



ROWDY TIMES

Oklahoma RedHawks Mascot Soars at Every Game

Oklahoma RedHawks

SMACK DAB IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STATE “where the wind comes sweepin’ down the plain,” is one of the longest running baseball traditions. Save a brief baseball drought in the late 1950s and early ‘60s, Oklahoma City has hosted a professional minor league baseball team every season since 1904. In that year, the Oklahoma City Mets played in the Class D Southwestern League’s first and only season. A century and two years later, the Triple-A Oklahoma RedHawks embody the tremendous popularity baseball continues to have in the state’s capital.

Much like the journeys of early settlers streaming into the state aboard wagon trains, going from the lowest level of minor league baseball to the highest was a bumpy trail. Oklahoma City’s early years were tumultuous; as the team underwent five league changes and four name changes in the first fifteen years. Finally, after splitting the 1918 season with the Hutchinson Salt Packers, Oklahoma City settled down in the Class A Western League as the Indians for fourteen seasons. The franchise retained the Indians name after joining the Texas League in 1937, and gained its first major league affiliation with, appropriately, the Cleveland Indians four years later. Other than changes in affiliation, the road appeared to be getting smoother. Then, in 1957, the path veered sharply southward to Corpus

Christi, Texas; and Oklahoma City was without baseball.

Ironically, it was Houston, Corpus Christi’s neighbor, that quickly helped rejuvenate Oklahoma City baseball. A product of the 1962 Major League expansion season, the Oklahoma City 89ers were created to accommodate the additions of the New York Mets and Houston Astros to the major leagues. The nickname 89ers commemorates the “Run of ‘89,” when the state’s Unassigned Lands were settled in a “land run” of over 50,000 people because the settlers’ squatter’s rights were denied by a government act. Nevertheless, many men tried squatty illegally and soon earned the derogatory nickname of “Sooners”—Oklahoma University’s school mascot. The Oklahoma City 89ers served as the Houston Astros’ first Triple-A farm team. They would later serve as the top minor league club for the Cleveland Indians, Philadelphia Phillies, and Texas Rangers.

When the American Association disbanded in 1997, subsequently dispersing its teams between the remaining two Triple-A leagues, the Pacific Coast and the International, Oklahoma City management resolved to initiate a complete identity makeover to coincide with the league switch. A new stadium—SBC Bricktown Ballpark—was constructed; the traditional turquoise, orange, and tan were replaced by brick red, black, and silver; and a ‘name the team’ contest produced a new nickname: the RedHawks.





A KID FAVORITE: Thanks to a bum knee, Rowdy (top) loses yet another race around the bases contest to a young fan. That doesn't bother the mascot though, as he greets youth teams (middle) and fans alike (above) at SBC Bricktown Ballpark.



Technically, there is no species simply called a “red hawk.” The red-shouldered hawk lives in America, but only on the coastlines, meaning the team nickname is actually a reference to the red-tailed hawk. Prominent throughout the United States and Canada, this species of hawk will migrate as far south as Mexico and Central America to avoid frigid winters. A bird of prey, the *Buteo Jamaicensis* feasts on a wide variety of creatures including rodents and mammals as large as rabbits, as well as, small reptiles, and even other birds. The red-tailed hawk’s acute vision allows it to soar high in the sky until it spots unsuspecting prey, sometimes making its presence known through a piercing scream. Despite not having a title like ‘state bird,’ the red-tailed hawk’s connection with Oklahoma has been immortalized through the lyrics of the Broadway musical, Oklahoma!

***Oklahoma,
Ev’ry night my honey lamb and I
Sit alone and talk, and watch a hawk
Makin’ lazy circles in the sky.***

Standing at almost six-feet tall, Rowdy the RedHawk cannot glide above the Oklahoma frontier like the other red-tailed hawks. That does not matter to him; he prefers running through the stands at the ballpark, leading cheers for his favorite baseball team. Unlike most of his smaller relatives, whose only red plumage is on their tails, bright red feathers cover Rowdy. Always wearing the Oklahoma RedHawks white home jersey and baseball cap, Rowdy is extremely popular among the younger fans who hold a perfect record against him in the nightly ‘race the mascot’ promotion.

Going into their 24th season as the Texas Rangers Triple-A farm team, the RedHawks look to continue “doin’ fine” in the 2006 season. After falling one game short of advancing to the Pacific Coast League championship in 2005, Oklahoma aims to capture their third consecutive PCL American Southern division title. **▮ Eric Karlton**