

JACKPOT, THUNDER



AND A
PAIR OF

Mascot and Logo of
the Lake Elsinore Storm

IN A SUBURBAN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY along-side Interstate-15, from early April to September, it's storm season. This annual event is no freak weather pattern; in fact it only strikes when the sun is a shinin'. So, what is causing this pseudo meteorological phenomenon? None other than the San Diego Padres' Advanced-A Lake Elsinore Storm!

The Storm began brewing in Palm Springs, where the team resided for years prior to their 1994 relocation to Lake Elsinore, Calif. Though Palm Springs served as a desirable vacation destination, tourist opted for sand over the stands as attendance lacked and management sought after a city that

would welcome the team with open arms. The administration found what they were looking for down a dusty highway in Lake Elsinore.

Upon arrival, the team kept in the 1990s tradition of choosing a separate identity from its big league parent club, dropping both the "Palm Springs" and the "Angels" (its former affiliation) from its moniker. When nickname issues arose, team management left it up to residents of their new community, who were quick to come up with some potential ideas. Faster than the speed of lightning, a plethora of bizarre names rolled in like thunder. While the "Algae" and "Slimebags" seemed perfectly eccentric for a Minor League

Baseball team, the fans voted for intimidation factor over Fear Factor and selected the Storm.

The Lake Elsinore Storm kicked off their inaugural season in 1994, maintaining relations with the California Angels prior to changing affiliation to the Padres in 2001. The Storm's original logo bore the city's initials and a lightning bolt, engulfed by a halo, streaking down the middle. While the halo formed a bond between the Storm and their former parent team, the old school emblem did not completely match the franchise's ominous nickname.

In 1998 the Storm changed their official home and road logos to a



Photographs Courtesy of the Lake Elsinore Storm



STORMING THE FIELD: Mascots Jackpot (left) and Thunder pump up Lake Elsinore fans at every home game.



thundercloud with leering eyes and switched their team colors to red and black. “The menacing look fit in with the ambiance,” said Storm President and General Manager Dave Oster. Although the personified storm cloud was intimidating, the team’s management decided to enhance the vibe another notch on their official alternate cap. The new look saw the storm cloud dissipate, leaving behind a completely black hat, with the two glaring “eyes of the storm”... and nationwide attention.

The now infamous “eyes” hat became so popular that the Storm promoted it to their home and away caps as well. While hot new logos infiltrate the shelves annually, the numbers continually show that through just last season, the Lake Elsinore Storm had the most popular New Era (the official cap of Minor League Baseball) cap in the minor leagues, outselling 160 teams’ caps. Logo recognition exceeds only enthusiast fans. “We have definitely seen the popularity of the logo reflected in the number of youth teams that approach us each season,” said Donna Grunow, the Storm’s director of merchandising. “It’s not just Little Leagues, either. It’s all sports from baseball to soccer to volleyball. We have at least one ‘Storm’ team in every state and even several ‘Storm’ teams outside the country.”

While the logo’s history and reputation are extensive, the Storm’s cap as we know it, almost wasn’t. When the first “eyes of the storm” hats were created, the glaring peepers were situated much higher on the crown. These hats never had a chance to see The Diamond (Lake

Elsinore’s stadium). Instead, a preseason alteration produced the revised version with eyes closer to the bill. Many players on the team wore sunglasses and when they tipped them up on their hat, which tends to be a chic look at the yard, the shades would cover the Storm eyes. The minor change has proven to be ingenious, for the eyes have remained at this height ever since.

While the Storm’s logo has changed a couple of times to increase intimidation, their mascots have not received the same treatment. Jackpot the rabbit remains as bright and pink as ever and Thunder remains a neon green furry... something.

2004 marks the eighth season that Jackpot waits behind the outfield wall for every home game. The only time this sunglasses-wearing bunny appears is when a home team batter hits the “jackpot”... a home run. As the crowd leaps up to cheer, Jackpot springs out of hiding and celebrates with cartwheels and dancing.

Although younger than Jackpot, Thunder is the Storm’s main mascot and has captured the hearts of Lake Elsinore fans since Opening Day 2001. With neon green fur, bushy yellow eyebrows, and a purple nose protruding from his face, Thunder bears a slight resemblance to the Phillie Phanatic, who happens to be his childhood idol. While fans usually envision Thunder as a dog, the question as to his true identity remains a mystery.

Now with Storm season blowing over, Jackpot will go into hibernation and uninformed fans will store their umbrellas eagerly anticipating the next burst of Thunder. ■ Eric Karlan



Jackpot

OFF THE FIELD

Favorites...

Snacks: hot dogs, nachos and outfield grass

Movie: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

Moment: When the new grass came in for the 2001 season

Worst Moment: Drinking too much carrot juice after the 1996 championship game

Likes: The Storm scoring runs and great music to dance to

Dislikes: Storm losses, rainouts and classical music

ON THE FIELD

Age: 10 years old

D.O.B.: June 11, 1994

Height: 4'10"

Weight: 78 lbs.

Thunder

OFF THE FIELD

First Appearance: April 8, 2001 (Opening Day)

Childhood Idol: Phillie Phanatic

Favorites...

Food: “Kibble, Table Scraps and Storm Dog”

Sunscreen: Banana Boat

Props: Silly String and Banana Boat Surfboard

Rappers: Snoop Doggy Dogg and Lil Bow Wow

Players: Todd Houndly, Ellis Barks, Rickey Thunderson and Denny Beagle

Mascots: Hamlet, Jackpot and Reggy

ON THE FIELD

Age: 3 years old

Height: 6'2"

Weight: “Very Healthy”