



SOX THE FOX

Mascot of the Colorado Springs Sky Sox

WHEN THE HAWAII ISLANDERS MOVED from the hot, sunny Pacific beaches to the chilly high altitudes of Colorado Springs, Colo., in 1988, climate was not the only drastic change. The team needed a fresh name to appropriately represent its new region and heritage. After contemplating the matter long and hard, management named the new franchise the Colorado Springs Sky Sox, which begs the questions: What are Sky Sox and what do they have to do with Colorado Springs?

Until the past 20 years, baseball had no firm place in the culture of Colorado Springs. Nestled high in the Rocky Mountains, the city is best known for its skiing and beautiful scenery. At the turn of the twentieth century, the region

attracted mostly rich aristocrats to their extravagant winter homes. When Colorado Springs' first baseball team began their inaugural season in 1901, it was no coincidence they were humorously nicknamed the Millionaires.

Unfortunately for the Millionaires, the actual millionaires in town did not embrace baseball in the community and the team folded after only four seasons. Following a 12-year professional baseball hiatus, residents of Colorado Springs caught a brief glimpse of it once again in 1916 when Wichita's team moved west halfway through the season. Once the 1916 season concluded, another 34 years passed before Colorado Springs boasted a baseball team again.

In 1950, Colorado Springs joined the eight-team Western League, which included: Omaha, Pueblo, Sioux City, Lincoln, Des Moines, Wichita and Denver. As the Single-A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox, Colorado Springs named their team the Sky Sox.

The "Sox" part of the name identified the team's affiliation; the "Sky" portion had a dual meaning. One reference was to the city's picturesque skyline. In fact, Katharine Lee Bates was so inspired by the

beauty from atop Pikes Peak—one of the tallest points in the Rocky Mountains at 14,100 feet—that she wrote *America the Beautiful* on the spot. The second reason was that the Sky Sox played, and still play, in the nation's highest ballpark—home plate is a whopping 6,531 above sea level! A mere eight years after their inaugural season, the entire Western League disappeared into the sunset, ending yet another short era of Colorado Springs baseball.

While Colorado Springs' management chose their current nickname to pay tribute to the region's baseball heritage, the lineage of today's Sky Sox does not overlap with their namesake's. The present-day franchise began play in 1918 in Sacramento, Calif., as the Solons. (Strangely, a solon is a "wise legislator." A word derived from the name of an ancient Athenian lawmaker and poet.) The Solons moved further west in 1960 and became the Hawaii Islanders. They remained in the nation's 50th state until 1988, returning to the continental U.S. as the Sky Sox, a Triple-A affiliate of the Cleveland Indians.

In 1993, only five years after a ball club returned to Colorado Springs, baseball became permanently ingrained in the state's heritage when the Colorado Rockies began play at Coors Field in Denver.





FAN APPRECIATION: Sox the Fox mingles with fans in the stands as part of his daily routine.

With this new addition to the major leagues, it was only appropriate that the nearby Sky Sox, former cross-state rivals with Denver in the Western League days, became the Rockies' Triple-A affiliate. The relationship has stuck ever since and the teams recently signed a contract to keep the two together through the 2007 season.

Unlike many other minor league clubs, the Sky Sox do not sport a flashy or trendy logo on their uniforms and caps. The team's on-field cap is black with an interlocking green "C" and "S." The team's official logo has not changed since 1993—"Sky Sox" is written in green cursive with a silver outline and a silhouette of Pike's Peak beneath the team name.

While the Sky Sox's official logo is classic, the team spent the latter half of the '90s in search of the perfect mascot—a fun figure that would have an uplifting presence at the stadium and could be

used on an alternate hat of sorts. The team initially invented **SOCKO**. Socko was a silver bat-swinging sock that appeared on Sky Sox hats for several years before coming to a sudden "death"—as team management fondly calls his vanishing—in 2000. Socko's demise was a result of his lacking versatility; it was implausible to make an interactive mascot out of a life-size sock.

After contemplating other animals, including a trout, as mascots,

Colorado Springs fans were introduced to Sox the Fox on Opening Day 2000. Team management chose a fox as their mascot because they are native to the forests of Colorado and the name rhymes with "sox!" Sox the Fox was purposely designed as a comical cartoon, resembling the Baltimore Orioles' official logo during the 1970s and '80s. Standing tall at six feet, Sox became an instant hit at Sky Sox Stadium. Whether it's acrobatic rou-

tines or riding motorcycles, fans never can predict what the sly fox will perform next. The team's batting practice hat, which has Sox's mug plastered on it, has also become one of the most popular minor league hats in the nation.

After a late run at the Pacific Coast League pennant last season, Sox the Fox and the Sky Sox will come out of hibernation to swat home runs through the thin Rocky Mountain air once again. Their 2005 season starts on April 7 when they play host to the Las Vegas 51s.

■ Eric Karlan

