BAY SPORTS DAILY

MAY 23, 2033 · THE TAMPA BAY CANNONS BEAT

Cannons sit one game off a playoff spot; nobody panic

BY **JUNIOR ESCAMILLA** · BAY SPORTS DAILY

Tampa Bay is 23-25, sixth in the Jade, and one game behind Fort Collins for the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference. I have covered this team since 2025, and it has never been this close in May.

My bar in March was fewer than 100 losses. This pace is 84. Two clubs in our division are behind us, Cincinnati and Las Vegas, and Cincinnati won 100 games last year. I asked for one team to finish behind us for once. So far I have two.

Now the bad news, right under the good, because I have never covered a pennant race and I don't trust myself in one. We have been outscored by 44 runs. We have scored 179 and allowed 223, 27th in the league. A team with those numbers should be about 19-29. We are 23-25 because we are 12-12 in one-run games and because the ball keeps bouncing our way, and I don't know how long that lasts.

So who is doing it?

Pat Cline, 32, a minimum-salary pickup from two winters ago, has made nine starts with a 1.90 earned run average and has not allowed a home run in 52 innings. Dan Murphy has six wins out of the bullpen, tied for fourth in the league in wins, and a 2.76. James Jimenez is 35 and has nine saves and a 2.05. Bill Suarez, one of the winter's one-year guys, has struck out 27 in 20 and a third.

Justin Davis is not doing it, and I am sorry to say that, because I like him. The ace, the $23.2 million man, is 0-6 with a 5.04 earned run average after 11 starts. He lost 3-2 at home to Boston on Sunday. Mark Flinn, who had a 3.30, is on the injured list. Danny Roman, who took some of the turns, has an 8.32 and 27 walks in 40 innings.

The lineup is a lot of the guys Leo bought in the winter, and it is a mixed bag. Victor Rodriguez has 11 home runs and a .165 batting average, which is a real stat line that a real player has. Tomas Ramirez is at .251. Gustavo Lopez is at .236. Nick Hancock, in center, is at .162. Chris McMillian, who hit 35 home runs last year, has seven and is hitting .180. The best hitter on the club might be Jimmy Howard, one of the nine minor leaguers Leo got from Somerville over the winter: .276 with a .358 on-base percentage. I made the graphic for him in December. I would like it noted.

The team won five straight from May 9 to May 14, the longest streak of the year, and the best series of the year was taking three of four in Baltimore. The first 24 games went 12-12, then 4-8 and 7-5. That is a team that is genuinely around .500, and around .500 is a place this franchise has not been since I started this job.

The farm keeps moving the right way. David Drake, last year's No. 5 pick, is 16th on the game's Top 100 now, up from 20th. Mike Brou is 28th, up from 33rd. Jeff Raymond is 52nd.

New York comes in for two. Then we go to Chicago for four and Montreal after that. New York and Chicago are both behind us in the standings. I am not used to that.