



THE CHICAGO BLACK SOX

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Three cities, eleven Octobers, one final, and not one division flag.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

Where the Country Changes Trains

Chicago was never anybody's destination. It was where you got off one train and waited in a cold station for another, and the whole enormous middle of the country funneled through it because there was no other way through: the cattle, the grain, the lumber, the people. Everything passed through Chicago. Almost nothing began there.

This franchise has been three clubs in three cities. It was the Boston Boom for twenty-two seasons, and the Carolina Reapers for seven, and since 2030 it has been the Chicago Black Sox. It has played thirty-one seasons of baseball and been to October eleven times.

It has never once finished first.

Not a single division flag in thirty-one years. Only one other club has gone the full thirty-one without one, the Southland Masked Bandits, and they have been to October eight times to this club's eleven. Eleven times this franchise has gone to the postseason, and eleven times it has gone in through the side entrance, as the second-best team in its own division or the third or the fourth, and once, in 2008, the side entrance took it all the way to the last series anybody plays, and it lost that too.

There is a kind of club that is always the other one. This is that club, and it has been that club in three cities, and the strange thing about it is that it keeps arriving.

I

Boom

2001 – 2007

The name was aspirational, and for one man it was accurate.

Ricardo Box played right field for the Boston Boom for four seasons and hit .342. Not in a season. Across four of them: five hundred and sixty-eight games, seven hundred and seventy-nine hits, two hundred and nine stolen bases, and three consecutive Silver Sluggers. In 2002 he hit .358 with two hundred and twenty-two hits and fifty-eight doubles. In 2003 he hit .366. He had been the eleventh player taken in the club's first draft, he played eight hundred and eighty-two games in the whole of his professional life, and he put up more than fifty wins above replacement in them, and when he was

finished the writers put him in the Hall of Fame almost immediately, in 2009, at which point he had been out of a Boston uniform for five years.

The clubs he played on won seventy-eight, seventy-eight, seventy-three and sixty-five games.

Then he left for the Kingston Frontenacs and it got worse. Fifty-five wins in 2005. Forty-seven in 2006 — a hundred and fifteen losses, the worst season this franchise has had and one of the worst anyone has had. Fifty-eight in 2007. Seven consecutive losing seasons to open a franchise's life, and by the end of them attendance had fallen from two and a half million to a million five.

What the losing bought was picks. The second overall selection in 2006 became Nick Kennedy. The second overall selection in 2007 became Malik Roach. The sixth pick of 2003 had already become Boyd Perry. And in the winter after the 2007 season the club acquired a first baseman from Kingston named Zach Koster, who could also pitch.

II

The Side Door

2008 – 2010

The 2008 Boston Boom won eighty-three games and lost seventy-nine and finished second, and did not lose a series until the last one.

Boyd Perry went twelve and eight with an earned run average of 2.72 and won the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference. Malik Roach, the catcher, hit .300 with twenty-six home runs. Nick Kennedy hit .296 with fifty-one doubles at shortstop. Tim Johnsen hit .319.

And Zach Koster, who was listed at first base, hit .329 with forty-four home runs and a hundred and seven runs batted in, and made thirty-one starts on the mound and went thirteen and nine with a 3.44. There is nothing else like it in the book. Across four seasons with this club he batted .294 with a hundred and eighteen home runs and went fifty-one and twenty-five on the mound with an earned run average of 3.50, and he did both at the same time, in the same weeks, for four years.

In October the Boom beat their first opponent, and Malik Roach was named most valuable player of the round. They beat their second, and Tim Johnsen took the honors. They beat their third, and it was Koster, which was the only reasonable outcome.

Then, in the 2008 Big League Championship Series, they met the Spokane Sasquatches, who had won eighty-nine games and finished second in their own division and had not been picked by anybody either, and Spokane won it, and J.J. June of Spokane was the most valuable player of the series.

It is the only final this franchise has played in thirty-one seasons. Two wild cards met in it, and the other one won.

They went back in 2009 at ninety and seventy-two, with Koster the most valuable player of the opening round, and lost the next series. They won ninety again in 2010, and Malik Roach hit twenty-nine home runs and was named Most Valuable Player of the Ice Conference, the first in club history. They lost again.

Three straight Octobers. Second place all three times.

III

Thirteen Years

2011 – 2023

Then everything went at once, the way it does.

Koster was gone after 2011 and would play for four more clubs. Perry left. Roach left. Kennedy left. Munehiro Hata held down third base and hit a hundred and thirty-five home runs across five seasons and won two Gold Gloves and it did not matter. The club won sixty-eight, seventy, seventy-five, sixty-eight, and then fifty-one in 2015.

In 2016 they took Kevin Sorensen with the first overall pick of the draft. He made ninety-nine starts for them and finished twenty-five and forty-one.

Fifty in 2021. Fifty-four in 2022. Thirteen consecutive seasons out of October, from 2011 through 2023, the longest drought this franchise has known and among the longest anybody has sat out in this league.

Aaron Horsfall, who would be elected to the Hall of Fame in 2026 on the strength of twenty years in a Denver uniform, spent a hundred and eleven games with the 2021 Boston Boom and hit .187. That is the sort of thing that happened to this club in that stretch.

The general manager's chair turned over three times: Jack R through 2010, then Sal F, then Chris H, then Mike Z from 2019, who is still there. And in 2023 the franchise left Boston, twenty-two years after it got there, and became the Carolina Reapers.

They lost ninety-three games in the first year of that too.

IV

Six Straight Octobers

2024 – 2029

And then, without any single moment you can point at, it turned.

The 2024 Carolina Reapers won ninety-two games, a twenty-three-game improvement, and went to October for the first time in sixteen years. Al Lovato hit forty-one home runs and was named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Tommy Scruggs and Trevor Jordan won Gold Gloves.

Ninety-four wins in 2025. Ninety-one in 2026, when Andy Mroczkowski was the most valuable player of the opening round. Ninety-three in 2027, when Vince Hernandez hit .296 with thirty-two home runs, won a Silver Slugger and a Gold Glove and took the opening round's honors himself. Ninety-one in 2028, when Victor Gonzales came up and hit .325 and was named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Ninety-four in 2029, when Tim Elizalde won the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference.

Six consecutive Octobers, and not one of them past the second round, and not one of them from first place. Three million two hundred thousand people came out in 2028, the largest crowd this franchise has ever drawn, in a city it would leave two years later.

V

Black Sox

2030 – 2031

The move to Chicago came before the 2030 season, and the club won eighty-seven games and went to October a seventh straight time, with Katsutoshi Wada named most valuable player of the opening round and Josh Foster winning a Gold Glove.

Then 2031, which is the best baseball this franchise has played since the year Ricardo Box hit .366.

Victor Gonzales hit .340 with two hundred and one hits, sixty-eight doubles, fifty stolen bases and a hundred and twenty-eight runs scored, was worth better than nine wins above replacement, and was named Most Valuable Player of the Ice Conference, the second in club history. Jeremy Albrecht, the

eighth pick of the 2022 draft, hit .291 with twenty-one home runs, a hundred runs batted in and eighty-three stolen bases. Katsutoshi Wada hit forty-two home runs and drove in a hundred and twenty-four. Eitan Menahem stole sixty-six bases from second base. Tony Mendiola won a Gold Glove at shortstop. Arturo Rivera went fourteen and seven.

Ninety-two wins. Eighth consecutive October. Third place.

VI

Never First

Thirty-one seasons. Two thousand three hundred and nine wins against two thousand seven hundred and thirteen losses, .460, which is the record of a club that has been genuinely bad for about seventeen years of its life and genuinely good for about eleven.

Eleven Octobers. One championship series, in 2008, lost. Two Most Valuable Players, seventeen years apart. Two Cy Young Awards, twenty-one years apart. Two Rookies of the Year, four years apart. One Hall of Famer of its own, Ricardo Box, who gave the club four seasons out of a career of seven and was gone by the time the good years started.

And no division titles. None. Not in Boston, not in Carolina, not in Chicago. Eleven times this franchise has been good enough to play in October and eleven times somebody in its own division has been better. No club in this league has gone to the postseason as often without ever winning its division.

That is not a curse and it is not a tragedy. It is an accounting. A club that has never finished first has still gotten into the tournament more often than most, and once it got there it went four rounds deep and stood at the end of the last one with a chance, and lost to another second-place club that nobody had picked either.

Everything passes through Chicago. The trains are still running. Ninety-two wins in 2031, an eight-year October streak that has not broken, a twenty-four-year-old in left field who just won the conference, and a franchise that has been waiting thirty-one years to finish first at something.

The Ledger

Franchise founded: 2001 (charter member, The Big League), as the Boston Boom

Relocations: Carolina Reapers, 2023; Chicago Black Sox, 2030

Home: Black Sox Field, Chicago — capacity 45,000

Conference: Ice Conference, Sapphire Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,309–2,713 (.460)

Postseason appearances: 11 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 0

Championship series appearances: 1 — 2008 (lost to the Spokane Sasquatches)

Division titles: 0

Best season: 2025 (94–68)

Worst season: 2006 (47–115)

Most Valuable Players: 2 — Malik Roach (2010), Victor Gonzales (2031)

Cy Young Awards: 2 — Boyd Perry (2008), Tim Elizalde (2029)

Rookies of the Year: 2 — Al Lovato (2024), Victor Gonzales (2028)

Hall of Famers: one of its own, Ricardo Box (2009). Aaron Horsfall, elected in 2026, played 111 games here in one season, 2021

Managers: Dante Peek (2001–2010), Zack Hays (2011–2013), Scott Duke (2014–2018), Chris Kays (2019–)

General managers: Jack R (2001–2010), Sal F (2011–2013), Chris H (2014–2018), Mike Z (2019–)

Longest postseason drought: 13 seasons (2011–2023)

Consecutive Octobers: 8 (2024–2031, and still running)

Best attendance: 3,212,307 (2028)

Pillars of the Franchise

Ricardo Box, RF (2001–2004) — The best hitter this franchise has ever had and it is not close. Four seasons, 568 games, a .342 average, 779 hits, 71 home runs, 330 runs batted in and 209 stolen bases, worth 34.9 wins above replacement, with Silver Sluggers in 2002, 2003 and 2004. He hit .358 in 2002 and .366 in 2003. First round, eleventh overall. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 2009, having played only 882 games in his whole career.

Zach Koster, 1B (2008–2011) — A two-way player, and the only one in the book. Four seasons at the plate: 507 games, a .294 average, 118 home runs, 358 runs batted in. Four seasons on the mound: 111 starts, 687 innings, 51–25, a 3.50 earned run average. In 2008 he hit .329 with 44 home runs and went

13-9, and was named most valuable player of the conference championship series that put the club in its only final. First round, fifth overall, 2003, by the Kingston Frontenacs.

Boyd Perry, SP (2007–2012) — Six seasons, 160 starts, 984 innings, 63-45, a 3.27 earned run average and 927 strikeouts, worth 25.0 wins above replacement. Cy Young Award winner of the Ice Conference in 2008, the year the club reached the championship series. First round, sixth overall, 2003.

Malik Roach, C (2007–2012) — Most Valuable Player of the Ice Conference in 2010, the first in franchise history. Six seasons, 593 games, a .275 average, 126 home runs and 401 runs batted in, with Silver Sluggers in 2008, 2009 and 2010 and the most valuable player award of the opening round of the 2008 postseason. First round, second overall, 2007.

Victor Gonzales, LF (2027–2031) — Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in 2028 and Most Valuable Player of the Ice Conference in 2031, when he hit .340 with 68 doubles, 50 stolen bases and 128 runs and was worth 9.2 wins above replacement by himself. Five seasons, 597 games, a .330 average and 25.4 wins above replacement, plus a Gold Glove in 2029.

Jeremy Albrecht, 1B (2027–2031) — Five seasons, 795 games, a .272 average, 94 home runs, 442 runs batted in and 268 stolen bases, with a Silver Slugger in 2031. The eighth pick of the 2022 draft.

Vince Hernandez, 3B (2023–2028) — Six seasons, 695 games, a .280 average, 121 home runs and 454 runs batted in, with Silver Sluggers in 2027 and 2028, a Gold Glove in 2027 and the opening round's most valuable player award that same October. A nineteenth-round pick, 592nd overall in 2020, by the Vancouver Vandals.

Tim Elizalde, SP (2028–2031) — Cy Young Award winner of the Ice Conference in 2029. Four seasons, 116 starts, 776 innings, 56-31 and a 3.15 earned run average. A fifteenth-round pick, 477th overall in 2020, by the Denver Dynamite.

Eitan Menahem, 2B (2027–2031) — Five seasons, 698 games, a .274 average, 204 doubles and 237 stolen bases at second base, worth 21.3 wins above replacement. First round, 22nd overall, 2025.

Munehiro Hata, 3B (2009–2013) — Five seasons, 722 games, 135 home runs and 410 runs batted in at third base, with Gold Gloves in 2010 and 2013, most of it on clubs that lost ninety games.

Nick Kennedy, SS (2007–2011) — Five seasons, 599 games and a .261 average at shortstop on the three postseason clubs, with a Gold Glove in 2009 and Silver Sluggers in 2008 and 2010. First round, second overall, 2006.

Josh Baker, SP (2026–2031) — Six seasons, 160 starts, 894 innings, 60-43 and a 3.63 earned run average, the rotation's constant through the whole run of Octobers. First round, eighth overall, 2021.

Tony Mendiola, SS (2026–2031) — Six seasons, 637 games, 59 home runs and 325 runs batted in at shortstop, with a Gold Glove in 2031.

Andy Mroczkowski, SS (2024–2027) — Four seasons, 609 games, and the most valuable player of the opening round in 2026, with a Gold Glove the same year. Second round, 63rd overall, 2018, by the Las Vegas High Rollers.

Paul Hassett, RP (2024–2031) — 459 appearances, 202 saves and a 3.01 earned run average across all eight seasons of the club's postseason run. First round, 32nd overall, 2023.

Jared Scott, CF (2007–2012) — Six seasons, 783 games, a .276 average and 81 stolen bases in center field, the everyday man through the 2008 run. Fourth round, 89th overall, 2005.

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