



ARIZONA REPUBLIC-JOURNAL

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Phoenix outscores its opponents and keeps losing

BY AUGIE SALCIDO · ARIZONA REPUBLIC-JOURNAL

Robby Morales is 31, was signed in the middle of January for one year and \$8.7 million because nobody else particularly wanted him, and he is 6-0 with a 2.40 earned run average and a 0.92 WHIP.

Six and nothing. On a team that is 21-27.

That is the whole season in one man's line... the pitching arrives, and then the afternoon happens around it.

The Firebirds have scored 202 runs and allowed 194. A club that outscores its opponents by eight runs is, by every reasonable expectation, a .500 club. This one is six games under, because it is 5-8 in one-run games and 2-4 in extra innings, and because it has lost eight of its last ten in the particular grinding way that a team with no margin loses them.

And the schedule has not been the excuse either. Phoenix went 17-19 against the Ruby and 4-8 since the crossover... which is the wrong direction, and is about as clear a sign as May gives you that this is a roster problem rather than a scheduling one.

The pitching has been genuinely good and almost nobody has said so. A 3.78 earned run average, 13th in the league. A 1.22 WHIP, 10th. One hundred thirty-one walks issued, seventh-fewest anywhere. Dan Gonzalez has a 2.13 earned run average across nine starts and a record of 2-4, which is not a sentence about Dan Gonzalez. Mike Taylor, who owns a Cy Young Award and is in the final year of a \$27.6 million contract, has a 1.77 earned run average and a 0.64 WHIP in six starts and has been hurt since the end of April. Jose Hernandez has a 2.49 with seven holds and three walks in 25 innings. Arvin Layug has a 2.10.

The hitting is the problem and it is not close. This lineup is 28th in the league in batting average at .228, 31st in slugging at .358, 31st in home runs with 40, and 24th in runs. Andy James is hitting .120 in 94 plate appearances. Tom Smith is at .175. Bobby Weed, signed in January, is at .193 with a .217 on-base percentage. Jose Zavala, at \$11.6 million, is at .214. Juan Mujica, who has 15 stolen bases and has been worth watching, is at .212.

There are three hitters going well. Manny Garcia is 33 and hitting .301. Steve Leonard is at .314. Javon Kornegay is 26, makes the league minimum, and is hitting .294 with a .486 slugging percentage and 25 runs batted in across 32 games, and he has been the most interesting thing in this lineup since the first week of May.

Now, a thing that happened over the winter which this column is going to keep returning to.

Travis Sudduth signed with Oahu on Christmas Eve for \$45.2 million. He won two Cy Young Awards in this uniform, in 2027 and 2028, and a third in Big Horn last season, and he is now making eight starts for a club in Honolulu and had a 2.15 earned run average before he got hurt.

Nate Fried and Pat Moore are still outside the Hall of Fame. Sudduth is in Hawaii. That is three of the best pitchers this franchise ever had, and this franchise has none of them, and it has now been 31 years without a championship.

Brendan Cooke is in his 32nd season running this baseball team, one of the handful of founding general managers still sitting in the same chair, and the winter he just had was six one-year free agents and no trades: Morales, Gonzalez, Juan Samayoa, Bobby Weed, James Rucks, Hunter Christie. Three of the six have been good. Two of them, Morales and Gonzalez, are the two best starters on the staff and both are gone in November unless something changes.

The club made the postseason last year at 78-84, which most people have already forgotten, and won the division the year before that, and this column called that division title a turning point in print... which it was not.

So no turning-point language this time. Just the arithmetic: nine games out, four behind the last playoff position, 114 to play, a pitching staff that ranks 13th and a lineup that ranks 31st in slugging. One of those two numbers has to move and there is no version of this summer where it is the pitching.

The farm, and this is the part that has quietly become the best argument for patience.

Jay Seabolt is hitting .295 with seven home runs at Tucson, and he is the one man down there who is both good and close.

The rest of what is playing is depth. Danny Hull is hitting .378 with a .653 slugging percentage at Wichita. Hunter Pettett is at .359 with a .631 and six home runs. Frank Rollins has a .421 on-base percentage

at the same level. Paul Gardener is hitting .347 at Flagstaff and Tim Lewis .342 at Tucson. Joel Gutierrez has a 1.46 over 37 innings and Mike Smith a 1.52.

Good numbers, all of them... and most of them belonging to men this organization is not building anything around.

The real argument for patience has not played a game. It is sitting in New Mexico and Orena, where the season has not opened: Willie Villalba, Tristan Miller, Chris Ma, Danny Mendosa. Nobody in this state has watched one of them play, and they are the four this organization would least like to lose.

The trick, and it has been the trick here for three decades, is getting them up the ladder before the window they were meant for has closed.

Morales is 6-0. The team is 21-27. Both sentences are true and the second one is the one that goes in the standings.