

FAVORITE 5 AT FIFTH THIRD FIELD

A fan favorite is easy to spot. He's the guy hitting the home runs or stealing bases. He's the guy striking out the opposing hitters, or making a sensational defensive play that saves runs — and wins games. A media member's favorite is a little trickier to notice. He may be the player willing to talk after a tough loss, or the guy who treats the fans right even when things seem to be going wrong. There have been a number of good people who have worn the Mud Hens uniform over the years. Here are a few of my favorite Mud Hens, along with the reasons they are among the game's "good guys."

Toledo Mud Hens

2004-05, 2007, 2009



Marcus Thames Outfield

1 Marcus Thames, OF, 2004-05, 2007, 2009: He came to the Mud Hens in 2004 and promptly had an amazing offensive outburst, slamming 24 home runs in just 64 games. It's easy to smile when you're hitting like Thames did in 2004. But Thames never stopped smiling, even during times when he was struggling with the bat in Detroit or sent to Toledo on a rehab assignment. And he also never forgot the Toledo media, making it a point to talk in the Tigers clubhouse before games.

Toledo Mud Hens

2005-07



Kevin Hooper Infield

4 Chris Bootcheck, RHP, 2012: The only time writers talk to a team's closer is after he has blown a save. Many closers don't understand that dynamic, but Bootcheck understood it and accepted it with grace. What's more, Bootcheck welcomed conversations before games about a variety of topics: the baseball business, agents, current events, and much more. He is thoughtful and well-spoken, which made our pre-game talks last season extremely informative.

Toledo Mud Hens

2012



Chris Bootcheck Pitcher

Honorable mention: Scot Drucker, Jeff Frazier, Jason Grilli, Mike Hessman, Jason Karnuth, Donny Kelly, Ruddy Lugo, Cody Ross, Andres Torres, Adam Wilk

Toledo Mud Hens

2002, 2006, 2008-11



Max St-Pierre Catcher

2 Max St-Pierre, C, 2002, 2006, 2008-11: St-Pierre was signing autographs before a game one day, and he saw a young fan with Down Syndrome hanging behind the crowd. So the veteran catcher gave the fan a gift: His shin guards and chest protector. St-Pierre was so well-liked by Toledo fans and teammates, the word that he was being promoted to Detroit in 2010 — after 14 seasons in the minors, not to mention problems with alcohol that threatened to derail his career — prompted a celebration similar to those of Toledo's championship seasons.

3 Kevin Hooper, IF, 2005-07: Forget the numbers with this 5-foot-10, 160-pounder, because his value to a team went well beyond hits and runs. Fans of the 2005 Governors' Cup championship squad will never forget that team's pre-game ritual, which had Hooper in the middle of a dancing circle of teammates. It's little wonder that once Hooper left the playing field he would become a manager — and a successful one at that. He is entering his fifth season as manager of the Wichita Wingnuts of the American Association, having led that club to four winning seasons and three division titles.

Toledo Mud Hens

2003, 2005



Carlos Pena Infield

5 Carlos Pena, 1B, 2003, 2005: Late one season Pena saw me in the clubhouse and quickly strode over. "You said I cost the team the game yesterday, and you've got it wrong," he said. I knew the play he was talking about, and I told him I thought I had it right, but he wasn't convinced. So I got the newspaper for that day, and showed him my story — and then a story by a former columnist who had made the mistake that angered the first baseman. "Hey, you're right. I'm sorry," Pena said. Those aren't words you often hear in the clubhouse. And Pena was always willing to talk — and to listen — after that incident.