ROCHESTER POST-EXPRESS

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Hernandes hits .359; North Stars' $209 million offense is 21st

BY **ADA BRIGHTBILL** · ROCHESTER POST-EXPRESS

Last year Rochester scored 820 runs, the most in baseball. After 48 games this year it has scored 183, 21st of 32. It has allowed 182. The record is 26-22, second in the Jade, seven games behind Denver, and two games clear of the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference. That is a playoff team on today's table, and it is not the playoff team this franchise has been for the last 10 years.

In April, with the club 8-4 over the sim but outscored on the season, I asked Keven when the offense would come around.

> *"The offense will come around, it's all we got," he said. "Even if the pitching behind Joey Reek is average, we'll be very solid."*

Half of the offense has come around. Vince Hernandes, in the last year of a contract that pays him $55 million this season, is hitting .359 with a .416 on-base percentage, 10 home runs and a .612 slugging percentage, and was player of the week on May 16. Jeff Williams, 25, still on a minimum salary, has 13 home runs, tied for fourth in the league, and was player of the week on April 25. Lyle Egner has nine home runs and was player of the week on May 23. Three player-of-the-week awards since April 25, from three different hitters.

The other half has not. Tim Liddick, in the first year of his five-year, $180 million extension, is hitting .211 with two home runs from behind the plate. Dave Smith, paid $22 million, is at .218. Jon Cammarn, the second baseman, is at .191, and Carlos Lopez, who has played 47 games in right field, is at .167. This club

strikes out less than any team in the league, 309 times, and still does not get on base. It is 22nd in on-base percentage. Alex Rojo is back from the injured list and hitting .400 in 13 games. That will help.

The pitching is close to what Keven described. Reek, who won the Pitcher of the Year award last year, is 4-3 with a 3.60, which is ordinary for him. Zachary Heal, the second overall pick in 2026, has a 2.47 in 10 starts. After those two the club has been building games out of the bullpen: Rochester's starters have thrown 165 innings, the fewest in the league, and its relievers 265, the most. Danny Alanis has thrown 47 and two-thirds innings across 10 appearances without a start, 4-1 with a 2.45. Matt Wetzel has a 1.56. Steve Gillis has five saves. Vinny Garza has made 13 starts and pitched 19 innings, with a 6.63.

The other question I asked was whether this is the year for the title Keven wants before the core gets old.

> *"It certainly must be," he said.*

The facts behind that answer are the ones from March. The payroll is $209.2 million, the highest in the league. Hernandes and Jorge Garcia, who is hitting .281 with 28 runs batted in, can both leave in the fall. The farm was ranked last in the league in December, there is still no Rochester prospect on the game's Top 100, and the closest help is a reliever: Andy Brady, 24, has eight saves and a 1.72 at Triple-A Los Angeles. In the draft the club took Rich Faber, a pitcher, at No. 21. Whatever this team does in 2033, it does with the players on the roster now.

In 2019 the franchise lost 117 games in Winston-Salem, and I covered every one of them. The club that came out of that season was built to hit, and for the first two months of this one it has not.

Montreal comes in for two. Then the North Stars go to Boston for four and on to Chicago. That is the two best pitching staffs in the Sapphire in the next six games, and an offense that needs to find itself against them.