THE STRAIGHT LINE

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE SOMERVILLE MONEYLINE BEAT

Moneyline rattle off 11 straight, still share Sapphire lead

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Plus-129. That is the best run differential in baseball, 492 scored and 363 allowed, and it comes with the most runs in the league, the most strikeouts in the league and a 64-41 record that exactly matches Montreal's in the Sapphire and Denver's in the Jade. In May the question was whether being very good would be enough for third in this division. It was a reasonable question at 28-20. Then the club won 11 straight, from May 23 to June 4, starting with a two-game sweep in Denver.

The Moneyline went 21-6 in May and 17-8 in June. On July 5 they were 56-30. JR's 3,000th win as a general manager came along the way. Since July 5 they are 8-11, and they went 11-13 in July, the first losing month of the year after March. Montreal has spent that time catching up.

I would not spend long on it. Nineteen games is not a sample. The number that bears watching is a different one: 14-17 in one-run games. A plus-129 club under .500 in the close ones has 17 blown saves to explain it, sixth-most in the league. Tim Snyder was Pitcher of the Month for June and has 23 saves and a 2.61 at 36 years old. The rest of the blown saves are spread around a bullpen that has a 2.95 earned run average, second in baseball. That is an unusual combination. The bullpen prevents runs and still gives leads away, which is a sequencing problem until it happens in October and becomes something else.

Jason White is 8-0 with a 2.91, and I do not know what to do with that. Eight wins and no losses in 65 innings of relief is mostly a matter of being in the game at the right time. The 66 strikeouts and 11 walks are the part I trust. Jason Shannon has 18 holds and has allowed two home runs.

The rotation is better than it was in May, when I called it the one ordinary thing on the club. Starters' earned run average is 3.44, fourth in the league. Bob Reyes has a 2.54 and went to the All-Star Game. Chase Martin has struck out 148 in 89 and a third innings, which is the kind of rate that makes a person check the

column heading. Mark Buescher came back down to 3.53. Kevin Speakman, the Rookie of the Month for June, is 7-3. Bob Nelson is at 4.25 and has allowed 16 home runs. Jason Sage is on the injured list.

The lineup answered my complaint from May. I said the young half had not carried it. Steve Frey was at .203 then. He has 23 home runs, a .360 on-base percentage and 19 stolen bases. Dave Tyler has 60 runs batted in. Eli Jones has gone from a roster note to .277 with 14 home runs. Phil Butterfield and Tyler made the All-Star team with Reyes.

Now the other half. Chase Posey, 32, paid $43.2 million this year and next, strained an abdominal muscle on July 27 and is listed as day-to-day for four weeks, with 11 home runs and a .759 OPS on the year. Antonio Reyna, 37, paid $32.8 million, has not played in Somerville since April. He has 89 plate appearances at Paradise and is hitting .288. I have been slow on this club's age twice before. Those are two of the three biggest salaries on the payroll, and neither one is in the lineup.

Six Somerville prospects remain on the game's Top 100: Sebastian Croslin 26th, Willie Schultz 38th, Dustin Geene 39th, Elliott Staley 45th, Kevin Miller 79th and Gene Brewer 96th. Croslin just reached Triple-A. The payroll is $189.1 million, fourth in the league. A club with this record and this farm can buy whatever the deadline is selling. Whether it should is a harder question.

Three in Spokane, then Vancouver and Oahu at home.