



THE BOSTON BEACONS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Ten Octobers and never a final. The light that gets other people home.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

A Light for Other People's Ships

A beacon is not a destination. Nobody sails toward a beacon. It stands on the point at the mouth of the harbor and it burns all night in weather nobody would go out in, and what it does, all it does, is tell somebody else where the rocks are so that somebody else can get home.

For twenty-two seasons this franchise played in a Pennsylvania valley and called itself after a dish the Pennsylvania Dutch made out of everything the butcher could not sell: the scraps and the trimmings, ground fine and pressed into a loaf and sliced and fried in the morning, and it was good, and nobody pretended it was steak. Then in 2023 the club moved to a harbor city and took the name of the light.

Thirty-one seasons. Ten Octobers. Three division flags, a hundred and one wins in a single summer, and the finest pitcher this league has produced, who threw three thousand four hundred and sixty innings in this uniform and never once threw a pitch in a championship series.

No franchise in The Big League has been to October ten times and never played for the trophy. Only this one.

The light burns. The ships go by.

I

Everything That Was Left

2001 – 2004

They were good almost immediately, which made everything after harder to explain.

The Lehigh Valley Scrapples won ninety games in the league's first season and went to October, and eighty-seven the next year, and in 2003 they won ninety-seven and the Sapphire Division. Three consecutive Octobers to start a franchise's life is a thing most clubs never manage once.

At the center of it was Rich Gordon, a second baseman who had been the fifth player taken in the club's first draft and who hit .295 with a hundred and twelve home runs and a hundred and thirty-two stolen bases across four seasons in the valley, and won Silver Sluggers in 2001, 2002 and 2004. Johnny Stone played right field and stole ninety-nine bases in six years. Ryan Wilson won a Gold Glove in center in 2004.

Twice they got to within one round of a final. In 2002, at eighty-seven and seventy-five, they came in as a wild card, beat their first opponent with Johnny Stone named most valuable player of the round, beat their second with Jason Gartz named most valuable player of that one, and lost the Ice Conference championship series. In 2003, with the division won, they beat their first opponent again — David Razo took the honors that time — and lost the conference championship series again.

Two Octobers, four series won, and the door shut in the same room both times.

Then Gordon left for the Kingston Frontenacs, where the best seasons of a Hall of Fame career were still in front of him, and the bottom came out of the whole thing at once.

II

Forty-Five and a Hundred Seventeen

2005 – 2008

The 2005 Lehigh Valley Scrapples won forty-five games and lost a hundred and seventeen.

It is the worst season in franchise history and one of the worst anyone has played in this league. Jose Aguilar started twenty games and finished four and twenty-one. Chris Puckett went six and fifteen and won a Gold Glove, which tells you what kind of year it was — the best thing anybody did was field. Doug Walsh played a hundred and fifty-two games at shortstop and hit .195. The club scored least and allowed most and finished seventh, thirty-two games out of sixth.

Fifty-two wins in 2006. Fifty-seven in 2007. Attendance fell from three and a half million to a shade over two million and stayed there.

In 2007 the front office changed hands. Kyle J, who had run the club through the three good years and the three terrible ones, gave way to JP Pearson, and Brad Robinette took over in the dugout. Neither of them has left. Pearson has now held the general manager's chair for twenty-five seasons and Robinette has managed for twenty-five, which is the longest continuous partnership anywhere in The Big League, and for the first two years of it they lost a hundred games.

Then, in the 2008 draft, with the second pick in the whole country, they took a right-handed pitcher out of nowhere in particular named Roland Cook.

III

The Arm

2009 – 2018

He was twenty-two years old and he went seventeen and six with an earned run average of 2.25 and two hundred and seventy-eight strikeouts, and he was named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference and won the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference in the same season, and the Scrapples won eighty-eight games and went back to October for the first time in six years.

Then he did it again. Eighteen and ten with a 2.68 in 2010, and the Cy Young. Eighteen and six with a 2.12 in 2011, and the Cy Young. Three in a row, on clubs that won eighty-eight, then seventy-one, then seventy-eight.

That is the whole shape of Roland Cook's career and, in a way, of this franchise's. He made thirty-four starts a year for sixteen years. He threw two hundred and thirty innings in a bad year. He never got hurt and he never asked out and he was, by any measure the league keeps, the most valuable pitcher who has ever worn this uniform: two hundred and seventeen wins, a 3.38 earned run average, three thousand three hundred and ninety-four strikeouts, and eighty-three wins above replacement, all of it for one club. In 2027 he became the first man elected to the Hall of Fame as a Scrapple and a Beacon.

Around him the club got good again slowly and then all at once. Barry Richardson came over from the Louisville organization and hit .282 with a hundred and sixty-six home runs across nine seasons. Ken Phillips, the fifth pick of the 2007 draft, played eleven years at second base and hit .204, which is the lowest average anybody has ever carried through a thousand games here, and hit a hundred and eighty-seven home runs while doing it. Chad Carpino drew four hundred and sixty-seven walks. Todd Vella hit .316 over five years and stole a hundred and eighty-three bases. Alex Lopez, already most of the way to a Hall of Fame plaque he would earn elsewhere, spent one season in the valley in 2012, went eleven and eight over two hundred and sixteen innings, and won a Gold Glove.

Eighty-nine wins and October in 2012. Ninety-seven and October in 2013. Then two near misses. And then the best two years this franchise has had.

The Autumn of a Hundred and One: 2017

The 2016 Scrapples won ninety-seven games and the division. The 2017 Scrapples won a hundred and one.

Ben McKenzie, a fourteenth-round pick taken four hundred and thirty-ninth overall by the Galveston Gremlins five years earlier, hit .326 with forty home runs and a hundred and twenty-four runs batted in and was named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Victor Perez hit forty-one home runs and drove

in a hundred and seven. Justin Gagliardi, a catcher in his first full season, hit .311 with twenty-two home runs and won a Silver Slugger and a Gold Glove. Jesse Ripke hit .299 at shortstop. Roland Cook went twenty-two and five.

Three million five hundred and thirty-four thousand people came through the gates, the largest crowd this franchise has ever drawn, and has drawn since.

They won the opening round — Gagliardi was named its most valuable player — and lost the next one.

Nobody in the Lehigh Valley treated that as a peak. A hundred and one wins is not a thing a club does by accident, the roster that produced it was young, and the arithmetic all pointed one way. But the crowd that came through the gates that summer is still the largest this franchise has ever drawn, and it would be fourteen years before the club won ninety games again.

In 2018 they won eighty-five and went again, and Antonio Reyes took the opening round's honors, and they lost the next one. That was the third consecutive October and the last one for a long while.

Nine Octobers now. Four series won in the first three of them, back in 2002 and 2003. Two more since. No final.

IV

Leaving the Valley

2019 – 2029

Seventy-three wins in 2019. Eighty in 2020. Seventy-three in 2021. Fifty-nine in 2022.

In 2023 the franchise moved to Boston and became the Beacons, and lost ninety-four games in the first year of it, and a hundred and two in the second, and a hundred and two in the third, and a hundred and seven in the fourth.

A lighthouse is not built for the people who tend it. That was the whole idea behind the name, and for the better part of a decade it was the only thing this franchise had to offer anybody: a light kept burning in a harbor, for ships that were all somewhere else.

Eight consecutive seasons of sixty-nine wins or fewer, from 2022 through 2029. Twelve consecutive seasons out of October, from 2019 through 2030, the longest drought in club history by nine years. Attendance bottomed at one million five hundred and fifty-one thousand in 2029, less than half what the ballpark had held twelve years before.

George Hoskin was there for most of it. An eighth-round pick, two hundred and forty-eighth overall in the 2013 draft, he played nine seasons at first base, hit two hundred and thirty-six home runs and drove in six hundred and ninety-one, hit forty-six in 2019 and thirty-seven in 2022 on a club that lost a hundred and three, and left after 2025 without ever appearing in a postseason game. Antonio Reyes played nine years in the outfield and stole two hundred and forty-two bases. Wan-fu Lou won three straight Gold Gloves at shortstop between 2021 and 2023 while hitting .186.

And Roland Cook kept taking the ball. He went six and eighteen in 2022 with an earned run average of 4.36, which is to say he pitched better than his record by a wide margin and it did not matter. He went thirteen and fifteen in 2023, the first year in Boston. In 2024, at thirty-seven, he went six and fourteen with a 5.45 and that was the end of it.

Sixteen seasons. Five hundred and eleven starts. Not one postseason game.

V

Ninety-One

2030 – 2031

Eighty wins in 2030, which after eight years of what had come before felt like a parade.

Then ninety-one in 2031, and the club went back to October for the first time since 2018.

Danny Hernandez hit .314 in right field. Edgar Tyler hit .310 with a hundred runs batted in. Scott Jacobs, the catcher, hit twenty-nine home runs and drove in a hundred and three and won a Gold Glove; Juan Hernandez won one on the mound. Bill Ramirez went fourteen and seven with a 2.96 across two hundred and seven innings. Mike Dibrell, the second pick of the 2024 draft, went eleven and four. Bryan Moorman, a sixteenth-round pick taken four hundred and ninety-eighth overall in 2021, played his sixth season in center field.

In July they traded four minor leaguers to Montreal for Eric Tangney, a shortstop who had been the sixth pick of the 2019 draft, and he hit .264 the rest of the way.

Three million twenty-two thousand people came out, the most since 2017. They lost in October. Nobody in Boston seemed to think that was the point.

VI

What the Light Is For

Thirty-one seasons. Two thousand three hundred and fifty-three wins against two thousand six hundred and sixty-nine losses, which is .469 and describes a franchise that has been very good for about nine years of its life and quite bad for about twelve.

Three division flags. Ten Octobers. Six postseason series won and no championship series played, which is the rarest line in the whole league and not one anybody wants. Three Cy Young Awards, all to the same man, in three consecutive years. Two Rookies of the Year. No Most Valuable Player, ever.

One Hall of Famer of its own, Roland Cook, who never saw a final. One more, Rich Gordon, who gave the valley his first four seasons and the Kingston Frontenacs his best five. And Alex Lopez, who wore the uniform for exactly one summer on his way to somewhere else.

Twenty-five years of JP Pearson in the office and Brad Robinette in the dugout, through a hundred-and-one-win season and a forty-five-win season and the move from a valley to a harbor, which is either remarkable patience or remarkable stubbornness, and from the outside those look identical.

The beacon does not get to go anywhere. It stands where it was put, and it burns, and the ships that see it are going somewhere else. In 2031 the Beacons won ninety-one games, and for the first time in a long time somebody in the harbor was watching the light instead of steering by it.

The Ledger

Franchise founded: 2001 (charter member, The Big League), as the Lehigh Valley Scrapples

Relocations: Boston Beacons, 2023

Home: Beacon Field, Boston — capacity 45,000

Conference: Ice Conference, Sapphire Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,353–2,669 (.469)

Postseason appearances: 10 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 0

Championship series appearances: 0

Division titles: 3 — 2003, 2016, 2017

Best season: 2017 (101–61)

Worst season: 2005 (45–117)

Most Valuable Players: 0

Cy Young Awards: 3 — Roland Cook (2009, 2010, 2011)

Rookies of the Year: 2 — Roland Cook (2009), Ben McKenzie (2017)

Hall of Famers: one of its own, Roland Cook (2027). Rich Gordon, elected in 2015, gave this club 515 of his 1,450 games. Alex Lopez, elected in 2020, pitched here for one season, in 2012

Managers: Brian Pitcher (2001–2006), Brad Robinette (2007–)

General managers: Alberto L (2001), Kyle J (2001–2006), JP Pearson (2007–)

Longest postseason drought: 12 seasons (2019–2030)

Consecutive Octobers: 3 (2001–2003, and again 2016–2018)

Best attendance: 3,534,031 (2017)

Pillars of the Franchise

Roland Cook, P (2009–2024) — The best player in franchise history and not a close thing. Sixteen seasons, 511 starts, 3,460 innings, 217–157, a 3.38 earned run average and 3,394 strikeouts, all of it for one club. Cy Young Award winner of the Ice Conference in 2009, 2010 and 2011, and Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in 2009, the same season. First round, second overall, in the 2008 draft. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 2027. He never appeared in a postseason game.

Antonio Reyes, RF (2015–2023) — Nine seasons and 1,348 games, more than anyone else has played here. A .263 average, 159 home runs, 578 runs batted in and 242 stolen bases, with a Silver Slugger in 2016, a Gold Glove in 2019 and the most valuable player award of the opening round in 2018. In 2016 he hit .343 with 230 hits.

George Hoskin, 1B (2017–2025) — Nine seasons, 1,266 games, a .271 average, 236 home runs and 691 runs batted in, and 649 walks. Forty-six home runs in 2019. An eighth-round pick, 248th overall, in the 2013 draft, and he played his entire career here without seeing October.

Barry Richardson, LF (2007–2015) — Nine seasons, 1,087 games, a .282 average, 166 home runs, 603 runs batted in and 145 stolen bases, with a Silver Slugger in 2009 and a Gold Glove in 2011. Second round, 46th overall, in the 2003 draft, by the Louisville Rivermen.

Justin Gagliardi, C (2017–2023, 2027) — The best catcher the franchise has had: 905 games in two stints, a .283 average, 160 home runs and 543 runs batted in, worth 31.5 wins above replacement. Silver Sluggers in 2017, 2018 and 2021, Gold Gloves in 2017 and 2020, and most valuable player of the opening round of the 2017 postseason. First round, 22nd overall, 2014.

Ken Phillips, 2B (2008–2018) — Eleven seasons and 1,064 games at second base, 187 home runs and 499 runs batted in on a .204 average, which is the strangest line in the book and was worth having. First round, fifth overall, in the 2007 draft.

Rich Gordon, 2B (2001–2004) — The first great player this franchise had. Four seasons, 515 games, a .295 average, 112 home runs, 319 runs batted in and 132 stolen bases, with Silver Sluggers in 2001, 2002 and 2004. He left for the Kingston Frontenacs and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 2015, with more than twice as many games in that uniform as in this one.

Jesse Ripke, SS (2016–2021) — Six seasons, 931 games, a .280 average and 105 home runs at shortstop on the two division winners. Silver Slugger and most valuable player of the opening round in 2016, Gold Glove in 2020. Third round, 68th overall, 2008, by the Virginia Rebels.

Victor Perez, LF (2015–2021) — Seven seasons, 945 games, 180 home runs, 547 runs batted in and 580 walks, with a Silver Slugger in 2017 on the 101-win club.

Johnny Stone, RF (2001–2006) — Six seasons, 805 games, 107 home runs and 99 stolen bases, and most valuable player of the opening round of the 2002 postseason, the first playoff series this franchise ever won. Eighth round, 220th overall.

Ben McKenzie, 3B (2016–2021) — Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in 2017, when he hit .326 with 40 home runs and 124 runs batted in for the best team in club history. Six seasons, 699 games, 139 home runs. A fourteenth-round pick, 439th overall in 2012, by the Galveston Gremlins.

Chad Carpino, RF (2008–2015) — Eight seasons, 848 games, 111 home runs and 467 walks. First round, 16th overall, 2005.

Wan-fu Lou, SS (2020–2026) — Seven seasons and 1,001 games at shortstop with Gold Gloves in 2021, 2022 and 2023, on a .186 average, through the worst stretch the franchise has known.

Bryan Moorman, CF (2026–2031) — Six seasons, 946 games, 131 home runs and a Gold Glove in 2028. A sixteenth-round pick, 498th overall in 2021, and the one everyday player who was there for both the 55-win season of 2028 and the return to October in 2031.

Compiled from The Big League franchise records, 2001–2031.