

From the Bullpen

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"THERE WILL BE BLOOD"

Brethren:

Little did we know it at the time, but these were the precise words that a grimly-visaged Judge McJester muttered to himself, first, in the mirror, and then to his deeply concerned spouse early in the morning on Draft Day 2008, as he cinched up his breeches before heading into the study to polish up his breastplate and put a final razor's edge on his trusty Excalibur. The truth be known, she had reason to be concerned, for she had only seen that steely look of determination on McJester's usually genial puss thrice before: On March 28, 1997, better known as HSL Draft Day '97; in September of 2002, as he loaded up the family in the Town and Country van for the road trip over to the Topeka Renaissance Faire; and on their wedding night. Suddenly, a cold chill came over her as she recollected the havoc wreaked by her knightly soulmate on each of said prior occasions.

"And I'll be taking no prisoners at this year's Draft, m' Lady," continued McJester. "If they see fit to give me José Reyes in the 1st round, I'll take him, I will. And if Josh Hamilton is there for me in the 6th round, I'll take him, too. And if Edison Vólquez is available in the 20th round, he'll be mine as well. And if Justin Duchscherer is still there for the taking in the 30th round, then Justin Duchscherer it'll be on the Blues' roster."

"But sayeth I, dearest Teresa. If any of those knaves seated amongst me at the Round Table, er, at the Rectangular Table, shall attempt to deny me my birthright by attempting to hornswoggle me out of my desired players, especially that perturbing little union crony SloPay, why, then, fair Teresa, by the powers granted to me by all of the gods in the heavens, and with great alacrity and dauntless courage, I swear to thee that, '**There will be blood!**'"

"I know, m' Lord, I know," sighed fair Teresa. "And I also know that trying to talk you out of it would be an utterly futile and useless waste of your lordly time, not even to mention a likely impingement upon my appointment at the hairdresser's this morning, and so I say to you, my love, yet with the fullest and most florid feelings that I am able to muster this grand morning of your destiny, that I wish you Godspeed, and pray that you pick the best damned fantasy baseball team that anyone has ever picked."

And so with the heartfelt blessing of his beloved soulmate, the fair Teresa, McJester applied a final coat of oil to his considerable metal apparel, donned his swift and courageous

stead—which only resembled a late-model, American-made gas guzzler—and headed north to do battle mid the treacheries which lay ahead in Regency Circle. Yes, there would be blood.

(To be continued ...)

All the drama and tomfoolery aside, our beloved Stretch continues to make a mockery of this league, steadfastly refusing to give any meaningful ground to his would-be pursuers. Through 19 weeks of play, the Yahoo scoreboard shows that:

BLUES LEAD CUBS BY 500+

Here are the standings through 19 weeks of competition:

1.	Blues	9439.9
2.	Cubs	8906.2
3.	Monarchs	8779.3
4.	Highlanders	8631.4
5.	Bears	8520.6
6.	Wahoos	8517.0
7.	Chiefs	8461.3
8.	Bombers	8271.6
9.	Skipjacks	8150.0
10.	Redbirds	7796.3
11.	Senators	7689.9
12.	Tigers	7664.3
13.	Tribe	7476.5

So thoroughly is McBlunder trouncing the competition that the rest of us have to look to other matters for amusement, like my recent pitched battle with Jim Ed for 10th place. I was so busy scratching and clawing my way past the **Tribe** and then the **Tigers**, that I didn't even notice that I was closing in on the **Crimson Chirpers** until my initial Fly By. The passing of each other back and forth for the next week was spirited competition and bully good fun, until my **Senators** hired Don Fehr and went on a two-day sit-down strike without telling me, bursting my prospects for continuing to climb the ladder up to and past Itchie, Mouse, and others, and threatening to vault me back into the cellar unless things get better quickly.

It is amazing to me how quickly the bottom can fall out and your team can go into a freefall when things go south for your team. You scratch and you claw and you inch your way up, promoting and demoting on a nightly basis, watching the waiver wire feverishly, doing everything that you can do to get a crampon firmly placed higher up on the mountain. Then, without warning, an avalanche from above hits you and drives you back down the mountain in 1/50th of the time that it took you to make your climb. But, hey, nobody ever said it was going to be easy. I will continue the good fight.

BASEBALL IQ

Almost every month when I receive my *Baseball Digest*, I take the baseball quiz. Since I consider myself at least somewhat informed about baseball statistics and records, I'm always deeply disappointed, if not embittered, to tally up my score and find that I usually don't even score high enough to qualify as an "average" fan. Whether I don't spend enough time thinking about the questions, am a bad test-taker, or really am dumb as a post remains debatable. In any event, when I took the baseball quiz in the most recent issue (September), I fared much better, scoring an 85, unequivocally qualifying me as a baseball expert.

Here is a [link](#) to the quiz. Give it a shot and see how you do. Here is a [link](#) to the answer sheet. You must grade your own work, and remember that the honor system is in effect. Let us know how you do.

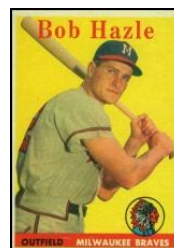
CHASING .400

In connection with Chipper Jones' flirtation with a .400 batting average earlier this season, there is a good article in *Baseball Digest* about the difficulty of batting .400 for even 100 at-bats of the season, not to mention the near-impossibility of keeping it up for a full season. According to Gerry Fraley (no relation to William), in *Baseball's Holy Grail: Hitting .400 in A Season*, hitting .400 is so difficult that only ten players with at least 100 at-bats in a season have finished that season with a batting average of .400 or over.

Can anyone guess who has the highest batting average for one season with at least 100 at-bats for that year? Is it the great "Rajah," who batted over .400 three different times in his career? Is it Ted Williams, who just wanted to be known as "the greatest hitter of all time"? Is it Ty Cobb, he of the greatest career lifetime batting average? Or how about Shoeless Joe Jackson, who hit the living crap out of the ball until they made him stop playing.

If you guessed any of the above, you would be wrong. The all-time single-season batting mark for players with at least 100 at-bats belongs to a pitcher, the great Walter Johnson, who in 1925 sported a batting average of .433 in 107 plate appearances. With that kind of prowess at the plate, you have to wonder why he only had 107 plate appearances. Remarkable.

One more thing, who, you might ask, was the last major league player to bat over .400 with at least 100 plate appearances? So glad you asked. That distinction belongs to none other than Bob "Hurricane" Hazle, who batted .403 in his 155 plate appearances in 1957 for the Milwaukee Braves. Even though, like me, you have probably never even heard of Bob Hazle, it's a fact. As the Old Professor used to like to say, "You kin look it up."



FEATURE BALLPARK: CHENEY STADIUM

During our recent family summer vacation to Seattle and British Columbia, the boys and I headed over to Tacoma to catch a Triple-A minor league game between the Tacoma Rainiers and the Tucson Sidewinders. Even though the hometown Rainiers, farm club to the Seattle Mariners, took it on the chin by a score of 4-1 at the hands of the Diamondbacks' top farm club, it was a great afternoon to see a game, in a nice old PCL ballpark.



Cheney Field was built in 1959-60 for \$940,000 in three months and fourteen days, the brainchild of local Tacoma businessmen Ben Cheney and Clay Huntington (in fact, a life-size statue of Mr. Cheney is actually seated in a stadium chair behind home plate). The first Tacoma minor league team was affiliated with the San Francisco Giants just down the coast to the south, and the first Giants pitcher to win a game at Cheney Stadium was Hall of Famer Juan Marichal. Some of the other famous alumni of the Tacoma farm teams include: Matty and Jesus Alou; Jay Buhner; Bobby Cox; Lee Elia; Junior Griffey; Jim Ray Hart; Scott Krause; Jamie Moyer; Manny Mota; and A-Rod.



Although a very fine place to watch a baseball game, Cheney Stadium is not a jaw-dropper by any stretch of the imagination, in part because the ballpark is not situated in such a way as to provide a great view of Mt. Ranier. If this ballpark was being constructed today, there is little doubt that it would be laid out differently, without as much concern about keeping with tradition in the way that the batter's box and pitcher's mound line up directionally.

It is always interesting to see which former major league players are playing at Triple-A these days, either on the way down, on rehab assignment, or caught in the up-and-down mode. In this category, we saw Jeff Salazar, Craig Wilson, Victor Diaz and Jorge Sosa. It is also fun to get a look at the up-and-comers, the future stars of the major league game, if

things go well. In this category we saw Tug Hulett, son of former major leaguer Tim Hulett, who is now up with the parent club; and Jamie D. Antona, a 3rd-sacker who was batting in the high .300s when we saw him, and appears to have all of the tools to be a successful major leaguer.



Although not a permanent part of the ballpark, one of my favorite features of Cheney Stadium was the location of the two bullpens, seemingly only 20 or 30 feet past the first and third base bags on either side, where the inactive bullpen pitchers sit in plastic lawn chairs, protecting the bullpen pitcher and catcher from a batted or overthrown ball, but so close to the action that it almost seemed like they were at a softball game at the company picnic.

RHUBARB

No report on a ballpark would be complete without mention of McJester's favorite feature, the mascot, which in this case was also my son Will's favorite feature. Yes, that lovable soft-skinned moose who goes by the name of Rhubarb is a cutup and mischief maker of the highest order. His signature "caper" is to sneak out onto the playing field in between innings, to the tune of Henry Mancini's "The Pink Panther" theme song, to furtively reach his hand—or I guess paw—into the unsuspecting umpire's ball bag to grab a game ball, and then to toss it up into the stands to some gleeful youth to the delight of everyone; and then do the same thing all over again two more times. You have to love Rhubarb.



And lastly, I would be remiss if I failed to mention that this is the only baseball park I have ever attended in which the crowd has been led in the singing of the "SpongeBob SquarePants" theme song, again by the delightful mascot Rhubarb. This was Joe's favorite feature of the game.

MADDUX REPORT

For those of you who aren't paying attention, Greg Maddux has now won all three of his last three starts, raising his season record to 6-8 and lifting his career wins total to 353. Only 1 more win to catch the Rocket, which will be a victory for "clean" ballplayers everywhere.

101 BASEBALL PLACES

While at the bookstore recently, I saw a new baseball book entitled "101 Baseball Places to See Before You Die." In my cursory review of the table of contents, I saw that there were many places on the list that have been (or will be) visited by the men of the Hot Stove League, including:

Yankee Stadium
Fenway Park

Wrigley Field
Tiger Stadium
The National Baseball Hall of Fame
Rosenblatt Stadium
Mickey Mantle's restaurant in New York City

One of these days I will scan in the entire list and provide you with a link to it, and we can continue checking them off on future HSL trips and escapades.

LAST WEEK, NEXT WEEK

Plaudits to Tricky for his outstanding issue of the Curbside Chronicles last week, which literally made me laugh until I cried, particularly the part about SloPay forcing Underbelly to get turked and then tasered. Great stuff, up and down.

For next week, we look forward to hearing from Possum in his long-awaited and much-anticipated Special Edition of 'Hoo-Crap.

That's it for this week, boys. In the immortal words of Slim Whitman,

All my best,

Skipper