



THE NEW ORLEANS MUDCATS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Two crowns, twenty-one Octobers, and a city that never rushes the song.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

Rhythm

New Orleans does not hurry, and it does not apologize for that.

The city has never believed that the point of a song is to get to the end of it. A second-line does not march; it sways. A brass band does not build to a climax so much as it settles into a groove and stays there, adding a horn, dropping a horn, letting the thing breathe, until the tempo itself becomes the pleasure. The city's whole genius is patience that does not read as patience — a willingness to keep the rhythm going long after other places would have wanted a finish.

For thirty-one seasons the Mudcats have played baseball exactly that way.

They have won two championships, in 2014 and 2017, and both of them arrived in the middle of long grooves rather than at the end of climbs. They have reached the postseason twenty-one times. They have also lost a hundred and six games in a single summer, one year after winning 98, which is the other thing about a city built on rhythm: when it drops the beat, it drops it completely.

Two crowns. Twenty-one Octobers. One catastrophic year. And now, at the close of the third decade, a fade that has taken the club to the bottom of its division for the first time in a generation.

This is the story of a franchise that learned how to build, how to rebuild, and how to keep time.

I

The Noah Era

2001 – 2007

GM Noah took over a club with no tradition and a great deal of ambition, and he moved fast.

The 2001 Mudcats lost ninety-one games. The 2002 club won ninety and went to October — the fastest turnaround in the young league — and **Steve Miller** won the Ice Conference **Most Valuable Player** award, the first great player this franchise produced. Luis Chasqueira took the wild card series MVP.

What followed was a genuine contender assembled at speed. Ninety-nine wins and the franchise's first division title in **2004**, with **Jared Kennedy** taking the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference and **B.J. Swart** the Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Ninety-two wins and another October in 2005. One

hundred wins in **2006**, and **Marcello Bland** won the conference MVP. In **2007**, Swart won it — the third different Mudcat to be named the best player in the conference in six seasons.

Noah's imprint was aggression. He traded constantly, recalibrating every year, chasing contention without letting the core go stale. It worked: five postseason berths in six seasons, a division flag, three MVPs, a Cy Young, and a Rookie of the Year. Miller, Bland and Swart would all eventually reach the Hall of Fame.

What he never got was the last series.

II

The Fall

2008 – 2010

GM Ryan took over in 2008 and immediately won 98 games and a division title, which made him look like a genius, and then the floor gave out.

B.J. Swart won his second straight MVP in that 2008 season. He was the reigning back-to-back Most Valuable Player in the conference, and Ryan traded him.

The 2009 Mudcats lost **a hundred and six games**. It remains the worst season in franchise history by a wide margin, and it came one year after a 98-win division winner. Ninety-eight wins to fifty-six, in twelve months. There is no gentle way to describe a collapse of that scale, and the trade of a two-time MVP is at the center of any honest account of it.

They climbed back to .500 in 2010 — Mitsuchika Miura winning Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference — and the reckoning was over almost as fast as it arrived. But the lesson of 2009 hangs over everything Ryan did afterward, and it may explain why the second thing he built, he built to last.

III

The First Crown

2011 – 2014

The rebuild took three years and produced a dynasty.

Eighty-eight wins and an October in 2011. A step back in 2012, though **Mike Shane** won the Cy Young that year, the first of two he would take for this club. Eighty-eight wins and another berth in 2013, with Shane winning his second Cy Young and Jon Rolle the wild card series MVP.

And then **2014**.

One hundred and three wins. A division title. And a postseason run that the franchise had been chasing for thirteen years: **Mike Brightwell** took the wild card round, **Chad Keyes** the division round, **Jamie Faunce** the conference round, and in the final series, **Enrique Ramos** was named Most Valuable Player as the New Orleans Mudcats beat the Milwaukee Mobsters for the championship of The Big League. **George Reed** won the Cy Young that season — the third different Mudcat pitcher to win one in three years, and he would be inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2021, though he spent only sixty-seven games in New Orleans and wears another club's cap on the plaque.

The city that does not hurry had taken thirteen seasons to get there, and had not needed to rush at the end.

IV

The Groove

2015 – 2021

Here is the part that makes this franchise unusual. The championship did not end the run. It sat in the middle of it.

2015: 100 wins, and back to the championship series — where the Huron Herons beat them. Faunce took the division round, Brightwell the wild card, Jeremy Blackwell the conference round, and four Mudcats won Gold Gloves in a single season. **2016:** 102 wins, second place, another October, Dave Rodriguez winning Rookie of the Year.

2017: 95 wins, third place in the division — and the franchise's **second championship**, over the Milwaukee Mobsters again. Jamie Faunce was named Most Valuable Player of the final series, having also won the division round, with Brightwell taking the wild card and Jaylen Dilworth the conference. A third-place club won the whole thing, which is the sort of result that ought to teach every front office in the league humility and never does.

2019: 105 wins, the best regular season in franchise history, Faunce winning two more series MVP awards. Then 90 wins and an October in 2020, 84 and another in 2021.

Ten postseason berths in eleven seasons. Two championships and a third final series. This was the longest sustained excellence any Ice Conference club had put together, and it ran on two extraordinary players.

Faunce and Dilworth

Jamie Faunce is the greatest October player this franchise has had. Nine seasons in New Orleans, 1,311 games, 292 home runs, 800 runs batted in, five Silver Sluggers, two Gold Gloves, and — the number that matters — series MVP awards in the 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019 postseasons, including the championship series in 2017. Steve Miller and Jaylen Dilworth hit for more here. No player in franchise history has been the best man on the field in more Octobers.

Jaylen Dilworth arrived in 2016 and won a Silver Slugger in **2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025** — eight consecutive seasons as the best hitter at his position in the conference. In eleven New Orleans seasons he hit .298 with 342 home runs and played 1,531 games, more than any Mudcat ever has. He also won the conference series MVP in 2017, on the way to the second ring.

V

The Long Sway

2022 – 2029

The run did not end so much as it loosened.

Eighty-three wins and no October in 2022, the first autumn off since 2012 and the end of a nine-year streak. Jaylen Dilworth and Travis Williams took Silver Sluggers on a club that finished fourth, Brandon Caron won a Gold Glove, and none of it added up to a berth, which had not been the arrangement here for a long time.

Then back, the way this band always comes back. Ninety-one wins and an October in 2023, with Dilworth taking a Silver Slugger and the wild card round both, Eric McReynolds a Silver Slugger of his own, and **Chris Kitchin** named Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference. Eighty-eight and another berth in 2024, a third straight Silver Slugger for Dilworth and a Gold Glove for Todd Gagnon. Ninety-eight in 2025, and a fourth Silver Slugger in a row for Dilworth, who by then was the steadiest bat the franchise had carried since Faunce.

Then the first real dip in fifteen years: seventy-three and eighty-nine in 2026, fifth place, Jon Shaw's Gold Glove the only ornament on the whole summer. It looked, for one winter, like the end of something.

It was not. Eighty-one wins and an October in 2027, with **Andy Chenault** taking a Silver Slugger and Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in the same season. Ninety-four in 2028, with **Eric McReynolds** carrying both the wild card round and the divisional. **Joe Barnes** won the Cy Young Award of the Ice Conference that same season. Ninety-four again in 2029, with a Gold Glove for Ryan Cerny.

Twenty-one postseason berths through twenty-nine seasons. Twice in that stretch the club looked finished, and twice it picked the groove back up inside two years. Nobody in New Orleans had any particular reason to think 2030 would be different.

VI

Dropping the Beat

2030 – 2031

And then it stopped.

In 2030 the Mudcats won seventy-seven games and finished **seventh**. In 2031 they won sixty-nine and finished seventh again. Two consecutive seventh-place seasons; the first back-to-back losing years since 2009 and 2010, and the first time in the franchise's life it has finished that low twice running.

What is left is defense. **Ryan Cerny** won Gold Gloves in 2029, 2030 and 2031 — three straight — and McReynolds took one in 2030. Those are the honors of a team catching the ball beautifully behind pitching that cannot hold and a lineup that has aged out. Faunce's last season in New Orleans was 2020, Dilworth's 2026. The two men who carried two decades are both gone, and nothing has arrived to replace them.

This is the sound of a band that has been playing the same groove for twenty years and has finally run out of horn players. It is not a crisis and it is not a scandal. It is the ordinary arithmetic of a long run ending, and New Orleans has been here once before — in 2009, at the bottom of a much steeper fall, three years before the pieces of a championship began to arrive.

The city knows how this works. You do not rush the next song. You wait for the tempo to find you.

Two crowns are in the rafters. They are not going anywhere.

The Ledger

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

Home: Ballpark of New Orleans — capacity 45,000

Conference: Ice Conference, Jade Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,730–2,292 (.544)

Postseason appearances: 21 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 2 — 2014, 2017

Championship series appearances: 3 — 2014 (won over the Milwaukee Mobsters), 2015 (lost to the Huron Herons), 2017 (won over the Milwaukee Mobsters)

Division titles: 3 — 2004, 2008, 2014

Best season: 2019 (105–57)

Worst season: 2009 (56–106) — one year after a 98-win division title

Most Valuable Players: 4 awards / 3 men — Steve Miller (2002), Marcello Bland (2006), B.J. Swart (2007, 2008)

Cy Young Awards: 5 — Jared Kennedy (2004), Mike Shane (2012, 2013), George Reed (2014), Joe Barnes (2028)

Rookies of the Year: 6 — B.J. Swart (2004), Mitsuchika Miura (2010), Dave Rodriguez (2016), Eric McReynolds (2021), Chris Kitchin (2023), Andy Chenault (2027)

Hall of Famers: 5 of its own — Marcello Bland (2012), Steve Miller (2015), B.J. Swart (2020), Mike Shane (2024), Jamie Faunce (2030); each played more of his career here than anywhere else. George Reed (2021) and Terence Mason (2018) passed through briefly.

Managers: Noah G (2001–2007), Ryan G (2008–2031)

General managers: Noah (2001–2007), Ryan (2008–)

Pillars of the Franchise

Jamie Faunce (2012–2020) — The greatest October player the franchise has had. Nine New Orleans seasons, 1,311 games, 292 home runs, 800 runs batted in, five Silver Sluggers, two Gold Gloves. Series MVP awards in four different postseasons, including the **championship series in 2017**. He finished his career with Myrtle Beach and three other clubs. **Hall of Fame, inducted 2030.**

Jaylen Dilworth (2016–2026) — Eight consecutive Silver Sluggers, from 2018 through 2025, which no other player in franchise history approaches. In New Orleans: .298, 342 home runs, 1,045 runs batted in and 1,531 games, the most any Mudcat has played.

B.J. Swart (2003–2009) — Rookie of the Year in 2004 and back-to-back Most Valuable Player in 2007 and 2008, then traded while holding both awards. He hit .287 with 257 home runs in seven New Orleans seasons, and finished a .296 career hitter with 522 home runs across four clubs. **Hall of Fame, inducted 2020.**

Steve Miller (2001–2009) — The franchise's first star and first MVP, in 2002. Four Silver Sluggers, and in nine New Orleans seasons 382 home runs — the club record — with 1,000 runs batted in and two division series MVP awards in the Noah era. **Hall of Fame, inducted 2015.**

Mike Shane, SP (2010–2021) — Back-to-back Cy Young Awards in 2012 and 2013, and twelve seasons without pitching for anyone else: 182–89 with a 3.08 earned run average and 2,299 strikeouts. The best pitcher the franchise has ever developed. **Hall of Fame, inducted 2024.**

Marcello Bland (2005–2008) — Most Valuable Player in 2006 and a central bat in the first great New Orleans lineup, though only four of his ten seasons were spent here. **Hall of Fame, inducted 2012.**

Eric McReynolds (2021–2031) — Rookie of the Year in 2021, a Gold Glove in 2030, and both series MVP awards in the 2028 postseason. The last man standing from the good years.

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