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# KeizerSports

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Courtesy HOUSTON CHRONICLE/Julio Cortez

### By MATT RAWLINGS Of the Keizertimes

Matt Downs starts off the Keizertimes list of the 20 greatest Volcanoes players of all time. Downs spent four years in the big leagues as an infielder for the San Francisco Giants and Houston Astros.

Being born and raised Alabama, Downs stayed in the area to play his college ball. He attended Shelton State Community College in 2003, then finished out the final three years of his college career playing at the University of Alabama.

From his freshman through junior seasons, Downs was mostly used as a pitcher. In his first two years with the Crimson Tide, Downs went 2-1 with a 4.91 ERA. But in 2006, Downs was used exclusively as a hitter/infielder, which is when his potential began to show.

Downs batted .298 his senior season with seven homers and 62 RBIs as he helped Alabama win the Southeastern Conference (SEC) title.

After his final season with the Crimson Tide, Downs was drafted in the 36th round of the 2006 Major League Baseball (MLB) Amateur Draft. He started his professional career later that summer in the Arizona Rookie League and began to show his ability, batting .310 with 34 runs scored, 52 hits, 16 double—which was second in the league—and 29 RBIs.

In 2007, Downs played a crucial role in one of the greatest seasons in Volcanoes history.

Downs led the Northwest League (NWL) in runs scored (68) and doubles (33), and was second in the league in batting average (.338) and hits (97). He also had eight homers, 48 RBIs and was named the league's co-MVP. The Volcanoes finished the season with a 57-19 record, won the NWL championship and were named the National Minor League Team of the Year.

Downs spent the first part of 2008 in Advanced-A ball with the San Jose Giants and continued to experience success. In 109 games, he

batted .304 with 74 runs scored, 133 hits, 30 doubles, 17 homers and 75 RBIs. He finished the season with the Fresno Grizzlies, San Francisco's Triple-A affiliate.

While he attended the Giants spring training, Downs began the regular season in Fresno. But on June 16, 2009, Downs got the call to the show, replacing former Volcano Emmanuel Burriss as the San Francisco second baseman. The day after his debut, Downs recorded his first two big league hits in a 4-3 loss to the Los Angeles Angels.

Downs had his fair share of struggles with the Giants in 2009 and was optioned back to minors multiple times throughout the season. He also started 2010 in Fresno, but was called back up in

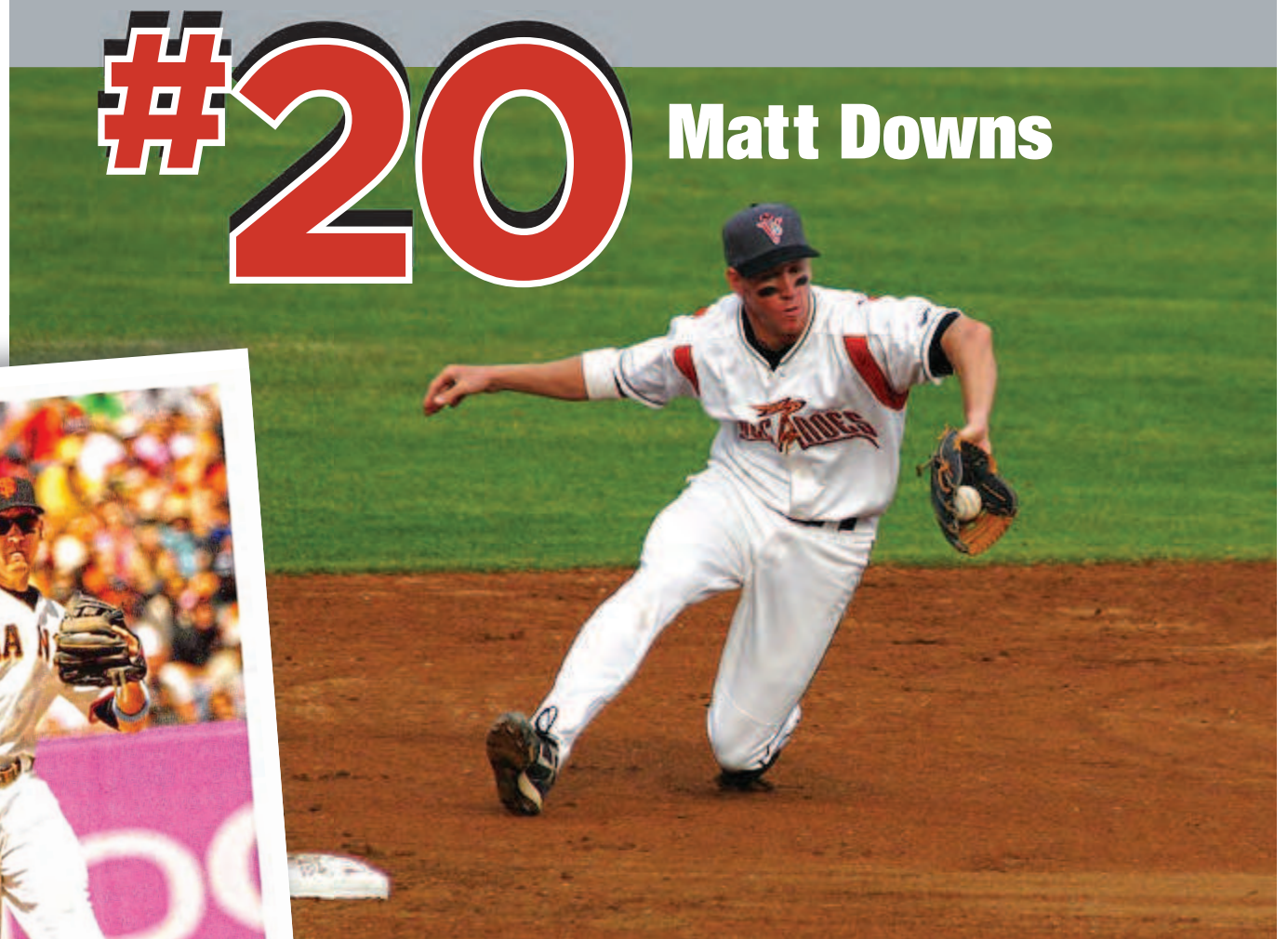


April to be a reserve player. In 29 games with the Giants in 2010, he batted .244 with six runs scored, 19 hits, seven doubles, one home run, and seven RBIs. But in late August, Downs was designated for assignment — where he would be claimed off waivers by the Houston Astros.

Downs was barely used for the remainder of the 2010 season by the Astros. But in 2011, he would have by far



LEFT: Matt Downs batting for the Houston Astros in 2011. BELOW: Downs fielding a ball during the Volcanoes NWL Championship season in 2007. LOWER LEFT: Topps released Downs' rookie card in 2010.



Submitted photo

runs scored, 55 hits, 18 doubles, 10 homers and 41 RBIs.

However, Downs couldn't create that same magic in the following season. He received occasional starts at a multitude of different positions, including the outfield, but was optioned down to Triple-A in August of 2012 before being recalled in September. Downs finished the season batting .202 with eight homers and 16 RBIs.

Downs was a part of the Miami Marlins organization in 2013, but spent the entirety of the season in Triple-A before being released.

After the 2013 season, Downs retired from playing and returned home to Alabama to become the head baseball coach at Marion Military Institute.

the best season of his career.

Downs made the Astros Opening Day roster and was an unexpected bright spot for Houston throughout the season. Downs had four game-winning hits for the Astros in 2011 and batted .349 as a pinch-hitter — which was the fifth best mark in the league. He also led the majors with three pinch-hit homers and 15 pinch-hit RBIs.

In 106 games that season, Downs batted .276 with 29

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