RÉCORD CIUDAD

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Luchadores add Cover's glove and Marchitto's arm, not a bat

BY **XIMENA OCAMPO RUVALCABA** · RÉCORD CIUDAD

In November I wrote that for 16 years the defense is where I have looked first, and that this winter the first place to look was the lineup. The club hit .188 in the conference championship series and scored 712 runs during the season, 16th of 32. Here is what Larry added to that lineup this winter: a catcher who hit .196.

Billy Cover won the Great Glove at catcher for Huron last year. He signed here for four years and $44.8 million, about $11 million a season. In 499 plate appearances he hit .196 with eight home runs and was worth 0.9 wins, almost all of it behind the plate. That is the kind of signing this front office makes, and it is not a bad one. The lineup needed a hitter.

The other addition was Eric Marchitto, a starter from Philadelphia, for four years and $36.5 million. Marchitto threw 166 innings last year with a 4.59 earned run average and allowed 25 home runs. He will have a better defense behind him here than he had in Philadelphia. Chris Gresham came from Toronto for two picks in 2034, and Mike Karr from Denver for a fourth-round pick. Danny Guzman, who is 35, is back on a one-year deal.

The defense was already among the best in the league, and it got the awards to show it. Lorenzo Valenzuela won the Great Glove at shortstop again, and Danny Kuntz won it at pitcher. Arturo Rivera won the Pitcher of the Year award in the Fire Conference, 15-3 with a 2.24 earned run average in 188 innings, at 34. The run prevention is not the question here. It has not been the question for years.

So the question stays where I left it. Fernando Lopez hit 43 home runs and is signed through 2034. T.J. Slaughter hit .322. Rocky Brito hit 21 home runs and .227. Beyond them the lineup that hit .188 in October is the lineup that opens tonight, with Cover added behind the plate.

The front office is betting on the model it has always trusted. A club that allowed 648 runs and scored 712 won 90 games last year. The same club, with a better glove behind the plate, should allow fewer this year. Whether it can score more is something no model of mine can promise.

The money is close to the line. The payroll is $187.3 million against a budget of $198 million, and $351.8 million is committed beyond this season, third-most in the league. Rivera is owed $32.8 million this year and is signed through 2035. Valenzuela, 34, is in the last year of his deal.

The farm has two names on the game's Top 100 prospect list this morning: Antonio Velazquez, a pitcher, 17th, and Kevin Clarke, a position player, 65th. Velazquez was the 19th overall pick in 2031 and struck out 83 in 77 innings in rookie ball last year. The Luchadores pick 29th in the draft this week.

Spring went 18-16. Phoenix comes to Mexico City tonight, then Myrtle Beach. Both finished behind this club last year. The lineup gets its first chance to show whether anything has changed.