

From the Bullpen

Official Publication of The



NEBRASKA
Hot Stove League



2006 Season

Edition No. 18

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Fellas,

Here are the standings through Week 12.

1.	Wahoos	5300.25
2.	Bears	5258.25
3.	Reds	5245.25
4.	Cubs*	5238.50
5.	Skipjacks	5094.50
6.	Bombers	4998.00
7.	Redbirds	4954.75
8.	Chiefs	4792.75
9.	Blues	4745.75
10.	Tigers	4689.75
11.	Tribe	4554.25
12.	Senators	4327.00

Rah, rah **Wahoos**.

Now that the official business is done, we'll move on to other topics. First, the Trip.

BUSCHED

I can't add much of value to Itchie's comprehensive recap of the 2006 HSL Trip to St. Louis, except to point out that this was our 22nd official Hot Stove trip, and that we have now seen 25 ballparks in 20 cities; that we have seen 27 of the 30 teams in baseball play; and that we have now witnessed a total of 54 contests. A pretty impressive track record by anyone's yardstick. With ten league members attending the *St. Louis Sojourn*, we matched our previous high water mark (San Diego 2004) for a bestest ever level of league participation. And it's fair to say, even without counting, that the previous league record for most shots of Jager bombs consumed was shattered on this year's Trip, thanks mostly to Tricko.

Once again, thanks again to all who were involved in the planning of this year's trip, and to all of you who took the time to make it another great Hot Stove League experience.

A MORE CONVENIENT TRUTH

No sooner had I landed home in Omaha from St. Louis than I had to pack for my next day's trip to Salt Lake City for a couple of depositions. Justice knows no state borders. After finishing up official business in Park City on a beautiful Monday, I checked the local paper and learned that the Salt Lake City Bees, the Triple A farm club for the Los Angeles Angels, were hosting the Las Vegas 51s at Franklin Covey Field. So, lo and behold, my night's entertainment was laid out before me.

When I arrived at the ballpark, about a mile due south of downtown Salt Lake, I saw what Rosenblatt Stadium once was and could be again: a beehive of activity, bustling with excited fans eagerly anticipating an evening of great minor league baseball and camaraderie. A saw-buck purchased a box seat directly behind the Bees' dugout, where I immediately spotted Nuke LaLouche -- I mean Jered Weaver, freshly sent down from the parent club for more seasoning. Seeing Weaver and several other fuzz-faced teammates standing up in the dugout and eagerly leaning over the rail to watch the start of the game was a breath of fresh air, particularly when contrasted with the bored complacency of certain unnamed veteran major leaguers. The truth is, I knew immediately that I was in for a special evening.

The game was a smorgasbord of sights, sounds, and smells, flooding the senses. The 51s had a big ol' lefty on the mound, whose name I didn't catch, but his batterymate was a young Hispanic named Dinor Navarro, whose batting average that night dipped from .045 to .042 (truly), but who is obviously on the team because he has a rocket launcher for a right arm, gunning out several would-be base-stealing Bees. The 51s also featured a hot-headed and erratic right-fielder by the name of Delwyn Young, whose play in right field can best be described as Lonnie Smith-like. Delwyn, who may or may not be related to Dmitri and the other mendacious Young, looked like he was on roller skates as he moved across the outfield trying to rendezvous with fly balls in his zone of responsibility. More than once when he realized that his mental vector diagram was off course, he started flapping his wings like a frenzied hummingbird as he attempted to shift directions to meet up with the white sphere, ultimately using his left arm to stab into the air like an errant knight to spear the ball. Some of the ugliest outs imaginable. Lonnie would look downright fluid alongside Delwyn.

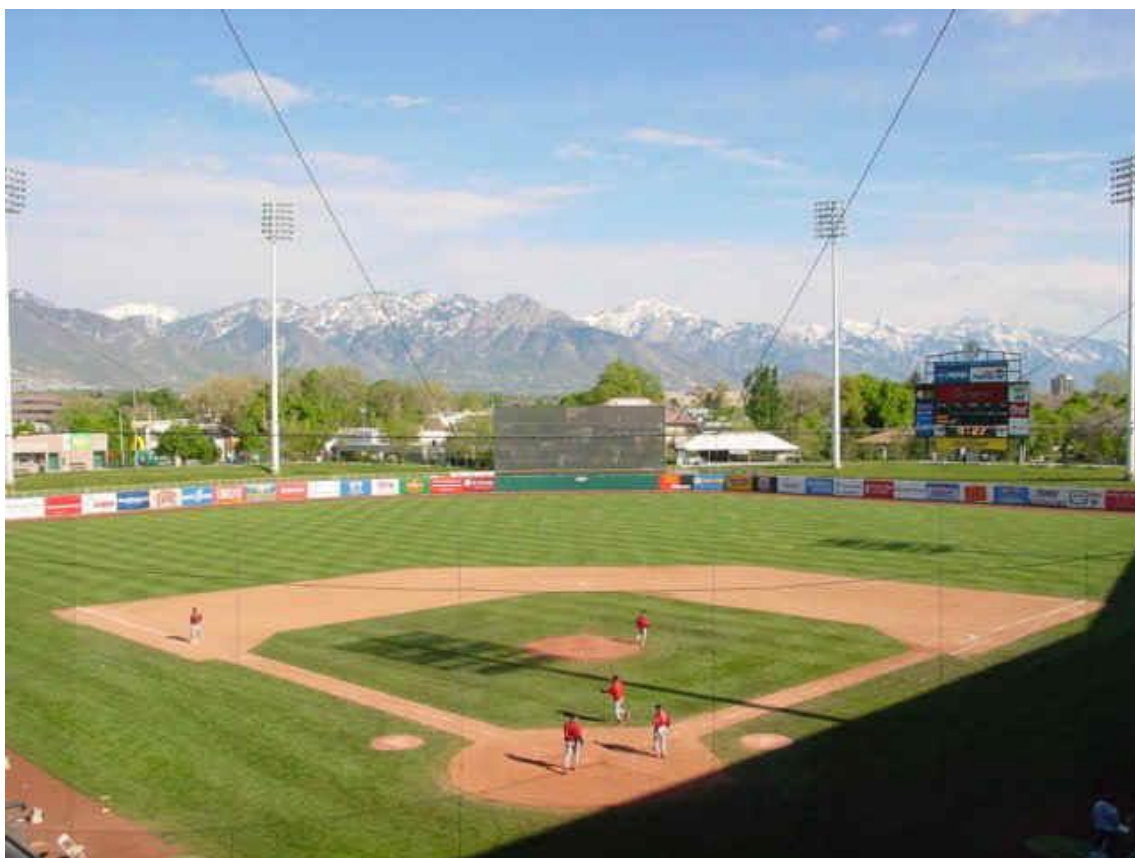
Howie Kendrick, the Bees' second baseman, made some of the loudest outs in memory as he watched his still-glistening batting average drop from .402 to .398. With Howie's superlative batting average, his power, his speed and his prowess as a member of the keystone combination, it is hard to imagine why this guy isn't in the Bigs. It's not like the Angels have Rogers Hornsby or Eddie Collins playing at the second sack spot or anything.

Any one of you would have enjoyed watching Bees Coach Eppard, No. 10, a grizzled veteran baseball man, manning the box at first base, stopwatch in hand to time the throws, something sage to say to each and every Bees baserunner. I'd like nothing more than to sit down and have a cup of coffee, or better yet, a tall mug of cold beer, with Coach Eppard, to ask him a hundred questions about his career in baseball.

There was so much to like about this night at the ballpark that I can't even begin to capture it in words, but I'll try anyway: The Bees' pitcher, Dustin Mosley, with his rocking-chair, fast-pitch softball pitcher windup, gritting it out for a complete game victory; the organist playing

"Ooh, What a Lucky Man He Was," when an opposing player rapped out a base hit, or "These Boots Are Made For Walking" when a player got a free pass; the perpetually happy Bumblebee mascot (Stretch would not be pleased) cruising around the field in his ATV, whipping the park youth into a frenzied lather; fresh, salty peanuts from local legendary vendor Western Nuts; the wholesome Utah Dairy Queen (no kidding) working the crowd, giving autographs; the educated Bees fans voting Yogi Berra as the most popular Salt Lake City minor leaguer ever, besting David Ortiz, Mickey Rivers, and former Bronx Bomber Tony Lazzeri; the Del Taco logo on the home and away batting circles; the "*Injured? Go with the big hitter 1-801-ITS-EASY Keith Barton*" lawyer advertisement adorning (putrefying) the top of the home dugout; the nubile young *Honey Bees* working the crowd, tossing Frisbees and tee-shirts, spreading enormous cheer and good will; the big tough Utah rancher sitting a few rows in front of me, with his finely waxed handlebar mustache and fingers the size of polish dogs, affectionately patting his red-headed pre-teen son on the back, sharing the bond of baseball; seeing 95%-deaf Curtis Pride, No. 19, veteran of many major and minor league campaigns, poised in the dugout and ready to be sent in if called upon by his manager, in this the last of his remarkable career. I'd love to be there when the crowd rises as one to applaud his legacy when he takes the field for the final time.

And perhaps best of all, this splendid day at the park blessed me with a million dollar view of the spectacular Wasatch mountain range to the east, framed perfectly by the ballpark architects, so beautiful that you just didn't want to stop looking at it to watch the game. Heaven on Earth, right here at the ballpark.



If any of you ever have the opportunity, I heartily recommend a trip to Franklin Covey Field in Salt Lake to see a minor league game. You will not regret it.

And so ends another tale of baseball splendor. Wishing you each a great holiday, and back at you soon.

Skipper

Next week: Screech sounds off.