



EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

MAY 24, 2032 · THE SAN JUAN STOGIES BEAT

Seven men hurt, and the second-best offense in baseball anyway

BY NÉLIDA CRUZ BETANCOURT · EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

The crowd on Monday stayed to the end of a game the Stogies were not going to win, and sang anyway, and that is worth putting at the top of a report that is otherwise going to spend a lot of time on an injury list, because it is the part a box score does not hold.

Here is the strange and genuinely encouraging shape of this season.

San Juan has scored 242 runs. Only one team in The Big League has scored more. The club is third in batting average at .260, second in slugging at .445, third in OPS at .769, fifth in home runs with 65. By every measure of what happens when this team is at the plate, it is one of the two or three best offenses in baseball.

The record is 23-25.

The gap is entirely on the other side of the ball, and the reason is sitting in the trainer's room. Seven men are on the injured list today. Jeremy Oakley is on the 60-day and has missed 56 days. Isaiah Logan, who has a 2.93 in six starts, is out. Steve Peterson has missed 72 across two stints, Willie Martinez 45, Jerry Molina 42, Jim Polgar 28, Marvin Lewis 28. Matt Bigby lost 47 days from March 3 and is back.

What is left has a 4.33 earned run average and a bullpen that has converted 11 saves and blown 10. A club scoring at the second-highest rate in baseball has given away ten leads.

And here is where the calendar becomes a kindness. San Juan went 15-21 inside the division, which is the entire deficit, all of it accumulated while the pitching staff was emptying into the trainer's room.

Since the crossover: 8-4, among the best records in baseball. The club this city has been apologizing for since March is not the club that has taken the field for the last two weeks.

And the young hitters are extraordinary, and this is the part to hold onto.

Frank Mildner makes the league minimum, is hitting .259 with a .601 slugging percentage and 13 home runs, fifth-most in the entire league, with 35 runs batted in, and he was the league's player of the week on April 19. Chris Whittington is 23, makes the league minimum, and is hitting .307 with a .556 slugging percentage and 10 home runs. Jason Parker is hitting .287 with 12 home runs. Danny Cunningham has played 21 games and is hitting .394 with a .500 on-base percentage and a .727 slugging percentage.

Four hitters. Three of them at the minimum salary. All four developed here.

The two large contracts of the winter: Dustin Potter signed on February 20 for four years at \$38 million, the biggest deal in this franchise's history, and he owns a Cy Young Award and is 5-2 with a 4.05 earned run average and 67 strikeouts in 11 starts, which is a fair start and not yet what the money is for. Mike Boller signed on New Year's Day for five years at \$26 million, is 33, and is hitting .275 with two Great Gloves behind the plate.

Chuck M. has run this club since 2005 and there were no trades at all this winter, only those two signings, which for a front office that has spent the last four years managing a relocation counts as a statement of intent.

Now, the organization below, because it is the best news in this report by a wide margin and almost nobody has written it down.

Santo Domingo is 19-5 and in first. Kingston is 23-13. Nassau is 16-8. Every level that has started its season is winning, and three of them comfortably.

Brian Caldwell is hitting .448 with a .542 on-base percentage and a .746 slugging percentage at High-A. Jeff Blanchard is at the same level hitting .359 with seven home runs. Eric Schmatz is slugging .663. Chris Cobble is 20 years old and hitting .378 with a .622 slugging percentage. Danny DesJardins is at .345 with a .667.

Five bats at one level, every one of them slugging over .600, and Chris Cobble at 20 is the one to write down. On the other side, Ryan Robert, the 54th overall pick in 2029, is 4-0 with a 1.56 earned run average at Kingston. Jon Harris is 5-0 with a 1.70 there. Brian Colvin, a third-round pick last June, is 4-1 with a 2.14. Victor Fierro has a 1.89 at Nassau.

And there is an arm on the Nassau roster this column would not trade for any of them. Matt Giglio is 19, he has struck out 17 men in 13 1/3 innings, and his earned run average is 4.72 across too few innings to read either way. Daniel Shuping has 27 strikeouts across 32 2/3 at Kingston. Adam Rall is hitting .274 with six home runs at Havana and Leon Leiva is slugging .546 beside him.

This is the deepest this organization has been since it arrived on the island, and it has arrived at the same moment the big-league club learned how to hit.

The Stogies have won seven of their last 10 and four in a row before Sunday. They are two games behind the last playoff position in the conference with 114 to play, and the pitchers who are hurt are, almost without exception, the pitchers who were good. Logan and Oakley and Peterson come back at some point this summer and the earned run average that currently ranks 21st comes back with them.

The last October in this uniform was 2029. The banner in this building was won in 2006 by the Louisville Rivermen, and it belongs to people who are not in this building.

What belongs to San Juan is four young hitters, a farm system playing .650 baseball across every level that has opened, and a crowd on a Monday that stayed to the end. That is more than this club had a year ago, and a good deal more than the standings currently show.