LA PRESSE SPORTIVE

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Machine staff allows fewest runs, stays tied with Somerville

BY **ÉTIENNE CHARBONNEAU** · LA PRESSE SPORTIVE

The light goes a little earlier now. It is the first of August, the month in which, for most of my working life, this column turned its attention to next year. Instead I have a standings page with two clubs on top of the Sapphire at 64-41, and one of them has allowed fewer runs than anybody in baseball.

The figure is 354 over 105 games. The earned run average is 3.13, the lowest in the league. So is the 90 home runs allowed. Somerville has the same record. Denver, in the Jade, has the same record too. I find I am not able to say what that means until September, which has been my policy for some time and has served mostly to make me late.

Sam Kelly has become the man the rotation runs through. He is 12-5, tied for the most wins in baseball, with a 2.22 earned run average and 166 strikeouts, second in the league, in exactly 150 innings. He was Pitcher of the Month for May and went to the All-Star Game. His pay this year is $4.5 million. T.J. Larson, whose spring I wrote about in May as though it had ended, came back from the hamstring and has a 2.56 in 13 starts, with four home runs allowed. Jong-su Im has a 2.52. John Kropp has a 3.06 and 119 strikeouts. Arturo Luna has pitched 49 and a third innings of relief at 1.09.

The summer has belonged to this building. Montreal is 39-15 at home, and I have looked for a reason and found only that it is so. On the road it is 25-26. It has swept Cincinnati, Tampa Bay, Las Vegas and Huron here, and it was swept in Philadelphia in July.

At the plate the club remains an odd animal. It has hit 138 home runs, third in baseball, and stolen 35 bases, 30th. Dean Salvucci is hitting .199 with 28 home runs and 65 runs scored, and he is an All-Star, which would have struck a younger me as a misprint. Pete Troiano and Ryan Weigold went with him. Weigold is at .293. Troiano is at .271 with 14 home runs, on $3 million, before his five-year deal begins next season. Willie

Solis has come down to .227 with 19 home runs. Third base is still where the hits go to die: Jon Morales, now on the injured list, has two home runs in 301 plate appearances.

The leak is what it was in May. Thirteen blown saves and a 5-6 record in extra innings. Dave Santillan has 23 saves. Eli Sponaugle has walked 42 men in 64 and two-thirds innings. If I were looking for the place in this roster that a trade might touch, I would look there, and at third base.

The organization below it is a thing I have not seen in 23 seasons on this beat. Gatineau is 64-17. Quebec is 63-30 and Sherbrooke 59-34, all three first in their divisions. Oscar Lopez, 18, is eighth on the game's Top 100, Chris Shere 20th, David Bustamante 52nd and Jorge Arbizu 64th. Four men on that list means Josh has something to trade if he decides to.

In May I said this was a better team than a good baseball team. It has gone 34-23 since and I am prepared to say the same thing again, and no more than that, for another month.

Three in Oahu, then Phoenix and Big Horn at home, in the long light that is left.
