



MODESTO IS GOING NUTS

>>> Introducing mascots Al the Almond, Wally the Walnut and a new look in the Central Valley

EVERY YEAR, CALIFORNIA BRINGS IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS from the sale and exportation of its nuts. The nut industry in Stanislaus County is second only to milk as the area's top commodity and is a major contributor to the economic growth of California. While walnuts and almonds are traditionally the most popular nuts in California's fertile and scenic Central Valley, a new breed recently debuted that locals are already going "nuts" over, the Modesto Nuts: the California League's newest minor league baseball nickname.

Even though 2005 marks Modesto's inaugural season as the Nuts, baseball's roots in the Central Valley reach back



to 1946. The present-day franchise dates to 1966, when the Modesto Reds—along with the Reno Silver Sox—debuted in an eight-team Single-A California League. Ironically, although the team's name remained the Reds for the next eight seasons, there was never any association between Modesto and the major league Cincinnati Reds—only the Kansas City Royals and St. Louis Cardinals.

In 1975, the team switched affiliations to nearby Oakland and took on the parent team's nickname. This began a three-decade-long tradition of Modesto Athletics baseball that remained unaltered (except for the logo) until the player-management agreement between Modesto and Oakland expired last season.

When Modesto baseball signed a new player development agreement with the Colorado Rockies, it was obviously illogical to retain the title of Athletics. That sparked a two-month-long 'name the team' contest. Once all the nominations were submitted, management put the five most popular names on the team's Web site for a decisive, online vote. The final tally had the Nuts winning handily with 52 percent of the vote. Crop Dusters placed second with 34 percent support, Steel and Derailers—both allusions to the railroad history in Central Valley—finished third and fourth respectively, while the Strike was a distant last with 2 percent of the vote.

To design an image quirky enough to match its new nickname, Modesto turned to Dan Simon of Studio Simon in



PeaNUT: Though the Oakland Athletics organization left Modesto, PeaNUT stuck around to keep an eye on the two new Nuts.

Louisville, Kentucky. Highly touted as one of the nation's leading logo designers, Simon created logos for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, and the NFL Super Bowl. With his artistic genius, the Nuts undoubtedly boast one of the most fun and unique new logos in minor league baseball and two of the coolest—and nuttiest—new mascots.

To pay tribute to California's nutty commodity, Studio Simon gave birth to Al the Almond. With a subtle, devious grin ingrained in his shell, Modesto's favorite almond always sports a maroon hat with the letter 'M' for his hometown. The Nuts' true home cap, however, is solid black adorned with Al's portrait.

In addition to being half of the Nuts'

official logo, Al is California's only life-size almond. After sprouting arms and legs, Al can be seen roaming around the Nuts' John Thurman Field all season long.

Making up the second half of Simon's logo is another one of the Central Valley's favorite agricultural products: Wally the Walnut. Sporting a maroon baseball cap and an endless, goofy smile, Wally decorates the Nuts' alternate hats. While slightly stockier than his almond companion, the walnut mascot still stands over 5 feet tall (and almost as wide) when he cheers for his favorite team at home games.

Along with Modesto's two newest and biggest nuts, the team retains a mascot from its days as the Athletics: PeaNUT the Elephant.

"Luckily he's got a name like PeaNUT," says Brian LaFountain, the Nuts director of public relations, about the team's stroke of good luck. "He'll still be one of the Nuts."

Aside from completing the Nuts' trio of mascots, PeaNUT became an integral figure in the Modesto community during the past few seasons and remains the ballclub's feature mascot for now.

"We have a PeaNUTs Reading Program that goes out and involves over 1,500 kids in the community that is in its fourth year currently," explains LaFountain about PeaNUT's role in Modesto and its surrounding areas. "There is also PeaNUT's Passport to Safety, which is four times a year. We go out along with PeaNUT and we finger-

print and ID kids for free, and that's partnered with the YMCA and a local credit union."

Although PeaNUT is an elephant, Modesto's favorite pachyderm will only be eating the nuts grown fresh from the Central Valley soil. After all, trying to break the shells of his mascot companions that almost match his height would be awfully difficult!

PeaNUT, Al, and Wally cheered on their favorite team at a packed John Thurman Field on April 7 for the Nuts' inaugural game against none other than the Oakland Athletics' Single-A Stockton



THE EVOLUTION OF A MODESTO NUT



Images Courtesy of Studio Simon