THE OKLAHOMAN SPORTS DESK

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Outlaws hit .257, lead the league; July slide costs Topaz

BY **MARGUERITE YOO** · THE OKLAHOMAN SPORTS DESK

On April 5 the Outlaws were 1-7. In May I split the season at that point because the two halves did not look like the same team. It is time to run the same chart again. Since that date Oklahoma City is 59-38, a .608 pace that would be 98 wins over a full season. The record as it stands is 60-45, third in the Topaz, two games behind Milwaukee and one behind San Juan, third in the Fire. In May I said eight games were just eight games. The eight games are what stands between this club and first place.

The record went from 24-24 to 58-39 in 49 games. It went 17-8 in June and took three in Boston, three from New York and three from Memphis on the way. Then, from July 22, it dropped two of three in Toronto, was swept in Philadelphia and has gone 2-6, and Milwaukee passed it. I would not make a great deal of eight games at this end either.

The chart I keep looking at this time is a different one. Oklahoma City leads the league in batting average at .257 and is second in on-base percentage at .327. It is 15th in runs, with 446. Those three numbers do not usually sit together. Part of the gap is the bottom of the order: Bryan Carpenter at .201, Mike Tarrant with two home runs in 362 plate appearances, Josh Miller at .236. Part of it is Dave Chapman, who cost two first-round picks and has a .279 on-base percentage in 445 plate appearances. I said so in May, and it has not changed.

The men who are getting on have been very good. Jeremy Porten is hitting .318 with a .417 on-base percentage, a .553 slugging percentage and 22 home runs. David Ramirez has 19 home runs and 28 steals. Porten and Ramirez both went to the All-Star Game with Alex Garcia. Javier Estevez has 23 home runs, the most on the club, in 363 plate appearances. Manny Jimenez is at .281 with 18.

The rotation is fifth in the league, with a 3.47 earned run average. Garcia has a 2.38 and is 9-3. Jeremy Valenzuela is also 9-3, on the minimum, with 21 home runs allowed. Garrett Hoenie, whose results I said had caught his strikeouts, has a 3.58 and is 4-8, which is a run-support number and not a pitching number. Jonathan Cooper is 3-5 with a 3.59, and that is the same chart. Brian Lee still has not thrown a pitch this year.

The ninth inning has changed hands. In May Shizuma Oda was the closer with eight saves and a 6.27. He has nine saves now, so he has added one in 10 weeks. Jake Metzker has 19 and a 3.57. Danny Reynolds is 5-0. Oda's earned run average is down to 4.63, in a lesser role, and he is paid $12.6 million, half of it by Chicago.

The record against clubs with winning records was 12-18 in May. It is 33-31 now, which is the improvement I would point to first. It is 27-14 against the rest. The club is 16-11 in one-run games and 29-25 on the road. All of that describes a good team, and the run differential, plus-57, agrees.

I have written about why this franchise has never reached a final for 15 years, and I have run a lot of models. In that time it has made a lot of Octobers. There is no chart that tells you whether this is the year. The chart says the club is good enough to be in the conversation, and it has said that before.

Mark Barnes is 58th on the game's Top 100, the one name from this organization. Belleville is 55-38.

Las Vegas comes in for three, then a trip to Galveston and Tampa Bay.