



From the Bullpen

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2008 Season

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Brethren:

DRAFT DAY, SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2008

Less than a month remains before the holiest day on the HSL calendar, our annual player draft, scheduled for Saturday, March 29, at 1 p.m. sharp at the Pansing Hogan Ernst & Bachman Rumpus Room. Please plan to be present in order to make your first selection by 1 p.m. Big Guy promises to have finalized any and all rule changes well in advance of that date, assuming that his hit contract on Possum succeeds in a timely manner.

Time to start buying every scrap of information being published about the best middle relievers for the 2008 season, which will ensure success for your team. I predict a run on middle relievers at about midway through the first round.

THE TRIP

The Trip is a go for June 7-9. If you have not already made your plane reservations, please do so immediately. More details to follow, but activities promise to include at least one game at brand spanking new Nationals stadium, and possibly a side junket to the Big Apple for a game at Yankee Stadium. Stay tuned.

TERROR ON FLIGHT 799

Earlier this week on Tuesday morning, I returned from Phoenix after a short jaunt there for a deposition, armed with some work to get done and lots of good reading material for the peaceful two and a half hour flight home. Or so I thought.

The day began nicely enough as I enjoyed a beautiful 70-degree-plus morning in the Valley of the Sun before heading to the airport. Once at my gate, however, things began taking a turn for the worse. I learned there that our flight was completely full, and armed with a B42 slot for my Southwest Airlines flight, I figured I was looking at a middle seat. However, once on board, I spotted an open aisle seat in Row 9, which even had room for my carry-on gear in the bin above. I took my seat, grabbed my reading material, and braced myself to see who would be sitting next to me in the middle seat, between myself and the kindly octogenarian woman from Council Bluffs (we'll call her Gladys).

I held my breath and muttered a silent prayer as the body double of Andre the Giant boarded the plane and shot a glance over at the seat next to me. To my great relief, at least temporarily, Andre II blew right past our aisle and found a spot near the rear of the plane. Shortly after this close call,

a tiny little fellow poked his head in and asked if the middle seat was taken, and upon learning that it was not, took it.

I sensed that I might be in for a problem when Bill immediately flipped open his phone and began showing off pictures of his Jack Russell terrier and prized poodle to Gladys, chatting her up and going on and on about how much he missed his “boys” and how much his “boys” missed him. He offered up that his “roommate” had been keeping them happy while he was in Phoenix on vacation, but that it was time for him to get home and take care of his children.

The situation escalated when Bill started in on some new subject with Gladys, she of the window seat, to which she responded by rolling her entire body clockwise into the window and slumping against it, cleverly feigning sleep to get Bill off the scent. That left only me, and unfortunately, I wasn't tired, had stuff I wanted to read, and thereby made the mistake of not joining Gladys in a state of feigned somnolence.

My relationship with Bill began as I was scanning through a Phoenix area real estate magazine that I picked up at the airport, looking for possible real estate bargains in Itchie's snowbird neighborhood. I swear on the beard of Zeus that Bill had a comment on each and every property on each and every page of the magazine, in response to which I politely nodded but said nothing, fearful of encouraging lengthy discourse. After about five minutes of this invasion of my privacy, I made a tactical decision to cede ownership of the magazine to Bill so that he could satisfy his curiosity without continuing to bug me, fervently hoping that this would keep him occupied and quiet for a measure of time. Wrong. Bill instead graciously thanked me for the magazine, tucked it into the seat pocket in front of him, and promised to scour it for bargains when he returned home to Lincoln. And the yammering continued.

For the next two hours, as I tried to demonstrate great concentration and focus on the reading materials perched in front of me, and without a mote of solicitation or a glint of encouragement, I learned more about Bill and his life than I know about most of you. By way of example, and by no means in any attempt to be exhaustive, I now know all of the following about Bill my flying partner:

- He is 45 years old, and was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska.
- His grandfather started the company business, a manufacturing facility in Lincoln, which provided their family with an upper middle class lifestyle. Bill, however, thumbed his nose at getting involved in the family business, dropped out of school at age 16, and moved to Hawaii.
- While his brother Bruce and his sisters Cheryl and Cindy grew in favor with their father, he became the outcast of the family, getting involved in a spiraling downward lifestyle of drugs and alcohol, culminating in his eventual status as a homeless person living in Phoenix for many years.
- Bill has had a number of run-ins with the constabulary and other authorities, resulting in being charged with a number of different crimes. After commenting more than once that he was “taking the 5th” on what he had been charged with – and being asked by no one to expound on the subject -- Bill, in his stream-of-consciousness mode of communicating, owned up to numerous and sundry felonies, but nothing “serious,” which were making it difficult for him to become reengaged in society.
- He has been clean and sober for nine years.

- He cashed in one-third of his half-million dollar trust fund to buy a house in Omaha, but the home has to be owned in the name of the trust, not in his name. Because of this, he cannot even get a damned credit card, for which he partially blames the internet.
- His sister married a very wealthy guy from Omaha, so she doesn't even need her trust fund. His brother Bruce, the family "control freak," got his money outright because his father thought he was responsible enough that he did not need a trust.
- He owns a percent of the railroad depot in downtown Lincoln, and he thinks that he stands to make a fortune if they ever get around to tearing it down and building a facility like the Qwest Center there. The rest of the family tried to buy out his stake in this for \$7,000, but he would have none of this.
- A buddy of his who owned a rundown body shop in Lincoln got a million dollars because they needed it for some Antelope Parkway project. Because of this, he figures that his stake in the railroad station must be worth at least as much.
- He will be taking a hot bath when he gets home, because he much prefers these to showers.
- He has a nice little pick-up-and-delivery business which he operates out of his home in Lincoln. However, he hasn't had a lick of business during the wintertime, which is one of the reasons why he went down to Phoenix to play a couple of rounds of golf. He is planning on doing some more advertising so that his business will pick up.

In addition to all of this personal information about himself, Bill was kind enough to share his knowledge about all kinds of different areas of interest, such as:

- The City of Lincoln has more than "double dipped" during the past ten years, going from a population of 120,000 to more than 300,000. Because of this, he theorizes, the rental market in Lincoln stinks right now.
- The very end portions of the wings on the plane, the parts that bend up and down, not only help to slow the plane down on landing, but also to stabilize it against lateral wind shear.
- One of the best movies ever made stars Morgan Freeman and Coo Noo (phonetic, as pronounced) Reeves, in which a secret band of CIA agents try to exploit a brilliant young science student to develop energy, resulting in the destruction of eight square city blocks of the City of Chicago. Although Bill could not remember the name of this fascinating movie, he was able to recall certain scenes in agonizing detail, including the oft-mentioned destruction of a good deal of Chicago.
- People with felonies on their record cannot qualify for school loans, even though the government, according to Bill, gives blacks and Mexicans all the money they want without ever requiring them to repay the loans.

I could go on and on, as did Bill, but I won't. Suffice it to say that I made a strategic mistake early on in our conversation when I began feeling guilty about merely nodding in response to Bill's commentaries, and actually began muttering a few sounds. As Bill's expositives grew more animated and rhetorical, and as I felt his eyes burning holes in the side of my right cheek as he waited for responses, I began throwing in an occasional "yup," a now-and-again "wow," and even a "how about that?" to demonstrate my interest.

Every man has to know his limits. After almost two hours of this nonsense, I finally reached my breaking point. I didn't know what else to do, but I knew I couldn't take it anymore, and so I abruptly got out of my seat and headed to the rear of the aircraft for the bathroom and a few minutes of solitude. I reviewed my options: (1) staying in the bathroom for the rest of the flight; (2) paying someone to switch seats with me; (3) returning to my seat and listening to Bill yammer on for the final half hour of the flight; and (4) returning to my seat and immediately feigning sleep. I chose option 4.

As soon as I returned to my seat, I immediately rebuckled and then closed my eyes and tipped my head to the left just so in my best effort to fake slumber. As Bill resumed his snappy patter, I remained steadfastly silent and kept my eyes closed, which quieted Bill at last. For a moment. I then had this sense of Bill's body lurking out around me, and I suddenly realized that he was trying to engage the woman across the aisle and just a bit behind me in conversation. I snuck a quick peek with my aisle-side eye, the left one, and saw her make a masterful head-roll to her left and close her eyes in a perfectly-timed maneuver to terminate Bill's attempt to reach across the aisle for a new chat-line. Well done, m'lady, well done.

The final 15 or 20 minutes of our flight was completed in relative blissful silence, as Row No. 9 on Flight 799, save one, lay reposed in faux slumber. After the plane landed, and after we disembarked for the terminal, I bade Bill adieu, at first refusing to acknowledge his request for my name (so as to keep in touch, presumably), and then yielding to pressure, I again said my goodbyes after disclosing my true identity: Robert W. Hurlbut of Lincoln, Nebraska. So good luck with that, Bob.



"...but the most amazing thing to me
is that we are in the sky,
and yet...we're not pie!...hehehe, yessss..."

SPOTTED IN PHOENIX

As I was driving from the airport in Phoenix to my nearby hotel, I came across a barbecue joint by the name of *Honey Bear's Barbecue* (a Floyd Rayford post-baseball enterprise, perhaps?), where the

written motto, and I kid you not, is "*You don't need no teeth to eat our meat.*" I will leave it to you to try to figure out the demographics of this ad campaign's target audience.

IN CLOSING

That's all for now, men. See you on the 29th for **DRAFT DAY**, if not before.

Skipper