KANSAS CITY STAR-JOURNAL

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE KANSAS CITY SCOUTS BEAT

Saxton leads with 38; Peterson, Smith carry Scouts' staff

BY **CORBIN DIETRICH** · KANSAS CITY STAR-JOURNAL

J. J. Saxton has 38 home runs. Nobody else in baseball has more than 32. He is hitting .273 with a .591 slugging percentage, and he has played all 105 games. I asked Brad last month whether Saxton was the MVP.

> *"Corbin, you should know the MVP isn't decided in July," he said.*

That is fair. It is August now, and one of the two men with 32 is his teammate. Jared Mettler, who was hitting .174 in May, has 32 home runs and 46 stolen bases, the most in the league, and he is at .217. Johnny Estevez has 45 steals. Nick Peeks has 23 home runs, and he was signed two days into the season. Kansas City has 179 home runs, the most in baseball, and also the most strikeouts, 1,085, and a .297 on-base percentage, 29th. This is a club that gets 14th in runs out of that combination. You get used to it.

The Scouts are 58-47, fourth in the Topaz, four games behind Milwaukee, and fifth in the Fire. They are three games clear of the last playoff spot. At home they are 37-17. On the road, 21-30. They reached 52-39 on July 15 and have gone 6-8 since, which brought them back to a crowd at the top of this division. I also asked Brad if they could catch Oklahoma City.

> *"We're only 3 games back with plenty of baseball to play, anything can happen," he said.*

They were. They are two back of Oklahoma City now, and Milwaukee has gone past both of them.

The reason this club is in that crowd is that two starting pitchers are having the seasons of their lives for $4.7 million between them. Nate Peterson is 11-4 with a 2.48 in 152 and two-thirds innings. He was Pitcher of the Month for May and again for July. Frank Smith, who I left out of my rotation in March and have owned up to already, is 11-4 with a 2.61 and 147 strikeouts. He was Pitcher of the Month for April. Oscar Almaraz, on the minimum, has 147 strikeouts as well and a 3.42. Kansas City's starters have a 3.41 earned run average, third in baseball.

Five Scouts went to the All-Star Game: Saxton, Peterson, Smith, Rob O'Neill and Ben Taylor. Taylor has 27 saves and 72 strikeouts in 49 and a third innings.

The bullpen around him has a 3.85, 21st, with 15 blown saves. Chris Williams, who is 7-0 with a 2.37 and has 37 strikeouts, has been the exception, and I do not know how long a reliever can go without losing. Freddy Echeverria, $35.2 million this year and through 2036, is 2-3 with a 5.09 in 16 starts. Dan Espeseth has been hurt and Estevez has a sore knee.

I have compared four clubs to the 2026 team over the years and I am aware of how that has gone. This one has a better rotation at the top. It does not get on base.

The farm. Jimmy Glover is still first on the game's Top 100, and he has now thrown a pitch: five starts for the Kansas Outlaws, a 2.42. Jon Crawford is 14th and Pedro Huante 67th. Maple Grove is 56-37 and in first, and Tony Toscano is still closing there.

At a league meeting this summer I heard the word "expansion" for the first time since 2011.

Denver comes in for three this weekend. Then it is three in Cincinnati, which has started to win, and a trip to Las Vegas. The Scouts have gone 36-26 against winning clubs this year, better than most clubs in the league. They will need that for the next nine weeks.