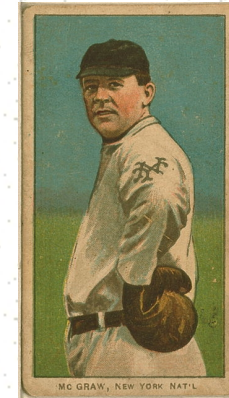

From the Bullpen

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Hot Stove League
Eastern Nebraska Division



2002 Season

Edition No. 23

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SKIPJACKS PAD LEAD

SURGING CHIEFS OVERTAKE HOMELESS CUBS*

BOMBERS POISED TO BEST SENATORS, WINGED PIGS SPOTTED AT KITTYHAWK

BASEBALL STRIKE AVERTED IN SPITE OF MARATHON PRAYER VIGIL BY ITCHIE AND BIG GUY

Brethren:

Although I am so nauseated by the likes of Paul Konerko and Freddie Garcia and a host of other underachieving **Senators**, I will set aside my personal apathy for the 2002 season and fulfill my duties as league scribe by penning yet another issue of *From the Bullpen*. Knowing that most of you* are hitting our HSL website on a daily basis in hopes of catching a new issue of *FTB*, I don't want all of you to be disappointed for a second consecutive week. So here we go.

WORK STOPPAGE AVERTED

Sorry, Itchie and Big Guy, but the season goes on. Let the chips fall where they may.

SKIPJACKS PAD LEAD

The amazing **Skipjacks** posted yet another outstanding weekly total during Week 22 -- leading all comers with 442.0 points -- to expand their lead over the sagging **Reds** by the still-tenuous margin of 8232.5-8086.0, a cushion of 146.5 points. It should be noted, however, that contrary to most season-ending pennant races, the projected points actually favor the leader at this time, with Itchie enjoying a 181.5-point margin in the *projected* column through 22 weeks.

Here are the standings from top to bottom through Week 22, including games of Sunday, September 1, 2002:

WEEK 22 STANDINGS

| | | |
|----|-----------|--------|
| 1. | Skipjacks | 8232.5 |
| 2. | Reds | 8086.0 |
| 3. | Chiefs | 7899.0 |

ITCHIE'S PRAYERS UNANSWERED

The big news of Week 22 was the eleventh hour settlement between the baseball owners and the Major League Players Association. In spite of a week-long prayer vigil organized by Itchie and Big Guy – Itchie because he realized that a strike would guarantee him the 2002 HSL championship** and Big Guy because it is his only shot to keep his pathetic **Estivaters***** out of the cellar -- the billionaire owners and the millionaire greedmonger players were able to find a way to settle their differences and avoid yet another baseball strike. Good thing, too. As displayed by the fans at Anaheim during the last game before the announced strike deadline, the players got a glimpse of what was likely to happen to them if they actually walked off the job and shut down the game this year.

* Even you deadbeat slug no-pays who still have not ponied up your share of the costs of our league web page.

** "Asterisk, schmasterisk," Brother Itchie was heard to say. "Ask me if I'm thinking about my asterisk when I'm hunkered down at the blackjack table at Bluffs Run, with my \$800 in winnings in my left hand and a 20-ounced tumbler of Yukon Jack in my right. Yeah, baby!"

*** Let me be the first to say: Huh?

My own sickeningly underperforming and gutless **Senators** are the only team that couldn't muster up at least 300 points for Week 22, finishing at 282.5, thanks to Mr. Sparkler and a rare Reverse Trotsky from the Big Unit.

| | | |
|-----|----------|--------|
| 4. | Cubs* | 7846.0 |
| 5. | Scumcats | 7696.5 |
| 6. | Bombers | 7650.0 |
| 7. | Senators | 7515.5 |
| 8. | Tribe | 7211.0 |
| 9. | Redbirds | 7191.0 |
| 10. | Blues | 7035.0 |
| 11. | Tigers | 6894.0 |
| 12. | Pirates | 6875.5 |

After the **Skipjacks**, the Lincoln **Chiefs** had the second-best point total during Week 22 with 430.5, using their big week to springboard past the lifeless and now homeless **Cubs*†** and into third place and a toehold on the final money position for the 2002 season. Just don't get too comfortable yet, B.T. and Jeff††. You may not have heard the last from Shamu*.

† Poor Shamu* can't decide if it was his team's move from Lincoln to West Des Moines, his preoccupation with the Mystery of Three Rivers, or just plain bad luck that was responsible for his team's nosedive in the standings, so he took control of what he could control and relocated his foundering team back in Lincoln. Memo to File: That wasn't it, Shamu.

†† Official HSL league nickname to be announced next week. I'm damned tired of politely referring to him as "Jeff."

Pitchers

| | | |
|----|-----------|-----|
| 1. | Schilling | 666 |
| 2. | RJ | 622 |
| 3. | Pedro | 563 |
| 4. | Gagne | 563 |
| 5. | Smoltz | 524 |

Here are the Week 22 point totals for the league:

WEEK 22 POINT TOTALS

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| 1. Skipjacks | 442.0 |
| 2. Chiefs | 430.5 |
| 3. Scumcats | 391.5 |
| 4. Bombers | 383.5 |
| 5. Blues | 374.0 |
| 6. Cubs* | 368.5 |
| 7. Reds | 364.0 |
| 8. Redbirds | 327.0 |
| 9. Pirates | 325.0 |
| 10. Tribe | 314.0 |
| 11. Tigers | 300.5 |
| 12. Senators | 282.5 |

League MVP through 22 weeks: A-Rod with 824.5 points.

Cy Young of the year through 22: Curt Schilling, 702.

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS*

| Hitters | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| 1. A-Rod | | 766 |
| 2. Bonds | | 684 |
| 3. Kent | | 651 |
| 4. Soriano | | 623 |
| 5. Tejada | | 608 |
| 6. Giambi | | 600 |
| 7. Vladdy | | 596 |
| 8. Sosa | | 594 |
| 9. Burkman | | 583 |
| 10. Pujols | | 567 |

* Not including bonus points.

| | |
|------------|-----|
| 6. Lowe | 507 |
| 7. Zito | 496 |
| 8. Koch | 490 |
| 9. Colon | 481 |
| 10. Oswalt | 478 |

WHO'S HOT - PITCHERS*

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Cory Lidle | 112 |
| Randy Wolf | 103 |
| Oswalt | 100 |
| Billy Koch | 100 |
| Reed | 99 |
| Appier | 98 |
| Hudson | 96 |
| Zito | 94 |

WHO'S NOT

| | |
|------------|------|
| Astacio** | (33) |
| Burkett | (25) |
| Sparks | (21) |
| Wright | (19) |
| Armas, Jr. | (19) |
| Sele | (14) |
| Fogg | (13) |
| Marquis | (11) |

WHO'S HOT - HITTERS

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Pujols | 123 |
| Kent | 120 |
| A-Rod | 119 |
| Bonds | 118 |
| Manny Ramirez | 117 |
| J. Payton | 109 |
| Jason Phelps | 108 |
| Palmeiro | 106 |
| Chavez | 105 |
| Bernie Williams | 102 |

* Last three weeks.

** A starter for the **Tribe**, you need to know.

WHO'S NOT

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Brian Jordan* | (4) |
| Adam Dunn** | 10 |
| Lowell | 11 |
| Hidalgo | 13 |
| Grudzielanek | 15 |
| Mo Vaughn | 22 |

PAINTING THE CORNERS

♦ While I am still furious at Don Fehr and all of the idiotic Player Representatives to the Players Association who still just don't seem to get it, I am happy that a strike was avoided, primarily because it would make me sick to see another postseason canceled, and because I truly believe that a strike at this time would have been ruinous to the game. At the same time, slap my mouth, I have to confess that I will be glad to see the season end for a different reason, so I can close out the chapter of my life known as the 2002 **Senators**. As Itchie would say, it has been one "frustrating" season for the old Skipper. I picked a pretty darned good team, I have to say, made a couple of decent free agent pickups, and yet sit here after 22 weeks in serious jeopardy of finishing the season behind even the **Scuzcats** and the **Bronx Bombers**, horror of horrors. It has just been one of those seasons in which, for whatever reason, things just haven't gone the way of the **Senators**. I know, I know. Cry me a river -- or make it *three*, Shamu* -- but I'm not really bellyaching, just venting a bit.

✍ If I ever try to pick Paul Konerko again, somebody please shoot me. The guy is a total pussy.

✍ What was it exactly that started this trend of changing the team names? And what is an "**Estivater**," other than proof positive that Big Guy is bored out of his skull with his 2002 **Tiger** team, and desperate to try anything to keep his beloved **Baby Bengals** out of the league bowels for the first-ever time.*

✍ What possessed SloPay to change his team name from the **Pirates** to the **Junkyard Dogs**? Some crazed notion that a name change might lift the heretofore flaccid **Pirates** out of last place and into the penultimate position? Or another remote manipulation of poor Denny's team by the cruel Giapetto Hurlbut? Whatever the root cause, let's get back on the keyboard and change that dumb name back to the **Pirates**, posthaste. You, too, Big Guy. We're not letting this league disintegrate into one of those goofy other BFJB leagues with the spazzy nonbaseball names such as the *Willie Muffs*, the *Sun Tzu Warriors*, or the ever-popular *Can O Whoop Ass* team.

LETTERS FROM A MADMAN

My personal campaign to put fear into the hearts of Don Fehr and the players did not quite blossom into the type of Farm Aid/Willie Nelson concert/grass roots movement that I had envisioned in the inner sanctum of my

✍ On the other side of the equator, we have the **Skipjacks**, for whom everything has gone as well as could possibly go this season, right up to and including this week's news that his main competition's pitching ace, Pedro, has a bad wing and may have to shut it down for the season. How many of you don't think that Itchie has a skinny little black voodoo doll in his home office with a shard of glass through the right shoulder? But I digress. When it's *your* year, it's your year. For a few of you -- U-Bob and SloPay come to mind -- this Your Year concept may be a bit hard to conceptualize. Patience, amigos, patience.

✍ After viewing the Message Board on our website last night, I was again amazed, amused and annoyed at the thought of the amount of time that Possum spends at the keyboard, polluting our Message Board with his repeated, stream-of-consciousness dross and drivel, while searching for an explanation as to why Pariah couldn't have devoted one-tenth of this time to keeping his commitment to authoring a special issue of *From the Bullpen*. When will I learn that trying to understand Possum is like trying to understand and solve the Holy Land conflict. As Robert Zimmerman once wrote: "You might as well try and catch the wind."

✍ I see that the **Reds** just drafted Michael Barrett and Adam Kennedy. I think that Magpie has more ex-**Senators** on his team than I have current **Senators**. Which may explain why he's in second place and I'm not.

* Another starter for the **Tribe**.

** You guessed it. Another starter for the **Tribe**.

cerebellum, but I did finally manage, after many drafts and redrafts, to send one plaintive letter to that carpetbagging festering sore named Donald Fehr.** I meant to e-mail all of you a copy of same so that you would know what your league emissary was doing about this issue, but since I didn't get this done, I will share a copy of the text of this letter here:

Dear Mr. Fehr:

I write to you as a long-time, ardent baseball fan.

It must be clear to you and the player representatives that if there is a work stoppage on Friday, the fans are going to revolt. If there is a strike, you will see millions and millions of long-time fans turn their backs on America's game. I am convinced of it.

This is not 1994, when the economy was soaring and the players were making half what they are making now. None of us feel any sympathy or empathy for a player who makes \$2.4 million a year playing a kid's game six months out of the year.

* Editor's Note: Sorry to break this news to you, Big Guy, but as of the above date, September 6, 2002, the Tigers find themselves in the unhappy, unwanted, unsettling and unfamiliar position of being in Dead-Ass Last, reportedly for the first time ever. Through games of Thursday, September 5, 2002, the Lincoln Junkyard Dogs have a whopping 2-point lead over the Estivaters, 7060.0

to 7058.0. It took almost ten full years for it to happen, but it happened.

** Sorry, U-Bob. I know he's your personal hero as the cudgel-carrying shyster/legal counsel to the Players Union. And yes, I know, I once had my picture taken with this slimy greaseball poised in mid-handshake. I was young and foolish then.

This time around, you don't have Cal Ripken and his quest for 2131 to bail out the game. You don't have a McGwire-Sosa race for Maris' mark on the horizon.

In short, last time around, Major League Baseball got lucky. This time around, it's clearly different. Fans are already sick and tired of shelling out a couple of hundred dollars to watch pampered superstars play ball in the sunshine. Your cushion is long gone.

Whether you and they realize it or not, the players are about to choke the last breath of life from the golden goose. As the head of the players' union, you are about to be known as the engineer who drove the Gravy Train off the railroad trestle. You will go down in infamy as the man who led more than seven hundred millionaire lemmings off the cliffs and into the sea.

Wake up and smell the coffee. Don't allow the history books to record your name as the man who single-handedly brought ruin to our national pastime. Settle and play ball.

Very truly yours,

David D. Ernst

Although I have not yet received a response from the Donald II, there can't be much

doubt but that this letter knocked enough sense into Fehr to come back to the bargaining table in earnest.

Let's wrap it up for this week, boys. Good luck to you in the waning weeks of the 2002 campaign.

Skipper

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