TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE TORONTO GRIFFINS BEAT

Griffins fade after 21-12 run, three back of line

BY **HOLLIS WEIR** · TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

Dave Nuttall is 34 years old and makes $1.1 million, and in May I told you he was the man I would hand the ninth inning to, and that nobody had asked me. Somebody must have been reading. He has 11 saves and 12 holds, a 1.75 earned run average in 54 games, and in July he went to the All-Star Game for a club with a losing record. A January signing nobody looked at twice. I am claiming half of that.

He went with Chris Wilson, and you know how I feel about Chris Wilson. He has come down from .407 to .333 since my last piece, and there is still nobody in this lineup close to him: a .407 on-base percentage, 44 runs, 17 stolen bases in 80 games. I asked Brandon whether anybody else was producing the way he wanted.

> *"Wilson has been a huge, huge part of our team and a great leader for the younger guys," he said. "We have a few players that are struggling to meet expectations and he has certainly helped provide offense when we've been lacking it."*

Brandon is too polite to name them, so I will do it gently. Alex Moralez, on the injured list, is hitting .158. Tom Pomaville has 15 home runs and is at .186. Carlos Cruz is at .203 with four home runs, and Daniel Frandsen is at .200. Blake Elmore has 33 runs batted in and only 12 runs scored. Toronto is last in the league in runs, batting average, on-base percentage and slugging. All four. I have tried to find a kind way to say that, and that is the kind way.

And yet for six weeks this summer you would not have known it. The Griffins were 23-38 on June 6. Then they won six straight, swept Cincinnati, Huron and New York, and went into the All-Star break looking

like somebody else. They went 21-12 from early June, and last month I asked Brandon whether that had changed his deadline plans.

> *"Yeah, if we keep it up, we may be buyers at deadline," he said.*

They have not kept it up. It was 4-8 this sim, swept in Milwaukee, and the club is 48-57, seventh in the Sapphire and 16 games back. The wild card is a shorter walk: three games behind Tampa Bay for the last spot in the Ice. With 57 to play I would not bet the house, and I would not give up on it either. I like a club that has already gone 25-19 from the bottom. Toronto is 32-22 at home, so come out and see them. On the road it is 16-35. We will not talk about that.

The reason this team has any chance at all is the staff Brandon built over the winter, and the men on it are a pleasure. Tim Elizalde has 11 wins, one behind the league lead. Albin Giolitti has a 3.23, and he has walked 21 men in 131 innings, which might be the most remarkable number on the club. Mike Vanover, another of those $1.1 million men, has a 3.30. Andrew Halama was player of the week on July 11, and he is 4-8 with a 3.95, which tells you how many runs he has had to work with. Starters' earned run average: 3.76, eighth in baseball.

I have some sad news about Ron Turner, the 20-year-old I have been telling you about since last summer. He is off the game's Top 100, where he was 97th in May. He is 6-4 with a 4.27 at Double-A, and he is still 20, and I am still telling you about him. David Tucker has climbed to 31st, Chase Williams is 50th and Nick Knight 70th.

Three in Vancouver, then Big Horn and Phoenix at home. Bring a sign for Dave Nuttall. He has earned one.