THE BEACON REPORT

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Beacons defy run differential, go 34-23 since May

BY **MARTY SOWERBY** · THE BEACON REPORT

On May 24 Boston was 23-25 with 208 runs scored and 231 allowed, and I told you the run differential said 21-27 and that it usually gets what it is owed. Since that night the Beacons are 34-23, they have outscored opponents 274-233, and they are 57-48, second in the Sapphire, fifth in the Ice Conference and five games clear of the last playoff spot. The model did not get what it was owed. The model got taken apart, and it is worth being specific about where.

It was not luck. I said the 6-1 extra-inning record would not hold, and at 9-3 it has held about as well as a small sample holds, but a club that outscores people by 41 runs over 57 games is not living on the tenth inning. What I got wrong was the offense. In May this lineup was 21st in runs and 20th in slugging, and I called it a slugging problem that had been there since the first week. It is still 20th in slugging. It is 29th in home runs, with 96. It is also eighth in runs, second in on-base percentage at .335 and third in walks, and it turns out that if you reach base often enough you do not need to hit the ball over anything. My model priced the power and treated the on-base skill as noise. That is a bad assumption and it is now out of the model.

The individual lines, for anyone keeping the ledger. Carlos de la Rosa: .388 on-base percentage. Troy Hutchinson: .304. Edgar Tyler has 80 runs batted in, second in the league, which is where he was in May, on a $500,000 deal that ends this season. Brian Morris, who was at .231 in May, is at .272 with 13 home runs. Danny Hernandez is back from 36 days on the injured list and hitting .287. Nobody here is having a monster year. Everyone is getting on base.

The rotation is Tyler Jackson and then a shrug that has gotten firmer. Jackson is 9-4 with a 2.93 earned run average and 143 strikeouts, 10th in the league, on the league minimum. Bill Ramirez was 0-5 at 4.50 in

May and is 6-6 at 3.66. Juan Hernandez is at 3.93. Anthony Anderson is 3-8 at 5.34 and is the one arm in the rotation the numbers cannot defend.

The bullpen is still the worst unit on the roster. Its 4.07 earned run average ranks 25th, and it has blown 19 saves against 32 converted, 63 percent, up from 52 in May, which is progress in the way a leaking roof that leaks less is progress. The pieces are not the problem so much as the depth: Nick Luke has 16 saves at 2.19, Dan Neff is at 2.69, Tetsuo Nagata at 2.95. In May JP's read was a few arms in a slump that would either work their way out or produce changes. Neither has fully happened. Boston has still not made a trade this season, which in May was a data point and is now a pattern.

That brings us to the deadline, where JP has, for once, told everybody exactly what he wants. His posts on the league's trade board ask for a shortstop who can field and an outfielder. The shortstop part is not negotiable. Eric Tangney, the shortstop JP brought in from Montreal last summer and told us in May would bounce back, has spent 126 days on the injured list and has not played a game this season. Keith Palavandishvili, the fallback, is on the 60-day list with him. Hutchinson has started 16 of the 21 games at short since July 5 and is a better hitter than he is a shortstop. Rich Rhinehart, 36, started the other five and is batting .184.

So: buyer. The more interesting question is with what, because this organization's balance sheet is one asset deep. Glendale is 19-62. Overland Park is 20-61. The rookie club in Fairview is 1-27. Jersey City, one of the two levels I told you in May held everything this organization controls, is 39-54. Joel Esparza, a second baseman at Double-A, is 91st on the league's own list of its top 100 prospects. The farm has been thin since the club came to Boston: in nine seasons here its minor-league clubs have never finished better than 13th in the league in combined record, and they were 24th last year.

And then there is Josh Owens. In May I called him the most valuable asset this organization controls. He is now first on the league's list of its top 100 prospects, the whole league, and second on DSA Reports' list dated July 19. He went 6-3 with a 3.01 earned run average in 86 2/3 innings at Herman before he was hurt on June 23, and he has not pitched since. Every club JP calls about a shortstop will still ask for him first.

My position, and I am aware of my own record on young pitching, is that he should not be the price for a shortstop in a year when Boston is five games clear of the playoff line. Pay for the shortstop in salary. Boston's payroll is $133.9 million, 19th in the league and $9 million under the average, and a rental with money attached is the one thing on this market JP can buy without touching Herman.

Fifty-seven games left. Six against Somerville, who swept Boston here in July, and six against Baltimore, a game back for second. Thirty-one seasons and no championship series. I told you in May where this club would finish, and I was wrong by a wide margin, and the right response to that is to stop predicting this one's record and start watching what JP does with the week in front of him.