



THE STRAIGHT LINE

MAY 24, 2032 · THE SOMERVILLE MONEYLINE BEAT

Somerville is 31-17 with nobody on the injured list

BY PRIYA RANGANATHAN · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Start with the number that is genuinely unusual, and it has nothing to do with the standings.

Somerville has not placed a single player on the injured list this season. Not one, at any point, through 48 games. Look across the rest of this division: Montreal has seven men on the list today and Boston has eight pitchers who have already missed time. Toronto has five. Baltimore has four. The Moneyline have had zero, and if you are looking for a variable that separates a 31-17 club from a 23-25 club in the third week of May, that one is sitting right at the top of the page and nobody controls it.

The rest of the ledger is what you expected. First in the Sapphire, third in the league, plus-61 in run differential, which is the largest in this division by a margin of 16 runs. The club is 24-12 inside the division and 13-6 against teams currently over .500, which is the split that matters and the one most clubs this far in front do not have.

That 24-12 divisional mark deserves a sentence of its own, because of where the wins came from. Those 24 wins were taken directly out of Montreal and Baltimore and Boston, which is why this club leads the division by five while Montreal sits at plus-45 in run differential and still looks up at it.

Against the rest of the league, the sample is 7-5. Twelve games. A record tied for third-best in baseball rests on 36 games against seven opponents and twelve against the other 24, and the confidence interval on that is wider than anyone is currently treating it.

The construction of the pitching staff is the most interesting thing this front office has done in years, and almost nobody has written it down.

Somerville's starters have thrown 235 innings, among the lowest totals in the league, and have a 4.12 earned run average, which ranks 16th, dead average. The bullpen has thrown 200 innings, the seventh-highest total in the league, and has a 2.70 earned run average, second-best of 32. The staff as a whole has 539 strikeouts, the most in baseball, ahead of second place by a wide margin.

That is a deliberate design. This team takes its starter out early, hands the game to an extraordinary relief corps, and wins. Alex Rangel has a 0.47 earned run average. Mike Nichols has a 0.86 and a 0.76 WHIP. Jason Shannon has a 0.97 WHIP with eight holds. Chris Charvet has 49 strikeouts in 27 2/3 innings. Jason White is 6-1 out of the bullpen across 49 innings, more innings than four of the starters. Nineteen saves, six blown. It is the best bullpen in this division and it is being used like a second rotation.

Whether it holds is the open question, and it is a real one. Two hundred relief innings in 48 games projects past 670 over a full season. Arms that throw that much in May are frequently not available in September, and this front office has watched two Octobers end with a tired staff.

At the plate: fourth in the league in runs, third in slugging, third in walks drawn, and 19th in batting average. This lineup does not get hits; it gets on base and hits the ball a long way. Antonio Reyna is 36 years old, is hitting .264 with a .522 slugging percentage and 12 home runs, ninth-most in the league, and has five Most Valuable Player awards and nine Platinum Sticks in a career that started somewhere else. Chase Posey is hitting .343. Dave Tyler is 24, has 40 runs batted in, fifth-most in baseball, and is signed through 2036 at \$5.5 million a year, which will look like the best contract in this division inside two years.

And Steve Frey is hitting .199 with 11 home runs, and Todd Taylor is hitting .193 with eight, and Mike Bellina is at .197. This is a club whose fourth, sixth and seventh-most-used hitters are all under .200 and it is still fourth in the league in runs scored, which is what a .322 on-base percentage and a .434 slugging percentage will do for a lineup that never hits a soft single.

Now the transactions, because the winter was strange and has gone almost entirely unremarked.

On December 2, Somerville sent Billy Perez, who has won two Cy Young Awards, to Chicago for three of Chicago's 2032 picks, the ninth, tenth and eleventh rounds. On December 31, it sold its own 2032 second-round pick to Southland for \$6 million. On January 18, it sold its 2032 sixth-rounder to Huron for \$3 million.

Net effect: a two-time Cy Young winner off the books, nine million dollars in, and a 2032 draft that is now missing its second and sixth round selections and has gained three of somebody else's late ones. On a club carrying the highest payroll in this division at \$186.8 million and the fourth-highest in the league.

That is a payroll-management winter, executed by a front office that has nothing left to prove about regular seasons and 26 postseason appearances without a championship. It is not obviously wrong. Perez has a 4.55 earned run average in Chicago and has allowed 11 home runs, and the rotation here has been average without him and the bullpen has been superb. The process is defensible on every individual line.

It is the aggregate that has been the subject of this newsletter for 16 years. JR L. has run this club for 31 seasons. He has built 20 seasons of 90 wins and 26 trips to October and has never once been the last team standing, and every single winter the individual decisions are defensible, and every single autumn the result is the same. This newsletter has asked, in print, whether he would trade five 90-win seasons for one bad year and a ring. Twenty-six Octobers have answered it for him.

The farm system, for what it is worth in a year like this one, is producing at Little River-Academy and almost nowhere else. Willie Schultz is hitting .427 with a .509 on-base percentage and a .729 slugging percentage there. Ken Ciaravino is at .406 in the same lineup, Matt Malecki at .341 with a .464 on-base percentage, Ricky Pawlus at .341. Four bats at one level, all hitting, none of them a first-round pick.

The men this organization is actually waiting on are on those same rosters and having a harder time of it. Kevin Miller, the best young hitter in the system, is at .235. Terrell Moody is at .211. Sebastian Croslin has 28 strikeouts in 17 1/3 innings and a 1.56 earned run average, which is the most interesting line in the system and comes with the smallest sample attached to it. Elliott Staley and Dustin Geene are both under 3.10.

It is a strange system to read. The batting averages belong to the depth and the talent belongs to the men hitting .220, and in a year when this club is 31-17 neither group is going to be asked to do anything.

Thirty-one and seventeen on May 24. The club is healthy, the bullpen is the best asset in the organization, and the lineup does not need to hit to score. Nothing here is going wrong. Nothing here ever goes wrong until it is October, and then something does, and the sample is no longer small.