GRAND STRAND SPORTS

MAY 24, 2032 · THE MYRTLE BEACH MERMEN BEAT

The best offense in baseball is on the 24th-biggest payroll

BY **CRICKET HALLORHAN** · GRAND STRAND SPORTS

Jose Ortega got one on April 5. Tommy Lee got one a week later. Jalen Wiggins got one on May 3. Rodolfo Pintasilgo got one on May 17.

Four different Mermen, four Mondays, in eight weeks. Las Vegas has three. Every other club in this league has two or fewer.

Now here is the part that still does not look real written down.

Myrtle Beach leads The Big League in runs scored. And in batting average. And in on-base percentage. And in slugging percentage. And in OPS. First in all five, out of 32 teams, on the twenty-fourth of May.

Two hundred sixty-two runs. A team average of .285. An on-base percentage of .359. That is the best offense in baseball and it is not an argument, it is the leaderboard, and this is a club that lost 95 games last season and 92 the year before that.

The record is 28-20, second in the Ruby, two games back, three clear of the last playoff spot in the conference. The run differential is plus-73, the largest in this division by a distance.

And the payroll is $125.3 million, which ranks 24th of 32 and third-smallest in the Ruby. Only Vancouver and Spokane are spending less, and Mexico City, two games ahead of us, is spending $47 million more.

So how.

Jalen Wiggins is hitting .329 with a .421 on-base percentage and 34 runs batted in, and he makes $1.7 million. Trent Erickson is 23, makes the league minimum, is hitting .323 and has stolen 14 bases. Jesse Hile

is 24, makes the minimum, and is hitting .321 with a .598 slugging percentage. Felix Alvarez is at .301. Eric Campbell is at .297. Tommy Lee is at .296 with 21 stolen bases. Mark Cobb is at .294 with a .380 on-base percentage.

Seven regulars at or near .300. Four of them cost essentially nothing.

The two March signings both landed. Israel Flores came on the third for four years at $20.2 million and is hitting .286 with a .508 slugging percentage and 34 runs batted in. Cobb came two days later on a one-year deal and has been everything a catcher is supposed to be. Daryl G. waited out the market into March and got both of them, and that is the whole transaction ledger, because there were no trades at all.

And Chris Breuninger has been the best pitcher in this division that nobody outside the Grand Strand has heard of. He is 28, he makes $4.1 million, he is 5-2 with a 1.40 earned run average, a 0.86 WHIP, 61 strikeouts against 10 walks, and he has given up one home run all season. One. In 51 innings.

The staff as a whole has allowed 42 home runs, second-fewest in baseball.

And it has held up against strangers, which is the part nobody down here saw coming. Myrtle Beach went 21-15 inside the division and 7-5 since the crossover. The same rate against the Ruby and against everybody else, which is reassuring in exactly the way a boring thing is reassuring.

Now, the honest paragraph, because there is one and it matters.

The record against clubs currently over .500 is 6-8. Against clubs under it, 22-12. This team has spent the first eight weeks beating Spokane and Southland and Vancouver, and the schedule ahead has a good deal more Mexico City and Big Horn in it. That is the test and it has not been taken yet.

Six men are on the injured list right now. John Perez and George Mizell are on the 60-day, Mizell at 56 days already. Chris Adams is on it too. Jeremiah Will has missed 42 days, Arnout Garcia 28, Estevan Gonzalez 28, and Kevin Lindroth 68 going back to February 23. The starters have thrown 211 innings and the bullpen 225, which is backwards and which is what happens when a rotation is short.

Wiggins is not among them, which is the one piece of good news in the paragraph.

Kenny Cripps, at $27.5 million, has a 2.11 earned run average and eight saves, and the bullpen behind him has blown seven, which is the one soft spot on an otherwise excellent pitching staff.

The farm is in good shape too, and it always gets the last section here for a reason.

Start with Bill Sanchez. He is 22, he is at Austin, and he is slugging .558 with eight home runs. He is the best player this organization has playing anywhere and he is one phone call from Myrtle Beach.

Willie Marrufo is 24 at the same level. Andy Hummer, a second-round pick in 2030, is hitting .295 there with seven home runs.

Lear Eichhorn is 21 and hitting .351 with a .438 on-base percentage at High-A. Chris Acevedo is hitting .349 at Cypress with 13 home runs and a .658 slugging percentage.

Ricky DeLille is at .433 and Yosef Mendel at .350, both at Tomball. Aaron Harrell has a 0.88 earned run average over 41 innings at Austin and Carlos Gonzalez a 2.62 at Cypress, and both of those men are depth rather than anything else.

And then there is Seguin, where Erik Fisher has not played a game yet and is the best young hitter this organization owns, and Corsicana, which has not started either and which has four teenagers on it this organization expects a great deal from: Ben Sloan, Eddie Jackson, Curt Barber, Greg Mullins. Nothing to show you until they play.

Next year is going to be fun. So is the one after it.

The banner in this building says 2024 and it was won in San Antonio, in a ballpark that is something else now, by a club most people on this beach never watched. Eighteen postseason appearances in franchise history and the last one was 2028.

That is the inheritance, and it has been a hard thing to sell to a town that gets a new set of fans every June.

This year there is nothing to sell. There is the best offense in baseball, seven hitters batting .290 or better, a starting pitcher with a 1.40 earned run average, and a 28-20 record on the third-smallest payroll in the division.

Come look at it before the crowds get here.