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Firebirds win five straight, buy Mills, lose Baker for year

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Tyler Holman came down from Spokane on the Fourth of July with a 3-10 record and a 5.67 earned run average... and I will admit I looked at the box and wondered. I asked Brendan what he saw.

> *"Holman is much better than his era this year as evidenced by his FIP," he said. "I think he can improve at Phoenix and he is still relatively young. I am delighted by his start."*

So am I. Holman has made five starts for this club. He is 2-2 with a 2.59. He has struck out 39 and walked two, in 31 and a third innings. Two walks. Spokane got a 2034 fourth-round pick, a 2035 third and two prospects, Chris Ma and Tristan Miller, and I have seen Brendan make worse deals on a slower afternoon.

I asked him if he was done adding.

> *"This team need a shot in the arm...over the last month they have been flagging," he said. "More pieces are on the way and hopefully some pretty big names!"*

He meant it. On July 18 the pieces came, two in one day. Jason Mills, the first baseman with 21 home runs in Chicago, came with a 2035 third-round pick and half his salary paid, and it cost a 2035 first-round pick and Jeff Whittington, a young arm who has 18 strikeouts in 16 innings at the Rookie level. Josh Baker came from Cincinnati, with half of what was left on his deal paid too, for a 2035 second and a 2035 fourth. Brendan had been at this for 32 years... and I do not know that I had ever seen him go for it like that.

Mills is hitting .200 in 41 plate appearances here, and he has not hit a home run. He will.

Baker was the one that felt like something. He made two starts in this uniform, 1-1 with a 1.64, 11 innings. On Sunday, in the last game of the month, he hurt his elbow on the mound. It is a torn flexor tendon. He will miss about nine months. I have been covering this ballclub for 22 years, and I sat there and thought of Sudduth, and then I thought about Brendan, who must have read that report at his kitchen table. He will be all right... he has had practice.

It should be said that the club won that game. It beat Rochester 3-2 and finished a sweep, five wins in a row. The Firebirds are 55-50, tied with Big Horn for third in the Ruby, four games behind Myrtle Beach, and the two clubs hold the last two playoff spots in the Fire. In the week they made those trades they were swept here by Cincinnati, of all people. They have gone 27-30 since my May piece. They were 35-25 on June 5. Brendan was right that they were flagging.

The best offense in baseball was playing here in the spring, and it is still third, with 486 runs. Bryce Mosely has 27 home runs and 74 runs batted in. Juan Mujica is hitting .294 with 31 stolen bases. Jay Seabolt, that 16th-round pick I did not have on any list, is hitting .305 with 18 home runs, and all three of them went to the All-Star Game. Octavio Toledo has 23 home runs and a .205 average, still its own kind of season. Joe Lloyd has 30 steals.

Robby Morales is 10-2 with a 4.14, and I would like someone to explain that to me over a long lunch. Roger Lippincott has a 3.38. Usami Miyamoto is 7-8. John Williams is on the injured list. So there is a spot in the rotation again, one day after there wasn't... and that is the kind of thing you learn to live with in Phoenix.

I know what I do in August. I wrote 2030 as a turning point. I am not writing this one.

The farm is doing well. Tucson is 55-38, Flagstaff 57-36, and New Mexico 21-7. Casey Morris is 24th on the game's Top 100, and Willie Villalba, 89th, has a 2.76 at Yuma.

New York is here for three. Then Montreal and Toronto on the road. Holman goes in there somewhere, and I will be watching.