THE GALVESTON GROTTO

AUGUST 2, 2032 · THE GALVESTON GREMLINS BEAT

# Gremlins slip two back of Regents, six head-to-heads left

BY **RUTHIE ALCORN** · THE GALVESTON GROTTO

Sixty-four and 41. That is the third-best record in baseball and it is 12 games clear of the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference. It is also two games behind Cincinnati.

On May 24 we were 32-16 and four games up on the Regents. Since then we have gone 32-25, which is a good record, and Cincinnati has gone 38-19, which is a better one. I told you in May that nobody in baseball had a better record than ours. That did not last.

The high point was July 9. We beat Tampa Bay that night and stood at 57-31, 26 games over. We have gone 7-10 since. New Orleans came to the island right after the break and swept us, 6-1, 4-2 and 9-6, and New Orleans is 42-63. Last night we lost 4-0 in Phoenix. Four and six in the last 10.

That is a bad three weeks. It is worth being clear about what did not cause it, because the thing that carried this club in May is still carrying it.

The staff has the fifth-best earned run average in the league. The rotation is fifth, the bullpen sixth. Greg Wilks has made 22 starts at 3.08 and Jeremy Lowry has a 3.13 and nine wins, both still on the league minimum. Jeremy Horrocks has thrown 52 1/3 innings of relief and allowed five earned runs, a 0.86. Nelson Mata is at 1.79. In May I said the question that would decide the summer was how long a short-handed staff could keep doing this. The answer so far is all summer.

The one arm that has changed is the closer. Antonio Perez had a 1.29 earned run average when I last wrote. He has allowed 14 earned runs in 25 innings since, and his season number is 3.33. He still has 28 saves, tied for fifth in the league, and the club is 18-9 in one-run games. That was 10-3 in May, and I said then it would come back toward even. It has, a little. We are 8-6 in them since.

The lineup is better than the one I worried about in May. It had 48 home runs then, 24th in the league. It has 120 now, 16th, and it is 13th in runs.

Ashton Turner is the reason. He is hitting .311 with 19 home runs and 47 stolen bases, second in the league, and he has scored 90 runs. Nobody else in baseball has more than 76. Lance Fitzgerald has 17 home runs and 65 runs batted in. Danny Adams, the $9 million winter signing, has 15 and 58. Jose Veras came back on June 7 and has hit .280 since.

Oscar Mitchell is still at .189. I asked Jeremy if right field was the spot he would fix, and he said no. Mitchell, he said, is very solid defensively out there and "is always a threat to go deep," and his on-base percentage "is over 100 points higher" than his average. The on-base percentage is .308 and there are 12 home runs, so the numbers are with him on the bat. Randy Wilkinson, who has four Great Gloves, is at .218 in center field. Those two are where the outs come from.

In the same answer Jeremy said his only concerns right now were "getting healthy and getting Buckmaster back to where he was before the elbow injury." Jeff Buckmaster made 32 starts with a 3.09 in 2030 and then missed most of last year. He is at 4.55 this season. In his last five starts it is 3.29. That is the right direction at the right time.

So, the deadline. It closes with the next sim.

This is not a club deciding whether to buy. A 64-41 team 12 games clear of the field is buying something. The question is how much, and Jeremy told us in July that "picks are always on the table for the right player." He has made one move so far. This week he sent a 2034 10th-round pick to Somerville for Edgar Rodriguez, a left fielder who was hitting .293 with 12 home runs and 58 runs batted in at Paradise, their Triple-A club. That looks like a bat for the bench or the designated hitter's spot, bought for almost nothing, which is how this front office likes to shop.

There is room to do more. The payroll is $125.5 million, 23rd in the league and $17 million under the average. Most of the pitchers I named above are on the minimum through this season, and Turner is signed through 2035. If there is a year to spend a real pick on one real arm for the ninth inning, it is the year the rest of the staff costs nothing. I trust Jeremy to know which arm. I would just like it to be one.

What I would not spend is the top of the farm, and there is more of it than there was in May. Chris Hein, our first-round pick this spring, went straight to Double-A Shreveport and is hitting .291 with a .383 on-base percentage in 41 games. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has him 26th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has him 58th and first in our system. DSA also has Nate Krogh, the 18-year-old pitcher we took in the second round, 104th, and he has a 2.66 in five starts at Texarkana. The league's list adds Josh Bassett at Waco, 65th, and Johnny Peterson, 80th, who has made 17 starts at Red Bud.

Justin Tidwell is on neither list. He is 20, he is hitting .326 with 15 home runs at Lafayette, and I told you in May he was the one to watch. I still think so.

The minor-league clubs have not been where this organization's strength shows. Taken together they finished between 16th and 23rd in the league in combined record every year from 2025 through 2031, and they are 14th this year. The strength shows here. Ten of the 14 pitchers who have worked for us this season make the league minimum.

Fifty-seven games left. Thirty-nine are inside the Jade and 27 are at home. Six are against Cincinnati, the club two games ahead of us: three here on August 27, 28 and 29, and three there on September 20, 21 and 22. We split the six we played with them in April and May.

This franchise has won its division once, in 2010. We are going to October this year unless something goes badly wrong. Whether we go as the second division champion in our history gets settled on those six dates, and the last three are in Cincinnati.