THE VIRGINIA REBELS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Twenty Octobers before the water got over the wall.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

Twice a Day, Forever

The tide in the Chesapeake comes in twice a day and it has done so every day since before there was anybody there to write it down. It does not hurry. It does not skip a turn to rest. On a calm afternoon in July you can stand on a dock at Cape Charles and watch it and see nothing happening at all, and then look at the piling an hour later and find the waterline eighteen inches higher than it was, and no single moment in between was the moment it happened.

Twenty times in thirty-one seasons the Virginia Rebels have played baseball in October. Only three clubs in The Big League have been more often. They have won six division flags and they have won a hundred and five games in a summer and a hundred and one in another, and for twenty-four years they had one man running the organization.

They won their first championship in 2025.

Twenty-four seasons of showing up before the water got over the wall. That is the whole story, and the interesting part is not that it took so long. The interesting part is that they never once stopped coming in.

I

The First Water

2001 – 2006

The Rebels were a charter member of The Big League and they were good out of the gate, which is rarer than it sounds and did them less good than you would expect.

Eighty-eight wins and a wild card in the league's first season, with Willie Herrera taking the most valuable player award of the opening round. Eighty-nine and the division in 2002. A losing year, and then eighty-seven and eighty-four and ninety-two: five Octobers in the first six seasons, four of them entered through the wild card.

Juan Pacheco hit a hundred and fifteen home runs in five years in right field and took the divisional round in 2004, the same October Tim Cree took the opening round. Nick Guzman took a round in 2005 and Jesse Glancy took one in 2006. Rod Sanchez threw two hundred starts with an earned run average of

3.12 and Matthew d'Aguilar went 39-22 in three seasons before he was gone. Alberto L opened the franchise and handed it over in 2003 to a man named Andrew C, who would still be there in 2026.

Five Octobers, four opening rounds won, and not one trip to a conference championship series. The tide came in and went out again.

II

Slack Water

2007 – 2013

Then five years of very little. Seventy-seven wins, seventy-eight, seventy-three, and two seasons at .500 that snuck into October and went out immediately.

Bryan Romo won a Gold Glove in 2007 and made two hundred and seventy starts across eight seasons. Josh Van der Werff won a Silver Slugger behind the plate in 2008. Dave Castillo, who would play twelve seasons in this uniform across two stints and hit two hundred and eight home runs, was the one bat worth watching. In 2011 a shortstop named Jesse Ripke came up, hit .284, and was named Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference.

And in 2012 the Rebels won a hundred and five games.

It is still the best regular season in franchise history. They took the division by a mile, and they lost in the first round. Three and a half million people came through the gates, a figure the franchise would not touch again for eight years. The following October, at ninety-two wins and third place, George Bierley took the opening round and the Rebels went out in the next one.

III

Out

2014 – 2019

Eighty-five wins in 2014, and then the bottom.

Seventy-three. Sixty-eight. Seventy-two. Sixty in 2018, which is a hundred and two losses and the worst season this franchise has ever played. Seventy-eight. Six consecutive seasons without an October,

the longest drought in club history, and an eighth-place finish, and attendance down to one million eight hundred and fifty thousand, the lowest the Rebels have ever drawn.

Andrew C stayed. That is the fact that matters about those six years, and whether it was loyalty or inertia is not a thing the record can settle. Paul Cassista and Kevin Fritz and Jose Marrozim won Gold Gloves. Mark Green hit a hundred and sixty home runs at third base and won two Silver Sluggers. Jason Sims won one in 2019. Wayne Rainville won a Gold Glove the same year.

And a right-hander named Jacob Hickenbottom threw twenty-two innings at the end of 2019 with an earned run average of 2.86.

IV

The Water Rises

2020 – 2027

Eight consecutive Octobers. It is the longest run this franchise has ever had, and it is the reason there is a banner.

It began out of nothing, which is how a tide always begins. The 2019 Rebels won seventy-eight games and finished fifth. The 2020 club won a hundred, with **Jacob Hickenbottom** going 18-3 with a 2.51 earned run average in his first full season and a roster made up largely of the same men who had lost a hundred and two games two summers before.

Eighty-four and an October in 2021, and then the deepest run this club had made in twenty years. Jose Hernandez took the opening round, Elad Litvinov the divisional, Clark Lake the conference championship series, and the Rebels reached the Big League Championship Series for the first time in twenty-one years of trying and lost it to the New York Empire. Hickenbottom went 16-5 with an earned run average of 2.08 and won the Cy Young Award of the Fire Conference. Kyle Ivy won a Gold Glove.

Ninety-eight wins and the division in 2022, and out early. Eighty-four and another October in 2023, with Ethan Washington taking a round and Preston Fifield a Gold Glove, and out early again. Two flags and four berths in four seasons, and the water kept coming up the bank without ever quite reaching the house.

The Twenty-Fifth Summer: 2025

A hundred and one wins and the division in 2024, and then, in 2025, ninety-seven wins and the flag and everything else.

Nate Weaver hit .289 with twenty-two home runs, a hundred and six runs and thirty-six stolen bases and was named Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference. He is the only man ever to win it in this uniform. Jesse Cox won a Silver Slugger. Joe Blevins and Jamie Faunce won Gold Gloves. Hickenbottom went 12-6 with a 2.62 earned run average and Preston Fifield 59-35 across five seasons behind him.

In October Kyle Ivy took the opening round and Brian Cohen the divisional, and in the Big League Championship Series against the Denver Dynamite the most valuable player was Vinny House, a second baseman who had hit .258 across nine seasons and had never won anything.

Ninety-seven wins again in 2026 and ninety-four and a flag in 2027, six division titles in all and three of them in four years. Andrew C left after 2026, having run the club for twenty-four seasons and seen it to one championship in his second-to-last summer.

V

Going Out

2028 – 2031

Eighty-two wins and no October in 2028, the only miss in twelve years, and the first sign the tide had turned. Manny Jimenez took a Silver Slugger and Joe Blevins another Gold Glove, his third in four seasons, on a club that finished fifth.

Then eighty-eight in 2029 and one more run at it. Joey Powell took the opening round, Manny Jimenez the divisional and the conference championship both, and the Rochester North Stars took the last one. Blevins and Powell won Gold Gloves. It was the third Big League Championship Series this franchise had played in nine years, and the second one it had lost.

Eighty-four in 2030 and another berth, with **Jesus Sifuentes** hitting his way to Rookie of the Year of the Fire Conference and a Silver Slugger beside it, and David Green winning a Gold Glove in the field behind him.

And then 2031. An 81-81 season, fourth place, a club that had no business in October and got there anyway, and very nearly finished the whole thing. Sifuentes took the wild card round and Pio Takami the conference championship, and Virginia played its fourth final in eleven years and lost it to the Denver Dynamite — the same club it had beaten for the trophy six years earlier.

Craig E held the chair from 2027, then it turned over twice more, and Kaden C has it now.

Four finals in eleven years. One trophy. The water comes up to the same mark every time, and stops there.

VI

The Waterline

Two thousand six hundred and thirty wins against two thousand three hundred and ninety-three losses, which is .524. Twenty Octobers in thirty-one seasons. Six division flags. Four appearances in the Big League Championship Series, all four of them since 2021, and one banner.

There is not a single Hall of Fame plaque that belongs to this franchise. Five men who played here are in the Hall and all five made their names elsewhere; the longest any of them stayed was a hundred and forty-six games. Jacob Hickenbottom has thrown more than two thousand innings in this uniform and won a Cy Young Award. Nate Weaver won a Most Valuable Player award. Dave Castillo and Alex Alonso and Joe Blevins each gave the club the better part of a decade. None of them has been elected, and Hickenbottom and Blevins are still playing.

It took twenty-five summers. Nobody who watched the 2018 club lose a hundred and two games believed the trophy was seven years away, and nobody watching the 2012 club win a hundred and five believed it was thirteen. The tide does not announce itself. It just does not stop.

The Ledger

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

Home: Rebel Stadium, Virginia — capacity 45,000

Conference: Fire Conference, Topaz Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,630–2,393 (.524)

Postseason appearances: 20 in 31 seasons

League Championships: 1 — 2025 (over Denver)

Championship series appearances: 4 — 2021 (lost to the New York Empire), 2025 (won over the Denver Dynamite), 2029 (lost to the Rochester North Stars), 2031 (lost to the Denver Dynamite)

Division titles: 6 — 2002, 2012, 2022, 2024, 2025, 2027

Best season: 2012 (105–57)

Worst season: 2018 (60–102)

Most Valuable Players: 1 — Nate Weaver (2025)

Cy Young Awards: 1 — Jacob Hickenbottom (2021)

Rookies of the Year: 2 — Jesse Ripke (2011, Fire Conference), Jesus Sifuentes (2030, Fire Conference)

Hall of Famers: none of its own. Five men in the Hall played here briefly: Pat Pharo for 146 games, Mike Wilson for 126, Omar Gonzalez for 122, George Reed for 24 and Rich Gordon for 21

General managers: Alberto L (2001–2002), Andrew C (2003–2026), Craig E (2027–2029), Corey A (2030), Kaden C (2031–)

Hundred-win seasons: 3 — 2012, 2020, 2024

Longest postseason drought: 6 seasons (2014–2019)

Consecutive Octobers: 8 (2020–2027)

Best attendance: 3,594,698 (2024)

Pillars of the Franchise

Jacob Hickenbottom, SP (2019–2031) — The best pitcher in franchise history. Thirteen seasons, 362 starts, 2,136 innings, 144-92, a 3.22 earned run average and 2,007 strikeouts. Cy Young Award winner of the Fire Conference in 2021 at 16-5 with a 2.08, and 18-3 in the hundred-win summer of 2020. Still here.

Nate Weaver, RF (2020–2028) — Most Valuable Player of the Fire Conference in 2025, the championship season, at .289 with 22 home runs, 106 runs and 36 stolen bases. Nine seasons, 1,153 games, 218 stolen bases, and the only MVP this club has ever produced.

Joe Blevins, CF (2023–2031) — Four Gold Gloves in center, in 2025, 2027, 2028 and 2029. Nine seasons, 1,341 games, 155 home runs and 222 stolen bases on a .218 average, which is what a club will carry for a defender of that kind.

Roger Snyder, SP (2020–2031) — Twelve seasons, 337 starts, 1,866 innings, 129-70 and a 3.29 earned run average. The second arm of the rotation through every October of the club's best run.

Dave Castillo, 1B (2003–2012) — Ten seasons across two stints, 1,200 games, a .268 average, 208 home runs and 666 runs batted in, and a Silver Slugger in 2005. The one bat that carried the club through the lean years in the middle.

Alex Alonso, LF (2005–2015) — Eleven seasons, 1,199 games, 1,434 hits and a .298 average, the highest of any Rebel with a thousand games in the uniform.

Bryan Romo, SP (2003–2010) — 270 starts, 1,698 innings, 114-85 and a 3.72 earned run average across eight seasons, with a Gold Glove in 2007.

Santos Gomez, LF (2019–2027) — Nine seasons, 1,170 games, 183 home runs and 335 stolen bases, more than any man in franchise history.

Danny Meza, RF (2024–2031) — Eight seasons, 1,083 games, a .268 average, 231 home runs and 648 runs batted in, with a Silver Slugger in 2026. The power in the middle of the order through the title and the two finals after it.

Kyle Ivy, SS (2019–2027) — Nine seasons at shortstop, 1,125 games, 284 stolen bases, a Gold Glove in 2021, and the most valuable player of the opening round of the 2025 championship run.

Mark Green, 3B (2010–2015) — Six seasons, 798 games, 160 home runs and 500 runs batted in with Silver Sluggers in 2013 and 2014, on clubs that mostly finished nowhere.

Rod Sanchez, SP (2001–2006) — The first ace. Six seasons, 201 starts, 1,281 innings, 83-60 and a 3.12 earned run average on the clubs that reached five of the franchise's first six Octobers.

Curt Graham, RP (2024–2031) — 518 appearances, 272 saves and a 2.26 earned run average across eight seasons, including the championship.

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