RICHMOND DISPATCH-LEDGER

MAY 23, 2033 · THE VIRGINIA REBELS BEAT

Rebels lead league in hitting, sit last at 19-29

BY **BO THREADGILL** · RICHMOND DISPATCH-LEDGER

The 27th of April, at home, the third game of a three-game set with San Juan. The champions had come to Richmond, and they left with a sweep, the second time they had swept this club in a month. That night the Rebels were 7-20. A year after 100 wins, they were 13 games under .500 before the calendar turned to May.

They are 19-29 this morning, last in the Topaz, nine games behind Huron and five short of the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference. Since that night against San Juan they are 12-9. That is not a comeback yet. It is a club that stopped falling.

Here is the thing nobody in this city can square. Virginia has the best offense in baseball. It leads the league in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging percentage and OPS, and it is sixth in runs. It also has the worst pitching in baseball, and it is not close. The staff earned run average is 5.53, 32nd of 32. The starters are last. The bullpen is last. The club has allowed 278 runs, more than anyone.

In April I asked Kaden what had happened.

> *"Rough start for sure, not where we want to be," he said. "The pitching needs to improve if we want to start winning again."*

And where would he start fixing it?

> *"We're going to be shifting some roles in the pen here soon," he said. "I have faith that*

> *Church and Henderson will figure it out."*

Zeke Tovar, who saved 38 games last year, has one save this year and a 5.53. Curt Graham has five saves and has not allowed a home run. Warren Herb has two. Phil Church is 4-4 with a 4.53 and 56 strikeouts in 47 and two-thirds innings. Ken Henderson, the starter who cost Albin Giolitti and two draft picks, a first and a fifth, is 4-4 with a 5.23, and his 71 strikeouts are fourth in the league. The strikeouts are there. The runs are, too. Rocky Gerling, the third overall pick in 2027, has a 6.39. Barry Richards, 36, has a 7.04.

The hitting is everything Kaden built it to be. Chris Schmotzer, 24, at shortstop, is hitting .312 with a .415 on-base percentage. Pio Takami is at .328. Jesus Sifuentes has 12 home runs. Tim Hart, the third baseman signed for power, has 12 home runs and 31 runs batted in, and was player of the week on May 16. He is also hitting .186. Kaden said the club needed power and that Hart had it. He was right about the power. Joey Powell, last year's Great Glove at third, has played 21 games.

Chris Wilson, the left fielder Kaden said in October he would love to have back, signed with Toronto for a year three days into the season.

Jim Gaudreau is 29th on the game's Top 100 this morning, up from 79th in March. Enrique Guzman is 60th.

I have written about 2031 more than once, and I know what people say about that. But on the last day of August that year this club was 60-69, and it played for the championship. This club is 19-29 on the 23rd of May. It has time. It needs pitching to use it.

Two in Myrtle Beach. Then Phoenix comes to Richmond for four. The Rebels swept Myrtle Beach here last week, two games, and nobody saw that coming either.