NORTHERN COLORADO SUN

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Roosters pen holds, bats don't; Blum's walks drop in Salt Lake

BY **DALE KIRKPATRICK** · NORTHERN COLORADO SUN

The bullpen is the part of this club that works, so start there. Fort Collins relievers have thrown 189 innings with a 2.80 earned run average, third-best in the league. Gilbert Woodside has pitched in 27 of the 48 games, 40 and two-thirds innings, 51 strikeouts and one home run allowed. Melvin Canales has not allowed a home run in 24 and two-thirds. Adam Dirks has a 2.00. Bill Barker, in the last year of his deal, has 11 saves and a 1.59.

In front of them the rotation is ordinary. Jesse Beck, in the first year of his $140 million contract, is 2-4 with a 3.47 and 63 strikeouts in 57 innings. Jose Alvarado is 2-6 with a 3.86 and has allowed 10 home runs. Alejandro Contreras, Luc Frangilli and Danny Kimball have earned run averages between 3.48 and 4.26. The starters, as a group, are 13th in the league.

That is a staff good enough to win most nights. The club is 24-24 because of what happens when it bats. Fort Collins has scored 164 runs, 28th in the league, with a .298 on-base percentage. It has been shut out six times.

Andres Maldonado is the exception. In April I asked Tim whether the lineup runs through him, when he had seven home runs. He has 11 now, with a .299 average, a .548 slugging percentage and 32 runs batted in. Arnáo Gomez was player of the week on May 2. After those two, the regulars are hitting between .195 and .262, and none of them has more than eight home runs.

Mark Cobb was signed on March 16 for the on-base percentage and the glove, and I wrote then that the club was giving up Chris Goers' power to get them. Cobb is hitting .195 with a .291 on-base percentage and one home run in 135 plate appearances. Goers signed with Southland in April for one year and $18 million and has six home runs in 84 plate appearances there. Danny Cazares, the backup, is 3-for-43.

The season has had two shapes. The club lost six straight to start April and was 3-11 on April 12. Then it won six straight, and since then it has been a .500 team, 21-13 from that low point on. At home it is 17-10. On the road it is 7-14. Against clubs with winning records today, 5-13.

The standings line that matters: 24-24 holds eighth place in the Ice Conference, the last playoff spot, level on record with New Orleans and one game ahead of three clubs at 23-25.

The help, as I said in March, comes from Salt Lake City, and it is coming in the order I expected. R.J. Blum has made eight starts at Triple-A with a 2.94 earned run average. Last year the walks were the number to watch: 56 of them in 28 starts. This year he has walked 14 in 52 innings, and he has moved up to fifth on the game's Top 100. Leo Gatica, 33rd on that list, has a 2.74 in seven starts. David Santiago, 36th, has a 3.12. Those are three starters, at the same affiliate, who could each take a turn in Fort Collins this summer.

Four more Fort Collins prospects are on the list: Carlos Bueno 17th, Jose Aguilar 26th, Rich Rico 91st and Chris Jackowski 92nd. That is seven in all, the same count as March. Cory Pineda is no longer on it. He is in Fort Collins, with 49 plate appearances and a .186 average. In the draft the club took Stephen Bennett, a pitcher, with the 16th pick.

The mechanism, then, is the same one it was in March, a month further along. The pitching arrives first. The hitting the club needs does not have a date on it yet, and the club is holding the last playoff spot while it waits.

Two at home with Toronto. Then four in Philadelphia, the club one game behind, and a trip to Somerville.