KVGS-AM AND THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW

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High Rollers' bullpen logs league-high 547 innings by design

BY **SONNY PARDO** · KVGS-AM AND THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW

Remember the number from May? Two hundred sixty-one relief innings in 48 games. I told you to do the arithmetic on what it would look like in August. Here is the arithmetic. It is August, and the Las Vegas bullpen has thrown 547 innings.

That is the most in baseball by 53. The rotation has thrown 393, the fewest in baseball by 64. The starters' earned run average is 5.67, and that is 32nd of 32. Last place. Nobody else is close enough to argue about it either.

Now, here is the part I owe you, because I did not have it in May. Eric answered my questions the night that piece ran, and the answer is a plan, not an accident.

> *"The nerds say, a SP's productivity drop dramatically the 3rd time through the order," Eric said. "So we cap our SPs at 18 hitters. We have been doing that for 3 years now. It is easier on the arms, and the wallet."*

He went on. "My entire rotation makes less than $10 mil combined. We focus more on 'leverage' over IP."

Fair enough. It is his club and he told us exactly what he was doing. So let us grade it on his terms. He said in May he expected "things to normalize to where they should be. A below average rotation that keeps it close for 3 innings, and offense that does just enough, and a lockdown bullpen."

Did they normalize? The rotation did not keep it close. Eduardo Carrillo was at 6.87 in May and he is at 7.44 now, with 40 walks in 52 innings, and he is on the injured list. Joe Stensland is 1-8 with a 6.95. Evan Lehman has come down to 4.75, and Tyler Davis to 5.21. Roger Thomas is still the one steady arm at 3.57, and he is 5-10. The offense did not do just enough. It is 25th in runs and 28th in on-base percentage.

And the lockdown bullpen? It is 15th in the league at 3.55. It was ninth in May. That is what 547 innings does to a relief corps. It does not break it. It wears it down to average.

Except for one man, and he deserves his own paragraph. Don Fraker has pitched in 59 games, all in relief, and thrown 103 1/3 innings with a 1.74 earned run average and 148 strikeouts. That is tied for sixth in the whole league in strikeouts, and most of the men ahead of him are starters. In 2018 we had a bullpen you saved for the games that counted. This year we have Fraker, and the games that count are all of them.

Jose Bautista, who Eric said in May "will bounce back," has, a little. He was at .204 then. He is at .240 with a .338 on-base percentage and 28 stolen bases. Arturo Molina has 24 home runs and 71 runs batted in. The club has stolen 165 bases, third in baseball. It is still the most entertaining bad team in the league.

Because it is a bad team. Forty-six and 59. Sixth in the Jade, 20 games behind Cincinnati, six games behind Denver for the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference. There was an eight-game losing streak from July 5 to July 17, swept in Galveston and swept at home by Rochester. The bottom came on July 20 at 39-56. They are 7-3 in the 10 games since.

Now the deadline, and I can tell you which way this one is going, because the front office already told the league. The trade block has Lehman, Advincula, Colson, Talamante, Valentine, Jose Chavarria, Mark Denton and Jeff Bass on it.

Relievers for sale, from a club that runs on relievers. That is a seller, and for once I cannot argue with it. Six games out with 57 to play and the worst rotation in baseball is not a pennant race. It is a waiting room.

So where does the waiting end? Same place I pointed you in May. Downstairs.

The Las Vegas affiliates have the third-best combined record in the league this year, and they were fourth or sixth in each of the last three. Tim Lankford, the eighth overall pick in 2025, is 10-1 with a 2.20 in 16 starts at Mandalay Bay. Josh Dillard has 14 home runs there. Bryan Kiestler, this year's first-round pick, is hitting .357 with 11 home runs at Luxor, and Eric Archie has allowed one earned run in 27 1/3 innings of relief on the same club.

And here is the catch, and you knew one was coming. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects does not have a single High Roller on it. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has Elia Benarrivo 84th and Ken Grossman 88th and nobody higher. Winning records and no ranked names. I called it a pipeline in May, two years from mattering. The two lists say it is a good farm team. It is not yet a farm system.

Fifty-seven to play, 30 at home, 39 inside the Jade. Ross Colson is back on the injured list, owed $20 million this year and nothing after it.

Back in 2018 this club won 117 games and the phone in the bullpen was a piece of furniture. I know. You have heard it. I will keep saying it until there is a rotation in this town that makes me stop.