TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

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Elizalde wins seven, Wilson hits .407; Griffins still can't score

BY **HOLLIS WEIR** · TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

Tim Elizalde came over from Chicago in January in the Jason Mills trade. He has made 10 starts since. He is 7-2 with a 2.55 earned run average, tied for the most wins in baseball, and in 74 innings he has allowed four home runs.

That last number is the one I want you to hold onto, because it is the whole winter in one line. Last October Brandon told me the defense would not stop home runs, "so some of the guys that cant keep it in the park will have to go." They went. Toronto allowed more home runs than any club in the league last year. This year it has allowed 43, fourth-fewest. The starters have a 3.38 earned run average, fifth-best in baseball. Mike Vanover, a $1.1 million signing, has a 2.38. Andrew Halama has a 2.89. Halama came in the Mills trade too.

So why are the Griffins 20-28, seventh in the Sapphire, 10 games out?

Because they cannot score. Toronto has 152 runs, second-fewest in the league. The team is hitting .220. Alex Moralez, who hit 37 home runs last year and is the club's highest-paid player, is hitting .153. Mike Larson, the No. 2 overall pick in 2027, has played every game in left and has no home runs and six runs batted in. Tom Pomaville, a first-rounder too, is at .205.

In April I asked Brandon why the club kept losing close games. It was 3-9 in one-run games then. "We need some help to get the bats to come alive," he said. "Chris Wilson could give us the extra firepower we need but we'll see if we need to make more moves."

He was right about Wilson. The outfielder signed for one year and $15 million on March 31 and has been the best hitter on the club since the day he arrived: .407 with a .440 on-base percentage in 24 games. He is the one Griffin I would buy a ticket to watch hit right now. One-run games have gone 5-4 since that question, which is better. The overall record is 8-13 in them, which is the season.

Brandon also said this, about the 9-15 start: "Its only the 1st month of the season, its a marathon, not a sprint. We can easily come back from a slow start!" I like that he believes it. I believe some of it too. The club went 11-13 over its last 24 games, and it took three of four from Rochester at home earlier this month. It also went 1-3 in New Orleans to finish the sim and has lost three straight.

The bullpen has been the other leak, 10 blown saves, second-most in the league. Juan Magana has 10 saves and a 4.43. Dave Nuttall, 34, a January signing, has pitched in 27 of the 48 games with a 1.85. He is the one I would hand the ninth inning to, but nobody asked me.

The draft was the good news. Toronto took Dave Whelan, a shortstop, fifth overall, then two pitchers, Steve Batie at No. 15 and Bobby O'Rourke at No. 28 with Virginia's pick from the Ken Henderson trade. Four of the club's prospects are on the game's Top 100: David Tucker 39th, Chase Williams 46th, Nick Knight 70th, and, at 97th, Ron Turner, the 19-year-old I have been telling you about since last summer. He made the list. I am going to enjoy that.

Next: two in Fort Collins, then four at home with Las Vegas and three with Galveston. The pitching has done its part. If the bats come around even a little, this is still a club that can make June interesting.
