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Mettler leads baseball in homers and steals

BY **CORBIN DIETRICH** · KANSAS CITY STAR-JOURNAL

Start at Davenport, because that is where two of my three bats are now.

In May I wrote that Ryan Patton, Antonio Meza and Scott Joyce were all at High-A and all hitting, and that this system, which has produced arms for 20 years, was finally producing bats. Joyce has held up his end. He is at Sioux Falls with a .299 average and 10 home runs. Patton and Meza were sent a level down to Davenport, whose season did not open until July, and neither played a game in June. Patton has eight home runs there in 25 games, which is fine for a 19-year-old. Meza is hitting .135 in 11 games. I called Patton's placement aggressive in May without saying the obvious thing, which is that aggressive placements sometimes get walked back.

The name that matters most arrived the day my last piece ran. Jimmy Glover, the third overall pick in the May draft, is 10th on the league's own list of its top 100 prospects. He is 19 and has made six starts at Kansas, the rookie club, with a 4.29 earned run average. Carlos Castillo, the teenage catcher I mentioned in May, is on the same roster with three home runs in 19 games. Jon Crawford, also 19, is 27th on the league's list and is at Davenport. Dante Muro, whom I described in May as getting hit hard at two stops, went down again to Sioux Falls, allowed six earned runs in four starts there, and is 73rd.

DSA Reports sees the system differently. Its list dated July 19 has no Kansas City player in its top 100. It has Pedro Huante 102nd, Josh Herrington 110th and Tim Gouldman 121st. Huante has 12 home runs at Sioux Falls. That is two respected lists that do not share a name, which usually means nobody knows yet, me included.

The organization's affiliates are 19th in the league in combined record this year. They were 22nd and 23rd the two years before that.

Now the big-league club, which for once is the bigger story.

The Scouts are 63-42, first in the Topaz by two games over Milwaukee and Oklahoma City, and first in the Fire Conference. They are 9-3 since July 19 and are at their best record of the season this morning. The payroll is $101.7 million, 29th in the league.

Jared Mettler has 34 home runs, the most in baseball. He has 61 stolen bases, also the most, and 14 more than anybody else. He has 76 runs batted in, third in the league, and a .292 average. He is 24, he was the 18th overall pick in 2029, and he makes $500,000. I asked Brad in July what the plan was for keeping him.

> *"It's only Mettler's 2nd year in the bigs, but we certainly look to keep him a Scout for as long as we can," Brad said. "Kid is shaping up to be a superstar."*

He has already shaped. The question in this town is the same one I asked in May, whether this organization can keep one, and with Mettler it will not get a cleaner test.

He has help now. Dan Espeseth, a third-round pick in 2025, has 23 home runs and 74 runs batted in, tied for fourth in the league. The offense I called 23rd in runs in May is 11th. It is fifth in home runs and second in stolen bases. Kurt Wagers is still at .199 and Mike Sullivan at .216, and Justin Olsen, the sixth pick in 2030, is at .230 in 58 games.

The pitching has come back toward the pack. The rotation was fourth in the league in May and is 11th now. Nate Peterson has thrown 143 1/3 innings at 3.77. Jason Bell has a 3.12 and Frank Smith a 3.19, both on the minimum. The bullpen is third in the league at 3.09. Tony Beltran, a $1.3 million signing in December, has a 1.53 over 59 innings, and Ben Taylor has 28 saves, tied for fifth.

Freddy Echeverria is 11-5 with a 4.68 earned run average in the first season of a five-year, $191.6 million deal. I asked Brad whether that was what he signed.

> *"I think Echeverria will say he's not playing to his expectations," Brad said. "He's had a lot of good starts, but had some games get away from him. We expect him to turn to form in the 2nd half."*

I wrote in May that this club had beaten what it was supposed to beat and had not yet proven the rest. It was 8-13 against clubs over .500 then. Against clubs with a winning record today it is 27-26, and outside the division it is 34-26. That is proof enough for me, and I was wrong to hedge as hard as I did.

The deadline closes with the next sim, and Kansas City has not made a move since May. It has posted nothing on the league's trade board and asked for nothing on the want list. For a first-place club, that is a choice, and I think it is the right one. What a seller would ask for is Glover, Crawford and the bats at Davenport, and a club in first place does not need to spend the next wave on two months.

Fifty-seven games left, 30 at home. Thirty-nine are inside the Topaz, six apiece against Milwaukee and Oklahoma City, the two clubs two games back.

The 2026 club won 99 games, took the division and went to the championship series. This one is on pace for 97. I have compared four teams to that one in print and found every one of them short. This one waits until October has had its say.