MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

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Blues win 18-inning game; rotation worst in baseball

BY **OTIS FRAYNE** · MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

Eighteen innings. That is how this month ended in Memphis. New York 9, Memphis 10, the last Sunday of July, 18 innings of baseball between two clubs with 63 losses apiece, and I do not expect anyone who stayed for the end of it will forget where they were. I stayed. I have been staying for 32 years.

The Blues are 42-63. They are tied with New York and Virginia for the worst record in baseball, last in the Topaz, 20 games behind Milwaukee. In May I told you this was a club that lost 108 games last year sitting two games under .500. It has gone 20-37 since. On the road it has won 14 games and lost 37. It went 1-8 in the sim around the All-Star break, 0-6 away, and it lost eight in a row from July 3 to July 15. The bottom was 38-62 on July 25. It has won four of five since then.

Nobody in this town was promised anything else. The plan said so. The plan is Chris Faulk and Efrain Rosales and Mike Jenkins, and I will get to them.

The trouble is the one I told you about in March and again in May. The starters have a 5.45 earned run average. That is 32nd of 32. No club in baseball has given up more home runs than the 153 the Blues have given up, and no club has hit fewer than the 87 they have hit. Mike Rosen has made 20 starts with a 6.62, 26 home runs and 38 strikeouts in 103 and a third innings. D.J. Bakker, the two-year deal, has a 7.38. Travis Byrd, the first-round pick, is 5-11 with a 4.91. Kyle Croitoru is still the best of them at 4.02. The club has allowed 528 runs, and in a whole lifetime of writing about this franchise I have learned there is no way to say that number that makes it any smaller.

Then you look at the hitting, and it has been the thing a man can stand. Jonathan Murrell, on the minimum, is 25 and has 20 home runs and 70 runs batted in. He was a fifth-round pick. Jenkins is hitting

.282 at 24 and has played every day. Eli Bernal went to the All-Star Game, the one Blue who did, and is hitting .267 with 10 home runs. Nachman Cohen is at .271. The club is eighth in batting average and 17th in runs. It is doing that with 87 home runs.

Casey Schnake was missing in May, and Eric said so. He is still missing. He is at .238 with nine home runs and a .340 slugging percentage, and he is paid $20 million this year and next.

The future has not moved, and that is the good news. Faulk is 12th on the game's Top 100, hitting .301 with 10 home runs at Chula Vista. Xavier Brown, the first pick in the draft, is 18th and hitting .252 with nine home runs at Cotati. He is 17. Rosales is 19th, 1-1 with a 1.39 at Los Altos. Ron McCool is 41st. Those are four names in the first 41, on a farm that has spent a long time without one.

I have watched a new plan come to this franchise about every five years since it played in Nashville, and I know how those stories usually end. I also know a 17-year-old who hits nine home runs in 118 plate appearances is not something this club has had before.

Fort Collins comes in for three. Then Denver for three, away, and New Orleans. Sixty-three losses on the first of August is on pace for 97. That would be 11 better than last year.