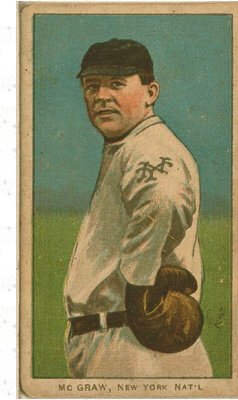

From the Bullpen

Official Publication of the
Hot Stove League
Eastern Nebraska Division



2002 Season

Edition No. 6

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**CUBS* MAUL NATIVE
AMERICANS, LEAD PACK
AFTER WEEK 1**

**BABY BEARS RUIN
POSSUM 'S WIRE-TO-WIRE
GUARANTEE**

**RESCUERS SIFTING THROUGH
CHARRED REMAINS OF
PIRATES AND REDBIRDS**

Brethren:

The heavily-armed West Des Moines **Cubs*** lived up to their preseason ballyhoo by blazing their way to a 434.5 Week 1 point total and undisputed possession of 1st place after the first week of competition in the Hot Stove League. Fueled by Sunday's career high 17-strikeout performance from staff ace Curt Schilling and his 89 points for the week, the **Cubs*** bolted past the self-anointed *Wire-to-Wire Favorite* **Wahoos**, who after a disappointing Sunday dropped to 3rd. While Shamu's* **Cubs*** may or may not be able to parlay their first-week lead into an asterisk-freeing season, if nothing else, the rest of the league will be forever indebted to him for erasing the **'Hoos** prospects for fulfilling their boastful owner's

WEEK 1 STANDINGS

Upper Division

1. Cubs*	434.5
2. Reds	392.5
3. Wahoos	388.0
4. Senators	386.0
5. Tribe	329.0
6. Tigers	328.5

Lower Division

7. Skipjacks	322.5
8. Chiefs	309.5
9. Blues	305.5
10. Bombers	302.5
11. Redbirds	213.5
12. Pirates	179.0

In addition to the banner week of Schilling, Shamu* also benefited from banner pitching weeks from Tom Glavine, Mike Williams, Billy Koch, Andy Ashby and from a late draft pick that makes the rest of us look utterly stupid, El Duque. What were the rest of us thinking while Shamu* patiently waited and snapped up Hernandez in the 24th round?

On the hitting side of the equation, Shamu's* **Cubs*** were led by 4th round pick Carlos Delgado with 37.5 points, Torii Hunter with 23.5, and Juan Uribe with 21.5

prophecy.

points. Notoriously slow starters Jim Thome and Craig Biggio were able to tally only 6.0 and 4.5 points, respectively, and will obviously warm up and contribute to the **Cubs***' cause as the days and weeks go on.

Congratulations on a great first week, Brother Shamu*.

AROUND THE HORN

Looking around the rest of the league, the **Reds** used a late week surge to climb past the **Wahoos** and into 2nd place with 392.5 points, principally hitting, with 268.5 points, tops in the league. The Yammering **Yahoos** are alone in 3rd with 388 points, even with absolute silence from the bat of Todd Helton, while your defending champion **Senators** finished Week 1 in 4th place with 386 points, thanks chiefly to the Big Unit and Mark Buehrle and a second-best pitching total of 174 points for the week.

After the top four teams, there is a bit of a drop-off to the next plateau, which is headed up by the 5th place Lincoln **Tribe**, whose early season woes were well chronicled in last Friday's Special Edition of *The Bellyflop*. The 5th place **Tribe** has a total of 329.0 points, composed of 179 hitting and 150 pitching points. Never one to rub salt in the wound, I must nevertheless point out for Underbelly — as if he hasn't recognized this on his own — that if he had only uttered the name *Curt Schilling* instead of *Pedro* in Round 1 of our Draft, the **Tribe** would be sitting pretty in 2nd place, just a shoulder sprain or a broken hamate bone away from overtaking the **Cubs***. Three words, Bob: *Wouda, couda, shouda*.

The final team in the Upper Division is the **Tigers** with 328.5 points. While Big Guy may take this as a moral victory since *FTB* picked the **Tigers** to finish in the cellar, Skipper stands behind his last-place prediction for the **Bengals**, although two teams down south are certainly doing their best to queer this prediction. More later on the **Redbirds** and **Pirates**.

In 8th place through the first week are the **Chiefs** with 309.5 points, certainly not where this team hopes to end the season, but a drastic improvement from where they finished last year. Rumor has it that B.T.'s co-pilot Jeff (wow, we really need a nickname for him — more on that later) is already throwing around hints for a bonus for getting the team off to such a good start. But it's not where you start, my friend, it's where you finish.

In 9th place after one week you will find the long-suffering **Blues** with 305.5 points. With a painful (although not league-worst) pitching total of only 73.5 points, the **Blues** were unable to take advantage of their hot bats (232 points, second best in the league) to start the year in a favorable position. I'm glad I wasn't there to see Dead Man Walking as he scanned the computer for his Week 1 positioning this morning.

In familiar territory, the **Bombers** start the year in 10th position with 302.5 points. Although Mouse's squad managed a respectable 205 hitting points for the first week, the tale of the tape was again his team's pitching performance, and the **Bombers**' 97.5 didn't cut the mustard. Of course, a couple of teams' staffs did even worse. Read on.

Which brings us down to the 11th place team, the **Redbirds**, who totaled a dismal 213.5 points for the week, nearly 90 points off the next rung up the ladder. Not only did the **'Birds** have a subpar hitting week with 160 points, but their pitching total of 53.5 was easily the worst in the league. I guess we'll have to put Señor White in touch with U-Bob, so he can learn from the master that it's *pitching, pitching, pitching* that wins this thing.

And now with some pain, since I picked his team to

Starting off the season at the top of the Lower Division in 7th place are the **Skipjacks** with 322.5 points. And this with significant overachievement during Week 1 from David Wells and Company. Itchie had better stick to the gaming tables in the Bluffs this season, because he's not likely to win any money through a high finish in the HSL standings.

finish 2nd, I give you the HSL Sewer Squad for Week 1, the **Pirates**, who were able to muster up only 179 points for the first week of the season, lodging themselves well into the bowels of the league. Turning a deaf ear to the Draft Day accolades of the other owners and managers, the HSL **Pirates** lined up single file, steered their collective frames into position, and pushed each other head first into the league outhouse, boldly sending a message that they would not be denied their rightful place in the HSL standings notwithstanding the quality of their team picked on Draft Day. SloPay has

no interest whatsoever in leaving the comfort zone of "the Club."

TOP PLAYERS

Curt Schilling was the leading pitcher during Week 1 with 89 points, followed by Diamondback teammate Randy Johnson with 61. Barry Bonds led all hitters with 60 points, even after taking Sunday afternoon off.

POPUPS AND FOUL TIPS

■ If Possum had led this thing from wire-to-wire to win the title, I would have presented him The Cup and simultaneously kissed his derriere on the stage of the Orpheum Theater — no, wait a minute, to do that I'd have had to first have The Cup to present to him. Never mind.

■ We haven't kept track of such things, but if we did, it would be my guess that the **Tribe's** Opening Day performance (negative 4.5 points) may have been the worst in the annals of the Hot Stove League, and that the **Senators** and **Wahoos** may have had the best, or at least one of the best, Opening Day totals with 119.5 points. It is a lead pipe cinch that the spread from top to bottom (124 points) was an all-timer. For the record, here were the standings through one game of the season:

1.	Senators	119.5
1A.	Wahoos	119.5

ugly epithets at his loved ones, but it would have been worth the price of admission to be able to tune in to what he was thinking as his prized peacock was stripped of its plumage inning by inning. I was quite certain there would be an e-mail waiting for me at home after U-Bob's disastrous first day, and I was right. Here's what our beleaguered hero had to say:

You think Scott took a year off, you haven't seen anything yet. Denny said he has dibs on my closers and Lance Berkman. How's Berkman for Juan Cruz and Nen for Steve Cox sound?

■ The President of the HSL Optimists Club, Itchie, is ready to throw in the towel after one week of the season. He has been heard to say that if he can't lead this thing from wire-to-wire, he'd just as soon take the year off and spend his time with his true friends over at the boats (oh, no, he doesn't have a problem), instead of spending the season trying to match wits with the mastermind of the **Senators** dynasty. Can you blame him? He has already delivered his concession speech, and I have it on tape.

■ I can't believe I didn't take El Duque in the draft, and along with the rest of you, let Shamu* steal him in the 24th round. I thought about taking him about five different times, had his name written on my list to think about during Rounds 10 through 20, and then foolishly passed on him repeatedly. If he stays healthy, which is a big if, his first game gem tells me that he is going to have a huge year. I haven't been outsmarted by Shamu* this

3.	Reds	56.0
4.	Chiefs	49.5
5.	Cubs*	46.0
6.	Tigers	45.5
7.	Skipjacks	42.0
8.	Blues	31.0
9.	Pirates	24.5
10.	Redbirds	17.0
11.	Bombers	0.5
12.	Tribe	-4.5

■ Pedro's Opening Day performance was what U-Bob had been living in dread fear of since girding himself to take him as his first pick in the Draft two weeks ago. I don't know that U-Bob was watching or tracking Pedro's first game inning by inning, but if he was, it must have been like laying on your back with your head in a guillotine and watching in horror as the blade descends down the track, as if in slow motion. U-Bob's too much of a gentleman to have been stomping around his house shouting

managed to avoid us entirely, but the rest of you losers apparently decided that your careers and/or personal lives are more important than Opening Day. When, oh when will you learn, my friends.

Since 1993, when our current consecutive Opening Day skeins began at Joe Robbie in Miami, B.T. and I have adopted a postal employee's attitude toward Opening Day, refusing to let rain, cold, sleet, nagging wives, demanding careers, our consciences, or gloom of night stay us from our appointed rounds. It's bigger than the both of us, it's where we are supposed to be on the glorious first day of the season, inside a ballpark, quaffing a cold one, pushing down a dog or a brät, and letting everything else take a backseat. As the title of Tom Boswell's terrific baseball book tells us, *Time Begins on Opening Day*.

Anyway, while it wasn't quite as exciting or glamorous as last year's trip to San Francisco to see Pac Bell, it was 70 degrees at Kauffman Stadium and there was darned near a full house to see the Royals take on the Twins in the opener.

bad since our freshman year at law school.

■ In re: the **Pirates**, I must say that I am a bit surprised at their anemic first-week performance, although I did realize while looking his team over again at the Tropicana that we all seriously overestimated them on Draft Day. I'm not sure if it was me or someone else who started beating the bongo drums for the **Pirates** that afternoon, but upon sober reflection, this team is much more likely to finish in the middle of the pack if not the lower end than in contention for money. Sorry, SloPay, but as Dizzy Dean used to say, *Them's facts*.

OPENING DAY

B.T. and I drove down to Kansas City last Monday for Opening Day, where we saw the visiting Twins bust the hometown Royals by the score of 8-6. McBlunder was reportedly in attendance at the same game, although he

tingling flyover. Nothing like a flyover to whip the crowd into a lather. Apparently Royals pitcher Jeff Suppan was still admiring the stealth when he took the hill for Royals in the 1st, needing only two pitches to put his team behind when that power-hitting mastodon, Jacque Jones, blasted an opposite field home run that may have been the farthest hit ball I have ever seen at Kauffman, possibly surpassing a blast that Bo Jackson deposited over the left field fence many years ago. So the crowd boos Suppan. Nice way to start your year. Two hitters later, Suppan gives up another Herculean shot out of the park, and we quickly see why the Royals' No. 1 starter did not make the cut in the HSL Draft.

In addition to the two home run blasts, we were treated to back-to-back triples from Neffie Perez and some other fleet-footed Royal, a feat that hasn't probably happened since Steve Balbino and Willie Mays Aiken hung them up. And of course, there was the joy of watching the major league scoreboard so we could root for our HSL players and agin the opposition. You can only imagine the

After some anxious moments looking for crickets with tickets (scalpers were nowhere to be found, just other baseball fans like us with their fingers in the air signaling their need for ducats), we were finally able to secure three(1) tickets to the game, albeit nowhere near McBlunder's primo seats(2). So that we could sit on the aisle and next to each other, we picked out two empty seats and decided to sit there until we got turked(3). U-Bob would have been in an ice cold sweat for the next three innings as we watched virtually every other seat in our section become occupied with late arrivals, except ours. Somehow we managed to find two of the three only open seats in our section and were able to sit in them for the whole game.

After our National Anthem was performed by some unrecognizable musician (he was no Van Cliburn), our pulses quickened as a stealth fighter jet approached from the north (I think) and did a spine-

[1] One for me, one for B.T., and one for B.T.'s mental health. Don't ask.

[2] Which he apparently only reserves for his close friends, not HSL riffraff.

[3] For Jeff's benefit, U-Bob's three biggest fears in life are: (1) being the only person at work *not to* have contributed five bucks toward the winning \$20 million lottery ticket; (2) someday having a bigger bald spot than Itchie; and (3) *turkophobia*, the fear of being openly humiliated at a public sporting forum by being ousted by the person in whose seat he was sitting in.

warm fuzzy feeling we got when they posted the Red Sox score on the board, exhibiting Pedro's Opening Day pasting.

Ahhh, it's good to have baseball again. How do we survive the winter without it.

THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD GO I

As B.T. and I reminded each other of favorite HSL memories, naturally at the top of the list was Curby's near fatal flop on the mean streets of Los Angeles, and the look of abject pity on the face of the nearby homeless man as he watched our luckless colleague go down like Shamu* on a plate of spaghetti. Good Lord, Tricky went down so hard his grandchildren's grandchildren may be born with maxillofacial deformities. He damned near ruined the concrete, as well.

In any event, in honor of Magpie having survived that disastrous face flop, I give you now my list of players that, but for the grace of God, could have been picked on my team:

👉 Pedro — I really did think of taking him as the first player picked. For about three seconds. He's toast.

[4] a/k/a The French Moon Cricket.

👉 Kevin Brown — burnt toast.

👉 Uggly Urbina — took a pounding on opening day and the loss, which won't be his last.

👉 Chan Ho Park — thank God he's a **Redbird**. They'll be parking them on him all year long.

I know. I have commented to more than one of you that I would never again set foot in a *domed* stadium, and most of all, not in the godawful TunaFishCanna Dome. But since business brought me to west coastal Florida, and since the Tigers were in town for an afternoon game, I could not resist. And I'm glad I came. I know now never to come to this horrific structure again, and with the authority vested in me as the *de facto* head of the Hot

👍 Jarrod Washburn — U-Bob couldn't demote him fast enough after his Opening Day cremation.

👍 Ken Griffey, Jr. — we all thought about him, but Big Guy was the unfortunate owner who ignored his gut and drafted him. Amid whispers around the league that he is "washed up," Junior finally hit his first home run of the season on Sunday, and then promptly wrenched his knee and took himself out of action for at least three to six weeks, if not the season.

On the other hand, here are some guys who are off to great starts that I wish I had on my roster:

👍 Barry Bonds — the guy is *en fuego* to the third power, but can he do it all year?

👍 Eric Milton — great stuff, great first game, could be his year.

👍 Mo Vaughn — just kidding, Tirebiter. There's nobody on your crappy team I want.

👍 Bartolo Colon — despite having a bigger head than Kelsey Grammar and a hat that just won't fit, that damned Possum's going to rake in the chips with Bart's pitching this year.

DUMP-A-CANA

As luck would have it, I was able to attend a second major league game during the opening week of baseball, the Thursday afternoon contest⁽⁵⁾ between the visiting Detroit Tigers and the hometown Tampa Bay Devil Rays⁽⁶⁾, at Tropicana Field. I

[5] If you want to call it that.

[6] I'm not sure why they call them the Tampa Ray Devil Rays, since the stadium is located in St. Petersburg, possibly the oldest (as in the average age of the citizenry) city in the world, and for

Stove League, I hereby forbid any of you from attending a game at PrinceAlbertInACana Park.

Why? Because baseball was meant to be played under an open sky. I mean, I'm not even crazy about retractable roof ballparks, because when they're closed, they still feel just like a dome, but at least when they're open, you can see the sky and the sun and the stars.

Anyway, I gritted my teeth and sat down to watch the Devil Rays pummel the toothless Tigers by the score of 9-2, with several Rays going Yard on Big Guy's former favorite pitcher, Jose Lima. I still find it hard to believe that Big Guy drafted this slug in the third round just three years ago, which signaled the beginning of the end of Jose's career. I was lucky enough to see Ben Grieve, proud **Senator** that he is, go deep in his first at-bat with his owner (me) watching. Matter of fact, Bennie Boy went 3-for-4 and looked pretty comfortable at the plate. Might Ben possibly be the linchpin to a successful title defense by Skipper? Stranger things have happened, you know, like Shamu* turning down the left over vat of chili on Draft Day. Go figure.

And here are a few more random thoughts that I cogitated up while watching the Rays and Tigers:

- ♦ On the third day of the new season, with the Devil Rays undefeated, I was able to buy a ticket for face value forty minutes before the game, no problem. There couldn't have been 15,000 people inside the stadium when the game started. Contract this, Bud.
- ♦ I immediately abdicated my assigned seat and trucked down to a completely empty lower section of seats about half-way between the third base bag and the left fielder. Over the course of the next two hours, maybe three other people came down from the nose bleed seats to sit in this all-but-empty section. So, I wondered to myself, would U-Bob have been fidgeting and fretting about the Turk had he been sitting next to me? In a word: *Absolutely*. There must have been some childhood incident the rest of us don't know about.

sure the leading consumer of motorized wheel chairs. Maybe they thought if they called the team the St. Petersburg Devil Rays, everyone would assume it was in an over-80 league.

- ♦ I have no idea why they decided to build this \$138 million eyesore back in the late 1980s. Why wouldn't you want to have outdoor baseball in the Sunshine State? It can't rain any more in St. Petersburg than in Miami, can it? I don't get it. Maybe they thought they would have an epidemic of their native octogenarians stroking out under the hot summer sun, or maybe they thought it would be this enormous tourist attraction or some damned thing. It was a bad idea then, and it's a bad idea now, and they ought to just push it into the Bay and start over.
- ♦ I had forgotten that this dump was originally called the Florida Sun Coast Dome back when it was built, as I recall, in an attempt to lure the Chicago White Sox to the Bay area. When the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team played here for three or four years, they changed the name of it to the *ThunderDome*. Whoopee. When they threw a whole bunch of good money after bad by pissing away \$85 million on renovations in 1996, they supposedly transformed the facility from "functional" to "*intriguingly innovative*." Wait a minute. The good people of St. Pete threw away \$85 million to get "*intriguingly innovative*"? Good investment. How about *Unusually Ugly* instead?
- ♦ I didn't realize it until I saw his mug up on the Tropicana Jumbotron, but Damian Easley has a funhouse-thin face like I have never before seen. Looks like a Pacific Halibut.

- ♦ They claim that Ash-a-Cana Field is supposed to have been drawn up to in some way resemble Ebbets Field from the outside. I don't see it. Ebbets Field post-nuclear warhead strike, maybe. I'm amazed at how dark and dingy and generally crummy the interior of Pop-a-Cana is. It reminds me of the basement level of the Civic Auditorium, before the Civic got its facelift. I will say this about it. It's pretty kid-friendly and there is a lot of good food of many varieties, and more than enough beer and beer vendors for the 15,000 fans who were there, albeit at six bucks a throw.

That's it. I'm done dissing Tropicana Field. If you don't believe me, come see the Bidet by the Bay for yourself.

LET'S TALK MONIKERS

I invited several of you to help me think of possible nicknames for our newest league member, Jeff Bechtolt, and SloPay was kind and thoughtful enough to provide me with several different suggestions, as follows:

Tonto
Poncho
Barney
Hutch
Huggie
Huggie Bear
Potsi
Shirley
Baby Trumpetfish II
Baby Blowfish
Scott's Favorite Brother-in-law

Har-dee-har-har. Some great suggestions, SloPay, but I think you would be better off attending to your team, given its current placement. I'm not willing to completely rule out *Potsi* or *Blowfish*, but I want to take my time and

- ♦ One of the two other people who came down to sit in my section was Mark, the Tugboat Operator from Baton Rouge, who I now know more about than B.T. and U-Bob combined. Do I look like a priest? Did it look like we were sitting in a confessional booth? But on the other hand, how many of you have a new best friend who owns a tugboat? There you go.
- ♦ Between the eighteen Tiger and Devil Ray players on the field for Thursday's game, I think I count four of them that are on HSL rosters, excluding Ben Grieve. Three of them are on SloPay's team. Hmmmm. Is it too late for me to change my prognostications? A team with three Devil Rays on it is not a team that's going to finish in the top two in the HSL.

not rush into this very important decision. We probably need to see Jeff good and drunk on a league trip in order to properly anoint him with his league sobriquet, and so we will plan to have him bunk up with honorary HSL member Tony "One-Way" Childers on our Pittsburgh extravaganza to make sure that he does not get underserved.

THE TRIP

The consensus on Draft Day was that we should head to Pittsburgh August 3-4. For those of you who keep calendars, please block these two dates off. One of us (I'm not volunteering, but somebody will) will start working on accommodations and reservations. More soon on this.

E-MAIL CORRECTION

Shamu* pointed out that our latest updated roster of HSL owners and managers improperly lists his e-mail address as dsinclair@cwgins.com. The correct e-mail address is csinclair@cwgins.com. Sorry, Dwight. (7)

WEB SITE

We are excited, proud, tickled pink and just downright pleased to be launching our new HSL web site, effective today, April 8, 2002. Your new HSL web site can be found www.nebraskahsl.com

at www.nebraskahsl.com. Please log in and take a look and let us know what you think. We are still working on loading up information into the archives, pictures, and so forth, and so it is not yet a completed work, but still serviceable in its present form. If you have any comments that you wish to share with others about the web site, your team, or one of your fellow teams, or even to blow off steam about your boss or wife, please feel free to use the Bulletin Board link to do so. Should be fun.

Skipper

[7]

For those of you who didn't know, Shamu's* other name is Charles Dwight Sinclair, a middle name formerly known only to relatives, close friends, and a former law school classmate we called My Favorite Martian, who almost got his clock punched by Shamu* for heckling our friend at a law school softball game

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