



HEY LITTLE BUDDY: Conrad shares hugs and a photo moment with little friends at L.P. Fans Stadium.

CONRAD

AND THE HICKORY CRAWDADS

PINCHING THEIR WAY THROUGH THE SOUTH ATLANTIC LEAGUE

IN THE MIDST OF THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN FOOTHILLS IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA is the small city of Hickory—population almost 40,000. With temperatures declining to a mere several degrees above freezing for most of the winter, humans and wildlife alike begin to brace for the cold. Yet, there is only one group of creatures whose disappearance during the winter months is particularly noticeable: the crawdads. Not only do the tiny crustaceans burrow up to three meters below the riverbeds for warmth, but all the baseball players return home for the off-season, too.

While the true Cambaridae has thrived in North Carolina rivers and ponds for millenniums, the Hickory Crawdads only recently migrated north from nearby Gastonia in 1993. During their tenure in Gastonia, the team was named after each of their

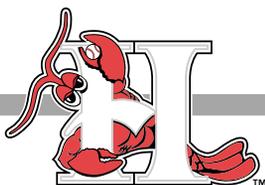
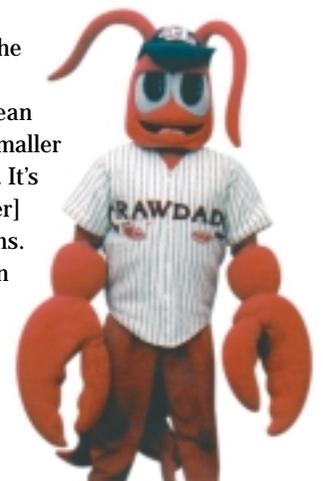
parent teams: Cardinals (1977-82), Expos (1983-84), Tigers (1986), and Rangers (1987-92). Relocation only occurred with a change in ownership.

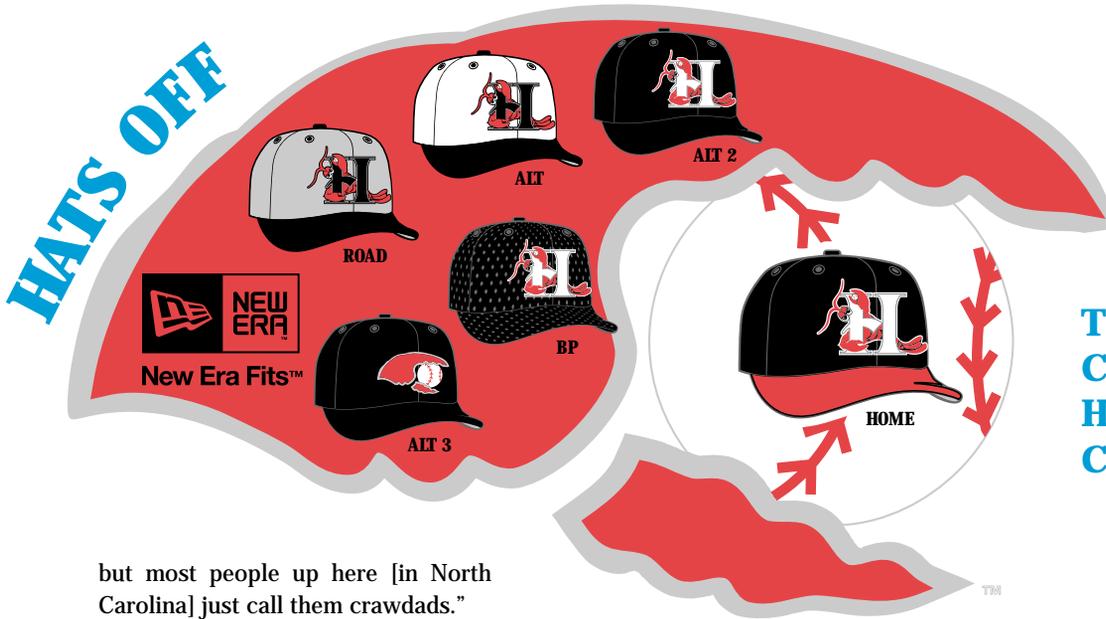
“Don Beaver just wanted to bring a minor league baseball team to his hometown,” says Crawdads Assistant General Manager Brad Dail. “It is something he dreamed of, and he wanted to give the fans of Hickory the opportunity to see some Minor League Baseball and a valuable family entertainment option.”

Upon moving to Hickory, the franchise finally established an independent identity from its major league affiliate. Turning to the new fan base for assistance, management ran a “Name the Team” contest for Hickory’s newest attraction. Before ultimately losing out to the Crawdads, other nicknames in final contention were Woodchucks, Valleycats, Hound Dogs, and Rivercats. From their

inaugural season through 1998, the Crawdads served as the Chicago White Sox low Single-A farm team in the South Atlantic League. Since 1999, the club has been affiliated with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

While fans resolved on dubbing their team “the Crawdads,” they could have chosen from a variety of other names for the same species: crayfish, mudbugs, carmels, yabbies, spoon-dogs or crawfish. No matter the term used, the animal remains in the words of Brad Dail, “A small crustacean that looks like a smaller version of a lobster. It’s found in [freshwater] rivers and streams. Most people down in Louisiana call them crawfish and use them as food,





THE MANY CAPS OF THE HICKORY CRAWDADS

but most people up here [in North Carolina] just call them crawdads.”

Embroidered onto almost all of Hickory’s merchandise is their primary logo depicting a red crawdad with leering black eyes, pinching a baseball in its claw, crawling behind a large white or black H (depending on the color of the cap’s crown). Only the club’s third alternate hat differs from the norm,

bearing the image of a crawdad claw clutching a baseball. Crawdad apparel continues to be a perennial top-seller, only a few years removed from being the outright most popular logo in the minor leagues.

While most Hickory fans order their favorite team’s hat in size 7-3/8, the Crawdads most dedicated fanatic requires a customized cap. Not only does his unusually large head make the size incalculable; two large holes needed to be cut in the black crown to enable antennae mobility!

After all, Conrad is a gigantic crawdad!

Never missing a single pitch since Hickory’s inaugural home game, team mascot, Conrad the Crawdad, has been a fan favorite at L.P. Frans Stadium for well over a decade. Standing approximately six feet tall on his hind legs, Conrad leaves his fellow crawdads (who average a mere several inches in length) dumbfounded as to how he can survive living out of freshwater. Despite having the capacity to crush a watermelon, Conrad only uses his gigantic pinchers to hug and high-claw fellow

Crawdads fans. He always sports a pinstriped Crawdads jersey, short enough to avoid interfering with his tail, which he commonly utilizes to whack opposing fans, players, and occasionally the umpires.

In his twelve seasons of single-handedly rallying the fans, Conrad was a part of two South Atlantic League championship teams in 2002 and 2004. Following Hickory’s latest championship, management went back to the local rivers and caught themselves another mascot: Candy the Crawdad! Wearing two white

bows in her curly red hair and a black Crawdads T-shirt, Candy immediately won over those fans with a sweet tooth by handing out (none other than) candy while roaming the bleachers. With Candy’s addition to the Crawdad family, fans



SWEETHEARTS?: Looks like Candy (left) and Conrad are sweet on each other.

have begun to speculate about the possibility of a romance with her male partner.

“The relationship is in the developing stages,” says Dail of the pair. “This season we just introduced Candy, and we are going to see where the relationship goes in the future. But they are not an item or anything like that.”

Conrad, Candy and the Crawdads will all be coming out of hibernation in April. For now, they can only dream of winning a third SAL championship pennant in five years. **■ Eric Karlan**