



GAMEDAY

MAY 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





APRIL RECAP AND MAY PREVIEW

The Hillcats enjoyed quite the journey to open up their 2025 season.

Beginning the year in Fayetteville, Lynchburg faced a troubling Opening Day, dropping 7-0 to the Woodpeckers. But the team bounced back quickly, winning each of their next two games in comeback fashion.

While visting Western North Carolina, the Hillcats took a team trip to visit a moment in baseball history. Fayetteville is the city in which Babe Ruth hit his first career home run. The spot is memorialized by a plackard, which the whole team traveled to go see.

Returning home, Lynchburg showed out during their home opener, shutting down the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers. However, the rest of the series showed signs of trouble, with Kannapolis holding Lynchburg at bay.

The team would then head out on the road to take on the Salem Red Sox. The Battle of 460 has always been a contentious matchup, but the two teams showed vastly different season projections. While up the road, Lynchburg went in and took five out of six, demonstrating dominance both on the mound and at the dish.

The momentum would be carried into their final full home series of the month, once again against the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. Lynchburg would win each of the first three games of the series, guaranteeing a split, and further showing that the team held promise for competing for the first half crown.

May will provide a new set of challenges, as the Hillcats will open up the month at home against the Charleston RiverDogs, wrapping up their two-week homestand.

Lynchburg will get a good taste of their other in-state foe, the Fredericksburg Nationals, facing them twice in a four week period. They will square off against Fredericksburg both on the road May 6-11 and return home for their matchup with the Freddies May 27-June 1. Fredericksburg enters as the defending Carolina League Champions, defeating the Cannon Ballers back in September.

Sandwiched in-between, Lynchburg will bring the beach to the Hill City with Myrtle Beach arriving May 13-18. The Hillcats will also have one more full series with the Woodpeckers, May 20-25, down in North Carolina.

Tickets for all the upcoming games and a full list of promotions are available at lynchburg-hillcats.com



THARP

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A CHIP ON HIS SHOULDER: RAFE SCHLESINGER

Written on the mound every time Rafe Schlesinger toes the rubber are the initials “PD”.

For those watching, it may appear as a special moment of memorial. But for Rafe, it’s been his motivation in the face of adversity.

Schlesinger grew up in Stony Brook, New York, a small hamlet on Long Island, just outside the city. It’s a small college town, which hosts slightly over 12,000 local residents. The town triples in size during the school year, when Stony Brook University is in session, which boasts a student population of nearly 26,000.

Attending Sachem High School, Schlesinger became a school legend. This season, his number will be retired by his high school alma mater, one of only two players in school history to be awarded that honor. But it wasn’t always sunshine and rainbows for Schlesinger leading up to this point.

At 12-years-old, Schlesinger was cut from his travel ball team.

“It kinda lit a fire that never went out to this day,” Schlesinger said. “I don’t expect it to ever go out.”

The “PD” on the back of the mound is not a joyful memorial, it’s a reminder of the pain and hurt caused by those who didn’t believe in him. He writes them before every start as a reminder of the coach that said he wasn’t good enough to play.



“Even when I’m having a rough one out there, I look down and it fires me up a little knowing that, I think it’s safe to say I have more proving to do, but I did my part in proving him wrong,” Schlesinger said.

He doesn’t look back on that moment in disgust, though. In fact, he thinks that it shaped him into the person he is today.

“I hope my kid one day has to through something like that,” Schlesinger said. “It sucks in the moment but it’s going to work out better for you in the future.”

The trials on the baseball diamond began even further back for the lefty. In the second grade, his family discovered he had a tic disorder. The disorder is more motor and less of a vocal tic, and it appears in the form of rapid eye movement and head shakes. However, the mound is the one place he never has to worry.

“When I get the sign from the catcher, I’m completely normal for those four or five seconds,” Schlesinger told D1Baseball.com. “When I’m really concentrated on something, (the tics) are minor or not even there.”

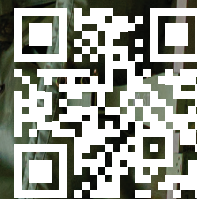
Now, he’s able to use his disorder he has faced to help other kids who may be facing similar challenges. He’s been able to come along side nearly a dozen of kids faced with tic disorders.

“The first time it happened, no joke, I wanted to cry almost,” Schlesinger said of the email to D1Baseball. “That a kid felt comfortable enough to reach out to me and to say that I inspired him and he looked up to me ...”

Schlesinger designed the banner raised for his jersey retirement at his high school. He has gotten into graphic design and proposed his own design to the school, which they readily accepted.

As he draws “PD” on the mound, it marks the turning point of a journey that has led him to professional baseball. A journey that has allowed him to inspire others amidst every challenge that may come their way.





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GUARDIANS TOP 30 PROFILE: #30 BRAYLON DOUGHTY

More of a position player in his first two seasons as a California high schooler, Doughty skipped most of the big showcase events in 2023 except for a breakout performance at the Area Code Games. As he performed well last spring, he steadily boosted his stock until the Guardians drafted him 36th overall and signed him for \$2,569,200. He'll make his pro debut in 2025 and could move faster than most prep pitchers.

Doughty stands out most with his precocious feel for spin, as both his low-80s curveball and mid-80s slider feature plenty of depth and can exceed 3,000 rpm. Both are plus pitches and his fastball could get there as he fills out his 6-foot-1 frame, because he already works at 91-95 mph and touches 97 with impressive arm-side run and command. He also shows promising aptitude for throwing a mid-80s changeup with fade, though it is a bit firm.

While Doughty isn't very physical, he's a good athlete with a quick arm and a fluid delivery. He not only fill the zone, but he also can land his quality breaking balls for strikes or get batters to chase them off the plate. His intelligence is another point in his favor that could help him reach his ceiling of a No. 2 starter.

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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home

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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HILLCAT ALUMNI

SPOTLIGHT:

STEVEN KWAN

Of the Hillcats alumni in Major League Baseball, maybe none are more surprising than Steven Kwan.

The 2018 5th round pick out of Oregon State University has blossomed into one of the most unheard-of stars in the sport. But before he became a Cleveland legend, he traversed the outfield at Bank of the James Stadium.

Kwan spent 2019 with Lynchburg while the team was still High A. Despite more walks than strikeouts, his numbers would not jump out at the eye. He slashed .280/.353/.382 while in the Hill City, accounting for an OPS of .735, the lowest of his Minor League Career.

While living in Lynchburg, Kwan lived with season-ticket holders, Buzz and Jen McFaden, who had hosted Hillcats for many years. However, Kwan has been one of the few who have stayed in contact to this day.

After leaving Lynchburg, Kwan took a significant jump, climbing the ranks of the Guardians system before making his Major League debut on April 7th, 2022 against the Kansas City Royals, his first Opening Day appearance.

However, days before, Kwan was not even sure he would even make the team, even up until the point when then Cleveland manager Terry Francona sat him down before the season.

“He’s like, ‘We know you worked so hard, but we’re sorry it took so long, we had to come to this decision,’” Kwan told Mandy Bell of MLB.com. “And I’m like, ‘I’m getting cut, that sucks.’ Kind of just preparing myself for it, but then he kind of took it a whole 180 on that and told me I made the team. So that was just a rollercoaster of emotions, but that was pretty fun.”

Little did anyone know, that surprise would launch a career that has skyrocketed the former Hillcat into the national spotlight, winning the gold glove in each of his first three seasons as a pro. In addition, he was named to his first all-star game last season, when he represented Cleveland in Texas.

This season, he remains the leadoff hitter and left fielder for the Cleveland Guardians, but his road to the majors and stardom began in Lynchburg.



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

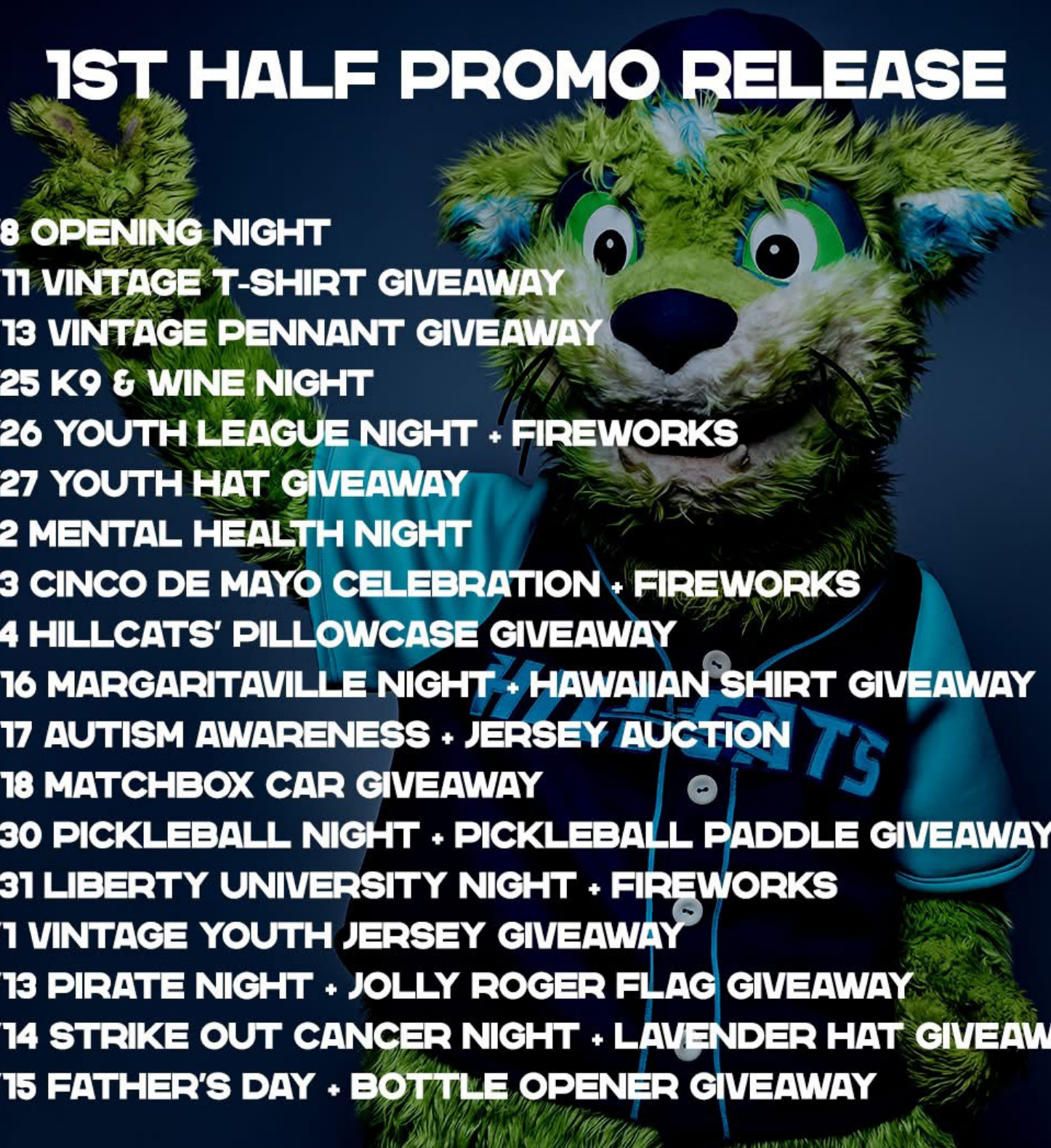
5/31 LIBERTY UNIVERSITY NIGHT + FIREWORKS

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

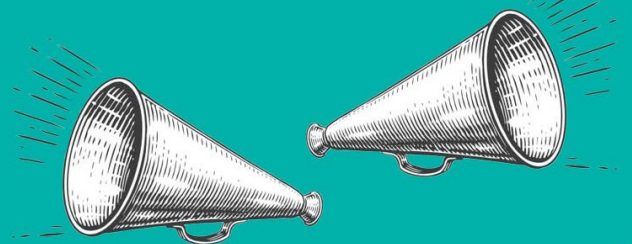
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AT AMERICA'S GRAND OL' BALLYARD



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



COLLEGE
HALF PRICE ADMISSION
PRIDE

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



DUGOUT TRAILBLAZER (COOPERSTOWN FEATURE)

By Bruce Markusen

It's difficult to fathom the pressure that Frank Robinson felt 50 years ago, as he prepared to become the first Black manager in the history of the American League. The emotional burden was enormous, given the game's conservative nature and the continuing presence of a few old-line naysayers who still questioned whether a Black man could capably guide a major league team.

As if that atmosphere of stress and anxiety was not enough, Robinson also faced the added burden of being a player. Having officially been named manager at a press conference on Oct. 3, 1974, Robinson was not just set to serve the Cleveland Indians as their manager in 1975; he had also had another prominent role to fill as the team's part-time designated hitter. By 1975, player/managers had become virtually extinct within the game. There were no other player/managers at the time, and the next player/manager would not arrive until 1977, when Joe Torre took on the dual role with the New York Mets.

Without question, Robinson faced a huge task, one that was made more difficult by Cleveland's mediocrity on the field. In 1974, the Indians had finished with a record of 77-85, placing them a distant fourth in the American League East. And in a division featuring veteran teams in Baltimore, New York, and Boston, there seemed to be little hope of the Indians emerging as a strong contender in 1975.



COOPERTOWN



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Head for Home

On the other hand, Robinson was well prepared for his first managerial go-round in the American League. As a player, he had long been regarded as one of the game's smartest and toughest competitors, as well as a clubhouse leader. He had also managed several seasons in Winter League ball, where he honed his managerial skills while guiding both veteran players and younger prospects.

As a Winter League manager, Robinson drew praise for his toughness and his general approach to the game. One of his players in the Puerto Rican Winter League, a young Reggie Jackson, raved about Robinson's calming, reasoned approach. Another Robinson quality, his ability to teach the game and its fundamentals, also drew positive reviews. That quality figured to help him in his first season at the helm of the Indians, a young team that would feature only two players in their 30s (Rico Carty and the newly acquired Boog Powell) as part of their everyday lineup.

Settling into Spring Training in Tucson, Ariz., Robinson announced a few changes in managerial policy, including the elimination of a curfew for his players, in contrast to past Indians practice. But he also made it clear that he had no interest in becoming a buddy to his players. Even though he was still just 39 years and a contemporary to the players (and still technically their teammate), he believed that he needed to draw a line of separation. Robinson was not "one of the guys." He was the boss, and his decisions would need to be respected.

One of the players who did not always agree with Robinson's methods was Gaylord Perry, the team's ace and 21-game winner in 1974. During the spring, Robinson implemented a tougher conditioning program that emphasized running and stretching as a way of cutting down on injuries. He believed that all of his players needed to follow the regimen. One day, Robinson noticed Perry taking some shortcuts during his running routine. So he called the veteran pitcher into his office and questioned whether anything was bothering him. When Perry said there was nothing wrong, Robinson admonished his star pitcher, telling Perry that he didn't appreciate his attitude. Robinson urged Perry, his most recognizable player, to set a better example for the younger players. Perry later met privately with Indians general manager Phil Seghi to request a trade, but the GM instead arranged for a meeting involving himself, Perry and Robinson. The one-hour sit-down allowed the manager and pitcher to clear the air, at least for the rest of Spring Training.

After the blow-up with Perry, Robinson's first Spring Training as manager proceeded without any other major incidents, setting the stage for the regular season. Robinson and the Indians made their way to Cleveland for their Opening Day game against the New York Yankees. Despite less-than-ideal weather conditions that included 36-degree temperatures, a large crowd of 56,715 fans gathered at Municipal Stadium on April 8 to see the historic debut of Robinson as manager. Those hardy fans also received a bonus, as Robinson penciled his own name into the lineup as the Indians' DH.

Prior to the cold-but-sunny afternoon game, Robinson met with Seghi. According to Robinson, Seghi offered the following recommendation to him: "Phil suggested to me this morning, 'Why don't you hit a homer the first time you go to the plate?'"

In response, Robinson said, "You've got to be kidding." Seghi almost certainly was joking, but his words would prove far more prophetic than anyone could have thought.

While Robinson's immediate task at hand included both playing and managing, there were also reminders that placed the nature of this Opening Day in a larger perspective. To mark Robinson's managerial debut, the Indians staged a 30-minute pregame ceremony. Several dignitaries attended, including Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. For Robinson, he was especially pleased that the ceremony included Rachel Robinson, the widow of Jackie Robinson, who had called for baseball to hire a Black manager just before his death in 1972.

According to Cleveland's newly installed manager, Rachel's presence at the ballpark kept his mind from straying. "I was very proud that (Rachel) would make the trip over there," Robinson said. "I hoped and wished that Jackie could have been there. The next best thing was having her there."

Earlier in the day, Robinson had focused on the task of filling out his first lineup card. In a manner contrary to many managers of that era, Robinson stacked the top of his batting order with his best power hitters, putting Oscar Gamble in the leadoff role, himself second, and the trio of George Hendrick, Charlie Spikes, and Boog Powell in the third, fourth, and fifth spots.

After Gamble started the bottom of the first with a foul pop to third base, Robinson stepped in to face Yankees right-hander George "Doc" Medich. Robinson fouled off three pitches in working the count to 2-and-2 before seeing a fastball low and away. It was not a bad pitch by Medich, but Robinson managed to pull it toward left field. Yankees outfielder Lou Piniella ran back to the wall and leapt, but the ball eluded his grasp and sailed into the seats. In storybook fashion, Robinson had managed to hit a home run in the first at-bat of his managerial debut – and make his general manager seem like a prophet.

As Robinson approached home plate, the fans at Municipal Stadium rewarded him with a roaring cheer. After tipping his cap to the crowd, he was immediately greeted by Gaylord Perry, Cleveland's Opening Day starter and the man who had drawn Robinson's ire during Spring Training.

"Any home run is a thrill," said Robinson to a flock of reporters after the game, "but I've got to admit, this one was a bigger thrill."

Robinson's blast gave the Indians an early 1-0 lead, but it did not last long, as the Yankees responded with three runs against Perry in the top of the second. Those runs would prove to be the extent of the offense against Perry, who settled down and finished off a complete game effort. In the meantime, the Indians rallied behind the bats of the slugging Powell, who went 3-for-3 with a home run, and Jack Brohamer, who added two hits and two RBI. The Indians won, 5-3, making Robinson the victor in his debut.

The crowd at Municipal Stadium responded to the Opening Day win as if the Indians had clinched the pennant. In the top of the ninth inning, as Perry faced the Yankees' Thurman Munson with two outs and a runner on first base, Robinson fought back some nervousness for only the second time that day (The first bout of nerves had come during the national anthem).

As the Municipal Stadium fans roared with each pitch, Munson battled Perry before hitting a routine tapper back to the mound. That resulted in the game's final out – and a large commotion in the stands. As Russell Schneider wrote in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the fans "gave the Indians a spinetingling ovation."

The fans in Cleveland seemed to appreciate the significance of the game. It was not just an Opening Day win; it was a most fitting way to make history, with the first Black manager in the American League contributing both with his decision-making and his bat.

For Robinson, the day's events had unfolded like a perfect script. "I couldn't think of any better way to start my new career," Robinson told the Associated Press. "I was extremely pleased by the way we won. It was a team effort. The guys came from behind and played together, and that's what you have to do to be successful."

As a team, the Indians would find more success in 1975 than they had in 1974, though it did not come easily. Robinson guided the Indians to a respectable record of 79-80, an improvement of three and a half games. It was also a tumultuous season, marked by frequent disagreements. In addition to the Spring Training incident with Perry, who would end up being traded in June, Robinson encountered dust-ups with Rico Carty and John Ellis. There were also many confrontations with umpires. Robinson brought his typical intensity and fire to managing, resulting in numerous on-field arguments and three ejections in 1975.

In later years, Robinson would calm his emotions, remaining old school in approach, but learning to curb his temper and select his battles more judiciously. Those adjustments helped him last for 16 seasons as a manager. In an era without wild card teams, Robinson would never lead a team to the postseason, but did earn two second-place finishes and took home American League Manager of the Year honors with Baltimore in 1989. More significantly, in taking on the pioneering task of managing, Robinson served as a trailblazer for other Black managers. Those later managers would include Larry Doby, Maury Wills, Felipe Alou, Cito Gaston, Dusty Baker, and Dave Roberts, among others.

But for all of them, it was Frank Robinson who cleared the path.

Bruce Markusen is the manager of digital and outreach learning at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

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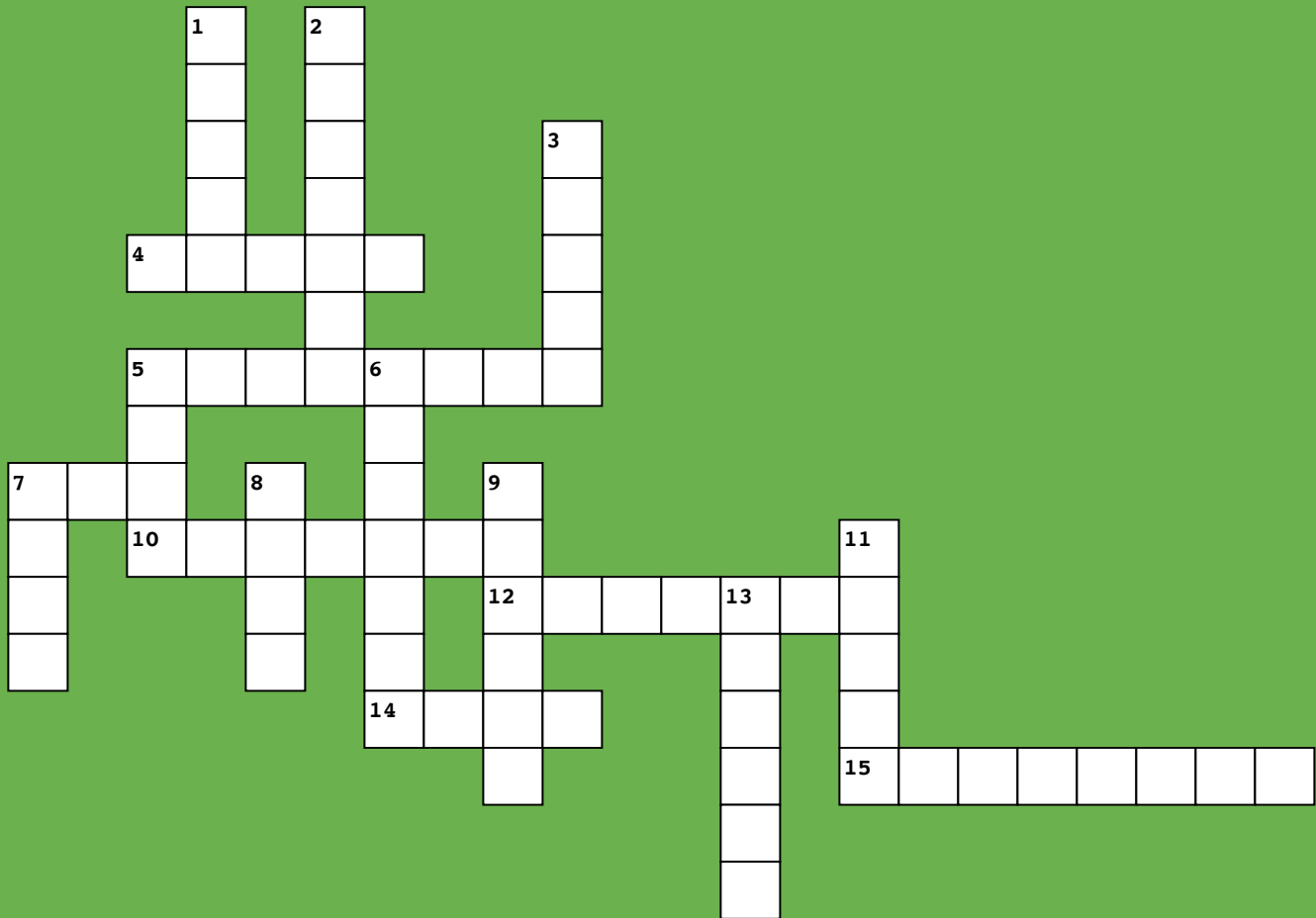
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CUTLINES

79-2005: Frank Robinson was traded to Cleveland late in the 1974 season before becoming the team's player/manager in 1975. (National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum)



SOUTHPAW'S FUN ZONE



Across

- 4.** to toss a ball
- 5.** the grassy area of the playing surface
- 7.** what you use to hit the ball
- 10.** "Bank of the James _____"
- 12.** the player on the mound
- 14.** what the infield is made of
- 15.** the mascot of the Hillcats

Down

- 1.** the manager of the Hillcats
- 2.** to win the game on the final swing
- 3.** where the pitcher stands
- 5.** three of these in each inning
- 6.** the dirt area of the playing surface
- 7.** the thing thrown
- 8.** the thing players stand on
- 9.** the person who calls balls and strikes
- 11.** what the outfield is made of
- 13.** the person who swings the bat

Limonadas

DE HILL CITY

