KVGS-AM AND THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW

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High Rollers 2-10 in one-run games; worst record in baseball

BY **SONNY PARDO** · KVGS-AM AND THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW

What does a bullpen plan look like when it doesn't work? It looks like 2-10. That is the High Rollers' record in one-run games. It is the main reason they are 17-31, last in the Jade, 16 games behind Denver, and last in all of baseball.

You remember the plan. Eric laid it out for me in March: run the openers for 18 batters, then hand the game to "an army of lights out relievers," with Motoshi Tanabe and Don Fraker taking 150 high-leverage innings apiece. He said 82-82 was likely.

Here is how it has gone. The starters have thrown 184 innings. The bullpen has thrown 241, the second-most of any bullpen in the league, and its earned run average is 4.36, 30th of 32. The club has five saves and eight blown. When the game is close at the end, this team loses it.

I asked Eric about it in April, when the bullpen had blown six saves and Tanabe two of them. His answer, in part: "We are 9-15. Nothing is going right. Tanabe has a 67 FIP-. That is very solid." He said Tanabe had been unlucky.

On Tanabe, I'll give him that one. Tanabe has a 3.03 earned run average and 50 strikeouts in 38 and two-thirds innings, and he has allowed two home runs. He has been fine. He is on pace for something like 130 innings, short of the 150 but not far. Fraker is the problem. Last year he threw 153 innings out of the bullpen with a 1.94 earned run average and won Reliever of the Year. This year he has a 4.01 in 33 and two-thirds, on pace for about 115. The army behind those two is where the games go: Dana McDowell has a 7.94, Dave Limauro a 4.85, Leo Advincula a 3.91 with two saves.

Evan Lehman was 0-5 with a 16.20 when I asked about him. Eric said he moved him "to low leverage mid-relief to get back on track." Lehman is 37. He is at 8.02 now, with eight home runs allowed in 33 and two-thirds innings.

Now the part that should make you angry. The offense is not the problem Eric said it would be. The High Rollers are 20th in runs, sixth in home runs and second in stolen bases. Jose Bautista is hitting .333 with a .424 on-base percentage and 25 steals, tied for the league lead. Arturo Molina has 11 home runs and 32 runs batted in. Frank Williams, 25, is hitting .306. This lineup has scored enough runs to win more than 17 games. It has not had a bullpen that could hold them.

Is there any good news? Jared Akin, a $500,000 starter, has a 2.66 earned run average and has walked seven men in nine starts. Tetsuo Nagata, back from the injured list, has made six starts with a 1.93. The club is 4-0 in extra innings.

In 2018 this franchise won 117 games. I am not asking for that. I am asking for a club that can win a 4-3 game. It has won two of 12.

Boston comes in for two. Then it's four in Toronto and on to Baltimore. Eric said .500. To get there from here, this club would have to go 64-50 the rest of the way.