

1997 PORTLAND SEA DOGS

Level: AA
Location: Portland, ME
Team Record: 79-63 .556
Result: 1st in Eastern League - Northern Division
Affiliate: Florida Marlins
Manager(s): Fredi Gonzalez
Stadium: Hadlock Field
Attendance: 397,117



Ralph Milliard of the Portland Sea Dogs against Akron, 11-08-1997

SEA DOGS 3, BAYSOX 1; Portland Rally in 8th Finishes Bowie

The Washington Post August 24, 1997 | Robert Fachel
The Portland Sea Dogs rallied for two runs in the eighth inning, spoiled a marvelous performance by Bowie right-

hander Hut Smith and pulled out a 3-1 victory last night before a Prince George's Stadium record crowd of 14,105. Smith (5-3) did not allow the Class AA Eastern League's top batting club a hit from the third inning until the eighth as he clung to a 1-0 lead. But with one out, Australian outfielder Glenn Reeves rapped his sixth home run to tie it. Ralph Milliard walked, stole second and scored the winner on a two-out single by Kevin Millar, who leads the league in batting (.347) and runs batted in (125). Lionel Hastings's homer off reliever Ken Greer in the ninth completed the scoring. Portland left-hander Hector Mercado (11-2) won his eighth straight decision. He allowed four hits and one walk in eight innings while striking out 10. Bowie's run came in the fourth on two-out doubles by Bryan Bogle and Jim Foster. Portland's Ryan Jackson, one of the league's top five batters, hit into inning-ending double plays with the bases filled in both the first and third innings. In the first, his smash struck Smith and caromed to second baseman Jesse Garcia, who started the twin killing. In the third, right fielder Johnny Isom caught Jackson's line drive and nailed Reeves at the plate.

1997 CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS

Location: Fort Mill, SC
Team Record: 76-65 .539
Result: 2th in International League - West Division
Affiliate: Florida Marlins
Manager(s): CARLOS TOSCA
Stadium: Knights Stadium
Attendance: 318,102



1997 Florida Marlins

Location: Miami, FL
Team Record: 92-70 .568
Result: Finished 2nd in NL East
Affiliate: Florida Marlins
Manager(s): Jim Leyland (92-70)
Stadium: Pro Player Stadium
Attendance: 2,364,387 (5th of 14)
Postseason: Won World Series (4-3) over Cleveland Indians
Won NL Championship Series (4-2) over Atlanta Braves
Won NL Division Series (3-0) over San Francisco Giants



Marlins Update

By DAVID O'BRIEN, March 13, 1997

WEDNESDAY'S HIGHLIGHT: Devon White and Charles Johnson each went 2 for 3 with a home run and three RBI to lead the streaking Marlins past the Los Angeles Dodgers 9-1 before an overflow crowd of 8,353 at Space Coast Stadium. Mike Piazza's solo home run was one of only four hits for the Dodgers, who lost for the second consecutive day against the Marlins (15-1).

WORTH NOTING: Second base prospect Ralph Milliard went 3 for 4 with two RBI to raise his spring average to .524. ... RHP Rick Helling started for the Marlins and was charged with one run on three hits with five strikeouts in four innings.

Milliard stays hot How good a spring has it been for...

By DAVID O'BRIEN Staff Writer, March 21, 1997

Milliard stays hot How good a spring has it been for second base prospect Ralph Milliard? Consider that his batting average dropped when he went 2 for 4 with two runs and two RBI. His average slipped from .520 to .517 [15 for 29]. "He's a good-looking player," Leyland said. "I've been very impressed with him." ... Closer Robb Nen's ERA climbed to 9.53 when he gave up a two-run homer by Travis Fryman with two out in the sixth inning. "He hit it hard," said Nen, who had a walk and a strikeout in his inning of work.

Ventura of White Sox Out With Broken Leg

The Washington Post March 22, 1997

White Sox third baseman Robin Ventura broke his leg and severely dislocated his right ankle sliding into home plate in a 4-1 victory over the Red Sox last night in Sarasota, Fla. Ventura suffered a compound fracture of the tibia and fibula, and is expected to be out at least three months.

Ventura, trying to score from second base on Ray Durham's single to left, was thrown out to end the fourth inning. Ventura did not get up, holding his leg in the air with his ankle gruesomely twisted.

REDS: Barry Larkin's left heel was much improved yesterday, two days after he got a cortisone shot in a swollen bursa sac, and he could be ready by Opening Day. The shortstop has been out for a week with tenderness in the heel at the base of the Achilles' tendon. Also yesterday, the Reds lost to the Marlins, 6-5, as Ralph Milliard and Gary Sheffield hit two-run homers for Florida. The Marlins won their fourth in a row, and their 19-4 record is the best in the major leagues.

A Little More Respect for Management

The Washington Post March 23, 1997 | George F. Will

His spikes echoing in the concrete runway under the stands, Jim Leyland heads for the field, a fungo bat in one hand and a Marlboro in the other. He is basic baseball, and

what brought him here to the Florida Marlins training camp tells much about baseball today.

Build it and they will come? Developers seem to have built a ballpark here to attract not just fans but a town. A sign on the center-field fence says Viera is a neat place to live. But except for the ballpark, Viera is pretty much hypothetical. Well, first things first.

Which is fine with Leyland. Other baseball people consider him one of the premier managers, even though he is 11 games under .500 (850-861) in his 11-year managerial career. He made his name wearing Pittsburgh black, but the ink was not black there, so today he is wearing Marlins teal. The Pirates resemble what the Marlins were four seasons ago, an expansion team. Their 25 players will be paid a total of about \$10 million this year, about \$1 million less than the Giants' left fielder, Barry Bonds. Leyland will be paid about \$1.5 million, more than the combined salaries of at least three of the Pirates' eight position players. After last season, when the Marlins' Miami attendance declined for the third consecutive season (to 1.6 million; the Rockies have already sold more than 3.4 million tickets for this season), Marlins ownership, which is rich, decided to build the team the new-fashioned way, and see whether fans will come. The Marlins spent \$89 million on multiyear contracts for six big-name free agents. However, Leyland, who was weary of scuffling for victories in Pittsburgh, baseball's Bangladesh, was the Marlins' biggest catch. Baseball has finally figured out how much managers matter. Baseball is so hard to play, only a few players -- Bonds, for one -- can do everything. The rest can do some things, and a manager's job, in making out the day's lineup and during the game, is to have the right player in the right spot at the right time. Like most of the best managers (recently Tony La Russa, Sparky Anderson, Whitey Herzog, Tom Kelly and others), Leyland wasn't much of a player -- .222 average and four home runs in six minor-league seasons -- so he had to use his head. And at Pittsburgh in the years of salary-shedding he learned how to wring maximum production from marginal players. The Marlins' priciest free agent is a pitcher, Alex Fernandez, a Miami native. Before you come to his pages in the alphabetically arranged Marlins media guide, you encounter Luis Castillo from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, a town that is to middle infielders what Saudi Arabia is to oil. The Marlins also have Felix Heredia, another Dominican; Livan Hernandez, a Cuban; Ralph Milliard, from Curacao; Edgar Renteria, a Colombian; Devon White, born in Jamaica; Alex Delgado, a Venezuelan; Hector Kuilan, from Puerto Rico. Miami, of course, has a Latin accent, but so, increasingly, does major-league baseball. Last season baseball's most common surname (11) was Martinez, the second most common (10) was Perez, the fifth most common (7) was Rodriguez. Baseball today owes much to the trail blazed by people named Aparicio, Clemente, Cepeda, Marichal and Carew. Asia also is becoming an exporter of major-leaguers, but no matter where players come from, the fundamental things apply, and the Marlins' fundamentals drill today is for base runners, practicing aggressive

running when pitches are thrown in the dirt. Little things. Like many modern managers, Leyland calls all his pitchers' throws to first base. Those "throw-overs" often are intended less to pick the runner off, or even to keep him close to the base, than to cause the runner to react in a way that might reveal his behavior when he is, or is not, planning to run. Leyland is paid to notice such small clues, and the other day he did. An opposition base runner dug his left heel into the dirt when planning to steal on the next pitch. That means Leyland knows that man's habit and, perhaps by watching the other team's signals, he also knows its steal sign. "I want my guys to look like they're stealing on every pitch, because if you're playing someone like La Russa, and do one little thing different {when you are ready to steal}, he's going to pitch out." Who was the runner who dug in his heel? That is classified. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you.

Robinson revered by many players but others in baseball choose to ignore history

Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) March 23, 1997

At the 1985 World Series, Vince Coleman was asked about Jackie Robinson, whose widow had thrown out the ceremonial first pitch.

"I don't know nothin' about him," the rookie outfielder told New York Times columnist Dave Anderson. "Why are you asking me about Jackie Robinson?"

While Coleman had no knowledge of the man who broke the major league color barrier 50 years ago, others have dedicated their careers to Robinson, who died in 1972. Red Sox first baseman Mo Vaughn wears No. 42 in his honor. So does Mets third baseman Butch Huskey.

"If it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't be sitting here," Albert Belle said one day this spring. "I can remember growing up in Louisiana and having a chance to play in the South, probably experiencing some of the things he went through, playing in Mississippi and Alabama where things can get pretty nasty.

"We should be very grateful that we have the opportunity to play professional baseball because of what he's done," Belle said.

Vaughn took time off from spring training and went from Florida to New York to attend the Jackie Robinson Foundation dinner. As he posed with other athletes, he said all players should spread Robinson's gospel.

"There ought to be a national holiday for Jackie Robinson," Vaughn said. "Based on the kind of person he was, we should celebrate the anniversary of his coming into baseball every year."

Vaughn sounds almost evangelical when discussing Robinson. So does Kirby Puckett, forced to retire from the Minnesota Twins last year because of glaucoma and now the team's executive vice president.

"Sometimes people complain when we get to this level," Puckett said, watching practice at Fort Myers, Fla., as he leaned on the batting cage. "But anything these guys have to endure is nothing compared with what Jackie had to do.

You think about the young players struggling in minor-league ball, guys who should have gotten a chance but never did for whatever reason. That's tough, man. But whatever he had to endure is 100 times worse." Several players said they can't imagine the hazing Robinson went through - having to stay in different hotels, taking his clothes to different dry cleaners. "Jackie Robinson paid a price for all of us," said Hall of Famer Joe Morgan. "Because Jackie Robinson was a second baseman, I became a second baseman." Others refuse to talk about Robinson, perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps out of disinterest. Barry Bonds wouldn't discuss him when asked by two different AP reporters during spring training. But then there is Florida rookie Ralph Milliard. With No. 42 taken by Dennis Cook, Milliard chose to honor Robinson by wearing No. 21.

And Belle, the White Sox outfielder who can be volatile at times, was glowing when he talked about Robinson. "I probably couldn't have dealt with it," Belle said. "But it takes a big man to be the first in anything. You have nothing but utmost respect for what he's done for minorities in baseball. And a lot of people, especially minorities, should be grateful that he pretty much put his life on the line."

Vaughn said all black players should be taught about Robinson.

"Pay attention to the man," he said before the dinner in New York. "Make sure people appreciate what he went through and what his purpose was. They should be proud of his memory and legacy."

Leyland may have Marlins sailing

Chicago Sun-Times March 29, 1997 | George Will

VIERA, Fla. His spikes echoing in the concrete runway under the stands, Jim Leyland heads for the field, a fungo bat in one hand and a Marlboro in the other. He is basic baseball, and what brought him here to the Florida Marlins training camp tells much about baseball today. Build it and they will come? Developers seem to have built a ballpark here to attract not just fans but a town. A sign on the center-field fence says Viera is a neat place to live. But except for the ballpark, Viera is pretty much hypothetical. Well, first things first.

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already have sold more than 3.4 million tickets for this season), Marlins ownership, which is rich, decided to build the team the new-fashioned way, and see if fans will come. The Marlins spent \$89 million on multiyear contracts for six big-name free agents. However, Leyland, who was weary of scuffling for victories in Pittsburgh, baseball's Bangladesh, was the Marlins' biggest catch. Baseball finally has figured out how much managers matter. Baseball is so hard to play, only a few players - Bonds, for one - can do everything. The rest can do some things, and a manager's job, in making out the day's lineup and during the game, is to have the right player in the right spot at the right time. Like most of the best managers (recently Tony La Russa, Sparky Anderson, Whitey Herzog, Tom Kelly and others), Leyland wasn't much of a player - .222 average and four home runs in six minor-league seasons - so he had to use his head. And at Pittsburgh in the years of salary-shedding he learned how to wring maximum production from marginal players. The Marlins' priciest free agent is a pitcher, Alex Fernandez, a Miami native. Before you come to his pages in the alphabetically arranged Marlins media guide, you encounter Luis Castillo from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, a town that is to middle infielders what Saudi Arabia is to oil. The Marlins also have Felix Heredia, another Dominican; Livan Hernandez, a Cuban; Ralph Milliard, from Curacao; Edgar Renteria, a Colombian; Devon White, born in Jamaica; Alex Delgado, a Venezuelan; Hector Kuilan, from Puerto Rico. Miami, of course, has a Latin accent, but so, increasingly, does major-league baseball. Last season, baseball's most common surname (11) was Martinez, the second most common (10) was Perez, the fifth most common (7) was Rodriguez. Baseball today owes much to the trail blazed by people named Aparicio, Clemente, Cepeda, Marichal and Carew. Asia also is becoming an exporter of major-leaguers, but no matter where players come from, the fundamental things apply, and the Marlins' fundamentals drill today is for base runners, practicing aggressive running when pitches are thrown in the dirt. Little things. Like many modern managers, Leyland calls all his pitchers' throws to first base. Those "throw-overs" often are intended less to pick the runner off, or even to keep him close to the base, than to cause the runner to react in a way that might reveal his behavior when he is, or is not, planning to run. Leyland is paid to notice such small clues, and the other day he did. An opposition base runner dug his left heel into the dirt when planning to steal on the next pitch. That means Leyland knows that man's habit and, perhaps by watching the other team's signals, he also knows its steal sign. "I want my guys to look like they're stealing on every pitch, because if you're playing someone like La Russa, and do one little thing different (when you are ready to steal), he's going to pitch out." Who was the runner who dug in his heel? That is classified. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you.

George Will

Error-prone Astros hand victory to Marlins

The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) May 10, 1997 | Associated Press

Two Houston errors helped Florida load the bases in the ninth inning for Gary Sheffield, who hit an RBI single to give the Marlins a 3-2 win over the Astros Friday night. Leading off the ninth, pinch-hitter Alex Arias hit a routine grounder that went through second baseman Craig Biggio's legs. Ralph Milliard then dropped a bunt toward third baseman Tim Bogar, who dropped the ball and allowed Arias to get to third. Jim Eisenreich was intentionally walked with one out before Sheffield chopped a single down the third-base line off Jose Lima (0-2). Robb Nen (2-1) pitched the ninth for the victory. The Marlins, limited to five hits over seven innings by Houston starter Darryl Kile, tied it, 2-2, in the eighth with a run off reliever John Hudek. Moises Alou drew a one-out walk and Bobby Bonilla followed with an RBI double. Jose Gonzalez drove in both Houston runs.

Low-budget pirates now in 1st place

The Cincinnati Post (Cincinnati, OH) May 10, 1997 By Compiled from Post news services

The Pittsburgh Pirates are in first place. This is not a misprint. Jose Guillen homered and drove in three runs and Francisco Cordova, finally given some support, pitched his first career shutout as the Pirates continued tormenting the NL's top teams, beating Atlanta 9-0 Friday night. PHILLIES 3, ROCKIES 1 - Calvin Maduro combined with two relievers on a four-hitter and Rico Brogna drove in two runs lifting Philadelphia. Maduro (3-3), beaten 9-0 by Colorado in his last start on May 4, allowed two hits in seven innings to improve to 3-0 at home this season. MARLINS 3, ASTROS 2 - Two Houston errors helped Florida load the bases in the ninth inning for Gary Sheffield, who hit an RBI single with one out to give Florida the win. Leading off the ninth, pinch-hitter Alex Arias hit a routine grounder that went through second baseman Craig Biggio's legs. Ralph Milliard then dropped a bunt toward third baseman Tim Bogar, who dropped the ball and allowed Arias to get to third. Jim Eisenreich was intentionally walked with one out before Sheffield chopped a single down the third-base line off Jose Lima (0-2). Robb Nen (2-1) pitched the ninth for the victory.

Lamont, pitching are the keys to Pirates' surprising success

Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN) May 11, 1997 | Souhan, Jim

Maddux under watchful eyes

Yes, Atlanta ace Greg Maddux is still pitching exceptionally well. He just isn't pitching exceptionally long.

Over the past nine seasons, Maddux has averaged 242 innings (even counting 202 in the 1994 strike season) and never has come close to visiting the disabled list. The Maddux of 1997 is a little different. Atlanta continues to handle Maddux carefully. Although the team denies he is on a pitch count to protect a tender right hamstring, Maddux has been allowed to throw more than 80 pitches only once in his past five starts, working past the seventh inning only once.

Wednesday, Maddux was pulled with two outs in the eighth inning of a 2-1 game after giving up a double to Ralph Milliard. To that point, he had been magnificent, having thrown 79 pitches and allowing two men past second base. But after Maddux left, Mark Wohlers served up a single to the first man he faced - light-hitting Edgar Renteria - and went on to blow the save.

Marlins' Boles likes to get close to the action with Cougars

Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, IL) July 22, 1997 | Bush, Joe

Florida Marlins vice president of player development John Boles was in Geneva for the Cougars' four-game set with Cedar Rapids last weekend. It was business as usual for the 48-year-old South Side of Chicago native who oversees the Marlins' minor-league system, one of the best in the game. Boles met with Cougars manager Lynn Jones and his coaches and players before the games, watched the games like a scout, then visited with the team afterward. Every minor-league coordinator follows the same routine, but very few can give what Boles does during batting practice and infield two hours before gametime.

Boles, who until this season did double duty as the Marlins' minor-league field coordinator (a roving coach), dons a practice uniform and hits fungoes and grounders and works individually with players. If Boles is a suit, that suit has a cap, stirrups and cleats. "He's one of us," Jones said.

Boles can think of just a few other men in his position who participate with his charges. Maybe more should - the Marlins' farm system was ranked third by Baseball America. "I really like it that way," Boles said. "When you're out there working with somebody with their bunting or their outfield play, they look at you as a uniformed guy and not an office guy.

"If you have the ability to instruct and get in the uniform, I think it's beneficial."

The Lewis University grad can boast of one more thing his peers can't - major-league managing experience. After the Marlins fired Rene Lachemann on July 7, 1996, Boles guided the squad to a 40-35 record. Boles had last managed, at the Triple-A level, in 1986.

He doesn't think it lends him much credibility with his minor leaguers - he and Jones agree today's ballplayer doesn't love the game and its tradition - but he thinks it improved his player-evaluation skills.

"When you're up there on a regular basis, you can really see who can (play) and who can't, and it gives you a good

indicator as to what certain guys in your system have to do to measure up with that level of play," Boles said.

It has been quite a year for Boles and the Marlins, who hired Jim Leyland as manager, spent \$89 million on free-agents and recently were put up for sale.

Boles has been busy preparing for the November expansion draft, from which each major-league team can protect 15 players with at least three years' minor- or major-league service or who are on the major-league roster.

After a player is taken in each of the draft's three rounds, a team can protect three more of its players.

Boles' protective priority is his prospects, and that job is made easier because many of them - like 1996 Cougars Jaime Jones and Nate Rolison - have played less than three years and so are exempt from the clutches of Tampa Bay and Arizona.

Nevertheless, many other prospects - like ex-Cougars Todd Dunwoody and Ralph Milliard - are not exempt, and tough decisions have to be made. "We're not going to trick Tampa Bay or Arizona," Boles said. "Ourselves and a couple other organizations are really being zeroed in on because we've got some pretty good players. "We know we're going to lose three quality people, we just hope that they're not the people we really want to keep. It's a crapshoot, really. "I've come up with seven different lists, and it's amazing how your lists change from spring training to this current date. I just did one the other day, and it changed dramatically from the beginning of the year."

When all facets of Boles' duties are considered, it's no wonder a trip to Kane County is something less than a homecoming.

"There's just no time to do anything special," he said.

"Friends will say, 'Oh, I heard you were in town and you didn't call me.' There's just no time. "There's a misconception - people think you get (to the park) five minutes before the game, and you go get 'em. We're here early, and after the game you're talking to staff members late. It's very busy.

"The only time I'd have to socialize would be coming back to Chicago during the off-season because during the season it's just impossible."

Boles graduated from Lewis in 1970 and served as the school's baseball coach from 1973-79. He began his pro baseball career in 1981 as a manager in the White Sox system and earned Class A manager of the year honors in 1983. He was hired by the Kansas City organization and managed at Triple-A Omaha until being promoted to the Royals director of player development post in 1986.

In 1989, Boles joined Montreal as minor-league coordinator before being boosted to director of player development in 1990.

He joined the expansion Marlins in 1991, coming over with current Marlins general manager Dave Dombrowski among other Expos front-office staff. The coaching and managerial background is what enables Boles to literally mold the Marlins of the future.

"He gets to know each and every one of us on a personal basis, and it makes it that much better," said Cougars first

baseman Jason Garrett. "He has total power over everybody's career in this room. It's kind of intimidating at times, but he does his best to not be as intimidating as you sometimes believe it could be.

"You would be a whole lot more tentative if you looked up and your head of the minor leagues was just in the stands

writing the whole time and you never got to talk to him, never got to interact. "Bolesy's always in the clubhouse and he's always out on the field with us. He's a real hands-on kind of guy. I think it's awesome."