THE STRAIGHT LINE

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Reyes muzzles Crabs in Game 7; Moneyline reach final

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Eighty-nine pitches, one hit, nine strikeouts. Bob Reyes threw six innings in Game 7 at Moneyline Stadium on Friday and Baltimore did not score off him. Eli Jones doubled home three runs in the second inning, Steve Frey added a two-run home run in the same inning, and Chase Posey homered in the third. Somerville won 7-1 and took the conference championship series four games to three.

JR told me before the series that Chase Martin would start Game 1, at home, "to set the tone," and that Reyes, "the captain," would get Game 3 in Baltimore. Both went as he said. Martin allowed one run in six and a third innings in Game 1, and Somerville scored nine times in the first inning, on a three-run home run by Frey, a grand slam by Jones and a home run by Dave Tyler, his second trip to the plate in the inning. Reyes threw 124 pitches in Game 3, walked four, and took the loss, 7-6, when Matt Lamberson hit a two-run home run off Jason Shannon in the sixth.

JR also wanted Martin to cut his walks "a little." Martin walked nine in 16 and two-thirds innings before this series and six in 12 during it, which is a little. JR's other number was "17.8 K's per 9," and it checks out: 33 strikeouts in those first 16 and two-thirds innings. In Game 5, with the series even, Martin struck out 12, which ties the club's postseason record for a single game, and Somerville won 4-3. Nate Johns drove in three of the four runs.

The game that held the series together was Game 4 in Baltimore, the night after the Game 3 loss. It went 12 innings and ended 1-0. Jason Sage allowed three hits in five innings, and Baltimore did not get another one. Tim Snyder, Alex Rangel, Chris Charvet, Jason Shannon, Joel King and Mike Nichols covered the last seven innings without allowing a hit. In the 12th Jose Lopez stole third, and Arturo Garcia, in the game at second base by then, singled him home.

Game 6 was the other side of it. Somerville had two hits, both in the first inning, and Sam Kutka beat the club for the second time in the series, 3-1. Over the seven games the lineup hit .218. Frey hit three home runs and struck out 13 times. Phil Butterfield went 3-for-24. Jones drove in nine runs, all of them on three swings. Antonio Reyna came back as a pinch hitter in Game 4 and started the last three games.

The staff covered for all of it. Baltimore hit .191 and struck out 79 times in 225 at-bats, and in the four games Somerville won, Baltimore scored five runs. The bullpen allowed seven earned runs in 29 innings across the series, and five of them came in one game, the 10-3 loss in Game 2.

San Juan is next. It won 82 games in the regular season, 24 fewer than Somerville. In the 31 finals this league has played, no two clubs were that far apart; the widest gap before this one was 20 wins, in 2023. On the way here San Juan beat a Kansas City club that won 97, a Virginia club that won 100, and Mexico City in seven, with the seventh game on the road.

Somerville has been to four finals, in 2007, 2009, 2020 and 2030. It won seven games in those four series and lost 16. The 2020 final went to Huron, which had won 84 games that season, 15 fewer than Somerville.

JR's answer before this round was that "the regular season is a different animal, and the baseball has no memory." By that rule the 24 wins buy nothing this week. The 2020 final is the evidence for his side of it.

The clubs met three times this season, all in July, all at Moneyline Stadium. Somerville won 5-4 in 10 innings and 2-1 in 11, and San Juan won the third, 4-2. They have never met in October. Games 1 and 2 are here on Sunday and Monday, three are in San Juan from Wednesday, and Games 6 and 7, if needed, come back here on November 14 and 15.

JR ended his answer with a line for me: "You write about the inability for our team to get a championship. You may have to come up with new material one of these days, and we hope it's in a couple weeks." Four wins would do it.