

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 34



November 8, 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
Dave Ernst

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Assistant Editor
Linda "Chief" Koftan

Confreres,

For your reading pleasure on this beautiful fall day, I submit the following:

DOLDRUMS:

**A state of apathy or lack of interest;
a situation where one feels boredom, ennui,
or tedium; a state of listlessness or malaise.**

I decided that this was the best word to describe my mood this morning after I woke up and dug in to read the third-to-the-last chapter of *Why We Love Baseball*, having to do with the successful pep talk given by Jason Heyward during a rain delay in Game Seven of the 2016 World Series, just before the **Cubs** went on to score 2 runs in the top of the 9th to break the curse of the owner of the *Billy Goat Tavern*.



The original Billy Goat Inn

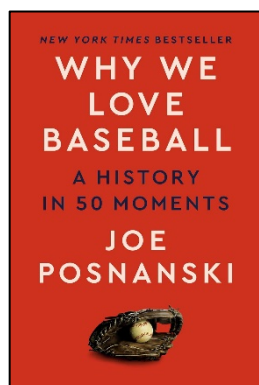
Why? Several reasons. Most immediate, I was supposed to be preparing this entire week for a jury trial which was scheduled to start next Monday, but the attorney for the plaintiff abruptly dismissed the lawsuit last week, citing “irreconcilable differences” with her client. In other words, *cold feet*. So instead of intensive trial preparation this week, there is almost nothing on my calendar, and no minor league baseball games toward which to redirect my energies.

Secondly, I am almost done with *Why We Love Baseball*,¹ and great books like this don't come along all that often.

Thirdly, baseball is over for a very long time, and I could really care less about the National Hockey League, NBA basketball until the finals, NFL football until the playoffs, college basketball until March Madness, and even college football until the Huskers right the ship. Okay, so call me one-dimensional, but apart from the law practice, my bucket is best filled with enjoyment of sporting events, primarily baseball.

So if I can't go *watch* baseball until at least February,² the next best thing for me is to *think* about it (in the immortal words of the immortal Roger Angell, the “inner game” of baseball, as it were). So that's what I am thinking about today.

BACK TO THE BIBLE



In *Why We Love Baseball*, Joe Posnanski implores his readership to not only enjoy his “History in 50 Moments,” but also to reach into their own memory banks of personal recollections of baseball, as a player, parent or fan. On our 2023 HSL Trip to Chicago, Brother Sunny asked all of us to come up with a list of our favorite personal memories of baseball, which was very thought-provoking. As we prepare to embark upon our 40th anniversary season of the Hot Stove League, I would like to invite the 13 of us to come up with our own best memories of baseball, which we can share at the Draft/Opening Day celebration in Scottsdale. My suggestion is that we think about and share the following:

1. *When and why* you became a baseball fan;
2. Your best individual baseball moment as a *player*, if you played, whether in college, high school, Little Chiefs, or the sandlot;
3. Your best individual baseball moment as a *coach*, if you were ever a coach;
4. Your best baseball memory as a *parent*, if you were the parent (or grandparent) of a baseball (or softball) player;
5. Your best baseball memory as a *fan*; and

¹ Which I began reading on September 20, 2023, and will finish this coming Friday, November 10, having successfully imposed enough self-discipline to complete my goal of reading only one chapter per day, so as to fully savor this prized possession.

² Although someone recently suggested to me that a trip to the Caribbean to catch some Dominican winter baseball might be fun. Hmm. I need to look into that a bit more.

6. Your best baseball *experience* outside of watching a game at a ballpark.

Give it some thought.

Leading by example, and as previously shared (*ad nauseum*) in previous issues of *FTB* or otherwise, I date my almost ridiculous, fervent love of baseball to 1968, when our sixth grade teacher at Pershing Elementary, Mrs. Reicher, allowed us to listen to the 1968 World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Tigers during school hours if, but only if, we had a transistor radio with an earpiece. Although I was loathe to miss out on our important school-work, I took Teach up on the offer and listened to many of the games, the first one taking place on Wednesday, October 2, 1968, when the Cardinals beat the Tigers by the score of 4-0, with Bob Gibson of Omaha getting the shutout win for the Redbirds.



Having refreshed my memory a bit through the magic of the internet, I listened to Game Two on Thursday, October 3, Game Five on Monday, October 7, Game Six on Wednesday, October 9, and Game Seven on Thursday, October 10, in the last of which the Tigers took the Series with a 4-1 win behind the masterful pitching of Mickey Lolich, besting the great Bob Gibson and the Cardinals by the score of 4-1. The TV announcers for that Series were Curt Gowdy, Harry Caray and George Kell. The radio announcers were Peewee Reese, Ernie Harwell, Jack Buck and Jim Simpson.

From an announcing standpoint, could it ever hope to get better than that? Nope. Well, unless Vin Scully was at the microphone.

Deep in the recesses of my cluttered mind, I also have a poignant memory of laying on the carpeted floor of my parents' living room and poring over the statistics for Major League Baseball, which were only printed back then on Sunday. I remember practically salivating over the statistics of the great Willie Stargell of the Pittsburgh Pirates, who was leading the Major Leagues in almost every significant hitting category at the time. I have a distinct memory of him having a 3-homer game which added to his bountiful stats, and when I googled *Willie Stargell and 3-homer games*,³ I learned, or more correctly, was *reminded*, that on May 22, 1968, Stargell went 5 for 5 and hit 3 home runs with 4 runs scored and 7 RBIs in the 13-6 victory over Chicago.⁴

³ On some later date, in some future issue, we will talk about the arcania of the list of players who have had the most 3-home run games in the Major Leagues, and, spoiler alert, it's not Babe Ruth, Barry Bonds, Hank Aaron or A-Rod. Hint: Think *oversized feline*.

⁴ Keep in mind that this was 1968, the "Year of the Pitcher." Remarkable.



Okay, that should whet your collective appetites for some of your own wonderful memories of baseball. I will provide you with another one of my beloved “forms” to fill out for next March at some point before the end of this year or in the beginning of next year.

UPDATE ON 2024 DRAFT/TRIP

And speaking of forms, I have now received from all but two of you a completed Reservation/Commitment form for the HSL 40-Year Draft/Trip, the deadline for which was October 31. The two of you who have *not* complied with the deadline, you know who you are. All I can

say is that PAwesome,⁵ you and your foolish comrade in arms had better find a good place to hole up and participate virtually in next year’s Draft/Trip extravaganza. May the Force be with you.

LIES, DAMNED LIES, AND STATISTICS

Being a bit of a statistics geek, I like to look back at the end of a Hot Stove League year and see how the various teams would have fared after the first three rounds, after the first five rounds, etc. There’s probably no real predictive value in running these numbers, but it’s fun from a “woulda, coulda, shoulda” standpoint.

That being said, as you will see from the below numbers, if the Draft had ended after just three rounds, and each team had held on to all three of its players drafted in these three rounds and had them in the starting lineup all year, then the **Cubs** owned by Brother Shamu would have won another HSL title with 2020.5 points, having brilliantly drafted Acuña, Semien and Goldschmidt in the first three rounds. Pretty salty. The **Bronx Bombers**, owned by Brother Mouse, would have finished in second place by his brilliant drafting of Gerrit Cole, Mookie Betts and Nolan Arenado in the first three rounds.

⁵ That’s right, Edson, the underling to whom you thought you had assigned this menial task for handling apparently dropped the proverbial ball. Yet another *Bridges Trust* oxymoronic misfortune or malfeasance, your call.

DRAFT RESULTS

ROUND 1 - DRAFT			
1.	Aaron Judge	Wahoos	508.7
2.	Ronald Acuña	Cubs	881.0
3.	Juan Soto	Saints	690.0
4.	José Ramírez	Tribe	571.5
5.	Manny Machado	Redbirds	476.8
6.	Gerrit Cole	Bombers	779.0
7.	Corbin Burnes	Senators	611.0
8.	Sandy Alcantara	Bums	420.0
9.	Kyle Tucker	Monarchs	642.8
10.	Justin Verlander	Tigers	496.0
11.	Trea Turner	Blues	556.9
12.	Julio Rodríguez	Bears	613.3
13.	Shohei Ohtani (B)	Skipjacks	699.3

ROUND 2 - DRAFT			
1.	Freddie Freeman	Skipjacks	783.3
2.	Bo Bichette	Bears	478.5
3.	Vladimir Guerrero	Blues	516.2
4.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	726.0
5.	Rafael Devers	Monarchs	573.2
6.	Pete Alonso	Bums	580.2
7.	Mike Trout	Senators	314.7
8.	Mookie Betts	Bombers	766.6
9.	Yordan Alvarez	Redbirds	540.7
10.	Corey Seager	Tribe	605.6
11.	Fernando Tatis	Saints	493.8
12.	Marcus Semien	Cubs	677.8
13.	Matt Olson	Wahoos	804.6

ROUND 3 - DRAFT			
1.	Kyle Schwarber	Wahoos	606.7
2.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	552.5
3.	Austin Riley	Saints	652.7
4.	Brandon Woodruff	Tribe	269.0
5.	Shohei Ohtani (P)	Redbirds	473.0
6.	Nolan Arenado	Bombers	474.9
7.	Max Scherzer	Senators	510.0
8.	Bobby Witt	Bums	625.4
9.	Francisco Lindor	Monarchs	624.6
10.	Aaron Nola	Tigers	534.0
11.	Shane McClanahan	Blues	406.0
12.	Jacob deGrom	Bears	132.0
13.	Shane Bieber	Skipjacks	337.0

Points After 3 Rounds		
1.	2111.3	Cubs
2.	2020.5	Bombers
3.	1920.0	Wahoos
4.	1840.6	Monarchs
5.	1836.5	Saints
6.	1819.6	Skipjacks
7.	1756.0	Tigers
8.	1625.6	Bums
9.	1490.0	Redbirds
10.	1479.1	Blues
11.	1446.1	Tribe
12.	1435.7	Senators
13.	1223.8	Bears

Our league champion **Wahoos** would have finished in third place with 1920.0 points after three rounds, having drafted Aaron Judge, Matt Olson and Kyle Schwarber 1-2-3. Obviously, Judge's injuries were a big factor in this hypothetical standing.

At the other end of the universe, the **Bears** would have finished last after the first three rounds with 1223.8 points, based upon SloPay's drafting of Julio Rodriguez, Bo Bichette and Jacob deGrom, mostly because deGrom scored only 132.0 points before taking the rest of the year off with an injury. Next baddest would have been the **Senators** with the second-worst three-round total of 1435.7 points, by virtue of having taken Corbin Burnes in the first, the fragile Mike Trout in the second, and the suspended and injured Max Scherzer in the third.



ROUNDS FOUR AND FIVE

ROUND 4 - DRAFT			
1.	Alek Manoah	Skipjacks	111.0
2.	Zac Gallen	Bears	681.0
3.	Luis Robert	Blues	524.2
4.	José Abreu	Tigers	372.7
5.	Dylan Cease	Monarchs	438.0
6.	Alex Bregman	Bums	602.6
7.	Ozzie Albies	Senators	622.8
8.	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	635.0
9.	Max Fried	Redbirds	286.0
10.	Cristian Javier	Tribe	430.0
11.	Julio Urías	Saints	343.0
12.	J.T. Realmuto	Cubs	398.3
13.	Yu Darvish	Wahoos	339.0

ROUND 5 - DRAFT			
1.	Framber Valdez	Wahoos	599.0
2.	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	645.0
3.	Randy Arozarena	Saints	536.8
4.	Logan Webb	Tribe	649.0
5.	Tim Anderson	Redbirds	225.6
6.	Michael Harris	Bombers	425.8
7.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	522.3
8.	Nathaniel Lowe	Bums	536.6
9.	Jazz Chisholm	Monarchs	298.9
10.	George Springer	Tigers	474.6
11.	Luis Castillo	Blues	644.0
12.	Corbin Carroll	Bears	627.5
13.	Adolis García	Skipjacks	572.6

Points After 5 Rounds		
1.	3081.3	Bombers
2.	2858.0	Wahoos
3.	2795.6	Cubs
4.	2764.8	Bums
5.	2716.3	Saints
5.	2674.3	Blues
7.	2603.3	Tigers
8.	2580.8	Senators
9.	2577.5	Monarchs
10.	2532.3	Bears
11.	2525.1	Tribe
12.	2503.2	Skipjacks
13.	2001.6	Redbirds

If we extend this analysis and torture (for some) through the first five rounds of the Draft, we find that Brother Mouse was akin to a runaway freight train at the conclusion of Round Five after picking up Kevin Gausman (635.0 points) in the 4th and Michael Harris (the second, not the first) in the fifth round (425.8 points), putting the **Bombers** at 3081.3 points through five rounds to the second place **Wahoos'** total of 2858.0 points. In other words, if this thing was a Pentathlon instead of a Marathon, Mouse would be drinking Dom Perignon from the Cup and we would be having our Winter Meeting at La Brasserie's at the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Other observations:

- The **Cubs** started out in 3rd place (through 5 rounds) and ended the season in 5th, about what you'd expect.
- The **Saints** started out the season in 5th place and finished in 2nd, through some savvy managing and ample funding through our league 1 percenter.
- The **Bums** started out in 4th place and finished in 3rd. Again, about what you'd expect.
- The **Skipjacks** started out in 12th and finished in 7th. Not bad considering that Itchie was three sheets to the wind the entire season.
- The **Monarchs** started in 9th and finished at 4th. Well played, Screech.
- The **Tigers** started in 7th and finished in 12th. Not well played, Big Guy.
- The **Tribe** started in 11th place and finished in 8th. Kudos, U-belly.
- The **Blues** started in 5th place and finished in 9th. Duh.
- The **Bears** started in 10th place and finished in 6th. That's a Rocket High grab for you, always hustling.
- And lastly, poor Tirebiter started the year in 13th (after 5 rounds) with 2001.6 points, almost 500 points behind the 12th place **Skipjacks**, and things didn't get any better after that. Sometimes you're the GOAT, and other times you're the goat. Ba-a-a-a-a. Next year, Jimmy.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

The Hot Stove League family continues to grow with the addition of two new grandchildren within the last fortnight. On October 24, Aspen Jean Thielen was born into this world, the third daughter of Zach and his wife, and the third granddaughter of John and Annie. Not to be out-done, this past Sunday, Sunny became a grandfather for the fourth time as the birth of Holden "Catcher in the Rye" William Blongewicz has been announced. Holden is A.J. and his better half's second son.

Welcome to the brood, kids. Congratulations to all.



Aspen



Holden

AROUND THE BEND WITH B.T.: DEUCES WILD

Last Friday I had the great, good pleasure of the company of B.T. for lunch at the Around the Bend Steakhouse near South Bend. As usual, we discussed all about respective maladies and infirmities, and at one point I talked about a colleague of mine only a year older who has recently exhibited the diminished ability to articulate his thoughts in words. B.T. chimed in with something like, "I know exactly what the poor bastard is going through, are you kidding? Just ten minutes ago I could barely get out of my mouth my lunch order for a chicken sandwich." True that.

B.T. also updated me on the status of his current facial hair, and indicated that he is shooting to get back to Seaworthy Status (see below), but he doesn't know if he will ever make it to the level of a Sam Elliott. I consoled him by advising him that his Teutonic Tickler looked just great, and that it was nothing to be ashamed of.



Like all the great ones⁶, the Teutonic Tickler shows off his supernatural ocular dexterity and his matchless powers of multi-tasking, seen here shooting the breeze with Skipper about baseball in one PHEB conference room, while listening intently to Tirebiter 'splain legal business in another conference room two doors down.

As our lunch was winding up at the end, B.T. suddenly jumped out of his chair and said, "Well, as I think we were talking about (we weren't), I've got to go 'drop a deuce.'" Who but B.T.?

That's it for this week, fellas.

Next week: In praise of minor league ballparks; multi-home run games; 1966 World Series.

Skip

GO BIG RED!

⁶ Marty Feldman, Pop-Eye at the State Fair, and all hammerhead sharks.