THE OKLAHOMAN SPORTS DESK

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Outlaws climb out of 1-7 hole; Chapman hits .240

BY **MARGUERITE YOO** · THE OKLAHOMAN SPORTS DESK

On April 5 the Outlaws were 1-7. They had been swept at home by Milwaukee and had lost six in a row. Since then they are 23-17, and this morning they are 24-24, fifth in the Topaz, four games behind Huron, tied with Vancouver and Mexico City for the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference.

I split the season at that point because the two halves do not look like the same team. They are the same team. The first eight games were the worst stretch of a season that has otherwise been about what the run differential says it should be: 209 runs scored, 199 allowed, plus-10. That is a .500 team, and that is the record.

The split I keep coming back to is a different one. Against clubs with a winning record today, Oklahoma City is 12-18. Against the rest, 11-5. Last week it swept Oahu, four games, here. It went 1-2 in Kansas City on Opening Day weekend and 1-2 at home against Kansas City in April, against the club Rees built this roster to catch.

Rees paid two first-round picks for Dave Chapman. Chapman has played 47 of 48 games and is hitting .240 with a .280 on-base percentage and five home runs. Last year he was worth 4.4 wins in Chicago. In March I wrote that the point of Chapman was to put a better hitter behind Jeremy Porten. Porten is hitting .322 with a .415 on-base percentage and 10 home runs. He has scored 27 runs. That is not enough for a man who reaches base that often.

The best hitter on the club this spring has been David Ramirez. He has 13 home runs, tied for fourth in the league, a .302 average and 14 steals, and he was the Batter of the Month for April. Manny Jimenez is hitting .274. Bryan Carpenter, 26, has played all 48 games and is hitting .162.

Shizuma Oda, the closer who cost a third-round pick and a second, has eight saves and a 6.27 earned run average. He has lost four games. The bullpen around him has been better than that: Tyler Moore has a 1.90, Danny Reynolds a 3.00, and Jordan Howard has allowed one earned run in 10 innings. The club has blown seven saves.

Garrett Hoenie, the $31.6 million starter whose strikeouts I said had run ahead of his results, has 41 strikeouts in 40 and two-thirds innings and a 3.10 earned run average. The results have caught up. Alex Garcia has a 2.82. Jeremy Valenzuela is 5-1. Brian Lee, who had a 2.40 last year, has not thrown a pitch this season and is about two months from returning.

Mark Barnes is 43rd on the game's Top 100, at Double-A Cobourg. The Outlaws had no first-round pick in this draft.

I have a model for most things about this club. It does not have a good answer for 1-7. Sometimes eight games are just eight games.

Two in Vancouver, the club tied with Oklahoma City for that last spot. Then Mexico City comes in for four.
