THE BEACON REPORT

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Beacons survive 11-game skid; injuries pile up before deadline

BY **MARTY SOWERBY** · THE BEACON REPORT

Plus-99 is the run differential after 105 games: 487 scored, 388 allowed. Run the same arithmetic I ran in May and it says about 64-41. The record is 60-45, third in the Sapphire, four games behind Somerville and Montreal, and the difference between those two records lives almost entirely in one stretch of 13 days.

On June 12 Boston was 44-22, the high-water mark. On June 21 it started losing and did not stop until July 4: two in Kansas City, three at home to Memphis, three at home to Oklahoma City, three in Milwaukee. Eleven straight, nine of them in sweeps by clubs from the Fire. The Beacons are 10-18 against that conference and 50-27 against their own. I asked JP what went wrong.

> *"Injuries are piling up and we've exhausted most of our depth," he said.*

The injury report backs him up. Troy Hutchinson has not played since breaking a bone in his elbow on April 11. Nick Luke, $19 million this year and next, has spent 56 days on the injured list. Konrad Palaszewski, 2.47 earned run average, is on the 60-day. So is Wyatt Squires. Mike Fuentes, 7-3 with a 2.84, strained an oblique and has missed 28 days so far. J.R. Cannon, who had six holds, partially tore his labrum on July 24 and will miss about three months. That is one starter and a good share of the leverage innings gone, and the club has still gone 13-8 since the streak ended.

The rotation that cost $14.5 million in May has held up better than a $14.5 million rotation should. Starters' earned run average: 3.54, sixth in the league. Juan Hernandez has 10 wins and a 3.29. Tyler Jackson is at 3.37 with 128 strikeouts. Bill Ramirez has 128 as well. Jimmy Gant is the weak spot, 4.50 in 98 innings, and with Fuentes out his turn matters more. Josh Owens is the surprise. I wrote him off in May at 6.27 in

relief. Since then he has a 2.27 in 47 and two-thirds innings, with his strikeout rate up over nine. My model had him as a reliever with a good name. It did not have him getting this much better this fast, and that one is on me.

The offense is second in runs on a .324 on-base percentage, sixth, with 362 walks. Luis Martinez leads the league with 86 runs batted in, has 30 home runs and is hitting .302. He has been player of the week twice and went to the All-Star Game with Scott Jacobs and Danny Stanescu. Martinez is a free agent in November, 31 years old. Jacobs has 17 home runs and was player of the week on July 18. Tony Williams, covering at second base, is hitting .316. Jim Reiser's one-year deal is at .219 with 16 home runs and 58 runs batted in, the same shape as May with more of it.

Two splits I would want answered before calling this club a contender. It is 17-28 against winning clubs and 43-17 against everybody else. It is 4-7 in extra innings. A thin roster gets exposed in exactly those games, when the fifth reliever is pitching the third reliever's innings.

The deadline math is straightforward. Nine games clear of the last playoff spot, four out of the division, 57 left. The farm cannot help much: Herman is 40-53, and Eric Behnke, 78th on the game's Top 100, is the only Boston name left on it. Any starter JP adds costs real prospects from a system short of them.

Three in Mexico City, then Myrtle Beach and Spokane at home.