BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE BALTIMORE BLUE CRABS BEAT

Crabs back in at 78-84; Somerville waits again

BY **ROSALIND FEENEY** · BALTIMORE LEDGER-STAR

In August I wrote that going 29-28 would not get this club into October. It went 24-33 after that and got in anyway, which tells you less about the Blue Crabs than about the bottom of the Ice Conference. Baltimore finished 78-84, sixth in the Sapphire, eighth of eight in the field. It is the first losing record this club has taken into a postseason since it came home in 2023, and it is the same 78-84 it went in 2028, the one year it stayed home.

I said in August that the close games had been holding the record up and that I would not lean on them. On August 1 the club was 19-10 in one-run games. Since then it has gone 3-19 in them. It lost 2-3 in 14 innings in New York on August 29, 0-1 there the next night, 0-1 at home to Montreal on September 3, 4-5 in 10 and 1-4 in 14 at Chicago that same week. August finished 8-19. By September 13 it was 66-77, eleven games under, and the wild card was a matter of who else would stop winning first.

Nobody else stopped. Baltimore did, for a while, the other way. It went 12-7 from there. On September 14 it beat Toronto 11-1, the one game it won in that series. It took two of three in Somerville. It swept New York at home, 10-1, 13-2 and 9-6. Then it won two of three in Montreal and the first two in Boston, and the 5-3 win there on October 4 clinched it. Steve's club has been to October 10 times in 11 Baltimore seasons now. This is the one it backed into.

The reason it is in at all is a 25-year-old on the minimum. Matt Locher was the closer in May, lost the job, and spent the summer as a man who strikes out everyone and loses anyway. He took the ninth back in the last two months: 1.59 earned run average after the deadline, 70 strikeouts in 45 and a third innings, nine saves. In September he pitched 21 and a third innings without allowing an earned run, struck out 34, and was the Ice Conference Rookie of the Month. He finished with 19 saves and 194 strikeouts out of the bullpen.

Johnny Cunnane, the All-Star in July, had five saves and three blown ones after the deadline, and the ninth went to Locher more often than not.

Roy Bell did what he has done all year: 12-8, a 2.99 earned run average, 198 strikeouts, about one walk or hit an inning. He is 34 and in the last year of the deal. Jake McHan gave the club a 3.20 after the deadline. Sam Kutka was steady. Steve Westbrook went 1-6 with a 5.53 in his last 11 starts and finished 5-15, and he is owed $31.6 million next year. Antonio Amaya, whose 2.39 on August 1 I had stopped trying to explain, gave up 9 home runs in 41 and two-thirds innings after it and finished at 3.97. I did not need to explain it. It explained itself.

The lineup is what it was in August, only less so. Matt Lamberson hit 39 home runs, 10th in the league, and .198 after the deadline. Victor Barboza hit 30. The club hit 210 home runs, sixth in baseball, and batted .234, 25th. It scored 687 runs and gave up 641, and a club that outscores its opponents by 46 is not, on paper, a 78-84 club. The 22-29 record in one-run games is the whole difference, and it is not a thing a club can practice.

Steve stood still at the deadline. Toronto, the club Baltimore was tied with in September, bought four players. Baltimore made no trade, and it finished one game behind Toronto and in the field all the same.

And so it is Somerville, for the fourth October running. We have played them seven times in the postseason, going back to 2014 when this was a Washington club, and they have won four. They swept us in the first round in 2030. We swept them in the first round in 2031. Last October they beat us in seven in the conference series.

It opens there on October 7 and 8. The next three are here, and if it goes six or seven it goes back to Somerville for those.

Baltimore won seven of the 12 against Somerville this year and outscored them, 56-51. It finished 20 games behind them anyway. That is the club Steve is taking up there: good enough on the right night, and not on enough of the others.