NEW YORK STANDARD

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Empire lose 107, never make a trade

BY **GIL AMSTERDAM** · NEW YORK STANDARD

Eighteen and 63.

That is the Empire's final record away from home. Eighty-one road games, 18 wins. In August I told you no club in baseball was within four games of this team's road record. It finished five clear of the next-worst, Memphis and Spokane, at 23-58.

The whole record is 55-107. Last year's was 61-101, and last year's was the worst in franchise history, Syracuse years included. This one is worse. Back-to-back hundred-loss seasons, and they are the only two this franchise has ever had.

In August I said the pace was about 103 losses. I was being polite.

After the deadline the Empire went 17-40. Nobody in baseball was worse over those two months. From August 25 to September 8 they lost 13 straight, nine of them on the road, in Somerville, Montreal and Boston, and the 13th was a 17-2 beating at home by Chicago.

Now the deadline.

On the trade block, where every general manager in the league could read it, Joe wrote: "Will move just about anyone on the TBL roster. Very few I won't."

The deadline came. The deadline went. Nobody moved.

The Empire did not make a trade this season. Not before the deadline, not at it, not after. Maybe the phone never rang. Maybe the prices were wrong. I do not care which. A club that lost 107 games and said it would move just about anyone moved no one.

In August I wrote that Andy Mroczkowski should go "tomorrow, for whatever comes back, because he is gone in October anyway." He stayed. He hit .217. He is a free agent now, and the club gets nothing for him.

Travis Eaton stayed, and he is owed $40.8 million next year. Ron Stone stayed, and he is owed $20 million. Stone hit 31 home runs, 14 of them after the deadline, and on the last day of the season he went 3-for-3 with two home runs and five runs batted in to beat Baltimore 6-4. It is a fine number. It is a fine number on a team that lost 107.

Chris Colvin stayed too. In August I said Colvin had to be one of the "very few." Nobody got traded, so he stayed by default, and that is fine with me. He also had a miserable two months: eight starts after the deadline, a 7.65 earned run average, and then a strained triceps on September 10 that ended his season. He finished with 172 strikeouts in 158 innings. He is 22 and the club controls him for years. He is still the one.

The rest of the pitching was what the record says it was. The staff's earned run average was 31st in baseball. The rotation was 31st. The bullpen was 31st. Eric Johnson lost 19 games, and only one pitcher in baseball lost more. Donovan Walker made 13 starts after the deadline with a 10.69 earned run average. Thirteen starts. Somebody kept writing his name down.

The offense finished 30th in runs and was shut out 13 times.

There were things worth watching, and I will name them, because somebody has to build around something. Jay Scott, the third baseman, hit .266 with nine home runs after the deadline, until a high ankle sprain on September 28. Sam Entwistle hit .289. Mike Higginbottom hit four home runs in 64 plate appearances.

The farm. The six affiliates finished with the second-worst combined record in the league, 232-436, ahead of only Mexico City. Buffalo, Rochester, Albany and Oswego all lost at least 87 games.

Two Empire players are still on the league's top-100 prospect list. Justin Timms is 64th, and he went 5-11 with a 5.29 at Buffalo. Jessie Marino, the first-round pick in May, is 93rd, with a 1.96 in 36 2/3 innings at Double-A. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, had Marino 27th. Edgar Valentin, the arm I liked best in this system in May, finished the year closing at Double-A Rochester with 19 saves and a 2.70.

The winter.

Free agency clears about $24 million, and $16.2 million of it is Mroczkowski. Next year's payroll already has $65 million in it, and $60.8 million of that is Eaton and Stone. Colvin, Scott, Entwistle and most of the young pitching are under club control.

Eaton has one year left now instead of two. That makes him easier to move than he was in August, if anybody in that building means it this time.

The 2010 Griffins won 98 games and a championship in this city. I covered that team. This one lost 107.

The ring was 2021. Joe said he would move just about anyone. The winter is a fine time to start.