THE STRAIGHT LINE

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Moneyline on 111-win pace again, best in baseball

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Seventy-two and 33. At that rate Somerville wins 111 games, which is the number the 2024 club won, and I would ask readers to hold that comparison lightly for reasons they will already know.

The Moneyline have the best record in baseball by six games over Cincinnati. They lead the Sapphire by 15. They have gone 41-16 since my May piece, they are 37-14 against clubs with a winning record, and they are 42-12 at home. The run differential is plus-157, the best in the league. Every full month of this season has been won by at least seven games.

In May I spent most of a column on the bullpen: 200 relief innings in 48 games, on pace for more than 670, and the question of whether arms used that way in May would be available in September. I asked JR whether it was the design or a consequence of a rotation he did not trust. He answered at length, and since the piece was already out, here is the part that matters.

> *"Don't worry about the bullpen innings," JR said. "The rotation will get their innings up when it's time. I don't have star pitchers to throw big innings in cold weather. I don't need a guy throwing 120 pitches in Tampa Bay, in May, either. And I have Jason White and Gilberto Toledo. Pick-up-the-ball-anytime- anywhere pitchers. They're our MVPs. We ramp up as slow as possible."*

I have checked it against the ledger, which is the only way I know how to take an answer. Through May 23 the starters averaged 4.9 innings a game. Since then they have averaged 5.1, and the bullpen's share has come

down with it. The full-season pace for relief innings is now about 656 rather than 670. It is a small shift and it is in exactly the direction he said it would be.

And the results have made the question academic. The bullpen's earned run average is 2.65, the best in the league. Alex Rangel has a 0.65 across 48 appearances and has not allowed a home run. Jason Shannon has a 2.11 with 15 holds. Chris Charvet has struck out 117 men in 67 1/3 innings. Jason White, one of the two men JR named, is 10-2 out of the bullpen across 83 1/3 innings. Tim Snyder has 27 saves.

The rotation has done more than get its innings up. Chase Martin is 10-4 with a 2.25 earned run average and 155 strikeouts, third in the league, on the league minimum. Bob Reyes has a 2.73 and 147. The staff as a whole leads the league in earned run average, runs allowed and strikeouts, 1,183 of them.

So the one thing I worried about in May has turned into the club's great strength. I had the risk right and the outcome wrong. That is a distinction I have made on this club's behalf for 16 years, and it would be dishonest not to make it against myself.

The lineup is fourth in runs and second in walks drawn. Steve Frey, who was hitting .199 when I last wrote, is hitting .223 with 29 home runs, fifth in the league, at 24. Antonio Reyna, 36, has 20 home runs. Dave Tyler has 62 runs batted in at shortstop on the contract I said would look like the best in the division, and it does.

The injured list, which was empty in May, is empty again this morning. The only stint all season belonged to Josh Coyne in June.

At the deadline this front office has done what it did all winter: small, precise, and not what anyone expected. It sent its 2033 first-round pick to Spokane for Joel King, a reliever with a 5.65 earned run average there who has a 2.45 in 11 appearances here. It moved Edgar Rodriguez to Galveston for a 10th-round pick and Travis Nelson to Chicago for two late ones.

In May JR told me why none of this worries him. "We have the most homegrown talent of any organization in the TBL," he said, and "half the rotation comes from the 20th round or later." Jason Sage, a 24th-round pick, and Bob Nelson, a 23rd-rounder, are two of the seven men who have started games this season. The farm underneath has the sixth-best combined record in the league and has been top eight every year since 2025. The league's own top 100 has three of them: Kevin Miller, 30th, hitting .309 with 13 home runs at Henderson, where I wrote in May that he was having a hard time; and two pitchers, Dustin Geene 44th and Elliott Staley 70th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, adds Sebastian Croslin, 54th, who has struck out 105 in 78 2/3 innings at Henderson.

Fifty-seven games left, 27 at home, 39 inside the Sapphire. The magic number is not yet small enough to print.

Four championship series, no championship, 26 Octobers in 31 years. None of that is on the schedule until October, and none of it will be decided by anything on this page. For 16 years I have said the process is sound. This year, the results agree.