

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 16



June 15, 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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Dave Ernst

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WEEK 11: CUBS AND SAINTS RIDE HIGH; WAHOOS STILL WINNING; REDBIRDS REEKING

Gentlemen:

For Week 11 of the Hot Stove League season the **Cubs** bested the field with a rip-roaring 552.5 point total, closely followed by the **Saints** with 528.0 points. With a third best weekly total of 479.1 points, the **Wahoos** maintained their overall lead at the top of the pack, but at the other end of the universe, the reeling **Redbirds** could muster up only 301.9 points and have dropped significantly in the standings.

Here are the standings through Week 11, the point totals for Week 11, and the usual individual statistics for your usual viewing pleasure.

HSL STANDINGS THRU WEEK 11 ENDING JUNE 11, 2023

	Team	Points	Pts Back
1	Wahoos	5333.1	-
2	Saints	5137.4	195.7
3	Skipjacks	4820.5	512.6
4	Bums	4795.4	537.7
5	Cubs	4774.1	559.0
6	Bombers	4713.0	620.1
7	Bears	4685.7	647.4
8	Tigers	4525.3	807.8
9	Blues	4478.5	854.6
10	Redbirds	4402.2	930.9
11	Monarchs	4395.6	937.5
12	Senators	4370.5	962.6
13	Tribe	4027.9	1305.2



POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 11

	Team	Pts
1	Cubs	552.5
2	Saints	520.8
3	Wahoos	479.1
4	Tribe	474.2
5	Bums	464.0
6	Bombers	453.7
6	Blues	450.3
7	Skipjacks	427.8
8	Senators	411.5
10	Bears	409.2
11	Monarchs	374.9
12	Tigers	341.9
13	Redbirds	301.9

TOP 25 PITCHERS

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Shane McClanahan	Blues	342.0
2.	Nathan Eovaldi	Wahoos	321.0
3.	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	309.0
4.	Marcus Stroman	Tigers	308.0
	Mitch Keller	Saints	308.0
6.	Gerrit Cole	Bombers	304.0
7.	Joe Ryan	Tribe	296.0
8.	Framber Valdez	Wahoos	295.0
9.	Zac Gallen	Bears	288.0
10.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	286.0
11.	Clayton Kershaw	Cubs	284.0
12.	Shohei Ohtani	Redbirds	276.0
	Merrill Kelly	Tigers	276.0
14.	Chris Bassitt	Senators	269.0
15.	Luis Castillo	Blues	265.0
	Cristian Javier	Tribe	265.0
17.	Jon Gray	Wahoos	261.0
18.	Logan Webb	Tribe	256.0
19.	Zach Eflin	Redbirds	254.0
20.	Shane Bieber	Skipjacks	251.0
21.	Tyler Wells	Skipjacks	250.5
22.	Lucas Giolito	Senators	249.0
23.	Corbin Burnes	Senators	242.0
24.	Justin Steele	Monarchs	239.0

	Bryce Elder	Redbirds	239.0
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WHO'S HOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Blake Snell	Skipjacks	69.0
2.	Lucas Giolito	Senators	62.0
3.	Taijuan Walker	Bums	61.0
4.	Shane McClellan	Blues	55.0
5.	Andrew Abbott	Tribe	53.0
6.	Shane Bieber	Skipjacks	52.0
7.	Kyle Hendricks	Monarchs	44.0
	Corbin Burnes	Senators	44.0
9.	Aaron Nola	Tigers	42.0
10.	Julio Teheran	Tribe	41.0
11.	Johan Oviedo	Blues	39.0
12.	Zach Eflin	Redbirds	38.0
	Braxton Garrett	Saints	38.0
	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	38.0
	Jesús Luzardo	Saints	38.0
16.	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	36.0
	Clayton Kershaw	Cubs	36.0
	Jon Gray	Wahoos	36.0
	Kyle Gibson	Monarchs	36.0
20.	Brayan Bello	Wahoos	35.0
	Michael Wacha	Wahoos	35.0
22.	Chris Bassitt	Senators	34.0
23.	Jordan Montgomery	Bums	33.0
	Kodai Senga	Redbirds	33.0
25.	Bobby Miller	Bums	32.0

WHO'S NOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Alek Manoah	Skipjacks	-21.0
	Mike Mayers	Tigers	-21.0
3.	George Kirby	Blues	-9.0
4.	Justin Verlander	Tigers	-6.0
	Adrian Houser	Senators	-6.0
	Matthew Liberatore	Tribe	-6.0
7.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	-4.0
	Taj Bradley	Bears	-4.0
9.	Dean Kremer	Cubs	-3.0
10.	Triston McKenzie	Monarchs	-2.0
	Brady Singer	Saints	-2.0

	Matthew Boyd	Monarchs	-2.0
13.	Miles Mikolas	Redbirds	-1.0
	Michael Grove	Saints	-1.0
	Tommy Henry	Bombers	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Freddie Freeman	Skipjacks	335.0
2.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	Cubs	324.1
3.	Marcus Semien	Cubs	294.5
4.	Mookie Betts	Bombers	285.9
5.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	283.9
6.	Corbin Carroll	Bears	277.2
7.	Yordan Alvarez	Redbirds	271.1
8.	Randy Arozarena	Saints	269.3
9.	Bo Bichette	Bears	265.4
10.	Wander Franco	Blues	262.5
11.	Matt Olson	Wahoos	261.5
12.	Aaron Judge	Wahoos	260.0
13.	Pete Alonso	Bums	257.6
14.	Adolis García	Skipjacks	251.9
15.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	250.5
16.	Jonathan India	Bears	248.3
17.	Yandy Díaz	Bums	247.5
18.	Juan Soto	Saints	242.5
19.	Jorge Soler	Bombers	240.5
20.	Josh Jung	Bears	238.6
21.	Luis Arraez	Bums	236.7
22.	Nick Castellanos	Senators	236.1
23.	José Ramírez	Tribe	231.3
24.	Mike Trout	Senators	229.2
25.	Ketel Marte	Saints	227.3

WHO'S HOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Corbin Carroll	Bears	56.5
2.	José Ramírez	Tribe	51.5
3.	Freddie Freeman	Skipjacks	50.2
4.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	43.5
5.	Gunnar Henderson	Blues	43.4
6.	Nolan Arenado	Bombers	42.9
7.	Nolan Jones	Saints	42.1

8.	Joc Pederson	Wahoos	40.0
9.	Elly De La Cruz	Blues	39.2
10.	Ryan Noda	Cubs	38.0
11.	Thairo Estrada	Saints	37.5
12.	Trea Turner	Blues	37.1
13.	Mookie Betts	Bombers	35.8
14.	Josh Naylor	Monarchs	34.0
15.	Tyler Stephenson	Tribe	33.5
16.	Fernando Tatis Jr.	Saints	32.1
17.	Gary Sánchez	Saints	31.9
18.	Joey Wiemer	Senators	31.7
19.	Ke'Bryan Hayes	Senators	31.2
20.	Isaac Paredes	Bombers	31.1
21.	Randy Arozarena	Saints	31.0
	Orlando Arcia	Tribe	31.0
	Jorge Soler	Bombers	31.0
24.	Seth Brown	Cubs	30.6
25.	Francisco Álvarez	Bums	29.5

WHO'S NOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Anthony Rizzo	Bombers	-6.40
2.	Rowdy Tellez	Wahoos	-5.80
3.	Christian Vázquez	Tigers	-5.00
4.	Dansby Swanson	Tigers	-4.10
5.	Ryan Mountcastle	Skipjacks	-4.00
6.	Jared Walsh	Blues	-3.80
7.	Jorge Polanco	Monarchs	-2.20
8.	Tommy Edman	Redbirds	-2.00
9.	Alec Bohm	Senators	-1.90
	Vinnie Pasquantino	Tribe	-1.90
11.	Giancarlo Stanton	Tigers	-1.50
	TJ Friedl	Bears	-1.50
13.	Christian Bethancourt	Redbirds	-0.50

IN PRAISE OF: PNC PARK

To cap off last week's Pennsylvania pusch my brother Dan and I continued our annual tradition of rewarding ourselves for passing our screening test by attending¹ a Pirates game at PNC Park. With excellent seats just beyond the third base bag and about half-way up the lower

¹ With our doctor, Randy Brand and his wife Rhonda, and his lead nurse Gail and her husband Jeff.

owl, we had a perfect view of the game, of the downtown Pittsburgh skyline, and the after game fireworks display. Pinch me, said he.



On a beautiful night with the temperature in the mid 70s and no wind, we saw the small-market Pirates annihilate the major league team with the highest payroll, the Mets, jumping out to a 14-2 cushion before bringing in rusty closer David Bednar for a little bit of work in the top of the 9th, in which the Mets plated 5 runs to bring the final tally to 14-7. Making the night even sweeter was the fact that recent Senator acquisition Ke'Bryan's Song Hayes had a 5-for-5 night at the plate with 3 runs scored and 4 runs driven in (20.3 points); while fellow Senator infielder Ji Hwan Bae had a clutch base hit, drove in two runs and scored two others for himself, stole a base, and ended up with a 6.6 point night. The seemingly ageless Rich Hill had a stellar

outing on the hill for the Buckos, pitching 7 innings and giving up 7 hits and 2 runs for a total of 27.0 points.

There is a lot of excitement in Steel City this year with the Pirates playing unexpectedly good ball and chasing the Milwaukee Brewers for the National League Central Division lead. Whether they can keep it up for the season is the \$64,000 question, but for now the Pirate faithful are having one heck of a lot of fun.

After attending Friday night's game, I again reflected on what a spectacular green cathedral is PNC park. When we went to Fenway for Opening Day, I was starting to lean back toward the ballpark in Beantown as the best in the majors, but I think objectively that PNC Park claims the top prize in the beauty contest. Perhaps in the future I will proffer the opinion that Fenway is the greatest ballpark of the 20th century, while PNC lays claim to that distinction for century number 21. How's that for a Solomonic solution to this raging debate.

A MAN'S MAN



*Budge Porter,
1975 Freshman UNL*

The weekend before last I played some poker with my old Pershing Panther buddies and Coach Hughes, and one of the individuals who was invited to play this year was former Nebraska Cornhusker Budge Porter. You may remember that Porter was a tremendous schoolboy athlete at Nebraska City and earned a full-ride scholarship to play defensive back for the Huskers. During a Husker scrimmage on April 21, 1976, while trying to tackle Husker running back I.M. Hipp, Porter sustained a severe injury to his cervical spine, ending his Husker career and putting him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Fast forward ahead 47 years. Budge is still confined to a wheelchair, but in the meantime he has also been married, raised three kids, including a son who coaches at Millard North, and had a successful career. Beyond these accomplishments, which are mind-blowing, I'm sure that there are many more victories and accomplishments that he has achieved but that he is far too modest to ever talk about.

I had met Budge before on a couple of different occasions at sports outings and gatherings in Omaha, but I had never really sat down and talked with him one-on-one or spent any real time in close proximity to him, but I was lucky enough to play poker with him for the better part of five or six hours at the aforementioned gathering. He is just the best dude imaginable. Upbeat, funny, self-effacing, a bit of a wisecracker in the nicest possible way, but as independent as I can imagine someone being with his medical limitations, rarely needing any assistance but graciously accepting it when offered and necessary. When the evening was over and I was reflecting back on it, it occurred to me that if I had been blindfolded throughout the evening, I don't think I would have had a clue that Budge is a wheelchair-bound quadriplegic. Just amazing.

What a privilege and honor to have spent part of an evening with a man's man like Budge Porter. I guess I should have thought a little bit more about that when I was having my little Meloxicam pity party last week.

(Editor's Note: Even though the severity of Budge's injury confined him to a wheelchair, he rehabbed hard and regained muscle. In 1981, Porter received a standing ovation when he used

crutches and walked slowly to receive his diploma on a stage set up inside the Bob Devaney Sports Center. He won the Ron Gustafson Inspiration Award in 2002.)

NO JOKE

I'm not a tennis fan by any stretch of the imagination, but on Sunday morning we watched the last set of the French Open between Djokovic and his opponent, Casper Ruud. I suspect that you have all heard that Djokovic won the match and with it his 23rd USTA Men's Grand Slam title, breaking his tie with Rafael Nadal. Of course, some might say it is tainted since Nadal was injured and couldn't even compete in the French Open (which he has won a record 14 times), but nevertheless the Joker is now #1 in career Grand Slam titles.

What was cool about this particular victory was watching the normally stoic Djokovic celebrate with his family after the match. There was so much emotion and joy as he vigorously hugged his wife and children and parents and siblings and many, many friends. I unexpectedly found myself with tears flowing down my cheeks as I watched this beautiful display of a superb champion sharing this joyous event with his family.

HOUSTON FLEETWOOD, REVISITED

Last Saturday I schlepped it down to Martell, Nebraska for a reunion of the much-heralded Houston Fleetwood softball team which terrorized Lincoln and a large portion of the Greater Midwest during the 1970s and '80s, and perhaps beyond. Here is a photo of the ten stalwarts who risked extradition to attend this epic event.



Because I keep everything, I was able to crack open a box in the furnace room and quickly unearth one of my favorite Houston Fleetwood uniforms of all, patterned after the Houston Astros unis of that time frame, and coupled with some of those extraordinarily uncomfortable and fashion citation-worthy Bike coaching shorts, to-wit:



My memory on this point is far from perfect, but I believe that it was in the spring of 1976, my freshman year in college, or the spring of 1977, toward the tail end of my sophomore year, that my old chum Larry Larson asked me if I would be interested in playing on this team. Larry grew up about three doors down from our own beloved Underbelly, who was one of the leading lights behind the maturation and rise to excellence of the H.F. softball powerhouse. I only knew Underbelly by reputation up until that point in time. Anyway, I somehow survived the Vince Lombardi-like tryout regimen at the cruel hands of Messrs. Hurlbut and Kennedy, and I found myself a full-fledged, card-carrying member of the Fleetwood juggernaut. If memory serves, I played for the Fleetwood for 6 or 7 or 8 years, including after moving to Omaha to begin work as a cub lawyer at my firm in 1983. For at least one season after that, I would drive back to Lincoln once or twice a week to lace up the spikes and lay it on the line for the glorious Fleetwooders.

There were some good stories told at the reunion, to be sure. One of them involved Larry's former fraternity brother, Kurt Rohren, who loved to bitch and whine about being far too athletic to be batting eighth or ninth in the lineup. Big league arm, little league bat, it was said.

Another story revolved around a tournament trip to Kansas City in which we had a fantastic post-game meal experience at a place called Tasso's, a lively Greek place down by the Plaza which featured belly dancers and the authentic Greek owner who would dance on the table and pour streams of ouzo down the back of your throat, ready or not. After full Greek meals by all 15 of us and many, many shots of ouzo and other alcoholic beverages, one of our team players, who shall remain anonymous, offered up his opinion that the bill could "push \$200"² and was only wrong by about a multiple of three.

Another story that surfaced at the reunion was about a game at Mahoney Park in which I was heckled by an opposing fan. After my first three at-bats resulted in a trifecta of gale force wind-aided yard balls, at my next at-bat—in reference to my severely overgrown blond mane—an opposing fan yelled, "Is that a bat or a blow dryer?" The raucous laughter amongst the opposition, and doubtless a few Fleetwooders, was met with an appropriate and oh-so-satisfying reply.

² Remember, these were late 1970s dollars.

In any event, it was good to see this loyal faction of the Houston Fleetwood organization back together for a few hours.

NOT RUNNING ON EMPTY

On Tuesday evening, accompanied by Dale and Jackie Mahlman, we attended the Jackson Browne concert at the Orpheum theater. He may be 74 years old and look like he's 90, but the old "Pretender" can still entertain a crowd, all of whom looked to be in their 60s or 70s. I'm not sure I have ever seen a crowd render and sustain a standing ovation for, like, the final five or six songs of a concert. Damned good stuff.



That's it for this edition, ³ amigos. Hope you enjoyed it and hope you all have a fantastic Father's Day weekend!

Lil Skip

³ And if my math is correct, this is the **750th** issue of *From the Bullpen*, dating back to the very first issue which was circulated on April 14, 1986. No reason to make a big deal out of it, but I will use this as an opportunity to find out how many people actually take the time to read my sometimes tedious footnotes. If you do, please send me an email that says something like, "Edition 750 received and reviewed, Skip!" But please do not copy in your fellow owners because I am interested in finding out how many people actually do read footnotes on their own and do not have to be prompted.

