HURON DAILY BEACON

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE HURON HERONS BEAT

Herons win 1-0 in 10, grab final Fire spot

BY **LORRAINE PETROSKY** · HURON DAILY BEACON

October 5, Kansas City. Nothing through nine.

Huron, Kansas City and Mexico City woke up that morning at 80-81, with one place left in the Fire. Steve Benton went six and a third innings and struck out eight. Nate Peterson went seven and two-thirds for Kansas City and struck out eight. In the 10th Danny Perez singled, stole second, went to third on a passed ball and scored on Dan Boyd's single to right. Jose Erbetto struck out J.J. Saxton on three pitches to end it. Mexico City lost at home to Big Horn. The Herons are in at 81-81.

I have stood in this building for a 115-win club that won nothing, and for an 84-win club that won everything. This one is the eighth seed, and it has the same record, near enough, as the last Huron club to win a title.

It got here the hard way, which is the only way it ever does. In September I asked Daniel whether this was a playoff team, after a 9-3 sim with sweeps of Milwaukee and Kansas City and a two-game hold on a wild card. It went 4-8 in the next sim. It lost three straight in Milwaukee to start the last one. Then it swept Memphis, 10-9, 8-3 and 8-1, lost the first two in Kansas City, 3-2 and 3-1, and won the third.

Chris Sandvik carried it. After the deadline he hit .327 with 19 home runs and a .668 slugging percentage. He was the Fire Conference Batter of the Month for September, .351 with nine home runs, and the player of the week twice, August 29 and September 12. He finished with 40 home runs and 109 runs batted in, at 27, on $3.1 million. Jeremy Albrecht hit .308 after the deadline. Dan Boyd hit .295 and drove in the last run of the season.

And the club ran, as it always does. Two hundred sixty-five stolen bases, the most in baseball. Yuji Kishi stole 50. Perez stole 43, the last of them in the 10th inning on October 5.

The pitching is what it has been. It walks almost nobody, 420, second-fewest in the league. It strikes out almost nobody, 1,155, the fewest. Everything goes to the fielders, and the fielders have to be good, and mostly they were. Roberto Velazquez finished 13-8 with a 3.58. Joey Payne won 12. Benton gave up 18 home runs in 61 innings after the deadline, and then he gave up nothing on the last day. The bullpen changed hands in September. Gregg Quinn blew three saves after the deadline, and Dennis Hansen took the ninth. Erbetto pitched the last two innings of the season and got the win.

Now San Juan. A hundred and three wins, the best record in baseball and the champions. We beat them eight times in 12 this year. We swept them twice in the first five weeks, three in their park and three in ours. They took two of three both times in the second half. We outscored them 55-47.

We have played this franchise three times in October, all of it when they were in Louisville. In 2005 Huron won in five. In 2006 Louisville won in five and went on to the title. In 2007 Huron won in four and went on to the title. I covered all three. Last year San Juan won it all at 82-80. This year it won 103. I write the records down. I have never found that they tell me much in October.

Matt Ray is 38th on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season. He is not what this week is about.

Games 1 and 2 in San Juan. Games 3, 4 and 5 here, where the Herons were 49-32. On the road they were 32-49. The gods keep their own ledger, and I have stopped asking to see it.