CINCINNATI REGISTER

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Regents go 38-19 since May, injured list still empty

BY **WENDELL BARR** · CINCINNATI REGISTER

August 1, in Honolulu. Oahu 2, Cincinnati 1, in 10 innings. Danny Sotelo took the loss.

It was the 39th loss of the season. The Regents are 66-39, first in the Jade by two games over Galveston, and they own the second-best record in baseball. They are 14 games clear of the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference with 57 to play.

In May I wrote that 28-20 was a fact and that was as far as it went. The club has gone 38-19 since. It went 19-7 in June. It won nine straight from June 13 through June 22. I said the pitching had been very good and the health had been perfect and that neither was promised past July. It is August, and both are still true.

The rotation has a 3.25 earned run average. That is the best in the league. Josh Baker is 12-2 with a 2.47 and a 0.98 WHIP. Matt Burke is 10-6 with a 3.10 and 135 strikeouts. Akira Nakamoto, who joined the club in January on the league minimum, is 8-3 with a 3.21. Chris Hartke and Jordan Montanez have both been under 4.00. Chris said in May this rotation was built to last a full season. So far it has.

Nobody on this roster has spent a day on the injured list all year. Not one day. I have been waiting for that to end since April.

The lineup is fourth in the league in batting average and fourth in slugging, and still strikes out less than almost anybody. Joe Duemler has 23 home runs and 72 runs batted in, sixth in the league. Juan Martinez has 18 home runs. Eric Chini has 17. Danny Badillo is hitting .289 and was the league's player of the week on July 19.

I also wrote in May that Nick Addison's 6-0 record in relief was a record the rest of the summer would take apart. He is 11-0. I was wrong about that, and I would like it noted that I was wrong in the direction of

this team being better than I said.

Now the part that is not settled.

The bullpen has a 3.85 earned run average, 21st in the league. It has blown 16 saves. Sotelo has 32 saves, the most in the league, and last night was one of his three losses. The club is 2-5 in extra innings. Matt Klaus has a 5.27 and has been put on the trade block, with the club's own note that he "can be had for cheap."

I asked Chris before the break whether the rotation needed one more arm.

> *"Always keeping our options open for an arm or a bat to help carry us over the line," he said, "but I really like this team right now and they've proven they're more than a flash in the pan."*

Then I asked him what would have to go wrong from here.

> *"It's baseball. Anything can happen," he said. "We've been lucky to stay away from serious injuries all season but one to a key player could make things interesting."*

He is right about that, and he said it before I could.

So is this a buyer. It should be, and a small one. The arm it needs is in the bullpen, not the rotation. The question is what it pays with. The farm will not cover much. Lexington is 46-47. Indianapolis is 39-54. Both High-A clubs are seventh in their divisions. This organization's minor-league clubs finished 24th in the league in combined record this year and have not finished in the top 10 once since the club came to Cincinnati. Mauricio Dominguez, a catcher at Lexington, is the only name on the league's list of its top 100 prospects, at 93rd. The best young player in the system is Bobby Avila, who is 17 and at Goodyear, and DSA Reports had him 20th in the league on July 19. Nobody is trading him for a reliever.

What the club does have is room. The payroll is $129.8 million, 21st in the league and $13 million under the average. Chris sold two draft picks to Tampa Bay for $6 million last winter. If there is a reliever out there whose club wants the money off its books, this is a front office that can take it.

There are 57 games left. Six are against Galveston, which has split six with this club so far. Six are against Rochester, which is six games back. The last time this franchise played a postseason game was 2009, and last October it lost a one-game tiebreaker in Baltimore, 10-2.

I am not writing the hope column. It is August 2 and there are still 57 games to play. But the record is 66-39, and it has been a long time since anybody in this town had to say that about this baseball team.