



GAMEDAY

APRIL 2025

LETTER FROM THE TEAM

Hillcats Fans,

Thank you for your continued support of the Lynchburg Hillcats.

When we purchased the team in October of last year, we knew there was work to be done to get the fan experience up to our standards. Fortunately for us all, we inherited a dedicated staff that shares our goal of making our team the best family-friendly entertainment available to the 434.

During this season, you'll begin to notice small improvements and changes to the fan experience. These will include more affordable food and concessions offerings to our community, new artwork around the stadium, and a reimagined game area for fans of all ages. At the completion of the 2025 season, we will embark on a major stadium renovation made possible by the dedicated efforts and support of the Lynchburg City Council.

Along first-base, we plan to add a second floor covered bar and lounge stretching down the concourse, a new picnic area along the right field foul line, and a new carousel and carnival area beyond that. Along the third-base concourse, we plan to add a new two-tier bar and over-21 lounge area. Finally, we will replace all of our bleachers with food and drink rail seating and add new cabanas in the main seating bowl. As you can see, the scope of our project is expansive and we hope you become as excited as we are to see it completed before the start of the 2026 season.

Our family has had roots in Lynchburg for three generations and we are very fortunate to help write the next chapter of baseball in Lynchburg.

Warmly,

Dylan, Holly, Abby, Olivia, and Ivy Narang



CLARIK





MEET YOUR HILLCATS COACHING STAFF

The Lynchburg Hillcats are excited to announce their field staff for the 2025 season.

Jordan Smith will once again return as manager for this season. Also returning to the coaching staff are bench coach Erlyn Cerda, hitting coach Cole Nieto, strength & conditioning coordinator Jack Baldwin, and athletic trainer Yuka Ogata. Joining them are pitching coach Shane McCarthy, assistant hitting coach Amanda Kamekona, assistant athletic trainer Patrick Reynolds, and development coach Gustavo Nava.

Smith returns for his third season at the helm of the Hillcats. Last season, he guided the team to a 67-62 record, finishing second in the first half and fourth overall in the Carolina League North Division. In 2023, he finished 67-64, third in the division.

A native of Wilmar, Minnesota, Smith's coaching experience began following the conclusion of his playing career, of which he spent its entirety in the Cleveland Guardians organization. He began his coaching career in 2019 as the bench coach of the Lake County Captains, where he returned to the same role in 2021.

Cerda will enter year two of his stint in Lynchburg, serving as the bench coach under Smith in 2024. A native of the Dominican Republic, he entered the coaching ranks in 2023, in the same position with the Guardians complex league team.

He spent a portion of the 2018 season with the Hillcats as a player, hitting .252 with 12 triples.

McCarthy spent the 2024 season working in the Arizona Complex League as the pitching coach. He retired in 2023 after spending the entirety of his playing career with the Cleveland organization, reaching as high as Double-A Akron. He finished his career with a Minor League stat line of 8-7 with a 3.36 ERA.

Upon graduating from Seton Hall in 2018 with a degree in Business Administration and Management, McCarthy was drafted in the 18th round by the Cleveland Indians. He played four years for the Seton Hall Pirates, including one finish on the All-Big East first team in 2016.

Also returning to the staff is Cole Nieto, the teams hitting coach. Under Nieto, the Hillcats led the league in doubles (209), triples (48), and walks (593). The team also finished second in on-base percentage (.347) and slugging (.363), and third in batting average (.247).

A northeast Ohio native, Nieto played his college ball at Baldwin Wallace University in Berea, Ohio. Following his playing career, Nieto would go on to serve as an assistant coach at the University of Dubuque in Iowa.

Assisting him will be Amanda Kamekona, a former UCLA softball player. She spent last season working on the staff in Akron, where the team led the Eastern League in triples (31). “AK” was hired in 2023 by the Guardians organization, the first woman to be hired to an on-field coaching position in the organization.

Graduating as a Bruin 2009, she was named to the all-PAC-10 first-team and was a third-team All-American. As a junior, she led UCLA in home runs (14), RBIs (46), runs scored (47), doubles (17), and slugging percentage (.663).

Returning as the strength and conditioning coordinator will be Jack Baldwin. In his first season with the Guardians organization, he was assigned to Lynchburg, where he oversaw the training regiments for the team, working heavily with speed and agility.

Prior to joining the organization, Baldwin was a performance coach in Boston, Massachusetts. He graduated with a degree in applied exercise science from Springfield College before pursuing a master’s degree in sport psychology from Cal State Long Beach.

Yuka Ogata will return as the lead athletic trainer for the Hillcats. She spent the entirety of the 2024 season in Lynchburg, having spent 2023 with the Lake County Captains.

Ogata graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan in 2018 before completing her master’s degree in Athletic Training from the University of Arkansas.

Joining Ogata will be Patrick Reynolds, the new assistant athletic trainer. Reynolds is rejoining the Guardians organization after working from 2018-2022 in the same role before leaving for the University of Maryland.

After graduating from the University of Delaware in 2016 with a degree in athletic training, Reynolds went on to study sports management at East Tennessee State University.

Rounding out the field staff for 2025 is Gustavo Nava. Nava, a native of Maracaibo, Venezuela, began his collegiate career in 2019 with the University of Rio Grande in Ohio. He would eventually transfer and finish his playing career at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

This will be his first season in the Guardians organization.





THARP

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HILLCATS ANNOUNCE 2025 OPENING DAY ROSTER

The Lynchburg Hillcats are excited to announce their Opening Day roster for the 2025 season.

The new edition of the Hillcats features three players in the Top 30 of the Guardians organization, according to MLB Pipeline, including two in the Top 10. The roster also features several returners from last year's team, which finished with 67 wins.

Highlighting the roster is a returning infielder, Welbyn Francisca. According to MLB Pipeline, he is currently the sixth highest rated prospect. The smooth hitting middle infielder appeared in 29 games for Lynchburg last season, slashing an impressive .325/.402/.402 at just 18-years-old.

Francisca was featured as a member of the Cleveland Guardians Spring Breakout team, which defeated the Seattle Mariners 8 to 7. Francisca would pick up two RBIs in his two at-bats.

Topping the pitching staff this season will be Braylon Doughty, a right-handed draftee out of high school. At only 19-years-old, Doughty brings youth to the Hillcats pitching rotation, while also touting a strong fastball, curveball, and slider. The latter two grading at 60 on the MLB scouting report (a 20-to-80 grading scale).

Doughty was taken as the 36th pick in last year's MLB Amateur Draft, and the first of several high school arms. He would sign for a signing bonus of greater than \$2.5 million to skip college. Despite only standing at 6'1, Doughty already throws in the mid-to-upper 90's with his fastball and exceeds 3,000 rpm on his breaking pitches.



Rounding out the Hillcats Top-30 Prospects is Luis Merejo. Another returner from the end of last season, Merejo impressed, displaying plenty of pop in his limited action in the Hill City. As one of the youngest players in the Carolina League when he arrived, Merejo still slashed .282/.372/.466 while also including 12 extra base hits in 30 games.

Merejo serves as a first baseman and a corner outfielder. He has an above average arm for his position, but his value is brought from his bat. He currently ranks as the 29th prospect in the Guardians organization.

A few of the other notable names on the roster include RHP Jacob Zibin, who has dealt with injuries early in his career. However, after being drafted in 2022, he appeared on the Top 30 prospect list, displaying an above average fastball and changeup.

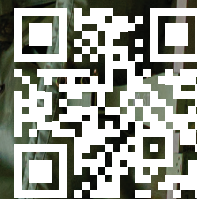
In addition, fan favorite Tommy Hawke will begin his 2025 campaign with the Hillcats. Hawke, a speedster on the bases, gained notoriety for swiping three bases in one inning, including a straight steal of home. The Wake Forest product is in the middle of transitioning to second base from his more natural center field role.

The rest of the pitchers on the roster include Jervis Alfaro, Luis Flores, Jogly Garcia, Sean Heppner, Melkis Hernandez, Izaak Martinez, Xavier Martinez, Sean Matson, Logan McGuire, Rafe Schlesinger, Cam Walty, Conner Whittaker, Julio Zapata, and Donovan Zsak.

The position players include Ryan Cesarini, Cristopher Espinola, Carlos Gutierrez, Garrett Howe, Yanki Jean-Baptiste, Robert Lopez, Alberto Mendez, Jeffrey Mercedes, Yaikel Mijares, Jose Pirela, and Bennett Thompson.

The 2025 Lynchburg Hillcats begin their season on April 4th in Fayetteville against the Woodpeckers before returning home on April 8th against the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers. Tickets for Opening Day can be purchased at [Lynchburg-hillcats.com](https://lynchburg-hillcats.com).





WE KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A WINNING TEAM

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GUARDIANS TOP 30 PROFILE: #6 WELBYN FRANCISCA

The Guardians target switch-hitting infielders with advanced bat-to-ball skills on the international market, and Francisca fit that profile when he received the highest bonus (\$1,375,000) in their 2023 class. Signed out of the Dominican Republic, he went 5-for-7 with a homer, triple, five runs and three RBI in his pro debut in the Rookie-level Dominican Summer League and hasn't stopped hitting since. He slashed .323/.414/.483 in his first two years as a pro and had no trouble handling Single-A pitching at age 18 in the final six weeks of last season.

Francisca has bat speed and tremendous feel from both sides of the plate and makes repeated contact to all fields with ease. He'll chase pitches on occasion but does a good job of working counts and drawing walks for a teenager. Though he's just 5-foot-8 and needs to add strength, he has surprisingly solid raw power and could provide 15-20 homers per season if he learns to drive the ball in the air more regularly.

Francisca is a solid runner but will flash plus or better run times on occasion, and he has the instincts and aggressiveness to steal bases. He's a twitchy athlete with smooth actions, range to both sides and reliable hands at shortstop. His average arm strength is a tick light for short but he projects as a solid defender there and plus at second base.

Courtesy: MLB Pipeline





A NEW ERA OF MEMORIES

The Lynchburg Hillcats are thrilled to announce several new changes coming to the ballpark for the 2025 season.

With single game tickets on-sale today, fans can explore all the new additions to the organization, from our ownership down to our gameday operations.

New to the club this year is Dylan K. Narang, who has taken over ownership of the team. Narang is no stranger to professional baseball, having served as a minority owner of the Albuquerque Isotopes before selling his stake at the start of 2024.

A Virginia native, after graduating from UVA's School of Commerce in 2002, Narang enlisted in the U.S. Army. After his active service he pursued an MBA from Georgetown University and earned a commission in the U.S. Army Reserve. In 2011, he completed an MFA from Chapman University, coinciding with the creation of his own media production company, Foggy Bottom Pictures.

Narang, who currently resides in Washington, D.C., purchased the club from the Elmore Sports Group, who concluded a nine-year run as owners of the Hillcats.

The sale of the organization ushers in a new era of baseball in the Hill City, with a renewed focus towards creating a family friendly atmosphere. New for 2025, the organization is proud to announce a large-scale reduction in concessions prices to make Lynchburg baseball affordable with an eye on families.

Furthermore, summer nights at the ballpark just became a lot cooler, with the installation of a new soft serve ice cream machine. Fans can enjoy cups each night throughout the season.

Finally, the Hillcats are installing a new in-house dining option serving Mexican cuisine.

Beyond the concessions stand, the Hillcats are building the best promotional calendar in team history. This season, the schedule includes nearly 20 giveaways and a dozen fireworks shows. Giveaways include jersey and t-shirt giveaways, campfire mugs, and multiple hat giveaways.



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Arthur's JEWELRY
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VOTE FOR PLAYER OF THE YEAR

The Lynchburg Hillcats are excited to bring back one of the traditions from our past this season.

Lynchburg and Arthur's Jewelry are teaming up to bring back the Hillcats Player of the Year! Fan's in attendance at Bank of the James Stadium will have the opportunity to place their vote for which Hillcats's player they believe deserves the award.

As part of the award, both the player and one of the fans that voted for them will receive a free watch, courtesy of Arthur's Jewelry. The award and the watch will be handed out at Fan Appreciation Night on August 31st.

Arthur's Jewelry is a family owned and operated jewelry store located in Bedford, Virginia. Located at 111 N Bridge St., Arthur's Jewelry is the community's home for engagement rings, fine jewelry, and diamonds.

Fans can cast their vote for Player of the Year by visiting the promotions booth located on the concourse during any of the Hillcats home games in 2025.

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RONNIE ROBERTS CLASSIC RETURNS FOR ANOTHER YEAR

The Lynchburg Hillcats were proud to host the 2025 Ronnie Roberts Classic at Bank of the James Stadium.

Similar to last year, the Ronnie Roberts Classic took place over two days, Thursday, March 27 and Friday, March 28, with eight local programs participating in the event. Each night will consist of two games featuring high school teams from around our community.

Beginning at 5:30 p.m. each night, the local high school teams played an official VHSL game on the field at Bank of the James Stadium. Thursday's matchups include Jefferson Forest vs. Heritage at 5:30 p.m. and EC Glass vs. Liberty-Bedford at 7:30 p.m. On Friday, Brookville and Rustburg will square off at 5:30 p.m. with LCA and Amherst to conclude the Ronnie Roberts Classic at 7:30 p.m.

In game one, Jefferson Forest dealt Heritage a mammoth 19-0 loss, controlling the game out the gate. One student drilled a home run out of the ballpark into the pine tree in left field. EC Glass and Liberty Bedford traded blows, but Glass was able to walk away victoriously.

On Friday, Brookville and Rustburg went back-and-forth all evening, before Rustburg was able to finish it with a walkoff in the seventh inning. Then, LCA faced off against UVA Commit, Jayden Davis from Amherst, but showed no difficulty jumping out to the early lead. LCA would throw a no-hitter in the mercy ruled ballgame.

The Ronnie Roberts Classic was formally launched in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide graduating high school seniors once last chance to play baseball in front of their community. Named in honor of former Hillcats general manager, Ronnie Roberts, the event seeks to celebrate his heart for the community and his love for baseball.

Roberts began his career with the Hillcats as the head groundskeeper in 1991 before working his way up to assistant general manager in 1993, and then general manager in 2016. He passed away in May of 2020, but his legacy is still felt at the ballpark and throughout the community.



1ST HALF PROMO RELEASE

4/8 OPENING NIGHT

4/11 VINTAGE T-SHIRT GIVEAWAY

4/13 VINTAGE PENNANT GIVEAWAY

4/25 K9 & WINE NIGHT

4/26 YOUTH LEAGUE NIGHT + FIREWORKS

4/27 YOUTH HAT GIVEAWAY

5/2 MENTAL HEALTH NIGHT

5/3 CINCO DE MAYO CELEBRATION + FIREWORKS

5/4 HILLCATS' PILLOWCASE GIVEAWAY

5/16 MARGARITAVILLE NIGHT + HAWAIIAN SHIRT GIVEAWAY

5/17 AUTISM AWARENESS + JERSEY AUCTION

5/18 MATCHBOX CAR GIVEAWAY

5/30 PICKLEBALL NIGHT + PICKLEBALL PADDLE GIVEAWAY

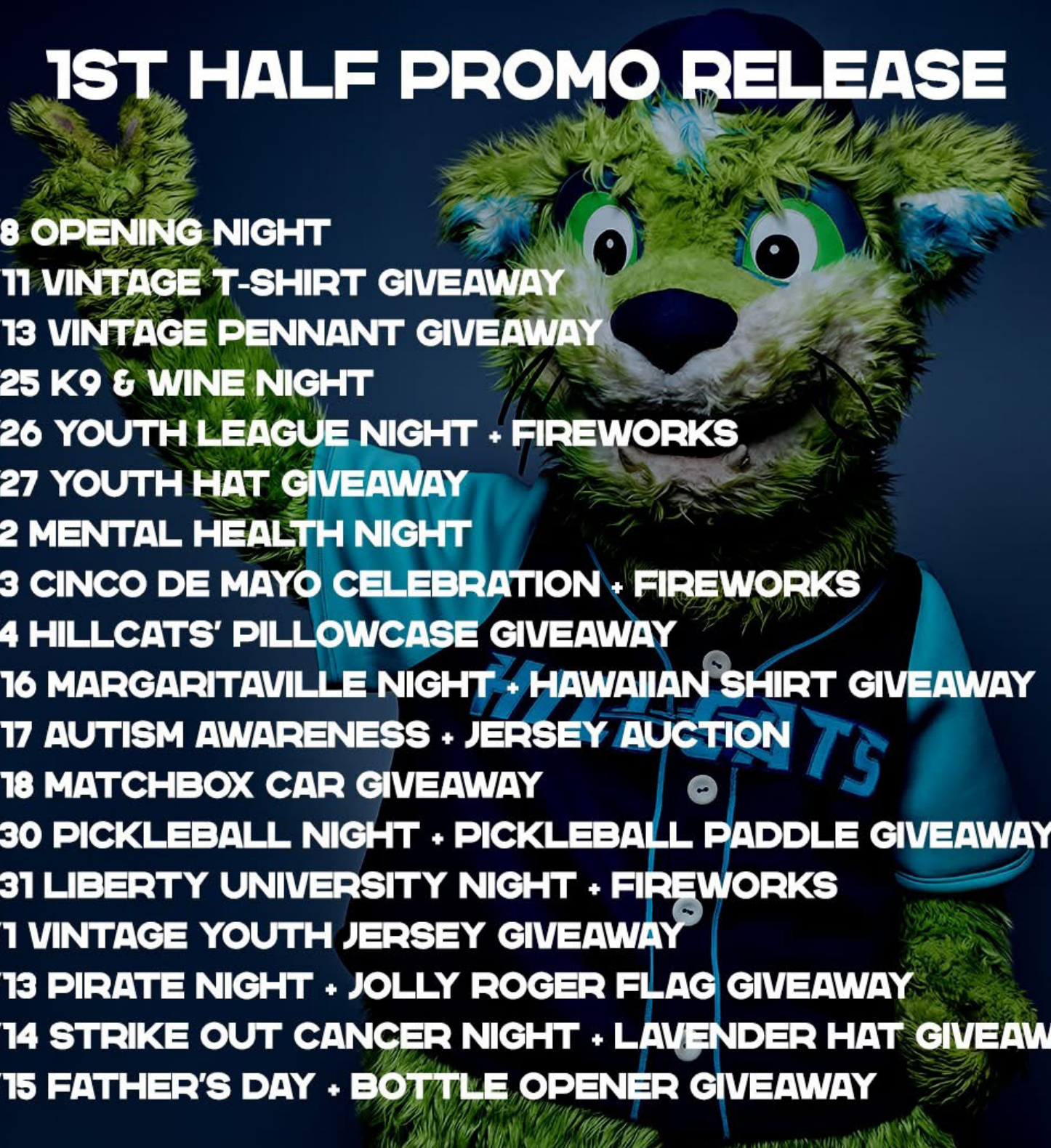
5/31 LIBERTY UNIVERSITY NIGHT + FIREWORKS

6/1 VINTAGE YOUTH JERSEY GIVEAWAY

6/13 PIRATE NIGHT + JOLLY ROGER FLAG GIVEAWAY

6/14 STRIKE OUT CANCER NIGHT + LAVENDER HAT GIVEAWAY

6/15 FATHER'S DAY + BOTTLE OPENER GIVEAWAY





NEW FOR 2025

MAKE MEMORIES EVERY TUESDAY
AT AMERICA'S GRAND OL' BALLYARD



B·I·N·G·O				
Single	Wild Pitch	Strikeout	Double Play	HR
Walk	RBI Single	Fly Out	Wild Pitch	Double
Research (empty)	Double	Free Space	Bunt	Stolen Base
Double (empty)	Double Play	Slide	Strikeout	HR
Stolen Base	RBI Single	Single	Fly Out	Walk



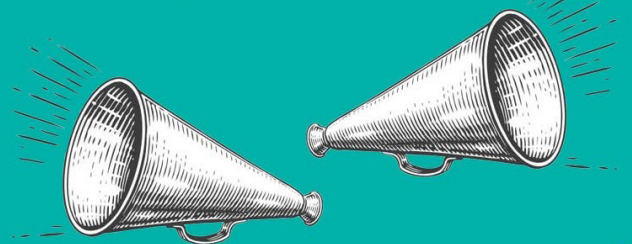
SILVER

BASEBALL BINGO

SLUGGERS

MORE INFORMATION AT LYNCHBURG-HILLCATS.COM
BANK OF THE JAMES STADIUM

MAKE MEMORIES EVERY WEDNESDAY
AT AMERICA'S GRAND OL' BALLYARD



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CLEVELAND ROCK (COOPERSTOWN FEATURE)

By Craig Muder

Tom Hamilton had been a Frick Award finalist three times previously, so he knew what would happen if he did not receive good news during MLB's Winter Meetings in Dallas.

But when the phone call came on Dec. 11 informing him that he was the 2025 Ford C. Frick Award winner, the flow of emotions caught Hamilton by surprise.

"Well, whoever had 'under 15 seconds before he cries' won," Hamilton said following the announcement. "I'm so humbled, I'm so grateful and I can't believe it happened."

Hamilton became the 49th winner of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's Frick Award, which is presented annually and honors the top broadcasters in the game. He will be honored at the July 26 Awards Presentation in Cooperstown as part of the July 25-28 Hall of Fame Weekend.

"I looked at that list of 10 finalists, and if you were to rank them, I would have put myself 10th," he said. "I was just so honored to be a part of that list. I know how blessed I've been and how fortunate I was to get that call."

"You sure don't get into this business thinking about the Hall of Fame awards. When you get the call you got your first job, you won the lottery. Getting that call in January 1990 to be hired by the Cleveland Indians was the greatest phone call I've ever had in my professional career. This ranks right up with it."



COOPERTOWN



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Head for Home

Hamilton began calling Cleveland games that spring, starting with Herb Score as his broadcast partner and then pairing over the years in the WWWE/WTAM-AM booth with Mike Hegan, Dave Nelson, Matt Underwood and Jim Rosenhaus. His career spans what is arguably the greatest sustained success in franchise history, with the team advancing to three World Series among 14 playoff berths.

“There’s no guarantee when you come into a new city or new market that people are going to like you,” he said. “I think I caught such a break, and if folks do like me, it’s because of Herb Score. Because Herb accepted me and because of the cachet he had in this town, if Herb accepted you, then the audience automatically was like, ‘OK, well, we’ll give him a chance.’

“There’s never apathy in the city of Cleveland about the ballclub. These are great fans, but, more importantly, the fans care. And I think I’ve been the beneficiary of that.”

Born Aug. 19, 1954, Hamilton was raised on a Wisconsin dairy farm until he was in his teens. He grew up listening to Milwaukee Braves games and announcer Earl Gillespie.

“I learned a work ethic from my mom and dad, but I also knew, ‘I don’t want to be a farmer,’” Hamilton said. “To listen to somebody like Earl Gillespie in New York, Chicago, wherever the Braves were playing, it just seemed like such a magical place. We all want to be major league players, but I found out in high school that was no way, shape or form going to be a reality.”

Hamilton spent his first years in broadcasting with stations in Wisconsin before landing a job with the Triple-A Columbus Clippers in 1987. After three years, the Cleveland Indians offered him a chance to join Score in the radio booth. He spent four seasons calling games for teams that had losing records before a young Cleveland team became the talk of baseball in the mid-1990s.

“If you take away the first MLB game I broadcast, the most magical moment for me would be Kenny Lofton scoring from second base in Game 6 of the ’95 ALCS against Randy Johnson. Kenny Lofton scores from second base on a passed ball? Nobody does that,” Hamilton said of a play that gave Cleveland a 3-0 lead in a game it would win, 4-0, to advance to its first World Series in 41 years. “And when Kenny did that, you knew then that club was going to the World Series.”

“By having four years of broadcasting when teams weren’t very good, a couple of things happened. One, I learned a valuable lesson from Herb, the most valuable being that your club’s record or how the season is going should never have any bearing on that night’s broadcast,” Hamilton said. “And then, because we went through some of those tough years with the fans, when the club got good, they were like, ‘Hey, you know what? He’s one of us. He knows what it was like.’”

At the Awards Presentation, the fans will likely feel they are with Hamilton when he reaches the top of his profession.

“The thought of going into Cooperstown?” Hamilton said. “That’s not supposed to happen to people like me.”

Craig Muder is the director of communications for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

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SOUTHPAW'S FUN ZONE

Title: "The Lynchburg Hillcats Baseball Adventure"

Instructions:

Welcome to "The Lynchburg Hillcats Baseball Adventure"! Get ready to fill in the blanks with words of your choice to create a hilarious and unique story about our favorite baseball team, the Lynchburg Hillcats! Once you've filled in all the blanks, read the story aloud and get ready to laugh at the crazy antics of the Hillcats!

Story:

Once upon a time in Lynchburg, the Hillcats were gearing up for an important game against their rivals, the _____ (adjective) _____ (noun) . The team was feeling _____ (emotion) as they stepped onto the field.

But just before the game started, _____ (player's name) discovered that their lucky _____ (noun) was missing! Without it, they were sure to lose!

In a panic, the team searched everywhere, from the dugout to the outfield, but the lucky _____ (noun) was nowhere to be found. Just when they were about to give up hope, _____ (player's name) had a brilliant idea.

"We'll each take a turn doing our funniest _____ (verb ending in -ing) until someone laughs so hard they accidentally reveal where the lucky _____ (noun) is hiding!" exclaimed _____ (player's name) .

So, one by one, the players took turns _____ (verb ending in -ing) . Some told jokes, others danced, and one player even attempted to juggle baseballs! But despite their best efforts, nobody could find the missing _____ (noun) .

Just when they were about to admit defeat, _____ (player's name) had a stroke of genius. "Let's check the mascot's costume!" they cried.

Sure enough, nestled inside the costume's fuzzy _____ (noun) was the missing lucky charm! With a cheer, the team retrieved the _____ (noun) and headed back to the field, ready to play their hearts out.

In the end, fueled by the return of their lucky _____ (noun) , the Hillcats played an incredible game and emerged victorious, much to the dismay of the _____ (adjective) _____ (noun) .

And so, with their lucky charm by their side, the Lynchburg Hillcats celebrated their victory late into the night, knowing that no matter what challenges they faced, they would always come out on top as long as they stuck together as a team.

Limonadas

DE HILL CITY

