TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

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Brandon takes over Griffins on eve of deadline

BY **HOLLIS WEIR** · TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

The office at the end of the hall has a name on the door again.

In May I wrote about a club with nobody in that chair, Keven gone to Rochester and Julio Duenas filling out lineup cards for a front office that did not exist. This week the league welcomed a new general manager for the Griffins: Brandon, who arrives with a deadline closing at the next sim and 57 games left in a season that has not gone the way anyone here hoped. The welcomes came quickly. One general manager sent him a trade offer before the welcomes were finished, which tells you something about the neighbourhood he just moved into.

So here is what he walks into, starting with the people, because they are still the best thing about this club.

Alex Moralez, the 24-year-old signed in January through 2036, has 25 home runs, tied for eighth in the league, and 70 runs batted in, tied for 10th. He had 13 when I last wrote about him. Jason Mills, the man who takes four pitches and then hits one 430 feet, has 24 home runs and is hitting .217, which is to say he has become more of himself. Brian Baker, who nobody outside this city had heard of in May, has 17. Qu-bing Jiang, one of the players who came back in the Tim Hart trade, is hitting .277.

Ken Henderson still deserves better than he gets. He is 9-8 with a 3.91 and 147 strikeouts, tied for eighth in the league. Charlie McCullough has a 0.74 WHIP out of the bullpen. Joe Case, who came from Milwaukee in the Alex Sanchez deal, has a 3.39.

And then the part of the story I am least equipped to write, and have to anyway: the home runs this club gives up.

In May the Griffins led the league in home runs hit and in home runs allowed. The first one has cooled. They have 135, eighth. The second one has not. This staff has allowed 157 home runs, the most in baseball. The rotation's earned run average is 5.04, 29th. Zachary Heal, the second pick in the 2026 draft, has a 6.75. Chris Gresham has a 5.59. That, more than anything, is why the Griffins are 45-60, seventh in the Sapphire, 27 games behind Somerville and seven out of the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference.

It has been a better summer than spring. The low point was July 7, at 34-53. Since then the club is 11-7, including a sweep of Memphis last week, and it is 6-4 in its last 10.

The deadline question is the one I asked in May, only now somebody can answer it. Henderson and Mills are each owed $20 million this year and next. Luis Martinez is owed $16.8 million and Jose Figueroa $16 million, through the same season. A club seven games out has four contracts a contender might want and, as of this week, someone with the authority to decide. I do not know yet what he thinks, and I would rather ask him than guess.

What he also inherits is the farm, and it is better than its record. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has five Griffins on it. Mike Larson, a 23-year-old center fielder at Winnipeg, is 41st, and has had a two-game look up here. Chase Williams, an 18-year-old pitcher who made six starts at Moose Jaw and has moved up to Calgary, is 67th. Rafael Castano and Nick Knight, both starting at Thunder Bay, are 86th and 92nd. And Ron Turner, the 19-year-old I told you in May was the best thing this club owns, is 100th. He has pitched at three levels this summer and is now at Double-A Thunder Bay, where he has a 1.38 in four starts. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, thinks more of him: 25th, behind only Larson, whom it has 15th.

Tom Pomaville, who I wrote about in May, is outside both top 100s and is hitting .277 with 13 home runs at Winnipeg, with 11 games up here already.

The affiliates as a whole are 22nd in the league in combined record. The names are ahead of the records.

Fifty-seven games left, 27 at home, 39 inside the Sapphire.

Two championships hang in this building, both won in New York. The last October this city saw was 2022. What is ours is a clubhouse that hits the ball out of the park and a farm with a 19-year-old climbing it quickly, and now, finally, someone whose job it is to decide what to do with both.