

# Pinchy and Buster

Mascot and Logo of the Lakewood BlueClaws



*Generation after generation, friends and families venture to the waterways on the coastline of New Jersey for the most popular local recreation: CRABBING.*



Photographs by Dave Schofield

Maneuvering small boats through tidal creeks or even the Hudson Bay, crews bait about a half-dozen lines with fresh fish and prepare the traps. After throwing the anchor over the stern, they anxiously wait for an unassuming claw to tug on the line. With patience and precision, crabbers must slowly pull the crustacean toward the surface before ending the showdown with a quick swipe of his long-handled dip net.

The art of crabbing became much less tedious in 2001, when the most miraculous catch ever was recorded in Lakewood, N.J. The net used: FirstEnergy Park. The catch: about two-dozen very athletic BlueClaws. Not only were these crabs much larger than average, they could play some amazing baseball! With that, the Lakewood BlueClaws embarked on their inaugural season.

While baseball does not have a rich legacy in Lakewood, the BlueClaws' franchise can trace its roots back almost twenty years. In 1987, the Fayetteville Generals resurrected baseball in Fayetteville, N.C., after a 31-year hiatus as a Single-A farm team for the Detroit Tigers. Following a decade of baseball with the Tigers, Fayetteville switched affiliations to the Montreal Expos taking on the name of the region, Cape Fear, while calling themselves the Crocs.

As the first season of the millennium closed, so did baseball

in Fayetteville. A new era began as yet another change in identity and location brought Lakewood the BlueClaws, who are now associated with the Philadelphia Phillies.

Like many other minor league ball clubs, the dubbing of the BlueClaws was derived from a name-the-team contest. While other cities' fans submitted ballots online or at the stadium, Lakewood endowed the honor of naming their team to the community's children.

Scores of kids from numerous counties surrounding Lakewood were asked to submit ideas that were specifically representative of the area in which they lived. With Lakewood being right along the Atlantic coastline, it was no surprise that other aquatic animals such as Sharks and Whales were additional options. When management stressed the importance of a team nickname symbolic of Lakewood, there was no question in the end that the BlueClaws was the obvious choice.

While many different species of crabs are caught annually in New Jersey, the blue claw is by far the most sought after. The blue claw is scientifically known as *Callinectes sapidus*, translated as "beautiful swimmer that is savory"—a befitting name. Crabbers admire this ocean dweller's beautiful hue with a great deal of caution; the blue claw is extremely temperamental and no one wants a pain-wrenching pinch. At the same time, the crab is considered one of the area's trademark





dishes. Thus, the abundance of the blue claw on the Jersey Shores is a delight to all hungry crabbers. After the catch, people usually boil the crabs in a spicy seasoning before picking at the delectable meat in the claws and sides of the body.

The only blue claw that no one will dare eat is Pinchy. Pinchy is the unofficial nickname that has been given to the crab on Lakewood's trademark logo, one of the most popular in the minor leagues. The image of Pinchy with a baseball in its claws is set on the team's official home, road and two alternate caps, while Pinchy's eyes are suspended on the crown of the team's gray third alternate hat. Coincidentally, the BlueClaw's third alternate hat bears a striking resemblance to "the eyes" logo that has become the Lake Elsinore Storm's trademark. But Lakewood was not playing copycat.

"We wanted to make it look like Pinchy was submerged under water," said the team's ticket manager Hal Hansen, a longtime member of the BlueClaws' management.

Since Lakewood's inaugural season, Pinchy has been given more and more life. In fact, the kid's zone inside First Energy Park has been dubbed Pinchy's Playground. There is, however, no life-size version of the logo wandering about the stadium. The reason, Hansen went on to explain, is that the team was worried about having a mascot with six legs protruding from its body—mascots are supposed to be fun, not a liability. Sorry Pinchy; you are just going to have to enjoy being embroidered on the hat.

The BlueClaws do have a mascot, though, and it is one of the most bizarre in any sporting arena. Meet Buster, the 6-foot-6-inch, green-haired, yellow bundle of fur. Designed by the same people that brought the world the Phillie Phanatic, the Phillies' Single-A mascot bears a striking resemblance to... absolutely nothing.

Buster grew up in the Sunshine State of Florida, listening to his family reminisce about days crabbing at the Jersey Shores. The only thing he loved more than the stories of crabbing was baseball. So when Lakewood was finally awarded a Minor League Baseball team, Buster was only too anxious to pack his bags and migrate north.

Buster set up his residence at First Energy Park and has not missed a single BlueClaws game since Opening Day 2001. When he is not rallying the crowd and cheering for his favorite team, Buster relaxes by the water, tanning and catching crabs.

Unfortunately, Buster will need to find a new activity during the chilly Northeast winter. The BlueClaws closed their 2004 season with a 70-66 record in the South Atlantic League's Northern Division and will have to wait until next April for their first game against the Lake County Captains. **|| Eric Karlan**



6'6"

**WEIGHT:** None of your business.

**COLOR:** Yellow.

**TEXTURE:** Fuzzy and furry.

**HOBBIES:** Humor that's a home run with fans. Tanning by the Jersey Shore. Shagging crabs.

**POSITION:** Anywhere he's needed.

**BATS/TROWS:** Right/Right

**RESIDES:** FirstEnergy Park, Lakewood, N.J.

**OBTAINED:** Acquired via free agency, Clearwater, Fla. (2001)

**GAMES PLAYED:** Every game.

**FANS ENTERTAINED:** Countless.

**DANCES PERFORMED:** Thousands.