

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 33



November 3, 2023

OWNERS:

Ted Bridges
("PAwesome")
Wahoos
Returning Champion

Jeff Bechtolt
("Screech")
Monarchs

Jon Blongewicz
("Sunny")
Blues

Denny Bontrager
("SloPay")
Bears

Jim Buser
("Tirebiter")
Redbirds

Rick Drews
("Big Guy")
Tigers

Dave Ernst
("Skipper")
Senators

Bob Hurlbut
("Underbelly")
Tribe

Scott Krause
("BT")
Saints

Mike Morris
("Mouse")
Bombers

Mitch Pirnie
("Magpie/Tricko")
Bums

Chuck Sinclair
("Shamu")
Cubs

John Thielen
("Itchie")
Skipjacks

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Publisher and Editor
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Linda "Chief" Koftan

Brethren:



AND THEN IT WAS OVER

With Wednesday night's 5-nil Game 5 victory by the Texas Rangers over the Arizona Diamondbacks, the 2023 Major League Baseball season is officially over. Crap. Now what are we supposed to do between now and the start of Spring Training 2024?

I don't really care who won the 2023 World Series, but I certainly wanted it to go the full seven games, just to prolong the playing of baseball for one more weekend. There was also the thought of a last-minute excursion to Arlington for Game 6 or 7, you know. But here we are, the season over, so we'll have to find some other way to occupy our time.

Here's one way, another chapter from *Why We Love Baseball* by Joe Posnanski.

NO. 9:
MAZEROSKI
October 13, 1960, Pittsburgh

Before we share the Posnanski text from this chapter, let me just give you a spoiler alert and tell you up front that the best thing about this particular baseball moment, to me, is the story about finding Bing Crosby's film of Game 7 of the 1960 World Series in the old crooner's wine cellar, and how it was shown some fifty years later to the surviving members of the 1960 Pittsburgh Pirates team and others, including catcher Hal Smith. You'll see what I mean:

As the fiftieth anniversary of Bill Mazeroski's famous home run approached, Bob Costas got the oddest call. It was from an archivist at Bing Crosby's estate. It seems the man was looking through the Crosby wine cellar for old movies he could use to put together a Bing Crosby Christmas special. There, as expected, he saw some of Crosby's old movies—*Road to Rio*, *Going My Way*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, and so on—but he saw something else that he did not expect at all.

It was a film can labeled "1960 World Series."

"What can I do with this?" the archivist asked Costas.

The archivist had no idea that he had just uncovered baseball gold. See, Crosby was a part owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates. [FN: Cosby's friend and frequent movie costar Bob Hope was a part owner of the Cleveland Indians.] He was in Paris during the World Series between his Pirates and the New York Yankees. He listened to the games on Armed Forces radio. When the World Series went to Game 7, he felt too nervous to fly back and attend.

Instead, he called up one of his assistants and told him to somehow record the game. The only way to do that in 1960 was to put a camera in front of the television set and create a kinescope. That's what the assistant did. The film inside that can was, as far as anybody knows, the only film of Game 7 of the 1960 World Series.

"What you have to understand," Costas says, "is that NOBODY has seen this. Nobody. None of the players have seen it. None of the fans have seen it."

Finding that kinescope was like finding yesterday. Costas and the MLB Network rented a beautiful theater in Pittsburgh, and they invited the Pirates who played in that series along with any number of other Pittsburgh luminaries. MLB Network set up cameras all around the theater.

And then, together, 50 years later, they all watched Game 7 of the 1960 World Series.

"It is," Costas says, "one of the greatest things I've ever been a part of."

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That was a bizarre World Series. The Yankees had to be there; they had been in the World Series ten times in the previous 13 seasons. But the Pirates? That made no sense at all. The Pirates had been a baseball laughingstock for the better part of a quarter century.

And the series itself seemed to reflect the absurdity of it all.

The Pirates squeaked by in Game 1.

The Yankees won the next two games 16–3 and 10–0.

The Pirates squeaked by in Games 4 and 5.

The Yankees angrily responded by winning the next game 12–0.

And then it was time for Game 7, even though the Yankees had outscored the Pirates 46–17. It's no wonder Bing Crosby was so nervous.

What Costas remembers most about watching that kinescope was the faces of awe and wonder he saw everywhere. "This was the first time Vern Law had ever seen himself pitch in the prime of his youth," he says. "All of these men, they're old men by now, and they're seeing themselves as they never have before."

The player who emerged most joyfully from the screen was Pittsburgh's breathtaking right fielder Roberto Clemente. "He didn't do much in the game," Costas says. "He actually fumbled a single and allowed Roger Maris to take second. But it didn't matter. Every time he came on-camera, people spontaneously cheered."

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Now, let me tell you about *my* favorite thing about the Bing Crosby reprise: Hal Smith finally got his moment.

Sure, everybody knows how that game ended. The score was tied, Bill Mazeroski led off the bottom of the ninth against Ralph Terry. It was 3:36 p.m. Maz hit a long fly ball to left field; the Yankees' Yogi Berra chased it back to the wall, then sadly looked up; the ball sailed over the fence; Mazeroski ran around the bases while waving his cap; and the crowd raced onto the field to celebrate with him. It's as iconic a moment as any in baseball's colorful history. The scene is forever.

And it always makes me think about Hal Smith. It's the plainest of names. If you google it, you will probably get pointed to the actor Hal Smith, best known for being the voice of Owl in *Winnie the Pooh* and playing the town drunk Otis Campbell on *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Our Hal Smith was not even the best catcher named Hal Smith. There was another, who played for Pittsburgh and made three All-Star teams. Our Hal did not make any.

That's not to say our Hal Smith was a slouch; no, he was a good hitter. But his defense was suspect, and he bounced from New York to Baltimore to Kansas City to Houston and finally to Pittsburgh.

Hal Smith had come up with two outs in the bottom of the eighth inning and the Yankees up by a run. There were two runners on.

In the theater in Pittsburgh, fifty years later, there was a nervous hush. "People were watching the game like it was happening live," Costas would say. Presumably everyone in there knew how the game would end, but they didn't know other details. Hal Smith himself sat in the theater quietly. He wore a brown suit that looked roughly four sizes too big. Few noticed him.

Hal Smith on the screen faced a 2-2 count against the Yankees' Jim Coates.

Then came the pitch, and Hal Smith turned on it. He hit it almost *exactly* to the same spot where Bill Mazeroski would hit it just moments later. If you watched it and didn't know, you would assume that it WAS the Mazeroski home run; that's how identical they are.

"I really didn't even know what happened until I rounded second base," Hal Smith said that day, 50 years later. "When I went around second base and I looked up and the people in the stands were on the dugout, I thought, *What have I done?*"

In the Pittsburgh theater, everybody leapt to their feet to cheer wildly. "They really went nuts, like it had just happened," Costas said.

That home run should have made Hal Smith famous. He had given the Pirates the lead against the New York Yankees in Game 7 of the World Series; how can you hit a bigger home run than that? Instead, the Yankees tied the game up in the ninth, setting the stage for someone else.

Still, in that theater that day, the cheers flowed for Hal Smith.

"You know what I thought?" Hal Smith told the crowd as he tried to hold back tears. "I thought, *No matter what happens, I really helped in the World Series. And that had been my lifelong dream.*"





The Mazeroski story is a fantastic one, and it's good to be reminded of it in detail, but now we also all know that the actor Hal Smith, not the Pittsburgh catcher who hit the home run in the bottom of the 8th inning to put the Pirates ahead, but the thespian who played Otis Campbell on *The Andy Griffith Show* also provided the voice of Owl in the *Winnie the Pooh* cartoons. Is that *not* an amazing piece of trivia that we can all enjoy springing on unsuspecting friends and family members? And as soon as I read it, I replayed the voice of

Owl and the voice of Otis in my head, and wondered to myself how it is that I never before made this connection. I'm just curious—did anyone else know this until you read it in the above chapter? If so, why didn't you tell us?

HSL TOP 25 PITCHERS

Okay, I have to eat a little bit of crow here. In our last edition of *From the Bullpen*, we published the Top 25 "Active" Pitchers at the end of the Hot Stove League season, neglecting to consider that there were several pitchers who had been dropped right at the end of the season to open up roster space, who actually finished in the Top 25. Thanks to Brother Shamu for pointing out the error in our ways.

As Roseann Rosannadanna often famously said, *Never mind*.

THE REAL 25

So after recalibrating and recalculating, we now provide you with the true list of the Top 25 Pitchers in the Hot Stove League for the 2023 season, which now includes No. 6, Zach Weaver, picked up by the **Cubs** in the 5th round; Pablo Lopez, drafted by the **Saints** in the 11th round; No. 14 Framber Valdez, selected by the **Wahoos** in the 5th round; and Sonny Gray, snapped up by the **Bombers** in the 16th round.

Adding in these four players then results in José Berríos of the **Senators**, Max Scherzer of the **Senators**, Justin Verlander of the **Tigers** and Kyle Gibson of the **Monarchs** being demoted from the top 25 list. This therefore changes my calculation of the number of top 25 pitchers on each of the Hot Stove League teams, thusly:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Teams with 3 Top 25 Pitchers | Bronx Bombers, Saints and Tigers |
| Teams with 2 Top 25 Pitchers | Cubs, Redbirds, Monarchs, Blues and Senators |
| Teams with 1 Top 25 Pitcher | Wahoos, Tribe |
| Teams with 0 Top 25 Pitchers | Skipjacks and Bears |

I still find it remarkable that the **Wahoos**, who, as you may know, won the 2023 Hot Stove League crown, had only one pitcher on the Top 25 list; and that the 6th place **Bears** and 7th place **Skipjacks**, who had no pitchers on the Top 25 list, were still able to finish as high up in the standings as they did. Whatever.



| | Pitchers | Roster | Pts | Pre-Season | Current | Rnd Picked | Overall Draft Position |
|-----|-------------------|-----------|-------|------------|---------|------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Gerrit Cole | Bombers | 779.0 | 14 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| 2. | Spencer Strider | Tigers | 726.0 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 17 |
| 3. | Zac Gallen | Bears | 681.0 | 32 | 9 | 4 | 41 |
| 4. | Blake Snell | Skipjacks | 680.0 | 118 | 10 | 7 | 84 |
| 5. | Logan Webb | Tribe | 649.0 | 87 | 13 | 5 | 56 |
| 6. | Zack Wheeler | FA | 645.0 | 39 | 14 | 5 | 54 |
| 7. | Luis Castillo | Blues | 644.0 | 28 | 15 | 5 | 63 |
| 8. | Kevin Gausman | Bombers | 635.0 | 18 | 17 | 4 | 47 |
| 9. | Pablo López | FA | 630.0 | 95 | 18 | 11 | 133 |
| 10. | Chris Bassitt | Senators | 618.0 | 128 | 23 | 10 | 124 |
| 11. | Corbin Burnes | Senators | 611.0 | 26 | 25 | 1 | 7 |
| 12. | Zach Eflin | Redbirds | 610.0 | 108 | 26 | 24 | 308 |
| 13. | George Kirby | Blues | 601.0 | 96 | 30 | 10 | 120 |
| 14. | Framber Valdez | FA | 599.0 | 50 | 31 | 5 | 53 |
| 15. | Justin Steele | Monarchs | 599.0 | 160 | 32 | 22 | 278 |
| 16. | Logan Gilbert | Bums | 599.0 | 83 | 33 | 6 | 71 |
| 17. | Kyle Bradish | Monarchs | 585.0 | 285 | 35 | 22 | 282 |
| 18. | Sonny Gray | FA | 573.0 | 162 | 39 | 16 | 203 |
| 19. | Kodai Senga | Redbirds | 565.0 | 191 | 43 | 12 | 152 |
| 20. | Merrill Kelly | Tigers | 562.0 | 229 | 45 | 16 | 199 |
| 21. | Mitch Keller | Saints | 559.0 | 273 | 46 | 26 | 336 |
| 22. | Freddy Peralta | Cubs | 546.0 | 115 | 50 | 15 | 184 |
| 23. | Jordan Montgomery | Bums | 545.0 | 129 | 51 | 15 | 190 |
| 24. | Jesús Luzardo | Saints | 546.0 | 165 | 54 | 10 | 128 |
| 25. | Aaron Nola | Tigers | 534.0 | 30 | 64 | 3 | 36 |

TOP 25 HOT STOVE LEAGUE HITTERS

Thanks to Linda, the following is a list of the Top 25 Hot Stove League hitters for the 2023 season, their points, and the round in which they were taken:



| | Batters | Roster | Pts | Pre-Season | Current | Round Drafted | Overall Draft Position |
|-----|------------------|-----------|-------|------------|---------|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Ronald Acuña Jr | Cubs | 881.0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 2. | Matt Olson | Wahoos | 804.6 | 21 | 2 | 2 | 26 |
| 3. | Freddie Freeman | Skipjacks | 783.3 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 14 |
| 4. | Mookie Betts | Bombers | 766.6 | 16 | 5 | 2 | 21 |
| 5. | Shohei Ohtani | Skipjacks | 699.3 | 283 | 7 | 1 | 13 |
| 6. | Juan Soto | Saints | 690.0 | 24 | 8 | 1 | 3 |
| 7. | Marcus Semien | Cubs | 677.8 | 31 | 11 | 2 | 25 |
| 8. | Austin Riley | Saints | 652.7 | 25 | 12 | 3 | 29 |
| 9. | Kyle Tucker | Monarchs | 642.8 | 9 | 16 | 1 | 9 |
| 10. | Corbin Carroll | Bears | 627.5 | 4 | 19 | 5 | 64 |
| 11. | Bobby Witt | Bums | 625.4 | 29 | 20 | 3 | 34 |
| 12. | Francisco Lindor | Monarchs | 624.6 | 33 | 21 | 3 | 35 |
| 13. | Ozzie Albies | Senators | 622.8 | 40 | 22 | 4 | 46 |
| 14. | Julio Rodríguez | Bears | 613.3 | 10 | 24 | 1 | 12 |
| 15. | Kyle Schwarber | Wahoos | 606.7 | 86 | 27 | 3 | 27 |
| 16. | Corey Seager | Tribe | 605.6 | 85 | 28 | 2 | 23 |
| 17. | Alex Bregman | Bums | 602.6 | 67 | 29 | 4 | 45 |
| 18. | Ketel Marte | Saints | 584.5 | 73 | 34 | 21 | 262 |
| 19. | Pete Alonso | Bums | 580.2 | 11 | 36 | 2 | 19 |
| 20. | Yandy Díaz | Bums | 578.2 | 103 | 37 | 16 | 201 |
| 21. | Rafael Devers | Monarchs | 573.2 | 19 | 38 | 2 | 18 |
| 22. | Adolis García | Skipjacks | 572.6 | 46 | 40 | 5 | 65 |
| 23. | José Ramírez | Tribe | 571.5 | 5 | 41 | 1 | 4 |
| 24. | Christian Walker | Redbirds | 567.2 | 122 | 42 | 8 | 100 |
| 25. | Marcell Ozuna | Tribe | 563.0 | 284 | 44 | 17 | 210 |

JIBBER JABBER



By my calculations, the number of top 25 hitters on each of the Hot Stove League teams ended up as follows:

4 top 25 hitters
 3 top 25 hitters
 2 top 25 hitters

Monarchs
 Saints, Skipjacks, Tribe and Bums
 Wahoos, Cubs and Bears

1 top 25 hitter
0 top 25 hitters

Senators, Redbirds and Bombers
Blues and Tigers



How about Acuña Ma-TaTa posting a total of 881 points? Wow, what a stud. For the season, he had 643 at-bats, 217 hits for a .337 batting average, scored 149 runs, hit 41 home runs and had 106 RBIs. He also stole 73 bases, becoming the first ever 40-HR/70-SB player. Although these numbers don't mean much to me, he had an OPS of 1.012 and a WAR of 8.1.

When I was clever enough to draft him second overall in 2021, in 82 games before being injured, he scored 72 runs, had 24 home runs and stole 17 bases, so there's that.



The only other 800-point player, Matt Olson, lasted until the very end of the second round, when PAwesome snapped him up as draft pick #26.



The **Bears'** drafting of Corbin Carroll in the 5th round at #64 overall was a stroke of genius in that Corbin finished at #10 among all hitters. He may go just a little bit earlier next year.



The biggest bargain of the draft, as it turns out, was Ketel Marte, who B.T. snapped up in the 21st round as the 262nd player taken, but who finished as the 18th best hitter with 584.5 points. Some guys have all the luck!

WHO KNEW?

In reading my newest baseball book (*Do You Believe in Magic?*) that Linda gifted me with on my birthday, I learned that the Dodgers once had a Triple A team that was based in Omaha, something I do not remember ever before hearing about. According to *Wikipedia*, the Omaha Dodgers were the Triple A affiliate of the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1961 and 1962, and were managed both seasons by Danny Ozark, who a decade later became the manager of the Philadelphia Phillies. As Mel Allen might have said, "How about that?"

IN PRAISE OF: JOE "MUDCAT" GRANT



I was #BLESSED to attend a sports banquet last evening at Christ the King Church, where Husker hoops coach Fred Hoiberg was the guest speaker and my old law partner and good friend

Joe Grant was feted for his decades-long service to CTK and its youth. Joe has emceed the annual sports banquet for about the last 20 to 25 years, and in recent years has taken on the role of *auctioneer* of donated charity trips and events. As shown above, last night he cajoled the crowd into a frenzied top bid of \$5,000 for lunch with Coach Hoiberg.

The tribute to Mudcat was stirring and memorable, including a video tribute from Trev Alberts and a number of Mudcat's CTK cronies. Best of all, Joe's entire family was present for his tribute, which prompted two separate standing ovations and much laughter and applause. If there was a dry eye in the house, I didn't see it.

As some of you may know, Joe has been beset by a number of medical issues over the past few years, and he is currently waiting on a lung for a transplant. In spite of all of his medical challenges, he remains endlessly optimistic and high-spirited, and I haven't once heard him grumble or heard him mutter a "Woe is me" sentiment.

A very good man indeed. Those of us who are fortunate enough to call him a friend are damned lucky.

* * * * *

That will do it for this week, gentlemen. Have a great weekend and *GO BIG RED!*

Skipper

