SPOKANE CHRONICLE

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Sasquatches lose 111; top prospect Montano stays in Walla Walla

BY **HAL ONDRUSEK** · SPOKANE CHRONICLE

Jonathan Montano, Triple-A Walla Walla, finished the season with 28 starts, 154 innings, 115 strikeouts and a 4.32 earned run average. In August he was at 3.83 after 108 innings, so the last stretch was harder on him than the first. The league's own list of its top 100 prospects, dated October 8, has him 14th. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, had him 24th.

This city still has not seen him pitch. In September I asked Sly whether he would come up when the rosters expanded, and Sly gave me a straight answer.

> *"No he will not make the roater expansion," he said. "He will potentially be invited to spring training."*

I will take a straight answer over a hopeful one any day of the year. Spring training is in about five months. I have written it on the inside of my notebook, next to the other date he gave me.

Toby Newman finished at Walla Walla too. He hit .327 there over 80 games with 11 home runs, after .331 at Sandpoint, which means the 16th-round pick I told you about in May hit better than .320 at two levels in one summer. In May Sly told me Newman was not in his plans for 2034. Newman has spent the summer making a case for an earlier date.

Ricardo Morales saved 21 games at Walla Walla and is 65th on the league's list, up from 81st. There is a new name on that list as well: Alan Smith, an outfielder who hit .329 with 11 home runs at Bend before he was moved up to Princeton, is 87th.

And Aaron Myers, the 18-year-old who had thrown nine and two-thirds innings at Bend when I last wrote, made 12 starts there and finished with a 3.91 earned run average over 50 2/3 innings. He was this club's first-round pick in May. He is the one I would watch most closely in this system next summer, Montano included.

Bend went 44-26. The affiliates as a whole finished 24th in combined record, one place better than in August.

Now the big-league club, briefly, as is our custom.

Spokane finished 51-111, the worst record in The Big League. It was never above .500 at any point in the season, not even after the first game. It went 18-39 after the deadline, and it lost its last 11, from September 25 to the final day.

Just before that it had its best week of the year. From September 20 to 24 Spokane won four straight, three of them against Oahu, which arrived here sharing the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference. Oahu lost all three, and two days later it was out of that spot for good. It was the only week all season in which this club decided anything about October, and it decided it for somebody else.

Tyler Holman is still the exception. He finished 9-14 with a 3.83 earned run average and 172 strikeouts in 171 2/3 innings, and he is still on the minimum. Joe Kavka, the seventh overall pick in 2026, hit .255 with 13 home runs and stole 21 bases.

At the deadline the front office moved one more name. Shane Romans went to Mexico City for its sixth-round pick next year. The others from the "Moving Expiring Contracts" list stayed, and most of them will now leave on their own.

In September I asked Sly what Spokane would do with the money coming off the books, Bill Garcia's and Justin Hebert's.

> *"We are looking to resign hebert," he said.*

He did. Hebert, who missed 157 days on the injured list this season and hit .239 when he came back, is signed for three more years at $16 million a year.

The winter's arithmetic is short. Garcia, who was paid $20.6 million this year and did not pitch in a big-league game, is a free agent, and so is Edgar Hernandez, and the free agents together take about $31 million off the books. About $43 million is committed to next season: Hebert at $16 million, Todd Nelson at $16 million and Brian McIntosh at $11 million. Holman, Kavka and nearly all of the young pitchers are under club control.

For the record, because it gets muddled every time it comes up: Spokane won the title in 2008 over the Boston Boom, who are now the Chicago Black Sox. Not the Beacons. It remains the only championship in this franchise's history. The next one, if it comes, is somewhere between Walla Walla and Bend, and Sly has told me exactly when he expects to see two of the men involved. I believe him. I have seen the dates in writing, which in this town is new.
