

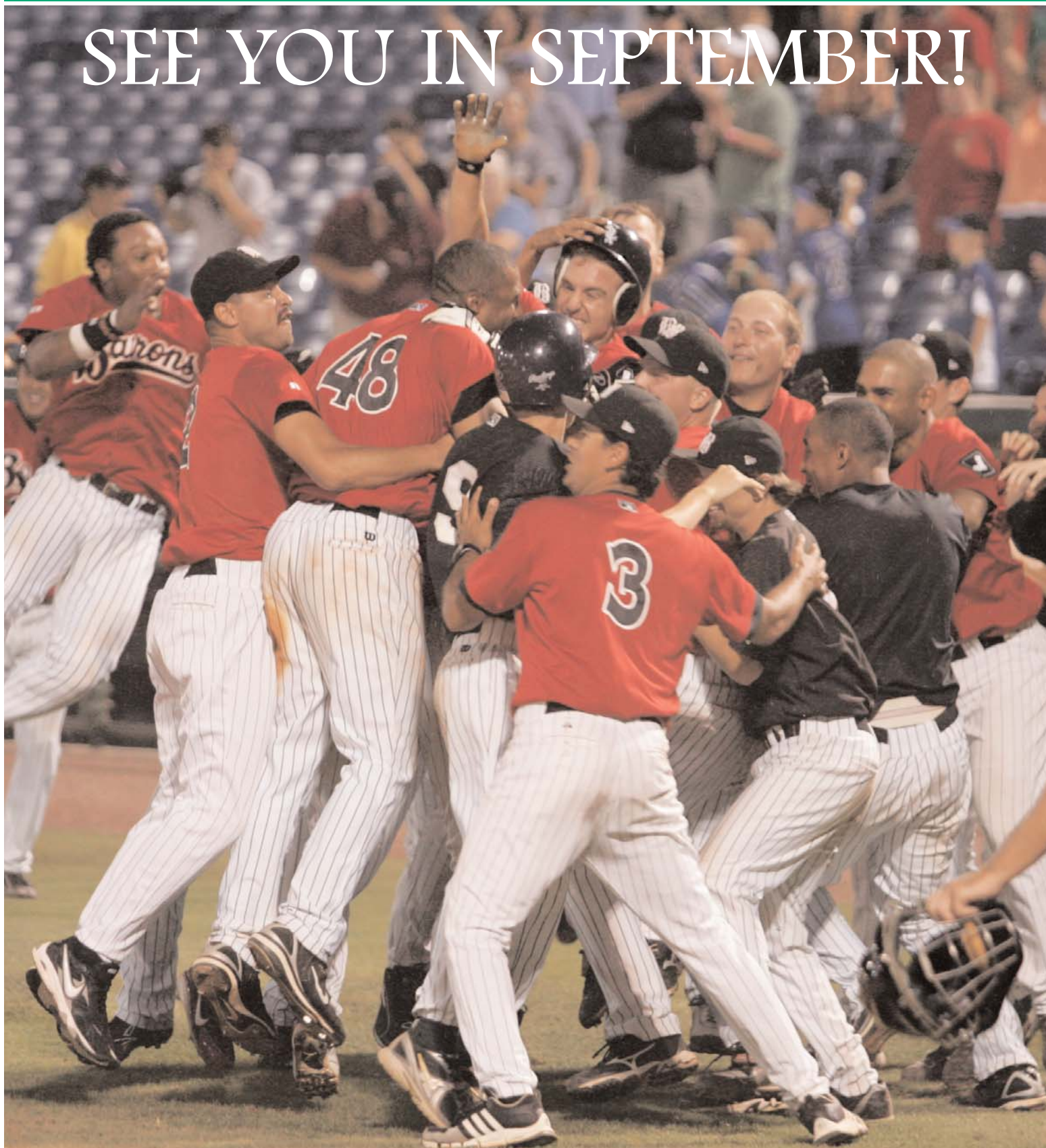
# SOUTHERN BASES

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## SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!



*The Birmingham Barons celebrate after clinching the first-half title in the South Division on June 9. Another on-field celebration took place eight days later when West Tenn won the league's first one-game playoff since 2000.*



# SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!

On the night the Boston Celtics captured their NBA-record 17th championship, the Huntsville Stars were shooting for a record of their own in the Southern League.

After finishing the first half tied with the West Tenn Diamond Jaxx atop the North Division standings with a 41-29 record, the Stars conveniently hosted the Diamond Jaxx in the opener of the second half on June 17. Per Southern League rules, if two teams are tied for the lead in divisional standings at the end of the first half, their first meeting of the second half would determine the champion.

Huntsville, which led by as many as five games at one point, was aiming for its fourth consecutive half-season title. No team had done that since the Southern League instituted the split-season schedule in 1976.

There certainly was a playoff atmosphere at Joe Davis Stadium, where bus loads full of Diamond Jaxx fans arrived over an hour before the first pitch. Reese Smith III and General Manager Tom Hanson also came out to support West Tenn's cause along with the mayor of Jackson, Jerry Gist.

Stars General Manager Buck Rogers had over 40 bottles of champagne ready in the event Huntsville emerged victorious on the one-year anniversary of the team's last first-half title celebration. Entering the first-half finale tied atop the division with Tennessee, Huntsville edged Birmingham, 3-2, to guarantee at least a tie in 2007. Later that day, West Tenn posted a 4-3 victory at Tennessee to prevent the need for the playoff.

On the final day of the first half this year, both the Stars and Diamond Jaxx were on the losing end of games decided by one run to set up the Southern League's first one-game tiebreaker since Greenville defeated Orlando on July 25, 2000. The year before that, Huntsville hosted a one-game playoff against West Tenn on July 15 to determine a first-half champion in the Western Division. The Diamond Jaxx prevailed in that game to reach the postseason for the first time.

The second one-game showdown between Huntsville and West Tenn in 10 seasons promised a showcase of the league's two best offenses. The Stars led the league with a .297 average, 413 runs scored and 78 home runs, while the Diamond Jaxx were second in all three categories with a .275 average, 359 runs and 57 homers.

West Tenn entered the game with the hotter offense, having led the league with a .286 average in the first half of June. That offense needed little time to click as Brent Johnson led off with a solid single to center. After an error and a sacrifice put two runners in scoring position, Mike Wilson smashed a double to straightaway center field to give the Diamond Jaxx an early two-run advantage.

The two-run double gave Wilson 11 RBI in a four-game span. He collected five RBI in a rain-shortened 12-4 win against Chat-

tanooga on June 13 as the Diamond Jaxx pulled into a first-place tie. Wilson drove in four more runs in an 8-2 victory over the Lookouts that preserved the deadlock atop the North Division.

After Huntsville scratched for an unearned run in the second inning, Adam Moore restored West Tenn's two-run advantage with an RBI single. It was Moore's 12th RBI in 11 games against the Stars in 2008. He had 26 RBI in 53 games against the rest of the league in the first half.

Luis Valbuena added another blow to Huntsville's chance at history with a two-run single in the sixth inning. After falling behind 0-2, Valbuena worked the count even before belting a line drive to center field that chased Stars starting pitcher Steve Hammond from the game.

The offense produced 10 hits against Hammond, leaving lefthander Ryan Ketchner to handle the rest. Ketchner, who had lost a matchup with Hammond just 12 days earlier, allowed just four hits and an unearned run in 7 1/3 innings before turning the game over to the bullpen. Shawn Kelley issued a one-out walk to Matt LaPorta in the bottom of the ninth inning, but induced Cole Gillespie to bounce into a 6-4-3 double play to seal a 5-1 victory and begin an on-field celebration behind the mound.

The Diamond Jaxx continued celebrating their first playoff berth since 2005 by dousing each other with beer in the clubhouse. The same method of celebration took place in Birmingham eight days earlier, when the Barons secured their first postseason appearance in three years.

The only team over .500 in the South Division since May 2, Birmingham was all but assured the half-season title after the first week of June. The only question seemed to be whether or not the Barons would celebrate the title at Regions Park.

With their magic number down to one following a 12-4 victory against Montgomery on June 7, Birmingham had two remaining home games before finishing the first half with a five-game series in Carolina. Unable to clinch in their penultimate home game of the half, the Barons did not let their final opportunity to share the first-half title with their home fans go to waste - and they did so in dramatic fashion.

On June 9, David Cook's sacrifice fly in the bottom of the 10th inning scored Robert Hudson with the winning run in a 4-3 triumph. It was the third RBI of the game for Cook, who was Birmingham's most feared offensive threat in the first half.

Cook was runner-up in balloting for Southern League Player of the Month honors in May after batting .404 (38-for-94) with nine homers, 20 RBI and 29 runs scored. His game-winning sacrifice fly may have been his final contribution to the Barons as he was promoted to Triple-A Charlotte three days later.

Cook's clutch flyball sealed Birmingham's first postseason appearance since 2005, when the Barons completed a league record-tying string of six straight seasons with a playoff berth. A new streak could be in store for Birmingham, which moved into sole possession of third place on the Southern League's all-time list with its 13th playoff appearance. Only Jacksonville (16) and Tennessee (14) have more since 1971.

Huntsville, which owned a Southern League-best 29-11 record on May 14, missed out on a chance to join Birmingham with its 13th playoff berth. The Stars will get another shot at No. 13 in the second half, but their quest for Southern League history went unfulfilled. Now Birmingham and West Tenn are the active leaders in consecutive berths.



# PLAYER OF THE MONTH



## MAT GAMEL ~ HUNTSVILLE STARS

AVG	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	SLG
.387	124	28	48	11	0	8	28	1	.669



Huntsville Stars third baseman Mat Gamel was named the Topps Player of the Month for May, as selected by the Southern League field managers. The Topps Company of New York, in conjunction with Minor League Baseball, presents the award each month to the top performer in each of the 10 full-season leagues.

Batting third in one of the minors' most potent lineups, Gamel ranked third in the Southern League with a .387 average and second with 28 RBI during the month. He also paced all of Double A with 48 hits and 83 total bases for the Stars, who batted .306 in May to become the Southern League's first team to collectively hit over .300 for a full calendar month since June of 2005.

Gamel singled on May 1 to extend a hitting streak to 16 games, a mark that stands as the longest in the league this season. He also singled on May 31 to extend his on-base streak to 46 games - a streak that was lengthened to a minor league season-best 53 games before being broken on June 8. In between those singles, Gamel pounded out 19 extra-base hits and produced 17 multi-hit games, including a dozen in the month's final 19 days.

A native of Neptune Beach, FL, Gamel established a personal season high with five RBI in an 11-3 victory at Montgomery on May 4. Four days later, he began an 11-game hitting streak that featured five homers and 11 RBI. Another double-digit hitting streak was born on May 22, when he singled twice to kick off a 13-game streak.

Consistency is nothing new to Gamel, who put together a 33-game hitting streak while with Class-A Brevard County last year. It fell just three games shy of matching the longest hitting streak in the Florida State League's history. In 2008, Gamel has accounted for three of the league's first 16 hitting streaks lasting more than 10 games.

The 22-year-old Gamel homered in three straight games both from May 8-10 and May 28-30, and his 13 home runs through the season's first two months left him just four shy of matching his career high. Gamel had nine home runs in 128 games with Brevard County last year before topping Hawaii Winter Baseball with eight during the offseason. In his first full campaign after being selected by the Milwaukee Brewers in the fourth round of the 2005 draft, Gamel belted 17 home runs for West Virginia of the South Atlantic League in 2006.

An integral piece to Huntsville's drive for a first-half title in the Southern League's North Division, Gamel hit safely in all 11 games against division rivals in May. Through the end of the month, he was leading the Southern League with a .383 average while sharing the top spot with teammate Matt LaPorta with 48 RBI.





# SOUTHERN LEAGUE NOTES



18, **RHP Justin Cassel** matched zeros with Suns ace James McDonald for seven innings. **RHP Fernando Hernandez** allowed a run to break the scoreless tie in the ninth, but the Barons rallied for two in the bottom half for their fourth walk-off win of the season.

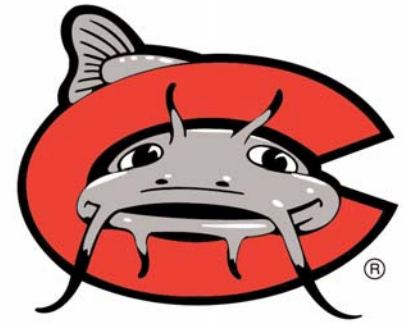
• The first 1,000 adults arriving to the game against the Jacksonville Suns on Friday, June 20 will receive a Frank Thomas bobblehead. Thomas hit .323 with 18 homers and 71 RBI with the Barons in 1990 before beginning his major league career that summer. Currently a member of the Oakland Athletics, Thomas ranks 19th all-time with 520 career homers.

• **OF David Cook**, reached base safely by hit or walk in each of his final 25 games with the Barons before being promoted to Triple A. He then reached base safely in each of his first eight games with Charlotte of the International League. ... On June

• **RHP Ryan Tucker** made his major league debut against the Cincinnati Reds on June 8, allowing one run and two hits in five innings of a 9-2 win. Tucker was leading the Southern League with a 1.41 ERA upon his promotion. ... **OF John Raynor** scored after stealing second base in the first, fifth and ninth innings in a 3-2 victory against Birmingham on June

12. The next night, Raynor singled home the go-ahead run in the eighth inning of a 5-2 win against the Barons. Through June 19, he was leading the league with 26 steals - seven more than his closest competitor.

• The first 1,200 kids ages 15 and under arriving to the game against Huntsville on Saturday, June 28 will receive a Tim Wakefield bobblehead. Wakefield established the Mudcats' single-season record with 15 wins in 1991 and finished third in National League Rookie of the Year voting in 1992 after going 8-1 with a 2.15 ERA for Pittsburgh. The knuckleballer ranks 13th among active major league pitchers with 172 wins.



• **SS Chris Valaika** had five singles and **OF Danny Dorn** went 4-for-6 with a pair of solo homers as Chattanooga matched a league season high with 21 hits in an 8-6 victory over Tennessee on June 6. The Lookouts stranded a whopping 15 runners on base as only five of their hits came with runners in scoring position. ... **RHP Robert Manuel**, who did not surrender an earned run in his first 16 innings of 2008, finished the first half with a 1.51 ERA and 47 strikeouts in 35 2/3 frames. Manuel allowed just 26 hits and eight walks. ... Through June 19, **SS Eric Eymann** hit .341 (56-for-164) in 44 games after posting a .173 average in April.



• The first 1,000 fans arriving at AT&T Field to see Chattanooga host the Carolina Mudcats on Friday, June 20 will receive a Lookouts replica batting helmet. The helmet is strikingly similar to the one worn by Lookouts first base/hitting coach Jamie Dismuke, who was a slugging first baseman for the Lookouts back in the 1990s. In 1993, Dismuke led Chattanooga with 20 homers and 91 RBI while hitting .306. He produced another 20-homer campaign two years later for the Lookouts, who reached the Southern League Championship Series in 1995.



Southern League leader with 19 home runs in the first half, crashed into the right-field wall while making a catch in the first inning against West Tenn on June 18. He was replaced by **OF Freddy Parejo**, who went 2-for-2 with a run scored and a stolen base in Huntsville's come-from-behind 7-5 victory. Parejo also drew a walk, just his third free pass in 50 games. ... Since finishing April with a pedestrian .257 average, **SS Alcides Escobar** has batted .376 (74-for-197) with 16 stolen bases in 46 games through June 19.

• The first 2,500 fans arriving to see the Stars take on the West Tenn Diamond Jaxx on Saturday, June 21 will receive a free baseball bat presented by Lynn Layton Chevrolet, WAFF 48 and WDRM 102.1 FM.

• **LHP Steve Hammond** allowed just two hits in 6 2/3 innings as Huntsville became the first team to reach the 40-win plateau in the Southern League in 2008 with a 5-0 victory at Jacksonville on June 11. In 2007, when the Stars won both halves in the North Division, the team did not reach 40 wins until June 24. ... **OF Matt LaPorta**, the

• Making his second Double-A start on June 12, **LHP Cody White** allowed just one run and three hits in 6 2/3 innings of a 10-1 win against Huntsville, which entered the game with a .302 team batting average.

**OF Adam Godwin** reached base in all five plate appearances with two singles, a double and two walks. ... Through June 19, the Suns were the only team in the Southern League to own a perfect record in games when leading after eight innings (33-0) yet be winless when either tied (0-5) or trailing (0-31) entering the ninth. ... **RHP James McDonald** gave up just three hits - all singles - in seven scoreless innings at Birmingham on June 18. It marked the ninth consecutive start in which he allowed three runs or fewer, a string that lowered his ERA from 5.27 to 3.52. McDonald was tied for the league lead with 79 strikeouts through June 19.



• When the Suns host the Chattanooga Lookouts on Saturday, June 28, it will be Southern Rock Night at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville. The Suns will wear specialty jerseys that will be auctioned off during the game. The first 1,500 fans will receive a Suns replica cap, and all fans are invited to enjoy a rock concert after the game from the Lizard Skinners.



# SOUTHERN LEAGUE NOTES



• **OF Jordan Schafer** hit a three-run homer in the first inning and added a solo shot in the third to lead Mississippi to a 6-4 victory at Mobile on June 6. In his first five games after serving a 50-game suspension, Schafer hit .381 (8-for-21) with three homers and nine RBI. ... In his first at-bat after being activated from the disabled list, **OF Reid Gorecki** launched a three-run homer to lead Mississippi to a 5-2 victory against Tennessee on June 11. Gorecki

added three more hits the next night, giving him hits in each of his first 10 games as a Brave. ... **RHP Luis Valdez** worked a perfect ninth inning at Montgomery on June 18 to pick up a save and extend his streak to 24 consecutive outings without allowing an earned run - a span covering 27 1/3 innings.

• Wednesday, June 25 will be Kids Night at Trustmark Park when the Braves host the second of six games against the Birmingham Barons. All kids ages 14 and under can get field box seats for \$2 and a fun-zone wristband for \$5 (regularly \$10).

• The Biscuits were the only Southern League team without a shutout this year before recording a 13-inning, 1-0 victory at Mobile on Friday, June 13. **RHP Wade Davis** allowed four hits in the first seven innings and **1B Gaby Martinez** scored on a fielder's choice in the 13th, ending a game that tied for the longest in terms of innings in team history. ... **RHP Ryan Reid** finished the first half by not allowing a run in nine innings following a promotion from Class-A Vero Beach on June 2. He gave up two hits and recorded 12 strikeouts and a pair of saves in that span. In his first second-half outing, he allowed five runs in a 7-2 loss to Mississippi.



• **RHP Reid Mahon** converted each of his 16 save opportunities in the first half, extending his streak to 23 consecutive successful conversions dating to last year. In his first full professional season, Mahon recorded 21 saves in 2007 to rank second in the Diamondbacks organization. ... One day after returning to the club from Triple A, reigning Southern League batting champion **1B Javier Brito** produced a two-run single in the bottom of the eighth inning to yield a 2-1 victory against Montgomery on June 15. ... The BayBears endured a 1-0 loss to Biscuits on June 13 in 13 innings. With that setback, Mobile fell to 0-4 in extra-inning games this season and remained the league's only team without an extra-inning victory in 2008.

• JaMarcus Russell will be at Hank Aaron Stadium on Friday, June 27 to throw out a ceremonial first pitch before the BayBears host Montgomery. Russell, the first overall pick in the 2007 NFL draft by the Oakland Raiders, grew up in Mobile and starred at Louisiana State University. He ranks second in LSU history with 52 career touchdown passes.

• It will be Military Appreciation Night at Riverwalk Stadium when the Biscuits host the Mississippi Braves on Saturday, June 21. Festivities beginning at 6:45 p.m. include a ceremonial first pitch being thrown on behalf of Lt. General Allen Peck, AU Commander and a flyover by the 187th Fighter Wing. Maxwell Air Force Base Honor Guard will do the colors and Maxwell-Gunter Men's Chorale will perform God Bless America during the seventh inning. There also will be a fireworks spectacular after the game.



• **RHP James Russell** went five hitless innings and combined with **RHP Kevin Hart** to give up just two hits in eight frames at Mississippi on June 14. However, a run in the 10th resulted in a 2-1 defeat, extending Tennessee's losing streak to a season-high eight games. The Smokies ended

the skid the next day with a 6-4 triumph to conclude the season's first half on a positive note. **2B Nate Spears** went 3-for-3 with two RBI in the victory, giving him a .465 average (20-for-43) and nine RBI in his first 14 games of June. Spears had 11 RBI after the season's first two months. ... **3B Josh Lansford**, son of former American League batting champion Carney, joined the club on June 19.

• When the Smokies host the Mobile BayBears on Saturday, June 21, it will be Pink Ribbon Survivor Night at Smokies Park. Players and coaches will wear commemorative pink jerseys which will be auctioned off after the game. All proceeds will benefit the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The next day will be Buffet Day, with fans receiving a \$2 ticket discount for arriving to Smokies Park wearing a Hawaiian shirt. Cheeseburgers and Coronas will be available for \$2, and the Jimmy Buffet tribute band Key West will perform postgame.

• **LHP Justin Thomas** struck out a season-high 10 batters without issuing a walk in a five-hit, 2-0 win at Huntsville on June 8, pulling the Diamond Jaxx into a first-place tie with the Stars. Thomas retired the final 11 batters he faced en route to his first shutout since August 19, 2006. In his next start on June 14 against Chattanooga, Thomas allowed two runs in seven innings of an 8-2 win that kept West Tenn tied for first in the division. After posting the fourth-worst ERA in the Southern League during May (6.27), Thomas sported a 1.71 ERA in his first three starts of June. ... One day after the Diamond Jaxx clinched the first-half title in the North Division, **OF Mike Saunders** was promoted to Triple A. Saunders had three hits, including a homer, in his second game with Tacoma on June 19. That same night, Saunders' replacement in center field for the Diamond Jaxx, **OF Greg Halman**, homered leading off the 11th inning to give West Tenn a 4-3 triumph at Huntsville. It was the first hit at the Double-A level for Halman, who was 0-for-8 with four strikeouts before that blast. At the time of his promotion, Halman was atop the Class-A California League with 19 home runs.



• Myron Noodelman will be at Pringles Park to entertain fans when the Diamond Jaxx host Tennessee on Thursday, June 26.





# WEEKLY AWARDS

## SOUTHERN LEAGUE HITTER AND PITCHER OF THE WEEK JUNE 2-8, 2008

### HITTER OF THE WEEK

#### CAMERON MAYBIN ~ CAROLINA MUDCATS



Regarded as one of the game's top prospects, outfielder Cameron Maybin has put his immense talent to work since the calendar flipped to June. The 21-year-old Maybin led the league with a 1.000 slugging percentage during the week thanks to seven extra-base hits, including three homers. He began the period with three hits, including a triple and a two-run homer, against Montgomery on June 2. He cranked a solo homer in the opener of a five-game series against Jacksonville on June 6 and capped a four-run sixth inning with a two-run double in a 7-5 victory over the Suns the next day. On June 8, the native of Asheville, NC extended both his hitting streak to nine games and his RBI streak to eight with a first-inning home run in a 3-1 triumph. Maybin, who was acquired in the offseason trade that sent former Southern League star Miguel Cabrera to Detroit, hit .448 with five homers and 11 RBI in his first seven games of June after batting .244 with seven homers in the season's first two months.

AVG	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	SLG
.400	25	6	10	2	2	3	9	0	1.000

### PITCHER OF THE WEEK

#### DAVID WELCH ~ HUNTSVILLE STARS



Lefthander David Welch celebrated his 25th birthday in style on June 2, pitching the Stars' first individual no-hitter in 15 years in the second game of a doubleheader at Chattanooga. Bidding for the league's first perfect game since 2003, Welch issued a two-out walk in the sixth inning before settling for Huntsville's first individual no-hitter since Tanyon Sturtze accomplished the feat on June 13, 1993, also against the Lookouts. Five days later, the native of Australia allowed two runs - one earned - and six hits in six innings of a 7-2 win against West Tenn. The victory gave Huntsville sole possession of first place in the North Division. It was Welch's sixth straight win and league-leading eighth overall.

W-L	SV	ERA	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
2-0	0	0.69	13	6	2	1	5	7	0



# WEEKLY AWARDS

## SOUTHERN LEAGUE HITTER AND PITCHER OF THE WEEK JUNE 9~15, 2008

### HITTER OF THE WEEK

#### CHRIS COGHLAN ~ CAROLINA MUDCATS

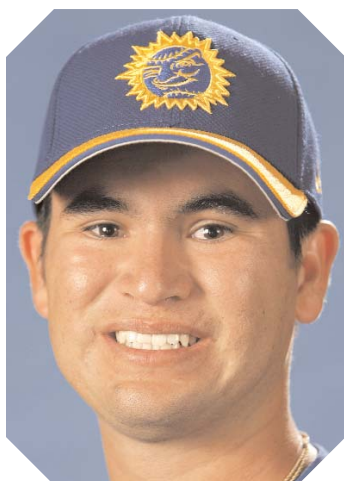


The second Mudcat in as many weeks to earn hitting honors, second baseman Chris Coghlan tied for the league lead with nine RBI and produced a .733 slugging percentage thanks to a league-best six extra-base hits. Coghlan began the period with his second career multi-homer game, connecting twice against Jacksonville's Marlon Arias on June 9. Three days later, the native of Tarpon Springs, FL ripped a two-out, run-scoring double in the bottom of the ninth inning to give Carolina a 3-2 victory against Birmingham. On June 13, Coghlan's two-run triple completed a pivotal three-run, eighth-inning rally in a 5-2 triumph against the Barons. Coghlan completed the first half with hits on June 15 - three days before his 23rd birthday - to cap a 10-game homestand in which he batted .361 (13-for-36).

AVG	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	SLG
.367	30	5	11	3	1	2	9	0	.733

### PITCHER OF THE WEEK

#### JESUS CASTILLO ~ JACKSONVILLE SUNS



Although the Suns were eliminated from the first-half title chase in the South Division earlier in the month, righthander Jesus Castillo played a key role in setting up drama in the league's other division on June 15. After a rain delay of nearly 3 ½ hours, the 24-year-old Castillo limited the Huntsville Stars' vaunted offense to three runs and seven hits in six innings of a 4-3 win that preserved a tie atop the North Division standings in the first-half finale. The result was a one-game playoff between Huntsville and West Tenn to determine a first-half champion on June 18. In his first start of the week, the native of Mexico carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning of a 9-5 win at Carolina on June 10. Castillo permitted just one baserunner through the first five frames before giving up a leadoff double in the sixth. He allowed just the one hit and an unearned run in 6 2/3 innings.

W-L	SV	ERA	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
2-0	0	2.13	12.2	8	4	3	4	8	0



# TOP PROSPECT SETS ARE HERE!



The 2008 Southern League Top Prospects Sets have arrived! The 30-card set designed by Grandstand includes three players from each Southern League team and has two-sided color. Among those featured in this year's set are Wade Davis, Mat Gamel, Clayton Kershaw, Matt LaPorta, Cameron Maybin, Jeff Samardzija and Chris Volstad. Click below and order yours today!

[http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/documents/2008/06/16/417810/1/Souvenir\\_Stand\\_order\\_form.pdf?sid=1111](http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/documents/2008/06/16/417810/1/Souvenir_Stand_order_form.pdf?sid=1111)

## TRIVIA QUESTION

*The Huntsville Stars narrowly missed becoming the first Southern League team with four consecutive half-season titles when they lost to the West Tenn Diamond Jaxx on June 17. Prior to Huntsville, what was the last Southern League team to win three straight half-season titles?*

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## TRIVIA ANSWER

*The Jacksonville Suns won three consecutive half-season titles beginning with the second half of 2000 in the Eastern Division. The Suns posted 183 regular-season wins during that span and shared a Southern League title with the Stars when the terrorist attacks of September 11 canceled the 2001 Southern League Championship Series. Only the 1992-93 Greenville Braves and 1976-77 Montgomery Rebels won three straight half-season titles before the Suns.*

