THE STRAIGHT LINE

MAY 23, 2033 · THE SOMERVILLE MONEYLINE BEAT

Moneyline strike out the league, still trail two clubs

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Plus-47. After 48 games Somerville has scored 222 runs and allowed 175, and the record that goes with it is 28-20, third in the Sapphire, two games behind Boston and Montreal. Two other clubs in the division are at plus-73 and plus-75, and the Moneyline are the ones chasing.

A 28-20 record is a 94-win pace. The underlying numbers say this is a very good team. They also say there are two other very good teams in its division this time.

Start where the club always starts. The staff has struck out 492 batters, the most in baseball, and has the fifth-lowest walks-plus-hits rate. Bob Reyes, whose five-year extension begins next season, is 4-1 with a 2.09 earned run average. Chase Martin has struck out 66 in 42 innings and missed time with a blister in early May. The bullpen in front of Tim Snyder is very good: Jason Shannon has a 2.28 and 37 strikeouts in 27 and two-thirds innings, Gilberto Toledo has not allowed a home run, and Snyder, 36 and in the last year of his deal, is tied for the league lead with 13 saves.

What is different is that the staff is sixth in earned run average instead of first. In late April I asked JR whether Reyes, Martin and Mark Buescher were the best top three in the league. All three were near 2.00 then. Buescher is at 4.34 now and has given up seven home runs in 45 and two-thirds innings. David Vasquez, the fifth starter, is 0-4 with a 5.70 and 25 walks in 30 innings. The rotation's earned run average is 3.65, 11th in the league. That is the one number on this club that is ordinary.

The lineup has had to do it without Antonio Reyna. He strained an abdominal muscle running the bases on April 26, hitting .330 with a .585 slugging percentage, and the estimate was five weeks. Randy Sorto tore ligaments in his ankle four days later. Here is the part I did not expect: the club is 13-9 since Reyna went

down, with a seven-game winning streak that swept Chicago and then Boston, in Boston. Phil Butterfield was player of the week on May 9 and is hitting .302 with a .547 slugging percentage. Jose Lopez is at .299.

I wrote in March that the value on this club is young and the money is not, and the first two months bear out half of that. Chase Posey, paid $43.2 million this year and next, is hitting .279 with four home runs and 14 stolen bases, useful and nowhere near the price. Reyna, 37 and paid $32.8 million in the last year of his deal, was the best hitter on the club until he got hurt. Steve Frey, last year's Rookie of the Year, is hitting .203. Dave Tyler is at .271 with two home runs. The young half of the roster has not carried the lineup the way I said it would. The old half did, until the injury.

One more number. The club finished the last sim 1-3 in Las Vegas, which has the worst record in the league.

The farm keeps growing. Six Somerville prospects are on the game's Top 100, one more than in March: Sebastian Croslin 32nd, Willie Schultz 37th, Dustin Geene 44th, Kevin Miller 47th, Elliott Staley 49th and Gene Brewer 72nd. Croslin has struck out 35 in 24 innings at Double-A. The club's own pick went to Spokane before the draft, so none of this year's first round is in that group.

The pitching is still the reason this club wins 100 games a year. It is not, this year, the best in its own division. Montreal has the lowest earned run average in baseball.

Two in Denver, against the best record in the league. Then home for Galveston and Fort Collins. Being very good may only be good enough for third this year.