

From the Bullpen

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GRIN AND BEAR IT

Fellow baseball enthusiasts:

I guess that's kind of like John Adams referring to Thomas Jefferson as a "fellow politician," accurate but a bit short of the mark. Sorry, just getting tired of the same old appellations.

This week's heading is good advice for Possum. Time for the delusional one to stuff the whining and sniveling already and to be a good loser (Lombardi would call this an oxymoron) and give credit to SloPay for picking a whale of a team in 2006; or if he can't stomach handing out this much praise to this year's winning pilot, then at least to commend him on his good fortune in catching lightning in a bottle for this one memorable campaign. Call it magnanimity or call it being a gracious loser, but do make the call.

My own prediction is that no indictments will ever be handed up in the Howardgate scandal, and that SloPay's **Bears** will manage to win this thing by a margin greater than the Howard-Fielder disparity for the relevant time frame. If I'm right, this whole little misunderstanding will probably blow over in no time at all, and U-Bob will be able to safely access his 401(k) account at the Bridges Investment Fund by the time he takes early retirement from Art FX. Of course, early retirement at this South Lincoln sweatshop is when you become an octogenarian, and not a moment sooner.

But enough frivolity. Let's get on to the business at hand, reporting on the standings and point totals for Week 23:

WEEK 23 STANDINGS

1.	Bears	10045.00
2.	Wahoos	9824.00
3.	Reds	9760.00
4.	Chiefs	9703.50
5.	Skipjacks	9543.00
6.	Cubs*	9479.50

7.	Tigers	9398.00
8.	Bombers	9376.00
9.	Redbirds	9245.25
10.	Blues	8999.00
11.	Senators	8948.75
12.	Tribe	8406.75

POINTS FOR WEEK 23

1.	Bears	518.50
2.	Senators	512.00
3.	Tigers	445.25
4.	Redbirds	438.75
5.	Wahoos	433.50
6.	Chiefs	409.00
7.	Cubs*	398.50
8.	Skipjacks	369.25
9.	Tribe	364.00
10.	Reds	359.00
11.	Bombers	285.25
12.	Blues	248.00

TOP TEN HITTERS

1.	Ryan Howard	Bears	696.75
2.	Albert Pujols	Skipjacks	666.00
3.	David Ortiz	Wahoos	661.00
4.	Miguel Cabrera	Bears	644.75
5.	Chase Utley	Bears	638.75
6.	Derek Jeter	Redbirds	632.75
7.	Jose Reyes	Senators	624.50
8.	Alfonso Soriano	Skipjacks	620.75
9.	Carlos Beltran	Chiefs	618.00
10.	Jermaine Dye	Senators	605.25

TOP TEN PITCHERS

1.	Johan Santana	Senators	633.50
2.	Roy Halladay	Skipjacks	626.00
3.	Brandon Webb	Redbirds	525.00
4.	Jon Papelbon	Reds	511.50
5.	Branson Arroyo	Wahoos	507.50

6.	Chris Carpenter	Chiefs	502.50
7.	F-Rod	Bears	499.00
8.	J.J. Putz	Chiefs	490.50
9.	John Smoltz	Cubs*	485.00
10.	Carlos Zambrano	Wahoos	478.50

BALTIMORE CHOPS



It's no coincidence that Itchie's top hitter has exactly 666 points.



Underbelly now has the distinction of having traded away not only the top hitter (Howard), but also the third best pitcher (Brandon Webb) and the seventh best pitcher (F-Rod). My advice to Bob: Just say no.



The **Bears** now have three of the top five hitters, to go along with four pitchers who are in the top twenty (No. 7 F-Rod, No. 14 Ryan, No. 16 Capuano, and No. 20 Jenks). When it's your turn to win, it's your turn to win.



With two weeks to play in the season, the pitching point caps are just about ready to start taking their toll. For those of you without pitching woes, look out above you for those plummeting rocks.

WHO'S HOT (Based on points from last week)

PITCHERS

1.	Frank Thomas	Tigers	61.00
2.	Garrett Atkins	Senators	55.75
3.	Matt Holliday	Blues	53.00
4.	Ryan Howard	Bears	52.75
5.	C. Hart (who?)	Reds	50.75

TOP HITTERS

1.	Johan Santana	Senators	65.00
2.	Brandon Arroyo	Wahoos	63.50
3.	Dave Bush	Bears	57.50
4.	C. James (who?)	Skipjacks	52.00
5.	Dontrelle Willis	Senators	45.00

Darned right my **Senator** players have been hot, it's just too bad that our stupid Yahoo! system won't allow me to get them into the majors to capture their rightfully earned points. Oh, yeah, except Monday night, when the system worked magnificently, and allowed me to get Doug Davis into the majors for his stellar 4.5-point outing, and Dave Williams into the majors for his grizzly minus 18-point outing. The baseball gods can indeed be cruel.



Although it has nothing to do with baseball, lads, I would be remiss if I did not put in a plug for the excellent book that I just finished, *1776* by historian David McCullough. For the literate minority among you, do yourself a huge favor and pick up a copy of this fascinating recounting of the watershed events of the Revolutionary War. For the rest of you, I would even recommend buying this book on tape and listening to this marvelous tale of the events that shaped our country. If nothing else, give up an episode or two of *The Simpsons* and at least read the thrilling account of Colonel Henry Knox's transporting of the guns of Ticonderoga from Lake Champlain in upstate New York across the snow-covered plains of western Massachusetts, and up Dorchester Heights in the middle of the night as the rebels forced the Brits out of their Boston stronghold; or just say no to tonight's episode of the reality show *du jour* and read about Washington's Christmas night foray across the Delaware River before routing the Redcoats and the Hessians in Trenton.

I loved re-reading Thomas Paine's goosebump-inducing famous words:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

These are the times that try men's souls. Wow. Eight simple words that sum it all up.

These were some rugged hombres, these ragged rebels, who went to hell and back to gain our independence from Britain. If not for these guys, we might all be talking like Benny Hill and have teeth like Austin Powers. Of course, for some of you this would be an improvement, but I'm not naming names. Anyway, I'm not sure that there are many dudes around today who would be able to survive all of the hardships that our patriot forefathers weathered for the sake of our freedom. Maybe it's just me, but I have a hard time picturing Itchie in a tri-cornered hat and wearing newspapers for shoes, trudging across the frozen turf toward battle; or imagining Shamu subsisting on a soldier's rations instead of his frequent visitations to the Grand Italian buffet at Valentino's. But I could be wrong.

And not to pick on Johnny and Sir Charles too much, but at about the same ages that Washington and Lee were leading the shabbily dressed, poorly financed and inadequately trained rebel forces into battle against seemingly insurmountable numbers and odds, Itchie was getting a snootful at Sweep Left on a nightly basis, and locking himself into the back seat of his car to avoid getting pummeled by some bar tough that he pissed off with his wisecracking patter; while Shamu was getting a bellyful and then a snootful before trying to pillage every conscious (or not) coed at the Kearney bars. I'm not saying that our two chums don't have the mettle of heroes, but J.T. has been known to call in sick when the automatic seat heater in his Lexus is on the fritz, and I'm not sure if General George would have been sympathetic to Shamu's claims of hypoglycemia every four hours between full feedings, or his practice of scooping up buffet "extras" into his gunpowder satchel for a midnight feeding.

Of course, when you think about it, you know there had to be a Shamu look-alike in Washington's Delaware crossing party. If we see them in every ballpark, you know that they were also on every battlefield as well. On the other hand, if Shamu had been born 200 years earlier, I'm not sure if he would have been a rebel or a Redcoat -- it probably would have depended on who was winning at the time. If Sir Charles was a Redcoat, I picture him in full British dress as a cross between famed English actor Charles Laughton and the lovable Sergeant Schultz from *Hogan's Heroes*.

I apologize for my wild digressions. Feel free to get back to what really matters -- the next episode of *The Simpsons* starts in about ten minutes.

OG NOT HAPPY

Loved Possum's hilarious reference to the old *SNL* Caveman Lawyer schtik, getting in a good dig at me for my well-chronicled computer problems this season. Cheryl seemed to find it entirely on the mark, darn it. And while technology does indeed frighten me, I swear that I did in fact hit the correct button to promote Santana, Davis, Willis, Williams, Suppan and Bonderman to my major leagues, and that it was a Yahoo! computer program glitch that deprived my starting lineup of 114 points on that terrible Tuesday night a week ago. With all due respect to Tom, *these* are the times that try men's souls.

WRAP-UP

Great work on your newsletter last week, Possum, really enjoyed it.

Next week, just what you all have been waiting for, a special edition of *The Bellyflop*, in which Underbelly will amuse and delight us on such varied topics as Brit Hume, Howardgate, and the dangers of All Terrain Vehicles. Like you, I can't wait.

Skipper