SOUTHLAND TRIBUNE

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Bandits 5-0 in extras, 14-7 in close games; still 46-59

BY **GERALD MABRY** · SOUTHLAND TRIBUNE

The Southland Masked Bandits are 5-0 in extra innings. They are 14-7 in one-run games. They are 46-59. I have now gone through that three times with a pencil. If you take out the games decided by one run, this club is 32-52. It wins the close ones and loses all of the others. In 29 years on this beat I have seen most of what can go wrong with a baseball team, and I had not seen it go wrong in that direction.

The club is sixth in the Topaz, 16 games behind Milwaukee and nine short of the last playoff spot in the Fire Conference. It has gone 24-33 since my May piece. It went 8-19 in May and 8-17 in June, which is two months of losing at the same rate, and I am told that is called consistency. Against clubs in its own conference outside the division it is 9-23. In March Anthony said a wild card race would make this a successful season. Two games out in May was a wild card race. Nine out in August is a different thing.

He has since posted that it is time to turn over the roster and that he wants prospects over picks. I believe about 40 percent of what Anthony tells me. I believe all of that.

There is a good deal to turn over. The injured list has nine men on it. Ryan Wallace is out four to five months. Jason Patrick strained his elbow on July 19 and will miss about three months. B.J. Reyna is out with the rest of them. The club signed more than two dozen veterans to one-year deals last winter, and I doubt it is a coincidence that most of them seem to need a rest.

Emmanuel Martinez went 16-4 last year on a club that won 66. This year he has a 3.95 earned run average and has allowed eight home runs in 127 and two-thirds innings. He is 6-13. That is how this place works. Dan Gonzalez is 4-7. Billy Perez, who once won two Pitcher of the Year awards, has a 5.74. The starters are 26th in the league and the bullpen is 26th in the league, which at least has the virtue of being even.

Brock Nickerson went to the All-Star Game. He has a 2.11 and 77 strikeouts in 59 and two-thirds innings. Justin Cruz has 15 saves, and his earned run average has gone from 0.48 to 2.89, the sort of thing that happens to a person here.

The offense hits singles. It is 31st in home runs. Angel Diaz is hitting .300. David Jensen has 59 runs batted in, and I can't explain how, since nobody has been on base. Nick Shrader has stolen 23 bases. Chris Goers, the $18 million catcher, is hitting .257 with 10 home runs in 160 plate appearances. Morgan Alison, signed in May for a year and $10 million, has four home runs. Jose Ortega, 35, was hitting .138 in May. I have decided not to look.

The strange part arrives, as it always does, at the end. The low point was 35-53 on July 8. Since then the club is 11-6. It swept Chicago, took two of three in Milwaukee, the best club in the conference, and took two of three in Toronto. I have stopped asking what any of this means.

The farm is the one thing here I trust. There are 10 Southland names on the game's Top 100, which is the same count as May. Christian Lombera is ninth, Blake Lee 16th, Jay Greenwood 27th, Geoff Fawcett 32nd, Chad Brown 35th, Steve Boettcher 36th. Arturo Lopez, the second pick in the draft, is 47th, and Zack Maurer 63rd. Tony Aldana is 68th, and he is on the big-league roster. Abdul Adel is 100th.

Rochester comes in for three. Then New Orleans and Denver on the road. I expect close games.