HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER

OCTOBER 8, 2032 · THE OAHU PADDLERS BEAT

Paddlers' seven-game skid, starting in Spokane, ends playoff bid

BY **KAMALEI HOʻOKANO** · HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER

On the morning of September 20 the Paddlers held the eighth and last playoff place in the Fire Conference, tied with Huron at 73-74, and that night they played in Spokane, which is where a contender would choose to be on a night like that, because Spokane lost 111 games this year and nobody in baseball lost more. They lost 4-2 that night, 2-0 the next, and 5-1 the night after that. Then they went to San Diego and lost three more, and to Myrtle Beach and lost one, and when the seventh loss was over they had scored 10 runs in a week and were three games out with eight to play. I have watched this franchise for 32 years and I do not think I have seen the water go out faster.

In August I wrote that the tide had come up to the line and had been lapping at it all summer. It did more than that, for a while. On August 23 the club was 58-66, eight games under and five out, as low as it had been all year. From there it won 15 of 23, and on September 11 Eddie Grimsley singled home the winning run against Vancouver in the bottom of the ninth, and Oahu went to bed in a playoff place. It stayed in one, alone or sharing it, until September 24.

It finished 77-85, sixth in the Ruby, five games short of the 82-80 that got three clubs in. That is 13 games better than last year. Two of the wins that came after the streak, in Myrtle Beach on September 28 and 29, took the eighth place away from the Mermen. By then that was the only September business this club had left.

The deadline came and went without a trade. In August I wrote that I did not expect any of the farm to be sold for two months of a pennant race, and none of it was, and nothing was bought either. The roster that went into September was the roster that came out of July.

I wrote then that the rotation was not the trouble, and for Travis Sudduth that stayed true all the way to the end. After the deadline he made 11 starts with a 2.40 earned run average and 80 strikeouts in 75 innings. On August 28 he threw eight scoreless innings and Oahu beat Spokane 1-0. On September 8 in Big Horn he threw eight more, struck out 14, allowed nothing, and Oahu lost 4-1 in the 11th on a home run by Brad Battiste, which is the sort of night I remember longer than the wins. He finished at 2.47.

For Roberto Garcia it did not stay true. He had a 2.39 when I wrote it. After that he made 11 starts with a 7.83 and went 1-7.

Pablo Pena, whose 4.94 I worried about in August, saved 13 games after the deadline with a 2.05 earned run average and finished with 36, eighth in the league. The club that was 11-11 in one-run games in August won nine of the 11 it played after.

And Loredo. In August I asked which one would walk out to left field for the last 57 games, the one with 515 home runs or the one hitting .187. It was the first one. After the deadline he hit .258 with a .358 on-base percentage and seven home runs. He homered on September 18, 19 and 20, and he was named player of the week. On September 24 in San Diego he hit his 522nd home run in this league, which ties him with B.J. Swart for third on the league's all-time list. He is owed $22.4 million next year and $16.2 million in 2034.

Adam Bills hit 31 home runs and drove in 92, on the league minimum. On October 3 against Big Horn, the division champion, he had four hits, and the second of his two home runs ended the game in the 10th. Jimmy Terry hit 28 home runs and stole 40 bases, and one of the home runs won a game against San Diego in the 13th inning on the last night of August. Craig Busby hit eight home runs in 77 plate appearances after the deadline, around a month and a half on the injured list, and two of them came in those wins in Myrtle Beach.

Curt Schalla played third base, as he had since July, and hit nine home runs in 62 games with a .345 on-base percentage. The hardest ball any Paddler hit all season left his bat at 120.4 miles an hour on August 24, and it was an out.

The winter looks quiet on paper. The men who can leave as free agents take about $18.5 million with them, and $11 million of that is Jim Leach's. About $81 million is already committed to next season, and $45.2 million of that is Sudduth. Bills, Terry, Busby and Schalla are all under club control.

The farm is where it was, which is to say it is the best in baseball. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects, dated October 8, has eight Paddlers on it, more than any other organization. Oliver Zimmer is second. Gary Walters is fourth, Casey Emerson sixth and Carlos Navarro 10th. Jonathan Reyes is 20th, Austin Smith 43rd, Nick Kunz 56th and Matt Lee 70th. Schalla was on that list in August and is not on it now, because he is a big leaguer. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has Navarro, Emerson and Zimmer seventh, ninth and 10th.

Down at Rancho Cucamonga the Low-A club went 46-24.

Here is what I think the last two months were. A club that lost 98 games a year ago held a playoff place for most of two weeks in September with a roster the deadline did not touch, and then it went to the worst team in baseball and could not score. The water came up farther than anyone on this island thought it would. Then it went out. It has done that before, and it has always come back.

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