



TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

MAY 24, 2032 · THE TORONTO GRIFFINS BEAT

The office at the end of the hall is empty

BY HOLLIS WEIR · TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

Julio Duenas fills out a lineup card every afternoon and hands it to a room that leads the entire league in home runs and is 19-29, and at some point in the last few weeks he became the most senior baseball decision-maker in this building.

Keven X. is in Rochester.

That is the news, and this city has been quiet about it in a way that says something. He took this job in 2024, spent eight seasons here, never got the club to October, and has gone to a franchise that won 100 games last year and is fourth in its division this one. The chair he left has not been filled. There is no general manager listed for the Toronto Griffins, in the last week of May, in a season that is already mostly decided.

So the people who are still here are the story, because they are what there is.

Jason Mills has hit 14 home runs, fourth-most in all of baseball. He is also hitting .175, which is 14 home runs and very little else, and watching him take four pitches and then hit one 430 feet has become the single most entertaining recurring event at this ballpark. Brian Baker has 13 home runs and is hitting .289 and has scored 35 runs, and nobody outside this city has any idea who he is. Alex Moralez is 24, signed in January for \$12.7 million a year through 2036, and has 13 home runs and 36 runs batted in, ninth-most in the league, in his first season here. Luis Martinez is slugging .522.

And you have watched every bit of it against the same seven teams. The Sapphire spent two months diagnosing this club in public and then the rest of the league got twelve games to confirm it. Toronto went 15-21 in the first and 4-8 in the second. Nobody needed the confirmation.

Seventy-two home runs. First in The Big League. Not first in the division, first everywhere, ahead of Philadelphia and Somerville and Denver and everyone else, on a team 12 games out of first place.

You have watched all of it happen and you know exactly what is wrong, because you have been sitting through the top of the sixth inning all spring.

This pitching staff has allowed 74 home runs, which is more than any other team in baseball. The starting rotation has a 5.14 earned run average, 28th of 32. Zachary Heal is at 7.26. Chris Gresham is at 6.61. Rob Bickford is at 5.98 and has given up 11 home runs in 43 2/3 innings. The club is 6-15 on the road and 0-2 in extra innings and 3-6 in one-run games, and every one of those numbers comes from the same place: the other team keeps scoring late and this one runs out of arms.

Ken Henderson has been the exception and deserves better than he has gotten. He is 6-3 with a 3.39 earned run average, he has made 10 starts, and the six wins represent nearly a third of this club's total. Jeff Parmelee, who was picked up in late January and is 33 and was not supposed to matter, has a 2.63 earned run average in seven appearances. Charlie McCullough has a 0.69 WHIP. Alex Gonzales has not allowed a home run all year. There are good arms in that bullpen. There are not enough of them and they arrive too late in the afternoon.

What makes the vacancy matter, rather than being an organizational detail, is the calendar. The deadline is coming. This roster has Ken Henderson at \$20 million with two years to run, Jason Mills at \$20 million with two, Luis Martinez at \$16.8 million with two, Jose Figueroa at \$16 million with two. Four contracts a contending club might want and nobody in the building with the title to move them.

Because look at what the man did on his way out the door. On December 2, Keven X. made three trades in a single afternoon and came away with Chicago's 2033 first-round pick, Chicago's 2033 third, and Milwaukee's first, second, third and fourth round picks in 2032. Six selections, four of them in the top four rounds of the draft this month, plus Qu-bing Jiang, Alex Nuno, Shawn Slater and Mike Bykowski. Out went Tim Hart, Dave Chapman, Shizuma Oda, Alex Sanchez and \$8 million.

That is somebody stockpiling picks for a draft he then did not stay to make. Shawn Slater is hitting .346 at Winnipeg right now. This organization walked into the amateur draft this month holding two first-round picks and nobody in the chair.

And there is real, specific reason to care about what happens next, which is that the pipeline has started to produce.

Start with Ron Turner, because everybody in that organization does. He is 19 years old, he was the 10th overall pick last June, and he is already holding a rotation spot at Edmonton with a 3.38. Nineteen, in High-A, in his first full year. He is the best thing this club owns and not one person in this city has watched him throw a pitch.

Tom Pomaville is hitting .301 with eight home runs and a .634 slugging percentage at Winnipeg. David Tucker has a .455 on-base percentage at Edmonton. Rafael Castano has a 3.44 at Thunder Bay. Vicente

Obuchowski is slugging .476 at Winnipeg.

Then the rest of the board. Antonio Benitez is hitting .385 with a .729 slugging percentage at Thunder Bay. Dennis Minelli is at .348 at Winnipeg. Eddie Camarillo is hitting .394. Carlos Torres has a 1.32 at Thunder Bay and Cory Lingerfelt a 2.42.

That is a group of bats and three arms, and arms are the exact thing this organization needs and the exact thing it cannot currently trade for or protect, because there is no one in that office to do it.

Two championships hang in this building and both of them were won in New York, in 2004 and 2010, by a club with a different name on the front of the uniform in a different country. The last October this city saw was 2022. The one thing that has been genuinely, unambiguously ours since the move is the group of people in that clubhouse right now, and they are leading the world in home runs and losing anyway, for a front office that does not presently exist.

Somebody should take the job. There are 114 games left and a good deal worth keeping.