MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

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Blues climb out of baseball's basement, barely

BY **OTIS FRAYNE** · MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

Thirty-six and 69. Twenty-seven games out of first in the Topaz on the second of August, 18 behind the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference, and this morning, not the worst record in The Big League. Spokane is 33-72. I will let you decide how much that is worth. I have been at this long enough to know it is worth something, and not much.

In May I wrote about seven one-run games and seven losses. The Blues have played 17 more of them since, and won six. They are 6-18 in one-run games on the year and 1-7 in extra innings, and last night Chicago took one in the 12th, 8-6. A person from another town would still call it luck. A person from here has stopped using that word.

There was a June. It deserves to be written down, because it may be the only one this year. The Blues went 12-14 in June, won four straight from June 22 to June 26, the longest winning streak they have had all season, and for a few weeks the ballpark sounded like a place where a baseball team played rather than one where it was kept. July was 8-15. Since the break it is 5-10.

The money I wrote about is where it was, and it has behaved a little better than it did in May, which I owe it. Eli Bernal was hitting .247 then. He is at .270, with nine home runs, and he is owed $28 million a year through 2036. Casey Schnake has 25 stolen bases and a .286 average and took a player of the week award on July 12. Nachman Cohen is still at .206, still owed $21.2 million through 2035. Gavin Sadler is 37 and has been on the injured list since April.

Vicente Chavez is the one who has carried it all summer, as he was carrying it in May. Twenty-two home runs, 56 runs batted in, a .283 average and a .504 slugging percentage, for $7 million this year. Jamie Bliss, who won a player of the week award of his own on June 21, is at .269.

The pitching I called no disgrace in May has come apart at the back of the rotation. Adrian Jones is 2-11 with a 5.90. Jonah Kitchen is 1-10. Travis Byrd, the sixth pick in the 2027 draft, is the bright spot, with a 3.08 across 20 starts and 112 strikeouts. Ben Cowhey has a 2.53 out of the bullpen and Joe Cardinal a 2.33. There have been 18 blown saves.

Then there is Max McIntyre, who is the story of the next two weeks whether anybody wants him to be or not. Through the Fourth of July he had a 3.20 earned run average and nine wins, on a deal worth $1.4 million that ends this year. He has pitched 21 innings since and allowed an 8.72, and his season number is 4.17. A contender looking at him now sees three months of good and one month of trouble. The club has not moved him. The deadline closes with the next sim.

It should move him, and it should move Bliss, whose deal ends this year too. There is no argument left for keeping a pitcher in the last months of his contract on a club 27 games out. That is not a hard decision. It is only a sad one, and this town has made its peace with those.

What is not sad is below. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has four Blues on it this summer. Chris Faulk, the second-round pick in 2029, is 14th. He is hitting .332 with a .425 on-base percentage at Bayshore Gardens. Efrain Rosales, the 18-year-old I told you about in May, before Cotati had opened its season, is 16th, and his first six starts have not been kind: an 8.00 earned run average. Mike Jenkins is 35th and hitting .321 at Madera Highlands. Roy Newmark, in the same rotation, is 98th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, agrees on the top two, with Faulk 22nd and Jenkins 34th, and puts Pedro Miranda, who has a 3.67 across 81 innings at Madera Highlands, 101st.

In May I told you there were three bats at Chula Vista hitting the way this lineup could not, and that somebody should find out before the summer was out whether they could do it here. Nobody has. Giovanni Porreca is 29, has 22 home runs at Triple-A, and has not been called up. Juan Rojas has 16. Quinn Stoikos has 11. I said then that none of them would be a better player than he is right now. That is still true. It was never the reason not to look.

Fifty-seven games left, 27 of them at home, 39 inside the Topaz: six apiece against Kansas City, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City, Virginia, Huron and Southland.

This franchise has had nine seasons of a hundred losses, going back to the years in Nashville. To avoid a tenth, the Blues would have to go 27-30 the rest of the way. They have played .386 baseball since May. That comes to about 22 more wins, and 104 losses.

And the people will come anyway. They came in June, when it was almost something, and they will come in September, when it is not. That is the part of this I have never been able to put in a box score, in either city, and I have stopped trying.