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Saxton mashes league-best 17 homers; MVP Mettler hits .174

BY **CORBIN DIETRICH** · KANSAS CITY STAR-JOURNAL

J. J. Saxton has 17 home runs. Nobody in baseball has more. He is hitting .328 with a .408 on-base percentage and a .656 slugging percentage, and he was player of the week this morning. In March I wrote that the Scouts were paying $95 million for the power and betting the average would come up in a better lineup. Forty-eight games in, both halves of that bet have paid.

Kansas City is 27-21, tied with San Juan for second in the Topaz and a game behind Huron. The club has won eight of its last 10, including four straight at home against Big Horn and three of four in Vancouver. It is 16-8 at home and 11-13 on the road.

The man who won the Most Valuable Player award last year is hitting .174. Jared Mettler has eight home runs, 12 runs batted in and 20 stolen bases, and a .285 on-base percentage. Last year he hit 43 home runs and stole 98 bases. His new contract does not start until next season. He is 25 and he has played all 48 games. Brad has kept him in the lineup every day.

Johnny Estevez has been the steady one. He is hitting .326 with 25 steals, tied with Las Vegas's Jose Bautista for the most in the league. Rob O'Neill is hitting .326 behind the plate. Nick Peeks, the right fielder signed for a year and $7 million two days into the season, is hitting .196 and has nine home runs and 28 runs batted in in 29 games. Ruben Munoz is hurt and expected to miss about seven weeks.

When I went through the rotation in March, I named Freddy Echeverria, Nate Peterson and Jason Bell. I did not name Frank Smith. Smith is 7-2 with a 1.61 earned run average, tied for the second-lowest among qualified pitchers in the league, and has 67 strikeouts in 61 and a third innings. He was Pitcher of the Month for April. He is 26, a 14th-round pick in 2025, and he is paid the league minimum. Peterson is 6-1 with a

2.30. Oscar Almaraz has a 3.47. Kansas City's starters have a 3.38 earned run average, fourth-best in baseball.

Echeverria, owed $35.2 million this year, has made seven starts. He is 0-2 with a 7.86. Joe Case, the starter signed for a year in January, is still on the injured list.

Ben Taylor has 12 saves and a 2.70. The bullpen around him has a 3.74, 21st in the league, and has blown seven saves. Chris Williams is 4-0 with a 2.03 in 10 appearances.

The farm. Jimmy Glover is now first on the game's Top 100, the top prospect in the league. He has not thrown a pitch this year; rookie ball has not opened. Jon Crawford is 12th, Ryan Patton 63rd and Pedro Huante 67th, and Huante's club, Double-A Maple Grove, is 24-12 and in first. Its closer is Tony Toscano, 24, with 12 saves and a 2.40. The Scouts took Drew Fluker, a pitcher, with the 22nd pick in the draft.

Two in Phoenix this weekend, then Spokane comes in for four and San Diego after that. The last time the Scouts saw the Seals, they lost both games.