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# COMEBACK YEAR: THE DRAGONS RETURN TO THE FIELD IN 2021

**Dayton, Ohio**—The Dayton Dragons have completed their 21st season of professional baseball. Here are some of the highlights from this season, on and off the field:

## Dragons Baseball Returns in 2021



After the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancelation of the entire 2020 Minor League Baseball season, the Dragons welcomed baseball and their fans back in 2021. The start of the season was delayed until May 4, and the Dragons home opener took place on May 11. The facility, now known as Day Air Ballpark, spotlighted the Dragons new naming rights partner, Day Air Credit Union.

The return of professional baseball in Dayton brought many changes to the league and the industry in general. Major League Baseball completed a restructuring of the Minor Leagues prior to the 2021 season, including the contraction of 42 affiliated teams. Here were some of the most significant changes:

- The league was now known as the High-A Central League after previously being referred to as the Midwest League.
- The league was reclassified to the “High-A” level of Minor League Baseball after being a “Low-A” league since the Dragons inception in 2000.
- The league was reduced from 16 teams to 12 (Burlington, Clinton, and Kane County were contracted; Bowling Green moved to new league).
- Each team in the High-A Central League was scheduled to play 120-games (60 home games), down from 140 games in previous years.
- All series in 2021 were scheduled for six games, Tuesday through Sunday. All teams had Mondays off throughout the season.
- Roster limits in 2021 were set at 30 players after teams played for 25-player limits in recent years.

After beginning the season with uncertainty related to the potential of playoffs to determine the league champions throughout the Minors, Major League Baseball announced on July 1 that the High-A Central League would conduct post-season play in September. The top two teams, regardless of division, would meet in a best-of-five series. Unlike past years, there was no “split season” in 2021, with no first half and second half champions. The Quad Cities River Bandits emerged as league champions in September, topping the Cedar Rapids Kernels, three games to two, in the championship series.

The Dragons were the winners of the “Mythical First Half” East Division title. Following the 60th scheduled game date, the Dragons were in first place with a record of 34-25 (with one rain-out), two and one-half games ahead of the second place club. Had there been a split season in 2021, the Dragons record would have guaranteed them a spot in the playoffs. The Midwest League had split its season into two equal halves for every season from 1956-1981, and again from 1988-2019. The league did not play a split season from 1982-87.

### **East Division Co-Champs, and the Best Record in a Decade**

The Dragons finished their 120-game season with a final record of 65-55, tied for first place with the Lake County Captains in the High-A Central League’s East Division. Their final winning percentage of 2021 of .542 was their highest in a season since the 2011 season, when the Dragons went 83-57 (.593) with a team that featured Billy Hamilton, Tucker Barnhart, and Donald Lutz.

Two teams from the West Division, Quad Cities and Cedar Rapids, finished with the two best overall records in the league, earning slots in the post-season championship series. The Dragons playoff hopes ended on the next-to-last day of the season.

**Prospects Aplenty:** The Dragons 2021 roster included a huge number of top prospects within the Cincinnati Reds organization. Nine members of the 2021 Dragons were ranked in the end-of-season listing by *MLB.com* among the top-20 prospects in the Reds organization, including Matt McLain (#3), Graham Ashcraft (#6), Mat Nelson (#9), Michael Siani (#11), Lyon Richardson (#13), Christian Roa (#14), Bryce Bonnin (#15), Ivan Johnson (#16), and Allan Cerda (#17). In the mid-season update of Reds top-10 prospects by *Baseball America*, McLain was #4, Nelson was #11, Bonnin was #13, Roa was #14, and Johnson was #15. Siani was listed by *Baseball America* as the “Best Athlete” and “Best Defensive Outfielder” in the Reds organization entering the season.

**First Round Fever:** Shortstop Matt McLain, the Cincinnati Reds first round draft pick in 2021 out of UCLA, became the latest first rounder pick to play for the Dragons. Recent first round picks to play for the Dragons, with their draft year, have included Nick Lodolo (2019), Jonathan India (2018), Hunter Greene (2017), Nick Senzel (2016), Tyler Stephenson (2015), Nick Howard and Alex Blandino (2014), Phillip Ervin (2013), Nick Travieso (2012), and Robert Stephenson (2011). Every Reds “true” first round pick (selected within the first 30 picks of the draft) over the last 11 drafts has played for the Dragons except 2020 first rounder Austin Hendrick, who spent the 2021 season at Low-A Daytona and would be a projected Dragons player in 2022.



Catcher Mat Nelson, the Reds 2021 supplemental first round pick (Competitive Balance-A; 35th overall pick) out of Florida State, also played for the Dragons. Players taken recently by the Reds in the supplemental first round (extra picks added between the first and second round for compensatory purposes) have included Todd Frazier (2207), Jesse Winker (2012), Michael Lorenzen (2013), Taylor Trammell (2016), and Jeter Downs (2017).



## Special Entertainment Events at Day Air Ballpark

The Dragons scheduled three premier “first time” entertainment events at Day Air Ballpark in 2021. They included:

- Preacher Lawson Comedy Show: June 25
- Rob Schneider Comedy Show: August 12
- Nitro Circus: August 28



**High School and College Baseball:** The Dragons "High School Baseball Showcase" presented by Orthopedic Associates completed its 16th year in 2021, allowing high schools the opportunity to play at a world-class facility. The Dragons and Day Air Ballpark hosted high 32 school baseball games as 61 area high schools moved their regular-season game from their home field to the downtown Dayton ballpark. Additionally, the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) Division I regional baseball tournament games were played at Day Air Ballpark in June.

Seven college games were played at Day Air Ballpark in 2021, including three University of Dayton games and a pair of doubleheaders featuring Wilmington College and Otterbein University.

## **Dragons Programs, Honorees, Events, and New Features**

### **CareSource's Veteran Salute Program**

In 2021, CareSource's Veteran Salute program highlighted nine veteran's stories over the course of the Dragons season. Veterans who were chosen were recognized at multiple Dragons games with an in-game video board moment and provided with VIP treatment when they attend the Dragons game. The honorees included Frank Keaton (U.S. Navy), Michael Vanderveen (U.S. Marines), Brian Bowersox (U.S. Army), Willard Ore (U.S. Army), Ralph Steward Jr. (U.S. Army), Mel Musser (U.S. Air Force), Catherine Beers-Conrad (U.S. Air Force), Dr. Cassie Barlow (U.S. Air Force), Jim "Pee Wee" Martin (U.S. Army). This program is an extension of CareSource's commitment to serve veterans and their families through innovative programs and partnerships to support their health and well-being.

### **Anthem Game Changers**

Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield recognized essential workers who changed the game for the community during the pandemic at Day Air Ballpark in 2021. Katherine Stewart, a Kroger grocery store employee (June 16); Nathan Heaton, a paramedic, and Jennifer Domenick, an EMT, both from Kettering Health (July 14); the Curriculum Team from Dayton Public Schools (September 1); and Dayton Foodbank (September 15) were all honored this season.

### **Community All-Stars**

The Dragons partnered with Flying Ace Express Car Wash, CenterPoint Energy, Great Clips, and Synchrony on the Community All-Stars Program, honoring Dayton's best individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond to improve the quality of life in the Miami Valley. The honorees were highlighted during a game with a special inning break award. The Dragons recognized Bogg Ministries on May 27, the CareSource Foundation on July 9, Detective Del Rio on July 27, A Special Wish Foundation—Dayton Chapter on September 1, and the Hope Center for Families on September 3.

### **Rebuilding the Arts**

The Dragons teamed up with Day Air Credit Union to bring a new program to Dayton this summer. Rebuilding The Arts was a season long initiative during the 2021 season that shined a spotlight on the plight of our community's arts programs who have been decimated by the COVID pandemic. It gave fans a chance to learn more about the vibrant arts scene in Dayton (and how they could support it) with three "Rebuilding the Arts" weekends at the ballpark. This summer, the Dragons featured the Muse Machine, Dayton Live, and The Dayton Art Institute. Each organization took over a weekend at the ballpark where they were able to share their story with video and live features on the video board, interactive information booths along the concourse, and a heavy social media presence. Additionally, the Dragons Foundation did fundraising for each of the organizations with a rolling 50-50 raffle in the ballpark, with all charity proceeds going to support their organization.



## **Hometown Heroes Celebration Nights**

Five times during the 2021 baseball season, the Dragons partnered with the Dayton Development Coalition along with Reynolds and Reynolds to shine the spotlight on the military, past and present, through the Hometown Heroes program. The Dragons recognized Dayton Blue Star Mothers on May 26; Operation Cherrybend on June 17; St. Vincent Supportive Services on July 7, and Missed Milestones and Holidays for servicemen and women on August 1. On August 21, the Dragons hosted American Celebration Night at Day Air Ballpark as 17 members of the Air Force Delayed Enlistment Program took the oath of enlistment during an inning break of the Dragons game. Also on that night, the members of the military presented the colors, sang the national anthem, and threw out the ceremonial first pitch as part of the pregame ceremonies.



## **New Dragons Mobile App**

The Dragons introduced a new Mobile App, available to download for free through the Apple App Store (iPhone) and Google Play Store (Android). It provides easy access to fan amenities, information on your favorite Dragons events, team Roster, in-game entertainment, ticket options, ballpark health and safety protocols, and links to the Dragons *PlayBall* Game Program, on-line store, and radio broadcasts. Learn more about the Dayton Dragons App at [www.daytondragons.com/ballpark/daytondragonsapp](http://www.daytondragons.com/ballpark/daytondragonsapp).

### **Digital PlayBall**

The Dragons official team program, *PlayBall*, became a digital publication in 2021, with new, added features. The publication included player bios, feature stories, game and series previews, schedule/standings/scores/stats, ballpark events and promotions, video clips and interviews, and a new team podcast, *The Dirt*.

### **Safety First with Kettering Health**

The Dragons partnered with Kettering Health to introduce new safety protocols at Day Air Ballpark in 2021. These included cashless purchases around the ballpark, the addition of higher grade air filters and increased air flow with iWave technology, utilization of GERMSTOP antimicrobial technology to treat surfaces and protect guests for 30 days, plexiglass at every customer service interface location, updated mask policies, and over 100 hand sanitizer stations in the ballpark.

## **Other Highlights at Day Air Ballpark:**

Frisch's Dragons Kids Club: The Kids club returned for its eighth year in 2021. Each member received a Dragons jersey, backpack, hat, two Dragons game tickets, and a gift card for a free mini-meal at participating Frisch's Big Boy locations.

Kroger Baseball Buddies: On nine dates during the 2021 season, children ages 7–13 served as Kroger Baseball Buddies. Each child received tickets to a Dragons game, a custom Dragons jersey, hat, backpack, autographed baseball, photo opportunities, a meal voucher to spend at the ballpark, and participation in the Dragons starting lineup on their game day.

Heater's Recycling Bin Initiative: The Dayton Dragons and Montgomery County Environmental Services teamed up for Heater's Recycling Bin Initiative (RBI) Program. This free, fun, and educational program allowed kids and families to learn about household recycling and how recycling benefits the economy and the environment. This year, participants will learn about how to "recycle right," as well as what items can and cannot be recycled.

Dragons 5K: The Dragons hosted their 11<sup>th</sup> annual Dragons 5K on July 24 at Day Air Ballpark presented by Orthopedic Associates.

Lexus of Dayton Home Run Challenge: For every Dragons home run hit at Day Air Ballpark during the 2021 season, the Dayton Dragons Foundation and Lexus of Dayton donated \$200.00 to the Dayton Food Bank, for a season-long total of \$8,400. Dragons fans added donations as well, bringing the total to more than \$15,000.

Dayton Dragons Blood Drive: To help rebuild the community blood supply, the Dragons hosted blood drives on July 22 and September 8 on the Day Air Ballpark Plaza. Everyone who registered to donate received free Dragons gear and a t-shirt.



### Dragons 50/50 Raffle

The 50/50 raffle during Dragons games at Day Air Ballpark raised thousands of dollars for local charities and the Dragons Foundation in 2021. The Hope Center for Families, the Dayton Art Institute, Dayton Live, and Rebuilding the Arts received money from the raffle, along with the Dragons Foundation, which provides necessary funding and resources to support the countless donations, charitable giving requests, in-kind donations, unique game experiences, and community wide Dragons programs.

### "Best of" National Anthem Performances

Due to COVID restrictions, the Dragons began the 2021 season utilizing archived video of the best performances of the national anthem over the last 20 years. The Dragons Entertainment staff reviewed hundreds of videos to make their selections. As restrictions were lifted, the Dragons welcomed winners from the 2020 National Anthem Tryouts presented by the *Dayton Daily News* to the ballpark to perform the national anthem.

### **Additional Major Events at Day Air Ballpark**

Donatos Movie Night: August 15

Great American Beer Tasting: Sept. 11

College Prep Night: Sept. 28

Yoga in the Outfield: June 22, July 20, August 24, Sept. 7.





## Ballpark Improvements

### Boost Engagement Suite Level

A longtime partnership with Dayton-based Boost Engagement has expanded to include a new naming rights deal for the suite level at Day Air Ballpark. Boost Engagement is a provider of marketing solutions, promotional products, and employee engagement solutions. The Boost Engagement Suite Level presents a business networking area within the community. Over 70 of the top 100 companies in the region book suites at Day Air Ballpark for an opportunity to connect and watch Dragons baseball. The expanded partnership, which began in 1999, includes new signage across the ballpark and a specific area for branding and storytelling.



### Upgrades to Party Decks

The Budweiser and Bud Light Party Decks have been upgraded using new TimberTech materials. A clean, luxurious, space with an added bar ledge provides the opportunity for socially distanced group entertainment.

### Touchless Technology

In accordance with new COVID guidelines, touchless technology was implemented throughout Day Air Ballpark in 2021. Dragons tickets for the 2021 season were digital. To comply with health and safety protocols, digital scanners were used by Dragons staff to provide a touchless ticketing experience for the public. Concessions were cashless and accepted all major credit cards, Apple Pay, and Google Pay. The Dragons Team Store and restrooms also featured touchless technology.

## Season Review

The Dragons season began on May 4 and concluded on September 19. Here are some of the facts and statistics:

### Dayton Dragons 2021 Recap

Final Record: 65-55 (Tied-1st in Eastern Division)

Home Record: 34-26

Final Attendance: 317,464 (55 dates)

Per Game Attendance Average: 5,772

The Dragons finished as the #1 ranked team in attendance in all of Single-A baseball for the 21st straight season. They finished as the #1 ranked team below the Triple-A level (Single-A and Double-A) for the 15th straight season. The Dragons finished the year ranked in the top 10 for all classifications of Minor League Baseball for the 21st straight year.

### High-A Central League Batter/Pitcher of the Week

Player	Batter/Pitcher	Dates
Brian Rey	Batter	May 3-9
Lyon Richardson	Pitcher	May 3-9
Brian Rey	Batter	May 10-16
Graham Ashcraft	Pitcher	May 31-June 6
Carson Spiers	Pitcher	June 7-13
Carson Spiers	Pitcher	July 19-25
Eduardo Salazar	Pitcher	August 16-22

### Dragons Cincinnati Reds Minor League Batter/Pitcher of the Month

Player	Batter/Pitcher	Month
Brian Rey	Batter	May
Graham Ashcraft	Pitcher	June

### Dragons on Baseball America's High-A Central League "Best Tools" Survey

Minor League Baseball's trade publication, Baseball America, conducted a survey of High-A Central League managers of the "best tools" in the circuit:

Best Defensive Outfielder: Michael Siani

## 2021 Dragons Team Leaders

### Batting

Batting Average:	Jacob Hurtubise, .283 (qualifier: minimum 324 plate app.) Francisco Urbaez, .333 (non-qualifier: 285 plate app.)
Home Runs:	Quin Cotton, 10
Runs Batted In:	Quin Cotton, 41
Stolen Bases:	Jacob Hurtubise, 39
Games Played:	Jacob Hurtubise, 102

### Pitching

Victories:	Pedro Garcia, 7
Earned Run Average	Eduardo Salazar, 3.49 (qualifier; min. 96 IP)
Saves:	Francis Peguero, 6
Games Pitched:	Francis Peguero/Pedro Garcia, 28
Innings Pitched:	Noah Davis, 100
Strikeouts:	Eduardo Salazar, 107

## Dragons among the High-A Central League Leaders

### Batters

On-Base Percentage	Jacob Hurtubise, 1st (.413)
Stolen Bases	Jacob Hurtubise, 3rd (39)
Runs Scored	Jacob Hurtubise, 4th (77)
Walks	Jacob Hurtubise, 4th (58)
Batting Average	Jacob Hurtubise, 5th (.283)

### Pitchers

Double Play Balls:	Carson Spiers, 1st, (9)
Earned Run Average:	Eduardo Salazar, 2nd (3.49)
Lowest Batting Avg. Against:	Eduardo Salazar, Tied-2nd (.222)
Wins:	Pedro Garcia, Tied-5th (7)





## Notable Dragons Performances

**Comeback Kids:** On June 8 and 9, the Dragons won two games in two nights despite trailing by five or more runs in each game. For reference, they posted a total of six comeback wins in the previous five years combined (697 games) in games in which they had trailed by at least five runs, averaging 1.2 “big” comeback wins per season. The June 8 win after trailing 7-0 matched the largest comeback for the Dragons over at least the last 15 seasons. The Dragons battled back to win six times after trailing by at least four runs in 2021. Over the last five years, they averaged 2.2 wins per season when trailing by at least four runs.

The Dragons most dramatic wins of the season came exactly one month apart, on May 15 and June 15, both at Day Air Ballpark. On May 15, the Dragons trailed Lansing 2-0 before Brian Rey hit a solo home run in the sixth inning, and Bren Spillane hit a two-run homer in the eighth to give the team a 3-2 lead. Dragons reliever Jake Gilbert then pitched out of a bases loaded, no out jam in the ninth to close out the victory. On June 15, the Dragons trailed Fort Wayne 4-1 going to the bottom of the ninth inning before rallying for four runs to win. The game-ender was a bases loaded, two-run double by Reniel Ozuna that brought in the tying and winning runs.

**Rey of Hope:** Dayton’s Brian Rey won the High-A Central League Batter of the Week for the first week of the season, then duplicated the feat by winning the same honor in the season’s second week. At the end of the second week, Rey had played in 10 games and was batting .450 with six home runs, 16 RBI, 10 extra base hits, and an OPS of 1.467. Before the end of the third week of the season, Rey was promoted to Double-A Chattanooga. Rey was also named Cincinnati Reds Minor League Batter of the Month for the month of May.

**Slamming:** The Dragons connected on four grand slam home runs in 2021, including one in the first game of the year by Quincy McAfee on May 4 at Great Lakes. Alex McGarry (June 10 vs. Great Lakes), Michael Siani (August 12 at Lansing), and Jonathan Willems (Sept. 12 at Lake County) also hit home runs with the bases loaded for the Dragons in 2021.

**Stirring Up Trouble:** Dragons outfielder Jacob Hurtubise ignited the team’s offense in his first professional season after graduating from West Point. Hurtubise led the league in on-base percentage while also finishing in the top five in batting average, stolen bases, runs scored, and walks. The blazing fast Hurtubise played all three outfield positions and frequently served as the Dragons lead-off hitter. When the Dragons were playing their best, Hurtubise was usually creating havoc for the opposition.

**Firing Missiles:** With a fastball that reached 99 mph, Dragons starting pitcher Graham Ashcraft put together an amazing stretch of four straight starts starting May 30 in which he did not allow an earned run. The streak totaled 23 innings and including 30 strikeouts and only six walks. Following the fourth start on June 17, Ashcraft was promoted to Double-A Chattanooga. He was named the Reds Minor League Pitcher of the Month for June.

**Rockin' Cotton:** Dragons outfielder Quin Cotton enjoyed the biggest single game of the year for the Dragons. In a Dragons 15-4 win on June 5 at Lake County, Cotton went 4 for 6 with two home runs and six runs batted in. His 10 total bases in the game, and the six RBI, were season highs for a Dragons player in 2021.



**Closing Strong:** The Dragons finished the season by sweeping the Fort Wayne TinCaps in a six-game series. The six-game winning streak was the Dragons longest of the season. They outscored their opponent during the streak, 46-23.

# Dragons in the News

**WDTN TV: Dragons Outfielder Jacob Hurtubise Relies on Speed, Precision Learned at US Military Academy:** <https://www.wdtn.com/sports/dragons-outfielder-jacob-hurtubise-relies-on-speed-precision-honed-at-us-military-academy/>

## **Select Stories from the Dayton Daily News**

**Dayton Daily News:** Manager Believes Dragons have ‘Something Special’  
<https://www.daytondailynews.com/sports/manager-believes-dragons-have-something-special/WF4KJ4SV7BAP7OTW3Y4RYXCGJM/>

**Dayton Daily News:** Roa, Strong Offense Lead Dragons Past Fort Wayne  
<https://www.daytondailynews.com/sports/siani-kickstarts-dragons-rout-of-fort-wayne/QOJM7ZKVHNBPFUCLY2INCLCPU/>

**Dayton Daily News:** Dragons Fall Short of Playoff Bid, but Sixth Straight Win Clinches Share of Division Title: <https://www.daytondailynews.com/sports/dragons-fall-short-of-playoff-bid-but-sixth-straight-win-clinches-share-of-division-title/3M7SPFRRHJC7RNJVJTRRP6OAHM/>

**Dayton Daily News:** More Math on Deck this Off-Season for Dragons  
<https://www.daytondailynews.com/sports/more-math-on-deck-this-offseason-for-dragons/UXWJI4PM3REQHDXMEJSKLLYIZM/>

**Dayton Daily News:** From Men’s League to Pro Baseball, Dragons Reliever Living a Dream  
<https://www.daytondailynews.com/sports/from-mens-league-to-pro-baseball-dragons-reliever-living-a-dream/ESTR5MLQJFENXGXMDDED6JOH6OQ/>

## **Social Media**

The Dragons continued to expand into social media in 2021. The Dragons Facebook page climbed to over 51,000 “likes” while the Dragons Twitter page jumped to over 19,900 followers, the Dragons Instagram page increased to 21,900 followers, and the Dragons TikTok page to over 17,700 followers.

## **Dragons Broadcast Information in 2021**

In 2021, 23 Dragons games were televised live on a major TV “over the air” station, Dayton’s CW (Channel 26). All 120 regular season games were broadcast on radio on WONE 980 AM and the Dragons Mobile App.



## **39 Former Dragons Play in Major Leagues in 2021**

### **Former Dragons who Made Major League Baseball Debuts in 2021 (117 total since 2000)**

Stuart Fairchild (Diamondbacks)  
TJ Friedl (Reds)  
Ryan Hendrix (Reds)  
Jonathan India (Reds)  
Alejo Lopez (Reds)  
Dauri Moreta (Reds)  
Packy Naughton (Angels)  
Tony Santillan (Reds)  
Mac Sceroler (Orioles)  
Jose Siri (Astros)  
Taylor Trammell (Mariners)

### **Additional Former Dragons Who Played for the Reds in 2021 (13)**

Tejay Antone  
Aristides Aquino  
Tucker Barnhart  
Jose Barrero (Garcia)  
Alex Blandino  
Amir Garrett  
Michael Lorenzen  
Tyler Mahle  
Sal Romano  
Nick Senzel  
Robert Stephenson  
Joey Votto  
Jesse Winker

### **Additional Former Dragons Who Played for Other MLB Teams in 2021 (15)**

Johnny Cueto, Giants  
Jay Bruce, Yankees  
Todd Frazier, Pirates  
Didi Gregorius, Phillies  
Billy Hamilton, White Sox  
Ryan LaMarre, Yankees  
Shed Long, Mariners  
Brian O'Grady, Padres  
Wandy Peralta, Giants/Yankees  
Tanner Rainey, Nationals  
Miguel Rojas, Marlins  
Robert Stephenson, Rockies  
Ronald Torreyes, Phillies  
Chad Tromp, Giants  
Justin Turner, Dodgers

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