

SPOKANE CHRONICLE

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Sasquatches deal closer for first-round pick

BY **HAL ONDRUSEK** · SPOKANE CHRONICLE

Jonathan Montano is still at Walla Walla, and he is better than he was.

In May he had a 4.87 earned run average across 44 1/3 innings of Triple-A for a club that was losing two of every three, and I told you he was the best pitcher in this organization by a clear margin. He has thrown 108 innings there now, with a 3.83 earned run average and 82 strikeouts. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has him 13th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has him 24th. He is 22, he was this club's first-round pick last June, and this city still has not seen him pitch.

Toby Newman has been promoted. He was the 16th-round pick I told you had a .400 on-base percentage at Sandpoint. He finished there at .331 with a .413 on-base percentage and is hitting .306 at Walla Walla, one phone call away. Matthew Lockwood is at .278 with eight home runs at Tacoma. Ricardo Morales, a 22-year-old reliever, has 16 saves and a 2.01 at Walla Walla, and the league's list has him 81st. Aaron Myers, the 17-year-old who had not thrown a pitch in May, has thrown nine and two-thirds innings at Bend, too few to mean anything yet.

I asked Sly in May whether Newman and Lockwood were part of his plans.

> *"Neither of them are in my plans for 2034," he said. "We may be looking for 2035 they just aren't there yet."*

That is the most specific thing anyone in this front office has said about a timeline since he took over, and I have written it on the inside of my notebook. Newman at Triple-A in August is the first evidence I have seen that the date might move.

Now the big-league club, briefly, because it is the part of this report that has nothing new to say.

Spokane is 33-72. That is the worst record in The Big League, three games behind Memphis. It has lost eight of its last 10 and it has gone 19-38 since my May piece. The on-base percentage of .280 is last in the league. It has drawn the fewest walks in the league and issued the most. In May I wrote that a team that could not command the strike zone on either side of the ball would lose about two of every three. It has lost 72 of 105.

Tyler Holman is still the exception. He is 5-9 with a 3.76 earned run average and 118 strikeouts across 22 starts, 26 years old, a draft pick out of this system and on the league minimum. Joe Kavka, the seventh overall pick in 2026, is hitting .271. Shane Romans has 13 home runs.

The deadline closes with the next sim, and this front office has done the one thing a club in this position should do. On the league's trade block Sly posted a line, "Moving Expiring Contracts," and a list: Roberto Castro, Bill Garcia, Joel King, Justin Hebert, Edgar Hernandez and Wil Reyna. One of them has moved. Joel King, the closer, went to Somerville for its first-round pick next year.

A first-round pick for a reliever with a 5.65 earned run average here is a good trade. That has not been true of this front office before. It is also the kind of trade that only pays off in about 2036, which is roughly when I expect this franchise to reappear in the standings anyway.

The other names on that list are harder to move. Castro and Garcia are on the injured list. Hebert missed most of the season hurt. Hernandez is 34.

The affiliates are 25th in the league in combined record, after 26th last season. It is not a winning system yet. It is a system with Montano at the top of it and Newman a step behind, and that is two more names than it had to its credit a year ago.

Fifty-seven games left, 27 at home. Thirty-nine inside the Ruby.

For the record, because it gets muddled every time it comes up: Spokane won the title in 2008 over the Boston Boom, who are now the Chicago Black Sox. Not the Beacons. It remains the only championship in this franchise's history, and the next one is pitching at Walla Walla every fifth day.