LA PRESSE SPORTIVE

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Machine sign young core through 2038, open vs. Moneyline

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The last time the Machine played a game that counted, it was 41 degrees in Somerville with the wind blowing in from right, and the Moneyline won Game 6 and the series. Five months later the schedule has sent the same club here for the first three games of the season. I don't think the people who make the schedule meant anything by it. I have covered this team long enough to notice it anyway.

The winter was spent on three contracts, and none of them begins until next year. Pete Troiano, the catcher, signed for five years and $55 million, $11 million a season from 2034 through 2038. Willie Solis, the first baseman, signed for five years at $4.5 million a season. Dave Santillan, who saved 34 games, signed for five years at $4 million a season. All three are 25 or 26. All three were already under club control for 2033. Josh did not have to do any of it this winter, and he did it anyway.

Add those to what was already signed and the shape of the next five years is clear. Jong-su Im is signed through 2036. Yuigo Sakaguchi through 2036. Ryan Weigold's five-year deal starts this season and runs through 2037. Gabe Rocke, who won the Great Glove at shortstop last year, through 2035. John Kropp through 2035. Chris Griffiths through 2036. Committed beyond this season: $287.6 million. For a franchise that went twenty years between Octobers, that is a great deal of money spent on the idea that the next five will look like the last three.

What Montreal did not do was add anybody of size. There were no trades. The biggest names to arrive came on small deals in January: James Rucks, a second baseman worth 2.4 wins for Phoenix last year, Edgar Hernandez from Spokane, Tim Doherty and Frank Allison from Oahu, Eric Johnson, who started 33 games for New York. Nobody important left, either.

The rotation most likely comes from Im, Kropp, Jim Taunton, T.J. Larson and Sam Kelly. Kropp struck out 201 last year and was the club's most valuable pitcher. He was hurt in October, spent the winter mending, and is healthy this morning. Kelly made 10 starts with a 2.01 earned run average. The bullpen is mostly back: Santillan, Griffiths, Dave Roughton with his 1.72, Steve Caron, and Greg Tarver, who is 39 and had a 2.67 earned run average.

The lineup is Dean Salvucci and then a question. Salvucci hit 44 home runs, the second-most in baseball, and batted .178, and was the most valuable player on the club. There is no one like him. Behind him Sakaguchi hit 23 home runs, Carter Morris 22 while hitting .179, and Troiano 14 from behind the plate. The Machine hit .212 against Somerville and scored 19 runs in six games, and the winter did not change who will be hitting.

The farm is strong, and it is almost all pitching. Oscar Lopez, who is 18, is 18th on the game's Top 100 prospect list as of this morning. Chris Shere is 21st, David Bustamante 59th and Jorge Arbizu 68th. Four names on the list, four pitchers. Shere is the closest, at Triple-A, and his 6.08 earned run average at Double-A last year is the number that will decide when he comes.

In October I wrote, on time for once, that the Machine is a good baseball team. I still believe it. For most of my years on this beat I waited for good seasons to end. Josh is not waiting. He has paid three young players for seasons that have not been played yet, and this franchise did not do that in the twenty years without October.

Spring went 17-15. The payroll is $150.4 million against a budget of $182 million.

Somerville kept Bob Reyes this winter, through 2038, the same year Troiano's deal ends. The two clubs will play each other every season of it. The first three are here, starting tonight.
