

HEATER AND GEM

TWO DRAGONS WHO LIVE IN THE KINGDOM OF DAYTON

Once upon a time, and even to this day, there lived two dragons in the land of Dayton, Ohio. These dragons are unlike the creatures you hear about in most other fairy tales. They do not breathe fire or guard legendary treasures of gold and jewels in their cave, or devour helpless humans lost journeying. Their passions are dancing and baseball. Their stomping ground is Fifth Third Field where they feast upon hot dogs and Dippin' Dots. Save the Wizards from the dominion of Fort Wayne and the LumberKings from not-so-far-away Clinton, because there are no mortal men who fear these beasts. In fact, most humans think they are lovable and cute.

Thus is the story of Heater and Gem, two of the mascots for the Single-A Dayton Dragons.

Heater's name has its roots in baseball, yet is quite misleading. Despite being with the Dragons since their inaugural game in April of 2000, he still struggles with pitching a strike—let alone a heater! Nevertheless, Dayton has continued to renew the green dragon's contract every off-season due to his disarming, toothy grin and natural ability to rally the fans. Standing just over seven feet tall, a slightly chubby Heater has some impressive dance moves for a dragon with a size 27 shoe!

In 2001, Heater's newly hatched niece, Gem, joined the realm of Dayton baseball. With bright topaz blue eyes, light jade skin, and coral pigtails, Gem is a shining beauty amongst other dragons. While her favorite place to be is the baseball diamond, Gem's name actually is derived from Dayton's nickname. Written in the *Cincinnati Daily Chronicle* by an anonymous reporter in 1845, it is widely believed that the city's nickname of "The Gem City" can be attributed to this quote:



Dayton Dragons



“In a small bend of the Great Miami River, with canals on the east and south, it can be fairly said, without infringing on the rights of others, that Dayton is the gem of all our interior towns. It possesses wealth, refinement, enterprise, and a beautiful country, beautifully developed.”

For over fifty years, the one thing Dayton did not possess—until the turn of the millennia—was a professional baseball team.

From 1884 to 1947, Dayton baseball experienced a constant identity crisis. Most teams survived no more than two or three seasons before disbanding or

switching leagues and nicknames. The squads who survived the longest were the Dayton Veterans in the Central League (1903-1917) and the Dayton Ducks of the Middle Atlantic League (1933-1942.) The Dayton Indians disbanded after two seasons in 1947. It would take over a half-century for the Ohio metropolis to host professional baseball again.

Prior to the spring of 2000, Mandalay Sports Entertainment (MSE)—partnered with NBA legend Magic Johnson and two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin—bought the Rockford Reds with the promise of a new state-of-the-art baseball facility upon moving east. Since their inaugural opening day, the Dragons have sold out every game in team history—even the only upper-deck bleachers in Single-A baseball. Today, Dayton is one of five MSE-owned minor league franchises, along with the Las Vegas 51s, Frisco RoughRiders, Erie SeaWolves and Hagerstown Suns.

Like many new minor league baseball teams, Dayton management organized



a ‘name the team’ contest upon MSE’s acquisition and relocation of the Rockford franchise. Because of the city’s rich heritage in aviation—and the fact that Dayton is the Wright Brothers’ birthplace—many locals proposed nicknames such as the Aces and Aviators. Management, however, felt the flying theme had already been exhausted with the minor league hockey Dayton Bombers and the University of Dayton Flyers. Instead, they favored the alliteration affect in Dayton Dragons.



HATS OFF



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-Anonymous



FUN GALORE: A setting sun gives way to stadium lights on a beautiful day in Dayton, Ohio. Mascots: Roofman (top), Gem (right, top), Heater (right, bottom) and Wink (bottom) make Dayton Dragon games a sheer delight.

In establishing an identity, the Dragons went against the recent trend of designing "cool" logos; the insignia embroidered on every cap is classic, but clever: a simple emerald green 'D,' with a speared dragon tail curving out of the letter's bottom. While Gem sports a white crowned hat, and Heater dons a black, there are two mascots who have neglected to wear their favorite team's cap: meet Wink and Roof Man!

Unlike in Shrek, where the ogre is trying to slay the dragon, Wink, the One-Eyed Ogre maintains an amiable relationship with his fellow dragon mascots. Dubbed "Wink" because his enormous eye can open and close, the brown Cyclops' claim to fame is his ability to inflate up to nine feet high—much like a Zooperstar, whose inflatable suits have earned national renown. Tall or short, though, Wink remains a hideous creature—strands of rainbow-

colored hair sprouting out randomly between his two horns, teeth in desperate need of braces, spiked cufflinks—and generally immobile... unlike Dayton's fourth and final mascot: Roof Man.

"Roof Man runs on top of [Fifth Third Field] and throws T-shirts into the crowd in the later innings," says Dayton's Marketing Director, Jim Francis, of the team's other unconventional mascot. "He wears a cape and a mask and tights."

Last season, the Dayton Dragons were dungeon dwellers, finishing in last and second-to-last place, respectively, in the 2005 season's two halves. The Dragons enter 2006 in hopes of avenging their previous woes, capturing the Eastern Division crown, and finding a happy ending; their first league championship in team history.

|| Eric Karlan

