

THE MAVERICK MASCOTS OF WICHITA

>>> Wilbur T. Wrangler corrals new pal Angus

DEEP IN THE HEART OF AMERICA, where cowboys stirred up legendary excitement and havoc not so long ago, the stage has been set for yet another epic Western showdown between good and evil. Instead of facing off on Main Street as tumbleweed rolls by at high noon, the showdown can be found nightly at Wichita's Lawrence-Dumont Stadium.

This latest Western saga will see the Wichita Wranglers' two mascots, Wilbur T. Wrangler, the loveable steed, and his new mischievous counterpart, Angus the Outlaw, conflicting with each other during Wichita Wranglers games throughout the summer.

Whereas most mascots in professional sporting events serve a sole purpose of rallying a crowd, Wranglers management intends to have the interaction between Wilbur and Angus provide an ongoing storyline. All season long, fans will witness perpetual pranks by the two mascots as they spar for dominance at the ballpark.

Always on the side of right and justice, Wilbur has been the chief cheerleader and fan at Wranglers' home games for the past 13 years. Standing roughly 6 feet high on two hooves, this loyal stallion always dons either a white cowboy hat (with the sides curled up to accommodate his ears) or his favorite Wranglers cap.

Wilbur's mischievous reputation and rowdy antics are infamous in Wichita. Fans know they must be prepared for any-



PONY EXPRESS: Wilbur horses around in this two-wheeled stunt during a Wranglers home game.

thing from catching T-shirts from Wilbur's one-barrel T-shirt sidearm to staying dry when the horse begins to soak young Wrangler fans with his favorite toy: a water gun. Yet, there is one crazy tradition unique to the constantly smiling steed.

"One of the things he does, that I doubt nobody else does, is he comes out on a four-wheeler and does laps around our infield all around the bases where he'll ride a four-wheeler on two wheels tilting to one side," says Matt Rogers, the team's marketing and media relations manager.

Wilbur's adversary in this mascot-style Western showdown is Angus.

Once one of the most devious and feared outlaws in Wichita, Angus returns to Kansas for the first time in nearly a century to antagonize Wilbur whenever possible. The notorious bandit has focused on making mischief at the ballpark, intimidating Wranglers fans with his broad, black cowboy hat, giant mustache, and never-disappearing five o'clock shadow.

In fact, Angus wasted no time in wreaking havoc.

"In our opening week, we did a promotion called Wilbur's Golden Baseball," tells Rogers. "We had a baseball painted gold that was supposedly found in the Arkansas River; it

Photographs Courtesy of the Wichita Wranglers





COWBOY UP: The oversized outlaw Angus has a beef with visiting teams, and loves to wreak havoc with fans.

was hid there back in the early 1900s and over time it's been coated with gold. Wilbur found it and it was going to be our official baseball for opening day... and then Angus stole it.

"We did a huge scavenger hunt over the Internet to where we'd send clues to everybody for them to find out where Angus was. The very last clue was a physical location to where Angus was supposed to be at. If they found him first, we gave \$500 cash and \$100 merchandise away."

Angus does not, however, spell out complete trouble for Wilbur, the Wranglers, and their fans.

"We almost thought that he would become like a fan with the other team. It has kind of worked to just the opposite, and he [Angus] has been the one antagonizing the other team, which Wilbur normally does," explains Rogers. "The interaction with him and Wilbur is that sometimes they are on the same team. He's a very versatile mascot."

The playful rivalry between Wilbur and Angus is a clear tribute to the part of town in which Lawrence-Dumont Stadium is situated.

Welcome to the Delano District in West Wichita, the rough side of town that less than a century ago witnessed cattle drives toward downtown, outlaw campouts, and showgirls at the local saloons. While the cowboy ruckus has simmered for considerable time, the tradition that the city of Wichita was based on is still very evident.

"The Delano District has started going back to revitalizing the heritage of this town," Rogers says. "The buildings that you see around this area are a real rustic color, kind of what you'd expect to see out on the prairie."

Now those rustic colors are also what people will see on the Wranglers logo. After almost a decade of sporting the formerly trendy black, teal, purple, and gray, management wanted the team colors to reflect the community's roots. The new Wichita hats are black and dark red. A bold maroon "W" masks a tan-cowboy-hat-wearing outlaw, only revealing his leering eyes. The team's official logo depicts a bandit riding his stamped-ing, fuming horse with a lasso and shows off the other team colors, gold and tan.

Wichita has a long history of baseball, dating back to the rough and rowdy days of the early 1900s. The local Wichita nine went under an assortment of names throughout the years, from the Aeros and the Indians, to the Larks and even the Izzies. When the San Diego Padres Double-A affiliate, the Beaumont Golden Gators, relocated to Wichita in 1987, the team was dubbed the Pilots to honor the city's ties to aviation. This title lasted two years before team owner Rich Products of Buffalo, N.Y. (the same corporation that owns the Buffalo Bisons and the Jamestown Jammers) made a push to change the team's identity to the Wranglers to recognize the city's predominant tradition.

The Wranglers, now the Kansas City Royals Double-A affiliate in the Texas League, got off to a sluggish start to their 2005 season in Wichita, but remain hopeful to win the league title for the third time in team history. **|| Eric Karlan**

