BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

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Barboza's only two hits clear fence; Crabs bounce Beacons

BY **ROSALIND FEENEY** · BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

Victor Barboza came up in the ninth inning of Game 5 in Boston with two out, Matt Lamberson on second after a double off Danny Stanescu, and Baltimore down a run. Barboza had one hit in the series to that point. He hit a 1-1 pitch 382 feet to left-center, Johnny Cunnane got the last three outs, and the Blue Crabs won 3-2 and took the series four games to one.

The run Barboza made up was the bullpen's. Jake McHan left Game 5 in the third inning with a strained muscle in his abdomen and a 1-0 lead, and the relievers had six and two-thirds to cover. Antonio Amaya, who left the Rochester series with a blister, threw three and a third scoreless. Manny Venegas followed him in the seventh and gave up three hits, the last a two-run double by Joey Benton, and Boston led 2-1. Arturo Flores struck out three in an inning and two-thirds to keep it there.

Those two runs were the only ones the bullpen allowed all series, in 18 innings. Steve used it the way he has since August. McHan went five and two-thirds in Game 1, Matt Locher got seven outs behind him and Cunnane the last three. Sam Kutka lasted four innings in Game 2, and Mike Van Voorhis, Jonathan Martins and Locher covered the other five. Roy Bell went eight in Game 3 and Steve Westbrook seven in Game 4, and Locher finished that one with two innings.

Barboza had two hits in the series, in 19 at-bats. Both left the park, a three-run home run in Game 3 and the one in Game 5, and they drove in five. I have covered hitters who went 2-for-19 in October before. None of them were the reason the club moved on.

The starting pitching was the larger story, and Bell was the largest part of it. He had not pitched since September 24, came off the injured list for Game 3 in Boston, and threw eight innings of three-hit ball without walking anybody. Baltimore won 8-0. The next night Westbrook allowed three hits in seven innings,

Danny Gaona singled home the only run in the seventh, and Locher closed a 1-0 game. In August I left Westbrook out when I wrote about the rotation working. Since then he has started the game that ended the Rochester series and won the one that put Boston a game from elimination.

Locher has now pitched 10 and a third innings this October without allowing a run, with 14 strikeouts. The staff's earned run average for the series was 1.80. Boston, which had scored 31 runs against Cincinnati, scored nine in five games, hit .176, and hit one home run, in the first inning of Game 2. That was the one game Boston won, 5-4, after four runs off Kutka in the first.

The hitting was thin and arrived when it had to. Justin Clay went 5-for-14 with two home runs and five runs batted in, four of them in Game 1. Gaona had three hits in the 1-0 game. David Peck, who went 2-for-16 against Rochester, went 3-for-21. The club hit .220. Pitching that allows nine runs in five games can carry a lineup that hits .220, and this week it did.

Somerville is next. It won 106 games, beat Denver and then Montreal, and won the season series 8-4. Baltimore won the last four of those 12, in July and September. Last October these clubs met in the first round and Baltimore won four straight. They have met six times in October in all, twice when this franchise was the Washington Generals, and each side has won three.

Games 1 and 2 are in Somerville on Thursday and Friday. Games 3, 4 and 5 are here from Sunday, and if it goes six or seven it ends in Somerville the following Thursday and Friday.

Nine postseasons in 10 years since the club came home. Three of them have reached a conference championship series, in 2023, 2027 and now this one, and the first two ended there. The only final this franchise has played was in 2013, and it was in Washington.