



ROCHESTER POST-EXPRESS

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A plus-34 run differential, and a losing record

BY ADA BRIGHTBILL · ROCHESTER POST-EXPRESS

The chair is filled. Keven X. came from Toronto and is in his first season running this baseball team, the first man to hold the job since Michael left after 2031. He inherited 98-64, 102-60 and 100-62 in the three seasons before this one, three straight division titles, and championships in 2026, 2027 and 2029.

The club is 23-25.

Before anybody in this city draws the obvious conclusion, here is the record, and it says something different from what the standings say.

Rochester has scored 240 runs, third-most in the league. It is batting .272, second. Its on-base percentage of .341 is second. Its .771 OPS is second. It has struck out 357 times, third-fewest of any club in baseball. The starting rotation has a 3.82 earned run average, sixth-best in the league, across 273 innings, which is the most any rotation in this division has thrown. The run differential is plus-34.

A team that outscores its opponents by 34 runs through 48 games is usually 27-21 or 28-20. This one is 23-25, and the entire discrepancy sits in one line of the ledger.

In games decided by one run, the North Stars are 1-9.

One and nine. This bullpen has blown only three, but it has only 10 saves, a 4.64 earned run average that ranks 27th of 32, and 157 innings, the fewest of any relief corps in this division. The late innings have been handed to Vinny Garza at 5.74, Joe Laffoon at 11.57 and Robby Vallejo at 4.74, with Matt Wetzels at 1.77 and Mark Campbell at 3.00 and a 0.83 WHIP being the two who have actually held. Steve Gillis came over from Chicago on April 12, for a 2034 sixth-rounder and Anthony Brooks, and has six saves in nine appearances.

That is the season. Not the lineup, not the rotation, not the new man in the office. Nine one-run losses.

The calendar does not offer an excuse either. Rochester went 18-18 against the Jade and 5-7 against the rest of the league since the crossover.

A club that won 100 games a year ago has now played .479 baseball against its own division and .417 against everybody else, and the one-run record is 1-9 across both. Whatever this is, it is not a scheduling artifact. It is the seventh inning, twice over.

Jeff Williams is 24 years old, makes \$500,000, arrived in this organization in a trade in August 2027 when he was 19, and is hitting .365 with a .416 on-base percentage, a .590 slugging percentage, 12 home runs and 41 runs batted in, which is the third-highest runs batted in total in the league. He missed 30 days in spring with an injury and has played every game since. He is the best position player this franchise has developed and he is doing it in a season nobody outside this city is watching.

Jim Reiser has 11 home runs and a .503 slugging percentage. Tim Liddick is hitting .303. Lyle Egner has a .380 on-base percentage. Carlos Lopez, who has been in this organization since 2022, is at .286 with a .368 on-base percentage. Joey Reek, who has a Cy Young Award, is 5-2 with a 2.20 earned run average and 79 strikeouts, sixth-most in the league.

The payroll is \$195.7 million, second-highest in The Big League. Vince Hernandez is owed \$55 million this season and has played 28 games. Mark Christensen is owed \$45 million in the final year of his deal and has a 3.32 earned run average, which is a fair return. Dave Smith is owed \$22 million through 2034 and is hitting .230 with a .265 on-base percentage. Alex Rojo is owed \$20 million through 2034 and has played 21 games.

Four contracts, \$142 million, 102 games played.

And now the part that this column has been building toward for two years, and which the new general manager did not create and will have to answer for anyway.

The farm system is gone.

Los Angeles is 17-19. San Francisco is 14-22. Memphis is 7-17 and last in its division. Fort Worth is 7-17.

Seven and seventeen, twice, at the level where a system is supposed to be loudest. The organization that won 2026 and 2027 with men it drafted, that turned Winston-Salem's 117-loss 2019 into nine straight winning seasons by drafting and developing and keeping, is 45-75 across every affiliate that has opened its season.

The third one did not come entirely from inside. Mark Christensen arrived from Cincinnati in July 2028 at \$44 million, and Vince Hernandez was signed away from Chicago that December and paid \$40 million in

the title year. Two of the best players on that team were bought. The pipeline that is supposed to make buying unnecessary is the thing that has gone quiet since.

There are a handful of names worth writing down and the list is shorter than it has been at any point since 2019.

Melvin Aguirre has a 4.08 earned run average across 39 2/3 innings at Los Angeles, and he is the best arm this organization still owns. Tim Korb has 46 strikeouts in 38 2/3 at the same level. Chris King has a 6.16 at Fort Worth at 20, across innings that do not yet say anything about him. Andy Brady is at Portland, which has not opened.

Then the rest. Bobby Chapman has a 1.03 earned run average at Los Angeles. Jody Hopkins is hitting .317 with six home runs at San Francisco. Jon McKenzie is at .317 at Los Angeles, and Tyler Vargas, a fourth-round pick in 2029, is 4-0 at the same level.

Four good lines belonging to four men this organization drafted to be depth, who have become depth. After that it is a great deal of losing at every level below Double-A, and it has been getting worse for three years while the big-league club won 300 games.

That is the inheritance. A lineup that is second in the league in almost everything, a rotation that is sixth, a bullpen that is 27th, four enormous contracts belonging to men who are mostly not on the field, a one-run record of 1-9, and a pipeline that has stopped producing.

The nine one-run losses will correct. They always do. This club is nine games out in the division and sitting exactly on the last postseason line in the conference, and on the strength of everything except the bullpen it should spend the summer climbing.

What happens underneath that is the longer story, and it is the one this job was always going to be about.