



From the Bullpen

Official Publication of
The Nebraska Hot Stove League
Eastern Nebraska Div.
Omaha, Nebraska

2008 Season

Edition No. 7

April 25, 2008

WEEK 4: CUBS CRUISING

Men:

As we near the end of the fourth week of play during the 2008 season, the defending champion West Des Moines **Cubs** find themselves with a comfortable, although not yet commanding, lead on the field. As this issue of *From the Bullpen* goes to press, the **Cubs** are enjoying a 100.6-point lead (1544.10 to 1443.50) over the 2nd place Millard **Monarchs**, with the 3rd place Lincoln **Chiefs** and five other squads close behind.

The complete standings through three weeks of play, through last Sunday night, are as follows:

WEEK 3 STANDINGS

1.	Cubs	1544.10
2.	Monarchs	1443.50
3.	Chiefs	1342.20
4.	Tribe	1337.50
5.	Bears	1329.00
6.	Blues	1319.80
7.	Wahoos	1300.80
8.	Redbirds	1270.10
9.	Bombers	1205.80
10.	Tigers	1201.00
11.	Highlanders	1098.20
12.	Skipjacks	1076.70
13.	Senators	1043.00

Top Drafted Hitter to Date:
Top Drafted Pitcher to Date:
Top Non-drafted Hitter:
Top Non-drafted Pitcher:

Chase Utley, Bears, 157.10 points
Brandon Webb, Cubs, 146.00
Jacoby Ellsbury, Tribe, 89.1
Cliff (The Stiff) Lee, Blues, 160.0

GUEST AUTHOR RESPONSIBILITY

As indicated on our home page, responsibilities for guest articles from each of you has now been assigned. Right now, immediately, without attempting even a single other task, get out your Blackberries, your Palm Pilots, your iPods, your Wiis, or in some cases, your crayons and butcher block pa-

per, and enter indelibly the week of your responsibility and your specific deadline for transmitting your witty ditty to Linda (send to either lindak@pheblaw.com or to lkoftan@cox.net):

Week No.	Author	Publication	Due Date
Week 5	Underbelly	The Bellyflop	April 30
Week 6	Big Guy	The Tiger's Tale	May 7
Week 7	Mouse	The Mousetrap	May 14
Week 8	McBlunder	The 7th Inning Stretch	May 21
Week 9	SloPay	The Bear Facts	May 28
Week 10	B.T.	From the Reservation	June 4
Week 11	Itchie	The Jiggernaut	June 11
Week 13	Shamu	The Whale's Tale	June 25
Week 15	Jim Ed	The Crimson Chirper	July 9
Week 17	Screech	Butterfly Blessings	July 23
Week 19	Curbie	Curbside Chronicles	August 6
Week 21	Possum	Hoo Crap	August 20
Week 22	Skipper	From the Bullpen	September 3

If for some acceptable reason you believe that you will not be able to fulfill your commitment during your assigned week, you may attempt to find a fellow unpublished guest author who might be willing to swap deadline dates with you. Examples of **acceptable conflicts** are: Your own demise or the death of a first-degree relative; occupancy in an intensive care unit; concurrent residency at the Valley of Hope Addiction Treatment Center; or recent blunt trauma. **Unacceptable excuses:** nonlife-threatening injuries; temporary discombobulation; child has one sporting event during same calendar month; cat got your tongue; biorhythms disrupted; feng shui on fritz; bad hair day.

Can't wait to hear from each and every one of you. Happy writing.

ANOTHER DAMNED BOOK REPORT: *The Echoing Green*

In addition to my savory experience with *How Life Imitates the World Series* during our recent holiday to Cabo, I also finished up a baseball book that I started way back last fall but then got bogged down on and set aside for a spell. The book, titled *The Echoing Green*, authored by Joshua Prager and published by Pantheon in 2006, is arguably the definitive work on *The Shot Heard Round the World*, Bobby Thomson's epic home run off Ralph Branca in the 1-game playoff between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants for the National League pennant on October 3, 1951. The premise of the book is that Bobby Thomson received a stolen sign from a bullpen catcher named Sal Yvars that Branca was about to deliver an 0-1 fastball, and that Thomson was able to jump all over the pitch and send it on a linear path over the left field fence and into the second row of seats for the game-winning home run. According to the book, Yvars received the stolen sign via telegraph wire from Giants assistant coach Herman Franks, who was sitting in the clubhouse located just past the centerfield wall at the Polo Grounds, home of the Giants, after Franks was able to steal the sign from the Dodgers' catcher through the use of a telescope.

Echoing Green is a meticulously researched and superbly crafted book which makes a pretty compelling case for the "theory" that Thomson knew that a fastball was coming his way that fateful afternoon in October 1951. However, the author was never able to obtain an interview from one of the key alleged perpetrators, Herman Franks, and the author's conversation with Yvars on the subject produced less than a full admission of guilt. As for Prager's conversations with Thomson—the alleged benefactor of the purloined sign—he never quite owns up to taking a stolen sign and using it to his advantage during the crucial at-bat. From my own perspective, the quantum of proof established through this fine work of investigative journalism may rise to a preponderance of the evidence, but clearly does not reach the level of "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Echoing Green began as a Wall Street Journal article back in 2003, and after much favorable reaction and a suggestion from a friend, author Joshua Prager completed his exhaustive research and interviewing of the subjects and many other witnesses to allow him to expand his article into a hefty book. Although a fascinating subject, I'm not sure that it warranted quite the treatment accorded it by the author. At times the book seems a bit redundant, long-winded, and rambling. A couple of times, I found myself checking how many pages I had left to get through the book, which is usually not a good sign, but in the end the author's eloquence, coupled with a fascinating subject matter, make this read worth the while.

ST. PAUL SOJOURN

Yesterday, in between appointments in Grand Island, I made the twenty-mile drive up to St. Paul, Nebraska, to get a look at the Nebraska Baseball Hall of Fame Museum. Although I think it may have been Big Guy who previously told me that our state HOF was worth visiting, I was pleasantly surprised. My expectations were exceeded. The Nebraska HOF has undoubtedly the finest collection of baseball memorabilia relating to favored son Grover Cleveland Alexander from nearby Elba, but as well they have nice collections relating to all five of the Cornhusker State natives who are in the National Hall of Fame at Cooperstown.

U-baldo would be especially interested in visiting the Nebraska Hall since his uncle, Dick Wagner, is prominently displayed with a number of photographs and newspaper clippings. Because Wagner was a local boy who made it to the big time, they are especially proud of him there in St. Paul.

If you are ever in the neighborhood, the Nebraska Baseball Hall of Fame is definitely worth a visit. Perhaps one of these days we can organize a road trip to the area for a golf outing, a trip to the Hall, and a visit to a few of the local ale houses. Not that any of you would enjoy spending a day with your chums playing golf, talking baseball and drinking beer. Foster Brooks Thielen says he's all over this junket, although he considers the golf and baseball to be superfluous.

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That's it for this week. Get ready to hear from good old Underbelly as he scratches out his first *Bellyflop* in quite some time.

Skipper