



# From the Bullpen

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## BLUES CRUISE

Is 11 the number? By that, I mean is it every eleven years that lightning strikes in the exact same spot, according to well-accepted scientific principles? (Or better yet, according to Wikipedia?)

If so, we can now make sense of the Blues' 2008 HSL season, since it closely mirrors the 1997 HSL campaign in which Stretch and his Blues caught lightning in a bottle and delivered a Joan Crawford backhand to the rest of the league participants. Those of you who were around for that campaign will remember that, like this year, McJester (then known as McBlunder) picked a rather vanilla team on Draft Day '97, watched them cruise along near the top for a spell, and then saw his team blast off like they were at Cape Canaveral headed for Mars. Now, eleven seasons later, we are witnessing a second version of the same phenomena.

This is not a knock on McJester, not in the slightest. However, before he gets his Lordly leotards bunched up in a wad, I had best explain.

In this age of uncertainty that we live and manage in, in which no major league player can be counted upon to have consecutive outstanding seasons, it would seem that Lady Luck is playing more and more of a part in determining one's managerial success on any given Draft Day. And if this Cup was still primarily won and lost on Draft Day, then we could chalk up all of Stretch's good fortune this season to good fortune. But such is not the case, and we have to give credit where credit is due. The truth of the matter is that the most important criteria for success in the Hot Stove League in current times is the ability to make bold, swift, decisive moves in the free agent market, and Stretch has demonstrated that ability in spades in this 2008 season by snapping up some of his top players (Cliff Lee, Ryan Ludwick, Evan Longoria, Matt Stairs) from the very same free agent pool that all of the rest of us were swimming in at the same time. You snooze, you lose.

In any event, with 17 weeks of play in the jar and only about one-third of the season left to be played, Stretch's lead on the field of 600+ points appears impregnable. Way to go, Blues.

### STANDINGS AFTER 17 WEEKS

1.	Blues	8501.8
2.	Cubs	7906.3
3.	Monarchs	7769.1
4.	Highlanders	7721.6
5.	Wahoos	7616.8
6.	Bears	7551.5
7.	Bronx Bombers	7325.2
8.	Chiefs	7306.3

9.	Skipjacks	7268.3
10.	Redbirds	6888.2
11.	Senators	6848.1
12.	Tigers	6673.5
13.	Tribe	6515.9

Top hitters/pitchers in the Hot Stove League for the first 17 weeks of the season:

#### HITTERS

1.	Lance Berkman	Tribe	531.5
2.	Ian Kinsler	Highlanders	501.2
3.	David Wright	Monarchs	481.8
4.	Chase Utley	Bears	473.7
5.	Hanley Ramirez	Tribe	469.0

#### PITCHERS

1.	Cliff Lee	Blues	506.0
2.	Dan Heran	Blues	492.0
3.	Tim Lincecum	Chiefs	490.0
4.	Roy Halladay	Monarchs	484.5
5.	Brandon Webb	Cubs	466.0

(One wonders how the Tribe can have the No. 1 and No. 5 hitters, and still be in the cellar. No small feat that.)

#### WHO'S HOT

Below are the top five hitters and pitchers during Week 17 of the Hot Stove League season:

#### HITTERS

1.	Connor Jackson	Monarchs	58.0
2.	Ryan Braun	Highlanders	53.1
3.	Adam LaRoche	Highlanders	49.8
4.	Matt Holliday	Chiefs	47.5
5.	Jeff Baker	Tribe	45.1

#### PITCHERS

1.	Ubaldo Jimenez	Bears	63.0
2.	Paul Maholm	Chiefs	62.0
3.	Randy Johnson	Skipjacks	62.0
4.	Jon Lester	Highlanders	61.0
5.	Johan Santana	Bombers	59.0

#### O CANADA

Having just returned from a week's holiday in Seattle and British Columbia, the Ernst family returned to the Midwest rested, relaxed, well-fed, well-entertained, and, well, broke. The Spendersons, as we now call ourselves, did their part to revive the lagging Canadian economy which, by the looks of

things, is in far better shape than that of the good old USA. Even though the conversion rate is roughly one American dollar for one Canadian dollar, it seemed as if our American dollars only bought about half in British Columbia what they could purchase here in Omaha. Perhaps this is because we spent most of our time in the village of Whistler, where they are already ratcheting up their prices to get ready for the 2010 Winter Olympics, but the high prices also seemed to hold true in other stops along the way. Welcome to Canada, eh Hoser?

Apart from the sticker shock, I will say this about British Columbia: It is absolutely gorgeous. If you ever get a chance to visit the Whistler area, I highly recommend it. Sometime when I get the chance, I'll have to tell you about our Zipline adventure, which was an absolute gas.

So much more to say, but with a print deadline staring me in the face, I will cut this issue off and get back with you all later.

Thanks to Screech for his witty and worthy "Monarch Missive." We look forward to hearing from Tricko next week in his always-enlightening and amusing "Curbside Chronicles."

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