



MILWAUKEE SENTINEL-PRESS

MAY 24, 2032 · THE MILWAUKEE MOBSTERS BEAT

Milwaukee is 32-16, and 11-2 in the games that were close

BY **DANNY KOLAR** · MILWAUKEE SENTINEL-PRESS

Steve Summey is 25, makes \$500,000, pitches in relief, and is 7-1.

Seven wins out of a bullpen, in May, which happens when a man keeps coming into tie games in the sixth and his team keeps scoring in the seventh. It does not mean much, and it is still the most Milwaukee statistic on this roster: a share of the best record in baseball and the wins are piling up on a middle reliever nobody outside this state could pick out of a lineup.

The Mobsters are 32-16. Best record in The Big League. All 32 teams, first place, on the twenty-fourth of May, after opening the season by getting swept in Oklahoma City.

Now, before anyone starts printing anything.

This team is 11-2 in games decided by a single run and 4-1 when they go past the ninth. Thirteen one-run games, 11 of them won. That is not a skill. Nobody has ever demonstrated it is a skill. Strip out the luck in those margins and this is a very good baseball team with a record two or three games better than it has earned, which is a thing worth saying now rather than in August when it corrects.

And while we are subtracting things, subtract the schedule too. Milwaukee did its 25-11 inside a Topaz that contains Memphis at 14-34 and Southland at 20-28. Since the crossover, 7-5. Perfectly good. Not the best record in baseball.

So: a share of the best record in baseball, level with Galveston at 32-16, built on a division with two of the worst teams in it, propped up by a one-run mark that will not hold. That is three separate reasons to keep the champagne where it is, and this clubhouse would give you all three without being asked.

What is real is the walk total. Milwaukee has drawn 192 bases on balls, the most in the league, eight more than anybody else. The on-base percentage of .334 ranks third. This lineup hits .251 and scores more than teams hitting .270, because it does not give away at-bats, and in a clubhouse that has never had a face and does not want one, a roster full of men who take a pitch is about as on-brand as it gets.

Willie Cuevas is hitting .306 with a .537 slugging percentage. Jesus Espinosa, who has a Rookie of the Year award and four Platinum Sticks, is at .285 with nine home runs and is the best player here. Moises Aguilar has 11 home runs. Ramiro Ortiz is 24, makes the minimum, is hitting .223 and has 10 home runs and 31 runs batted in, which is the kind of line that gets a man dropped in the order in a smarter city and has been left alone here, correctly.

Paul Stepp is being paid \$19.3 million, has four Platinum Sticks, and is slugging .267 with no home runs in 168 plate appearances. He is a catcher, he has caught a staff with the second-best earned run average in the league, and nobody in that clubhouse is worried about it. Bob Donaldson is 35, has a Most Valuable Player award, and is hitting .154. Both of those men have been around long enough to know what this is, and neither of them will say a word about it on the record, which is also on-brand.

The pitching is where the season actually lives. A 3.38 earned run average, second-best in baseball. The bullpen has a 2.84, third-best, across 196 innings. Josh Brown has a 0.83. Chris Calvert has a 1.61 and a 0.76 WHIP. Alex Garcia, signed in January for \$800,000 at 34 years old, has a 1.77 and seven saves. Bruce Leon, signed the same week at 35, has a 1.62. Ryan Moynahan has 27 strikeouts against three walks. Steve Ford has 10 holds.

Ryan O. went out last winter and signed five relief pitchers, four of them 30 or older, for a combined \$10.8 million, and four of the five have been excellent. He also made one trade, and it was not quiet at all: Joe Case, Alex Nuno, Mike Bykowski and Milwaukee's first, second, third and fourth round picks in 2032, all of it to Toronto, for Alex Sanchez and \$8 million in cash. Sanchez is 5-1 with a 3.29 in the first year of a \$25 million deal and the money helped pay for the bullpen. The cost was this year's entire draft above the fifth round. Nobody in this clubhouse will say a word about that and nobody outside Wisconsin noticed it happened.

The payroll is \$186.1 million, fifth in the league. This club could buy a personality if it wanted one. It has instead bought seven relievers and a number two starter, and it is in first place, and there are probably nine people in America outside Wisconsin who could name three men on this roster.

Down below, Queen City is 25-11 and in first, and it is full of men who have been in Triple-A a while. Dustin Hunter is hitting .362 with a .650 slugging percentage. Francisco Benavides is hitting .418. Mike Fluitt has a 2.12 over 46 innings, Jay Houck a 1.69, Aaron Lee a 1.66. Good pitchers, all of them. The kind who come up in August when an elbow goes and go back down in September with a handshake and a per diem.

The ones this organization is actually waiting on are a level down and having a worse time. Larry Leppert Jr. has a 4.79 at Fort Wayne and is the best of them. Manuel Ruiz is hitting .283 there. Jody Lamb is at .188 in High-A. Esteban Calleja has a 3.94 at Bay City at 19, and Calleja is the one to circle.

Chris Spears and David Pruitt are both slugging over .545 at High-A.

Two championships in this city, 2013 and 2030, and not a single Hall of Famer to show for either one. The 2030 team won 100 games and took the whole thing and this column spent most of that September explaining why it would not, which is on the record and stays there.

So no window talk. Not in May, not from here. It is 48 games, the one-run record is a loan that gets called in, and the only honest sentence available is that this is the best team in baseball today and has been for six weeks and has done it without anybody noticing.

Which, around here, is generally how they like it.