GRAND STRAND SPORTS

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE MYRTLE BEACH MERMEN BEAT

# Mermen lead Ruby by three, sign Chavez for catcher hole

BY **CRICKET HALLORHAN** · GRAND STRAND SPORTS

First place. Still.

I wrote that in May. I'm writing it again. Put it back on the fridge.

The Mermen are 59-46, three games up on Vancouver in the Ruby. It's August. This town hasn't seen a playoff race since the club got here.

I asked Daryl last month if his tinkering was finished, because he told me it had hurt the chemistry.

> *"still tinkering, and Erik Fisher is coming up next sim," he said. "Should send the team into full on compete mode."*

Full on compete mode. I'm having that printed on a shirt.

Fisher is seventh on the game's Top 100. He was the first pick in the whole draft last year. He's hitting .266 at San Antonio, where this club used to live, and as of this morning that's where he still is. Watch this space.

Then I asked about the $3 million in cash Daryl put out there, picks for money.

> *"Gonna use it to fill my Catcher spot and possibly a 5th SP," he said.*

Well, hello. On July 21 the Mermen signed Miguel Chavez, a catcher, for a year and $6 million. He hit .255 in 117 plate appearances for Oahu before they let him go.

I said it in March and I said it in May. The catcher was the hole. Somebody heard me.

The best part of the team is still the back of the bullpen. Steven Alexander is 26, on the minimum, with 27 saves, a 1.38 earned run average and 85 strikeouts in 52 and a third innings. Kevin Lindroth has 17 holds. They both went to the All-Star Game.

So did Mark Christensen, and hooray for him twice. He struck out his 2,000th batter last month. He's up to 2,011. He is 10-4 with a 2.84 and has walked 28 men in 142 and two-thirds innings. That's the $46 million signing, doing exactly what it said on the box.

Robby Ayala has a 2.88. Miguel Sanchez, who I was worried about in May, is 10-5. Ten wins! The earned run average is 4.22, and I'm not going to bring it up again. Chris Breuninger is the one where Daryl might still be looking, 2-5 with a 4.62.

The bats have kept us up there. Israel Flores has 24 home runs and 74 runs batted in, fourth in the league. Rodolfo Pintasilgo went to the All-Star Game too, that's five if you are counting. Trent Erickson has 34 stolen bases. Bill Sanchez, 23, has 16 home runs. And Willie Martinez, the MVP of last year's final who signed here for the minimum, is hitting .284 and was player of the week on August 1. The best $500,000 anybody spent this year.

The Mermen are 30-15 in the division. That's the race right there. They're 29-20 against winning clubs. And they play everywhere: 30-24 at home, 29-22 on the road.

Sure, there's a catch. The club has gone 30-27 since May. It was 25-10 at the high point, way back on May 7. Vancouver is three back and Big Horn and Phoenix are four. A division can get away from you in a hurry.

But I'm not worried. I'm watching. There's a difference.

Now the farm, because you know I can't skip it. Melvin Batres has jumped to 10th on the game's Top 100, from 38th in May. Greg Mullins is 28th, Christopher Bond 49th, Lear Eichhorn 65th, Mike Jones 91st and Ben Sloan 93rd. With Fisher that's seven names. Moose Jaw is 21-7 in Rookie ball.

This club could be good for a long time. It might be good right now.

Chicago comes in for three. Then Boston and Philadelphia on the road. Come see them before they go.