

FLOWING TIDES

A HISTORY OF THE NORFOLK TIDES AND THEIR MASCOT RIPTIDE

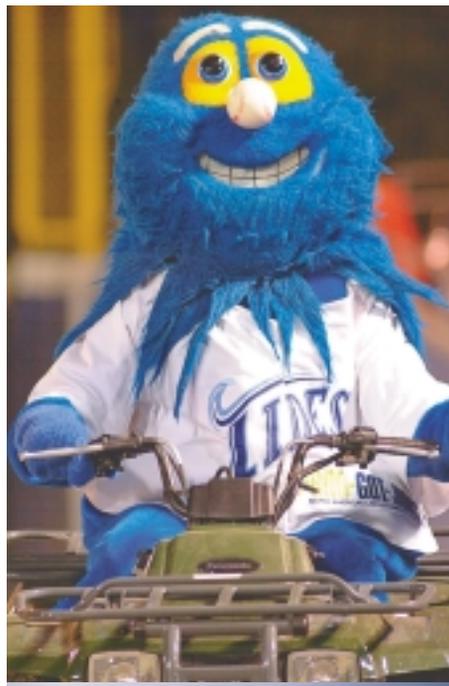


Allison Veinore

WHEN THE MONTREAL EXPOS were considering destinations for relocation, many people thought the franchise would move to Norfolk, Virginia. What most people do not realize is that more than forty years ago the Tidewater metropolis nearly landed the Mariners. Thwarted in their efforts, Norfolk continues to host Triple-A baseball with the Norfolk Tides.

Tidewater is a region of eastern Virginia identified by its various tidal rivers—notably the James, York and Potomac—whose currents flow west from the Chesapeake Bay into the heart of the Old Dominion State. A tidal river, simply defined, is a river where the effects of the tide are strongly felt upstream. In 1961, the Tidewater region was granted a professional baseball team in the Class A South Atlantic League. Like many minor league baseball teams, a ‘name the team contest’

was organized—
in this case by a



ALL SMILES: With an ever-constant smile plastered on his face, Riptide keeps fans smiling as he poses with them and entertains the crowd on his four-wheeler at Harbor Park.

local newspaper, *The Virginian Pilot*. After tallying the votes, the nickname ‘Mariners’ was selected by the masses, honoring the large naval presence in Tidewater. However, *The Virginian Pilot* editor Robert Mason decided he preferred the alliteration of Tidewater Tides better, and the Mariners name was abandoned.

The expansion Tides ended a six-year baseball hiatus in Tidewater in 1961, following a long tradition of Norfolk Tars teams. Like the proposed Mariners, the name Tars commemorated Tidewater’s numerous naval bases, as it was a term synonymous with sailor. After playing in the Virginia League from 1906 through 1928 (two of those seasons under the name Mary Janes), the Norfolk Tars were reborn in the Piedmont League in 1934, assuming the role of the New York Yankees Class B farm team. Norfolk continued play until the Piedmont League disbanded in 1955.

Following the corrupt ‘name the team’





contest, the Tidewater Tides kicked off the 1961 season not in Norfolk, but at nearby Portsmouth's Lawrence Park. Eight seasons, which included a transfer from the Sally League to the Carolina League (in 1963) and four affiliations later, the Tides would finally find parity.

In 1969, the New York Mets moved their Triple-A farm team, the Jacksonville Suns, north to Tidewater—assuming ownership of the Tides. In their inaugural International League season, the Tides started a winning tradition by capturing the league champion Governor's Cup—a feat their parent team repeated in the World Series only weeks later. The Tidewater Tides would go on to win five more Governor's Cups in 1972, '75, '82, '83 and '85. After winning the league pennant in 1983, the Tides earned a trip to the first ever Triple-A World Series, where the champions of the three Class AAA leagues

met in Louisville, Kentucky. Tidewater prevailed in the four-game round-robin tournament, with a 3-1 record over the American Association's Denver Bears and the Pacific Coast League's Portland Beavers. The Triple-A World Series was not played again until 1998, when the Pacific Coast League's New Orleans Zephyrs downed the International League's Buffalo Bisons in four games of a best-of-five series; (the American Association was disbanded the year before.)

In 1993, the Tides began play in their new, state-of-the-art facility in downtown Norfolk, Harbor Park. In the same season, the team officially changed their name to the Norfolk Tides. With their new stadium and identity in place, the Norfolk Tides also added their newest #1 fan: Riptide.

Riptide's birth on March 10, 1993, was not on a baseball field, but at the nearby Hampton Roads Admirals (now

the Norfolk Admirals) minor league hockey arena—quite ironic that the mascot for the Tides was born on frozen water. A big, blue, fuzzy monster with yellow eyes and a baseball for a nose, Riptide's appearance can best be equated to the purple monster Grimace from McDonalds. This may not be a coincidence; Riptide's costume was constructed by Olympus Flag and Banner, the same company that has created McDonalds mascots' costumes, exclusively, for the past thirty years. Wearing only a red T-shirt with the Tides trademark 'T'—a royal blue vertical with a sky blue wave crossing the top—and red baseball cleats, the beloved Riptide runs around Harbor Park rallying the crowd at every Tides home game.

After winning the Southern Division in 2005, the Norfolk Tides enter 2006 looking to continue the winning tradition. ■ Eric Karlan