

HOOK

Mascot and Logo
of the Columbus Catfish



Photographs Courtesy of the Columbus Catfish

Hook OFF THE FIELD

Usually seen: Floundering around Golden Park

In his off-season: He can be found stealing bait off unsuspecting fishermen's lines

Favorites...

Baseball player: Catfish Hunter

Food: Golden Park's Jumbo Dogs...
"He's never been one of those 'bottom-feeders'"

Book: "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish"

ON THE FIELD

Age: 5 months **D.O.B.:** 4/6/2004

Height: 6' 3" **Weight:** 280 lbs.

Throws: Right **Bats:** Right

Birthplace: The dregs of the Chattahoochee River

Resides: Chattahoochee River in Columbus, Ga.



THERE WAS A TIME NOT SO LONG AGO when Minor League Baseball franchises popped up more often than a .210-hitting backup catcher. Such was the case when the South Georgia Waves moved up the road from Albany, Ga., to Columbus, Ga., in 2003, as it marked the third time the Los Angeles Dodgers' Single-A franchise had relocated in five years. It also represented a return of professional baseball to the Columbus area after a one-year hiatus.

History being told, in 1991, the South Atlantic League expanded, adding the Columbus Indians and the Sumter Flyers. By the following year, the two teams underwent identity changes. The Sumter Flyers moved south to Albany, Ga., and became the Polecats; Columbus changed its nickname to the RedStixx, a nod to the tribe of Native Americans that used to inhabit the region.

While Minor League Baseball disappeared from Albany in 1996, the RedStixx remained successful as a farm team for the Cleveland Indians. Following the 2002 season, though, the franchise was sold and moved to

Eastlake, Ohio, closer to its parent team, and became the Lake County Captains. Just like that, Columbus was left without a team for the first time in over a decade.

Though it was unrealized at the time, salvation would come in a roundabout way for Columbus baseball fans once again in the form of an expansion. In 2001, Minor League Baseball wanted to balance the Single-A leagues, allowing each major league franchise the opportunity for an Advanced-A and Low-A farm team. To solve the problem, two teams were taken from the Advanced-A Florida State League while two were added to the Low-A South Atlantic League, creating the Lexington Legends and the Wilmington Waves.

The year marked the first season of baseball in Wilmington, N.C., as well as its last. The Dodgers' farm team moved to Albany, Ga., in 2002, becoming the South Georgia Waves. Unfortunately, history once again repeated itself, as Albany was unable to support a baseball team. Knowing relocation was inevitable for the 2003 season, officials chose the obvious destination, a mere two and a half

Logo/Mascot Profile



Hook



weeks prior to the April opener: Columbus.

While the community was ecstatic to welcome back baseball despite the hasty move, the team needed to undergo some changes following the 2003 season. Minor league nicknames are always indicative of their locale, so a name change was imminent. The Waves were not an appropriate name because Columbus is a landlocked town. The team's management decided to capture the local culture by dubbing the ball club the Catfish.

These aquatic scavengers are known, and named, for the long whisker-like barbells that extend from their upper jaws. In many southern states it is common sport to fish for these animals and in many cases eat them! In fact, Columbus is not the

only minor league team to recognize the catfish's popularity and cultural importance. Thriving on the bottoms of freshwater rivers throughout the world, catfish are also referred to as mudcats, Carolina's team nickname!

Finally, there was the issue of where to say the team was from. In the nineties, both Albany and Columbus had minor league teams, and a distinction in location needed to be made. When baseball was restored in Albany, they had simply been "South Georgia." Should Columbus continue to do the same? The answer was no. "While Albany is truly South Georgia, the people in Columbus don't consider themselves South Georgians," Coulson Barbiche, the team's director of ticket sales, explains. With that, the Columbus Catfish became official.

The Catfish's logo is one of the more popular new minor league logos of the season. Players boast a Dodger Blue hat with a Dodger Blue catfish swinging a baseball bat. It is not what is on the front of the hat that is unique, though. On the right side of the Catfish's official game hat is a peach with a fishhook through it.

"We did it to be unique... (It was) too tempting to pass up on.

It incorporates the fishing aspect and the Peach State," Barbiche explains again. Georgia was nicknamed the Peach State because its farmers' produced the tastiest peaches anywhere. (Ironically, the peach did not become the official fruit of the state until 1995!) The peach and hook image makes the Catfish the only minor league franchise with a secondary logo, and the only major or minor league team with a logo on the side of its official on-field cap.

While the move to Columbus spelled change for almost every aspect of the club, there is one entity that management did not change: the mascot. Crash has been the team's number one fan since its days in Wilmington. With a name that coherently relates to the team's former moniker, the mascot's only makeover for the 2004 season was a new name... Hook. The big blue lobster currently resides at the Catfish's home, Golden Park, so he will never miss a game. Hook and his team wrap up their inaugural season in Columbus this month, and are sure to be back in town to entertain Georgian baseball fans next spring.

■ Eric Karlan

