



PELICAN BRIEFS

by
S. Derby Gisclair

The Forgotten Pelicans

The 1977 Team

When the failing New Orleans Pelicans franchise was sold to Little Rock in the fall of 1959 it marked the end of professional baseball in New Orleans for the first time in 72 years. It also led to the eventual collapse of the Southern Association after the 1961 season.

In 1976, Oklahoma businessman A. Ray Smith took a gamble on the future of professional baseball in the Crescent City when he announced that he would relocate his AAA American Association franchise, the Tulsa Oilers, to New Orleans for the 1977 season. The team would appropriately be renamed the New Orleans Pelicans and the recently christened Superdome would be their home field. In its baseball configuration the Superdome could seat 62,000 fans.



Lance Nichols

Owner Smith assembled quite a management team, with former major leaguers Billy Martin as Chairman of the Board and Satchel Paige as Vice President for Public Relations. Lance Nichols was named the field manager. There were serious discussions at the time about expanding major league baseball and New Orleans had already made the short list of cities for consideration. Smith hoped that a winning team and huge fan support would give him the inside track to ownership of a future major league team in New Orleans.

The club was the AAA affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals and nine of the players from the 1977 Pelicans would eventually be called up to the Cardinals. In all, sixteen players would make it to the majors.

Among the hitters, Benny Ayala led the team in home runs (18) while Mike Potter took the honors for RBIs (87) and Pat Scanlon led all hitters for average (.363). The pitching staff was led by Earl Bass (10 – 10, 3.56 ERA) and Steve Dunning (8 – 8, 3.92 ERA). Ayala was the only member of the

team named to the All-Star squad.



Earl Bass



Steve Dunning



Pat Scanlon

S. Derby Gisclair

404 Notre Dame Street – PH1, New Orleans LA 70130

HITTERS	POS	BA	HR	RBI
Jesus Alvarez	IF	.248	8	31
Benny Ayala	OF	.298	18	73
Rick Bosetti	OF	.310	7	21
Leon Brown	OF	.162	1	9
Manny Castillo	IF	.167	0	6
Charlie Chant	OF	.157	5	22
Ron Farkas	IF	.158	1	4
Tom Harmon	C	.272	3	29
Dane Iorg	OF	.330	9	48
Tony Larussa	IF	.188	3	6
Tom McMillan	IF	.260	0	2
Nyls Nyman	OF	.276	3	38
Ken Oberkfell	IF	.251	4	32
Marty Parrill	IF	.196	3	14
Brock Pemberton	IF	.241	3	41
Mike Potter	OF	.263	15	87
Jim Rigglesman	IF	.240	17	52
Tom Sandt	OF	.259	10	29
Pat Scanlon	IF	.363	6	22
John Tamargo, Sr.	C	.254	10	42

PITCHERS	POS	W	L	ERA
Al Autry	P	4	6	4.97
Mike Bass	P	10	10	3.56
Mike Beard	P	0	4	6.21
Stan Butkus	P	5	3	3.95
Doug Capilla	P	3	4	4.50
Pat Darcy	P	0	1	12.60
Tom Detorre	P	3	4	5.34
Dave Drumright	P	0	0	6.00
Steve Dunning	P	8	8	3.92
Pete Falcone	P	2	5	4.91
Bob Galasso	P	1	2	2.70
Barry Raziano	P	0	1	4.65
Bill Rothan	P	5	10	6.16
Ramon de los Santos	P	3	6	7.03
Randy Scarbery	P	2	1	4.32
Charles Schultz	P	1	0	3.00
John Sielicki	P	1	3	5.66
Eddie Solomon	P	4	2	4.20
John Sutton	P	5	4	3.32
Randy Wiles	P	6	4	3.60

Players shown in **BOLD** denote future major leaguers

The club struggled to finish in last place in the American Association West division with a record of 57 – 79 (.419), 14 games back. It was not for lack of fan support, however, as attendance was 217,957 for the season, second only to the 288,167 posted by Denver. Smith once again relocated the team to Springfield (IL) for the 1978 season.

New Orleans never did receive a major league expansion team, but Denver did in 1993. This meant that the Denver minor league franchise would have to relocate their team. In a strange twist of fate, the Denver franchise moved to New Orleans, becoming the New Orleans Zephyrs and returning professional baseball back to the city for good.