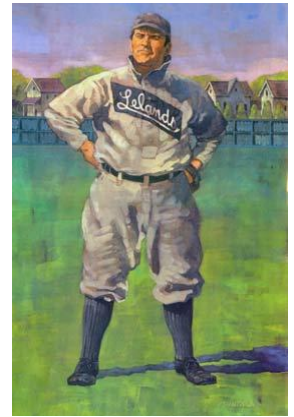

FROM THE BULLPEN

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WAHOOS COOL DOWN, REMAIN IN FIRST DESPITE CASTILLA GAFFE; TIGERS STILL *EN FUEGO*, LEAPFROG FLAGGING BLUES TO CAPTURE 4th

Brethren:

With the league-leading **Wahoos** finally cooling down a bit (297 points for Week 17), the rest of the league, with one exception, was able to make up a bit of ground during the week, even giving hope that there might be some semblance of a pennant race after all. However, the pennant race may not be between the **Wahoos** and the **Senators**, but between the **Wahoos** and the scorching hot **Tigers**, who put together a 393-point week on top of last week's 502-point output to put the once left-for-dead Bengals solidly in 4th place.

It's hard to believe that only six weeks ago the **Tigers** were lodged in the distal portion of the league's Lower Division, threatening to displace the **Bombers** in the penultimate position, before catching lightning in a bottle and racing wildly through the standings to its current 4th place position. It should also not go unnoticed that the **Tigers** have almost no cap limit problems in their future, and stand almost even-steven with the 3rd place **Reds** on a projected-points basis. If Big Guy can continue to nudge and wheedle more unthinkable overachievement from the likes of John Burkett, Rick Helling and Steve Sparks, who knows how high up the ladder this once near-laughingstock team might climb.

But enough of the proverbial kiss-of-death hyperbole. Let's take a look at the standings through 17 weeks:

WEEK 17 STANDINGS

1.	Wahoos	6348
2.	Senators	6163
3.	Reds	5984
4.	Tigers	5785
5.	Pirates	5713
6.	Blues	5669
7.	Cubs*	5633
8.	Skipjacks	5597
9.	Tribe	5585
10.	Redbirds	5395
11.	Bombers	5229
12.	Chiefs	4753

The surging **Tigers** paced the field with 393 points during Week 17, followed closely by the late-blossoming **Bombers** with 392 points. The **Reds** were third with 387, followed by the **Senators** with 379, just ahead of the **Pirates**' 373 and the **Chiefs**' 370.

On the other hand, the transparently overachieving **Blues** are finally getting a true look at themselves in the mirror, and had the fewest points during Week 17 with 276 points, well behind the 11th-best performance of the **Wahoos** with 297. From top to bottom, the performances during Week 17 looked like this:

WEEK 17 POINT TOTALS

1.	Tigers	393
2.	Bombers	392
3.	Reds	387
4.	Senators	379
5.	Pirates	373
6.	Chiefs	370
7.	Redbirds	347
8.	Cubs*	342

9.	Tribe	337
10.	Skipjacks	299
11.	Wahoos	297
12.	Blues	276

The league MVP continues to be Luis Gonzalez, who continues to drop jaws all around the league with his incredible power surge after years of being (relatively speaking) a punch-and-judy type hitter. Luis' 638 points through 17 weeks puts him on pace of right around 1000 points for the season, if he can somehow keep up his blistering pace. Randy Johnson, he the jewel of the lusterless **Skipjacks** team, continues to pace the Cy Young field with 537 points. After this week's most recent outing by RJ, he continues to be right at the pace to get Nolan Ryan's season strikeout record, if only Brenly will let him pitch into the 7th or 8th inning, now and then.

INFIELD CHATTER

◆ Many thanks to our beloved Bobbaloo for last week's *Special Edition of The Bellyflop*, which as usual provided some amusing glimpses into the world according to Bob. U-Bob is reportedly down in the Sarasota area this week, checking out the territory with his wife for a possible retirement venue. (Little did B.T. know that he was paying U-Belly enough to retire on at age 45, but it's amazing what a guy can do if he smuggles four or five articles of merchandise out the door each day.) I'm sure U-Bob will enjoy living amongst a population that is about 98% Semitic and with an average age which is exactly double his own.

◆ No truth to the rumor that Bob has joined Bad Punctuators Anonymous.

◆ I see that the **Tigers'** pitching staff is now one of the top staffs in the league, at least in terms of gross points. But in terms of personnel, give me Maddux and Suzuki; the rest of this staff is well-suited for the trash dumpster in U-Bob's back alley. As to the rest of his team, it's easy enough to guess that Big Guy took Alomar in the 2nd round after Maddux in the 1st, but after that, you could hold a gun to my head and I couldn't guess who he drafted in the 3rd, 4th and 5th rounds.

◆ Until this past Sunday, I was dead sure that the **Wahoos** had more karma going for it than the Blongewicz family, and that Possum's squad was probably a lock to win this thing. But then on Sunday night, as I was reading through the box scores on the computer and

cursing Possum for having Vinny Castilla on his roster¹, until I hopped over to the Bill James program and took a look at Possum's roster to see, painfully, that Vinny Castilla was listed as being a starter in the Red Sox lineup. Damn the luck, I thought. But as my Sunday evening ritual passed the midnight hour and the Bill James point totals were updated, I wondered why Possum's team didn't have a bigger lead over the **Senators**, given the 30 bonus points and the regular points that he would have earned for hitting three home runs. On a hunch, I moused down to Transactions, and what to my wondering eyes did appear but a promotion of Vinny C. by Possum effective Monday. My shriek of joy nearly awoke everyone in the house, as I realized that Possum had pulled a *Burnitz* and left his turkey by Vinny on the bench, á la your Braniac author of the *Bullpen*. Life, suddenly, was again good, as I realized that Possum's string of incredible fortuity was at a painful end. While Possum may still win this thing, it's no longer a lead pipe cinch lock.

◆ Speaking of anti-karma, I note that Possum has left an arklful of Paul O'Neill's points down in the minor leagues. Which means, I guess, that even Possum gets to play the shell game now and then.

◆ Did anybody catch a recent outing by **Wahoos'** reliever LaTroy Hawkins? Now they're starting to call him Troy *LaBoom!*

◆ I finally got so fed up with Daubach that I had to dump him. He was the master of the shell game, going 4223 whenever on my bench, for example, and 5000, 1E when in my starting lineup. Good riddance to this bad actor.

◆ Fred McGriff looks pretty darned good in a Cubs uniform. Mouse has to be fairly happy about that trade.

◆ Too bad about Mussina getting roughed up just a bit by the Rangers last night. More evidence that the bloom is off the **Blues** rose.

SAME TIME LAST YEAR

Just for kicks, I will point out that last year at this time the **Wahoos** were in firm control of the league with 6715

¹ Who hit three home runs that day for the Astros and was robbed of a fourth, nothing short of impossible given Vinny's current bat speed or lack thereof.

points (4686 hitting points, 2029 pitching points), and had a 519-point cushion over the second-place **Reds**. The **Tribe** was in last place at this time last year with a total of 4999. The top hitter through 17 weeks last year was A-Rod with 594 points, while the top pitcher was Randy Johnson with 550 points, just 13 points ahead of his total for this year.

Thanks again to U-Bob and SloPay for taking the reporting duties the past two weeks. The break was kind of nice, but it's been hard to make myself sit down and get out this issue after this respite.

Good luck in the final third of the season, and let's all cheer on those **Senators**.

Skipper