



THE HURON HERONS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

The stillness and the strike. Three crowns, and the worst seasons in the division.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

The Stillness and the Strike

A heron hunts by not moving.

It stands in eight inches of water with its neck folded back on itself and it waits, and what it is doing while it waits is nothing at all. Twenty minutes. Forty. An hour. Fishermen who have watched them all their lives will tell you the bird looks asleep, looks dead, looks like a piece of gray driftwood somebody stuck in the mud. And then the neck unfolds and the strike happens somewhere below the speed a human eye can follow, and the bird is standing exactly where it was standing, holding a fish.

There is no wind-up. There is no gradual acceleration. There is the stillness and there is the strike and there is nothing in between.

In 2003 the Huron Herons lost a hundred and twelve games. In 2005 they won a hundred and twelve. In 2012 they lost a hundred and eleven. In 2014 they won a hundred and one, and in 2017 they won a hundred and fifteen, a total only one club in league history has ever beaten. In 2025 they lost a hundred and three.

Three championships. Ten division flags. Twenty Octobers in thirty-one years. Four men in the Hall of Fame who belong to this franchise and no other. And the worst seasons anybody in the Topaz Division has ever played, sitting in the record two summers away from the best.

This is not a story about consistency. It is a story about a bird that does two things.

I

Driftwood

2001 – 2004

The first four years were the mud.

Sixty-six wins in 2001. Fifty-five in 2002. Fifty in 2003, which is a hundred and twelve losses and the worst season this franchise has played. Sixty-six in 2004. Two hundred and thirty-seven wins in four years, four consecutive finishes in sixth or seventh, and a ballpark that drew under two million in back-to-back summers.

There is no story in those seasons, which is very nearly the point of them. A heron standing in shallow water is not doing nothing. It is doing the only thing that works, which is to stand still long enough that the water forgets it is there. The trouble is that from the bank it looks exactly like a bird that has given up.

Franklin Casquinha won a Gold Glove in the first season and Alex Paulin, Ryan Grubb and Mark Morales won three between them in the fourth, and Victor Rivera, a shortstop who had arrived in 2004 and hit .229 with twenty-seven home runs, won nothing and was worth four and a half wins anyway. He would be the best player on a championship club inside four years, and nobody watching him hit .229 that summer could have told you so.

Shaun Young ran the club for one year and David B for two. In 2004 a man named Michael E took the chair, and the neck unfolded.

II

The Strike

2005 – 2010

The 2005 Huron Herons won a hundred and twelve games.

Not eighty-five. Not ninety-four on the way to something. A hundred and twelve, from sixty-six the year before, which is a forty-six-game swing and the largest one-year improvement any club in The Big League has ever made. They took the division by daylight. Omar Gonzalez hit .285 with thirty-nine home runs and a hundred and four runs batted in. Victor Rivera hit thirty-five and drove in ninety-two. Mark Morales went out every fifth day with an earned run average of 2.80 and Alfredo Cruz behind him at 2.99. Jonathan Vickers was named most valuable player of the divisional round and Brett Johnson of the conference championship series, and Huron walked into the Big League Championship Series and lost to the Montreal Machine.

A hundred wins and the division again in 2006, with Pat Pharo, a right fielder in his first season, named Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference.

The Rivera October: 2007

The 2007 club won ninety-two games and finished second, twenty wins worse than the 2005 team and eight worse than the 2006 one, and it is the club that won everything.

Steve Cole took the most valuable player award of the opening round. After that it was one man. Victor Rivera was named most valuable player of the divisional round, and then of the conference championship series, and then of the Big League Championship Series against the Somerville Moneyline. Three rounds in a row, on his way to a career of 1,094 games in this uniform, two hundred and forty home runs and a plaque in the Hall of Fame that came in 2022.

Six other men in the league's thirty-one years have taken three series awards in a single October. Only two of them, Rivera and Gregorio Prieto thirteen years later, did it for this club, and both times the third one was the final.

The club kept going. Ninety-three wins in 2008. A hundred and fourteen in 2009, the second-best season the franchise has had, with George Reed going 41-15 across four seasons here and winning the Cy Young Award of the Fire Conference. A hundred and one and another flag in 2010. Six straight Octobers, four division titles, one trophy, and attendance above three and a half million every year.

Then Michael E left, and in 2011 the Herons won seventy-five games, and in 2012 they lost a hundred and eleven.

III

Back into the Mud, Briefly

2011 – 2013

Three years. Seventy-five wins, then fifty-one, then seventy. The 2012 club is the second-worst in franchise history and it came two seasons after a hundred and one wins and a division flag, which is the kind of collapse that usually takes an ownership change or a scandal to explain and in this case took neither.

Josh A had the chair by then. Tony Davis and Carl Gore won Gold Gloves in the wreckage of 2012. Malik Roach won a Silver Slugger behind the plate in 2013.

And a right-hander named Miguel Parra, who had thrown eighty-three innings in 2012 with a 2.39 earned run average and sixty-three more in 2013, was about to become the best pitcher this franchise has ever had.

IV

The Long Strike

2014 – 2022

Nine consecutive postseason berths. It is the longest run in franchise history and one of the longest in the league.

In 2014 the Herons won a hundred and one games and the division, and Miguel Parra went 20-10 with an earned run average of 2.65 and won the Cy Young Award of the Fire Conference.

In 2015 they won a hundred and three and won it all. Colt Kerr, a third baseman in his first full season, hit .297 with forty-three home runs and a hundred and eleven runs batted in, was named Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference, and then took the most valuable player award of the conference championship series and of the Big League Championship Series against the New Orleans Mudcats. Kenny Renstrom took the divisional round. Chris Kollars won a Silver Slugger. Parra went 18-5.

In 2016 they won ninety and Ernie Pawlus won the conference Cy Young, the third in eight years for this club.

In 2017 they won a hundred and fifteen games.

It is the second-best regular season anyone in The Big League has ever played, behind only the hundred and seventeen Las Vegas won in 2018, and it produced nothing. Oscar Montenegro hit .320 and was named Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference. Kenny Renstrom took another divisional round. And then it was over, and the flag was the only thing they kept.

Ninety-eight wins and a flag in 2018, and a run to the final, and a loss to the Las Vegas High Rollers. Ninety-eight and a flag again in 2019, with Montenegro hitting .302 with forty-nine home runs and a hundred and forty-seven runs batted in, Ken Taylor named Rookie of the Year, three different men taking three different rounds in October, and another final, and another loss to Las Vegas.

Fourth Place: 2020

The 2020 Huron Herons won eighty-four games and finished fourth in their division.

They were the last club into the tournament and they did not lose a series. Gregorio Prieto was named most valuable player of the first round, and of the second, and of the Big League Championship Series against Somerville. Danny Preciado took the conference championship. Cale Collins won a Gold Glove.

Three years earlier this franchise had won a hundred and fifteen games and gone home early. Now it won eighty-four and won everything. Somerville, which has been to October more often than any club in the league and has never won it, lost its second final to Huron in thirteen years.

Ninety-three wins in 2021 and eighty-six in 2022 closed the run out. Brian Glasscock was named Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference in 2021 and won Gold Gloves in center field in 2022 and 2024. Daniel L had taken the general manager's chair in 2020 and holds it still.

v

Standing Again

2023 – 2031

The bird went back into the mud almost at once.

Sixty-nine wins in 2023, the first losing season since 2013, and the nine-year run ended in a single winter without anybody quite seeing it go. Eighty-five and an October in 2024, with Brian Glasscock taking a second Gold Glove in center. And then 2025: fifty-nine wins and a hundred and three losses, the third-worst season this franchise has played, one summer after a postseason berth. It is the second time Huron has lost a hundred games within two years of an October.

Seventy-two in 2026. Eighty-five in 2027, better and still not enough. Four seasons, one berth, and a fan base that had watched this exact sequence twice before and had learned not to read anything into either half of it.

Then it happened again, the way it always has here, without warning and without a reason anybody could name. Eighty-nine wins in 2028 and the tenth division flag in franchise history. **Armando Ramirez**, a second baseman who arrived that spring, hit .270 with thirty-two home runs and forty-eight stolen bases, was worth eight and a half wins, and was named both Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference in the same season. Nobody else in this franchise's history has done both. Nate Stutts took the wild card round, and October ended in the next one.

Eighty-five wins and another berth in 2029. Eighty-eight in 2030, with Manny Pineda carrying the wild card round and Dan Boyd the division. Ninety-nine in 2031, the best regular season here since the hundred-and-fifteen-win club of 2017, and a second-place finish for it.

Four straight Octobers to close the book, and every one of them ended before the final.

The men who held it up through all of it deserve the sentence. Pineda has played nine years in right field and stolen two hundred and seventy-eight bases. Aubrey Santomauro came out of the bullpen five hundred and six times with an earned run average of 2.02. And Miguel Parra, who threw two thousand one hundred and fifty-seven innings in this uniform across twelve seasons and won a hundred and forty-nine games, went into the Hall of Fame in 2030.

Two Things

Two thousand six hundred and forty-four wins against two thousand three hundred and seventy-nine losses. Twenty Octobers. Ten division flags. Six trips to the Big League Championship Series and three trophies, which is more than any club in the Topaz Division has and more than most clubs in the league.

And a 50-112, and a 51-111, and a 59-103, and four straight losing seasons to open the franchise.

The three titles were won by clubs that finished second, first and fourth, at ninety-two wins, a hundred and three, and eighty-four. The hundred-and-fifteen-win team, beaten only once in the whole history of the league, has nothing. So does the hundred-and-fourteen-win team of 2009, and the hundred-and-twelve-win team of 2005 lost the final.

The bird does not accelerate. It is either standing in the mud or it is holding a fish, and the thirty-one years of this franchise are not a curve, they are a set of alternating states, and anyone who has tried to predict which one Huron would be in next April has been wrong about as often as they have been right.

The Ledger

Franchise founded: 2001 (charter member, The Big League)

Home: Herons Stadium, Huron — capacity 45,000

Conference: Fire Conference, Topaz Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,644–2,379 (.526)

Postseason appearances: 20 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 3 — 2007 (over Somerville), 2015 (over New Orleans), 2020 (over Somerville)

Championship series appearances: 6 — 2005 (lost to the Montreal Machine), 2007 (won over the Somerville Moneyline), 2015 (won over the New Orleans Mudcats), 2018 (lost to the Las Vegas High Rollers), 2019 (lost to the Las Vegas High Rollers), 2020 (won over the Somerville Moneyline)

Division titles: 10 — 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2028

Best season: 2017 (115–47)

Worst season: 2003 (50–112)

Most Valuable Players: 2 — Oscar Montenegro (2017), Armando Ramirez (2028)

Cy Young Awards: 3 — George Reed (2009), Miguel Parra (2014), Ernie Pawlus (2016)

Rookies of the Year: 5 — Pat Pharo (2006, Fire Conference), Colt Kerr (2015, Fire Conference), Ken Taylor (2019, Fire Conference), Brian Glasscock (2021, Fire Conference), Armando Ramirez (2028, Fire Conference)

Hall of Famers: 4 of its own — Omar Gonzalez (inducted 2012), Victor Rivera (2022), Pat Pharo (2023), Miguel Parra (2030). Several others passed through: Hector Campos played 285 games here, Aaron Harrison 416 across three seasons, George Reed 87, Ricardo Anguiano 103, Rich Gordon 147 and Mike Wilson 34

General managers: Shaun Young (2001), David B (2002–2003), Michael E (2004–2011), Josh A (2012–2017), Mason S (2018–2019), Daniel L (2020–)

Hundred-win seasons: 6 — 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2017

Hundred-loss seasons: 3 — 2003, 2012, 2025

Longest postseason drought: 4 seasons (2001–2004)

Consecutive Octobers: 9 (2014–2022)

Best attendance: 3,621,166 (2017)

Pillars of the Franchise

Miguel Parra, SP (2012–2023) — The best pitcher the franchise has had and its most recent Hall of Famer, elected in 2030. Twelve seasons, 355 starts, 2,157 innings, 149-102, a 3.58 earned run average and 2,137 strikeouts. Cy Young Award winner of the Fire Conference in 2014 at 20-10 with a 2.65, and the front of the rotation for the 2015 champion and every club of the nine-year run.

Victor Rivera, SS (2004–2010) — Most valuable player of three consecutive rounds in the 2007 postseason, including the Big League Championship Series, one of only two men to do it for this club. Seven seasons, 1,094 games, 240 home runs, 651 runs batted in, three Silver Sluggers and a Gold Glove. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 2022.

Oscar Montenegro, RF (2015–2023) — Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference in 2017, when he hit .320 on the 115-win club, the best team in franchise history. Nine seasons, 1,189 games, a .294 average, 259 home runs and 774 runs batted in, and a 2019 of .302 with 49 home runs and 147 runs batted in that is the best offensive season in franchise history.

Pat Pharo, RF (2005–2010) — Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference in 2006 and the best pure hitter this club has developed: a .310 average across six seasons, 220 home runs and 631 runs batted in in only 785 games, with three Silver Sluggers. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 2023.

Colt Kerr, 3B (2014–2020) — Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference in 2015, and in the same October the most valuable player of both the conference championship series and the Big League Championship Series. Seven seasons, 940 games, 219 home runs, 621 runs batted in, a Silver Slugger and a Gold Glove.

Omar Gonzalez, 1B (2005–2008) — The franchise's first Hall of Famer, elected in 2012. Four seasons, 563 games, a .297 average, 146 home runs and 379 runs batted in, and the middle of the order on the 112-win club of 2005 and the 100-win club of 2006.

Manny Pineda, RF (2023–2031) — Nine seasons, 1,205 games, a .266 average, 192 home runs and 278 stolen bases, two Silver Sluggers, and the most valuable player of the opening round of the 2030 postseason. The everyday right fielder through the club's most recent run.

Armando Ramirez, 2B (2028–2031) — Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference in the same 2028 season, at .270 with 32 home runs and 48 stolen bases. Four seasons, 558 games, 136 stolen bases and two Gold Gloves.

Ernie Pawlus, SP (2013–2022) — Cy Young Award winner of the Fire Conference in 2016. Ten seasons, 233 starts, 1,327 innings, 90-57 and a 3.63 earned run average.

Gregorio Prieto, 1B (2018–2027) — Most valuable player of three rounds of the 2020 postseason, including the Big League Championship Series, on a club that finished fourth. Ten seasons, 1,201 games, 196 stolen bases.

Aubrey Santomauro, RP (2019–2023, 2027–2030) — 506 appearances, 213 saves and a 2.02 earned run average across twelve seasons, the most durable arm in franchise history.

Mark Morales, SP (2004–2009) — 150 starts, 68-35, a 2.80 earned run average and a Gold Glove in 2004. The ace of the 112-win club that turned this franchise around.

Jorge Lopez, SS (2016–2023, 2028) — Twelve seasons across two stints, 1,147 games at shortstop, 176 stolen bases and a Gold Glove in 2017 on the 115-win team.

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