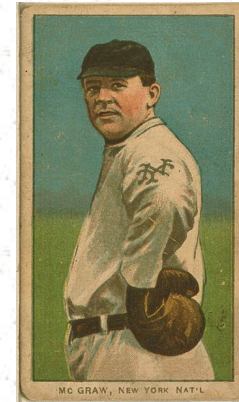

From the Bullpen

Official Publication of the Hot Stove League

Eastern Nebraska Division



2002 Season

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Brethren:

Great day on Saturday, Boys! Unquestionably the Funnest Day of the Year. Thanks to all of you for taking time out from your busy lives to keep this league going. I'm not sure what I'm going to do in another 35 or 40 years when most of you are dead and there are only a couple of us still kicking.

Those of you who skipped out on the post-Draft excursion to the boats missed out on several rare opportunities. First, you didn't get to see Itchie snap his fingers and get a lady Pit Boss to open up a new blackjack table for the HSL boys in a New York minute. They couldn't have serviced us quicker if we were with Donald Trump at the Taj Mahal in Atlantic City. I have heard, but don't know, that these casinos will only give you this sort of treatment if: (a) you are extraordinarily wealthy; (b) you have a full head of hair and an Adonis physique; or (c) you can piss away money faster than David Hunter. Your pick.

Secondly, if you didn't make it over to the River after the Draft, you also missed out on lining your pockets with Native American money. Blessed with the good fortune of

entertaining glimpse of Big Guy's early onset Alzheimer's disease, as five of us wandered aimlessly around the casino parking lot for the better part of a half hour, looking for Big Guy's vehicle. Big Guy parked his car solo after dropping off his passengers at the door, so its location was known only to him. And, no, you can't blame alcohol for this missing vehicle escapade, only an alarmingly early senior moment. This perhaps explains a few of Big Guy's selections at the Draft.

But enough of what some of you missed on Saturday. What you didn't miss was another great day of drafting our baseball teams, every one of which has a shot at capturing the league Crown this year. While the overall level of preparation may have tailed off a smidge, the combined years of experience and baseball acumen took over and made this probably the most even HSL Draft of all time. True parity. Now, any one of our teams could certainly fall prey to injuries, horrific slumps or malmanagement, but at least as the starter's pistol is raised and fired, there are twelve teams whose names could be etched on the Cup at the end of the 2002 season.(1)

But let's get right to what all of you have really been waiting for ere these past days,

riding in on Itchie's coattails to the freshly-opened blackjack table, several of us beat the house and had the good sense to walk away with the house's money in our pockets. Even Big Guy, who as per usual opted to play those exciting and intellectually challenging quarter slots, walked away with his house account in the black.

And thirdly, if you didn't make the trip over, or if you stayed and gambled until the wee hours of the morning, like one of our contingency, you missed a disturbing yet

Skipper's Annual Predictions, Picks and Pans²

TIGERS

Strength(s) (S): Home run power to spare, with Sammy Sosa, Luis Gonzalez and Ken Griffey in the lineup. Even with the expanded home run caps this season, the Tigers are almost sure to break through this barrier.

Weakness(es)(W): Starting pitching, infield. This is one of the most pathetic pitching staffs ever assembled on Draft Day, primarily because Big Guy waited until Round 7 to take Jamie Moyer as his first starting pitcher, and then took, in succession, Al Leiter, Joe Mays and Brad Penny. Not pretty.

Best Pick(s) (BP): Luis Gonzalez in the 2nd is a terrific selection. The guy has learned how to hit for power and average, and is in the prime of his career.

Most Obvious Blunder(s) (MOB): Bret Boone in the 4th. Last season was a career aberration, and this year you will see Boonie back down among the other mortals at 2nd base.

Flyer(s) (F): Some might call Tony Armas, Jr., in the 15th a flyer, but not really. This is

(1) That is, if Possum ever gets my name etched on the Cup for the 2001 season and gets the hardware over to me for safe-keeping.

BOMBERS

S: Solid outfield, seasoned starting pitching (Clemens, Lieber, Pettitte, Appier) with a couple of youngsters (Bud Smith and Ryan Dempster) with lots of potential.

W: Left side of infield is AA, team is wafer thin at back-ups if injuries take a toll, as they always seem to do with poor Mouse's squad.

BP: Clemens in the 3rd will be a steal if he's healthy; Lieber in the 5th equally larcenous if he can repeat last season.

MOB: Sasaki in the 5th as his top closer may be suspect, given the way he petered out at the end of last season, but if the off-season has refreshed his arm, this pick will be fine.

F: Furcal as a starting shortstop, although a second-year man, has to be considered a flyer.

PS: Like last year, Mouse has again picked a pretty decent squad on paper, certainly one without any glaring deficiencies. As long as he can stay sober during the season when trade proposals are made, the Bombers have as good a shot as anybody at finishing in the money. But hey, I've known Mouse longer than any of you, and I'm saying he is going to

an old, experienced, but crummy team. Postscript (PS): Big Guy's warning that he was woefully unpre-pared for the Draft was obviously not just another episode of BG blowing smoke up our pantaloons. He really was unprepared, as evidenced by Exhibit A, his team roster. How could this happen to a guy with the memory of Hannibal's team of elephants and a love of Fantasy Baseball that is unsurpassed? Our resident amateur wig-picker, B.T., would probably say that his acute lack of preparation is because he is afraid of failure. If so, he may have plenty to fear this season. Read on.

Predicted Order of Finish (POF): The proverbial DAL (dead-ass last). Sorry, Big Guy, but somewhere around the 4th round you stroked out during the Draft and never recovered.

[2] To put a little extra spin on the ball, this year I am listing my team rankings in reverse order, from worst to first. No offense to the **Tigers**, who have the ignominious distinction of being predicted for the cellar spot.

the way down to 10th. If only U-Bob had stuck with good hitting instead of chasing after rainbows. Maybe tilting at windmills was the way to go, U-belly.

POF: 10th.

REDBIRDS

S: Great middle relievers, decent outfield.

W: First base, catcher, starting pitching.

BP: Getting Shecky Green in the 3rd was a pretty sweet deal for Tirebiter. He'll probably have a great year even without Sheffie batting behind him.

MOB: Picking Chan Ho Park in the 4th as his

finish in 11th, which means that Mouse will be puking in Pittsburg, so inebriated will he be.

POF: 11th.

TRIBE

S: Killer closers (Rivera and Nen).

W: Bad catching, untested third sackers, mediocre-to-poor starting pitching after Pedro. Let's see, I think that's it.

BP: Andruw Jones in the 6th is a stroke of genius if his bat is rekindled, but just a stroke if not.

MOB: Taking relievers in the 2nd and 4th rounds instead of quality starters and every day players, particularly when the rest of us weren't even thinking about relievers until at least the 4th, 5th or 6th rounds.

F: Adam Dunn in the 7th, Ishii in the 18th. U-Bob does love those flyboys, doesn't he?

PS: I'd love to be able to say that this is the year of the Tribe, given all of the health problems that their Chief has endured this year. But instead, it says here that the Tribe drops precipitously from last year's 4th place position, all

BP: Maybe Cliff Floyd in the 8th, if he can repeat last season, or maybe C.C. Sabathia in the 11th, if he can slim down to Cecil Fielder's size or so.

MOB: Wade Miller in the 4th. There were mo' better pitchers still around when Miller was picked.

F: Somebody named J. Tom. Who?

PS: Upon second and third glance, this team is definitely better than I thought it was on Draft Day, possibly my thoughts then were influenced by McBlunder's Dead-Man-Walking/Glum Gus routine. Guess that's just our beloved

ace starter. Pitching for the Rangers, he might go 22-and-0, but his ERA may be in double digits. Location, location, location.

- F: Willis Roberts in the 24th. Didn't he used to be on *The Jeffersons*?
- PS: Even though it didn't seem like Tirebiter was hitting the cups that hard at the Draft, I'm hard-pressed to explain any other factor that could have caused him to pick such a bland, middle-of-the-pack team. This clearly looks like a team destined for the Lower Division.
- POF: 9th.

SKIPJACKS

- S: Middle infield, middle relief, sounds like middle of the pack to me.
- W: Subpar outfield, two injured or injury-prone starting pitchers.
- BP: Jeff Kent in the 6th, if his wrist fracture heals quickly and he can beat that nagging perjury charge.
- MOB: I-Rod in the 2nd. Pudge has done been hitting the fudge, and now looks more like a fridge. Pudge is on a great hitting team, but his future is in the past.
- F: Juan Pierre in the 8th will have to do. No real whiz kids on this ancient squad.
- PS: Kind of a disappointing Draft for Itchie. Perhaps his friend Jugdish wasn't working the morning shift at the Cigs and Swigs convenience store that Itchie traditionally frequents the morning of the Draft. That, and the Itchmeister just plain went brain dead in the 10th when he took David Wells, along with most of what else happened the rest of the Draft. Possibly his mind was elsewhere, like at a blackjack table in Council Bluffs.
- POF: 8th.

BLUES

- S: Bonds and Bagwell, bingo-bango-bongo.

McBlunder's happy-go-lucky personality coming out.

POF: 7th.

CHIEFS

- S: Dynamite infield, B+ starting pitching, solid outfield.
- W: Thin at back-up, Erstad, Salmon, Rolen, Wood and Piazza all known injury risks.
- BP: Sheffield in the 4th was a bargain; Scott Rolen in the 5th in his contract year may be even better.
- MOB: Eric Milton in the 8th was probably a skosh early, but no glaring Draft Day errors for this team.
- F: No real flyers on this team, unusual for a B.T.-coached team.
- PS: Whether it's the addition of his co-manager, an increase in the medication, a decrease in the medication, or hearty words of encouragement from Archbishop Curtis, the **Chiefs** look certain to make 2001 a one-year anomaly, and could realistically place anywhere from 8th to just one slot behind the **Senators**. Attaboys.
- POF: 6th.

REDS

- S: Best player in baseball (A-Rod) at short, potential comeback player of year at second (Alfonzo), terrific young pitching.
- W: Power shortage at first and outfield, talent outage at catcher.
- BP: A-Rod was a no-brainer, so let's say Alfonzo in the 6th (robbing him from the **Senators**, who were due to draft next).
- MOB: UU in the 7th was a substantial and surprising blunder, only partially cured by taking Izzie in the 8th.
- F: Pineiro in the 9th.
- PS: The **Reds** are clearly back on track after a couple of gloomy years in the also-ran category. Looks like Tricko's strategy of

W: Middle infield basically sucks, thin at back-up spots.

putting as much distance between himself and Possum during the Draft is paying some real dividends. However, in spite of

a very solid performance on Draft Day, the **Reds** face some stiff competition from the four clubs who are analyzed hereinbelow.

POF: 5th.

WAHOOS

S: Killer infield, with four picks in the first six rounds.

W: Starting pitching is suspect, although big years by Colon and Ortiz would change this prognosis.

BP: I'm liking Colon in the 9th, a late selection for a guy just about to turn the corner.

MOB: Pujols as No. 15 overall was a full round early, especially in his customary sophomore slump year.

F: Who is this Ensberg (sounds Jewish?) that Possum took in the 21st.

PS: Another solid draft by the **Wahoos**, and not likely to result in early season injuries to his top two picks. Possum's 1 through 5 picks are as good as any five in the league, but since this thing is won from Rounds 10 to 20, the jury is out on how things will go for Possum on the basis of his picks during this portion of the Draft. While another finish in the money wouldn't surprise anyone in this league, I look for Possum to drop one notch to the four-hole.

POF: 4th.

SENATORS

S: Starting pitching, catcher and shortstop.

W: A starting outfield that I'm not at all

PIRATES

S: Tremendous infield, but who's Steve Cox? Solid in CF and RF.

W: Gaping holes in left field and at catcher, largely untested starting pitching, but with great potential.

BP: Getting Chipper that late in the 2nd was unthinkable, and getting Hidalgo in the 10th was taking candy from a baby.

MOB: Waiting until the 15th round to take his first closer (Escobar) has to be seen as potentially ruinous, but on the other hand, SloPay's mentor and former co-conspirator has a surplus of top line relievers just waiting to be traded when the time is right. As if U-Bob is about to let his fellow club member exit this exclusive quartet ahead of him. In any event, properly managed, there is a long-overdue money finish in the offing for the Buccos.

F: Toby Hall, catcher for the Devil Rays.

PS: For the man of few words, a few words: Well done.

POF: 2nd.

CUBS*

S: Great (yes, great) starting pitching, great two-deep at first base, well above average outfield, above-adequate closers.

W: Middle relief, potential decline from aging starting pitchers, potential mismanagement because of overeagerness to remove asterisk.

BP: Many choices here. Maddux in the middle of the 2nd, Walker in the middle of the 3rd, Delgado in the 4th, Thome in

proud of, and three back-up outfielders that I'm not exactly bragging about either.

BP: I'm pretty pleased with getting Posada in the 5th, but even happier about getting Mark Buehrle in the 7th, whose WHIP ratio was Big Unit-ish last year.

MOB: I'm just not a Bobby Abreu fan, and so I'm still shaking my grape at why I gupped up and took him in the 4th.

F: Nick Johnson in the 16th .

PS: I don't exactly love my team, but I don't hate it either. If a few things fall the right way, this team could be sniffing Shamu's* tail come this September. On the other hand, if I don't have career years from a few of these guys, the **Senators** could be fighting to stay in the Upper Division. Fortunately, a finish lower than Itchie seems about as likely as an announcement from B.T. that he has decided on a major career change as a certified public accountant.

POF: 3rd.

the 5th, Williams in the 6th, Alou in the 8th, Glavine in the 10th, etc. It seems like Shamu* got almost all of his studs two or three rounds later than you would expect, at least in retrospect.

MOB: I don't really see one. I like all of Shamu's* Draft picks where he got them.

F: Juan Uribe in the 11th, hitting in that thin air.

PS: I really, truly don't want to give Shamu* the kiss of death, but even five days after the Draft, I stand in awe of how good of a team Shamu* picked last Saturday. I mean, I'm thinking to myself, why did I take Bobby Abreu in the 4th when I could have had Carlos Delgado. Why didn't I take Wickman in the 12th, or Burkett in the 14th, or C.J. in the 19th, and so on and so on. Shamu* soberly, quietly, and here's the surprise, *intelligently* picked his best team ever. Drum roll,

³Non-titleist.

please. Congratulations, Shamu*. This is the year that you do away with the @#) (\$*@#&\$ asterisk once and for all.

POF: **YOUR 2002 HSL CHAMPEEN!**

WEB SITE

Though this issue and the next several will still be going out on paper, we will soon begin publishing *From the Bullpen* from our soon-to-be launched web site. To help bring this creaky old bunch up into the 21st century, I went out and bought a new piece of software to allow us to create our own web

- When I showed up for Draft Day, I had forgotten that I was due to collect \$1,000 for my winnings and side bets. I just wanted the damn trophy, since this thing is all about pride, and money is secondary. It all went to the wife anyway.

- It's a beautiful spring morning, baseball practice for Joe and Will starts tomorrow, and Opening Day is Monday. How can it get any better?

ENCLOSURES

page, at a cost of about \$180 clams, I might add. Seemed steep at first when Linda recommended it to me, but then I realized that divided twelve ways, it would only be 15 bucks a pop. Feel empowered to help defray this expense by kicking in 15 claims apiece, payable to yours truly. Or not.

BALTIMORE CHOPS

- Still can't believe that Shamu* didn't pack the rest of B.T.'s chili into his backpack. Guess Shamu's* serious about this diet business.
- I hope that B.T. or Jeff or U-Bob or one of you other mackerel snappers don't send your copies of *From the Bullpen* on to the Bishop. He'll have me squeezing beads and saying Hail Marys with Senator Chambers and Company to pay penance for all my misdeeds.

Enclosed for your use are:

1. The 2002 Hot Stove League Draft Roster; and
2. A revised and updated Owners/Managers Roster, including, we hope, updated and accurate e-mail addresses (no guarantees on U-Bob, who changes e-mail providers more often than his boxer shorts), and all of the information I could wheedle out of B.T. on his new co-manager, Jeff Bechtolt. And by the way, welcome to the Big Leagues, Jeff! We will all have to think about an official league nickname for him. He's too lean for *Flounder*, and *Stretch* is already taken, so give this some thought, will you?

* * * * *

That's going to do it for this issue of the *Bullpen*. Good luck to each and every one of you in the 2002 season.

Skipper

[Back to Top](#)
[Home](#)

[Back to Archives](#)