

BIG LUG, RATCHET & LUGGIE

>>> Mascots and Logo of the Lansing Lugnuts



Ratchet and Big Lug

The ‘Nuts—as the Lansing Lugnuts are fondly called by fans—have proudly become one of the most beloved team names in the sports world. As the team’s vice president of marketing, Darla Bowen, put it: “It’s fun on every level. It’s quirky, it has alliteration, and it’s timeless.”

Their popularity makes it virtually impossible to find anyone that has a bad thing to say about the team name. But it was not always this way. When owners Tom Dickson and Sherrie Myers first announced Lansing’s team name, it was almost as impossible to find anyone who approved of the name. “It was a tornado of hostility,” said Myers of Lansing residents’ reactions to the Lugnuts.

The story building up to this storm of fan fury is filled with irony and drama. As Lansing is the capital of Michigan, and because of its huge local automobile industry, most of the 2,000 entries in the 1995 “Name the Team” contest were traditional names such as the Senators, Capitals, or anything to do with cars.

After consulting focus groups, Dickson and Myers found these options to be unfavorable. For one, the groups claimed local fans would want a name independent of their automotive industry. Moreover, the co-owners were looking for an eccentric name that would prove successful in the minor league market. Wanting to open their team store the day the team name was announced, Dickson and Myers had put themselves on a tight timeline; they forced themselves to select a name quickly.

With all these factors in mind, the “River Dragons” was hastily selected—Lansing is on a river and Dragons are peculiar mythology. The name was trademarked and logos were drawn up and sent to merchandise manufacturers.

A mere two months prior to the grand opening of the River Dragons’ team store, Dickson and Myers—looking over last minute entries from the contest—came across about a dozen proposals for Lugnuts; too many to ignore. It was love at first sight; it was quirky, it was fun. The name

Photograph Courtesy of the Lansing Lugnuts

Ratchet
OFF THE FIELD

Favorites...
Movie: *The Land Before Time*
TV Show: *Power Puff Girls*
Song: “Bye Bye Bye”
Drink: Milk
School Subject: Biology
Color: Teal

ON THE FIELD

D.O.B.: April 1998
Height: 6’
Weight: You shouldn’t ask!

Big Lug
OFF THE FIELD

Favorites...
Movie: *Jurassic Park*
TV Show: *Friends*
Song: Lugnuts Theme Song
Drink: Kool-Aid (purple-saurus rex)
School Subject: Geography
Color: Purple

ON THE FIELD

D.O.B.: May 1995
Height: 6’10”
Weight: Big



incorporated the automotive industry—a lug nut is “a steel bolt that secures the wheel of a car.” Meanwhile, focus groups changed their tune saying that the city’s ties to their automotive heritage might be too much to walk away from after all.

There was only one obstacle to hurdle: the toy company Hasbro already trademarked the name “Lugnuts” for a potential future action figure! This did not faze Myers, who remained steadfast in her mission to use Lugnuts as a nickname. Calling top Hasbro executives, Myers pleaded her case while openly admitting that there was not much at the time Lansing baseball could do in return. Fortunately, that did not matter. Within 24 hours, Hasbro gave up the trademark. Lansing would be the Lugnuts!

With the countdown clock at two months, and ticking, the Lansing Lugnuts needed a logo. Local resident Craig Wheeler had submitted a handful of names to the “Name the Team” contest with logo renderings to go along with each one; he was more than eager to draw the Lugnuts’ logo.

The logo is an artistic vision of a cartoon lug nut—though, the depiction bares more of a resemblance to a nut and a bolt. “Luggy,” the lug nut, is silver while the other team colors are red and black. Luggy can be found all over the team’s apparel, always with the same dizzy expression on his face.

Even with the unveiling and team store opening only days away, the residents of Lansing remained anxious and impatient. The arrival of baseball to Michigan’s capital was one of the most exciting events in its recent history. Local journalists tried time and time again to bribe the Lugnut officials working on the store to spill the beans. No one ever did give away the surprise, but that did not prevent the newspapermen to find out early after all.

The day before the Lugnuts’ official team store, “Nuts and Bolts,” opened to the public, a reporter got his big break when he discovered a crack in one of the

store’s windows. Peeping through the hole he saw the team’s name, logo and colors... sort of. When the story ran the following morning all that was correct was the team name. The logo depicted by the reporter did not resemble the Luggy everyone loves today but an ugly worm-like cartoon. Moreover, the article said the team’s colors would be red and blue.

While how the name leaked to the public obviously played a huge factor, the general population of Lansing was up in arms over the Lugnuts. They had expected something serious, respectful to local tradition like all the major league clubs. As Norveda Lunda of Lansing was quoted in the Lansing State Journal only days after the premature reveal, “The naming committee has made Lansing the laughing stock of baseball history.”

Town and team officials were bombarded with negative feedback. The story even found its way to ESPN’s SportsCenter, CBS’s Late Show with David Letterman, and CNN. Yet, even with a town of angry and disappointed fans, “Nuts and Bolts” brought in over \$75,000 in the first 48 hours.

The negative public feedback was not a surprise to Dickson and Myers. They knew the fans would come to love the quirky Lugnuts more than they ever could love a traditional ball club. They were correct in their prediction. It took a matter of weeks for the hatred to dissipate. Now, most locals have obliterated the negative incident from their minds.

The 2005 season will be the Lugnuts’ first as a farm team for the Toronto Blue Jays—Lansing has also been a Midwest League Single-A affiliate for the Kansas City Royals (1996-98) and Chicago Cubs (1999-2004). Before the decade-long era of Lansing baseball, the team made homes in Lafayette from 1955-1957 (as the Chiefs and Red Sox), Waterloo from 1958-1993 (as the Hawks, Royals, Indians, and Diamonds), and Springfield from 1994-95 (as the

Sultans). The Lugnuts’ arrival marked the first time Lansing had an affiliated baseball team.

As fans celebrate a decade of baseball and “GO NUTS” chants, support remains as strong as ever: after becoming the first minor league team ever to attract over 500,000 fans in their inaugural season, attendance at Oldsmobile Park remains consistent.

Of course no fan is as loyal as Big Lug and Ratchet, the Lugnuts’ two mascots. It is not exactly clear what the colorful creatures are, but their prehistoric appearance indicates a relation to dinosaurs. Do not let the unusually large teeth frighten you, though! Both baseball enthusiasts are the most loveable and fun Lugnut fans at Oldsmobile Park. The purple, teal-spotted Big Lug and his female teal, purple-spotted companion Ratchet have never been spotted without their favorite team’s hat (backwards obviously) and jersey. Although they would never give up a day at the stadium to learn how to use the small silver screws in the auto shop, no one loves their ‘Nuts more than Lansing’s Big Lug and Ratchet! ■ Eric Karlan

