



From the Bullpen

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My Brothers from different Mothers:

Sorry for the delay in posting this edition of *From the Bullpen*, but I have been shellshocked for the past week since returning from our Spring Break vacation to Cabo and finding my beloved Senators team at the bottom of the compost pile, after having left our fair berg with my boys nicely positioned in second place in the standings. However, I have learned my lesson: I will never again put my family ahead of my fantasy league baseball team.

SKIP'S PICKS

I realize that I have prepared an elaborate evaluation of the HSL Draft annually for about the last twenty-odd years, generally referred to as "Skipper's Picks 'N' Pans," and I fully intended to do the same thing again this year while getting in a little R&R in Cabo, but I was too darned busy relaxing to actually get anything worthwhile on paper. Oh, my intentions were honorable, and I fully planned to put together a whimsical little piece about each of your teams picked on Draft Day, using movie titles and clever clichés and whatnot (I hate it when other people use "whatnot" to cover for a lack of creativity and intelligence, but I've decided it's entirely acceptable for me to do so). However, once on holiday, I soon realized that this was going to demand far too much cerebral activity, and furthermore, that it would drastically cut into my drinking time at the resort swim-up pool bars.

The bottom line for you boys is that you will have to do without my glib, pithy, often side-splitting observations in the "Pans" part of the equation, at least for this year, but I am still feeling generous enough to provide you with my predicted Order of Finish for 2008. Hence, please find immediately hereinbelow "Skip's Picks, Sans Pans":

Predicted Order of Finish	Team	Owner	Comments
1.	Cubs	Shamu	For a second year in a row, Shamu drafted a terrific team. I'm not sure what's gotten into him. Based on general appearances on Draft Day, he may owe it all to ample nutrition. Back to back.
2.	Monarchs	Screech	Hard to believe that anyone would use " Monarchs " and "serious contender" in the same sentence, but alas, Steinbrenner Jr. is coming of age. Wonder if he will share his winnings with

Skeezix?

3. **Chiefs** Baby Trum-
 petfish If I had 50 hours a week to devote to managing my team, I'd have a shot at finishing in the money, too. B.T. is back: for goooooood! Nice team, Scooter.
4. **Redbirds** Tirebiter Drafting seven different Tigers seemed like a good idea at the time, but not now. If they catch fire and begin playing as anticipated, the fortunes of Jim Ed's team will also rise accordingly. Not a title team, but not bad.
5. **Highlanders** Curby An excellent team that is currently in the deep freeze. Assuming a late spring thaw, Mitch's troops will be right in the thick of things.
6. **Bears** SloPay Even with Verlander sucking gas, this team is squarely in contention. If some of Denny's underperformers start performing, look out for this squad.
7. **Tigers** Big Guy The most Asian team ever drafted in this league, but a solid group with outstanding pitching. If he gets some Ying to go with his Yang, Big Guy could even ride this Orient Express into the Upper Division.
8. **Tribe** U-belly The best team that Bob has picked in 20 years, but subject to U-Baldo's annual overmanipulation and general mismanagement. With luck and good health, this team could even float up to the surface of the Lower Division.
9. **Senators** Skipper I know, I know, I know. This team is currently dead last and going the wrong direction fast. But now that Big Daddy's back in town, and if my team's collective batting average ever gets over the Mendoza Line, this squad has some real potential—like avoiding last place, for instance.
10. **Skipjacks** Itchie Although he picked a crappy outfit and is much more interested in getting a snootful than in managing this dung heap of a team, the Itcher by sheer luck alone will be able to keep out of last place this season. But barely.
11. **Wahoos** Possum This is a bad team. Even if Big Poppy's bat heats up, this team is going nowhere, fast. Possum can no longer be taken as a serious contender in this league. Eleventh place may be generous.
12. **Bombers** Mouse God bless you again, Mouse, for taking Prince

Fielder in the 1st, keeping me from having to make that decision. I like Jake Peavy quite a lot right now, thank you very much. But where were you in the 2nd when I needed you to draft C.C. Sabathia? Sorry, Mouse. I want you to win this thing one of these years, but this isn't the year.

13. **Blues** McBlunder I had no idea that this team was so bad when Stretch drafted it back on March 29, but they are. Welcome to Club 13, Jon! Sorry about that, but better you than me.

So there you have it, boys, Skipper's picks for 2008.

**BOOK REPORT:
*HOW LIFE IMITATES THE WORLD SERIES***

I just finished reading another Tom Boswell classic, entitled *How Life Imitates the World Series*. I was a huge Boswell fan before (having previously twice read *Why Time Begins on Opening Day*, and numerous and sundry other Boswell articles on baseball), but after having finished this book, I am convinced that Bos is the best contemporary baseball writer, better even than Roger Kahn, whose best work is clearly behind him, and Roger Angell, who has not been heard from much on the subject of baseball, lately.

If you haven't read this classic collection of Boswell's best, do yourself a huge favor and buy it. I so enjoyed reading it on our trip to Cabo, it felt like the book, or Boswell, or both, had become a good friend. That may sound a bit strange, but it's true.

Since he writes for the Baltimore Sun, Boswell has written a lot about his beloved Orioles and their cantankerous former manager, the Earl of Baltimore, shown below with two of his lifelong friends.



Allow me to share with you a few of my favorite excerpts about Weaver from this book:

It is perhaps Weaver's dominant managerial characteristic that his players seldom think of him in terms of love or hate. Weaver is so candid, yet somehow stays so naturally aloof, that his players regard him not with affection or loathing, but with a strong professional respect and a tepid, unemotional loyalty. "We're all on speaking terms," says Weaver. Other managers would shudder at such tenuous relationships.

With Weaver, the deep lines, the lines of character that run to the core, are all rooted in his 20-year purgatory in the bush leagues. "You learn the lesson the first day in class D . . . you're always going to be a rotten bastard, or in my case, a rotten little bastard, as long as you manage," he says. "That's the rule. To keep your job, you fire others or bench them or trade them. You have to do the thinking for 25 guys, and you can't be too close to any of them."

Weaver's confidence in his own decisions is his trademark. He once watched Mike Cuellar get knocked out early in 13 consecutive starts, before finally removing him from the rotation. Sadly, Weaver said, "I gave Mike Cuellar more chances than my first wife."

There's a great chapter in *How Life Imitates the World Series* about Thurman Munson called Captain Bad Body, which is laugh-out-loud good reading. I share with you parts of it:

Thurman Munson, who died at 32 in a crash while piloting his private airplane, cultivated a misunderstanding with the world at large, just as he nurtured a powerful camaraderie with those he loved—his teammates and his family.

Small talk, which might only bore others, infuriated Munson. Good manners he disdained as weakness or fraud. Intransigence—take me or leave me—he had raised to a standard of personal integrity. Introduced to a stranger, he might begin, "Where'd you get that ugly shirt?" It was his method for finding his social bearing quickly. "The same place you got that ugly face," was always a proper answer.

. . . .

"I seem to attract dirt," Munson once said with pride. "The game was only ten pitches old tonight and I was filthier than anyone else all night." To those who appreciated him, Munson was a sweathog, who, beneath the tools of ignorance, was the essence of pride and rude wit.

. . . .

At the plate, where he was a .300 hitter five times, batted .339 in three playoffs and .373 in three Series, Munson took his sweet time, digging in his back foot defiantly, adjusting his batting glove interminably, twisting the last kink out of his fidgety neck, then pawing, yank-

ing and nodding until he was absolutely ready. His message to the pitcher was evident to the entire stadium: "When I get all of this finished, you're in trouble."

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On the bases, Munson revealed the all-sport athlete who was concealed under shinguards and chest protectors as he dashed first-to-third as though his britches were on fire, ending his digging, stumbling dashes with a variety of wildly improvisational slides that left him deliciously filthy.

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"Munson always said, 'How's it going, kid?' to rookies, and 'How's the family?' to the veterans when he came to the plate," Mark Belanger said. "One day, I got furious and said, 'Thurman, we all know what you're doing. You're trying to distract me and I'm hitting .190. Just leave me the hell alone. Just shut up when I'm up here or I'll hit you with my bat.'

"He got this terrible hurt expression and said, 'Jeez, Blade, I didn't know you felt that strongly. I swear I'll never say another word to you.'"

On his next at-bat, Belanger was all ready to swing when the high-pitched penetrating voice behind him said, "How's the family, Blade?"

. . . .

Ballplayers do not leave epitaphs, only memories and friends. Munson, the man who may have been baseball's ideal teammate, was rich in both.

Beautiful stuff. If any of you want to borrow my copy of this book, let me know and I will be happy to share it with you.

**THE PEOPLE vs. THE CHICKEN:
Ohio Appeals Court cries, "FOWL!"**

We haven't heard from Stretch for a while about his wrong-headed and ill-fated lawsuit against the San Diego Chicken, but in the event that he is considering a revival of that litigation, or the taking on of any similar cases in the future, I have some important information for him. As I was recently reading one of my legal periodicals, I saw a blurb about a remarkably similar lawsuit filed in Dayton, Ohio, dealing with an injury sustained by one Roxane Harting at a baseball game on June 16, 2004, between the Dragons and the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers at Fifth Third Field in downtown Dayton. As indicated in the opinion of the Court of Appeals of Ohio, Second District, for the particular game in question, the hometown Dragons contracted for the services of, yes, you guessed it, the famous San Diego Chicken, the same fowl defendant who was the target of Stretch's former client.

Back at the game, it appears that Ms. Harting was seated with her boyfriend, Chet Davis, together with his family, along the third base line, directly behind the dugout in the front row. During the bottom of the sixth inning, a player for the Dragons hit a line drive foul ball into the stands along the third base line, striking Ms. Harting in the head and knocking her unconscious. Her injuries resulted in Ms. Harting being transported by ambulance to Miami Valley Hospital. Moving swiftly, Ms. Harting's ambulance-chasing attorney shortly thereafter filed a lawsuit against the Dragons and the Chicken, alleging personal injuries sustained as a result of her attendance at the baseball game. Ms. Harting cleverly argued through her sleazeball lawyer that the Chicken, who was hired to entertain the crowd during the baseball game, constituted an "intervening cause" outside the normal course of the game, which negated her legal duty of assumed risk in regard to accepting dangers associated with the game. Ms. Harting further contended that the defendants were negligent in conducting "a form of entertainment other than that of baseball," and in failing to provide additional safety measures and precautions, all of which resulted in her injuries.

From a summary judgment against her, Ms. Harting's tassle-shoed mouthpiece filed her appeal. In rejecting his argument that his client was relieved from the assumption of any inherent risk associated with the game, the Court of Appeals responded with the following common sense observation:

This argument ignores the fact that team mascots and their antics are common phenomena and the mascots are normally present during the entire course of the game. In many cases, the team mascots are more popular than the team itself. The fact that the Chicken appeared while the game was being played does not absolve Harting from the duty to protect herself from the ordinary risks inherent in the sport.

Given the prevalence of costumed team mascots at sporting events such as baseball, football or basketball games, it is perfectly reasonable for a spectator at one of these games to expect to observe those mascots during the normal course of the game. The fact that Harting was allegedly distracted by the Chicken during the bottom of the sixth inning when she was struck by the foul ball did not negate her duty to pay attention to the action taking place on the field.

Amen. For a review of the Court's full opinion in this case, I provide the following [link](#).

EXTRA INNINGS

- ◇ As long as we're on the subject of mascots (I'll take Baseball Mascots for \$500, Alex), I'm already girding myself for McBlunder's reaction when he sees the brand new presidential trio of mascots at Nationals Park in June. At some point along about the third inning of Friday night's game, three-quarters of the Mt. Rushmore Titans will emerge from an outfield gate and "race" each other around the perimeter of the field, to the great delight of many and the immeasurable infuriation of others, perhaps including one of our own. Does anybody want to make book on whether Stretch pops his cork and laces together a string of expletive-laced remarks at this lovable triumvirate, much as happened at Petco Park in '05? Or will Jon have his scoutmaster mountie hat on (talk about a good visual) that evening, and take it all in as good fun, remembering the parting words from his anger management counselor: *"I'm okay, you're okay, we're okay, Stretch!"*? You all know that I'm not a gambling man, but if I was, I'd put it at about 70/30.

- ◇ I can't believe how quickly I find myself 500 points out of 1st place. I really was in 2nd when we left for Cabo, and dropped to 13th in just over a week, even though I thought I was managing my team in abstentia to at least some degree. In these trying times for my baseball team, I find myself turning to weapons of mass destruction and religious fanaticism for comfort, so if you see me and Pope Benedict tooling around in his Pope-mobile, wielding AK-47s, I trust you will understand.
- ◇ I direct this mostly at SloPay, but it also applies to a few others among you who frequent the Message Board: **Ixnay on the team name puns, already!** They are becoming un-Bearable. Hit the paws, please! For crying out loud, this isn't *American Idol, Hee-Haw Edition*.
- ◇ My decision this spring to sign up for Major League's Extra Innings Baseball Package was absolutely the third best decision I have ever made in my life. Last night I was able to switch back and forth between the Padres-Rockies game (to catch Peavy's masterpiece), the Mets and Nationals' 13-inning marathon, and the Mariners-Oakland As matchup, in which Carlos Silva garnered a nice win for my squad. For any of you who have not yet made this move, I say to you now, **make it**. You will be glad that you did.
- ◇ I signed up for XM radio last season so I could pick up more baseball games on the radio in my car, a very good decision indeed. An added bonus to hearing the games at night is to be able to listen to Charlie Steiner each and every day on MLB Home Plate, which is a work of beauty. Charlie has about the best job in the whole word—getting paid plenty for talking about baseball.

GUEST WRITING SCHEDULE

Within the next week, we will post the schedule for guest authors' submissions to From the Bullpen. As always, Itchie has the honor of memorializing our league Trip, so we will pencil him in for June 9. Please check back this coming weekend on the website to note your writing assign.

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That's all for now.

Skipper