THE GALVESTON GROTTO

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Gremlins' 16-game streak seals Jade title

BY **RUTHIE ALCORN** · THE GALVESTON GROTTO

One hundred and two and 60. That is the second-best record in baseball and the second-most wins this franchise has ever had, behind the 2006 club that won 104 and played for a championship. It is also the second division title in our history. The first was in 2010.

In August I told you that whether we won the division would get settled on six dates, three here and three in Cincinnati. I was wrong about that. We split those six games, three and three. The division got settled in between them.

On August 27 Cincinnati beat us here, 7-4, and we were five games back. The next night we beat them 9-0. Then we did not lose again until September 15 in New Orleans. Sixteen straight wins, from August 28 to September 14: two from Cincinnati, three from Denver, a sweep of Rochester, three in Las Vegas, three from Tampa Bay and two in New Orleans. Two of them took extra innings: Danny Adams drew a walk with the bases loaded in the 12th to beat Denver on August 31, and Aaron Milstead singled home the winner in the 15th against Tampa Bay on September 12. When the streak ended we were 93-50 and the race was ours to lose. We did not lose it.

At the deadline I asked Jeremy whether the right player for the ninth inning was worth a real pick. He said Perez was our long-term closer, but that if he could find the perfect fit, yes. On deadline day he sent our 2033 third-round pick and a 2034 fourth to New Orleans for Jahiem Bryant, who had 15 saves there. In September I asked him who gets the ninth inning of a one-run game in October. "Bryant was brought in as a setup man," he said, "Perez is the closer."

They both did exactly that. Since August 2, Bryant has pitched 36 1/3 innings in 28 games with a 0.99 earned run average and 11 holds, and he has not given up a home run since he got here. Antonio Perez, whom I worried about in August after he gave up 14 earned runs in 25 innings, pitched 23 2/3 innings after the

deadline with a 1.52 earned run average and 13 saves in 13 chances. He finished with 41. I said in August I would just like Jeremy to buy one arm. He bought one, and it fixed the one he already had.

The rest of the bullpen was already fixed. Jeremy Horrocks finished with a 1.17 earned run average in 76 2/3 innings, the best in the league among pitchers with 40 innings or more. Nelson Mata finished at 1.64. The club blew 12 saves all season, fewest in baseball.

And Jeff Buckmaster came all the way back. Jeremy told us in July that his one concern was getting Buckmaster back to where he was before the elbow. At the deadline I asked whether Buckmaster would be one of the four who start in October. "Absolutely," Jeremy said. After the deadline Buckmaster made 11 starts, won six, lost none and had a 1.51 earned run average. Greg Wilks finished at 3.04 with 208 strikeouts in 210 innings. Jeremy Lowry won 16. Wilks and Lowry are both on the league minimum, and when I asked in September which of them he would extend first, Jeremy said, "We'll worry about that in another season or two." Fair enough. It is October.

The lineup did its part with men on base. After the deadline we hit .282 with runners in scoring position, second in baseball over those two months. Ashton Turner hit .310 with 27 home runs, stole 75 bases and scored 131 runs, the most in baseball by 16. Lance Fitzgerald drove in 102. Oscar Mitchell, the right fielder Jeremy told us in July was "always a threat to go deep," hit 13 home runs after the deadline. Jeremy was right about him.

The one sale at the deadline was small. Jason Fink went to Milwaukee for a 10th-round pick.

Montreal is next.

We open at home on October 8 and 9. Games 3, 4 and 5 are in Montreal starting the 11th, and if it goes six or seven, we come back here on the 15th and 16th. We split four with Montreal here in June, and they outscored us by one run.

We have met in October three times. We won in 2004, three games to two. Montreal won in 2007, three games to one. And in 2030 we swept them, four straight, in the first round. That was the last time this club won a postseason series. Last year Rochester put us out in the first round.

We have been to the postseason 12 times and played for a championship once, in 2006. That club won two more games than this one. We start finding out tonight whether this one gets further.