

FROM THE BULLPEN

Official Newsletter of the

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

2023: Our 39th Season

Edition No. 24



August 24, 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

Webmaster and
Assistant Editor
Linda "Chief" Koftan

BUMS STILL HUM

The white-hot **Bums** continue to be the top story in the Hot Stove League, with Magpie's charges scoring 509.7 for Week 21 to outpace the **Saints** (470.6) and the **Wahoos** (418.8) and remain in second place through 21 weeks of play, but only 39.3 points behind the **Saints**. Here are the Week 21 standings and the point totals for that week:

STANDINGS

	Team	Points	Pts Back
1	Saints	9878.8	-
2	Bums	9839.5	39.3
3	Wahoos	9729.6	149.2
4	Monarchs	9097.2	781.6
5	Skipjacks	9010.8	868.0
6	Cubs	9001.2	877.6
7	Bears	8844.5	1034.3
8	Bombers	8747.8	1131.0
9	Senators	8667.0	1211.8
10	Blues	8644.1	1234.7
11	Tribe	8607.5	1271.3
12	Tigers	8157.9	1720.9
13	Redbirds	8004.4	1874.4

POINT TOTALS FOR WEEK 21

	Team	Pts
1	Bums	509.7
2	Bears	500.9
3	Senators	487.6
4	Saints	470.6
5	Redbirds	458.1
6	Monarchs	456.6



7	Wahoos	418.8
8	Tribe	417.1
9	Cubs	393.8
10	Bombers	367.9
11	Blues	358.9
12	Skipjacks	343.8
13	Tigers	328.8

As already mentioned, the **Bums** have been h-o-t, **HOT!** As earlier pointed out, on June 18, after 12 weeks of play, the **Bums** were 655.5 points behind the **Wahoos**. Since that time, the **Bums** have scored the following totals in the ensuing weeks:

Week 13	516.0
Week 14	511.3
Week 15	588.0
Week 16	313.6
Week 17	528.8
Week 18	528.8
Week 19	489.1
Week 20	645.0
Week 21	509.7

During those eight weeks, the **Bums** totaled 4114 points, meaning that they averaged 514.25 points per week during that span, including the shortened All Star week. Can you say *en fuego*?

By way of contrast, here are the total points scored by the rest of the league during those same eight weeks:

2.	Monarchs	3674
3.	Senators	3646
4.	Tribe	3608
5.	Saints	3603
6.	Wahoos	3351
7.	Cubs	3295
8.	Blues	3293
9.	Skipjacks	3290
10.	Bombers	3252
11.	Bears	3210
12.	Redbirds	2896
13.	Tigers	2753

And so we can clearly see why Molly has been hiding Big Guy's razor blades these past eight weeks.

The question is, can the **Bums** keep it up and prevent US Steel and General Motors from taking yet another Hot Stove League title? We will all know soon enough, brethren. Could be one heck of a final pennant race.

TOP 25 PITCHERS

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	580.0
2.	Zac Gallen	Bears	555.0
	Gerrit Cole	Bombers	555.0

4.	Pablo López	Saints	518.0
5.	Logan Webb	Tribe	514.0
6.	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	495.0
	Corbin Burnes	Senators	495.0
8.	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	484.0
	Luis Castillo	Blues	484.0
10.	George Kirby	Blues	483.0
11.	Justin Steele	Monarchs	474.0
12.	Blake Snell	Skipjacks	473.0
13.	Logan Gilbert	Bums	470.0
14.	Zach Eflin	Redbirds	467.0
15.	Shohei Ohtani	Redbirds	466.0
16.	Framber Valdez	Wahoos	456.0
17.	Chris Bassitt	Senators	454.0
18.	Max Scherzer	Senators	441.0
19.	Mitch Keller	Saints	439.0
20.	Nathan Eovaldi	Wahoos	429.0
21.	Freddy Peralta	Cubs	428.0
22.	Merrill Kelly	Tigers	427.0
23.	Sonny Gray	Monarchs	424.0
24.	Kodai Senga	Redbirds	421.0
25.	José Berríos	Senators	419.0

WHO'S HOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Logan Allen	Tribe	47.0
2.	Dakota Hudson	Bears	46.0
3.	Max Scherzer	Senators	43.0
4.	Spencer Strider	Tigers	42.0
5.	Kyle Hendricks	Monarchs	41.0
6.	Merrill Kelly	Tigers	38.0
7.	Kyle Bradish	Monarchs	36.0
	Charlie Morton	Wahoos	36.0
9.	Reid Detmers	Bears	35.0
	Paul Blackburn	Tigers	35.0
11.	Grayson Rodriguez	Bums	34.0
	Braxton Garrett	Saints	34.0
13.	Kodai Senga	Redbirds	33.0
	Eury Pérez	Bears	33.0
	Corbin Burnes	Senators	33.0
	Tyler Glasnow	Bears	33.0
	Tarik Skubal	Saints	33.0
	Bryce Elder	Redbirds	33.0
19.	Eduardo Rodriguez	Senators	32.0
	Julio Uriás	Saints	32.0
	Zack Wheeler	Cubs	32.0
	Jordan Montgomery	Bums	32.0



23.	Bobby Miller	Bums	31.0
	Kutter Crawford	Wahoos	31.0
	Bryce Miller	Saints	31.0

WHO'S NOT – PITCHING

	Pitchers	Roster	Pts
1.	Tony Gonsolin	Blues	-22.0
2.	Hunter Greene	Bears	-19.0
3.	Michael Lorenzen	Bums	-13.0
4.	Jack Flaherty	Wahoos	-12.0
5.	Jesse Scholtens	Bears	-11.0
6.	Jesús Luzardo	Saints	-10.0
7.	Patrick Sandoval	Monarchs	-9.0
8.	Matthew Liberatore	Saints	-8.0
9.	Josiah Gray	Redbirds	-7.0
10.	Gerrit Cole	Bombers	-6.0
11.	Johan Oviedo	Blues	-5.0
12.	Garrett Whitlock	Blues	-4.0
	JP Sears	Tribe	-4.0
	Kevin Gausman	Bombers	-4.0
	Reese Olson	Cubs	-4.0
16.	Austin Gomber	Cubs	-3.0
17.	Clarke Schmidt	Tribe	-2.0
18.	Chase Silseth	Bears	-1.0
	Wade Miley	Skipjacks	-1.0
	Tyler Anderson	Wahoos	-1.0

TOP 25 HITTERS

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	Cubs	651.3
2.	Shohei Ohtani	Skipjacks	645.3
3.	Freddie Freeman	Skipjacks	611.3
4.	Matt Olson	Wahoos	607.0
5.	Mookie Betts	Bombers	596.4
6.	Marcus Semien	Cubs	514.6
7.	Kyle Tucker	Monarchs	503.1
8.	Juan Soto	Saints	493.4
9.	Austin Riley	Saints	492.2
10.	Bobby Witt Jr.	Bums	488.5
11.	Ozzie Albies	Senators	486.2
12.	Christian Walker	Redbirds	476.4
13.	Adolis García	Skipjacks	475.6
14.	Francisco Lindor	Monarchs	472.0
15.	Pete Alonso	Bums	471.7
16.	Corbin Carroll	Bears	467.8
17.	Christian Yelich	Tigers	467.5

18.	Julio Rodríguez	Bears	464.8
19.	Rafael Devers	Monarchs	458.0
20.	Luis Robert Jr.	Blues	453.1
21.	Corey Seager	Tribe	450.0
22.	Lane Thomas	Cubs	447.3
23.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	446.5
24.	Nathaniel Lowe	Bums	445.1
25.	Ketel Marte	Saints	444.5

WHO'S HOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Julio Rodríguez	Bears	71.1
2.	Christian Walker	Redbirds	57.0
3.	Bobby Witt Jr.	Bums	53.7
4.	Eddie Rosario	Tigers	51.5
5.	Gunnar Henderson	Blues	50.2
6.	Rafael Devers	Monarchs	47.3
7.	Charlie Blackmon	Blues	47.0
8.	Mookie Betts	Bombers	43.9
9.	Spencer Torkelson	Tribe	43.1
10.	Corey Seager	Tribe	42.2
11.	Brandon Nimmo	Bums	42.0
12.	Paul Goldschmidt	Cubs	39.6
13.	Pete Alonso	Bums	39.3
	Ezequiel Tovar	Monarchs	39.3
15.	Teoscar Hernández	Bombers	38.5
16.	Nolan Jones	Bears	37.3
17.	Harold Ramírez	Redbirds	36.5
18.	DJ Stewart	Cubs	36.1
19.	Tommy Pham	Wahoos	35.6
20.	Marcell Ozuna	Tribe	35.5
21.	Francisco Lindor	Monarchs	35.4
22.	Stone Garrett	Saints	35.0
23.	Jorge Soler	Bombers	33.5
24.	Josh Lowe	Saints	33.0
25.	Pablo Reyes	Cubs	32.5

WHO'S NOT – HITTING

	Batters	Roster	Pts
1.	Matt Chapman	Cubs	-5.3
2.	Andruw Monasterio	Bears	-5.2
3.	Mickey Moniak	Wahoos	-5.0
4.	Trevor Story	Skipjacks	-4.7
5.	Logan O'Hoppe	Saints	-4.5
6.	Harrison Bader	Redbirds	-3.5
7.	Henry Davis	Monarchs	-1.5

	Adam Duvall	Skipjacks	-1.5
9.	Amed Rosario	Skipjacks	-0.5

IN PRAISE OF: BOSSE FIELD

On Tuesday night after a little bit of legal business in Evansville, Indiana, I took in a Frontier League game between the Evansville Otters and the Joliet Slammers at historic Bosse Field located at 23 Don Mattingly Way. This shopworn old relic of a field was built in 1915, just shortly after Fenway Park made its debut in 1912 and Weeghman Park (now Wrigley) opened its gates in 1914. In fact, Bosse Field is the third-oldest professional baseball park in the country that is still hosting games.



Bosse Field

Erected at a cost of \$65,000¹ as the first *municipal* baseball stadium for professional play, Bosse Field has been home to a number of different teams over the more than a century of its existence, including the Evas, the Black Sox, the Little Evas, the Pocketeers, the Hubs, the Bees and the Triplets. Evansville gained its first major league affiliation in 1928, partnering with the Detroit Tigers, where many years later Mark “The Bird” Fidrych began earning his reputation in 1976. At other times they partnered with the Boston Bees, the Milwaukee Braves, the Chicago White Sox, the Minnesota Twins and the Milwaukee Brewers. Cooperstown denizens who played at Bosse Field include Hank Greenberg, Chuck Klein, Warren Spahn, Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, and Bert Blyleven.

And I did not know until I got there that a number of scenes from *A League of Their Own* were filmed at Bosse Field in 1991, and so Tom Hanks, Madonna, Geena Davis and Rosie O’Donnell all spent some time in spikes at Bosse Field.

¹ Or when adjusted for inflation, \$1.6 million today.

At the game that I attended, there were four cheerleaders, pictured below, all dressed in period garb from the era of *A League of Their Own*, providing entertainment to the fans and the players. Don't know if this is a nightly feature, or if I just lucked out by being there on a night when they were performing.



The game I witnessed in high heat and humidity was less than competitive with the visiting Slammers living up to their nickname with a torrent of runs in the top of the third inning on their way to a 9-3 laughter over the Otters. But I was treated to some of the best heckling I have ever before heard, good-natured and almost incessant, causing me to meander up to the seats where the three hecklers were situated and to congratulate them on their clever and articulate patter. I asked if this was a routine for them at home Otters games, and they laughed and said that this was the first time they had ever been to Bosse Field for a game and that their heckling was entirely spontaneous. Well done, I commended them.

And one last rose to toss at Bosse Field—an ice cold, 32 oz. tumbler of Kona (Big Wave) Beer could be had for a mere 8 bucks, and was had, to be sure. So in all respects, a very good night at the ballpark.

IN PRAISE OF: REDEMPTION

Earlier this month, on Thursday, August 3, to be exact, HQ and I received the shocking news that our friend Mark Dahir had passed away that morning of a massive heart attack. He died just a few days short of turning 49 years of age. Sad, sad news that we are both still trying to process.



Some of you may have known Mark, either personally or by reputation, but he was the CEO of the Heart Ministry Center at the time of his death. Michele and I both got to know him in an earlier part of his career with Heart Ministry Center, back when he was a volunteer. In the fall of 2013, as we were packing up our respective houses and getting ready to move, Mark came to the acreage as a passenger in a big panel truck being driven by another HMC volunteer. He loaded up an entire truck of the furniture, clothes, and other personal property we donated to the Heart Ministry Center as we prepared to move into a rental house while we were building our current residence. We were each immediately impressed with Mark, not only by his stature—he was a mountain of a man, with huge muscles—and his booming voice, but also by his sincerity and his boundless energy, which was infectious. At that time, we knew nothing about his background and the destructive path he had been on for a number of years.

As we both got to know Mark better through our volunteering at HMC, we learned that he grew up in a well-to-do Omaha banking family, was more or less raised at the Happy Hollow Country Club, attended Creighton Prep, and had a seemingly unrestricted path to fame and fortune in the family business. That is, until his inner demons and addictions took him to the brink of despair and almost caused the death of a very good man, Steve Murray, who happened to be the father of Evan Murray, the catcher on the Mount Michael baseball teams who received the pitches of Joe and Will for several years.

Michele and I both remembered hearing on the television news about a terrible vehicular accident that occurred on February 15, 2011, wherein the son of an affluent banking family with a history of six previous DUIs had crashed into Steve Murray's vehicle in the early morning hours, severely injuring and almost killing him. The driver, who Michele later learned was Mark Dahir, was high on meth at the time. He ended up going to jail, and he lost his driver's license for the rest of his life. And then the story of Mark's redemption began.

As Mark often told it in his own words, he was having lunch with Father Fangman at Caniglia's Venice Inn and bemoaning his lot in life, when Father Fangman said something to him like, "When are you going to stop thinking about *yourself* all the time, and start thinking about *others*?" Mark later said that this question from Father Fangman was a turning point in his life. The next day, Father Fangman called John Levy, who was then the CEO of the Heart Ministry Center, and said Levy should meet with Mark Dahir and enlist him as a volunteer at HMC.

The rest of the story about Mark's life is one of the most unbelievable stories of redemption ever told. He became a volunteer, at first, and then an employee of the Heart Ministry Center. He started the HMC *Fresh Start* program, which has been incredibly successful, and has helped more than a hundred former addicts and downtrodden people to turn their lives around. Because Mark had been living the lies of addiction for so many years, he was able to call out B.S. on the people who wanted to enter the *Fresh Start* program but who were not yet ready, and this no doubt led to the salvation of many people who otherwise would now be dead or in prison.

One of my first experiences with Mark was when he was in his early days at HMC and involved in trying to find donated vehicles for some of their North Omaha clients. We donated our red Suburban—which Joe used to drive a cadre of Mount Michael baseball players to away games for several years—and Mark found a suitable recipient for it, a genial giant of a man who

was then in his early 30s and trying to get his life turned around. Mark insisted on the three of us getting together for breakfast to give the donee a chance to express his gratitude toward the donor, and it was a truly heartwarming experience. Just one example of how Mark made giving and getting personal, helping both parties to the transaction feel good about it.

After Mark's sudden passing at the tender age of 48, we attended his wake and his funeral at Christ the King Community Church, and I have never before witnessed such an outpouring of love and emotion. Numerous clients of the Heart Ministry Center, mostly black, got up and extolled the goodness and compassion and exuberance of Mark Dahir. At his funeral, there were fifteen Catholic priests and Archbishop George Lucas, all there to recognize and commemorate one of the most amazing stories of redemption about which any of us will ever hear.

This imperfect man who made a perfect turnaround in his life will be sadly and sorely missed by many, by his family, by his co-workers and volunteers at the Heart Ministry Center, by his clients, and by his friends. Every one of us who was lucky enough to know him will miss his aggressive bear hugs, his wonderful cliches,² and his parting words in his unmistakable gravelly voice: "I love you, man!" R.I.P., Mark Dahir.

THE TRIP

Our 38th Hot Stove League Trip is a mere two weeks away. Shamu, Sunny, Magpie, Mouse and yours truly will be in attendance, and we would love to have a few more of you come on over and join us, even if that means hitching a ride with B.T.'s Mobile Sewage Treatment Wagon. Let the old Skipper know if it might work out and we will try to find a ticket for you, if not a commemorative Trip 38 HSL shirt to have and to hold and to boast about evermore.

That's it for this week, fellas.

Next week: On the Road to Asheville and Hickory.

Skipper

² One of our favorites was when he would say, "We just need to meet people where they *are at*."