RÉCORD CIUDAD

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Luchadores hit .188, fall to Stogies in seven

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Seventy-two of 201. San Juan put 201 balls in play in this series and 72 of them fell for hits, a .358 average on balls in play. Against Big Horn it was 73 of 213, .343. During the regular season opponents hit .292 on balls in play against this club, almost exactly the league rate of .290. In the last two series the defense has been well short of its season, and its season was average.

Mexico City's own number went the other way. It put 147 balls in play and 32 fell, .218. It hit 10 home runs to San Juan's seven and walked 21 times to San Juan's 17. It also struck out 67 times, hit .188, and lost the series four games to three while being outscored 34-19. Over the regular season this lineup scored 712 runs, 16th of 32.

In this series San Juan came to the plate with runners in scoring position 98 times and had 22 hits in 83 at-bats. Mexico City came up in those spots 36 times and had five hits in 30.

Two of the positions behind the pitchers were played by replacements for most of the series. Jonathan Coon played center field in all seven games in place of Rocky Brito, who sprained his ankle against Big Horn, and hit .179 with two home runs. T.J. Slaughter was hit by a pitch in Game 1 and fractured a finger, and Brendan Bosarge and Shane Romans played second base after him; Slaughter is out about six weeks. Lorenzo Valenzuela had back spasms in Game 3 and started every game after it at shortstop. Michael Klaassen hurt a hamstring in Game 5 and will miss about three weeks, and Jesse Thomas hurt his Achilles the same night, started the last two games in left field, and homered in Game 7.

The three wins came from the pitching. Ed Waterman allowed one run in five and two-thirds innings in Game 3 in San Juan, and Fernando Lopez hit a home run 450 feet in a 3-2 win. In Game 5 Arturo Rivera threw three scoreless innings before neck stiffness ended his start, and five relievers finished a 5-1 win; one of them, Eduardo Linares, came out of it with a partially torn labrum. In Game 6 Lopez, Cody Polster,

Valenzuela and Ian McIlree homered in the first two innings off Isaiah Logan and Tom Edwards, and Ricky Falk followed Danny Kuntz with three scoreless innings in a 5-3 win.

Steve Parker saved all three. He finishes the postseason with nine and a third innings and no runs allowed. I doubted him after the deadline, and I was wrong.

San Juan won the other four games by a combined 28-6. It had 21 hits in Game 1 and won 11-2, and 15 in Game 2 and won 5-1. In Game 4 Chris Whittington cleared the bases with a double off Falk in the second inning, and Jonathan Mendoza, who had allowed two runs in the first, held the 4-2 lead through the seventh. Game 7 was here on Friday. Dustin Potter struck out 10 in six innings, San Juan scored three runs off Waterman in the fifth and five more after him, and Thomas's home run was the only run Mexico City scored. It ended 8-1.

This is the second straight year the club has gone out in this round in seven games. In 21 seasons the franchise has made five postseasons and has not played in a final.

The money for next year is mostly spoken for. Mexico City has $137.2 million committed for 2033, $32.8 million of it to Rivera, who is 35 and signed through 2035, and $20.8 million to Lopez, signed through 2034. Linares, who is 36, reaches free agency, as do Harry Smith, who had a 2.49 earned run average in 72 and a third innings, Fernando Conde and Egidio Marinelli. Klaassen and Waterman are eligible for arbitration.

For 16 years the defense is where I have looked first. This winter the first place to look is the lineup.