EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE SAN JUAN STOGIES BEAT

Stogies go 13-2 in extras, sit one game behind Milwaukee

BY **NÉLIDA CRUZ BETANCOURT** · EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

The Humidor has drawn 43,639 people a night this season, third in baseball, and on a Wednesday in July you could hear them from the harbor. Boston came in and left without a win, three games in three nights, the last one 11-10 in 12 innings, in the middle of six straight, the longest streak of the year. A year ago this city was still learning how to hold a pennant race. It knows now.

San Juan is 61-44, second in the Topaz, one game behind Milwaukee, and second in the Fire Conference. In May it was 27-21. It has gone 34-23 since, and over the last 20 games it is 14-6. Last year this club won 82 games and a championship. It has 61 on the first of August.

Now, the extra innings. I wrote in May that the Stogies were 7-1. They are 13-2. Thirteen and two. In one-run games they are 22-11. They won in the 15th in San Diego in June. In April Chuck told me it was "luck so far, it will likely even out." I have been waiting ever since. The run differential is plus-36, and that usually belongs to a club about four games worse than this one. Chuck is an honest man. He may also be wrong, and I would like nobody to tell the baseball.

The men doing it are young, and they are ours. Frank Mildner, 25, on the minimum, has 26 home runs and 67 runs batted in, and he was player of the week on July 25. Chris Whittington, last year's Rookie of the Year, is hitting .290 with 19 home runs. Adam Rall was Rookie of the Month for May and again for June. He is 24, hitting .281 with 14 home runs in 81 games, and he came up from the farm I told you about in March. Mike Boller, 34, went to the All-Star Game and is hitting .276. Scott Moore has 17 home runs and 23 stolen bases.

The pitching is the short part. The starters have a 4.47 earned run average, 27th in the league. Dustin Potter, on $38 million, has a 3.81 and 119 strikeouts in 108 and two-thirds innings. Jonathan Mendoza is at

3.98. Isaiah Logan is 4-8. Nate Parker has walked 58 men in 84 and a third. These are good men, and they have been getting through five innings and handing the game to the bullpen.

And the bullpen takes it. D.J. Zaccardelli has 20 saves, a 2.33 and 62 strikeouts in 46 and a third innings. Brian Zimmel has a 2.33 and 10 holds. David Fisher is 6-4. The bullpen's earned run average is 3.23, eighth-best. It has also blown 20 saves, the most in baseball, so if you are wondering how a club goes 13-2 in extra innings, it starts with needing to play them.

Something else I did not expect: this club is 32-22 on the road and 29-22 at home. After all I have written about the Humidor, I will only say the people here deserve a few more.

Jamie Bliss, the right fielder signed for five years, played 11 games in April and has been at Havana getting ready, hitting .289. Dylan Cuffie, 35, is hitting .199 and is on the injured list. Havana is 59-34, first in its division. Matt Giglio is 46th on the game's Top 100, Brandon Jones 57th, Jeff Blanchard 76th and Zachery Jolitz 84th. There is more coming behind Rall.

New Orleans comes to the Humidor for three. Then we go to Las Vegas and Cincinnati. This club can win it again. The building will be full when it starts to try.