EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

AUGUST 2, 2032 · THE SAN JUAN STOGIES BEAT

Stogies cling to last playoff spot; Potter fans No. 2,000

BY **NÉLIDA CRUZ BETANCOURT** · EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

On the night of July 11 the crowd at the ballpark stood up in the middle of an inning for a pitcher on a team that was losing. Dustin Potter had just struck out his 2,000th batter. He struck out nine that night against Oklahoma City, and the Stogies lost 3-2. It is the kind of evening a city with a short history in this league collects and keeps.

Here is where the summer has taken them since.

The Stogies are 54-51. That is sixth in the Topaz, which is the most crowded division in baseball, and eighth in the Fire Conference, which is the last playoff spot. They hold it by two games over Oahu and three over Vancouver, San Diego and Phoenix. They have won eight of their last 12 and swept Montreal on the road last week.

It has not been a straight road. In May I wrote about a club that was scoring runs faster than almost anyone and waiting on its pitchers to get healthy. It went 17-10 in May and stood at 35-28 on June 10. Then it lost nine straight, from June 11 to June 20, and for a week this city went quiet. July was 14-9.

The pitchers did come back, and the staff has become the part of this team I would bet on. It has allowed 98 home runs, third-fewest in the league, and struck out 970, third-most. Its WHIP is sixth-best. Potter is 8-4 with a 3.87 and 149 strikeouts, fifth in the league. Isaiah Logan, one of the men on the injured list when I last wrote, is back with a 2.87 across nine starts. John Campbell has a 2.50 out of the bullpen and Miguel Valencia a 2.08, and Bill Snyder has allowed one earned run in 23 innings.

The hitting is still here too, sixth in the league in runs and third in slugging. Chris Whittington, 24 and on the minimum, has 20 home runs and a .295 average. Frank Mildner has 19, and he is on the injured list now, which is the one piece of bad news in this report. Jason Parker has 19 as well. Danny Cunningham, who was

hitting .394 in 21 games when I last wrote, is hitting .333 with nine home runs in 53, and I have run out of ways to say he should play more.

And the deadline closes with the next sim. I asked Chuck in July whether a club one game out should buy or trust its young hitters. The Stogies have made no trades this season. They have posted nothing on the league's trade board. In a division where Huron paid a first-round pick for a starter and Oklahoma City and Milwaukee are each two games out of first, that silence is its own answer: this front office is trusting the kids.

I think it is the right answer, coming from the most optimistic person in this press box. The club is spending $148.7 million already. Potter is signed through 2035 and Mike Boller through 2036. Jonathan Mendoza, the $17 million starter, has been sent down to Havana after nine starts and a 6.21. There is not an obvious place for a new arm to go, and the young hitters are the reason this team is in a playoff spot at all.

The organization underneath them is also still the best news in this report. The affiliates have the seventh-best combined record in the league, and they have finished in the top nine every year since 2025. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has three Stogies on it. Adam Rall, a 23-year-old second baseman with 18 home runs at Havana, is 12th. Daniel Shuping, who has made 17 starts at Kingston, is 75th. Matt Giglio, the 19-year-old I wrote about in May, is now closing at Nassau, with 26 saves, and is 99th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, puts Rall 16th, and adds Clint Dukeshire, a center fielder with 13 home runs at Kingston, at 38th.

Chris Cobble, the 20-year-old catcher I told you to write down, hit .358 at Nassau and has moved across to Santo Domingo, where he is at .295. Write him down again.

Fifty-seven games remain, 30 of them here. Thirty-nine are inside the Topaz, six apiece against Kansas City, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City, Virginia, Huron and Southland. There is no soft part of that schedule. There is also nobody in this division who wants to come to this ballpark in September.

The last October in this uniform was 2029. The next one is two games away, in a building that stood up for a pitcher on a night the home team lost.