

# Reno Gazette-Journal

## Journeyman Tracy has left mark on minors in 16-year career

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By: Chris Gabel

The minor leagues are supposed to be about development. A place to learn the game, perfect one's craft and move on to bigger and better things.

They are supposed to be the pit stops on the way to the major leagues -- brief and temporary.

But for some, like the Aces' Andy Tracy, the minors can become home.

For 16 years, Tracy has spent his summers riding buses from town to town, receiving daily meal money and playing in half-empty stadiums.

Tracy has played in places like Cape Fear, Juniper, Ottawa, Tulsa and Lehigh Valley. He's worn the jersey of the Crocs, Senators, Hammerheads and Sky Sox. There even was a season in Japan.

At age 37, he is the oldest American position player in the minors. And yet, in many ways, he's just like a young boy peeking through the chain-link fence as the major leaguers play on the other side.

"That's why I'm still playing," Tracy said. "I've always thought I could help a big-league team off the bench.

"I've always said I'm going to play until I stop putting up numbers. That's what my goal's been every year."

Tracy once again has shown he can put up those numbers. After working through a few age-related injuries, the left-handed hitting Tracy is hitting .473 in his past six games, including six home runs.

For the season, he was hitting .293 through Friday with 16 home runs and 44 RBIs.

"You look at his range, his range isn't real good. You look at his glove, he's got a below-average glove. He can't run," Aces manager Brett Butler said. "But he can hit. He's always been able to hit; he'll always be able to hit. He could roll out of bed and hit, and he could still help a big-league club."

Tracy still believes he could play a 17th season and be successful. But as enjoyable as this year has been at times, it's also been a sign for Tracy.

"I still think I can hit but sometimes age just catches up to you. Sometimes your body just kind of tells you when it's time to walk away," Tracy said

"I pretty much knew, with the team we had coming out of spring training, that I probably wasn't going to be an everyday player. I was OK with that, but I've always said that when that happened that would be it for me."

So Tracy -- the youngest of five brothers who took over the active minor-league lead for home runs (292), RBIs (1,055) and total bases (2,728) this year, and still could do so in runs (925) and doubles (334) -- will give way to another stage in his life.

"It's kind of scary because you're going into a new phase of your life and don't know what to expect," Tracy said. "Every year I knew what to expect as a baseball player. Now, I don't really know what to expect."

### **Career minor leaguer**

To be the active leader for any minor-league stat is both impressive and alarming. It says you've had quite a bit of success but it also means that you've been in the minors for quite some time.

Tracy spent parts of five seasons in the majors with the Expos, Rockies and Phillies. He received 192 at-bats with the Expos (now the Nationals) in 2000.

But he has nearly 20 times more minor-league at-bats as he does in the majors. If the minors are home to Tracy, then the majors have been the rest stop, fleeting and in the rear-view mirror.

"He came to terms with maybe not being in the big leagues all the time," said Tiffany, Tracy's wife of 10 years and mother of their two children, Cooper and Nola. "He was in the big leagues, he got that taste and then he had to step back and say, 'OK, it's OK that I'm going back to the minors.'"

"I really respect the way he's dealt with it all. Someone doesn't want to spend most of their 16-year career in the minor leagues. But he's taken it in stride and become a mentor to a lot of younger players."

Tracy, who also spent 10 years playing winter ball in Latin America, accepted his role as a powerful left-handed bat and a veteran presence in the Triple-A clubhouses where he spent the past seven seasons.

"I know that I've put up some good numbers," Tracy said. "I've never judged myself on getting to the big leagues because sometimes things just don't work out for you. I've always just tried to play the best I could at whatever level I was at."

Tracy has wondered if as a younger player he knew what he does now, or if he had the perspective he does now, perhaps things could have been different. But he carries no regrets.

"I think anybody, no matter what profession you're in, learns on the job. I think baseball is the same way," Tracy said. "You learn on the job and you learn the hard way sometimes. Sometimes you make mistakes and it costs you, and you don't even know its cost you until years later.

"Sometimes I didn't take advantage of opportunities to be in the big leagues when they gave me the chance and other times I thought I should have been in the big leagues when I wasn't. But that could be anybody in any job. You think you should be somewhere you're not. I didn't let it get to me for more than a couple days, though."

Tracy's perseverance paid off in 2009. He hit .417 in nine games with Philadelphia and was put on the supplemental postseason roster. Had there been an injury, he could be added to the active roster.

There wasn't an injury and Tracy never played in a postseason game. But he was in uniform when the Phillies won the World Series that year. He was part of the dog pile on the field. He was part of the champagne celebration in the clubhouse. He rode the parade float through Philadelphia.

"There were a couple other guys on the supplementary roster with me and we just said we were going to enjoy it just like we were on the active roster," Tracy said. "We had a great time.

"Ultimately, though, when you're playing is the most gratifying."

### **The next step**

The average Triple-A player is 25, and Tracy often hears the playful jokes from teammates about his age. Raul Chavez, Marc Kroon and Brett Tomko, all 38, are the only older minor leaguers.

It will be time to move on after this season.

"I don't think it was a very tough decision for him. We'd talked about it the last few years," said Tiffany, who met Tracy at Bowling Green University, where he played football and baseball. "I think he's just ready to step forward."

Tracy wants the next step to be into coaching.

"In the clubhouse, it's obvious he's the leader and he's had a huge part in this team and why we've been successful," Aces catcher Konrad Schmidt said. "He keeps it light but if

you do something wrong he'll let you know. He won't call you out unless you deserve it. It's been a real good influence on this team."

Tracy's spent the past few years building contacts around baseball, trying to position himself to land a coaching job next year. He's earned Butler as a reference.

"He's off the charts in understanding the game and the way it's supposed to be played. He's off the charts in understanding his role, even though no one wants to be at Triple-A, and how valuable his role in the clubhouse is," Butler said. "He's got the tools to be a manager and I would suggest we keep him in this organization. ... Words can't even describe the impact he's had on this team."

## **Reno Gazette-Journal**

### **Reno Aces playoff tickets go on sale on Saturday**

August 19, 2011

Play-off tickets for the first-place Reno Aces go on sale Saturday at 10 a.m.

Ticket prices for all playoff games at Aces Ballpark are the same as the club's regular season prices. Full strips of playoff tickets are on sale now. Beginning Saturday, the general public may purchase tickets to game 1 and game 2 of the Pacific Conference Series. Tickets purchased for games that are not played are fully refundable.

Tickets may be purchased at the Aces Ballpark Box Office, online at [www.RenoAces.com](http://www.RenoAces.com) or by phone at (775) 334-7000.

If the postseason began today, Reno would face-off with the Sacramento River Cats in the first round. If the Aces make the playoffs, Reno would host the first two games on Sept. 7 and Sept. 8. If they advance to the league championship, they would host the third, fourth and fifth games from Sept. 16 to Sept. 18.

This season, Reno has held at least a share of first place every day since April 25 and enters play tonight armed with a 4.5-game lead over Tacoma in the Pacific North Division with just 19 games left to play.

The Aces return home on Saturday night for a four-game series against the Tacoma Rainiers.