obvious Blunder (MOB):

Wasting a second-round pick on a guy with a split throwing arm tendon may haunt Possum the entire year, although he's already justifying this gaffe by blaming it on Draft peer pressure. I guess Tricky did have a sawed-off shotgun pressed against your temple, didn't he?

You Heard It Here First (YHIHF):

This team has eight guys on it whose last names end with the letter "Z." Guess Possum really loves those Mexicans. I mean Hispanics.

Predicted Order of Finish (POF):

As much as it pains me to put this in print, it pains me even more that I actually believe it: **Repeat Champion.**

2. REDS

S: Tricky's infield is to die for, with A-Rod, Chipper and Thome.

W: Starting pitching is suspect after Zito and Leiter, although if Millwood and Radke return to form, this could be a very good mound corps.

BP: Getting Danny Graves in the 13th round was grand larceny.

MOB: Taking Vladdy in the 2nd after his career year may prove regrettable.

YHIHF: Tricky will either end up loving J.D. Drew, if the guy gets a clue, or be driven stark, raving mad by his inconsistency and his four days a week in the starting lineup.

¹ I realize that most of you think you have none.

POF: The Lord is first, his friends are second, and Tricko is *Third*.

3. SKIPJACKS

S: With four hurlers taken in the first seven rounds, this team ought to be tough on the pitching side of the ledger. Assuming, of course, that Itchie got good information from Habib over at the Quik Shop.

W: The Jax' starting infield would be considered mediocre in Double A.

BP: Darren Dreifort in the 11th. Darren turns the corner in 2001 and dominates. Just forget that he got shelled the other night by the Diamondbacks.

MOB: Wanting Tim "Moscow on the" Hudson way too bad – talk about pushing your panic button!

YHIHF: With a high strike zone on his side, the Dove Destroyer (the Big Unit) might strike out 400 hitters this year and win his third consecutive NL Cy.

POF: The same as Foster Brooks Thielen had to drink at the Draft, about a *Fifth*.

4. CRIMSON CHIRPERS

S: With Brownie, Chan Ho, and the Rocket on this staff, it's apparent that Tirebiter really does believe that pitching is everything. If it is, this staff might just carry the cocksure Iowaegan to his first-ever crown.

W: This outfield is as punchless as Itchie when his buddies are being attacked by bar toughs. If Jim Ed gets 500 points out of any of them, it'll be surprising.

BP: Sez here that getting the Rocket as late as the 4th round was a smooth move.

MOB: Greg Vaughn in the 7th? What kind of plant were you smoking in that round, boy?

YHIHF: With terrific pitching and very little hitting, Tirebiter will be pounding the trade drums fast and furious this year, looking for a chump in need of pitching.

POF: Tirebiter's favorite number on the craps table, *Seven*.

5. SENATORS

S: Starting pitching, outfield depth.

W: So maybe I'm a little bit thin a shortstop. So what.

BP: If he's healthy, getting Kerry Wood in the 4th round will make the rest of you look like

you were out to lunch that round. If he's not, Todd Walker in the 10th will still look like a stroke of genius by the old Skipper.

MOB: Picking carping Carl Everett in the 7th round may end up burning my britches, especially since I could have had Greg Vaughn that same round. Hardy-har.

YHIHF: Senators' pitchers lead the league in strikeouts, carrying team into contention.

POF: I'd just as soon not jinx myself by predicting victory for the Senators, so let's modestly suggest that my squad will come in *Second*.

6. BLUES

S: I'll have to get back to you on this one.

W: How much time do you have? Let's start with Stretch's starting infield of Sweeney, Knoblauch, Womack and Randa. Or how about a starting outfield that has Jeff Jenkins and Matt Lawton in it? I could go on, but no need to belabor the point.

BP: Mussina in the 1st.

MOB: Sweeney in the 3rd or Rounds 8-17.

YHIHF: This team may be out of contention by late April.

POF: How low can he go? Try the *Twelfth* of never. It's the outhouse for McBlunder in 2001.

7. CHIEFS

S: B.T. is solid at closer with Armando Benetiz and Troy Percival. Starting pitching is better than it looks. Or so the Chiefs must pray.

W: The Chiefs lack a "go-to" starting pitcher, and are weak, oh so weak, at the middle infield positions.

BP: If McGwire's knees are healthy, nabbing him in the 4th was a steal. If not, Scott Rolen will be seen as a bargain in the 7th if his cranky back holds up.

MOB: Waiting until the 6th round to take a starting pitcher will prove foolhardy for B.T., who has apparently been spending far too much time listening to U-Bob's philosophical baseball rantings and ravings.

YHIHF: Consecutive lower division finishes for the Chiefs.

POF: If B.T. lays it all on the line, this team could finish as high as *Ninth*.

8. TIGERS

S: With _____ Sosocki and Urbina in the bullpen, the Tigers won't have any problem capping out on saves. With this squad, there is little danger of breaching any other point caps.

W: If Smoltz is hurting, so too is the Tigers staff. You have to love Maddux, but one man does not a

rotation make. But now let's get to the real weakness: The six-pack of warm blats disguised as Big Guy's outfield. With the Happy Hustlers (Schniffy and Moishe) patrolling the corners, Finley in the middle and the whole mess backed up by Surhoff, Incarnacio and Bichette, this is one of the uglier outfields ever selected in the Hot Stove League.

- BP: Double U in the 12th was a stroke of genius.
MOB: Moises Alou in the 6th was just a stroke.
YHIHF: Any hope that Big Guy had of moving back up among the League elite was likely dashed on Draft Day.
POF: Skipper's crystal ball sees a No. 1 in Big Guy's future – no, there are two of them. Looks like *Eleventh* for the toothless 2001 Tigers.

9. BOMBERS

- S: A sterling infield, especially if Biggio keeps up his early pace.
W: Starting rotation is average at best, and sub-par if Colon and El Duque falter.
BP: Either Maglio Ordonez in the 6th or Craig Biggio in the 9th would have to be considered savvy drafting.
MOB: Taking Bartolo in the 2nd round when he probably would have been around in the 4th.
YHIHF: Mouse manages his team with the deft of Joe Torre and pilots this year's Bombers squad to his first-ever Fab Four Finish.
POF: Sally *Fourth*.

10. CUBS*

- S: Catcher, 1st and 2nd base, closer.
W: Those two dirty words: *Starting pitching*.
BP: As of today, it's Hideo in the 20th. We'll reassess at midseason.
MOB: Waiting until Round 11 to take his second starting pitcher (Chuck Finley), after Tom Glavine in the 3rd. Not so sure that taking Tom Glavine in the 3rd was all that bright, either.
YHIHF: Determined to spend at least one week of the season in first place, Shamu's* boys put together what will likely be their top-scoring week of the season – just in time for that critical first free agent draft.
POF: Upper Division, just barely. *Sixth*.

11. TRIBE

- S: Right field, first base.

- W: Pitching, of every variety.
BP: I want to say Manny Williams in the 14th round, but he's got too many failing body parts to count on. So let's go with Jose Vidro in the 5th, who will likely be the top-scoring second baseman.
MOB: Taking the Tub of Goo II (David Wells) in his washed-out year. That, and continuing to pretend that pitching is meaningless in this league.
YHIHF: U-Bob is the first guy in the history of this league to draft a starting and backup second baseman whose last names begin with the letter V. As the old professor used to say, *You could look it up*.
POF: It ain't going to be pretty, my friend. *Tenth*.

12. PIRATES

- S: Plenty of home run power.
W: A pitching staff to die for (anyone who picked this crummy staff, he deserves to be shot).
BP: If Juan Gone does what he's capable of with the Indians, getting him as the 60th player overall will make the rest of us look silly, just silly.
MOB: Ryan Dempster in the 4th? Like he wouldn't have been available in about Round 12 or so.
YHIHF: SloPay burns rubber for the first couple of weeks, then drifts slowly back down to the Lower Division that he calls home.
POF: Too many good hitters to finish in the cellar, but the Irate Pirate still won't be plundering his way into the Upper Division. *Eighth*.

P.S. It seems that it gets harder and harder every year to rank the Draft Day teams with any level of confidence. Maybe we're all getting so damned good at this that it's just tough to tell one team from another. Or maybe it's just a giant crap shoot and it's merely up to the baseball gods to decide whose team will finish where this year. But I do believe this with many of the fibers of my being: The Wahos are going to be tough to beat out of at least a money spot, and the Blues have about the same chance of winning this thing this year that McBlunder's class action litigation *The American People v. The Confounded Chicken* case had of clearing the tarmac on takeoff. There ought to be punitive damages involved here somewhere.

Week 1

Cubs* say “NoMo” to Lower Division

Because it's taken me so dang long to get this post-Draft issue out, I will have to use this opportunity to also public-

ize the Week 1 standings and to congratulate **Shamu*** on snaring the 12th draft position for the first Free Agent Draft of the season. Backed by the bravura performance of Hideo Nomo in throwing the first Red Sox no-hitter in about 30 years, **Shamu*** managed to best the field and finish Week 1 in sole possession of first place with 443 points, followed closely by the **Wahoos** with 420 and the **Pirates** with 419. At the other end of the spectrum, the **Chiefs** suffered a miserable hitting week to finish with 213 points, trailing the **Tigers** (240), and the **Blues** (251). After suffering through one of the slowest starts in history during the first four or five days, the **Blues** rallied over the weekend to bolt into 10th place.

The top hitter during Week 1 was Carlos Delgado, with 57 hitting points and 30 bonus points for a total of 87. Nomo was the top pitcher during Week 1 with 40 pitching points and 50 bonus points for the ecstatic **Cubs***.

The top hitting team for Week 1 was the **Pirates** with 335, followed by the **Senators** with 308 points. The **Chiefs** trailed the circuit with 103 points, well behind the **Tigers'** hitting total of 136.

The top pitching team for Week 1 was the **Hanover Wahoos** with 190 points, besting the **Cubs*'** 164. The **Blues** staff trailed the pack with 68 points, ahead of the **Pirates'** 84.

The **Senators** hitters led the way in batting average during Week 1 with a hefty .342 clip, probably not a sustainable average for 26 weeks. The woeful **Chiefs** hitters could manage to hit at only a .211 pace, an astoundingly poor start, but not much worse than the **Blues'** .218 BA for the week. The **Pirates** hitters had 19 home runs during Week 1, one more than the **Senators'** 18, while the **Tigers** and **Chiefs** trailed the pack with only 5 roundtrippers.

PAC BELL VISITED

For Opening Day 2001, B.T. and his boys Sam and Eli joined Joe Jackson and myself for a terrific Opening Day trip to San Francisco and our first-ever visit to Pacific Bell Park. If you haven't yet been to this jewel of a stadium, I highly recommend it. It is perfectly positioned on the Bay at China Basin so that it receives a goodly amount of sunshine and not nearly as much of

the Bay wind as would shiver one's timbers at Candlestick.

The structure itself is gorgeous, built of red brick and green steel, similar in appearance to Camden Yards. The short right field wall which allows Barry Bonds to hit home runs into McCovey Cove is a terrific feature, as is the giant fielder's glove in left field with a 501-foot sign in the pocket.

We watched Livan Hernandez pitch the Giants to a 3-2 Opening Day win over the San Diego Padres, a game which featured Barry Bonds' 495th career home run and hits number 300__ and ____ by Tony Gwynn. We also saw Tony get gunned down at the plate by a Barry Bonds throw, a play that didn't so much showcase Bonds' arm as it underscored Gwynn's lack of major league speed. I'm pretty sure that I could have legged it home ahead of the throw and slid in safely, bad knee and all.

In any event, it was a terrific trip, and a memorable Opening Day for the boys.

THE TRIP

Milwaukee- June 2-3

Speaking of great trips, Mouse and McBlunder are all over this year's HSL junket to Milwaukee, snaring first-rate air accommodations on Midwest Express for a song. More details on this sure to be great visit to Miller Park.

And that's a wrap for this week's issue of *FTB*. It's great to have baseball and box scores back, isn't it?

Skipper

