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Kansas City is 31-17 and nobody saw it coming

BY CORBIN DIETRICH · KANSAS CITY STAR-JOURNAL

Start down there, because that is where this organization's story always starts and because for once the top of it is worth getting to.

Ryan Patton was the ninth overall pick last June. He is 19 years old, he is at High-A already, which is aggressive placement for a teenager out of his first full spring, and he is hitting .305 with a .391 on-base percentage and three home runs. Antonio Meza, the 25th overall pick a year earlier, is 20 and at the same level hitting .339 with a .554 slugging percentage. Scott Joyce, a sixth-rounder from last June, is at .360 with a .433 on-base percentage.

Behind them at the same level are the two this organization thinks hardest about. Tony Toscano has not played enough at Sioux Falls this year for the line to say anything, and Sean Helm is hitting .231 beside him, which tells you as little. At Maple Grove, Ed Alicea has 36 strikeouts in 45 1/3 innings and Pedro Huante has seven home runs and a .338 on-base percentage. Dante Muro has been hit hard there, at 6.88.

Carlos Castillo is 16 and Jimmy Glover is 19 and both are at Kansas, which has not opened its season. Nothing about either is measurable yet and they are three levels and four years from being relevant to anything, which is exactly how far away the last four of these were when this paper started writing about them.

Three bats taken in the last two drafts, all of them at High-A before their 21st birthday, all of them hitting. This system has produced arms for 20 years and not much else. That is changing, and it is changing at exactly the moment the big-league club stopped needing to wait.

The Scouts are 31-17. Second in the Topaz, a game behind Milwaukee, fourth in the league, six games clear of the last postseason position in the conference. The three seasons before this one went 70-92, 72-90

and 75-87.

The payroll is \$103.2 million, 30th of 32. Only two clubs in baseball are spending less. Here is where the wins came from.

Nate Peterson has a 2.28 earned run average and a 0.91 WHIP over 67 innings, the most on the staff, and he makes \$500,000. Jason Bell has a 2.62 and makes \$500,000. Frank Smith has a 2.30 across seven starts and six relief appearances, and makes \$500,000. Chris Williams is 3-0 with a 3.62 and makes \$500,000. Four pitchers, all developed here, all at the minimum, and the rotation's 3.61 earned run average ranks fourth in the league.

The bullpen ranks fourth too, at 3.05. Ben Taylor has 18 saves, which is the most of any relief pitcher in The Big League, with a 1.73 earned run average, and he was a 10th-round pick in 2021 who has been in this organization his whole career. Tony Beltran is 4-0 with a 1.50. Gabriel Holina has a 1.20. Mike Whitten has six holds.

The staff has allowed 175 runs, second-fewest in baseball, and 46 home runs, fifth-fewest, and the whole thing costs less than what three clubs are paying one player apiece.

Then there is Jared Mettler, who is the best thing to happen to this franchise in a decade. He is 24, he was the 18th overall pick in 2029, he won a Rookie of the Year award and a Platinum Stick already, and he is hitting .269 with 15 home runs, third-most in all of baseball, 34 runs batted in and 23 stolen bases. He makes the league minimum and he is under club control for years yet, and if this organization is ever going to find out whether it can keep one, it is going to find out with him.

The front office did something different this winter, and it is worth marking. On January 22 Brad J. gave Freddy Echeverria five years and \$27.2 million a season, and gave Rob O'Neill three years and \$14.6 million the same day.

He has done this before, and the men it bought are mostly gone. Brad Wilson was here five years from 2025 and was paid as much as \$48 million in one of them. Marty Kilby got three years from 2026 and peaked at \$21 million. Arturo Rivera got three from 2026 and peaked at \$36 million. Andy McGuigan had five from 2021. None of them is on this roster now, and the club won 70, 72 and 75 games in the three years after the last of those deals ran out. What is different this time is the roster it is landing on: a rotation of four men at the minimum, and a 24-year-old in the middle of the order.

Echeverria is 4-2 with a 3.94. O'Neill is hitting .278 with 11 home runs and a .562 slugging percentage from behind the plate, and he has been the better of the two. Sergio Soto, who is in the last year of an \$18 million deal, is hitting .327 with a .560 slugging percentage and 10 home runs. That is three veterans producing, on a club that has historically had none.

The honest qualifier, and it is a real one. Kansas City went 25-11 inside the division, tied for the best divisional record in baseball, in a Topaz that also contains Memphis at 14-34 and Southland at 20-28. Against Milwaukee and Huron, the two good clubs in it, the record is 4-6. And since the crossover began the Scouts are 6-6.

So: 23-4 against clubs currently under .500, 8-13 against clubs over it, and twelve games of evidence about how this roster handles anybody outside the neighborhood. This club has beaten what it was supposed to beat, thoroughly, and has not yet proven the rest.

They have also been shut out seven times, which is more than any club in this division, on a lineup that ranks 23rd in runs scored. Mike Sullivan is hitting .207 in 214 plate appearances. Kurt Wagers is at .219. Antonio Belanger has 25 plate appearances and one hit. The offense is fourth in the league in home runs and 23rd in runs, which means it is not stringing anything together.

But the pitching is third in the league and signed for almost nothing, and there is a 19-year-old at High-A hitting .305 and a 20-year-old next to him slugging .554, and the last time this club was in a pennant race, in 2026, it got there the same way.

Kansas City has been getting people ready for somewhere else since before there was a ballpark here. This year it appears to be getting them ready for here.