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Rams win Ruby by one game, thanks to one walk

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Ninety-one and 71. First in the Ruby, by one game over Mexico City. That is the 10th division title this franchise has won, the ninth since it came to the valley.

It came down to one game, so it is worth saying which one I would point at. On the 30th of August, at home, Mexico City's Arturo Rivera threw seven innings at this lineup and gave up nothing. Neither did anybody else. In the bottom of the ninth the bases were loaded and Bill Raymond took ball four, and Big Horn won 1-0 without a hit to end it. The Rams beat Mexico City 5-0 and 9-2 the next two days. They won two of three in Mexico City in late September. Mexico City won its last five games of the season and finished a game short.

The Rams lost four of their last five games, clinched in the middle of them on the 4th of October, and finished with a 1-0 loss to Myrtle Beach. The last week does not change much.

In August I wrote that Big Horn had lost its best starter and gone 10-2. Miguel Sanchez came back. He made 10 starts after the deadline with a 2.67 earned run average and finished 11-4, 2.22, on a one-year deal for $10.1 million. Nick Williams finished 14-8 with a 2.54 and walked 24 men in 195 innings, which is the kind of number you have to read twice. John Morris, called up at the deadline, made 11 starts with a 3.40. Johnny told me in August that the rotation was open once Sanchez returned. I asked him in September who was out. The answer, as it turned out, was Brian Cronk, who made three starts after the deadline.

The staff walked fewer batters than any in baseball, 385, and finished second in earned run average and second in runs allowed. It also struck out fewer batters than all but two clubs, and it is still 21-30 in one-run

games for the season, which is what I said a staff like this would cost. First place anyway.

The two relievers Johnny bought from Southland on deadline day, Malachi Lott and Nick Hill, for next year's second- and fifth-round picks: Hill gave up two earned runs in 22 2/3 innings. Lott had a 3.23 and saved five. John Underwood, 34, pitched in 83 games and finished with a 2.10 earned run average and 20 saves, which is too much for one man and he did it anyway.

The lineup is where the story gets strange. Josh Ferguson hit 19 home runs after the deadline, in 232 plate appearances, and slugged .653. Bill Raymond finished with 35 home runs, 101 runs batted in, 115 runs scored and 52 stolen bases, and with runners on second or third he hit .299 and slugged .583.

Then there is Ernesto Sanchez. He was hitting .400 when I last wrote. After the deadline he hit .199. On the 1st of October he hit a home run that left the bat at 130 miles an hour, and nobody in baseball hit a ball harder all season. Raymond's 128.3 in April is second. Ernesto is 23. I will take the home run and wait on the rest.

In August Johnny told me part of his thinking was the hope that some players who had been struggling would start to step up. Danny Hess, at $30.5 million, hit .218 after the deadline. Steve Schwarz is on the injured list again.

After the deadline, with men in scoring position, this lineup hit .220, 29th of 32. That is the number I would watch.

Now Huron.

The Herons finished 82-80 and come here for Games 1 and 2 on the 8th and 9th. Games 3, 4 and 5 are in Huron from the 11th, and if it goes six or seven it comes back here on the 15th and 16th. Big Horn won three of four from Huron in May, here, and outscored them 21-7. Big Horn was 53-28 at home this year. Huron was 31-50 on the road.

They have met twice in October. Huron won the 2017 quarterfinal, four games to one. Big Horn won the 2028 quarterfinal in seven.

Ten division titles. Two finals, 2012 and 2022, both lost to Denver. Sixteen postseasons and no ring. Denver is in the other conference's bracket this year, which is the first good news I have had from that direction in a while. The rest of it, the valley will have to go and get.