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Blues lose 108, franchise's 10th 100-loss season

BY **OTIS FRAYNE** · MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

Fifty-four and 108. That is the final line, and it makes the 10th time this franchise has lost a hundred games in a season, counting the years in Nashville. In August I did the arithmetic in this space. To avoid a tenth, the Blues would have to go 27-30 the rest of the way, and I said the way they had been playing pointed to about 104 losses. They went 18-39. I was four losses kind.

There is not much to be gained by walking through it game by game, so I will give you the shape of it. August was 9-18. The club lost 11 straight from August 18 to August 30, the longest losing streak of the season. September was 7-18. After the deadline the Blues went 10-35 against clubs that are playing this month. Only Spokane finished with a worse record, at 51-111, and so the line I wrote in August, that Memphis was no longer the worst team in baseball, held up, for whatever that is worth. I said then it was worth something, and not much. I stand by both halves.

In August I also wrote that the club should move Max McIntyre and Jamie Bliss before the deadline, since both of their contracts were ending and there was no argument left for keeping them. The deadline came and went without a trade. On August 13 McIntyre hurt his shoulder, and he finished the year on the injured list. Bliss hit .238 the rest of the way. Both deals end now. Bliss can leave as a free agent, and the club has nothing to show for him except the two months. McIntyre has four years in the big leagues, one short of free agency, so he goes to arbitration and the club controls him for one more season, for whatever a pitcher coming off a shoulder injury turns out to be worth.

I asked Eric twice about the three bats at Chula Vista, Giovanni Porreca, Juan Rojas and Quinn Stoikos, and whether September was the time to find out what they could do here. Rosters expanded. None of them came up. They are still at Chula Vista this morning.

There were good things. Casey Schnake hit .310 after the deadline and finished at .294. Bobby Garcia hit 23 home runs. Vicente Chavez, who carried this lineup in the first half, finished with 28 home runs and 74 runs batted in, and is signed through 2035 at no more than $9.5 million a year, which is the best contract on this roster and it is not close. Travis Byrd, the sixth pick of the 2027 draft, struck out 174 in 173 2/3 innings, and the club has signed him for five more years. Jonah Kitchen threw seven and two-thirds scoreless innings to beat Milwaukee 2-0 on September 25, and Dennis Joseph won it with a home run in the ninth.

The winter looks like most winters here. About $19 million leaves with the free agents, most of it in small pieces: Bliss, Adrian Jones, Joey Price and a bullpen's worth of one-year arms. Kitchen and Garcia go to arbitration along with McIntyre. About $95 million is already spent on next season, and much of it is the money I have been writing about since spring. Eli Bernal is owed $28 million in 2033 and every year through 2036. Nachman Cohen, who hit .212, is owed $21.2 million in 2033 and through 2035. Gavin Sadler, who is 38, is owed $13.6 million. Schnake is owed $20 million, and he at least earned his.

The help, if it comes, comes from below. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects has five Blues on it this fall. Chris Faulk, a second baseman, is 12th. Efrain Rosales, the pitcher I told you about in May before Cotati had opened its season, is 15th. Mike Jenkins is 27th, and he got his first look at the big leagues in September, 30 plate appearances, before he strained an oblique on October 4. John Anderson is 74th and Roy Newmark 92nd. Pedro Miranda, the starter I mentioned in August, finished at Madera Highlands with a 3.44 earned run average over 86 1/3 innings. That is five more reasons to keep watching than the big-league club gave anybody this year.

And now the part I have written every fall for 32 years. This season the Blues drew 18,687 people a game, the fewest of any club in the league, and in September, with the losses piling up, it was 15,902. I wrote in August that the people would come anyway. Fewer came than anywhere else in baseball. But it is not zero. Fifteen thousand people a night came to watch a team lose 108 games, and that is not a baseball statistic. It is a fact about a place, and it is the one I have never been able to explain to anybody who did not grow up near a team like this one.