

GUILFORD the GRASSHOPPER

Mascot and Logo of the Greensboro Grasshoppers



Guilford in Greensboro

IN THE WORLD OF MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL, THERE EXISTS A CONSTANT COMPETITION amongst all 160 teams to produce the trendiest and most eccentric baseball caps around. Thus, with every season comes a lengthy lineup of new names and logos; teams vying to capture fans' attention nationwide and become the minor league logo du jour. With this in mind, the Single-A Greensboro, N.C., franchise decided it was time to establish a new image—a unique identity that would be an instant hit with baseball fans across America.

Greensboro's management spent a great deal of time contemplating a new identity. The goal in the renaming process was bluntly stated by Greensboro's general manager, Tom Howe: "We wanted to be different." "Different" could have easily been achieved with wacky nicknames such as the Regulators, Hit Men, Tree Frogs, or Dirt Bags; yet, in the end, it was the Grasshoppers that prevailed.

While Greensboro is not home to an abundant grasshopper population, the new nickname—upon closer

examination—has more significance than it initially reveals. For starters, Grasshoppers are green—a blatant reference to the city they play for: Greensboro. The word "grasshopper" also contains several allusions to the game of baseball. Baseball is played on grass, and a common term for a routine, bouncing infield groundball is a "one-hopper." Perhaps the most surprising part of the new team name is its historical significance! During the Civil War, several battles were fought in Greensboro and the surrounding areas; one of the weapons used in these battles was a cannon nicknamed "the grasshopper" for the way it lurched forward and backward when it fired.

"We want people to be able to identify with the team name," said Howe, of the most important reason that the Grasshoppers were selected as Greensboro's new identity. The name is most certainly fun and can be appreciated by children and families alike.

The new Grasshoppers logo is sure to be one of the most popular minor league logos on the market come springtime. There is nothing very intricate about it—a cartoon grasshopper,



surrounded by a white letter G, throws a baseball. The green grasshopper sports a white hat with an orange G on it as well, encompassing the team's three primary colors.

While the 2005 season marks the beginning of the Grasshopper era, it is merely the latest chapter of baseball history in Greensboro. Professional baseball in the North Carolina city dates back to the turn of the 20th century and fans have enjoyed Minor League Baseball in War Memorial Stadium since 1926 when the Greensboro Patriots first opened the facility.

The Grasshoppers' roots do not, however, trace back to the Patriots of the "Roaring Twenties." In fact, the original Grasshoppers played in Greenville, S.C. Before becoming the South Atlantic (Sally) League, the Western Carolinas League represented Single-A ball from 1963-1979. In the same year the league was started, the Greenville Braves celebrated their inaugural season. For the next 10 years the team remained in Greenville, serving as a farm team for the Braves ('63-64), Mets ('65-66), Red Sox ('67-71) and Rangers ('72); the club was always named after their parent team. In 1973, the team relocated to Charleston, became the Pirates, and remained there until the birth of the Sally League.

In 1979, the Charleston Pirates

moved to Greensboro where they have remained ever since. The team was known as the Hornets and played under the Reds, Red Sox and Yankees for various stints over the next 14 years. In 1993, the team switched names once again, this time to the Greensboro Bats. Like the Grasshoppers, the appropriate allusion to baseball in the team nickname made it cute, but not a nationwide hit. Nevertheless, the Bats played Single-A ball under the Yankees for 10 seasons before switching to the Florida Marlins. The Grasshoppers will assume the role of the Marlins' Single-A affiliate this season.

Not coincidentally, the Bats' final season was also the final season for World War Memorial Stadium. "We knew we wanted a new identity to go along with the new ballpark," said Howe of the team's drastic off-season makeover. The newly anointed Grasshoppers will play their home games in the brand new First Horizon Park. With a low outfield wall, fans can take in a picturesque view of downtown Greensboro while watching the game in any of the stadium's picnic areas or 5,300 seats. First Horizon Park also boasts one of the largest video scoreboards in the minor leagues—a whopping 66 feet tall and 48 feet wide!

While the players will only use the field for home games, there is one grasshopper that will literally call First

Horizon Park "home." After reviewing over 300 entries in their "Name the Mascot" contest, Grasshoppers management dubbed their life-size bug Guilford; a tribute to Guilford County, the third-largest county in North Carolina and home to Greensboro!

Sporting an orange jersey of his favorite team, Guilford will be hopping around First Horizon Park at all of the Grasshoppers' home games. Ironically, and quite comically, the locally owned Pest Management Systems, Inc. has signed on to sponsor the giant insect!

A final heads up to all Grasshopper fans! After designing Guilford, Sugar Mascots, Inc. (located in Toronto, Ontario) is currently working with Greensboro once again to possibly add two more members to the Grasshopper family. Keep your eyes out for more critters at First Horizon Park!

Eric Karlan

THE STATS ON

Guilford the Grasshopper

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 200 lbs.

Throws: Right

Bats: Right

Resides: First Horizon Park

Born: Greensboro, N.C.

