



# THE MONTREAL MACHINE

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*A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031*

*It ran for seven years, won everything once, and sat idle for twenty.*

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

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## PROLOGUE

# The Thing Itself

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A machine has no memory. That is the whole point of a machine. It does not know what it did last year and it does not care what you expect of it this year; you turn it over and either it runs or it does not, and if it does not, somebody has to open it up and find out why, and that can take an afternoon or it can take twenty years.

The Montreal Machine ran for seven consecutive seasons. From 2003 through 2009 it went to October every single year, won three division flags, and in the autumn of 2005 won the only championship this franchise has. Ninety-five wins, then eighty-seven, then ninety-five, then ninety-seven, then ninety-two. A left fielder who had been the two thousand two hundred and thirteenth player taken in the draft hit five hundred and sixty-four home runs in this uniform and is in the Hall of Fame. A right-hander made two hundred starts. The place drew three and a half million people in a season.

Then it stopped, and it stayed stopped for twenty years.

Twenty consecutive seasons out of October, from 2010 through 2029 — the second-longest stretch of nothing anybody has endured in The Big League, and the men who had won the thing were gone within three years of it and the men who replaced them never got close. Then in 2030, with no obvious explanation, the Machine won ninety-six games, and in 2031 it won ninety-five, and Montreal has been back to October twice in two years.

It does not remember 2005. It never did. That is what makes it a machine and it is also, possibly, what saved it.

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I

## Assembly

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*2001 – 2004*

They were ordinary at first, which is the correct way to build something.

Seventy-six wins in 2001, seventy-nine in 2002. Alex Villarreal played center field from the first day. Matt Mace and Nick Tyler, both taken early in the club's first draft, started thirty games apiece. Salvador Figueroa won a Gold Glove in 2001, Angel Torres another in 2002.

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The 2001 draft is the one that mattered. With the fifth overall pick Montreal took Travis Plath. With the hundred and eighth they took Vinny Penalver. With the two hundred and seventy-sixth they took Paul Tizzard. With the two hundred and eighty-fifth they took Ruben Cruz. And in a round nobody keeps track of — the eightieth, two thousand two hundred and thirteenth overall — they took a left fielder named Steve Moss.

Moss came up in 2003 and hit thirty-two home runs. Aaron Allen hit .280 and stole a hundred and nineteen bases in four seasons and won a Silver Slugger in 2003 and was named most valuable player of the opening round of that October, the first postseason series this franchise ever won. Eighty-six wins and a berth. Ninety-one wins in 2004, and a Silver Slugger for Moss, and Ken Hollenback with a Gold Glove, and October again.

In 2004 Ray Kane took over in the dugout. He would manage the club for eight seasons and all of the good ones.

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II

## 2005

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The 2005 Montreal Machine won ninety-five games and the division and then won everything else.

Steve Moss hit .275 with forty-two home runs and a hundred and three runs batted in. Paul Tizzard hit .292 with twenty-four home runs at second base and was worth six wins above replacement. Vinny Penalver hit twenty-four home runs at third. Ruben Cruz played a hundred and forty-eight games at shortstop and won a Silver Slugger, which no one who watched him hit .241 would have predicted. Nick Tyler went fifteen and seven with an earned run average of 2.57 across two hundred and thirteen innings, and Matt Mace went twelve and four with the same 2.57, and Elmer Gonzalez came out of the bullpen four dozen times with a 2.38.

In October, Steve Moss was named most valuable player of the divisional round, and then most valuable player of the conference championship series, which is as good a two-week stretch as anyone in this league has had.

And in the Big League Championship Series, against the Huron Herons, the most valuable player was Paul Tizzard, a tenth-round pick out of the club's first draft who had hit .238 as a rookie two years earlier.

Three million three hundred and twenty-eight thousand people came through the gates that year. They came in the same numbers the next year and the year after, and in 2008 three million three hundred and ninety-four thousand of them came, which remains the largest crowd this franchise has drawn.

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It is the only trophy Montreal has. It has now been sitting on the shelf for twenty-six years.

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### III

## Running Hot

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*2006 – 2009*

The machine did not slow down for four more years. It just stopped winning in October.

Travis Plath came up in 2006, hit .291 with thirty-eight home runs and ninety-nine runs batted in, won a Gold Glove in right field and was named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Steve Moss had the best year of his life the same season: .308, fifty-four home runs, a hundred and forty-eight runs batted in. Paul Tizzard was most valuable player of the opening round. The Machine won eighty-seven and lost in the divisional round.

In 2007 they won ninety-five. Ruben Cruz took the opening round's honors. Nick Tyler went nine and seven with a 2.95 across a hundred and ninety-two innings and won the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference, the only one in franchise history. They lost in the divisional round.

In 2008 they won ninety-seven, the most this club has ever won, and Moss hit .324 with fifty-seven home runs, and they lost in the divisional round.

In 2009 they won ninety-two and the division, and Plath hit .300 with thirty-seven home runs and won a Silver Slugger, and Harold Frew won a Gold Glove, and they lost in the divisional round.

Seven straight Octobers. Six series won, five of them in the first two years. One trophy, and four consecutive autumns of going home in the second week.

Then Aaron Allen was gone, and Tizzard was gone to Spokane, and Cruz was gone, and Villarreal was gone, and Nick Tyler threw his last pitch for the club in 2011, and Travis Plath left in the middle of 2011 for Somerville, where he would put up the other half of a career that has him on the Hall of Fame's Veterans Committee ballot in 2032.

Steve Moss stayed. He would play seven more seasons in Montreal and never see another October.

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### IV

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# Twenty Years

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*2010 – 2029*

Seventy-one wins in 2010. Seventy-two in 2011. Sixty-six in 2012. Seventy in 2013.

It is a long time. It is longer written out than it is to read: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029. Twenty seasons in which the Montreal Machine did not play a postseason game. Only one franchise in the league has sat out longer.

What is strange about it is how rarely the club was terrible. Nine of those twenty seasons were between seventy-four and eighty-three wins. The Machine was not broken so much as idling: never bad enough to earn the top of a draft, never good enough to finish above fourth. Ryan J ran the front office from 2012 through 2018 and Matt Pincince managed the same seven seasons, and neither of them ever had a club within eight games of a berth.

Steve Moss finished. He hit .311 with thirty-seven home runs in 2012 and won his fourth Silver Slugger, on a club that lost ninety-six. He played out 2016, his fourteenth season in Montreal, and left, and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 2025 with two thousand three hundred and sixty-four hits and five hundred and sixty-four home runs in this uniform and forty-six games anywhere else.

Around him: Carlos Nava hit .289 across eight seasons. Joe Jones played a thousand and seventy-two games at second base and hit .290. Jose Garcia stole a hundred and twenty-five bases in six years. Robby Viana struck out a thousand and thirty-two men in six seasons and finished forty-nine and sixty-three. Roberto Alvarado, the seventh pick of the 2012 draft, made a hundred and thirty-seven starts over eleven years and went thirty-two and fifty-one.

And then, in the last five years of the drought, the parts started arriving. Eric Tangney, the sixth pick of the 2019 draft, took over shortstop in 2025 and hit .291 with seven wins above replacement in 2027 and won a Gold Glove that year. Shane Wilson came from Kansas City and hit a hundred and sixteen home runs in four seasons. Jim Taunton came up in 2026 and took the ball every fifth day. Bobby Simmons appeared in five hundred and forty-six games out of the bullpen, more than anybody in club history.

## ***The Man Who Hit .199***

And Dean Salvucci, the twelfth pick of the 2025 draft, who is the strangest player this franchise has produced and possibly the best argument in the book for looking past the number on the scoreboard.

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He has played six seasons in center field and hit .199. Not in a slump. Across the whole of it: seven hundred and eighty-four games, five hundred and fifty-two hits, a career batting average that begins with a one.

He has also hit a hundred and seventy-one home runs, drawn five hundred and fifty walks, stolen ninety-eight bases, scored four hundred and sixty-five runs, and been worth twenty-seven and eight-tenths wins above replacement, which is more than Travis Plath was worth here and more than Paul Tizzard was and within striking distance of what Alex Villarreal did in nine years. In 2028 he hit .187 with forty home runs and a hundred and twenty-seven walks and was worth nearly seven wins, on a club that finished fourth. He won a Silver Slugger that year, which means somebody was paying attention.

The 2029 Machine lost ninety-seven games, the worst season in franchise history. Salvucci hit .180.

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V

## Turning Over

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*2030 – 2031*

Nobody saw 2030 coming, and nobody has entirely explained it since.

The club won ninety-six games, thirty-one more than the year before. Yuigo Sakaguchi hit .288 with thirty-two home runs and ninety-nine runs batted in and won a Silver Slugger. Salvucci hit twenty-nine home runs, drew a hundred and eight walks and stole twenty-five bases. Ryan Weigold, a thirteenth-round pick taken three hundred and ninety-seventh overall in 2026, played third base. Jim Taunton went sixteen and five with a 3.06 across two hundred and six innings.

Two million seven hundred thousand people came out, the most since 2011.

And in 2031 they won ninety-five and went back. Salvucci hit forty-three home runs and drove in a hundred, which is the best season of his odd career. Sakaguchi hit .289 with forty-nine doubles. Bobby Simmons was still closing. In October, Ryan Weigold was named most valuable player of the opening round, the first postseason series this club had won since 2007.

Twenty years of nothing, and then two Octobers in two years, and the youngest core the franchise has had since Travis Plath came up.

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VI

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# What the Machine Is For

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Thirty-one seasons. Two thousand four hundred and fifty wins against two thousand five hundred and seventy-three losses, .488, which is nearer to even than the story feels, because seven of those years were spectacular and twenty of them were not anything at all.

Three division flags, all inside five years. Nine Octobers, seven of them consecutive. One championship, in 2005, over the Huron Herons. One Cy Young Award. One Rookie of the Year. No Most Valuable Player, ever, in thirty-one seasons.

One Hall of Famer of its own: Steve Moss, an eightieth-round pick who gave this franchise fourteen years and five hundred and sixty-four home runs and is the only man in the Hall whose plaque belongs here.

The machine ran. Then it did not, for a very long time, and Montreal kept the doors open and kept selling tickets to a building where nothing happened in October for two decades. Then somebody turned it over and it caught.

It still does not remember 2005. Nobody in the clubhouse now was alive for it in any way that counts. But a machine that has run once can run again, and this one is running.

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## The Ledger

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

**Home:** Machine Stadium, Montreal — capacity 45,000

**Conference:** Ice Conference, Sapphire Division

**All-time regular-season record (2001–2031):** 2,450–2,573 (.488)

**Postseason appearances:** 9 in 31 seasons

**League Championships:** 1 — 2005 (over the Huron Herons)

**Championship series appearances:** 1 — 2005 (won over the Huron Herons)

**Division titles:** 3 — 2005, 2008, 2009

**Best season:** 2008 (97–65)

**Worst season:** 2029 (65–97)

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**Most Valuable Players:** 0

**Cy Young Awards:** 1 — Nick Tyler (2007)

**Rookies of the Year:** 1 — Travis Plath (2006)

**Hall of Famers:** one of its own, Steve Moss (2025), and no other Hall of Famer has played a game in this uniform

**Managers:** Oscar Galvan (2001–2003), Ray Kane (2004–2011), Matt Pincince (2012–2018), Nick Googe (2019), Fadey Aizov (2020– )

**General managers:** Jack R (2001), Ben B (2001–2003), Dean D (2004), Tim W (2004–2011), Ryan J (2012–2018), Max Gruber (2019), Josh A (2020– )

**Longest postseason drought:** 20 seasons (2010–2029), the second-longest in league history

**Consecutive Octobers:** 7 (2003–2009)

**Best attendance:** 3,394,067 (2008)

### ***Pillars of the Franchise***

**Steve Moss, LF (2003–2016)** — The greatest player in franchise history and one of the great sluggers in the league's. Fourteen seasons, 2,185 games, a .284 average, 2,364 hits, 564 home runs and 1,480 runs batted in, worth 47.5 wins above replacement, with Silver Sluggers in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2012 and the most valuable player awards of both the divisional and conference championship series in the 2005 title run. He hit 54 home runs in 2006 and 57 in 2008. He was the 2,213th player taken in the draft, in the eightieth round. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 2025.

**Nick Tyler, SP (2001–2011)** — Eleven seasons, 331 starts, 2,064 innings, 125-109, a 3.42 earned run average and 1,630 strikeouts, worth 40.0 wins above replacement, more innings than any pitcher this franchise has had. Cy Young Award winner of the Ice Conference in 2007, the only one in club history. Second round, 29th overall.

**Travis Plath, RF (2006–2011)** — Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in 2006, with a Gold Glove the same season. Six seasons, 722 games, a .272 average, 203 home runs and 524 runs batted in, plus a Silver Slugger in 2009. First round, fifth overall, in the 2001 draft. He gave the second half of his career to Somerville and returns to the Hall of Fame's Veterans Committee ballot in 2032.

**Paul Tizzard, 2B (2003–2008)** — Most valuable player of the 2005 Big League Championship Series, which is the single most consequential thing anyone has done in this uniform. Six seasons, 838 games, a .282 average, 123 home runs and 447 runs batted in, and the most valuable player award of the opening round in 2006 as well. Tenth round, 276th overall, 2001.

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**Matt Mace, SP (2001–2008)** — Eight seasons, 217 starts, 1,321 innings, 94-57, a 3.24 earned run average and 30.1 wins above replacement, the second arm on every club of the good years. He went 12-4 with a 2.57 in the championship season. First round, 28th overall.

**Dean Salvucci, CF (2026–2031)** — Six seasons, 784 games, 171 home runs, 399 runs batted in, 550 walks, 98 stolen bases and 27.8 wins above replacement, on a .199 batting average. A Silver Slugger in 2028, when he hit .187 with 40 home runs. Forty-three home runs and 100 runs batted in in 2031. First round, twelfth overall, 2025.

**Alex Villarreal, CF (2001–2009)** — The first Machine. Nine seasons, 1,002 games, a .270 average, 119 home runs and 89 stolen bases in center field, worth 22.2 wins above replacement, on every club of the seven-year run. Fourth round, 85th overall.

**Vinny Penalver, 3B (2002–2008)** — Seven seasons, 936 games, a .287 average, 150 home runs and 518 runs batted in at third base, the quiet middle of the order on the championship club. Fourth round, 108th overall, 2001.

**Eric Tangney, SS (2024–2031)** — Eight seasons, 862 games, a .276 average and 25.7 wins above replacement at shortstop, with a Gold Glove in 2027, the year he hit .291 and was worth seven wins. The sixth pick of the 2019 draft. He was traded to Boston during the 2031 season.

**Ruben Cruz, SS (2003–2010)** — Eight seasons, 999 games at shortstop on a .245 average, with a Silver Slugger in 2005 and the most valuable player award of the opening round of the 2007 postseason. Eleventh round, 285th overall, 2001.

**Elmer Gonzalez, RP (2004–2009)** — 486 appearances, 800 innings, 56-24 with a 2.83 earned run average, 934 strikeouts and 42 saves, the bullpen through all six of the club's best seasons. Fourth round, 102nd overall.

**Joe Jones, 2B (2013–2020)** — Eight seasons, 1,072 games, a .290 average and 151 home runs at second base, the everyday man through the middle of the long drought. Sixth round, 149th overall, 2011.

**Carlos Nava, LF (2011–2018)** — Eight seasons, 1,065 games, a .289 average, 152 home runs and 237 doubles, and never a postseason game.

**Aaron Allen, RF (2002–2005)** — Four seasons, 602 games, a .280 average and 119 stolen bases, with a Silver Slugger in 2003 and the most valuable player award of the opening round that October, the first playoff series this franchise won. Seventh round, 189th overall, by the Nashville Blues.

**Bobby Simmons, RP (2022–2031)** — 546 appearances, more than any pitcher in club history, with 103 saves and a 3.38 earned run average across ten seasons, the last two of them in October. Eighteenth round, 560th overall, 2014, by the Las Vegas High Rollers.

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**Jim Taunton, SP (2026–2031)** — Six seasons, 175 starts, 1,047 innings, 58-53 and a 3.86 earned run average, and 16-5 with a 3.06 on the ninety-six-win club of 2030. A twenty-third-round pick, 709th overall in 2018, by the Denver Dynamite.

**Yuigo Sakaguchi, LF (2029–2031)** — Three seasons, 377 games, a .284 average and 63 home runs, with a Silver Slugger in 2030 and 49 doubles in 2031.

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