

From the Bullpen

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WAHOOS CLING TO NARROW LEAD AS FIELD TIGHTENS; NERVES FRAYED

Men:

With a score-plus-one of weeks of the '06 campaign now behind us, it has become clear that the 2006 campaign will go down in the HSL annals as one of the most competitive, if flawed, seasons in our remarkable history. With a mere six weeks to go in the season, the **Wahoos** lead the league by the narrowest of margins, 1.25 points, over the success-starved **Bears**. Will Possum's savvy and guile be enough to overcome his pitching cap woes and the fateful good fortune which must be out there somewhere waiting for SloPay after twenty years of abject failure in fantasy league baseball? Only time will tell. Fortunately for Possum, the trade deadline has passed, and so there is no measure of chicanery that can result in more players from the star-studded **Tribe** lineup finding their way past Commissioner Van Winkle's sleepy-eyed visage and onto the pennant-stretch roster of the **Bears**.

WEEK 21 STANDINGS

1.	Wahoos	8961.75
2.	Bears	8960.50
3.	Reds	8876.50
4.	Chiefs	8863.75
5.	Bombers	8729.75
6.	Cubs*	8703.00
7.	Skipjacks	8695.00
8.	Tigers	8503.75
9.	Blues	8344.00
10.	Redbirds	8257.50
11.	Senators	7991.50
12.	Tribe	7761.75

SKIP'S BLIPS



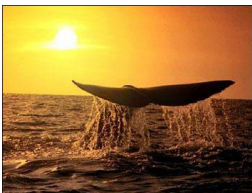
With only 1.25 points separating our top two squads, with fewer than 100 points dividing the top four, and with seven teams within 300 points of the lead, this will be a barn-burner of a pennant race. The unknown factors, of course, are how much the pitching caps will play into the mix, whose players will get red hot and whose will be ice cold in September, and whether SloPay, Screech, Shamu and Mouse have the constitutions to allow them to thrive, survive, or take a deep dive during the stretch run. It's just one man's perspective, of course, but I sense the weight of the world on SloPay's shoulders as he considers the moves to make in order to maximize and not jeopardize his team's chances. I wonder to myself whether he hears that old Seals and Crofts tune *We May Never Pass This Way Again* running through his head. Of course, if it wasn't before, it probably will be from now on.



As to Screech, he seemed unusually serene, almost confident during our trip last week to Des Moines to see a game at Principal Park. I'm not sure if this was the calm before the storm, or whether the old Screechster is just too much of a dullard to recognize the magnitude of his current situation, but if he is feeling any anxiety whatsoever, he is covering it up better than Itchie hides his bald spot.



Mouse, on the third hand, is probably resigned to another disappointing finish, given his usual injury bugaboo and his cataclysmic innings-pitched overindulgence. He obviously wants his **Bombers** to stay as high as they can in the standings for as long as they can, before they plummet in freefall to their final resting spot in the Lower Division.



And then Shamu, our beloved face in every ballpark, is going with the quiet, fervent prayer route, supplicating not only that his chief rivals' key players die in a fiery plane crash or fall victim to an early batch of American Bird Flu, and that if his primary prayers are answered, that the asterisk next to his **Cubs*** team name not be joined by an obelisk because of our flawed 2006 points system. You have to admire a man who spends such a big part of his life in devout meditation and prayer.

Wahoos



I'm not ignoring the **Wahoos** or the **Reds** in my assessment, it's just that they are battle-tested after many seasons of competing for the top prize, and so there is less intrigue about their ability to withstand the pressure. We are all well aware that Possum is capable of piloting his Wahoos to another title, and that Tricker is perfectly capable of guiding his Commies to another second-place finish.

POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 21

SloPay's broken calculator and/or keyboard made it a bit difficult to decipher this week's weekly point totals based on his recounting of the yearly stats in his newsletter from last week, but as best I can reconstruct things, these are the point totals for Week 21 of the season:

1.	Tigers	469.00
2.	Chiefs	468.00
3.	Senators	450.00
4.	Tribe	448.75
5.	Bears	432.25
6.	Reds	400.00
7.	Blues	387.75
8.	Cubs*	378.25
9.	Redbirds	359.50
10.	Bombers	358.25
11.	Wahoos	356.25
12.	Skipjacks	345.00



The **Chiefs** have continued their torrid streak, totaling more than 2000 points during this time period, averaging more than 500 points per week while moving up the totem pole to fourth place and within the century-mark of the league-leading **Wahoos**. I just hope that they haven't climaxed too soon, something that has been known to be problematic with their manager in the past.



OMAHA SENATORS

While my own **Senators** have continued to play up to their capabilities of late, we can't seem to gain any ground on the Redbirds or the Blues located just above us on the ladder. If my boys can stay hot and move up to 10th or 9th by season's end, I would be most grateful; however, their primary charge is to score at least enough points to stay out of the bad company in the league bowels.

TOP TEN PITCHERS THROUGH 21 WEEKS

1.	Jo. Santana	Senators	540.00
2.	R. Halladay	Skipjacks	499.50
3.	J. Papelbon	Reds	490.50
4.	J. Smoltz	Cubs*	484.00
5.	C. Zambrano	Wahoos	476.50
6.	C. Carpenter	Chiefs	462.00
7.	B. Webb	Redbirds	461.50
8.	C. Schilling	Tigers	458.00
9.	J. Putz	Chiefs	441.00
10.	Ma. Rivera	Bombers	437.00

TOP TEN HITTERS THROUGH 21 WEEKS

1.	D. Ortiz	Wahoos	632.50
2.	T. Hafner	Skipjacks	616.50
3.	A. Pujols	Skipjacks	593.50
4.	C. Utley	Bears	587.25
5.	Mi. Cabrera	Bears	587.00
6.	C. Beltran	Chiefs	577.00
7.	M. Ramirez	Bombers	570.75
8.	D. Jeter	Redbirds	568.25
9.	J. Reyes	Senators	564.00
10.	A. Soriano	Skipjacks	563.75

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Next week: Possum sounds off.

Ciao.

Skipper