RÉCORD CIUDAD

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Luchadores' starters sink to 29th; Brady, Henson carry bats

BY **XIMENA OCAMPO RUVALCABA** · RÉCORD CIUDAD

Starters' earned run average: 5.01, 29th of 32. That is the number that explains Mexico City's season, and it is not the number I expected to write about in May.

The Luchadores are 24-24, fourth in the Ruby, five games behind Myrtle Beach and tied with Vancouver and Oklahoma City for the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference. They lost the first six games of the season, all at home, swept by Phoenix and then by Myrtle Beach. Since then they are 24-18. At home they are 10-14. On the road, 14-10.

In March I wrote that this club, with a better catcher, should allow fewer runs this year, and that whether it could score more was the open question. I had it backwards. The lineup has scored 219 runs, 10th in the league; last year it finished 16th. The pitching has allowed 211, and the staff earned run average is 4.37, 27th. My model was wrong about the part it has always been right about.

The starters are the whole problem. Arturo Rivera, who won Pitcher of the Year at 34, is 2-6 with a 5.10. His strikeouts are not the issue: 75 in 60 innings, second in the league, against 13 walks. Eric Marchitto, signed for four years and $36.5 million, has a 6.71 and has allowed 13 home runs in 57 and two-thirds innings. Chris Gresham has a 5.71. Ricky Falk, at 3.62, and Antonio Santiago, at 3.70, have been the steady ones. The staff walks almost nobody, 124 in 48 games, third-fewest in baseball. It has also allowed 63 home runs, near the bottom of the league.

The bullpen is eighth in the league at 3.22. Steve Parker has 11 saves. Xavier Gaines, 35, signed for a year in January, has a 1.16 in 31 innings.

The offense has two new reasons. Adam Brady, 25, a third-round pick, is hitting .298 with a .390 on-base percentage and a .570 slugging percentage, with seven home runs and 10 steals, and he was the league's

Rookie of the Month for April. Dave Henson has 12 home runs, tied for eighth in the league. Jonathan Coon is hitting .297 with 13 steals. Fernando Lopez has nine home runs.

Below them the lineup is what it was. Rocky Brito, paid $12.2 million, is hitting .145 in 188 plate appearances. T.J. Slaughter is at .194. Billy Cover, the Great Glove catcher, is at .224. Lorenzo Valenzuela, in the last year of his deal, is hitting .230 without a home run. The on-base percentage as a team is .307, 23rd.

Antonio Velazquez is 18th on the game's Top 100 this morning, one spot lower than in March, and is pitching at High-A Nogales. Kevin Clarke is 51st. The Luchadores took John Brannon, a pitcher, 29th in the draft.

Southland is here for two. Then four in Oklahoma City and on to San Juan. A club that is 14-10 on the road may not mind the trip.