SOUTHLAND TRIBUNE

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# Ojeda hits No. 300 at Southland, in a Scouts uniform

BY **GERALD MABRY** · SOUTHLAND TRIBUNE

Francisco Ojeda hit the 300th home run of his career on September 28, in the eighth inning, in this ballpark, against this club. He was wearing a Kansas City uniform at the time. Southland was ahead 2-1. There were men on first and third. It was a three-run home run, Justin Washington threw the pitch, and the Scouts won 4-2.

In July I asked Anthony whether Ojeda would get to 300 in a Southland uniform. He got there in front of one, which I suppose is close.

My August column ran under the headline "Southland sold its bullpen and kept Ojeda." It was true for most of a day. On deadline day Ojeda went to Kansas City for its second-round pick next year, and Ben Becker and Tim Ranieri went to Virginia, with Southland paying half of what both of them are owed, for four minor leaguers: Willie Lopez, Diego Munoz, Dave Shahan and Pat Taylor. Ojeda hit 13 home runs for Kansas City after that, which is a playoff club, and Becker and Ranieri went to Virginia, which is another one.

I said in August I believed about 45 percent of this front office's plan. The plan was to sell, and it sold. I am holding at 45, on the principle that a plan you can see working in July still has to survive a winter.

The club that was left went 20-37. The losing streak that was five games long when I last wrote ran to 11, from July 27 to August 8. August was 7-20. The Masked Bandits finished 66-96, seventh in the Topaz, 34 games behind Virginia, on the lowest payroll in the league.

The pitching staff finished last in earned run average, last in WHIP and last in runs allowed. In August I predicted the staff would get younger, cheaper and worse. It got younger and cheaper and stayed exactly as bad, which in this franchise's history counts as beating the forecast.

And yet, as I keep having to write, the lineup hit. The Masked Bandits finished third in baseball in home runs, with 222. Manny Ruiz hit 32 of them in 111 games, 15 after the deadline, and on September 21 in Oklahoma City he hit two and drove in six in a 14-13 win, which is the sort of baseball game this club plays. David Jensen hit 26 and drove in 93.

Emmanuel Martinez went 5-1 with a 2.12 earned run average after the deadline and finished 16-4 with a 3.10. This club won 66 games. He won 16 of them. He is still the reason to come to the ballpark every fifth day, and he is still on the minimum. Who pitches beside him next year, I cannot tell you. George McDaniel walked 78 men in 90 1/3 innings and finished with a 10.46. He is still learning, and we are all still watching him do it.

Christian Lombera did not come up in September. He finished the season at Seattle, hitting .271 with 10 home runs, and the league's own list of its top 100 prospects, dated October 8, still has him eighth.

In August I wrote that six names on that list was too many for all of them to disappear. Five of them are still there. Blake Lee, the catcher, is 24th, and he hit eight home runs at Cape Girardeau. Zack Maurer is 31st, Steve Boettcher 40th and Chad Brown 91st. Only Bill Meger fell off. In St. Louis that would have been a parade. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, had Lombera 13th and Alvin Phillips 17th.

Seattle won its division at 80-52. Little Rock won its division at 88-44. The affiliates finished 10th in combined record.

The winter will not take long to describe.

The free agents take about $36 million with them, $24.5 million of it Francisco Bernal and Nick Nunez. What this club has committed to next season is $8 million. That is not a misprint. Three million of it is owed to Malachi Lott, who pitches for Big Horn now. Martinez, Jensen, Ruiz and nearly everyone else who did anything worth writing down this year are under club control.

Anthony told me in May that the future is bright. I have now watched the future win its division twice, in Seattle and in Little Rock, and I have watched the present lose 96 games. That happened in one summer, to one organization, which is new. Call it a change in the weather pattern. April will say whether it held.