THE STRAIGHT LINE

OCTOBER 8, 2032 · THE SOMERVILLE MONEYLINE BEAT

Moneyline win 106 but stumble late; champs up first

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

One hundred and six and 56. In August I told you the pace pointed at 111, the 2024 number, and asked you to hold that comparison lightly. You were right to. The club went 34-23 from deadline day on and finished five wins short of the pace. It still owns the best record in baseball, by four games over Galveston, and the best run differential, plus-249. The staff finished first in earned run average at 3.06 and first in strikeouts with 1,784. The lineup was second in runs.

That is the season, and it is a very good one. It is also not the part of the last two months I would ask you to look at.

On September 5 the Moneyline beat Toronto for a ninth straight win and stood 94-41, 53 games over .500. From there they went 12-15. Six of those losses came in a row, from September 10 to 15: swept at home by Boston, then swept in Baltimore. Montreal had already swept them in August. Count only the games since deadline day and the split is plain enough to print. Against clubs that missed the playoffs, 25-11. Against clubs that made them, 9-12.

Twenty-one games is a small sample, but it points one way. For the whole season the number is 50-26 against winning clubs, and that is the number I would bet on. The last two months are the other number.

The pitching held. In May I asked JR whether 200 relief innings in 48 games was a design or a symptom, and he told me the starters would get their innings up when it was time. Through May 23 they averaged 4.9 innings a start. Between then and the deadline, 5.1. Since August 2, 5.3. I checked it in August and he was right, and I checked it again this week and he is still right. Jason Sage has a 1.65 earned run average in nine starts since the deadline. Chase Martin finished at 2.20 with 222 strikeouts and Bob Reyes at 2.58 with 224,

both on deals that cost less than a single month of Antonio Reyna. The rotation's 3.31 and the bullpen's 2.73 were both the best in the league.

The deadline itself was what this front office always does: small, and right. Joel King cost the 2033 first-round pick. Since August 2 he has pitched 25 innings in 21 appearances with a 1.08 earned run average, 30 strikeouts, six walks and eight holds. Josh Coyne went to Boston on deadline day for $42, which I mention only because I have never before had occasion to type that figure into a transaction. Tim Snyder closed out the year with 35 saves.

The lineup is where I have to write the paragraph I have been slow to write before. Reyna hurt his back running the bases on October 3. The diagnosis is chronic back soreness and the club expects him out about four weeks. He is 37. He finished with 34 home runs and 110 runs batted in, tied for fourth in the league, and no hitter on this roster has meant more to this lineup. Two days before that, Chase Posey fractured a rib in a collision at a base, and he is expected to miss about three weeks. That is both corner outfielders, $75.2 million of this year's payroll, gone for a series that ends by October 16 either way.

I have spent 16 years telling you this club's process was sound and the noise was just noise. Some of what I filed as noise over those years was age, and the word in Reyna's diagnosis is "chronic." I will try to notice it sooner this time.

The good news is that the replacements are not hypothetical. Randy Sorto has hit .292 with 17 home runs in 402 plate appearances and has kept it up since the deadline. And Dave Tyler, the shortstop on the contract I once called the best in the division, is the hitter I would want up in October. With a runner on second or third this season, Tyler hit .362 with a .664 slugging percentage in 171 trips. Steve Frey hit 39 home runs, tied for seventh in the league, at 24, and .210 since August.

There were walk-offs, too, for those of you who measure a season in those: Arturo Garcia's two-run home run in the 11th against Toronto on September 3, and Jose Lopez's two-run single to beat Montreal 2-1 on September 18.

Which leaves Denver.

The defending champion finished 82-80, the eighth and last club into the Ice field, and comes to Somerville for Games 1 and 2 on October 8 and 9. Games 3 through 5 are in Denver from the 11th, and 6 and 7, if they are needed, back here on the 15th and 16th. Somerville won all four meetings this year, by a combined 17-12, and none of them after June 1.

You do not need me to tell you the rest, but it is my job. These two franchises have met in seven postseasons. Denver won the 2010 first round in seven, the 2012 quarterfinal in five, the 2024 semifinal in seven, the 2025 semifinal in six and the 2029 quarterfinal in four straight. Somerville won in 2020 and again

in 2030, in seven, the last time it reached a final. Denver has won six championships. Somerville has been to four finals and won none.

Every projection I trust makes Somerville a clear favorite in this series. Every projection I trusted made Somerville the favorite in 2024 too, when 111 wins ended in a seventh game against this same club. A best-of-seven is short enough that the better team loses it often. That is arithmetic, and it has been the arithmetic every October I have covered.

A seven-game series and a 162-game season answer different questions. Somerville has already answered one of them.
