



Photographs Courtesy of the Mahoning Valley Scrappers



RISING FROM THE SCRAP HEAP MEET SCRAPPY AND THE MAHONING VALLEY SCRAPPERS >>>

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

In the Minor Leagues, names are customarily chosen to honor a piece of the hometown's history and heritage or to show a bond with the parent franchise. Selecting nicknames based on nationwide marketability is even more common.

In the Mahoning Valley, it is ATTITUDE.

The home of minor league baseball, for the Mahoning Valley, is in Niles, Ohio, a suburb north of Youngstown. The area is known for its blue-collar workers, grids of train tracks and historic ties to the steel industry. The nickname, Mahoning Valley Scrappers, is an extension of the locals' character: symbolic of both their moral fiber and fortitude.

In the words of Scrappers' general manager Dave Smith: "Scrapper by definition conveys a person that fights or battles.

The Mahoning Valley is very industrial in nature. We just felt that the name really embodied the spirit of the people in the valley here."

Ever since the city was founded in the early nineteenth century, Niles, as well as the rest of Mahoning Valley, has been a haven for industrial growth. The accredited founder of Niles, James Heaton, built the Valley's first blast furnace, which is a forge as well as a charcoal blast furnace. Over the ensuing decades, the area witnessed a boom in both its industry and population, thanks to the discovery of high-grade black ore—ideal for the production of iron. By 1870, the once tiny community, engulfed by thickly wooded terrain, was a mini riverside metropolis with smoke-spewing factories.

In 1874, the city of Niles was dealt a seemingly devastating one-two punch to its ultimate survival and success: the Depression of 1873 and the folding

of James Ward & Company—a monopolistic city industry in which every resident had invested money. Had it not been for the Mahoning Valley's scrapper-like resilience and tough-nosed determination, the city may have fallen to adversity.

Over the course of the next century, the Mahoning Valley would endure several more hardships: recession, competition with big business, the Great Flood of 1913, the Steel Strike of 1937, and a tornado in 1985. Nevertheless, the scrapper persona always triumphed as local industry perpetually expanded. Niles' population now exceeds 20,000.

In 1999, a stroke of good fortune brought professional baseball to the Mahoning Valley for the first time. With the expansion of Major League Baseball to thirty teams, two additional Double-A affiliates were needed. The Erie Sea Wolves—a Pittsburgh Pirate short-season affiliate at the time—was awarded





AGELESS WONDER: Scrapper appeals to fans of all ages during the Scrappers' games at Eastwood Field.

Double-A status in 1999, leaving a vacancy in the New York-Penn League.

"Our ownership group [Palisades Baseball], still maintained the rights to the New York-Penn League team, so we now had to find a market to relocate the team to," explained Smith. "We ended up finding a suitable community here in the Youngstown-Warren area. Starting in the 1999 season, we started playing here. We have been here for six years and we are going onto our seventh season."

Given the history of the area, creating the Cleveland Indian's newest farm team's identity was an easy task.

"In a town that's industrial and manufacturing in nature, you get a core of blue-collared individuals who are hard-working people and have a great spirit to them," says Smith as a testament to the locals' scrapper-like characters. "I think [the name Scrappers] ties into that fighting nature. Whether it's with their job or with their families, it's just people with a lot of that blue-collared spirit and hard-working mentality."

"Seven years now into our existence [the Scrappers] is our complete identity here," continues the team's general manager. "People know who we are. They identify with the Scrappers. They have taken ownership of the team here; that is how we identify ourselves now."

When designing an image to identify with a scrapper, there was one animal that Palisades Baseball believed fit the profile perfectly.

"We felt that a bulldog or junkyard-dog style mascot would be one to convey [the definition of a scrapper.] When you think of a bulldog, you think of a dog that fights until the end; it fights until victory. We thought that the bulldog mascot, with the Scrappers' name, was a natural fit."

Thus, "Scrapy the Bulldog" was conceived.

Topping forty-one years in age—in dog years that is—Scrapy is not simply the team's mascot and most loyal fan; he is the face of the franchise. Scrapy's steel-gray mug and big, toothy grin adorn every article of Scrappers' merchandise.

The team's official on-field caps and jerseys both have a navy blue backdrop—the Scrappers' primary color. On both pieces of clothing, Scrapy pays tribute to the local industrial culture by sporting a gold hard hat atop his head. With glaring dark-red eyes and a spiky collar, the team's mascot is depicted as a fighter, eager to pounce and dismantle any challenger.

The Scrappers' primary logo shows Scrapy in the midst of a pitching deliv-

ery. Scripted across the pitching bulldog is the word "Scrappers" in a bold, steel-bolted text. The "Scrappers" inscription lies atop a steel bar engraved with the words "Mahoning Valley."

With their 2005 campaign well underway, Scrapy and the Scrappers are looking to show off their tough and fighting spirit in an effort to repeat as the New York-Penn League champions for the first time in team history.

Eric Karlan

