BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

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Crabs lose five straight series, cling to Ice playoff spot

BY **ROSALIND FEENEY** · BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

On July 8 this club was 48-40 and had every reason to think about something other than the wild card line. It has gone 6-11 since. It lost two of three in Toronto, two of three in Oklahoma City, two of three at home to San Juan, two of three at home to Virginia and two of three in Southland, five straight series by the same score, and it comes to the last sim before the trade deadline at 54-51, tied with Philadelphia for fourth in the Sapphire, 10 games behind Somerville and Montreal.

The number that keeps this from being a worse column is three. That is the margin over Tampa Bay and the last playoff spot in the Ice. Sixth of 16 is a postseason team today. I wrote in May that going 7-5 every sim would get it there. The club has gone 29-28 since, which will not.

There is a reason the record has held up as well as it has, and I would not lean on it. Baltimore is 19-10 in one-run games and 8-3 in extra innings. It has outscored its opponents by 29 runs over 105 games. That is a club a few games over .500, which is what it is, and the close games have been the difference between that and something a good deal less comfortable.

In May I wrote that the money had gone to the ninth inning and the ninth inning had gone to somebody else. That has changed. Johnny Cunnane had three saves then and has 12 now, with a 1.98 earned run average, 56 strikeouts and three walks in 36 and a third innings. He went to the All-Star Game. Matt Locher, who had nine saves in May, has picked up one since. He has 124 strikeouts in 79 and a third innings on the minimum, and he is 2-7.

Roy Bell is 34, in the last year of his contract, and is having the season the club hoped for from the $26 million: a 2.96 earned run average and 133 strikeouts against 31 walks. He is 7-6. Antonio Amaya has a 2.39 in 20 starts and has struck out 39, which I have stopped trying to explain. Sam Kutka has 10 wins, a 4.11 and

20 home runs allowed. Steve Westbrook has allowed 20 as well, is 4-9, and is owed $31.6 million again next year. Jake McHan came back and has a 4.59. Pete Johnson went 0-6 with a 6.02 and is back at Arnold.

The offense hits home runs and very little else. The 137 are fourth in baseball. The .305 on-base percentage is 22nd, and the 443 runs are 16th. Matt Lamberson has 30 home runs and is hitting .237. Rick D'Amore has 15 and is hitting .173. David Peck, worth five wins to this club last year, is at .222 with a .360 slugging percentage. Victor Barboza's .309 in May has come down to .252, with 20 home runs. Jorge Soto and Arturo Flores are both hurt, and Danny Gaona, Nate Davis and Michio Tanaka are on the injured list.

I have watched Steve work a great many deadlines from a position like this one, a little over .500 with a veteran staff and October in reach. David Crespin is 7-2 with a 3.30 at Severna Park. Nobody in this organization is on the game's Top 100. What the club has to spend is mostly money, and it is already 11th in the league at $155.7 million.

Three in Big Horn, then Mexico City and San Diego at home. Baltimore is 13-15 against that conference, with 57 games left and the deadline one sim away.