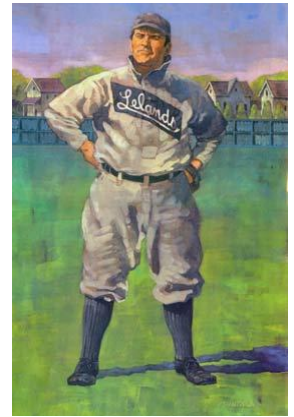


FROM THE BULLPEN

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2001 Season

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THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

POSSUM SELLING MORE SOULS THAN AL BUNDY

Infriggible.

When a guy can trade off his top two hitters – and apparently also one of his best pitchers – and still count on his third string second baseman to hit multiple home runs (three) in one night so as to bestow bonus points, it's probably time for the old Skipper to sack up the bats and pack it in. Little-known, little-used and lightly-regarded Jose Ortiz has two home runs the entire season until Saturday. Possum then deals up a soul, probably Max's¹, and on Saturday night, Jose Ortiz goes Yard three times in the same game, and then hits his fourth homer in two days on Sunday. I will go out on a limb and predict that if Jose Ortiz plays major league baseball for twenty-two more years, he'll never again hit three home runs in one game or four in a weekend.

This boolsheet irritates me on so many different levels it's not even funny. For starters, *Todd Walker*, a Draft Day and current **Senator**, is supposed to be playing second base for the Rockies, so if any Rockies second baseman hits three home runs in one day, those points should be going in my account, and not in the Possum National Bank. And by the way, what exactly did Walker do to get his keester traded to that buzzsaw Reds ballclub on the Eastern front. The guy was hitting at a career average clip, was a close third in team RBIs behind Larry Walker and Helton, and for some unexplained reason the guy gets shipped off to the Reds, making room for Ortiz. I didn't get it then, and I don't get it now.

¹ Although he may have burned up Max's several seasons ago.

Anyway, I'm mad as hell and I don't really want to take it anymore, but what's a guy to do? **Senatorial** souls are not for sale.

TWENTY WEEK STANDINGS

With twenty weeks in the jar, and a mere six to go, Possum has solidified his lead on the **Senators** to the tune of 7435-7249, a sizeable cushion of 186 points. And while the **Senatros** may hold a slight projected points lead on the **Wahoos**, thanks to Itchie and as pointed out by Possum during a recent *Closest Encounter of the Weirdest Kind* with him, the projected points gap will diminish quickly as Possum's home runs drop off in the absence of Bonds and Jason Giambi from the **Wahoos** lineup.

And speaking of my bonehead manager to the west, even with their newly supercharged hitting lineup, the **Jax** were only able to score the meager total of 313 points during Week 20, yielding substantial ground not only to the 3rd place **Reds**, but also to the cluster of fun battling it out for 4th through 9th places. That's what happens when you mess with team chemistry, Itchie.

The standings from top to bottom through twenty are as follows:

WEEK 20 STANDINGS

| | | |
|----|-----------|--------|
| 1. | Wahoos | 7435 |
| 2. | Senators | 7249 |
| 3. | Reds | 7025 |
| 4. | Tigers | 6750 |
| 5. | Tribe | 6723 |
| 6. | Skipjacks | 6635 |
| 7. | Blues | 6588.5 |
| 8. | Cubs* | 6588 |

| | | |
|-----|----------|------|
| 9. | Pirates | 6504 |
| 10. | Redbirds | 6384 |
| 11. | Bombers | 6145 |
| 12. | Chiefs | 5555 |

The top hitting team for the year is, of course, still the **Wahoos** with 4905, way out ahead of the second-place **Pirates** with 4632. The **Bombers'** hitters lag the field with 3614.

The top pitching team remains the **Senators** with 2982, although the **Skipjacks** have narrowed the gap between first and second and now are less than 300 points behind with 2707. The **Wahoos** are third with 2530. The **Chiefs'** pitching staff trails the pack with 1846.

Jacked up by the infusion of Randy Johnson and his two outstanding wins during Week 20, as well as banner pitching performances from Matt Morris (59 points) and Tony Armas, Jr. (50), who both won big twice during the week, the **Wahoos** put together a 435-point week, tops in the league. Even without the two top hitters on the team, Bonds and Giambi, the **Wahoos** still managed to fashion an eye-popping hitting total of 262 points during the week, as every other hitter on Possum's team stepped it up a notch and knocked them dead during the week. If I have to sit through one more night of box scores with multiple home runs and bookoo RBIs from the likes of Cruz, Jr., Konerko, Koskie, Boone, Posada and Cordova, I do believe that I'll probably snap and come after Possum with a piano wire. Unless one of his BIF shareholders beats me to it first.

The second best team during the week was the **Tribe**, which posted a most pleasing total of 423 points for the week, allowing the **Tribe** to surge past the turncoat **Skipjacks** and into 4th place. U-Bob has proved that you need not deal with the devil to enjoy success in this league. That said, it's a fair bet that Itchie chalked up a lot more points between Bonds, Jason Giambi and Javier Vazquez last week than the Big Unit put on the board for the Possum.

The third best team for the week was the **Blues** with 396. Given up for dead not long ago, the **Blues** actually have a fighting shot at an Upper Division finish this season, although that nagging ten-game suspension of Mike Sweeney certainly won't help the cause, now will it? That's what he gets for foolishly attacking my man, Jeff "Uncle Charlie" Weaver.

At the other end of the spectrum, the **Pirates** had an absolutely miserable week, scoring only 233 points, fewer even than the **Chiefs** and **Bombers**. As a matter of fact, this malperformance by the **Buccos** has even put the lowly **Crimson Chirpers** in a position to possibly finish in 9th place, like that would be something to write home about. Of course, Tirebiter *is* from that State of Confusion next door, Iowa, and the U of I boys seem to think 9th place in the Big Ten isn't all that bad of a performance, given their last few years of play on the gridiron.

Here are the Week 20 point totals from top to bottom:

WEEK 20 POINT TOTALS

| | | |
|-----|-----------|-----|
| 1. | Wahoos | 435 |
| 2. | Tribe | 423 |
| 3. | Blues | 396 |
| 4. | Reds | 390 |
| 5. | Tigers | 387 |
| 6. | Cubs* | 367 |
| 7. | Senators | 340 |
| 8. | Skipjacks | 313 |
| 9. | Redbirds | 291 |
| 10. | Bombers | 284 |
| 11. | Chiefs | 265 |
| 12. | Pirates | 233 |

AROUND THE PLATE

▸ I can't even believe that the Red Sox canned Jimmy Williams. Like it's his fault that he has ten players on the DL and that Carl Everett is on the roster². To even have this club in the race for the division title or the wild card spot with Nomar and Pedro each out for half of the season is a testament to Jimmy³. Against tall odds, he has held this team together with smoke and glue, to coin a B.T. phrase.

▸ The HSL was a firepot of competition this week, with five teams scoring 387 points or more. My 340 points for the week would be good for second or third best most weeks, but this week it earns me a major drop in relative position and hence prestige among my peers.

▸ As Don Williams might croon,

² I know, I know. He's a **Senator**, but that doesn't mean that I have to like him, or that he will ever be a **Senator** again, does it.

³ Although the way he spells his first name drives me crazy. Whose brainstorm was that, anyway?

*Lord, I hope this week is good.
My team is empty and misunderstood.
I should be thankful, Lord, I know I should,
But Lord, I hope this week is good.*

Hey, I'm getting desperate. I'll try anything.

▸ It occurred to me the other day that the pilot of the **Bengals**, Biggest Guy, has never authored, to my knowledge, his own special edition of *From the Bullpen*. I can't believe it. Here we have one of the most erudite members of the league, with the best memory of any person or animal I have ever known, and who can tell "topper" stories with the best of them, yet he has never shared with us, at least formally, his spin on the HSL, life and other things pertinent and nonpertinent.

Consider yourself solicited for next week's special rag edition of *From the Bullpen*. No, thank you.

▸ In a similar vein, I haven't called upon the pilot of the **Rancid Redbirds** to voice his opinion in the bully pulpit this year. There's a reason for it: His team stinks. And I'm sensitive to his need to avoid humiliation and embarrassment. Finishing 9th or 10th is shame enough, so I'll spare him the added pain of being ridiculed for his pan-Iowa intellect and humor, and here I speak figuratively and benevolently, and not literally.

▸ Hey, Shamu*, how the heck's it going out there? Get lost in any St. Louis casinos until 5:30 in the morning lately? Remember, there are witnesses.

▸ So Bonds is at 54, and needs 17 in the next six weeks to break McGwire's records, or three a week, about one every other game. Ain't gonna happen.

▸ Two nights ago (Tuesday) I was fairly jazzed because I knew I had four starters on the hill, Schilling, Sele, Weaver and newly-promoted (or so I thought) Schoeneweis. Even though the Possum surged ahead with last week's bountiful performance by the **Wahoos**, I felt that with my ace starters going twice during this week, I had a shot at picking up some serious ground. I usually save my prayers for more important matters, like marital harmony, but because of my near desperation, I closed one eye and hand and muttered half an entreaty for good baseball fortune.

Because my stinking laptop computer has been *sans* internet access for four or five days, I had to spend an hour and a half on the phone with Cox Cable and then an

hour with a technical specialist from Compaq to get my stupid machine back up and running again. Once up, I immediately clicked over to the box scores and saw that Schilling had taken it on the chin to those all-powerful Pirates by the score of 4 to 2, and that Schoeneweis had been blown out of the box in the third inning, the capstone blow being the first-ever grand slam from future Hall-of-Famer Doug Mirabelli. As if that wasn't enough pain for me, I then turned to the Atlanta box score and saw that my man Steve Karsay had given up the ghost, blown a save, and took a loss on the chin. So far, my pitchers are 0-and-3 for the night, and I haven't even gotten to the Sele-Weaver matchup. You can only imagine what a great mood all of this put me in, particularly when I saw that Possum's lone starting pitcher that night, Ortiz, had pitched another gem for the Giants. Oh, the pain.

▸ I learned yesterday that Big Guy is actually talking about doing a deal with Possum to help bail him out of his pitching dilemma, swapping one of Big Guy's ace relievers for Bret Boone. Why my so-called friends in this league are so damned intent on helping Possum bail out his leaky tiki is beyond my ken, since it has always been the "unwritten rule" (right, Bob?) that you don't make a trade with the leader if the trade has the potential for helping him win the league (and certainly not during the last week of August or in September!). So much for unwritten rules. Possum made his own bed, so why not let him lie in it. What do you guys have against a guy being stewed in his own juice, anyway?

▸ I guess that dealing with the Devil is just too tempting, is that about it, fellas? Well, if you do trade with the Possum, then let me borrow this line from Niedermeyer: *You're all worthless and weak.*

▸ I see that Javier Vazquez got another nice win for the **Skipjacks** last night. That puts him ahead of RJ in post-swap points. Yessssss!

▸ That splattering noise that you may have heard last night as you lay quietly in bed was the sound of Possum's **Wahoos** being splattered against the home run ceiling. Either with Bret Boone's home run last night, or Ray Durham's two dingers, or the solo shot of Cruz, Jr., the home run limit has now been hit, and the **Wahoos** will no longer be getting those 4 extra points on each occasion they go Yard. Let's just see how big of a leak this creates in Possum's dirigible. With 5½ weeks to go, there could be more than a few lost HR points.

^^*^*^*^*^*^*

That will do it for this week's issue of *FTB*. Talk at you later.

Skipper