

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 11



May 4, 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

STAFF:

Publisher and Editor
Dave Ernst

Webmaster and
Assistant Editor
Linda "Chief" Koftan

CUBS CATCH FIRE, ASSUME LEAD

The story of Week 5 in the Hot Stove League was the **Cubs**, who somehow managed to put together a 629.9-point week, almost a hundred points more than the second best **Skipjacks** and more than 200 points greater than the flagging **Saints** and **Wahoos**.

On the other hand, the free-falling **Blues** could only manage 266.8 points for the week, fewer even than the total of the punchless **Tribe**, and nestled into 11th place in the standings.

Below are the Week 5 standings from top to bottom, followed by the point totals for Week 5.

HSL STANDINGS THRU WEEK 5 ENDING APRIL 30, 2023

	Team	Points	Pts Back
1	Cubs	2256.3	-
2	Wahoos	2182.5	73.8
3	Saints	2170.2	86.1
4	Bums	2108.1	148.2
5	Bombers	2078.0	178.3
6	Redbirds	2013.3	243.0
7	Skipjacks	1978.1	278.2
8	Bears	1974.7	281.6
9	Monarchs	1950.8	305.5
10	Tigers	1934.1	322.2
11	Blues	1902.7	353.6
12	Senators	1879.1	377.2
13	Tribe	1661.0	595.3



POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 5

	Team	Pts
1	Cubs	629.9
2	Skipjacks	533.8
3	Bums	465.3
4	Tigers	459.1
5	Senators	448.4
6	Monarchs	436.2
7	Bears	435.3
8	Redbirds	429.7
9	Bombers	403.4
10	Saints	402.2
11	Wahoos	401.6
12	Tribe	271.2
13	Blues	266.8

Pretty much the entire **Cubs** roster was *en fuego* during the fifth week of competition, with Alex Cobb (48.0), Clayton Kershaw (41.0), Zack Wheeler (34.0) and Vince Velasquez (31.0) all appearing on the "Who's Hot – Pitching" list for the week; and even more **Cubs** gracing the "Who's Hot – Hitting" list during the week: Byron Buxton (44.0), Paul Goldschmidt (37.4), Matt Chapman (31.4), Joey Gallo (29.4), and Jack Suwinski (29.0). I'm sorry, *who?* *Jack Suwinski?* Okay, I guess I need to start paying a little more attention. But who in their right minds would have guessed that any team could have turned Joey Gallo into a team asset, given all of the time that he has spent below the *Mendoza line* these past couple of seasons. A silk purse from a sow's ear, if ever there was one.

Here are the individual numbers for the week and for the season:

TOP 25 PITCHERS

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Gerrit Cole	Bombers	189.0
2.	Clayton Kershaw	Cubs	170.0
3.	Zac Gallen	Bears	168.0
4.	Shohei Ohtani	Redbirds	162.0
5.	Sonny Gray	Bombers	154.0
6.	Justin Steele	Monarchs	153.0
	Shane McClanahan	Blues	153.0
8.	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	148.0
9.	Joe Ryan	Tribe	145.0
	Spencer Strider	Tigers	145.0
11.	Luis Castillo	Blues	135.0
12.	Jacob deGrom	Bears	132.0

13.	Mitch Keller	Saints	131.0
14.	Marcus Stroman	Tigers	125.0
15.	Eduardo Rodriguez	Senators	121.0
16.	Framber Valdez	Wahoos	119.0
17.	Vince Velasquez	Cubs	117.0
18.	Shane Bieber	Skipjacks	115.0
	Hunter Brown	Wahoos	115.0
20.	Pablo López	Saints	113.0
21.	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	111.0
	Nathan Eovaldi	Wahoos	111.0
23.	Anthony DeSclafani	Skipjacks	108.0
24.	Graham Ashcraft	Bums	107.0
25.	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	106.0

WHO'S HOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Sonny Gray	Bombers	67.0
2.	Josiah Gray	Bums	64.0
3.	Nathan Eovaldi	Wahoos	63.0
4.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	48.0
	Alex Cobb	Cubs	48.0
6.	Martín Pérez	Tigers	47.0
7.	Clayton Kershaw	Cubs	41.0
	Jordan Montgomery	Bums	41.0
9.	Zac Gallen	Bears	40.0
10.	Justin Steele	Monarchs	39.0
11.	Aaron Nola	Tigers	38.0
	José Berríos	Senators	38.0
	Hunter Brown	Wahoos	38.0
14.	Chris Bassitt	Senators	36.0
	Charlie Morton	Wahoos	36.0
16.	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	34.0
	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	34.0
18.	Luis Garcia	Bums	33.0
	MacKenzie Gore	Skipjacks	33.0
20.	Miles Mikolas	Redbirds	32.0
	Roansy Contreras	Saints	32.0
	Nick Martinez	Bombers	32.0
23.	Vince Velasquez	Cubs	31.0
	Mitch Keller	Saints	31.0
	Joe Ryan	Tribe	31.0

WHO'S NOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Kenta Maeda	Senators	-24.0
2.	Johan Oviedo	Tribe	-14.0
3.	Ryne Nelson	Bears	-13.0
4.	Kyle Bradish	Bears	-12.0
	Zack Greinke	Blues	-12.0
6.	Jordan Lyles	Bombars	-11.0
	Dylan Cease	Monarchs	-11.0
8.	Cal Quantrill	Redbirds	-10.0
9.	Eric Lauer	Cubs	-7.0
10.	Joe Musgrove	Saints	-6.0
11.	Sean Manaea	Senators	-3.0
12.	Tanner Houck	Wahoos	-1.0
	Reid Detmers	Saints	-1.0
	Julio Urías	Saints	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Matt Chapman	Cubs	143.0
2.	Randy Arozarena	Saints	140.6
3.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	Cubs	139.3
4.	Max Muncy	Wahoos	128.5
5.	Matt Olson	Wahoos	128.3
6.	Mike Trout	Senators	128.2
7.	Yandy Díaz	Bums	124.4
8.	James Outman	Skipjacks	123.4
9.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	123.2
10.	Marcus Semien	Cubs	122.7
11.	Adolis García	Skipjacks	121.9
12.	Brent Rooker	Tigers	121.6
13.	Pete Alonso	Bums	119.7
	Rafael Devers	Monarchs	119.7
15.	Cody Bellinger	Tribe	119.6
16.	Nico Hoerner	Blues	119.0
	Bryan Reynolds	Monarchs	119.0
18.	Wander Franco	Blues	118.8
19.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	117.1
	Vladimir Guerrero Jr.	Blues	117.1
21.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	116.1
22.	Thairo Estrada	Saints	115.4
23.	Jorge Mateo	Redbirds	115.2

24.	Alex Verdugo	Blues	114.6
25.	Patrick Wisdom	Senators	114.1

WHO'S HOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Brent Rooker	Tigers	63.5
2.	Brandon Drury	Senators	57.2
3.	Byron Buxton	Cubs	44.0
4.	Isaac Paredes	Bombers	40.5
5.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	40.0
6.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	37.4
7.	Jorge Mateo	Redbirds	35.7
8.	LaMonte Wade Jr.	Bums	35.6
9.	Josh Jung	Bears	35.5
10.	Jeremy Peña	Bombers	34.9
11.	Manny Machado	Redbirds	34.7
12.	Jazz Chisholm Jr.	Monarchs	34.0
13.	Randy Arozarena	Saints	33.6
14.	Cal Raleigh	Wahoos	33.1
15.	Nathaniel Lowe	Bums	32.7
16.	Matt Chapman	Cubs	31.4
17.	Wander Franco	Blues	30.8
18.	Bryan Reynolds	Monarchs	30.5
19.	Andrew Vaughn	Bears	30.0
20.	Corbin Carroll	Bears	29.5
	Jarren Duran	Bears	29.5
22.	Joey Gallo	Cubs	29.4
23.	Salvador Perez	Senators	29.2
24.	Jack Suwinski	Cubs	29.0
25.	Jesús Aguilar	Bombers	28.7

WHO'S NOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Nolan Arenado	Bombers	-5.20
2.	Ty France	Saints	-4.50
3.	Trea Turner	Blues	-3.50
4.	Jorge Soler	Bombers	-3.00
5.	Mark Canha	Bums	-1.50
6.	Oscar Colás	Blues	-1.00
7.	Amed Rosario	Bums	-0.20

It is notable that the Gray brothers, Sonny and Josiah, were the hottest pitchers for the week with 67.0 and 64.0 points, respectively. And while we are talking about last week's top-

scoring pitcher, don't you just love the name "Sonny"? I mean, if I had it to do over again, I think I would name one of my male offspring "Sonny." Not to be confused with "Sunny," which is a great nickname for our effervescent sunrise optimist—the inimitable McBlunder—but would not be appropriate as an actual first name for a male, to my binary way of looking at the world.

And digressing a little bit more, how many great "Sonny's" can we come up with, he asked rhetorically? Actually, not that many. Sonny *Liston*; Sonny *Jurgensen*; Sonny *Sixkiller*; Sonny *Siebert*; Sonny *Bono*; Sonny *Dykes*; Sonny *Perdue*; and Sonny *Drysdale*. That's all I got. It pales in comparison to the list of "Billys" that we came up with during our epic stroll through Georgetown, many years ago.

Any others that I'm missing? Feel free to chime in.

From the "Who's Hot – Hitting" list, who among us would have guessed before the season that Brent Rooker would be on top with 63.5 points, that Isaac Paredes of the **Bombers** would be fourth with 45.5 points, or that the list would include LaMont Wade Jr., Josh Jung, Cal Raleigh, Jarren Duran, Jack Suwinski or Jesús Aguilar? The times, they are a-changing.

Taking a peek at the "Who's Not – Pitching" list, I am aggrieved to once again own the headliner, this week in the form of Kenta Maeda, who boat-raced the **Senators** backwards to the tune of negative 24.0 points. One more outing like that and he is headed for the scrapheap.

IN PRAISE OF: THE EMERALD ISLE

For the better part of the past fortnight HQ and I had the great good fortune of visiting the Emerald Isle, my first trip to this glorious piece of Earthly terrain. Meeting up with a fun-loving bunch called the *International Academy of Trial Lawyers* in Killarney, we got to experience the sights and sounds of this bucolic community situated in County Kerry, followed by a fascinating visit to Belfast in Northern Ireland, followed by two days of pub-hopping in Dublin. An excellent adventure, to say the least. I commend the land of Eire to you all.

As to which you could all attest, I could drone on for dozens of pages about our visit to Ireland, but instead I will try to keep it to a tolerable recounting of some observations and recollections which might be of interest:



I absolutely love the Irish brogue, which seems to differ from county to county. Strange as it may seem, I almost found myself "thinking" in an Irish brogue after being immersed in it for a day or two. With some people who have particularly heavy accents, I found myself having to lipread in order to have any understanding of what was being said by them. Many times I found myself just nodding affirmatively to their statements, and not really knowing what they had just said.



The Killarney National Park—in Killarney, of course—is one of the most beautiful preserves upon which I will ever set eyes. It is much different than our National Parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone, but every bit as scenic in its own way, and with a bonus of a beautiful, medieval castle (Ross Castle) located at water's edge.



Ross Castle



One of the best parts of our visit to Northern Ireland was getting to listen to a ninety-minute lecture from a noted area historian who gave us the *Reader's Digest* version of a thousand years of fighting on the Emerald Isle, including a very difficult to grasp explanation of the Troubles and the various factions involved in the fighting and later in the making of peace. My conclusion after listening to this recitation was that one of the hardest jobs in Northern Ireland would be teaching a high school history class.



They are very big on street murals in Belfast, mostly depicting the oppressed Irish Catholics or the oppressive Protestant Republicans, or the incompetent, intervening British military which was dispatched by the Prime Minister to try to keep the peace. They couldn't and didn't. My favorite mural was the one of Bobby Sands, pictured below, the first of several IRA prisoners to martyr themselves by going on hunger strikes to the point of death by starvation.





While on our coastal tour on our last day in Northern Ireland, we stopped at a pub along the way and had lunch followed by a short course in Irish whiskey tasting. Not my usual vibe, but well worth the experience. That night we had a sendoff dinner hosted by our new Northern Ireland friends, which included a drop-the-mic rendition of "O Danny Boy" by a young, red-bearded barrister who absolutely killed it and left the room with nary a dry eye. For those of you who were in attendance on our Hot Stove League Trip to Boston way back in the '90s when the Tip O'Neill doppelgänger treated us to an impromptu performance of the same song, you know what I'm talking about. Goosebump-inducing, indeed.



A few other fun facts about Northern Ireland:

- C.S. Lewis, Van Morrison, Rory McIlroy and Liam Neeson are a few of the more well-known people from Northern Ireland;
- The *Titanic* was built in Northern Ireland in 1912;
- The *Game of Thrones* was filmed in Northern Ireland;
- A seasoned Irishman can tell if someone is Protestant or Catholic by the pronunciation of one letter: "H."



Our last two days in Ireland were spent in Dublin, a very old and very beautiful city, with a pub a stone's throw away no matter where you are. We toured St. Patrick's Cathedral, which was built in the 1200s and is absolutely amazing,¹



St. Patrick's Cathedral

and then spent the rest of our time just walking here and there and ducking in and out of Irish pubs to listen to great Irish music and drink Guinness. In one of the better pubs that we went to, we met a pair of cops from Leister, England who had flown over from London that morning at a cost of €30 and were flying back that night and were planning on working the next day. We shared a few shots, and HQ taught them how to roll a quarter off their noses and into a shot glass, as I pretended to understand everything they said by nodding in agreement to everything they said. Presumably they told their colleagues the next day that they had met a very agreeable American chap.

¹ The amount of stained glass in this church is absolutely mind-blowing. The history that this church has seen would take a semester to recount. Going off my memory here, I think that there are something like 600 or 700 bodies of British Empire heroes buried within this church, including members of the British light cavalry slain in Crimea in 1854 in the famous "Charge of the Light Brigade" as told by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; and including missionaries to such faraway places as Belize who died there from Yellow Fever. One of the longest-serving "Dean"s of St. Patrick's was Jonathan Swift, who also was the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, so let's just say the guy was diverse.



Michele doing the quarter trick

All in all, a great trip to a beautiful place that I highly recommend to anyone who hasn't been there. I plan on making it over there again, the Good Lord willing and the creek don't rise.

R.I.P. DICKY GROAT

Many of you likely saw that former Cardinal and Pirate great Dick Groat passed away at the age of 92. What I didn't realize until reading the joyful article about him by Joe Posnanski was just *how great* an athlete he was.

Because it's too good not to share with my brethren, I share with you now the Posnanski piece on Dick Groat in its entirety.

Dick Groat was quite a man. He was not gifted with particularly great athleticism — he stood only about 5-foot-11, wasn't especially fast, as a hitter he lacked power, as a basketball player he lacked explosiveness — and yet, the man won an MVP Award, came close to winning another, played in both the NBA and MLB, almost singlehandedly led his Army team to championships in both baseball and basketball, and is a member of both the College Basketball AND College Baseball Halls of Fame.

Groat loved basketball more; he would say that he rarely felt happier or more alive than when he was on the court. But he knew baseball was his ticket. He grew up just six or so miles away from Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, and after his junior season at Duke, Pirates general manager Branch Rickey offered him a contract to play.

"Sign now," Rickey said, "and you'll be the starting shortstop tonight against the Giants."

Groat declined. He said that he had received a scholarship from Duke and owed the school four years. He signed one year later, though, and sure enough, skipped right over the minor leagues. His first start was June 19, 1952, just after he graduated from Duke. He was 21 years old. He went two-for-four with a run and two RBIs.

He wanted to pursue both sports, but Rickey talked him out of it ... or bullied him out of it.

In 1960, he won the MVP award as the Pirates won it all. There were three good MVP choices on that Pirates team — Roberto Clemente (who hit .314/.357/.458 and should have won the Gold Glove), Don Hoak (who hit .282/.366/.445 with 97 runs) and Groat (who won the batting title at .325 and teamed up with Bill Mazeroski to form an impenetrable double-play combination). Groat was generally viewed as the team leader, and he won the award.

In retrospect, yes, this was another one of those years when Willie Mays was the clear choice, but this was a time when the award HAD to go to someone on the Pirates because they had shocked everybody by winning the pennant and then the World Series. That was probably not even Groat's best season; in 1963, after getting traded to St. Louis, he hit .319/.377/.450 with a league-leading 43 doubles.

When he finished his baseball career, Groat became obsessed with golf and became something like a three or four handicap. He had a big impact on golf, too. In the 1970s, his nephew Bob would come to stay with him and his daughters in the summertime, and Dick would take Bob out to the golf course that he and teammate Jerry Lynch had designed, called "Champions Lake." Bob fell in love with golf and later taught the game to his two sons.

Bob was Bob Koepka. And one of those two sons is Brooks Koepka.

Dick Groat was a consummate gentleman who would show up at sporting events all the time and exude class and modesty and decency. He passed away on Thursday. He was 92 years old.



And that's a wrap for this issue, fellas.

Skipper