



THE MEXICO CITY LUCHADORES

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2012 to 2031

Twenty years, no division flag, and a Hall of Famer who never pitched in October.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

The Mask

In lucha libre the mask is not a costume. It is the man. A luchador may lose a hundred matches and remain exactly who he was when he walked in; what he cannot lose is the mask, because the mask is the thing he wagers only once, and when it comes off he is finished, and everyone in the building knows it.

The Mexico City franchise has never won a division. In twenty seasons it has finished above .500 four times. It has been to October four times and has won three postseason series in its entire history. Its all-time record is 1,491-1,749, a winning percentage lower than all but three clubs in The Big League.

And in those same twenty years it produced a unanimous first-ballot Hall of Fame pitcher, a second ace who has now thrown more than 2,800 innings without ever wearing another uniform, a closer with five hundred and twenty-two saves, and fourteen Gold Gloves. The talent was never the problem. Mexico City has spent two decades sending out extraordinary men to lose in front of two million people, and the men keep coming back the next night.

That is the story. Not a rise, not a fall. A club that goes out every evening, takes the fall, and keeps the mask.

I

The Thing Nobody Could Catch

2012 – 2016

They arrived in 2012 as the Mexico City Chupacabras, one of four expansion clubs the league added that winter, named for a creature that has been hunted for decades and never once produced.

The name fit better than anyone intended. The early Chupacabras were a rumor of a baseball team. Sixty-seven wins in the first year, seventy in the second, and a general manager named Kyle J who lasted two seasons and left with a record of 137-187.

Larry L took over in 2014, and he is still there, eighteen seasons later, having watched every October the franchise has ever played.

His first team won seventy-two and produced the franchise's first pieces of hardware, Gold Gloves for Jamie Lindahl and Dylan Aspin, which is a revealing sort of first: not a bat, not an arm, but two men who caught the ball. Then, out of nothing, came 2015.

Eighty-seven wins. Second place. A postseason berth in the club's fourth year of existence, and a series win over Louisville in six games with Manny Galindo named most valuable player of the round. Milwaukee beat them in seven in the next round, and the Chupacabras went home having played the best baseball of their history and come within a single evening of the conference final.

It has been sixteen years, and 2015 is still the best regular season this franchise has ever had.

They won sixty-nine games the following summer.

II

A New Name, and the Arrival

2017 – 2021

Before the 2017 season the club dropped the creature and became the Luchadores, and in the same winter it acquired Andre Crawford.

Crawford was thirty-one and had spent nine years in Fort Collins being very good for a team that mattered. He came to Mexico City and became something else entirely. In 2017 he went 14-10 with a 2.68 earned run average and won the Fire Conference Cy Young Award, on a club that finished 73-89 and last in the Ruby Division. In 2018 he went 16-6 with two hundred and fifty-three strikeouts and won it again. In 2020 he won it a third time.

He never pitched a postseason inning for them.

The 2019 club got in, at 80-82, the only losing team in franchise history to reach October, and Huron beat them in seven games in the opening round. Crawford was in the middle of the best stretch of his career, five straight seasons with an earned run average under 3.15, two hundred and ninety-three strikeouts in one of them, and the whole of it was spent on teams that finished fourth, fourth and fifth.

Behind him, a bullpen was quietly being built around one man. Ricky Guzman came up in 2014 and closed games for Mexico City for fifteen years, and finished with five hundred and twenty-two saves, a 2.26 earned run average, and 1,231 strikeouts in nine hundred and ninety innings. He never won a single award the league hands out. On his first Hall of Fame ballot, in 2031, he drew 45.5 percent of the vote and is still on it.

Andre Crawford

He pitched twelve seasons in Mexico City and left in 2028 with a record of 144-149.

Read that again, because it is the sentence that explains this franchise. One hundred forty-four wins and one hundred forty-nine losses, a 3.49 earned run average across 2,647 innings, three Cy Young Awards, and a losing record, because in eleven of those twelve summers the club behind him finished under .500.

In February 2031 the Hall of Fame voters put him in on the first ballot with 100 percent of the vote. Not one writer left him off. He is the only Hall of Famer the franchise has ever produced, and more of his career was spent here than anywhere else, and he never once pitched a game in October for them.

III

Great Arms, Empty Septembers

2022 – 2025

Antonio Santiago arrived in 2018, twenty years old, and has never played for anyone else.

By 2022 he was the best pitcher on the staff, and that summer he went 15-11 with a 3.15 earned run average and two hundred and eight strikeouts and won the Fire Conference Cy Young Award. Mexico City finished 77-85, sixth in the division.

What happened next was the worst two-year stretch the club had known: 65-97 in 2023 and 62-100 in 2024. Crawford, thirty-eight and thirty-nine years old, went 9-17 and then 8-17 with earned run averages barely over four, which is to say he pitched perfectly respectable baseball and was beaten twice as often as he won.

The one thing those teams could do was field. Lorenzo Valenzuela, a shortstop who hit .218 across twelve seasons and 1,500 games, won Gold Gloves in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2028. Wally Gullledge won one on the mound in 2024. Melvin Aguilar and Chad Wisz won them in 2025, Ben Reeve in 2026. Fourteen Gold Gloves in twenty seasons for a club that has never finished first.

Crawford came back at forty in 2025 and went 16-11 with a 2.57 earned run average. The Luchadores won seventy-four games.

IV

The Bottom

2026 – 2029

Fernando Lopez came up in 2026 and started hitting home runs into a stadium with nothing riding on them.

Forty-five in 2027. Thirty-nine in 2028. Fifty in 2029, with a hundred and nineteen runs batted in and a Silver Slugger, on a club that lost eighty-eight games. He hit .232 for his career here and it did not matter; he was a third baseman who put the ball over the fence more often than anyone in franchise history, two hundred and nineteen times in six seasons, and he did it entirely in the dark.

The 2028 season was the worst the club has recorded: 59-103, last in the Ruby Division. Crawford made his final twenty-eight starts that year and went 5-13. Guzman closed his last games. Valenzuela and Dave Henson won Gold Gloves, which was the whole of the good news.

Then something began to turn. Danny Kuntz and John Shephard came into the rotation in 2029 behind Santiago. Steve Parker took the ninth inning. The 2029 club won seventy-four, which was not remarkable, but it was the last losing season Mexico City has had.

v

Two Falls, and a Third Still Coming

2030 – 2031

A lucha libre match is decided over three falls, and the men who understand the form know that losing the first one is not the same as losing.

In 2030 the Luchadores won eighty-five games, their first winning season since 2018, and finished third, and reached the postseason for the first time since 2019. Huron beat them in six in the opening round. Fernando Lopez won a Gold Glove. Antonio Santiago, thirty-two years old and in his thirteenth season, went 11-10 with a 3.18 earned run average.

In 2031 they won eighty-six and finished second in the Ruby Division behind Big Horn, and then did something the franchise had never done. They beat Milwaukee in six. Then they beat Big Horn, the club that had owned the division for a decade, in six. Ryan Metcalf was most valuable player of the first round and Dave Henson of the second.

That put Mexico City in the conference championship series, one round from playing for a championship, in the twentieth year of the franchise's existence.

Virginia beat them in seven games.

Santiago went 16-9 that season, the most wins of his career, at thirty-four. He now has a hundred and fifty-four wins and a hundred and fifty-one losses in fourteen seasons, all of them here, and 2,617 strikeouts, and one Cy Young, and he has still never pitched in a championship series. It is the same arithmetic Andre Crawford carried out of this city three years earlier, and Santiago is not finished.

The mask is still on. Nobody has taken it.

The Ledger

Franchise founded: 2012 (expansion), as the Mexico City Chupacabras

Relocations: 2017, the Luchadores

Home: Luchadores Park, Mexico City — capacity 45,000

Conference: Fire Conference, Ruby Division

All-time regular-season record (2012–2031): 1,491–1,749 (.460)

Postseason appearances: 4 in 20 seasons (2015, 2019, 2030, 2031)

League Championships: none

Championship series appearances: 0

Division titles: none

Best season: 2015 (87–75)

Worst season: 2028 (59–103)

Most Valuable Players: none

Cy Young Awards: 4 — Andre Crawford (2017, 2018, 2020), Antonio Santiago (2022)

Rookies of the Year: 1 — Dan Smith (2018)

Hall of Famers: 1 — Andre Crawford, elected unanimously on the first ballot in 2031

General managers: Kyle J (2012–2013), Larry L (2014–present)

Deepest run: 2031, Conference Championship Series (lost in seven to Virginia)

Gold Gloves: 14 in 20 seasons, four of them to Lorenzo Valenzuela (2022, 2023, 2024, 2028)

Pillars of the Franchise

Andre Crawford, RHP (2017–2028) — The franchise's only Hall of Famer, elected on the first ballot with 100 percent of the vote. Three Fire Conference Cy Young Awards, 2,647 innings, 2,287 strikeouts, a 3.49 earned run average, and a record of 144–149, because the clubs behind him finished under .500 in eleven of his twelve seasons.

Antonio Santiago, RHP (2018–present) — Fourteen seasons, no other uniform. Franchise leader in wins (154), innings (2,853) and strikeouts (2,617). Fire Conference Cy Young in 2022 on a 77–85 team; sixteen wins at thirty-four on the 2031 club that came within a game of the final.

Ricky Guzman, CL (2014–2028) — 522 saves, a 2.26 earned run average, 1,231 strikeouts in 990 innings across fifteen seasons, and not one award. Drew 45.5 percent on his first Hall of Fame ballot in 2031 and remains on it.

Fernando Lopez, 3B (2026–2031) — Franchise leader with 219 home runs and 531 runs batted in. Fifty home runs and a Silver Slugger in 2029; a Gold Glove in 2030.

Lorenzo Valenzuela, SS (2020–2025, 2027–2031) — Twelve seasons, 1,500 games, a .218 average and four Gold Gloves. The defining defensive player of the franchise and the clearest statement of what these teams valued.

Kevin Jorgensen, OF (2016–2023) — Franchise leader in hits (1,111) and runs (555) across eight seasons in the middle of the lean years.

Matt Tirrell, RHP (2015–2023) — 1,861 strikeouts and a 99–108 record; the arm that bridged the Chupacabras to the Crawford era. Received no votes on his 2031 Hall of Fame ballot.

The 2031 club: Ryan Metcalf and Dave Henson, most valuable players of the two rounds Mexico City won; Danny Kuntz, John Shephard and Steve Parker, the arms Larry L built behind Santiago to end eleven straight losing seasons.

Compiled from The Big League franchise records, 2012–2031.