DENVER HERALD

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Dynamite lead the league in homers, blown saves, wins

BY **CAMILLE OSSORIO** · DENVER HERALD

Victor Baez's extension is four years and $116 million, $29 million a season, starting in 2034. Jay signed it in the first two weeks of the season, which settled the first of the three big contracts that end this October. Baez has hit all season like a man who wants the front office to feel good about it: .352 with a .435 on-base percentage and a .582 slugging percentage. He has scored 37 runs, the most on the club.

The club around him is 33-15, the best record in baseball, seven games clear in the Jade. In March Jay called this a 92-win team. In April, at 17-7, I asked him whether it still was.

> *"Yeah we're on target for 92," he said. "#nobodybelievedinus"*

Grade it. A .688 winning percentage over 162 games is 111 wins. Denver is not on target for 92. It is well ahead of it, and the run differential agrees with most of that: 227 scored, 161 allowed, plus-66, the profile of a club that should be about 32-16. The record is a game better than the runs, which is about as close as anybody gets.

The runs come from the long ball. Denver has hit 81 home runs, the most in the league, while batting .240 and stealing 15 bases. Danny Adams, the one-year, $8 million signing in March, has 12 home runs. So does Matt Hoogerhyde. Jared Pink, the catcher, has 10 home runs and a .152 batting average. Kevin Porter, 35, in the last year at $30 million, missed most of April on the injured list and is hitting .175 in 50 plate appearances since.

The rotation is where the winter's money went, and it is the best in baseball, with a 2.68 earned run average. Marco Ruiz has a 2.06 in 70 innings, which on this year's $10 million slice of a $150 million deal is the best value on the staff. Matt Ware was Pitcher of the Month for April, is 7-1 with a 1.76, and is tied for the most wins in baseball. Jonathan Miller, whose earned run average was over four last year, has a 3.38. Jesus Garcia has a 2.77 in seven starts, and early this season signed a three-year, $3 million extension that begins next year.

Then there is the bullpen. Denver has 11 blown saves, the most in the league. In April I asked Jay who closes now that Brian Cronk, 7.71 at the time, was hurt.

> *"As previously mentioned, Denver doesn't use a closer, because they're dumb," he said. "Eddie Alonso remains the stopper."*

Alonso has pitched in 27 of the 48 games, 44 and a third innings, with 59 strikeouts, three saves and 12 holds. He has also blown four, tied for the most in the league. Nobody on the staff has more than four saves. That is what no closer looks like in a box score: 22 saves spread across nine pitchers and more chances let go than anyone else. It has cost Denver some games. It has not cost it the lead, and Jay has been doing it this way for long enough that I no longer expect him to change it in May.

The one trade since Opening Day was small: Nick Hill and $3 million from Southland for a 2034 fourth-round pick. Hill has a 6.07 in 13 and a third innings. The draft brought Ken LaBombard, a center fielder, at No. 18. Gustavo Perez is 89th on the game's Top 100, the organization's only name on it.

Two cautions, because a record like this attracts the other kind of column. Against clubs with winning records today, Denver is 6-6. Against the rest, 18-6. And since the high-water mark of 30-10 on May 13, the club is 3-5. Neither is a crisis. Both are the kind of thing that matters in October, which is the only month this franchise grades itself on.

Somerville comes in for two. Then four in New York and a trip to Philadelphia.