

Rays, Hot Rods Unveil 2021 Opening Day Roster *Blake Hunt, Pedro Martinez assigned to Bowling Green*

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY – The Bowling Green Hot Rods, in conjunction with the Tampa Bay Rays, are excited to unveil the club’s 2021 opening day roster. Bowling Green returns 14 players from past rosters and welcomes two top prospects ahead of the team’s season opener.

Blake Hunt joins the Hot Rods after spending three seasons in the San Diego Padres system. The catcher is MLB Pipeline’s #18 prospect in Tampa’s system and was brought over in the mega deal that saw former Hot Rods pitcher and Hot Rods Hall of Famer Blake Snell go to San Diego. The right-handed hitter was the 69th overall pick of the 2017 draft by the Padres.

Hunt is joined by another newcomer to the Rays system in Pedro Martinez. Originally from Venezuela, the shortstop is coming off an impressive 2019 season that saw him bat .311 between the Arizona League Cubs and short-season Eugene. A switch-hitter, the 20-year-old is MLB Pipeline’s 30th-ranked Tampa prospect.

Bowling Green will also welcome back 14 returning players for the 2021 seasons thanks to the club’s promotion to High-A. Thirteen of those players were on the Hot Rods in 2019, including outfielder Grant Witherspoon and catcher Roberto Alvarez who were Midwest League All-Stars that season. Pitchers Chris Gau, Miller Hogan, Chris Muller, Cristofer Ogando, and Zack Trageton also return from 2019 (while earning a promotion). Mikey York will return to Bowling Green after stints with the club in 2017 and 2018, as well.

Erik Ostberg rounds out the catcher’s slot on the roster in his return to Bowling Green Ballpark and is joined by fellow position players Jonathan Aranda, Connor Hollis, Osmy Gregorio, and Jordan Qsar. Ruben Cardenas will be in BG to start 2021 after an impressive showing between the Lake County Captains and Hot Rods in 2019. In fact, Cardenas was traded to the Rays while Lake County was at Bowling Green Ballpark, prompting the outfielder to walk next door to his new home clubhouse.

Niko Hulsizer completes the Hot Rods outfield and promises to bring the thunder with him. The Dodgers’ 18th round pick of 2018 has already hit 30 home runs in his two seasons of MiLB experience, including 21 in 2019 between four clubs with 15 of those long balls coming for Great Lakes. He was also a Midwest League All-Star for the Loons.



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Newcomers are plenty in this iteration of an opening day roster, too. Michael Mercado was the Rays' 2nd round pick of the 2017 draft and is returning after not pitching in 2019 due to injury. The righty was Baseball America's 13th-best Rays prospect in 2018.

The roster is flexible, as well, this season. Tanner Dodson, the 71st overall pick of the 2018 draft, will be the second-ever two-way player in Hot Rods history. He'll join more newcomers on the pitching staff in Peyton Battenfield (RHP), Carlos Garcia (RHP), Joseph La Sorsa (LHP), Jacob Lopez (LHP), Evan McKendry (RHP), Jayden Murray (RHP), Ezequiel Zabaleta (RHP).

Offensively the Hot Rods are a mix of experienced talent and young promise. While Martinez is just 20 years old, he's joined on the infield by Evan Edwards and Jacson McGowan who were both drafted out of college.

While subject to change, the opening day roster includes 27 active players. The pitching staff has 13 right-handers and two southpaws, while manager Jeff Smith has five left-handed hitters, eight righties, and a switch hitter to construct his lineup. Muller and La Sorsa will be the tallest players on the team at 6'5", while Ostberg, Aranda, and Hollis all measure at 5'10", the shortest on the club.

The Hot Rods open their 2021 season on the road with a six-game series in Greenville, South Carolina against the Greenville Drive at Fluor Field on Tuesday, May 4. Fans can catch all the action with Shawn Murnin, the Voice of the Hot Rods, on WBGN 94.5 FM and 1340 AM in Bowling Green or globally at <https://www.milb.com/bowling-green/fans/audio-listen-live>.

The Hot Rods finally return to Bowling Green Ballpark for the 2021 home opener on May 11th for a six-game homestand against the Asheville Tourists. Individual tickets for May and June are still available at the team box office, bghotrods.com, or calling 270-901-2121. The home opener homestand will be packed with special theme nights, Hospital Appreciation Week, giveaways, and so much more!

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Hot Rods Baseball is presented by MedCenter Health

