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# From the Bullpen

Official Publication of the

# Hot Stove League

Eastern Nebraska Division



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2002 Season

Edition No. 20

August 9, 2002

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## **STEEL CITY RECOVERING FROM HSL VISIT**

## **SHAMU\* CRUSHED BY THREE RIVERS SCANDAL, VOWS LITIGATION**

## **TRIBE SLUMPING BADLY AFTER PEDRO GAFFE**

## **REDS CREEP QUIETLY INTO SECOND**

Brothers:

The first order of business this week is to genuflect in Brother Itchie's general direction and give credit where credit is due for a bang-up HSL Trip this weekend past; and the second, to let the rest of you eight weenies -- "*I can't go, Bluto, I'm afraid,*" -- know just how much fun you missed on our excursion to the Steel City. In fact, it's so important for the rest of you to know what you missed that I'm giving front page attention to the Trip, and will fill you in later on the current league standings and goings-on. Maybe that'll teach the rest of you to

our merry band. The Trip went off without a hitch or a hiccup, and our collective costs for the entire weekend probably amounted to less than the rental fee for the gilded 32-passenger van last year in Milwaukee. If Itchie's other career opportunities continue to dry up like my drought-stricken lawn, he has a bright future as a travel agent for Carlson Wagonlit Tours, or where have you. Well done, Brother Itchie, well done.

Your league ambassadors thoroughly enjoyed the weekend junket to Pittsburgh and the new jewel of Two Rivers (see below) PNC Park. Each of us now rate PNC in the top 10 of ballparks that the HSL has attended, with its beautiful brick and steel façade brilliantly situated on the shore of the lovely Alleghany River in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh. Its strategic location gives it convenient pedestrian access to the downtown eateries and houses of libation, if not ill repute, and a stirring view of the impressive Pittsburgh skyline from virtually any seat in the house. The unanimous opinion of we four is that there is no other ballpark with a better view of its surroundings than PNC, Coors Field not excepted. Too bad the eight of you who don't paddle your

rethink your priorities a bit.

## **THE TRIP: STEEL CITY REMEMBERED**

Although the humorous but often boastful and self-serving Itchie often reports on the happenings on HSL Trips (to the extent that his alcohol-soaked memory brain cells enable him), because of my concerns over his tendency for hyperbole and my fear of potential misrepresentations of fact, I am taking upon myself to recount for all of you the events of the weekend past. First, a high-five to Itchie for his most excellent work in lining up air arrangements, accommodations and game tickets for

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\* To the extent that his alcohol-soaked memory brain cells enable him.

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As we learned from Cap'n Jimmy, our tour guide, while we traversed the rivers around downtown Pittsburgh in stupefying heat and humidity, there really aren't three different rivers, but two which become one. The Allegheny River from the north and the Monongahela from the south merge together on the western edge of downtown Pittsburgh, their confluence being referred to as the Ohio River. This staggering revelation that in reality there are only two rivers that become one, and not three distinct waterways, came as a devastating blow to our sometimes naïve and simple-minded brother, Shamu\*, who learned in Mrs. Martin's geography class in the third grade that there were three rivers, and has dogmatically clung to this belief ever since. Not since Meriweather Lewis got to the headwaters of the Missouri River and learned

own canoes had to miss out on this one.

## **RUN RIVER RUN**

After settling in at the lovely Pittsburgh Hilton, we naturally were curious as to whether the Steel City might have a place or two where a guy could wet his whistle, so we ventured out and found one, but not before encountering the crazed Internet lady. After avoiding a clash with her, we enjoyed the first and second of many Saturday libations. Properly refreshed and with several hours to kill before game time, we decided to expand our cultural and geographic horizons and embarked upon a tourist boat ([photo](#)) which, by no mere coincidence, served adult beverages. And so with Itchie's customary "Give 'er the gas, Cappy!" directive, we were on the water for our tour of the three rivers of Pittsburgh. Or so we thought.

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\*\* See below.

## **BONDS GOES YARD**

Shortly we were on our way to the ballpark. After slurping down a couple of frothy margaritas inside the restaurant, we made our way to our excellent seats on the third base side and hunkered in for the game. While we didn't exactly witness an epic pitching matchup on Saturday (Kip Wells for the Pirates against former Pirate Jason Schmidt for the Giants), we were lucky enough to see Barry Bonds hit homer No. 597, his 30th of the year, a three-run shot to deep right-center in the second. In his next at-bat, Barry thought he hit another home run in nearly the same spot, but this one fell short and bounced off the right field fence, producing one of the longest singles of all time for the gimpy showboat.

that there was an entire mountain range separating him from the start of the Columbia River has mankind seen such river-based disappointment and despair. The rest of us thought that Shamu\* was going to pack up his Stanley Steamer trunk full of Brut products and hail a cab to the airport for an immediate return flight to Omaha, but we were able to calm him down and help him deal with his bitter disappointment through the aid of copious quantities of alcohol.

In my time, the only occasion I have seen Shamu\* more disappointed was a certain episode at County Stadium in Milwaukee in which our beloved friend was temporarily separated from his free Brewer seat cushion and nearly suffered a crippling stroke.

Shamu's\* river dance complete, we returned to our place of accommodation for a bit of relaxation before venturing to PNC Park. This being perhaps the first time that I have ever shared quarters with McBlunder on a league trip, I learned something new about my dear friend. His millhouse snoring is not limited to nocturnal emissions -- he is capable of sawing logs -- giant Sequoias -- at any time of the day, as he proved during his short afternoon nap. I'm not even sure Stretch was asleep, but his not insubstantial proboscis was putting the Weyerhaeuser factory to shame and threatening the steel skeleton of the Hilton hotel.

where the four of us generally and Itchie in particular were alarmingly overserved. After adding a couple of gin fizzies and rum-and-cokes to his resume, Itchie was transformed before our very eyes from sober, wise-cracking smartass to inebriated, wise-cracking smartass, a mantle that he wears well. Indeed, after guzzling down enough grain alcohol to make Foster Brooks look like a teetotaler by comparison, Itchie was a handful for his not-quite-so-stewed

After the Giants scored three runs in the top of the eighth to increase their lead to 9-1, Dusty decided to rest Bonds and Kent, nearly paying the price when the Pirates rallied for five runs in the bottom of the eighth to close the gap to 9-6. However, the Giants scored two more in the top of the ninth to extend their lead, and the game was won by the Giants by a final score of 11-6.

In addition to Bonds' home run, we also saw jacks by Itchie's boy Kent and U-Bob's new whipping boy, Brian Giles. Stellar pitching we did not see.

## POST-GAME FESTIVITIES

After Saturday's game we toddled out of the stadium in search of a friendly local tavern where Brother Itchie might continue his round-the-world drink tour, and were excited to have a chance to see one of Pittsburgh's top entertainers, "*Burgh Man*," a deeply disturbed street performer dressed up to resemble a cross between Batman and Darth Vader, wearing a troubling mask, flashing lights and skates, as he juggled and encouraged people to give him money for essentially being a complete fool. After dispensing with Burgh Man, we made our way to the "Olive or Twist" lounge just blocks from the ballpark,

When the obviously overserved hotel guest was refused access, there was consideration given to opening the mini-bar forcibly by tossing it out the window of Shamu\* and Itchie's twenty-first floor hotel room to the cement patio below, but fortunately, reason, logic, and a jammed window prevailed. Judging by Itchie's appearance at breakfast the next afternoon, one more cocktail may have been fatal. It may have been the first time ever that a hotel mini-bar key was listed

colleagues, alternately demanding answers to the most personal and pinpoint of questions, and demonstrating his mule-like stubbornness by insisting that his answers to all trivia questions and topics of discussion, but only his, were correct.

In retrospect, I feel that I have to take a little bit of the blame for Itchie's evening of drunken monkeyshines and provocation, as I may have been just a titch too sharp with him on the plane during the first leg of our trip when I corrected his half-cocked statement that Robin Ventura was the leading grand-slam hitter *of all time*. Maybe my response (Which was something like: "No. Absolutely not. You're dead wrong, you're absolutely wrong. You idiot.") was not taken by Itchie in exactly the intended spirit, and if so, for this I am profusely apologetic. Of course, he was still as wrong as a red-haired goatee -- as Casey would say, "You kin look it up" -- but my apologies just the same.

As you can imagine, it was a bit difficult prying Itchie loose from his seat at Olive or Twist. All he really wanted to do was drink, argue, cross-examine, drink, argue some more, and drink. Finally, after hearing him whine for about the fourteenth time that "I'm finally having some fun, and you guys want to leave," they started shutting down the bar lights and we were able to cajole young Foster out the door, but not before he pissed off a new bridegroom by hugging and otherwise having offensive physical contact with a young bride who was adorned in her wedding dress. Remember, lustful one, one day your daughters too may be hanging out at bars in their wedding dresses, if you're lucky, so be glad that we made you leave.

After returning to his hotel room, Itchie reportedly still thirsted for alcohol and had a hankering for a stogie, and browbeat the malleable Shamu\* into contacting the front desk for a key to the mini-bar.

as the cause of death on a death certificate.

Needless to say, Sunday was anticlimactic as the wounded troops pulled together for a massive buffet breakfast followed by a trip to the swelter of PNC Park. Fortunately, Itchie had the foresight to secure shaded seats for us to witness Sunday's contest, which was again won by the Giants after another clash-of-the-Titans pitching matchup between Kris Benson and Kirk Rueter. Unfortunately, we had to leave the game early to catch our return flight home, and so while Bonds was cracking out his 598th home run in the top of the eighth inning, the rest of us were listening to Shamu\* chat up our effusive cab driver on the way to the airport. We now know more about the cabbie's personal life than the cabbie's own mother, thanks to Shamu's\* thirty-minute, no-subject-is-off-limits discourse with him.

There was probably more to the weekend that I have long since forgotten, but there you have it in 10,000 words or less. The consensus among the four of us is that next year's junket should be to Cincinnati to see their new ballpark there, and to catch our first glimpse of the Reds in real-live competition. Maybe we'll even invite a few of the rest of you slugs along to join us.

Now that the events of the 2002 Trip have been properly and accurately recorded, on to other league business. The **Reds** used a 418-point Week 18 to scamper past the slumping **Cubs\*** and into second, trailing the still-leading **Skipjacks** by a mere 38.5 points. At the other end of the universe, the pitching-depleted **Tribe** slumped wildly, being the only team in the league to score less than 300 points for the week with a paltry total of 226.0 points. So much for Brian Giles.

Here are the standings through Week 18, and the point totals for our eighteenth week:

\* Which was something like: "No. Absolutely not. You're dead wrong, you're absolutely wrong. You idiot."

### WEEK 18 STANDINGS

#### Upper Division

1.	Skipjacks	66/4.0
2.	Reds	6635.5
3.	Cubs*	6590.0
4.	Chiefs	6263.0
5.	Senators	6077.5
6.	Tribe	6035.0

#### Lower Division

7.	Bombers	5994.0
8.	Scumcats	5977.0
9.	Redbirds	5742.5
10.	Tigers	5688.0
11.	Blues	5613.5
12.	Pirates	5502.0

### WEEK 18 POINT TOTALS

1.	Tigers	418.0
(1)	Reds	418.0
3.	Wahoos	383.5
4.	Blues	366.5
5.	Pirates	358.5
6.	Bombers	355.0
7.	Chiefs	352.5
8.	Senators	347.0
9.	Cubs*	338.0
10.	Skipjacks	314.0
11.	Redbirds	311.5
12.	Tribe	226.0

#### Individual Leaders

##### Hitters

1.	A-Rod	616
2.	Bonds	524
3.	Alfonso	507
4.	Giambi	505

### WHO'S HOT - PITCHERS\*\*

Pedro	129
Lowe	105
Moss	105
Millwood	94
Smoltz	92
Miller	91
Moyer	90
Redman	90
Saarloos	90
Wagner	90

### WHO'S NOT

Wright	(41)
Simontacchi	(25)
Garland	(19)
CC	(5)
Ohka	(2)
Ishii	(2)
Wichman	(1)
Mussina	6

### WHO'S HOT - HITTERS

Gonzo	146
Nomar	131
A-Rod	118
Trot Nixon	119
Magglio	113
Beltran	111
Tejada	108
Burks	106
Ortiz	103

5.	Kent	48/
6.	Iejada	4/9
7.	Nomar	4/3
8.	Sosa	4/1
9.	Giles	469
10.	Larry Walker	468

**Pitchers**

1.	Schilling	541
2.	Pedro	480
3.	RJ	4/4
4.	Gagne	439
5.	Lowe	436
6.	Smoltz	422
7.	Moyer	399
8.	Zito	397
9.	Colon	396
10.	Kim	391

Palmeiro	103
Boone	103

**WHO'S NOT**

Todd Zeile	(5)
Shawn Casey	(4)
Castillo	3
Molina	6
Hidalgo	11
Lopez	17
Tatis	18
Konerko	18

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\*\* Last three weeks.

**TRIP SUMMARY**

This year's trip to Pittsburgh marked the eighteenth different city to which a delegation from the Hot Stove League has visited\*. Here is an updated list of HSL trip venues:

Year	Dates	City	
1985	Aug. 3-4	Kansas City	1
1986	Aug. 16-17	Kansas City	
1987	Oct. 4	Kansas City	
1988	Aug. 13-14	Chicago	2
1989	July 20 July 21-22 July 24	Kansas City Milwaukee Chicago	3
1990	July 4 July 5 July 6-7	Kansas City Arlington Arlington	4
1991	Aug. 31- Sept. 1	Chicago	
1992	June 11 June 12 June 13	Toronto Cleveland Detroit	5 6 7
1993	August 5	Anaheim	8

	August 6 August 7	San Diego Los Angeles	9 10
1994	July 7 July 8 July 9 July 10	Kansas City Boston New York Baltimore	11 12 13
1995	July 7-9	Denver	14
1996	June 21-22 June 23	Cleveland Detroit	
1997	June 28-29	Atlanta	15
1998	July 7	Denver	
1999	May 15-16	St. Louis	16
2000	June 3-4	Houston	17
2001	June 2-3	Milwaukee	
2002	August 3-4	Pittsburgh	18

18 years, 18 cities, 21 stadiums, 27 teams, 45 games. Nice work, boys.

To close out this issue, a very happy birthday to Brother McBlunder, who turned 43 on Tuesday.

Next week: Mystery guest writer.

Skipper

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\* Or been visited upon, depending on your perspective.

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