

## INTRODUCTION

As the 20th century melted into the 21st, the well-meaning folks at Minor League Baseball made plans to celebrate the 100 greatest teams in the history of the minors since 1901.

A hundred teams for 100 years.

Assigned to rank the teams were highly respected baseball historians Bill Weiss and Marshall Wright. The job — as with all efforts like this — was a thankless one for Weiss and Wright.

Really now, who could say for sure if the 1920 St. Paul Saints, who were No. 6 on their list, were that much better than, say, the 1990 West Palm Beach Expos, who checked in at No. 89?

C'mon, were the 1903 Jersey City Skeeters appreciably better at No. 7 than the 1983 Reading Phillies were at 62?

How does one differentiate between teams? The teams ranked in the Top 100 played in different classifications in dramatically different eras with demographics that kept teams in the minors from being nothing more than a whites-only club until 1946, when Jackie Robinson made his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers' top farm team in Montreal.

These variables made the rankings flawed from the outset, when the 1944 Milwaukee Brewers were the first team announced at No. 100.

Eventually, the countdown reached 73, and that was where Minor League Baseball placed the 1993 Harrisburg Senators.

*Seventy-freaking-third.*

Anybody who saw that team knew better.

More than 15 years after its release at the turn of the new millennium, the MiLB Top 100 list — specifically, Harrisburg's ranking — still irked Jim Tracy, the Senators' manager in 1993.

"I would put the nucleus of my club against any of them," Tracy said a quarter-century after leading the '93 Senators to exactly 100 victories from Opening Night through the final game of the Class AA Eastern League playoffs.

"I don't know who these other 72 teams are," he said, "but we'll play a short series against any of them, and we'd win most of them. I don't think I'm going out on a limb here. That's just how good this team was."

Just how good?

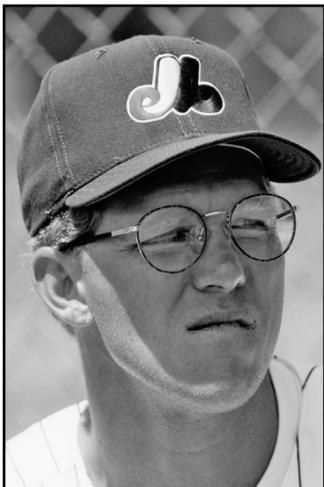
The numbers tell only part of the story.

Tracy's team graduated 22 of its 41 players to the major leagues with eight of those 22 playing in the majors for at least 10 seasons. Phenomenal numbers.

Even more extraordinary when considering that of every team on MiLB's Top 100 list only the '93 Senators had as many as eight of their players spend at least 10 seasons in the majors after first playing with them.

The 1937 Newark Bears, who were ranked third on the list, and 1992 Columbus Clippers, at No. 72, were next with seven each.

Only 19 of the 72 teams that were ranked ahead of the '93



JIM TRACY

Senators played in the post-segregation era. That era started in 1946 with Jackie Robinson's arrival in Montreal for his one-year stay there before reaching Brooklyn as the majors' first black player since Fleet Walker played in 42 games for Toledo in 1884.

Of those 19 post-segregated teams, only eight played either at the Class AA or AAA level, and none of those eight teams had an average age younger than the '93 Senators.

In some ways, the '93 Senators were an experiment, one devised by the Montreal Expos for their Class AA affiliate well before the start of spring training that year.

What would happen, the Expos wondered, if they stashed most, if not all, of their top prospects in one place at one time?

Would they dominate their league or would they collapse under the weight of their own alpha male egos?

The timing was perfect for such an experiment, given the Expos' top prospects in 1993 ranged in age from 19 to 22.

Age-wise, many of them were too young for Class AA.

Talent-wise, most of them were too good for it.

The Expos knowingly planned to set loose a team talented enough to obliterate the Class AA Eastern League.

First, they had to find the right person to manage the team.

That person was Jim Tracy.

Since Class AA tended to be baseball's last level on which players often faithfully took on the persona of the manager, the always-confident-but-never-cocky Tracy was the perfect fit.

His clubhouse in Harrisburg was one in which the top prospect in Cliff Floyd was treated no differently than a former prospect like Darrin Winston, a pitcher whose career by 1993 was hanging on the surgically rebuilt ligaments of his left elbow.

His clubhouse in Harrisburg also was where another of the Expos' top prospects, Rondell White, was assigned a corner locker beneath a balky, sometimes-dripping air conditioning unit that occasionally made postgame interviews both noisy and wet.

To White's left was Floyd, whose locker was bordered on the other side by outfielder Tyrone Woods — a mostly soft-spoken but sometimes smoldering, barrel-chested man who believed he was an everyday player but knew his playing time always was going to be impeded by the presence of top prospects like Floyd, White and Glenn Murray.

Woods could have griped and aired his complaints in public. He rarely did.

Nor did Chris Martin, the Senators' everyday shortstop in 1991 and second baseman in '92 who often watched from the bench in '93. The playing time he expected at shortstop instead went to a better all-around player in Tim Barker, whom the Expos acquired in an offseason trade from the Los Angeles Dodgers for onetime All-Star third baseman Tim Wallach. No room at second base for Martin, either, not after the slick-fielding Mike Hardge arrived a month into the season from Class A West Palm Beach.

Martin, like Woods, was good enough to start for most, if not all, of the other seven teams that season in the Eastern League.

So were other bench players who either started the season with the Senators or finished the summer with them. Accomplished hitters like Oreste Marrero and Randy Wilstead, a pair of left-handed first basemen who batted from the same side of the plate as Floyd, often sat because no one was replacing Floyd. Period.

Ten of the 11 pitchers who started games for the '93 Senators would become major leaguers.

The No. 4 starter in the rotation was Kirk Rueter, who for a decade after leaving Harrisburg would become one of the most consistent left-handers in the majors.

The No. 5 starter was Miguel Batista, who outlasted everyone from the Class of '93. He pitched in the majors until 2012 and then

for three more seasons in the Dominican Winter League before finally retiring at 43 years old — 26 years after first signing with the Expos in 1988.

The '93 Senators were that talented, that deep, that good.

They were not, however, perfect.

More than a few members of the Class of '93 enjoyed the nightlife both in Harrisburg and around the league, and they often did so with a beer in one hand and a groupie or two nearby.

They were 20-something years old, and young 20-somethings at that. They were ballplayers, not saints. Well, except maybe for first baseman Randy Wilstead, the happily married, soda-sipping Mormon from St. George, Utah.

They were, as team broadcaster Mark Mattern called them a quarter-century later, “a group of rock stars.”

The Class of '93 also lost some games they should have won. Then, too, so has every great team since the game was first played.

They had some instances when someone did not run hard to first base — OK, one time — but, not to mention any names, Mike Hardge never again coasted down the line.

They also had some less-than-happy campers.

Early in the season, two of those frustrated players, backup catcher Miah Bradbury and infielder Ron Krause, abruptly quit. They opted to retire — Bradbury inexplicably after being told he was promoted to Class AAA Ottawa and Krause when he started losing playing time.

And, every now and then, Woods — a self-proclaimed “suspect” instead of a prospect — would be dusted off for a start, hit a ball halfway toward Harrisburg’s West Shore and then after the game wonder aloud what he needed to do for more playing time. Woods always knew exactly when he was talking, like whenever Montreal general manager Dan Duquette and his staff were in Harrisburg to evaluate their Class AA team. Woods knew they would read his comments in the next morning’s newspaper.

Toward the end of the season, Tracy had some sit-downs with a couple of players who thought they already should have been promoted to Ottawa, but still were in Harrisburg.

Tracy’s biggest challenge was Derrick White, the Senators’ first baseman in 1992 who had reached the majors midway through the 1993 season only to grumble his way back to the minors late in the season. Not back to Class AAA Ottawa, but to City Island, where White inherited Kirk Rueter’s uniform number, Cliff Floyd’s

batting helmet and Rondell White's locker, the one in the corner of the clubhouse under the dripping air conditioner.

If the demotion two levels from the majors to the Eastern League did not humble Derrick White, then that perspiring AC did.

"We had to overcome clubhouse tangles and fights, as expected in a long season with close quarters," catcher Lance Rice said of sharing such a small-time clubhouse with so much big-time talent.

"We genuinely liked each other," Randy Wilstead remembered 25 years later. "There were the typical arguments in the clubhouse over what music got played and girls ... but for the most part we enjoyed being around each other."

Disagreements stayed in the clubhouse, never aired in the daily newspaper and never evident on the field.

There, on the field, the Class of '93 played with a singular focus, and that was to beat the crap out of the Eastern League.

They fought together on the field and rarely lost, whether in a game or in one of a handful of bench-clearing brawls they had against teams tired of being bludgeoned by the league's most potent offense and of being fooled by its best pitching staff.

At times, they seemed to win games hours before the first pitch.

Typically, teams set up batting practice groups to allow starters to hit in quartets for each of the first two rounds before letting their bench players scramble for pitches to hit during the final round.

Not the Senators. Especially for home games, and this was where the gamesmanship began.

Regardless of his lineup on a given night on City Island, Tracy arranged his hitters so the final quartet would take their batting practice close to 5 p.m. — the same time visiting teams would congregate in deep left field to stretch before taking their own BP.

A couple of Harrisburg pitchers stood as sentries, ostensibly to protect those stretching and presumably unaware players from being struck by balls hit toward them.

The pitchers, though, did nothing to shield those players from the balls being rocketed over their heads and off the painted wood of the billboards in left field or simply launched over the fence.

Four of the Senators' most powerful right-handed hitters — Rondell White, Shane Andrews, Glenn Murray and Tyrone Woods, who arguably was the greatest 5 o'clock hitter in team history — routinely joined Tracy's final group of BP hitters to take aim at the left-field wall and beyond.

The '93 Senators lost a lot of baseballs that way.

In doing so, they also won the pregame battle of wits by giving opposing teams, especially opposing pitchers, an up-close look at what awaited them in the game.

“Can you imagine as word traveled throughout the league about the Harrisburg club and how powerful they were, and then to walk out when you came to the island to play and have to stretch, and watch that last group of guys,” Tracy remembered 25 years later.

“How much of an intimidation factor do you think that was, especially if you were a starting pitcher on the opposing club? Or a reliever for that matter,” Tracy said. “I can’t tell you how many times we finished BP early in the season and had to send for more balls because there would be like four left in the bucket.

“And to try to find the ones that were no longer in the park, you were either going to have to walk a helluva long way or be one really good swimmer.”

This went on for six months, starting from the time the Senators first gathered in mid-March for spring training in Lantana, Florida, and ending in mid-September with the most decisive comeback in Eastern League playoff history.

The Harrisburg *Patriot-News*, in its annual preseason section on the team, proclaimed in the first line of the lead story on the Senators’ upcoming season that “this should be fun.”

Those four words — “this should be fun” — rankled the older, stuffier shirts in the newsroom as they grumbled about an editorial comment being injected into what was supposed to be an objective story. *Well*, the editors muttered, *we can’t have that, you know*.

They were wrong, because those four words turned out to be a prediction of the absolute, unvarnished truth of the season that was to follow.

The Class of ’93 was all about fun, the kind of fun that came with winning, overcoming adversity both on and off the field, and winning again. Not just winning, either, but dominating.

The Class of ’93 did all of that.

This is their story.

Enjoy.

**Andrew Linker  
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