DENVER HERALD

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Dynamite fizzles; champs fan 55 times, out in five

BY **CAMILLE OSSORIO** · DENVER HERALD

Two weeks ago I asked Jay who would close against Somerville. He answered with a rule he has kept since he took the job.

> *"Since I took over Denver, we've never used a closer," he said. "I always have my best pitcher as the 'stopper,' coming in in the highest leverage spot in the seventh inning or later. In this case, I have no good relievers, so Gregg Quinn and Danny Kimball will split stopper duties."*

Here is how that went. Kimball pitched three and a third innings in two games and allowed nothing. Quinn pitched five and a third in three and allowed four runs on three home runs. Two of them came in the seventh inning of Game 1, by Nate Johns and Dave Tyler, in what was a 2-1 game when he came in and a 5-1 game when he left. The third was Randy Sorto's in the eighth inning of Game 3, which tied a game Denver was leading 1-0. Quinn also won Game 4, the only one Denver did win, with two scoreless innings. Bill Carstensen, whom I had named in this space as the answer to that question, allowed four runs in four innings, three of them on Phil Butterfield's three-run home run in Game 4.

That is the bullpen. It is not why Denver lost.

Denver lost because it hit .139. Twenty-two hits in 158 at-bats, 55 strikeouts, four home runs from the club that hit 245 of them this season, the most in baseball. Chase Martin struck out 12 in Game 1 and 11 in Game 5. Jason Sage allowed one hit in six innings in Game 2 and Denver did not get another. Bob Reyes

allowed one hit in seven and a third in Game 3. Emilio Della Mea went 1-for-17. Matt Hoogerhyde went 1-for-18 with eight strikeouts. Jared Pink struck out 11 times in 17 at-bats.

The pitching that was the hole in August mostly held. Matt Ware, whom Jay named for Game 1, allowed two runs in six innings there and four in six in Game 5, and lost both. Marty Kilby threw five and two-thirds scoreless innings in Game 3 and came out of it with a sore hamstring. Malik Harris threw four scoreless innings in Game 4. Over five games the staff allowed 20 runs. Somerville's allowed 11.

Game 3 is the one Denver will think about. It led 1-0 on a wild pitch into the eighth, at home, in 41 degrees. Sorto tied it. Nobody scored again until the 12th, when Steve Georgiou threw a wild pitch with Fernando Medina on second and Tyler doubled him home. Denver had three hits in 12 innings. It lost 2-1, and Kevin Porter came out of the game with a herniated disc.

Game 5 was the best Denver hit all week, and it still lost 5-4. Jose Nolasco, the deadline bat I graded in this space, hit a two-run home run in the first. Pink homered in the fifth to tie it 3-3. Eli Jones tripled in the go-ahead run off Georgiou in the seventh, Tyler singled in another, and Victor Baez's home run in the eighth, 442 feet, was the last run Denver scored in 2032. Nolasco finished the series with four runs batted in, most on the club.

Before the series I said the number I most wanted to see change was .184, what Denver hit late in close games after the deadline. In this series it hit .227 in those spots, 10-for-44. That moved. Nothing else did.

Denver had not gone out in the first round since 2027, and it has now happened five times in 21 postseasons. This was also the end of a season in which Denver won 82 games on the largest payroll in the league, $256.8 million, more than $50 million clear of the next club. The arithmetic of that payroll is the winter.

Of what Denver paid this year, $82.9 million belongs to players who reach free agency this winter. The biggest single number on that list is Morgan Alison's $32 million, for 152 plate appearances before he went on the 60-day list and never came off. Kilby, $19 million, is a free agent. So is Tom Everette, who hit .318 with 23 home runs. So are Ivan Sanchez and most of the bullpen: Carstensen, Georgiou, Kimball, Jon Romero and Chris Ruggiero. Quinn and Harris go to arbitration.

The club already has $148.4 million committed for 2033, and $25 million of it is Nolasco's. In August Jay called next year's budget "a problem for future me." It is October 17, and future me has arrived.

The rotation finished 19th in earned run average this season. The bullpen blew 29 saves, the most in baseball, and its two stoppers are a man going to arbitration and a man going to free agency. Jay has never used a closer. He may not need one. He will need, by my count, two starters and three relievers he trusts, and the money to buy them is mostly already spoken for. Watch which of those he goes after first.