THE BEACON REPORT

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Four-trade deadline day pays off; Beacons back in October

BY **MARTY SOWERBY** · THE BEACON REPORT

Zero trades from Opening Day through August 1. Four on August 2. Payroll went from $133.9 million, 19th in the league, to $158.7 million, ninth. And the club went 35-22 the rest of the way, 17-8 in September, to finish 92-70, third in the Sapphire and sixth in the Ice, and into the postseason for the second straight year.

The ledger, because nobody else is going to print it in full.

Chicago sent Eitan Menahem. Boston paid with its 2033 first- and fourth-round picks and Carlos Sanchez. Toronto sent Luis Martinez. Boston paid with its 2033 third-rounder and three minor leaguers: Blake Elmore, Ethan Murphy and Joel Esparza, who was 91st on the league's own top-100 list in July. Mexico City sent Tom Mandich for Keith Palavandishvili and Matt Day. Somerville sent Josh Coyne for $42.

Return on that, through October 6: Menahem hit .264 with a .328 on-base percentage and stole 21 bases in 55 games. Martinez hit .267/.342/.471 with 11 home runs and 31 runs batted in, which is roughly what a first baseman at $16.8 million a year through 2033 is supposed to do. Mandich caught behind Matt Bailey and Scott Jacobs and came to the plate 13 times. Coyne hit .207 in 103 plate appearances at shortstop. The shortstop problem the trade board described in July was not solved; it was staffed. Eric Tangney has not played a game this season and still has 82 days left on his injury.

Now the model, which I have been wrong about twice this year and intend to be precise about the third time. Boston scored 739 runs and allowed 695. A run differential of plus-44 projects to roughly 86 wins. The Beacons won 92. The six wins live where you would expect: 26-17 in one-run games, 13-4 in extra innings. Since the deadline those were 8-3 and 4-1, and three of those extra-inning wins ended on a walk-off single:

Edgar Tyler in the 10th against Phoenix on August 22, Kevin Smith in the 10th against Chicago on September 15 for a 1-0 win, and Tyler again in the 12th against Montreal on October 1.

In May I would have called that regression waiting to happen, and in August I admitted the model had mispriced this lineup's on-base skill. Here is the part that survives both corrections. In close and late spots after the deadline, Boston hit .275 with a .328 on-base percentage, per StatsPlus's play-by-play. With a runner on second or third it hit .270, sixth in baseball over those two months. Carlos de la Rosa hit .347 with men in scoring position all season, with a .433 on-base percentage. A lineup that reaches base that often in those spots is going to keep winning games a run differential says it should not, at least until somebody hits a home run off it, and Boston itself finished 26th in home runs.

The biggest number on the roster belongs to Tyler: 130 runs batted in, first in the league, at 26, on a $500,000 contract that ends this season. With runners in scoring position he hit .313 and slugged .537 across 236 plate appearances. Whatever JP does this winter, the first line item is already written.

The rotation sorted itself into three and two. Tyler Jackson finished 13-6 with a 2.90 earned run average and 224 strikeouts; Juan Hernandez had 228, tied for fourth in the league, and a 3.07 after the deadline; Bill Ramirez had a 2.86 after it. Anthony Anderson made 11 more starts at 5.23 and finished 6-12, 5.30. I asked in September whether he would start any of the 12 games against Montreal and Somerville. He started on October 4 against Somerville. Boston lost 13-2.

The alternative did not exist. Josh Owens, first on the league's list of its top 100 prospects, has not thrown a pitch since June 23, when he was hurt at Herman. The injury cost him 94 days, and the season was nearly over when they ran out.

The bullpen finished 21st in earned run average at 3.86, and it goes into October without its closer. Nick Luke strained an oblique on September 14 and is expected to miss about five weeks, which takes him past the first round. Danny Stanescu saved six games after the deadline with a 2.01 earned run average, and Jose Paz had a 1.64. Dan Neff, with an 8.38 after the deadline, is on the 60-day list. David Torres is out with an inflamed shoulder.

The matchup: Cincinnati.

The Regents won 100 games and have home field: Games 1 and 2 there October 8 and 9, Games 3 through 5 here from the 11th, 6 and 7 back in Cincinnati. They won three of four in May, by a total score of 17-16, and the clubs have not met since. One of those was a 6-5 loss in 12 innings. That is the entire sample, and it is too small to build on.

The history is a different matter, and it is the part of this franchise Boston readers least want to hear about from me. This franchise has reached the semifinal twice in 32 seasons, in 2002 and 2003, as the Lehigh Valley Scrapples. Both times it lost to the Atlanta Smashers, four games to two and four games to one, and

both times the Smashers went on to win the championship. The Smashers are the Regents. They moved to Durham in 2014 and to Cincinnati in 2030, and this is their first postseason since 2009. Boston's last series win was in 2018, a first round, in Lehigh Valley.

The model has this series about where you would expect a 100-win club at home against a 92-win club that outplayed its run differential by six. The model has also been wrong about this team twice since May. I will be watching the late innings, which is where Boston has lived all year and where it now has to live without Luke.
