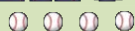


NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE



SEASON XXXVII



2020 HSL Champion
West Des Moines Cubs
Manager: Shamu

400

FROM THE BULLPEN

2021 Campaign

Edition No. 18

August 27, 2021

TRIBE SHINES, BUT TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

The top-scoring team for Week 20 was the **Tribe** with 581.4 points, and while his team has had the potential all season long, at this point in the season, it's too little, too late. Even with this blockbuster week, the **Tribe** was only able to hold onto its Upper Division, 6th place standing, and not move up to challenge for a money finish.

The second-best team for the week was the **Bums** with 556.2 points, enough to enhance their position in the standings such that with six weeks of competition remaining, their 372.9 lead over the second-place **Cubs** seems insurmountable. Having said that, we all know that Shamu is capable of a *Biblical* finish to the season, and so nobody should count his team out.

Here are the standings through Week 20, and the point totals for the week:

**HSL STANDINGS THRU WEEK 20
ENDING AUGUST 22, 2021**

Rank	Team	Points	Pts Back
1	Bums	9856.1	-
2	Cubs	9483.2	372.9
3	Saints	9393.2	462.9
4	Skipjacks	9326.8	529.3
5	Bombers	9077.7	778.4
6	Tribe	8982.8	873.3
7	Monarchs	8910.1	946.0
8	Wahoos	8902.9	953.2
9	Redbirds	8790.0	1066.1
10	Bears	8694.8	1161.3
11	Tigers	8688.2	1167.9
12	Senators	8364.3	1491.8
13	Blues	7923.6	1932.5

POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 20

Rank	Team	Wk 20
1	Tribe	581.4
2	Bums	556.2
3	Wahoos	543.4
4	Monarchs	511.4
5	Cubs	498.6
6	Bombers	481.1
7	Saints	447.4
8	Skipjacks	445.1
9	Tigers	443.1
10	Redbirds	430.7
11	Bears	424.4
12	Blues	368.9
13	Senators	355.0

Walker Buehler of the **Skipjacks** continues to lead all pitchers in the league with 657.0 points, seemingly so far ahead of the second-place Zack Wheeler (582.0) that he will finish the season atop the final pitching standings. On the hitting side of the ledger, Vladdy Jr. continues to lead the pack with 578.3 points, but Ohtani continues to remain hot and at 551.6 points, he could certainly overtake Vlad for the top spot.

It is noteworthy that the **Monarchs** have the third, fourth and fifth best hitters in the league through twenty weeks (Freddie Freeman, Marcus Semien and Matt Olson) and yet remain in the second division in the standings. When will you learn, Brother Screech, that hitting don't mean squat. Unless you don't have it, that is.

Anyway, here are the top 25 hitters and pitchers and the "Who's Hot" players in each category for the week:

TOP 25 PITCHERS

1.	Walker Buehler	Skipjacks	657.0
2.	Zack Wheeler	Wahoos	582.0
3.	Kevin Gausman	Saints	556.0
4.	Gerrit Cole	Bums	553.0
5.	Robbie Ray	Tribe	545.0
6.	Max Scherzer	Tigers	536.0
7.	Adam Wainwright	Monarchs	533.0
8.	Brandon Woodruff	Redbirds	526.0
9.	Corbin Burnes	Redbirds	522.0
10.	Freddy Peralta	Senators	495.0
11.	Charlie Morton	Cubs	491.0
12.	Julio Urías	Tigers	475.0
13.	Lance Lynn	Bums	466.0
14.	Jacob deGrom	Wahoos	465.0
15.	Joe Musgrove	Bums	463.0
16.	Lucas Giolito	Bears	455.0
17.	Germán Márquez	Tigers	454.0
18.	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	452.0
19.	Zack Greinke	Senators	448.0
20.	Carlos Rodón	Bums	440.0
21.	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	437.0
22.	Anthony DeSclafani	Bombers	433.0
23.	Marcus Stroman	Bombers	426.0
24.	Frankie Montas	Cubs	423.0
25.	Tyler Mahle	Saints	422.0

WHO'S HOT - PITCHING

1.	Gerrit Cole	Bums	60.0
2.	Logan Webb	Bums	55.0
3.	Adam Wainwright	Monarchs	54.0
4.	Vladimir Gutierrez	Bums	51.0
	Sandy Alcantara	Wahoos	51.0
6.	Touki Toussaint	Saints	49.0
7.	Marcus Stroman	Bombers	47.0
8.	Cal Quantrill	Wahoos	45.0
9.	Wade Miley	Senators	43.0
10.	Framber Valdez	Tribe	42.0
	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	42.0
12.	Max Fried	Cubs	40.0
13.	Tyler Anderson	Wahoos	39.0
14.	Carlos Hernández	Bums	38.0
15.	Triston McKenzie	Tribe	37.0
	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	37.0

WHO'S NOT - PITCHING

1.	Yusei Kikuchi	Redbirds	-16.0
2.	Alek Manoah	Bears	-11.0
	Nick Pivetta	Skipjacks	-11.0
4.	Logan Gilbert	Saints	-10.0
5.	Jaime Barria	Blues	-9.0
	Alec Mills	Skipjacks	-9.0
7.	JT Brubaker	Wahoos	-8.0
8.	Ryan Weathers	Saints	-7.0
	Dane Dunning	Skipjacks	-7.0
	Garrett Whitlock	Senators	-7.0
	Eduardo Rodriguez	Cubs	-7.0
12.	Jesús Luzardo	Saints	-6.0
	Spenser Watkins	Blues	-6.0
14.	Brandon Woodruff	Redbirds	-4.0
15.	Reid Detmers	Senators	-3.0
16.	Jon Lester	Senators	-2.0

17.	Sonny Gray	Cubs	36.0
	Madison Bumgarner	Senators	36.0
19.	Aaron Nola	Tribe	35.0
	Robbie Ray	Tribe	35.0
	Taylor Widener	Tigers	35.0
	Frankie Montas	Cubs	35.0
23.	Walker Buehler	Skipjacks	34.0
	Eli Morgan	Bears	34.0
	Patrick Corbin	Wahoos	34.0

17.	Zach Plesac	Skipjacks	-1.0
	Tyler Mahle	Saints	-1.0
	Freddy Peralta	Senators	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

1.	Vladimir Guerrero Jr.	Blues	578.3
2.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	551.6
3.	Freddie Freeman	Monarchs	520.6
4.	Marcus Semien	Monarchs	516.4
5.	Matt Olson	Monarchs	499.3
6.	Fernando Tatis Jr.	Bears	484.8
7.	Austin Riley	Bears	483.2
8.	Juan Soto	Redbirds	482.3
9.	Rafael Devers	Saints	481.9
	Jesse Winker	Bums	481.9
11.	Ozzie Albies	Senators	475.5
12.	Max Muncy	Wahoos	474.7
13.	Jose Altuve	Bums	471.9
14.	José Ramírez	Cubs	471.6
15.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	471.5
16.	Bryan Reynolds	Bears	463.9
17.	Trea Turner	Bums	463.5
18.	Jake Cronenworth	Skipjacks	459.3
19.	J.D. Martinez	Blues	458.8
20.	Bo Bichette	Skipjacks	456.6
21.	Carlos Correa	Bombers	452.2
22.	Manny Machado	Bums	449.7
	Chris Taylor	Saints	449.7
24.	Cedric Mullins	Bums	449.4
25.	Bryce Harper	Saints	442.5

WHO'S HOT - HITTING

1.	Tyler Naquin	Tribe	60.0
2.	Brandon Lowe	Tribe	52.7
3.	Freddie Freeman	Monarchs	47.3
4.	Amed Rosario	Cubs	47.1
5.	Pete Alonso	Skipjacks	45.4
6.	Luke Voit	Saints	44.8
7.	Nicky Lopez	Blues	44.6
8.	Carlos Correa	Bombers	42.1
9.	Ty France	Blues	40.9
10.	Kolten Wong	Skipjacks	40.8
11.	José Ramírez	Cubs	40.0
12.	C.J. Cron	Redbirds	39.1
13.	Odúbel Herrera	Bombers	39.0
14.	Avisaíl García	Cubs	37.5
15.	Nick Castellanos	Cubs	36.5
16.	Andrew Benintendi	Redbirds	36.3
17.	Wander Franco	Bears	35.4
18.	Juan Soto	Redbirds	34.5
	Yordan Alvarez	Tribe	34.5
20.	Jose Altuve	Bums	34.3
21.	Paul Goldschmidt	Monarchs	34.2
22.	Austin Riley	Bears	33.7
23.	Joey Votto	Tigers	33.5
24.	Daulton Varsho	Bums	33.1
25.	Christian Yelich	Saints	33.0

WHO'S NOT - HITTING

1.	Rafael Devers	Saints	-6.4
2.	Jake Fraley	Bums	-6.0
3.	Dominic Smith	Bombers	-5.9
4.	Jarred Kelenic	Skipjacks	-4.5
5.	Cody Bellinger	Blues	-3.5
6.	Gavin Lux	Blues	-3.1
7.	Lewis Brinson	Cubs	-3.0
8.	Andrew McCutchen	Redbirds	-2.5
9.	Rowdy Tellez	Wahoos	-2.2
10.	Will Smith	Blues	-1.4
11.	Austin Hays	Cubs	-0.9
12.	Buster Posey	Senators	-0.5

THE TRIP: ARLINGTON, TEXAS 2021: BEST TRIP EVER!



While Alpha Dog (aka Itchie aka Foster aka Bender aka Purveyor of Dreams) was supposed to provide a recap of the 2021 HSL Trip to Arlington, it turns out that he has been afflicted with an unidentified illness this week, and is unable to carry out his solemn duty. This mysterious illness, which is still under wraps, involves symptomology consistent with: COVID-19; the flu; the brown bottle flu; Herpes Simplex I, II, III and IV; schizophrenia; acute alcohol withdrawal; a bad tummy ache caused by too much ice cream; and gingivitis. While Alpha Dog refuses to relinquish his right to privacy and threatens to assert HIPAA violations by anyone who dares to challenge his medical standing, at least a few knowledgeable persons in the medical field believe that JT is faking all of his symptoms in order to get out of having to do an honest day's work of reporting on the HSL Trip.

So be it. With JT on the sidelines, allow a more responsible and authoritative voice to provide the following recap of the Trip:

THE DRIVE

The 2021 Trip to Arlington began with Big Guy picking up Alpha Dog and the Skipper for the drive to Lincoln to meet up with B.T. Fortunately, Skipper was in the passenger seat and provided competent navigational assistance on this drive, which assured a timely and direct route to Southeast Lincoln.¹ Once in Lincoln, the three Omahans piled into B.T.'s luxurious Mobile Sewage Treatment Van.² The drive from Lincoln to Arlington in Black Beauty was a joyful junket, filled with a cornucopia of entertaining stories about Hot Stove League Trips past, and discussions of such high-minded topics as the best lines from *My Cousin Vinny*, *Best in Show*, *Airplane* and *Naked Gun*. Oh, how the girls would have loved it!

¹ To be contrasted with Alpha Dog's epic 2010 navigational Trip blunder, and our return through Kansas on this Trip, which we will now refer to as Chanhassen 2.0.

² Also known as "Black Beauty," the best that Mercedes has to offer, and what else would you expect from our league One Percenter--whose amassed riches were aptly described later on in the Trip by Shamu as "**Biblical**."

As usual, our wise-cracking Alpha Dog had some great lines on the Trip, starting with the following exchange with B.T.:

AD: So does your mom recognize you when you visit her, Scott?

B.T.: Oh, she knows that I'm *somebody*.

AD: You've been telling us *that* for years, Scott!

A killer line, without a moment's pause. Alpha Dog is indeed a quick-witted SOB, there's no question about it.³

As B.T. continued to pilot us down Highway 81 through Kansas, there was a discussion of "Bucket Lists" sports experiences that several of us talked about checking off in our golden years, such as the Masters golf tournament, the Kentucky Derby, an NCAA Basketball Final Four, etc. When B.T.⁴ boldly declared that he didn't have a single thing left on his Bucket List, again without a pause of even a nanosecond, Alpha Dog threw out, "What about Asian Twins?"⁵ That one brought down the house.

So yes, the drive down from Lincoln to Arlington was a laugh riot, particularly while Alpha Dog was still working on his first Fifth.⁶

THE HOTEL

After arriving in Arlington, B.T. swiftly guided us to the Arlington Hilton hotel, the same accommodations that we enjoyed on the 2019 Trip. You may recall that B.T. developed a certain fondness for one of the employees at the hotel bar, and he wanted to make sure that this chap was still working there and ready to serve us libations well after the midnight hour.

After checking in, we met up with Brothers Sunny and Shamu, the latter of whom had apparently begun drinking early that morning before leaving Des Moines, as he was buzzing like a bumblebee by the time we saw him at the hotel. The first words out of Shamu's mouth, literally, were "This Trip is going to be **Biblical!**" The rest of us weren't exactly sure what part of the Good Book Shamu was referring to, but speculation ranged from Genesis 18⁷ to John 2:1-11,⁸ to John 3:16.⁹ In any event, next up was a visit to the hotel bar, to wet our whistles before heading over to Globe Life Field for the 7 p.m. baseball game between the Rangers and the Oakland Athletics.

³ If only he would use his magic powers for good instead of evil.

⁴ I remind you again of his One Percenter status, as Shamu incessantly reminded all of us on the Trip.

⁵ Not to be confused with the "Wichita Twins," about which all of us are sworn to secrecy. Except to say, in Shamu's parlance, they were "Biblical."

⁶ In the Old Days, his goal was 100 beers for the weekend. Now, for Alpha Dog, it's "A Fifth a Day Keeps the Doctor Away." But perhaps not the mortician, as Alpha Dog's continued efforts to emulate One Way Tony move him higher and higher up on the Dead Pool List.

⁷ The story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁸ The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine--to make sure that we didn't come up short on spirits if B.T.'s friend at the hotel bar shut us down again.

⁹ With Shamu wearing a rainbow-colored wig and vowing to "save" the entire audience at the baseball game.

THE BALLPARK

Once inside Globe Life Field, we were all amazed and a bit taken aback by the seeming immensity of this structure. From the outside, frankly, it looks like a big warehouse or a new-fangled metal barn, but not much like a ballpark. On the inside, it is cavernous and feels a bit sterile, but contains every conceivable amenity known to man, including a full bar at every concession stand. Because of the heat and humidity, the retractable roof was closed, and the temperature inside the building was probably about 65 degrees.

While Globe Life Field is not going to make anyone's Top Ten list of beautiful ballparks, it is still a fine place to watch a baseball game. And watch a couple of games we did, as highlighted below.

THE GAMES

The Superlative Six (Big Guy, B.T., JT, Shamu, Skipper and Stretch) kept the HSL Trip Tradition alive, and arrived at Globe Life Field on Friday night for a contest between the Rangers and the Oakland Athletics, a reprisal of the 2019 HSL Trip to Globe Life Park. With excellent seats just outside the third base dugout, the HSL boys watched with unabated glee in the first post-pandemic HSL Trip game. After the A's were retired without scoring in the top of the 1st, the Rangers struck first when Ralph Kiner's illegitimate grandson Isiah Kiner-Falefa singled to deep right, followed by a single by Charlie Culberson, an error by Sterling Marte in center, a fielder's choice, a single by Nathaniel Lowe, a sacrifice fly by DJ Peters, and two groundouts, to put the Rangers ahead by the score of 3-0. The A's clawed their way back over the course of the next several innings, taking the lead in the top of the 6th when Matt Chapman singled to center to score Mitch Moreland, who had tripled to right field to score Yan Gomes.

With the A's up 4-3, **Senator**-hurler Cole Irvin confidently took the mound for the bottom of the 6th, aiming both for a win and a Quality Start. Instead, the leadoff batter, Andy Ibáñez, was safe at first on a fielding error by ham-handed shortstop Elvis Andrus, and after the white-hot Jason Martin, batting a buck fifty-four (.154) for the season, singled to center and advanced Ibáñez to second, the Oakland skipper pulled Irvin for Sergio Romo, who promptly served up the first career home run to future Hall-of-Famer Yohel Pozo, putting the Rangers ahead for good at 6-4, and tagging Irvin with the loss. Matt Olson added a solo homer in the top of the 7th to tighten the contest to 6-5, but then in the bottom of the 7th, DJ Peters hit a mammoth home run to left (446 feet) to drive in himself and Lowe, completing the scoring for the game.

On Saturday night, the Hot Stove Leaguers again had excellent seats, this time in the first deck along the first base line, as they awaited the blockbuster pitching matchup between Oakland's James Kaprielian and the Rangers' Jordan Lyles. The A's drew first blood in the top of the 1st when Jed Lowrie singled to right and scored Sterling Marte, but the Rangers came right back in the top of the 1st when Nathaniel Lowe doubled to left and scored one of the 18 Hernandez boys who are currently playing in the Major Leagues, third baseman Yonny.

In the top of the second, the A's retaliated when Matt Chapman blasted a 413-foot home run to left field to put the A's ahead by the score of 2-1, and then the next several innings were quiet until Matt Olson cranked out a round-tripper (393 feet) to left field to put the A's up 3-

1. After the Rangers tied it up with two runs in the bottom of the 6th inning, the A's took the lead for good in the top of the 7th when Mitch Moreland homered to left center (392 feet), Matt Chapman hit his second dinger of the game to left (407 feet), Sterling Marte doubled to score Seth Brown, and Matt Olson singled to score Sterling Marte. The final run of the game came in the top of the 9th when Seth Brown hit a 480-foot blast to right field, securing the 8-3 win by the visitors. Andrew Chafin, pitching in relief of Kaprielian, notched the win after first blowing the save while Jordan Lyles took the loss, giving up 8 hits and 5 earned runs across six innings.

With Globe Life Field now on the been there, seen that list, the Hot Stove League has in 36 years paid visits to 24 cities, seen games in a whopping 34 different Major League ballparks, and watched games involving 31 different Major League teams. Pat yourselves on the back, fellas.

SHAMU'S DOPPELGÄNGER

As usual, we were able to spot another of Shamu's ubiquitous Doppelgängers, this time in the person of Chuck Morgan, the public address announcer for the Texas Rangers since 1983, who has not missed a single game during that span.¹⁰ You'll see the pictures.

THE REST OF IT

Hopefully Alpha Dog will eventually provide us with his own madcap recap of the 2021 Trip, but just in case he doesn't, let's not forget a couple of other Trip highlights:



Brother Stretch's excellent navigational assistance as B.T. piloted Black Beauty around the Arlington area in search of *Boston's Restaurant & Sports Bar*, which happened to be located directly adjacent to our hotel, which we realized only after a twenty minute excursion in the other direction.



Shamu's shocking revelation that he loves Biblical Chex.¹¹



Alpha Dog's offer to fix Shamu's summer teeth for a mere fifteen grand, a significant savings over the 45k that Shamu was quoted.



Alpha Dog's navigational blunder which had us heading for Detroit on the drive home, before B.T. recognized this crucial mistake and righted our path home.

¹⁰ And who was being inducted into the Texas Rangers Hall of Fame at the start of the Saturday evening, August 14, game that we attended. While not evident now, Morgan had a flaming red head of hair in his salad days, but like Shamu, has continued to grow old nothing but gracefully. As pigs fly.

¹¹ Apparently Jan makes the best Chex mix in West Des Moines, if not the Midwest.

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Let me finish this issue of *From the Bullpen* with some of the photographs taken on this year's magical mystery tour to Arlington. Hope you enjoy them, boys, it was a helluva Trip.

Best Trip Ever!

Skipper



The Superlative Six at Globe Life Field



Ballpark or Convention Center?



Shamu introduces Alpha Dog to a Biblical and statuesque baseball embrace



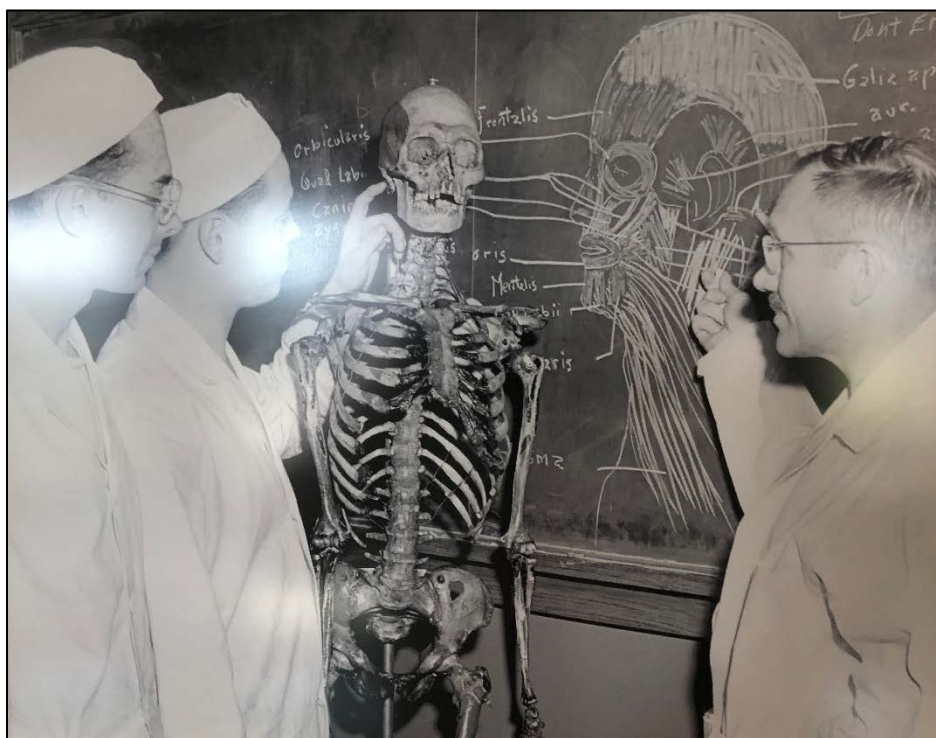
At Shamu's suggestion, Alpha Dog grabs a feel of one of Nolan Ryan's Biblical pex



A fascinated B.T. listens as Big Guy explains how he is able to ambulate on his otherworldly bowed legs.



B.T. scolds Shamu for his Biblical overchecking of his fantasy league team performance



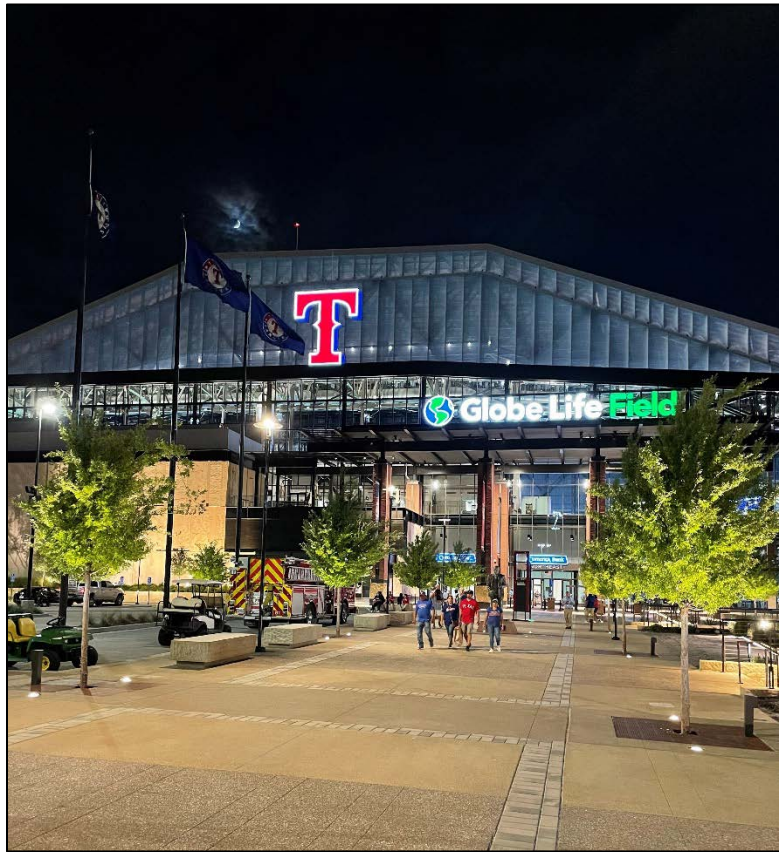
Alpha Dog examines Shamu as part of his bi-annual Dead Pool reassessment



Alpha Dog scowls at vendor with inadequate alcohol inventory



The customary ice cream encounter--
some would say "Biblical"



Globe Life Barn



Shamu's Doppelgänger Chuck Morgan and friend



Shamu tries to convince his pals to patronize Underbelly's (aka Masterspieler) concession stand



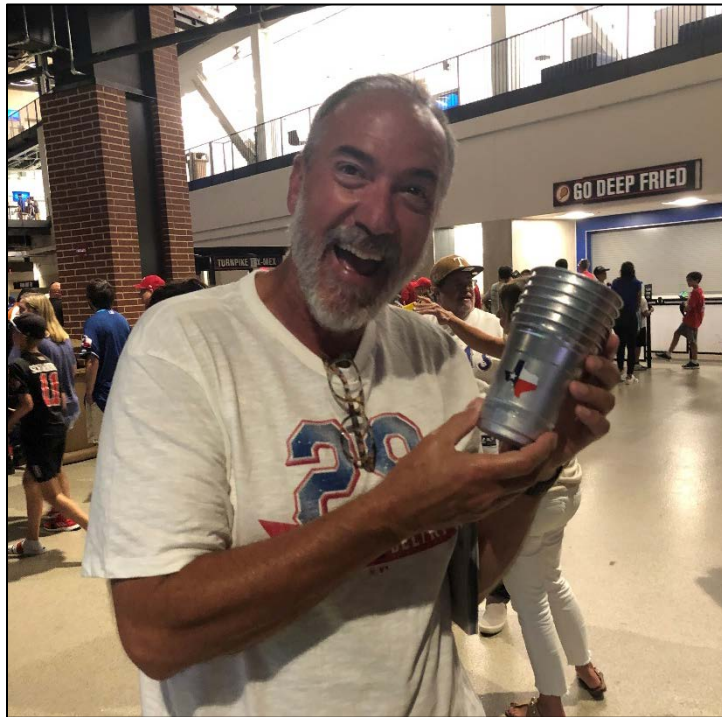
Alpha Dog's new pen pal



"25 bucks for a cocktail? Of course I'll pay it!
On second thought, make it a double!"



Da Boys



The HSL One-Percenter shows off his \$25 apiece Electric Lemonade souvenir cups -- Beth will be thrilled!



Several HSLers flip coins to see who has to sit next to Alpha Dog in Black Beauty for the 40-minute drive to Boston's Sports Bar



Chuck's new office at Globe Life Field --
a Biblical view!