MILWAUKEE SENTINEL-PRESS

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Mobsters' clutch gene fades: 1-6 in one-run games

BY **DANNY KOLAR** · MILWAUKEE SENTINEL-PRESS

Steve Summey is 9-1 now. Still 25, still on the minimum, still a middle reliever, and still the most Milwaukee thing on this roster. Two more wins in ten weeks, which is about the pace you would expect once the tie games in the sixth inning stopped turning into wins in the seventh.

They have stopped. That was the whole point of what I wrote in May, and I would like the record to show that I am not enjoying this as much as it sounds.

In May the Mobsters were 11-2 in one-run games and I called it a loan. I asked Ryan whether 11-2 could hold. "Who says it can't hold up?" he said. "Our boys got the clutch gene." The club was 19-10 in those games on July 5. It is 20-16 now. Since my May piece it is 9-14 in games decided by one run, and since July 5 it is 1-6. The loan got called.

In July I asked him whether the gene had been traded. His answer, in full: "The boys lost Jesus."

Fair. Jesus Espinosa has not played since May 11. He was hitting .285 with nine home runs and a .530 slugging percentage, he is paid $23.5 million a year, and he is not expected back this season. In May I called him the best player on this club. He still is, from the dugout.

Where that leaves them: 61-44, second in the Topaz, two games behind Kansas City and level with Oklahoma City. Tied for second in the Fire Conference, nine games clear of the first club outside the field. On July 24 they won in Baltimore and stood at 60-38, the best they have been all year. Since then they are 1-6, swept in Boston, and they dropped two of three at home to Somerville.

What held up is the thing I said was real. Milwaukee has drawn 394 walks, the most in baseball. The on-base percentage is .332, fourth. The lineup is third in the league in OPS and ninth in runs, and in a clubhouse

with no face and no interest in getting one, a lineup that takes pitches is about as on-brand as it gets. Ramiro Ortiz has 21 home runs and 65 runs batted in. He is hitting .224, which in a smarter city would get him dropped in the order, and he took a player of the week award on May 31. Trevor Faria took one on June 28 and Willie Cuevas on July 19. Moises Aguilar is hitting .293.

The pitching, which I said was where the season lived, has come back to the pack. The staff was second in the league in May. It is seventh. The bullpen was third and is 10th. Josh Brown still has a 1.33 and Ryan Moynahan a 2.82, and Alex Sanchez has a 3.09 across 22 starts in the first year of the deal that cost this year's first four draft picks. Ryan told me in May that if Sanchez holds up into the later years of that contract it is "easily worth it." Year one is holding.

So what does a club with the fifth-highest payroll in the league do at the deadline, two games out of first with its best player gone for the year?

I asked Ryan in July who the arm or the bat was that he would go get.

> *"No comment," he said.*

Two words, and I have known him long enough to hear three more in them. He had already told the rest of the league. On the league's want list he has asked for an infielder rental, "ideally a all-star or near all-star quality guy," first basemen need not apply, and if that fails, "a slightly above average IF, rental or not." That is a man replacing Espinosa, not a man standing pat. The payroll is $186.6 million and nobody in Wisconsin has ever heard this front office say it is out of money.

My read: he gets his infielder, he gets him cheap, and nobody outside this state notices it happened.

Down below, the name to know changed since May. Larry Leppert Jr., whom I called the best of a thin group at Fort Wayne, went up to Queen City and has a 1.46 across seven starts there. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has him 28th in the league. The league's own top 100 has one Mobster on it, Jason Klamm, 74th, a second baseman hitting .276 at Queen City. He got 10 games up here and three hits. Esteban Calleja, the arm I told you to circle, is 19 and closing at Cedar Rapids now, with 14 saves.

Fifty-seven games left, 30 at home. Thirty-nine inside the Topaz, six apiece against Kansas City, Virginia, Huron and San Juan. Three against Oklahoma City.

Two championships in this city and I spent most of the September before the second one explaining why it would not happen. Not this time. It is a good team with a loan paid off and its best player on the shelf, and it is still two games out of first. Around here that is a quiet August, and quiet is what they like.