



THE TAMPA BAY CANNONS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Two hundred-win summers, nine Octobers, and never once a final.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

The Forecast

On the Gulf coast of Florida the weather is always about to happen. The radio says a system has formed somewhere out past the Keys and is moving north-northwest, and the water in the bay goes glassy and strange, and the palms along the outfield fence at Palms Park start to lean, and everyone in Tampa spends three days watching a shape on a map.

Most of the time it turns. It goes up the coast, or it goes west into the Panhandle, or it comes apart over open water and arrives as an afternoon of rain. The people who live there do not stop watching the map, because one year it will not turn. But most years it does.

The Tampa Bay Cannons have played thirty-one seasons in The Big League. They have won ninety-six games in a summer, and a hundred, and a hundred again. They have won two division titles and been to October nine times. And in thirty-one years they have never once played a game with a championship on the line. Not a final, not a conference championship series won, nothing. Eight clubs in this league have never reached a final, and Tampa Bay is one of them. It has also, in the last three seasons, played the two worst years any club has played in the history of The Big League.

The storm keeps forming. It keeps turning.

I

Good Enough to Watch

2001 – 2005

The first Cannons were not bad, which in an expansion year is its own kind of achievement. Eighty-three wins in 2001, third place, Hector Campos at third base hitting .301 with thirty home runs, Andres Montoya going 17-10 with a 2.49 earned run average over two hundred and thirty-one innings, and three Gold Gloves in one season, taken by Luis Gonzales behind the plate, Greg DeYoe and Angel Camacho.

They were a defensive club before anybody had a word for it. DeYoe won a Gold Glove in each of the first three years. Gonzales caught a thousand two hundred and seventy games over ten seasons and hit .214 and nobody ever thought about moving him. Chris Carmody and Guillermo Alonzo took the ball behind Montoya. Eduardo Alberto played second base and hit .268 with power.

Eighty-four wins, then eighty-two, and in 2004 eighty-eight and the club's first October. They won the wild card round, Eduardo Alberto taking the series, and went out in the next one. Campos hit .343 that year, which is still the highest average any Cannon has posted over a full schedule.

Then 2005: ninety-six wins and sixty-six losses and the first division title in franchise history. Matt Purdy took a Silver Slugger. Jay Drust won the first of four straight Gold Gloves in left field. Omar Ramirez won fourteen. Three million five hundred and thirty thousand people came to Palms Park, and that gate has never been matched.

They lost the first series they played.

II

Fifty-Nine

2006 – 2012

The bottom fell out in a single winter. Campos left for Denver. The 2006 Cannons won fifty-nine games and lost a hundred and three, thirty-seven games worse than the club that had won the division the year before, which remains the sharpest one-year fall in franchise history. Montoya, thirty-two years old and five seasons removed from a 2.49 earned run average, went 6-16 with a 5.73.

What followed was seven years with one good summer in the middle of it. Eighty wins, then sixty-nine. Then, in 2009, eighty-eight wins and a second-place finish and an October, with Ron Blackwell and Matt Purdy carrying the offense (Purdy hit .294 with forty-three home runs) and Javon Cooper pitching. They lost the first series.

Then sixty-two wins. Sixty-six. Seventy-two. Attendance slid under two million in 2011, the only time it happened before the collapse of the late 2020s.

Two men were worth the price of a ticket in the lean part of that stretch. Matt Purdy played ten seasons in right field, twelve hundred and sixty-six games, .283 with two hundred and seventy-five home runs, and never played a postseason game that mattered. And in 2011 the Cannons used the second overall pick of the draft on a shortstop named Jamal Barnett.

III

Barnett

2013 – 2017

Barnett came up in the middle of 2012 and hit .301 in fifty-five games. The following spring the whole thing turned over at once.

The 2013 Cannons won ninety-two games and finished third. They beat their wild card opponent, B.J. Swart taking the series, and then they beat the club that had finished ahead of them, Matt Reed taking that one. It brought them to the conference championship series, and they lost it, and that is as close as this franchise has ever come to playing for anything.

Swart, the first overall pick of the 2002 draft, hit .278 with thirty-four home runs and stole thirty-seven bases that year and won a Gold Glove and a Silver Slugger. Reed hit .299 with fifty-three doubles. Barnett hit .249 with twenty-three home runs and drove in ninety-three at twenty-four years old. Corey Kimball started thirty-three games.

The Best Team They Ever Had: 2014

A hundred wins and sixty-two losses, and second place, because the New Orleans Mudcats won a hundred and three.

Jamal Barnett hit .300 with forty home runs, forty-five doubles, a hundred and twenty-two runs batted in and a hundred and thirty-six runs scored, and was named Most Valuable Player of the Ice Conference. He is the only man ever to win it in this uniform. Matt Reed hit .306 with two hundred and seven hits. Swart hit .328 in a hundred and sixteen games. Kimball won thirteen. Jim Zenger won a Gold Glove.

They were eliminated in the first series they played, and no Cannon won a postseason honor that October.

In 2015 they won ninety-eight and finished fourth, which tells you everything about the Jade Division in that decade. Ricardo Anguiano, who spent parts of four seasons here and a hundred and nine games in all, went 20-8 with a 2.77 earned run average, one of the best years any Tampa Bay starter has had. They went out in the first series again.

Then Swart's knees went, and Barnett's bat went, and it was over. Eighty-three wins in 2016. Seventy-three in 2017.

Stockett

2018 – 2022

Nick Stockett was a second-round pick, fifty-fifth overall, in 2014, and he is the strangest great player this league has produced.

He hit .203 for the Tampa Bay Cannons. Not in a bad year, but over thirteen seasons and one thousand three hundred and sixty-seven games, which is more than any man has played for this franchise. In that time he hit two hundred and seventy home runs, drove in six hundred and sixty-eight, stole two hundred and ninety-seven bases and won five Gold Gloves in right field. He was worth more to this club than anyone except Jamal Barnett, and there were whole seasons in which he did not get a hit in four out of every five at-bats.

In 2019 he hit .226 and hit forty-six home runs and drove in a hundred and six. That is the kind of player he was, and Tampa Bay built five decent years around him.

Eighty-seven wins and a wild card round won in 2018, with Steven Hoffman hitting .352 in sixty-three games after coming up. Eighty-six in 2019, one short of October. Ninety-seven in 2020, and out in the first series. Eighty-two in 2021.

And then 2022: a hundred wins, sixty-two losses, and the second division title in franchise history, five games clear of a Denver club that would go on to win the championship. Stockett hit .206 with thirty-five home runs and ninety-four runs batted in and won his fourth Gold Glove. David Archuletta, an eighteenth-round pick, saved forty-five games with a 2.02 earned run average. Hoffman hit .286 with fifty-two doubles. Tim Young made thirty-three starts, as he did in every season from 2017 through 2024.

They lost the first series they played. It was the ninth and last October this club has seen.

v

The Water Goes Out

2023 – 2031

Sixty-nine wins in 2023. Steven Hoffman hit .306 with two hundred and three hits, fifty-five doubles and sixty-two stolen bases that summer, which is one of the finest seasons anybody has had here, and then he signed with Rochester, and Tampa Bay has not had a .300 hitter since.

Seventy wins in 2024. Sixty-one in 2025. Seventy-three in 2026, which now looks like a good year. Then fifty-two and a hundred and ten. Then fifty-two and a hundred and ten again.

Then 2029.

Forty-one wins and a hundred and twenty-one losses. It is the worst season any club has played in the history of The Big League. The next year the Cannons won forty-three and lost a hundred and nineteen, which is the second worst. No franchise in this league has ever owned both ends of that list, and Tampa Bay owns them back to back.

Someone had to pitch those games. Gabe McCann, an eleventh-round pick, made ninety-three starts between 2026 and 2031 and finished 11-61 with a 5.42 earned run average, and he took the ball every fifth day for six years on clubs that could not catch, hit or field behind him. Chad Couch caught twelve hundred and twenty-one games across thirteen seasons and was still there at the end. Christian Brenner, who had already pitched through the worst decade in Nashville's history, came to Tampa in 2027 and went 29-65 in four years.

Nine straight losing seasons. Five straight of a hundred losses or more. Nine years since the last October, and the attendance down to one million five hundred and ten thousand in 2030, the smallest crowd this club has ever drawn.

In 2031 they won fifty-seven, which counted as improvement. Billy Kern was the best hitter, John Hall the best pitcher, Alden Barnaby the best rookie. Leo C took over as general manager in the middle of 2030 and has the job now.

VI

What Never Came

Two thousand three hundred and forty-five wins against two thousand six hundred and seventy-seven losses. Fifteen winning seasons out of thirty-one. Nine Octobers. Two division titles, seventeen years apart. One Most Valuable Player. No Cy Young Award, no Rookie of the Year, no championship series, no trophy.

One Hall of Famer of its own: Hector Campos, third baseman, five seasons in Tampa Bay and seven hundred and forty-five of his fifteen hundred and ninety-seven career games here, inducted in 2030. B.J. Swart, inducted in 2020, gave this club five hundred games out of nineteen hundred and thirty-six and belongs to New Orleans. Ricardo Anguiano, inducted in 2022, threw a hundred and nine games here across four seasons and belongs to Denver.

Nine times this franchise has gotten into October and nine times it has come home. Twice it won a hundred games. Once, in 2013, a ninety-two-win club that had finished third in its own division won two rounds and stood one series away from the final, and lost it, and that is the high-water mark.

The people came anyway, three million a year through the middle of it, until the last few summers took even that. They came to Palms Park to see whether this was the year the thing that keeps forming out over the Gulf finally comes ashore.

It has not yet.

The Ledger

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

Home: Palms Park, Tampa Bay — capacity 45,000

Conference: Ice Conference, Jade Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,345–2,677 (.467)

Postseason appearances: 9 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 0

Championship series appearances: 0 — the club has never reached a final. Its deepest run was 2013, when it won two rounds and lost the conference championship series

Division titles: 2 — 2005, 2022

Best season: 2014 (100–62)

Worst season: 2029 (41–121) — the worst season in the history of The Big League

Most Valuable Players: 1 — Jamal Barnett (2014)

Cy Young Awards: 0

Rookies of the Year: 0

Hall of Famers: 1 of its own — Hector Campos (inducted 2030), 745 of his 1,597 career games in Tampa Bay. B.J. Swart, inducted in 2020, played 500 of his 1,936 games here and belongs to New Orleans; Ricardo Anguiano, inducted in 2022, pitched 109 games here across four seasons and belongs to Denver

General managers: Dick G (2001–2007), Matt Reed (2007–2008), Cole H (2009–2019), John S (2020–2030), Leo C (2030–)

Hundred-win seasons: 2 — 2014, 2022

Hundred-loss seasons: 8 — 2006, 2010, 2025, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031

Longest postseason streak: 3 seasons (2013–2015)

Longest postseason drought: 9 seasons (2023–2031, active)

Longest run of losing seasons: 9 (2023–2031, active)

Best attendance: 3,530,967 (2005)

Lowest attendance: 1,510,612 (2030)

Pillars of the Franchise

Jamal Barnett, SS (2012–2021) — The best player in franchise history and its only Most Valuable Player. Ten seasons, 1,219 games, a .238 average, 193 home runs and 649 runs batted in, with three Silver Sluggers and three Gold Gloves. His 2014 was the finest season anyone has played here: .300, 40 home runs, 45 doubles, 122 runs batted in, 136 runs scored. Second overall in the 2011 draft. He hit .184 in 2019 and .189 in 2021 and played every day anyway, because there was nobody else.

Nick Stockett, RF (2018–2030) — More games than any man in club history: thirteen seasons, 1,367 of them, and a .203 average with 270 home runs, 668 runs batted in and 297 stolen bases. Five Gold Gloves, a Silver Slugger in 2019, and the most valuable player of the 2018 wild card round. He hit 46 home runs in 2019 while batting .226. Second round, 55th overall, 2014.

Matt Purdy, RF (2005–2014) — Ten seasons, 1,266 games, a .283 average, 275 home runs and 725 runs batted in, with Silver Sluggers in 2005 and 2009. He hit .344 in 2006 and .335 in 2007 and 43 home runs in 2009, mostly for clubs going nowhere. Second round, 42nd overall, 2003.

Hector Campos, 3B (2001–2005) — The franchise's only Hall of Famer. Five seasons, 745 games, a .306 average, 125 home runs and a .343 season in 2004, the best any Cannon has hit over a full schedule. He left for Denver after 2005, played for four more clubs, and finished with 1,597 games and 270 home runs. Inducted in 2030.

Chad Couch, C (2016–2028) — Thirteen seasons behind the plate, 1,221 games, a .259 average and 505 runs batted in. He caught the 2022 division winner and was still catching in 2028, on a club that lost a hundred and ten. First round, fifth overall, 2012.

Luis Gonzales, C (2001–2010) — Ten seasons and 1,270 games, all of them here, a .214 average and three Gold Gloves. He caught every good team the franchise had in its first decade and never played for anyone else.

Andres Montoya, SP (2001–2008) — More innings than any pitcher in club history: 1,655 of them over eight seasons, 254 starts, 99-85 with a 3.69 earned run average, all of it in Tampa Bay. He went 17-10 with a 2.49 in the first season the club ever played. Fifth round, 124th overall.

Steven Hoffman, LF (2018–2023) — Six seasons, 823 games, a .300 average, 1,042 hits and 274 stolen bases, with Silver Sluggers in 2020 and 2023. He hit .352 as a rookie and .306 with 62 stolen bases in his last summer here before leaving for Rochester. First round, 26th overall, 2014.

Matt Reed, CF (2013–2017) — Five seasons, 710 games, a .283 average and 115 stolen bases, and the most valuable player of the 2013 division round, the deepest October this club has had. He hit .306 with 207 hits and 49 doubles on the 100-win team of 2014. Eighth round, 197th overall, 2011.

B.J. Swart, LF (2013–2017) — The first overall pick of the 2002 draft, and the man who won the 2013 wild card series. Five seasons here, 500 games, a .284 average and 116 home runs, with a Gold Glove and two Silver Sluggers. Most of his 1,936 career games were played in New Orleans, and that is the club his 2020 Hall of Fame plaque belongs to.

Tim Young, SP (2016–2024) — Nine seasons, 282 starts, 1,521 innings, 92-96 with a 3.78 earned run average. He was the rotation for most of a decade, including the 2020 and 2022 October clubs. Second round, 50th overall, 2012.

David Archuleta, RP (2020–2029) — Ten seasons, 267 saves, a 3.17 earned run average and 1,039 strikeouts in 719 innings, with 45 saves and a 2.02 on the 2022 division winner. An eighteenth-round pick, 562nd overall, in 2017.

Jay Drust, LF (2003–2010) — Eight seasons, 1,022 games, a .278 average and four consecutive Gold Gloves from 2005 through 2008. Sixth round, 161st overall, 2001.

Eduardo Alberto, 2B (2001–2005) — Five seasons, 758 games, a .268 average and 131 home runs from second base, and the most valuable player of the 2004 wild card round, the first postseason series this franchise ever won. Third round, 68th overall.

John Johnston, RF (2020–2024, 2026–2028) — Two stints, 1,068 games, 143 home runs and 192 stolen bases, with a Gold Glove in 2022. Fifth overall in the 2015 draft, and one of the last good players on the roster before the floor gave way.

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