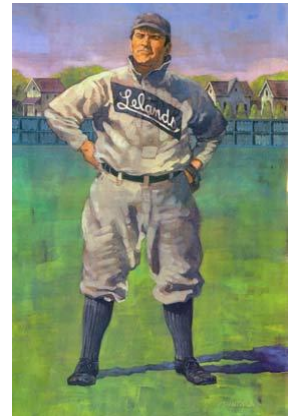


# FROM THE BULLPEN

## Official Publication of the Hot Stove League Eastern Nebraska Division



2001 Season

Edition No. 11

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### WAHOOS WALTZ INTO FIRST

#### DEFENDING CHAMPS WREST LEAD FROM TEPID SENATORS

#### CUBS\* USE 393-POINT WEEK TO VAULT TO THIRD

Brethren:

In a week of absolute mediocrity among Hot Stove Leaguers, the **Wahoos** used a 380-point Week 8 to end the **Senators'** five-week command of the standings, assuming a 3060 to 3033 point lead. The **Senators** were able to muster up only 316 points during Week 8, most of which (199) were pitching points. Though still leading the circuit with a team batting average of .308, the **Senators** batsmen could only account for 116 hitting points for the week, surely one of the meagerest weekly-hitting totals for the year. With only nine hitters in the starting lineup, and about eight of those nine in mini-funks, it may be time to start pulling a few levers. Oops. Did I say that out loud?

The **Cubs\***, all but left for dead after last week's 227-point disaster, rebounded smartly with a 393-point week, tops in the league, to jump from 7<sup>th</sup> place, down in the Lower Division, all the way to 3<sup>rd</sup> place, past the **Reds**, past the **Blues**, past the **Tribe** and past the **Pirates**. Led by the redoubtable Hideo Nomo, who once again flirted with a no-hitter and ended up with a one-hit, 14-strikeout gem, the **Cubs\*** served notice that they will not be ignored this season, at least insofar as competing for 3<sup>rd</sup> place is concerned.

Also in the news this week, the **Tigers'** wheels are now officially off the axles, as the toothless felines produced the league's puniest output during Week 8

with but 221 points, landing the **Tigers** in the unenviable position of trailing both Mouse and Itchie's sorry squads.

### Week 8 Standings

1.	Wahoos	3060
2.	Senators	3033
3.	Cubs*	2676
4.	Pirates	2661
5.	Blues	2642
6.	Reds	2619
7.	Tribe	2598
8.	Redbirds	2514
9.	Skipjacks	2460
10.	Bombers	2419
11.	Tigers	2417
12.	Chiefs	2027

### Week 8 Totals

1.	Cubs*	393
2.	Wahoos	380
3.	Blues	328
4.	Reds	320
5.	Chiefs	319
6.	Senators	316
7.	Skipjacks	284
8.	Bombers	281
9.	Redbirds	272
10.	Pirates	261
11.	Tribe	222
12.	Tigers	221

Barry Bonds continues to lead the MVP race with 313 points, as he remains on pace to shatter McGwire's season home run record. Pedro continues to lead the Cy Young race with 267 points, but the **Senators'** own Curt Schilling has narrowed the gap considerably, now standing at 245. If

not for Ben Davis, and more later on him, the **Senators'** ace might very well be looking backward at Pedro right now.

### TOP INDIVIDUAL HITTERS (EXCLUDING BONUS POINTS)

1.	A-Rod	290
2.	Barry Bonds	283
3.	Manny Ramirez	279
4.	Todd Helton	278
5.	Luis Gonzalez	268
6.	Larry Walker	259
7.	Lance Berkman	252
8.	Juan Gonzalez	243
9.	Ryan Klesko	237
10.	Jason Giambi	235
(T)	Al Pujols	235

### TOP INDIVIDUAL PITCHERS (EXCLUDING BONUS POINTS)

1.	Pedro Martinez	251
2.	Curt Schilling	246
3.	Randy Johnson	209
4.	Rick Reed	196
5.	Brad Radke	191
6.	Ichiro Suzuki	183
7.	Chan Ho Park	178
8.	Kevin Brown	177
9.	Jeff Shaw	173
10.	Wade Miller	171

The league leader in hitting is still the **Pirates** with 1973 points, but the **Wahoos** have overtaken the **Senators** for the second-best hitting team with 1895 hitting points, totaling a whopping 264 hitting points for the week.

The pitching team leader is now the **Senators**, who used banner pitching performances by Curt Schilling and Kerry Wood to take the pitching lead with 1242 points to the **Wahoos'** 1165. The third best pitching team, the **Cubs\***, are a distant third with 997 points, ahead of the **Skipjacks** (936) and the **Redbirds** (911). The lousiest pitching team is still the **Pirates**, with 688 points.

### FOUL TIPS

► How many of you think that Ben Davis should be fried in boiling bacon fat for laying down a bunt to break up Schilling's perfect game after 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings on

Saturday night? Forget about the fact that Schilling is a **Senator** for a minute, and tell me that this clown shouldn't be run out of baseball on a rail. Is it Ben Davis or Ben Dover? I still can't believe it. And to add insult to injury, I had to listen that evening to Dave "Gums Flapping Plenty" Campbell pontificate on *ESPN Baseball Tonight* about how in 40 years of his being in baseball he had never heard of an "unwritten rule" about a player *not* breaking up a perfect game or no-hitter in the late innings with a bunt. Hogwash. No, make that *bullshit*. It's unwritten all over the place.

Anyway, the next time that Davis' team squares off against the Diamondbacks, I hope that both Schilling and the Big Unit put this clown flat on his back every time he steps to the plate. Cotton-picking bushleaguer. You owe me big time for this one, Mouse.

► I'm really looking forward to this weekend in Milwaukee with the boys, although it just won't be the same as our 1988 trip some thirteen years ago. For one thing, most of us who went on that trip were single, in our low 30s, and still had full heads of hair and reasonable prospects for picking up babes. For another, our then lead singer and spiritual leader U-Bob will not be along on this season's junket to Milwaukee, and hence unable to lead us in a rousing rendition of whatever happens to be on the jukebox, to the terror of all other patrons. However, it seems that U-Bob will be in the same Cheesehead state that we are in this weekend, reportedly for a clandestine meeting with some Wisconsinite who runs a House of Mufflers franchise by day and deals in illegal fireworks by night. U-Bob is apparently picking up two or three gross of those 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inch Black Cat fireworks that just can't be found around these parts, as well as ten or twelve boxes of super-sized snakes that leave burn marks the size of a discus on your driveway. Yes, *this* is why U-Bob will not be in attendance with us to quaff cold beers and talk Hot Stove League baseball at Miller Park on Saturday and Sunday, and not because he will be attending the graduation of a step-half-nephew thrice removed at some undisclosed location in a state bordering us to the south. Evidently the lure of the illegal snake has outweighed any vestige of loyalty by U-Belly toward the Hurlbut clan or us.

### AROUND THE HORN

Since we are now fairly well into the season, let's take a little peek around the league to see how everybody's team is doing as of the Memorial Day weekend:

## The Capitol Hill Call

△ Despite two near misses, my **Senators'** bonus point drought lingers on. Not only did the aforementioned Ben Davis hose my squad out of 50 bonus points for a perfect game, the **Senators'** Kerry Wood also came close to bonus points with his Friday one-hitter, 14-strikeout performance. What, you couldn't squeeze in one more strikeout in nine whole innings, Kerry? And to think that I was just lamenting a day earlier when I thought that it was Wood who had pitched the 1-0 shutout on Thursday until seeing that it was Jon Lieber.<sup>1</sup> I forgot to mention in last week's issue that I had the opportunity to see Kerry Wood pitch in Chicago the previous Saturday, and watched him struggle mightily to find the strike zone. From the sound of the ball hitting the mitt, it was obvious that Wood was throwing some high velocity stuff, but he was behind on the hitters all day long, and had to rely on Uncle Charlie to get the ball over the plate more than a couple of times. Fortunately, the wind was blowing in at Wrigley that day (Sammy Sosa absolutely crushed a ball that fell just short in right center, which would have been out on any other day or in any other ballpark) and kept Wood in the game, even resulting in a win. Looks like he got his control problem figured out just in time.

## Wahoo Hoots

△ I'm looking at the **Wahoos'** roster and I'm trying to figure out how they have the third best hitting team. Yes, I realize that Bonds is absolutely *en fuego*, and I see that Bret Boone is leading all second basemen, hurl, hurl. But who else is doing it for these non-descript **Wahoos'** Corey Koskie? Ray Lankford? Alex Gonzalez? Cruz, Jr.? Paul O'Neill? Give me a break. Or better yet, give the **Wahoos** a breakdown.

Yet somehow, some way, the **Wahoos** have managed to find their way among the elite at the Bill James system, recently checking in at the 9<sup>th</sup> spot among the top fifteen BJFB teams. Not that the modest Possum will ever let you know about this good fortune for his team. Right. But let's be good sports and recognize one of our own for his admirable accomplishment in brilliantly managing his **Wahoos** to a

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, *that* Jon Lieber. The one that Mouse left down in the minors for this gem, the same day that Shawn Estes was also down rotting off some tomatoes on the vine.

place among the crème de la crème of *Bill James Fantasy Baseball*.

## Redbird Ramblings

△ Not to pick on the 8<sup>th</sup> place **Redbirds**, but grab a look at the first basemen on this team: David Ortiz, Eric Karros, Lee Stevens, and David Segui. Ouch. That's ugly with a capital U. At least Tirebiter is smart enough to have three of the four in the minors, with Segui being the lone first sacker in the starting lineup. Where would this team be if 11th-round draft choice Presto Wilson wasn't the leading point-getter among center fielders? Just ahead of the **Chiefs**, I imagine.

## Tribe Talk

△ As long as we're visiting the flaccid East Division (woe, woe are they), let's stop in at the **Tribe's** teepee and take a quick look around. Why, exactly, is this team so volatile, scoring 407 points one week and 222 points the next? For your answer, look no further than right field and first base. If Bagwell, Walker and Sosa have huge weeks, the **Tribe** can keep pace with the field. If this trio has only an average or a poor week, this team drops faster than my retirement portfolio with the Bridges Investment Fund. If only Jason Varitek could have a three-homer game and 30 bonus points each week for the **Tribe**. With Chris Michalak, David Wells, Jaret Wright, Jason Johnson and Jason Schmidt as five of your six starting pitchers, you can't expect a whole lot from your team. And if not for former scab<sup>2</sup> Rick Reed on this staff, the **Tribe** pitching would be even more dismal than it is.

## Tiger Tidbits

△ Staying with another anti-Beast from the East, I look at Big Guy's **Tigers** and wonder to myself: *Where did it all go wrong, Big Guy?* This sorry collection of molecules would have a hard time competing in my son Joe's 7-year-old Kingswood Athletic Association league, much less the majors. One wonders what this team would be like without the twin Rice-Grinders from the Far East, Ichiro Suzuki and Kazuhiro Sasaki. Probably just ahead of the **Chiefs**, would

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<sup>2</sup> When did U-Bob's *metamorphosis* from Labor to Management happen? Who among you have heard U-Bob swear on Eugene Debs' grave that he would never, ever have a "replacement player" on his team? Was that the same night in Chicago that U-Belly was dancing solo to a Gloria Estephan tune on the shores of Lake Michigan, proclaiming to all who would listen that "I love my life!?" We've come a long way since then, haven't we, Bob?

be my guess. Looking back at Draft Day, McBlunder must have forced Big Guy to bong-chug a case of warm French beer pre-Draft for a manager of Big Guy's caliber to draft this awful of a team. The buzzards will soon be circling overhead.

### Chief Chatter

△ What more needs to be said about the **Chiefs**? Even without a rudder, this team had enough talent aboard to score 319 points during Week 8, the fifth-best total in the league. If McGwire and Junior can ever get their sorry keisters out of sick bay and into the starting lineup, this team might actually have a chance of catching and overtaking the **Tigers**. Not a great chance, but a chance. Don't know about you, but if I'm the pilot of the **Tigers**, I'm not feeling real good about that.

### Cub\* Hubbub

△ It's thoroughly impressive that the **Cubs\*** have been able to stay in contention thus far this year with Mike Piazza's forgettable start and the sluggish beginnings posted by Rafael Palmeiro, Edgardo Alfonzo and Bernie Williams. Four of Shamu's\* top five draft picks have done little or nothing so far to justify their existence in this league this year, and if any or all of them get hot for the **Cubs\***, Shamu\* might have the audacity to contend for a money spot in the standings. On the other hand, it's somewhat doubtful that Nomo will continue to toss 14-strikeout, one-hitters for the rest of the season, but you just never know.

### Skipjack Stuff

△ It's more than a rumor that Itchie's not real happy with his lot in life this HSL season, bouncing around between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> places these past couple of weeks. With Brent Mayne, Jose Offerman, Tony Batista, Tyler Houston, Ben Grieve, Elmer Dessens, Tim Wakefield and Jose Mesa in your starting lineup, you wouldn't be whistling on your way to work either, mister. Face it, Itchie. You picked a crummy team to begin with, you haven't gotten jack in the free agent draft, and you haven't done such a hot job of managing these guys, either. Just be happy that Medicare is considering covering hair transplants.

### Bomber Blasts

△ There are a couple of things I don't like about Mouse's team. One is named Ben Davis, for whom a firing squad would be far too good. Another is that Fred McGriff and John VanderWal are Mouse's starting first basemen. Not a good sign.

The shame of it all is that Mouse actually picked a pretty darned good team this year, but they are seriously underperforming, along with their impetuous manager. If Jeter, Glaus and Magglio ever start doing what they're capable of, and if El Duque ever figures out what it is that went wrong, this team could actually have a shot at getting out of the Lower Division. On the other hand, in spite of Mouse's constant micromanagement of this team – the guy makes more moves than Itchie at a free summer street dance – or perhaps because of it, the **Bombers** may be destined for a Lower Division finish, yet again.

### House of Blues

△ The **Blues**. The Blind Pig of the Year Award plainly goes to McBlunder, whose free agent pickup of Albert Pujols will go down in Hot Stove League history. Not only had McBlunder not even heard of this guy on Draft Day, when he picked him up in the free agent draft, it was only because he didn't understand how the new Bill James computer program worked and he misfired while trying to pick up Dave Magadan or some other worthless third-sacker. And only after first putting in for Chris Truby, Paul LoDuca, Kevin Tapani, Daryle Ward and Ron Gant. Yes, Ron Gant. Look it up.

And how about McBlunder's recent boldness and bragadocio? I'm referring of course to his recent in-my-face e-mail announcing his team to be in 3<sup>rd</sup> place – if even for a fleeting moment – after the *Bullpen* picked the **Blues** to finish dead-ass last. Yadda, yadda, yadda. I will remind McBlunder that about a week after *FTB* came out with this brave and unequivocal prediction, Stretch himself called this prognosticator and passionately agreed with this prediction, commenting repeatedly about how strongly that he felt that his own team did in fact suck, and confirming his own belief that the **Blues** would finish the year in the cellar. I will also remind him that he does in fact have Paul LoDuca, Doug Mientkiewicz, Joe Randa, Deivi Cruz, Cliff Floyd, Geoff Jenkins, Gabe Kapler, and Matt Lawton in his starting lineup, and Kevin Tapani, Omar Daal and Rich Garces in his starting pitching rotation. I got news for you, pally boy. LoDuca will not go six for six ever again in his career. Hell, he may never piece together six hits in a month again; Mientkiewicz will not be batting .390 in September; Joe

Randa is still Joe Randa; Geoff Jenkins will never again hit three home runs in the same game; Pujols will not be batting .370 in August or drive in 150 runs; Kevin Tapani will not win the Cy Young award this year; and Omar Daal will not go 24-and-0 this year as a starting pitcher. Other than these little eye-openers, I'm sure you have nothing to worry about in terms of your team sustaining its current performance and position. You may not finish dead-ass last, McBlunder, but if you finish in the top four, my pal U-Bob will kiss your rear by the Winston Churchill statue in the Plaza on the busiest Saturday of the year.

### Pirate Poop

△ Against tall odds and the straightjacket of history, the **Pirates** have continued to stay competitive for a money finish. With Carlos Delgado, Lance Berkman, Richard Hidalgo and Juan "I Really Can Play 140 Games and Break Sweat in an Option Year" Gonzalez on his roster, SloPay will have no problem in hitting the home run and RBI caps for the year, and should probably end up in the top three or four in hitting for the season. However, with a starting rotation of Brad Penny, Chuck Smith, Frank Castillo, Glendon Rusch and Wade Miller and backups Brian Tollberg, Mark Redman, Paxton Crawford and Ryan Dempster, if the **Pirates'** pitching staff finishes anywhere other than last, it will have to be considered a bonus for the **Pirates**. With very good hitting and very bad pitching, it's looking like a 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> place finish for the **Pirates**.

### Red Review

Man, has Magpie been quiet this year. He's either too busy traveling the world as David Sokol's personal valet and masseuse; too busy raising money for homeless and injured rodeo clowns; or mired in the Lower Division of the Hot Stove League. Other than pulling a Possum and trying to swap Jose Jimenez for my rookie sensation Ben Sheets, I haven't heard a peep from him.

Even though A-Rod is back to career form and leading the circuit in base points (excluding bonus points) with 290, and even though Ryan Klesko is having a career year and J.D. Drew has stepped it up a couple of notches, this team has been unable to generate any momentum thus far this season. Part of the problem may be that he has a catcher who I've never even heard of, Jason LaRue, and newcomer Alfonso Soriano as his starting second baseman. However, the

bigger problem would seem to be his questionable pitching staff. Although Brad Radke is having a banner season, Al Leiter is off to a miserable start, and Barry Zito is certainly not having the type of year that Curby had planned. And, with Kevin Millwood on the disabled list for who knows how long, it doesn't look like things will be getting better for the **Reds'** arms anytime soon.

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That's it for my snapshot analysis of the league rosters with about one-third of the season in the jar.

### NEXT WEEK

Itchie weighs in with his assessment of Miller Park, McBlunder's driving habits, Tirebiter's drinking habits, Mouse's new ballpark weekend ensemble, B.T.'s assorted and plentiful quirks, idiosyncrasies and peccadilloes, and of course, the sights, sounds and smells of Miller Park, in a special issue of *The Jiggernaut*.

Truly yours,

The Skipper