

# 4,000 AND COUNTING

Hello Dragons fans. I am Tom Nichols, and for the last 11 years, I have been the broadcaster for the Dragons on radio and television. I recently passed a milestone in my career in Minor League Baseball, a career that began in 1988 when the longtime voice of the Indianapolis Indians, Howard Kellman, gave me my first chance. On August 8th, I called my 4,000th Minor League game.

I have worked for seven teams over my 31 years in the Minor Leagues, and over one-third of that time has come with the Dragons. I have worked at all levels, including Triple-A, Double-A, Single-A, and professional independent baseball. In my first year with Indianapolis, our team featured "The Big Unit," Randy Johnson, who would go on to be inducted in the National Baseball Hall-of-Fame. My first year as the primary voice of a team came two years later, in 1990, when our team in Kinston, North Carolina included Jim Thome, who would go on to become one of the greatest home run hitters in baseball history and went into the Hall-of-Fame at Cooperstown just a few weeks ago.

My time with the Dragons has included many of the most exciting moments of my career. Some of the most amazing days involved thrilling games or player achievements, and some of the others were tremendous personal events that meant something just to me, as someone who grew up a huge baseball fan and then got to spend a huge chunk of my life working in the game. Here are some of my favorite moments with the Dragons, divided into two categories: Baseball Thrills, and Personal Moments.

## BASEBALL THRILLS

- Jose Siri's record-breaking 39-game hitting streak in 2017. This was the most exciting day-to-day story of my career. A hitting streak in baseball is unique. Every day brings increased drama as the streak builds. Every at-bat is exciting. Siri broke the league record, which had stood for 40 years, in a two-strike hole in his last chance of the game. I will never forget it.
- Billy Hamilton's 100th stolen base in the 2011 season. If you have heard me talk about Billy Hamilton, you know about my enthusiasm for the speedster who I identify as the most exciting single player I have ever had the pleasure to watch play.
- The first no-hitter in Dragons history in 2017. This was even more special to me because it also happened to be the first no-hitter I ever called for the home team, in my 30th year as a broadcaster.
- The Dragons victory in the final game of the first round of the 2017 playoffs. The 2017 season was special, but this game was truly incredible. We were huge underdogs in West Michigan, had the game all but locked up, only to see West Michigan come back to tie with two outs in the bottom of the ninth, an absolute punch to the gut. But the Dragons responded by scoring in the 10th and won, advancing to the league semi-finals for the first time in nine years.



- Seth Mejias-Brean's "Ultimate Grand Slam" in 2013. This game had the greatest ending I have ever seen. We were down by three runs in the bottom of the ninth inning at Fifth Third Field, managed to load the bases, and Mejias-Brean blasted the ball out of the ballpark. Four runs, and put this one in the win column.
- Hunter Greene's 100 mph debut. The arrival in Dayton of our 18-year-old flame-thrower in 2018 was something special. We had heard a lot about him, but when he let loose his very first pitch at Fifth Third Field, with a press box packed full of local, regional, and national media, and the board lit up at 100 mph, I could not believe it. Of course, he later hit 102.

## PERSONAL MOMENTS

- The most amazing moment of my 31-year career came in 2017 when I got to announce part of the Futures Game at Fifth Third Field on the Reds Radio Network with Jeff Brantley. My first Major League broadcast after so many years! It was something I had always dreamed of, and I did not know whether to laugh or cry. It was very emotional for me and my parents, a day I will remember forever.
- Dragons sell-out #815. When the Dragons broke the all-time sell-out streak record in 2011, it meant so much to me, because from that day forward, every one of my co-workers, every fan who had ever come to a game, and every player who had played on our field, could know they were part of something that had never happened before, in any league, any sport, any city.
- The Joe Morgan game. What began as a normal day earlier this season became a career highlight. Reds legend Joe Morgan was in the press box for a Dragons game, and I invited him to join me on the TV broadcast for one inning. He was a bit reluctant at first, but eventually agreed. "Little Joe" was one of my heroes growing up as a huge fan of the Big Red Machine in Muncie, Indiana, and when he came on our telecast, he seemed to enjoy our conversation as much as I did. When the first inning ended, he asked to stay for another. And then another, and another. At the end, Joe told me that any time he was ever back at a Dragons game, he would join me on the broadcast. It was a great night for me, and hopefully, our viewers.
- Our season with Ken Griffey Sr. In 2010, former Reds star Ken Griffey Sr. was our hitting coach. I never called him Senior because as I told him, to me, he was just Ken Griffey, the right fielder and #2 hitter with the Big Red Machine. Over the season, we had many great conversations about games from my golden years as a fan. He was a great guy and became a friend.
- First home broadcast with the Dragons. In 2008, we opened the season on the road, but my first home broadcast was a TV game. I invited former Reds pitcher Jim O'Toole, who has since passed, to do the broadcast with me. He was great! While Mr. O'Toole's career ended before I was old enough to follow baseball, but he had many, many stories of facing Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and a World Series against Mickey Mantle and the Yankees. He was a special man.



There is an old song by Mac Davis that I like to refer to when reflecting on my career. It was called "Rock and Roll I Gave You the Best Years of My Life." When I think back on my 31 years in the game, and now, 4,000 broadcasts that have passed, I say to myself, "Baseball, You Gave Me the Best Years of My Life."