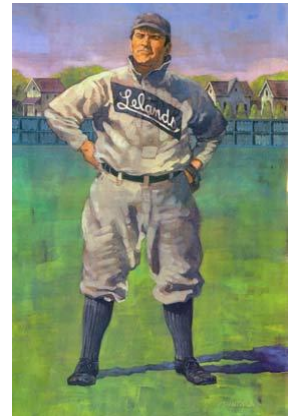

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Publication of the Hot Stove League Eastern Nebraska Division



2001 Season

Edition No. 17

July 13, 2001

Brethren:

This issue of *From the Bullpen* comes to you from the Black Hills, which the boys and I are visiting for our summer vacation. Today we tubed down the Niobrara River near Valentine, and tomorrow we plan to see "Mountain Rushmore," as Will puts it. I haven't been here myself since I was Joe's age, back in 1964, and in those 37 years I forgot about the rugged majesty of the Badlands. I can see why Teddy Roosevelt spoke so fondly of his years ranching in the Badlands. I'll bet that this is where he came up with his favorite exclamation, "*Bully!*"

But now on to baseball. In spite of Pedro's continued absence and the rather lackluster performances of most of his other pitchers, the **Wahoos** continue to lead the way through the All-Star break with 5196 points, a margin of 67 over the second-place **Senators**. With Pedro out for the rest of July, and Nomar still on the shelf, I almost hope that Possum wins this thing again so we don't have to put up with his whining and sniveling about injuries for the rest of our HSL careers. Well, wait a minute. Nah. I guess I can put up with his whining if that would be the price of winning this thing.

The two main reasons that Possum is winning this thing are named Bret Boone and LaTroy Hawkins. Go figure. Boone, a perennial slug, has probably already matched his seasonal career highs in home runs and RBIs, and here we are at the All-Star break. And the guy plays in a pitcher's park. His boy LaTroy – no, that's not a racial epithet so don't pull out the race card on me – is headed for about 45 saves, all the while pitching for the Twins and in the Metrodome, mind you. Possum would probably tell us that he knew that Boonie and LaTroy were both ready for break-out years. Whatever. The point is, Boonie's got more

points for the **Wahoos** than Nomar would have had even if he was healthy from Day One, and LaTroy's hyper-overachievement more than makes up for the few points that Pedro will lose while healing up his wing. So cut the whining crap already.

My **Senators** are somehow hanging in there even though Helton is mired in an agonizing slump, Magglio is suddenly ice-cold, ditto for Jeromy Burnitz, and Carl Everett remains on the DL. Moreover, Cleveland's stupid trade of Steve Karsay to Atlanta for that idiot John Rocker (can you believe that he referred to Chipper Jones as "white trash"? As B.T. might say, people who live in glass houses shouldn't call the kettle black). This brilliant move has effectively ended the season for Bob Wickman, my top closer until I traded for Mariano Rivera.

But enough idle chatter. Here are the standings through fourteen weeks of the season:

Week 14 Standings

1.	Wahoos	5196
2.	Senators	5129
3.	Reds	4933
4.	Pirates	4781
5.	Blues	4704
6.	Skipjacks	4691
7.	Cubs*	4662
8.	Tigers	4602
9.	Tribe	4594
10.	Redbirds	4508
11.	Bombers	4271
12.	Chiefs	3937

AROUND THE HORN

△ The *en fuego* **Reds** led the HSL in weekly point totals for the second straight week with 453 points, on the strength of strong outings by Brad Radke and Barry Zito and the hot bat of Garrett Anderson.

△ The resurgent **Skipjacks** used a 435-point week to jump from 9th to 6th place, riding the Big Unit's tiring left arm for all that it is worth. If Chuck Nagy hadn't walked the **Skipjacks** backwards by about 30 points in his last couple of outings as a starter, the **Skipjacks** would be in 5th place with their sights set on the **Pirates**.

△ The **Tribe** had the third best total for Week 14 with 413 points, earning this sad squad a temporary promotion to 9th place. With a current starting rotation of Chris Michalik, Esteban Loaiza, Jason Johnson and Rick Reed, how far do you think this team can go this season? Quite possibly this is the worst HSL pitching staff of all time.

△ The **Pirates** used a 400-point total during Week 14 to maintain its hold on 4th place, probably the latest in the season that the **Pirates** have been in 4th place for about the last decade. This team continues to use marvelous hitting (Juan Gonzalez, Richard Hidalgo, Lance Berkman, Miguel Tejada) to overcome pathetic pitching. With a starting rotation of Penny, Smith, Buehrle, Dempster and Miller, this has to be the HSL no-name pitching staff of all-time. If the **Pirates** could just trade a little bit of that hitting for some quality pitching, they'd have a legitimate crack at a top 3 finish.

△ Those poor **Blues**, with their underappreciated manager (Stretch) and their underappreciated left fielder (Cliff Floyd), managed to moan and whine their way to a 387-point week, fifth best for Week 14 and good enough to keep their tenuous toehold on 5th place. Not to throw a wrench of discouragement into your monkeyworks, McBlunder, but if any of your first-half overachievers (LoDuca, Mientkiewicz, Sweeney, Pujols, Floyd, Lawton, Tapani, Daal) come down to earth during the second half, your management skills will be put to a true test.

△ Despite having a 368-point week, sixth best in the league, the **Cubs*** slipped a notch to 7th place in the standings, just a hoot and a holler below the **Skipjacks**. Relying chiefly on the bats of Luis Gonzalez, Bernie Williams and the rejuvenated Ruben Sierra –

who probably hasn't even been on a team since Shamu's* asterisk year of 1993 – and getting negligible starting pitching points, the **Cubs*** are destined for problems when his outfielders inevitably cool down unless his pitchers completely turn things around. Me sez a rough road ahead for the Shamster* in the second half.

△ The **Wahoos** and **Senators** tied for the seventh best weekly total for Week 14 with 342 points, meaning that the **Wahoos** picked up no ground on the **Senators** during the week, and the **Senators** gained no ground on the defending champion during the week. However, since Possum's squad had pulled ahead by about 140 points mid-week before an end-of-week flurry by the **Senators**, staying even was a moral victory for the **Senators**.

△ The **Tigers** managed to stay in 8th place despite only logging 315 points for the week, ninth best in the league. Even with All-Star years from Robbie Alomar, Ichiro Suzuki, Moises Alou, Greg Maddux, Paul Quantrill and Kazuhiro Sasaki, this team just can't seem to sustain any momentum from week to week. Too many gaping holes on this team for it to be a contender.

△ The **Bombers** had the tenth highest total for Week 14 with 275 points, allowing the Bronx Zoo to remain snugly in 11th place. Not much chance of moving up, and not much chance of moving down. Even six straight wins from the gifted Kerry Wood (my gift to Mouse) and a white hot month of June from Jim Thome (hey, I thought he was on the **Reds**?) couldn't salvage the **Bombers**' first half.

△ The languid **Chiefs**, still receiving next to no production from Junior and Big Mac, had the second to worst point total during Week 14 with 232 points, causing the **Chiefs** to drop further off the pace of the only team potentially within his sights.

HIT AND RUN

◆ Where would Shamu* be without Luis Gonzalez? Notwithstanding Bonds' 39 home runs before the break, Luis is clearly the leading MVP candidate, and his first half of the season is arguably one of the greatest starts of all time. The guy is fourth in batting with a .355 average, second in the league in runs scored with 75, first in the majors in runs batted in with 86, and his 246 total bases are 21 more than his nearest challenger in either league. And all of this in what is at best a hitter-neutral ballpark and without a great stick batting in front of or behind him in the lineup. Significantly, Luis is on target to threaten the 1000-point barrier under the Bill James system, and to think that I

just about picked him in the round right before Shamu* blind-pigged him.

◆ While Itchie has spent much of the first half of the season whimpering and whining about the Big Unit, the second overall pick in the Draft, with 202 strikeouts at the break, RJ is on pace to fan 379 batters this season, meaning that he could seriously challenge Nolan Ryan's single-season mark of 383. And one of these days, manager Bob Brenly's going to leave him in for the full nine innings when the Big Unit's on a roll, and he might just push the game strikeout record up a notch to 21 or 22.

◆ There have been some pretty unbelievable individual performances thus far this season. For instance, who would have thought on Draft Day that: Bret Boone would be leading the American League in runs batted in, tied with Manny Ramirez at 84; or that Gonzo would be on pace to hit 65 home runs; or that Bonds would have a slugging percentage of .826; or that Lance Berkman would be leading the National League in batting with a .365 average; or that John Burkett would be second in National League ERA with 2.49; or that Ichiro Suzuki would be on pace to get more than 250 hits in his rookie year, or that he would be leading the Majors in stolen bases; or that LaTroy Hawkins would be gainfully employed in a non-prison setting, much less being one of the saves leaders with 23; or that Nomo would throw a no-no and be one of the AL strikeout leaders with 115. Should make for an interesting second half.

◆ At the break, the amazing Mariners are in front of the As by 19 games. The Twins lead Cleveland by 5. The Cubs are ahead of the Astros by 3 games. The Phillies are ahead of the Braves by 1. And in spite of all of their injury woes, the Red Sox are only 1½ games back of the Yankees. Should be a very interesting second half.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

I read the other day that from the San Diego Padres team that made it to the 1998 World Series against the Yankees, only Trevor Hoffman, Sterling Hitchcock and Tony Gwynn remain. This team was dismantled more swiftly and thoroughly than the 1996 Marlins World Series champion team. It truly is a mercenary business.

I saw the highlights of Jose Canseco hitting two home runs for the ChiSox last weekend. I read where Canseco signed for the league minimum, and that he was quoted as saying that he is a "young 36" and that he wants to continue playing so he can reach 500 home runs, because nobody who has hit 500 home runs is not in the Hall of Fame. Canseco in Cooperstown? The thought nauseates me.

BALLPARK UPDATE

I read recently that the new Cincinnati ballpark will be ready to open in 2003, and that there will be new parks in Philadelphia and St. Louis probably in 2004. Rumor is that the Royals may even be looking at a new downtown ballpark to replace the ill-placed Kauffman Stadium. Looks like the boys from the HSL will have plenty of venues to visit in the coming years.

DISTANT THOUGHTS

The Black Hills is a pretty nice vacation venue for a family with a pack of kids, and there's a whole lot more to do here now than when I was here back in '64. The Mount Rushmore museum and tourism center is great, and if any of you have not been to the nighttime lighting program, I highly recommend it. If you weren't ready to go to war for your country before seeing the program, you definitely will be after.

Joe and Will spent roughly the GNP of French Guyana on exquisite Black Hills souvenirs, but at least they have accrued lasting personal property of value. As measured in cents.

In stark contrast to the beauty of the Black Hills, the biker creatures started rolling into town on Wednesday, weeks before their celebrated Sturgis Rally is to begin in early August. I didn't know true fright until I saw a 60-something biker "babe," her white hair and weathered features alarmingly festooned with leather, jewelry and tatoos. To think that some poor little two-year-old probably refers to her as "Nanna." But hey, I try not to be judgmental.

In the *For What It's Worth* department, in four plus days in the Black Hills I saw only one individual who appeared to be of African-American descent. They could never have a major league baseball team in this area, because there would be nobody to scalp the tickets.

THIS WEEK'S QUIZ

Time for this week's quiz. E-mail your responses to me at dernst@gphlawfirm.com. The response rate to date has been remarkable. (My remark is: You're all a bunch of shiftless slugs who are too lazy to even hazard a guess; but I am undeterred.)

1. The sculptor who created Mount Rushmore was: (a) Korczak Ziolkowski; (b) Gutzon Borglum; or (c) Chubb Feeney.

2. Which of the following actors *was not* in *The Magnificent Seven*: (a) Robert Wagner; (b) Steve McQueen; (c) Yul Brynner; (d) James Coburn; (e) Ed Begley, Sr.; (f) Eli Wallach.

3. The most famous guest at the Trouthaven Ranch where the boys and I stayed in the Black Hills was: (a) Nipsey Russell; (b) Flip Wilson; or (c) the guy who played the part of *Lionel* on *The Jeffersons*.

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That should do it for this issue of *From the Bullpen*, gents. Next up (I hope): Pipsqueak sounds off in a guest edition of *The Irate Pirate*.

The Skipper