



# THE SPOKANE SASQUATCHES

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

*One afternoon it walked out of the trees. Everything else is tracks and argument.*

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

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## PROLOGUE

# The Photograph

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The thing about the photograph is that it is real.

Not the creature — that is the argument, and the argument has been going on for a century and will go on for another. The photograph is real. Somebody stood on a logging road in the Cascades with the light going and the camera he happened to have, and he pressed the shutter, and what came back was a shape in the trees that is either the most important frame ever exposed in North America or a man in a suit. It is out of focus at the edges. The subject is turning away. Everyone who has looked at it has decided what they were going to decide before they looked.

But nobody disputes that something was photographed.

In 2008 the Spokane Sasquatches won the Big League Championship, and it is the only frame this franchise has. Thirty-one seasons of tracks and broken branches and hair samples that came back inconclusive, and one afternoon when the thing walked out of the trees in full daylight, and there it is, and no one can take it back.

What makes the picture strange, and what makes this a story rather than a scrapbook, is that it was not taken in the year anyone expected. The season before, Spokane won a hundred and six games. The season before that, eighty-seven. The season before that, eighty-nine and a division flag. Three years of everyone in the Northwest saying the same thing: it is up there, it is enormous, it is going to come down out of the trees any minute now.

It came down in 2008, in the year the club won eighty-nine games and finished second.

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I

## Tracks in the Snow

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*2001 – 2003*

The Sasquatches were a charter member of The Big League, and their first three summers were the kind that get skipped in the telling: 74-88 in 2001, 65-97 in 2002, 69-93 in 2003. Two hundred and seventy-eight losses in three years.

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But the club was not empty, and this is the part the record obscures. Adam Beshara, a catcher who would go on to play twelve seasons in Spokane and appear in more games than any Sasquatch but one, won a Silver Slugger and a Gold Glove in the very first season. Mark Berry won a Silver Slugger beside him. Jay Scott took a Gold Glove. In 2003, Ben Fowler — a third baseman who had come up the year before — won the first of the two Silver Sluggers he would win in this uniform, and Ron Oliver won a Gold Glove.

The general manager was a man named Chris, and he had arrived with the franchise, and he would still be there twenty-six years later. There is no comparable tenure anywhere in the league. Whatever else is true of this club's history, it was built by one person, over a working lifetime, in one city.

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## II

# The Long Approach

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*2004 – 2007*

In 2004 everything turned at once. Spokane won eighty-eight games and a wild card, the first postseason berth in franchise history, and lost in the first round. Scott Kinney went 18-8. Wayne Williamson, a right fielder in his first big-league season, hit .281 and was worth nearly five wins. Beshara and Fowler both won Silver Sluggers.

In 2005 they won eighty-nine and the division outright, and this time they won a playoff series — Kirk Sobel took the divisional round MVP — before going out in the conference championship series. In 2006 they won eighty-seven and lost in the first round.

And in 2007 they won a hundred and six games.

That is still the best regular season in franchise history, and the only time this club has ever won a hundred games. Joey Johnson went 19-9 with an earned run average of 2.90 and was named Cy Young Award winner of the Fire Conference. Kinney went 17-9. Williamson hit .335. Manny Perez won a Gold Glove. The Sasquatches led their division from the front, took the flag by daylight, and walked into October as the most feared club in the conference.

They lost in the first round.

There is no way to soften that, and this history will not try. A hundred and six wins and out in a week. It is the single hardest fact in the franchise's ledger, and it sat there for exactly one year.

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### III

## The Sighting: 2008

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### *What Actually Happened*

The 2008 Spokane Sasquatches won eighty-nine games and finished second in their division. Seventeen fewer wins than the year before. They went into October as a wild card, which is to say as an afterthought, and they did not lose a series.

They beat their first opponent, and Mike Marino was named Most Valuable Player of that round. They beat their second, and Jason Gartz took the honors. They beat their third, and Marino took his second of the month. And in the 2008 Big League Championship Series they beat the Boston Boom, now the Chicago Black Sox, and the Most Valuable Player of the championship was J.J. June, a third baseman in his first full season, who had hit .268 with thirty-one home runs and a hundred and four runs batted in and had not, until that month, been the most famous player on his own team.

Nobody outside Washington had picked them. Nobody inside Washington had picked them either, honestly, not after what 2007 had done to the city. The 2008 club was not better than the 2007 club by any measure the league keeps. It won.

That is the whole lesson of the postseason, and every franchise learns it in one direction or the other. Spokane is the rare club that learned it both ways in consecutive Octobers.

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### IV

## Still Out There

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### *2009 – 2016*

For eight years the Sasquatches kept crossing the trail.

They won eighty-four in 2009 and missed. Eighty-six in 2010 and lost in the first round. Ninety-one in 2012, the second-best season the franchise had yet had, and lost in the first round. Eighty-seven in 2014 and lost in the first round. Eighty-six in 2016 and lost in the first round. Four postseason berths in eight years, four first-round exits, and in between, in 2011 and 2013 and 2015, three summers of nothing at all.

But the roster in those years was, on the evidence of the last thirty seasons, the best collection of everyday players this franchise has ever assembled.

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Edgar Maciel arrived in 2009 and played eleven seasons in Spokane. He hit .286 with three hundred and fifty-six home runs and eleven hundred and ninety-four runs batted in, won three Gold Gloves, and in 2016 hit .333 with forty-nine home runs and a hundred and forty-four runs batted in, which remains the finest offensive season in club history. He was never named Most Valuable Player of the conference. Mike Marino played ten years and hit .287. J.J. June played eleven and was the club's third baseman from the championship through 2017. Wayne Williamson played twelve, hit .293, stole three hundred and forty-four bases, and put up five separate seasons worth more than five wins.

They were together, most of them, for the better part of a decade. They won one playoff series in that decade, in 2008, and it happened to be four of them.

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V

## The Disappearance

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*2017 – 2026*

Then the trail went cold, and stayed cold longer than any stretch in franchise history.

Ten consecutive seasons without an October. The bottom of it came fast: 73-89 in 2017, and then 61-101 in 2018 — the worst season the Sasquatches have ever played — and then 62-100 in 2019, 64-98 in 2020, 69-93 in 2021. Four straight last-place finishes. In 2018 and 2019 the club lost a hundred games in back-to-back years for the only time in its history.

Chris stayed. That is the remarkable thing, and it is not obviously to his credit or against it; it is simply the fact. The man who had built the 2007 club and the 2008 champion sat in the same chair through the whole collapse and most of the way out of it.

And there was one player worth the price of a ticket. Matt Jacobs came up in 2020, on a club that lost ninety-eight games, and hit .284. He won Silver Sluggers in 2021, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 — five of them in six years — and a Gold Glove in 2024, and he did all of it for teams that finished fourth, fifth, fifth, fifth and seventh. Jose Saucedo caught more than eleven hundred games in Spokane across nine seasons and hit .195, which is the sort of line that only survives on a club that badly needs the defense. Todd Nelson came up in 2023 and won Gold Gloves in 2026 and 2031.

By 2023 the club had climbed back to .500. By 2026 it had fallen back to seventy-eight wins and seventh place, and Chris was replaced, in the middle of that season, by a man named Don.

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## VI

# A Second Glimpse

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2027 – 2031

The team Don inherited was better than its record, and it showed almost immediately.

Spokane won ninety games in 2027, took a wild card, and won a playoff series for the first time in nineteen years — Todd Nelson taking the round's honors — before going out in the next. Justin Davis, who had arrived in 2025 and would become the most durable starter the club has had since Kinney, went 14-8.

In 2028 they won ninety-four games and the division, the first flag since 2007. They beat their divisional opponent, with David Burgess taking the round MVP. They beat their conference opponent, with Jordan Padilla taking his. And in the Big League Championship Series they met the Denver Dynamite and lost.

It was the second time in franchise history that Spokane had played for a championship, and it came twenty years after the first.

In 2029 they won ninety-eight games — the second-best season in franchise history — finished second, and lost in the first round. Justin Davis went 16-12 with a 2.61 earned run average. Kyle Ivy won a Gold Glove. Don had by then given way to a general manager named Sly.

And then it was gone again. Eighty wins in 2030. Seventy-one in 2031, sixth place, the worst full season since 2021. Israel Flores won a Silver Slugger in the wreckage and Todd Nelson won another Gold Glove, and the Sasquatches finished the season twenty games out.

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## VII

# Inconclusive

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Thirty-one seasons. Two thousand four hundred and eighty-two wins against two thousand five hundred and forty-two losses, which is a shade under .500 and is, over three decades, about as honest a summary as a franchise can be given. Twelve Octobers. Three division flags. Two championship series. One trophy.

That one is the whole argument. There are clubs in The Big League with better records across the same thirty-one years and nothing to show for them — Somerville has been to October twenty-six times

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and has never won it; Big Horn has been fifteen times and has never won it. Spokane has been twelve times, has been under .500 for its history, and has a banner.

The men who might have carried the franchise into the Hall of Fame have not made it. Wayne Williamson, who played twelve years in this uniform and hit .293, never received a single vote in his years on the regular ballot; he came before the Veterans Committee in 2031 and received none there either, and will not be eligible again until 2036. Ben Fowler, twice a Silver Slugger in Spokane and a Most Valuable Player runner-up, exhausted his ballot in 2025 without an induction and comes before the committee again in 2033. Edgar Maciel, who is by any measure the best player this club has ever developed, has not yet had his hearing.

The one Hall of Fame plaque with any Spokane on it belongs to Mark Berry, who played two seasons here at the start and eleven somewhere else. So there is no monument. There is the photograph.

It is out of focus. The subject was turning away. It was taken in the wrong year, by a club nobody was watching, and everyone who has looked at it since has decided in advance what they were going to see. But the shape in the trees is enormous, and it is right there in the frame, and no amount of arguing has ever made it go away.

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## The Ledger

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

**Home:** Sasquatch Stadium, Spokane — capacity 45,000

**Conference:** Fire Conference, Ruby Division

**All-time regular-season record (2001–2031):** 2,482–2,542 (.494)

**Postseason appearances:** 12 in 31 seasons

**League Championships:** 1 — 2008 (over the Boston Boom, now Chicago)

**Championship series appearances:** 2 — 2008 (won over the Boston Boom, now Chicago Black Sox), 2028 (lost to the Denver Dynamite)

**Division titles:** 3 — 2005, 2007, 2028

**Best season:** 2007 (106–56)

**Worst season:** 2018 (61–101)

**Most Valuable Players:** 0

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**Cy Young Awards:** 1 — Joey Johnson (2007)

**Rookies of the Year:** 0

**Hall of Famers:** 1 — Mark Berry (inducted 2013), who won a Silver Slugger in the franchise's first season and spent two years in Spokane before making his name elsewhere

**General managers:** Chris O (2001–2026), Don M (2026–2028), Sly D (2029– )

**Ninety-win seasons:** 5 — 2007, 2012, 2027, 2028, 2029

**Longest postseason drought:** 10 seasons (2017–2026)

### *Pillars of the Franchise*

**Edgar Maciel, 1B (2009–2019)** — The best player the franchise has ever had. Eleven seasons, 1,762 games, a .286 average, three hundred and fifty-six home runs, 1,194 runs batted in, and 44.3 wins above replacement in Spokane, more than any Sasquatch in either half of the game. Three Gold Gloves and two Silver Sluggers. His 2016 — .333, forty-nine home runs, a hundred and forty-four driven in — is the best season any Spokane hitter has produced, and it came on a club that lost in the first round.

**Wayne Williamson, RF (2004–2015)** — Twelve seasons, a .293 average, three hundred and forty-four stolen bases, and five years worth better than five wins apiece. He hit .330 in 2006, .335 in 2007 on the hundred-and-six-win club, and .305 in the championship season. He has never received a Hall of Fame vote.

**J.J. June, 3B (2007–2017)** — Most Valuable Player of the 2008 Big League Championship Series, in his first full season, which is the single most consequential thing any Sasquatch has ever done. Eleven years, 1,519 games, two hundred and twenty-one home runs, seven hundred and ninety-four runs batted in.

**Mike Marino, LF (2007–2016)** — Ten seasons, a .287 average, and two series MVP awards in the 2008 run, including the conference championship that put the club in the final. A Silver Slugger in 2015.

**Scott Kinney, SP (2003–2016)** — Fourteen seasons in one uniform, which no other Spokane player has managed. He started at the front of the rotation for the 2004 wild card, the 2005 division winner and the 2007 juggernaut, then finished his career in the bullpen, and left with 123 wins, a 3.34 earned run average and 173 saves.

**Adam Beshara, C (2001–2012)** — The first Sasquatch. Twelve seasons and 1,574 games, three Silver Sluggers and a Gold Glove, and one of only two men on the roster for both the 65-97 season of 2002 and the championship of 2008. The other was Ben Fowler.

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**Matt Jacobs, 1B (2020–2026)** — The one good reason to watch during the disappearance. Five Silver Sluggers in six seasons and a Gold Glove, .281 with two hundred and twenty-three home runs, on clubs that never once finished above fourth.

**Ben Fowler, 3B (2002–2008)** — Silver Sluggers in 2003 and 2004 and a hundred and sixty-seven home runs across seven seasons, the middle of the order for the first good teams this franchise ever had. He returns to the Veterans Committee ballot in 2033.

**Joey Johnson, SP (2005–2011)** — Fire Conference Cy Young Award winner in 2007, on the strength of a 19-9 season and a 2.90 earned run average. The best year any Spokane pitcher has had.

**Justin Davis, SP (2025–2031)** — The ace of the second glimpse. Seven seasons, 89-71, a 3.25 earned run average, and a 2.61 in the ninety-eight-win summer of 2029.

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