DENVER HERALD

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE DENVER DYNAMITE BEAT

Dynamite win Jade by 18, rest Ruiz for Toronto

BY **CAMILLE OSSORIO** · DENVER HERALD

Five hundred sixty-five runs allowed, the fewest in baseball. A 3.22 earned run average, the best in baseball. A 3.17 from the starters, also the best. Ninety-seven and 65, the Jade by 18 games, a 16th straight postseason and the second seed in the Ice, one game behind Somerville for the first. Jay called it a 92-win championship team in March. On the wins he was five light.

Since August 1 the club went 33-24. It clinched a playoff spot on September 13 and the division on September 18, and for the last three weeks it played like a team that knew both. That is not a complaint. It is the context for the two decisions that matter most in Game 1.

The first is Matt Ware. He tore a flexor tendon in his elbow in Cincinnati in September and is out until spring. He finished 15-6 with a 2.32, the best earned run average among qualified starters in the league, and he threw a perfect game in July. In August I said the defense was doing a great deal of his work, and it was. It did not throw the pitches. In September I asked Jay who starts Game 1 now.

> *"Oh Marco Ruiz, of course," he said. "He's on ice for the last two sims quietly preparing to dominate."*

He meant it literally. Ruiz started on September 7, beat Galveston 8-4, and has pitched one inning since. Ruiz finished 12-10 with a 3.03, 206 strikeouts and 39 walks in 193 and a third innings, and his deal runs through 2037, $150 million in all, most of it still to come. Rest helps a pitcher's arm. It does not always help his command. We will know which on the 7th.

The second decision is Victor Baez. He has not played since September 11. He is not on the injured list. He hit .323 with a .420 on-base percentage and 26 home runs in 132 games and was worth more wins than anyone in the league except Ashton Turner. Whether he is in the lineup on Friday is the biggest roster question this club has.

Now the grade I promised in August. The Rochester trade cost two first-round picks, two seconds, a third and three prospects. Vince Hernandes, on $55 million in the last year of his deal, hit .303 with 12 home runs and a .600 slugging percentage after August 1 and was the Ice Conference player of the week on September 5. That part is an A. Lyle Egner hit .237 with 11 home runs in 56 games, about what a half-price outfielder should. Jorge Garcia hit .180. Two of three. October writes the rest of it.

Jay's August 1 business was smaller and cheaper. He got Andy May and $270,000 from Memphis for two minor leaguers, and Jean Dupont from Southland for four more. Dupont pitched to a 1.42 in 14 games but blew three saves. He sold Danny Huelsbeck, Casey Guest and Jeremy Winkles to Mexico City for a 2035 third-round pick, and Alex Moya for a seventh. A club at $257.7 million cannot add salary, so it moved bodies. The ledger is clean.

The bullpen is the thing I would watch, as I said in May and again in August. Eddie Alonso finished with 80 appearances and 138 and two-thirds innings, all in relief, 12 blown saves, tied for the most in the league, and 25 holds. Jeff Zullinger has the most saves on the club with 11, and so does Brian Cronk, who has a 5.64. Nobody owns the ninth. In a regular season that is depth. In a short series it is a question.

Behind Ruiz the rotation is David Varas, 11-2 with a 2.26, who moved into it in August and had a 1.90 in nine starts; Jonathan Miller, 14-6; Malik Harris; and Ryan Zander, a 32-year-old who did not throw a big-league pitch until September 12 and then made five starts with a 1.69.

The opponent is Toronto. In August Jay told me the only thing that worried him was an 82-80 club in the playoffs. Toronto finished 79-83 and won its last seven, including three in Somerville. Denver took three of four from them here in June. The franchises have met in October four times, three of those when Toronto's club was in New York, and Denver won the last three, two of them in seven games. Toronto was 30-51 on the road. Denver was 54-27 at home.

Games 1 and 2 are here, on the 7th and 8th. The fewest runs allowed in baseball, the best bat in the lineup idle since September 11, and nobody in charge of the ninth: that is the club Jay is taking into Friday.