VANCOUVER LEDGER

AUGUST 2, 2032 · THE VANCOUVER VANDALS BEAT

Vandals' bats wake up, but club sits three out

BY **SIMON BEAUDRY-NASH** · VANCOUVER LEDGER

I owe Ben an apology and I am going to deliver it in capital letters so nobody misses it.

HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE RUNS.

In May we were 28th in the league in runs scored and I spent a whole column yelling about a lineup that put the ball in play more than anybody and could not score. Ben answered my questions that week, and the part I did not print went like this:

> *"The power will come. The weather is starting to warm up and so will the bats. Dora hasn't gotten going yet. Carrasco either with the long ball. Plenty of guys. We know they have power for days, we've seen it in past seasons. I'm willing to bet we won't be 28th in runs for long."*

We are 14th. Fourteenth! Still the fewest strikeouts in the league, 751 of them, and now the sixth-best batting average in baseball and runs to show for it. Justin Dora has 13 home runs. Jared Littrell has 14. Alex Carrasco has 11. It is not power for days. It is power for most of the afternoon, and I will take it.

And the record came with it. We were 20-31 on May 27, eleven under, the bottom of the season. We have gone 31-23 since. There were SEVEN STRAIGHT WINS from June 18 to June 25. Since the All-Star break we are 10-5, and in the last two weeks we swept Rochester here, took two of three in Galveston and beat up New Orleans twice.

We are 51-54. Three games behind San Juan for the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference, tied with San Diego and Phoenix, one behind Oahu. FOUR TEAMS fighting over one chair, and we are one of them.

Bob Labbe is hitting .304 at the minimum. Gabe Reed is at .283. Angel Diaz is at .320 in 54 games. And Adam Bickler, who I told you in May was 2-6 with the fourth-most strikeouts in the league, now has 164 strikeouts, SECOND IN THE WHOLE LEAGUE, and a 3.49 earned run average across 152 innings, the most on the staff by a mile. His record is 6-7. OF COURSE IT IS. This uniform does that to a man.

The rotation behind him is still the problem. Ryan Wallace, the $12 million Pitcher of the Year winner we signed in March, has a 5.71. The starters as a group are 28th. D.J. Bakker has a 3.11 in a swing role and is the best thing on the staff after Bickler.

So you would think, three games out, with the lineup finally hitting, that this is the week we go get a starter.

You would think that.

Here is what the front office posted on the league's trade board this week. On the block: Bakker, Wallace, Chris Jones, Angel Diaz and Ian Crook. On the want list, in Ben's own words: "prospects of all shapes and sizes, but ya know, good."

That is a SELLER. Three games out, winning 10 of 15, and shopping the best arm it has after Bickler.

And I am going to do the thing I always do, which is blame the building instead of the players, except this time I am not sure the building is wrong. Because of what is underneath.

The Vancouver farm system has the second-best combined record in the league, the same place it finished last year. Four of our six affiliates are in first place. Kelowna is 68-25. Vernon is 58-23. White Rock is 56-25. Victoria is 56-37. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has SEVEN Vandals on it, tied with Fort Collins, behind only Oahu: Jake DeLong 36th, Kyle Gregson 40th, Micah Patterson 45th, Jeremy Austin 48th, Ernie Flores 51st, Luis Ramirez 56th, Roberto Acevedo 59th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has Jarrod Bensel 11th, and seven Vandals in its top 100.

In May I told you to stop cheering the 27-year-olds and start watching DeLong, Bensel and Flores, and three kids at Kamloops we had not seen. DeLong hit .434 at White Rock and is hitting .361 at Victoria now. Bensel is 11-3 at Kelowna. Flores is 51st on the league's list. And the Kamloops kids have played. Jeremy Warner, the first-round pick from 2030, has a 3.34 in six starts there. Troy Morris has made four. Micah Patterson is hitting .295.

Willie Lomeli, the one I was yelling about in May, has gone from Vernon to Kelowna and is hitting .378 there with nine home runs. Ben said in May he still needed work with his glove. Maybe. The bat does not.

So here is the curse, updated. For 31 years this franchise has had one great player at a time and nothing behind him. Right now it has 20-somethings stacked four levels deep, and the front office is choosing them over two months of a race for the fourth wild card. I HATE IT. I also cannot tell you it is wrong.

Fifty-seven games left, 30 at home. Thirty-nine inside the Ruby, six apiece against Oahu and Phoenix, two of the clubs we are chasing, and three against San Diego, the third.

Thirty-one seasons. Zero championship series. One of these years it changes, and I have started to think it changes in Kelowna first.

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