RÉCORD CIUDAD

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Henson mashes 32 homers; Luchadores' arms keep them out

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Slugging percentage: .634. That is Dave Henson's line through 103 games, with a .306 average, 32 home runs, tied for second in baseball, and 82 runs batted in, second to Boston's Luis Martinez. He was player of the week three times in a span of four weeks, on June 20, June 27 and July 11, and Batter of the Month for June. He is paid $11.4 million this year.

The Luchadores are 54-51, fifth in the Ruby, five games behind Myrtle Beach and one game short of the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference. Since my May piece they are 30-27. In May I wrote that my model had been wrong about the part it has always been right about. The lineup was outperforming and the pitching was not. Ten weeks later that error has grown.

The offense is fifth in runs at 484, third in slugging at .425 and third in OPS at .744. Last year it was 16th in runs. Henson, Jonathan Coon and Adam Brady all went to the All-Star Game. Coon has 19 home runs, 69 runs batted in and 77 runs scored. Brady was Rookie of the Month for April and again for July and is hitting .294 with a .535 slugging percentage. That is two hitters on the minimum and a third on $11.4 million producing the core of a top-five offense.

The staff earned run average is 4.03, 24th. The starters are at 4.43, 25th. Arturo Rivera, 36, has made 14 starts, is 3-8 with a 4.96 and has a salary of $32.8 million. The 92 strikeouts in 81 and two-thirds innings say there is a pitcher left in there. The record does not. Chris Gresham is 3-9 with a 5.11. Eric Marchitto, signed for four years and $36.5 million, went 5-5 with a 5.26 and had elbow surgery. He will miss about eight months. Ricky Falk, at 3.61, remains the steady one. Xavier Gaines, 35, a one-year signing, moved into the rotation for nine starts and has a 2.78 overall.

The bullpen is 13th at 3.43. Steve Parker has 29 saves, the most in baseball.

Two sets of numbers explain why I would not call this roster a contender on the evidence. It has allowed 449 runs, 22nd, in a season when the defense was supposed to be the argument. And three regulars are giving the lineup very little: Rocky Brito, $12.2 million, is at .194. Billy Cover, $11.9 million, is at .192. Lorenzo Valenzuela, 34, in the last year of his deal, has one home run in 327 plate appearances. For 16 years I have told readers to look at the defense first. This season the numbers do not support the pitchers it was supposed to protect.

The club is 28-23 on the road and 26-28 at home, the opposite of the league's normal shape and a pattern that has held since May. I do not have a causal claim to make about that. It lost all three to Phoenix here in July, and those games are the difference between fifth place and third.

The farm offers no August help. Tijuana is 34-59 and Ciudad Juarez 35-58. Antonio Velazquez is 23rd on the game's Top 100, down from 18th in May, and Kevin Clarke is 56th. Both are a good distance from the capital.

With one sim to the deadline and a payroll of $183.9 million, fifth in baseball, the arithmetic is simple. One game out, a top-five offense, and a rotation that needs an arm. Larry has been in this chair since 2013 and knows the model's limits as well as I do.

Boston here for three. Then Baltimore and New York on the road.