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Blues lose last seven, finish 13 wins better than 2032

BY **OTIS FRAYNE** · MEMPHIS DELTA TIMES

The season ended the way the summer did, losing, and mostly on the road. Seven straight to finish it: the last game at home against Virginia, then three in Huron, the first of them 10-9, then three in Oklahoma City, the first of them 1-0. The Blues finished 67-95, last in the Topaz, 36 games behind San Juan. Only Spokane lost more.

I said in August that 63 losses on the first of the month was a pace for 97, and that 97 would be 11 better than last year. It came out 95, and 13 better. A man in this town learns to take his good news by the inch.

There was some of it, early. August was 15-12, the club's first winning month of the year. It won five straight at one point, and at the end of the month it took two of three in Milwaukee, where Milwaukee does not lose much, and swept three in Southland. Then September came the way it does here. Ben Cowhey, the closer, partly tore his labrum against Huron on September 5 and is out four months. Five days later Mike Jenkins tore a ligament in his knee running the bases against Oklahoma City, and he is gone nine or ten months. Jenkins was hitting .310 after the deadline. He is 24, and he had played every day. The club was eliminated on September 21.

I asked Eric in September who plays second base next year.

> *"Current AAA phenom 2B Chris Faulk will start next season with the big league club playing second base," he said.*

This city has been waiting a long time to read that. Faulk is ninth on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season. He hit .288 with 17 home runs at Chula Vista this year. Efrain Rosales, the pitcher, is sixth. Xavier

Brown, the first pick in the draft, is 14th, and he is 17. Ron McCool is 36th. And David de Leon, who came from Denver on the first of August with Theodosio Carrapa for Andy May and $270,000, is 63rd. Five names in the first 63, from a farm that for most of my working life could not put one on that list.

I asked Eric who closes now that Cowhey is hurt.

> *"Joe Cardinal will continue to be the closer," he said.*

Cardinal had 14 saves after the deadline. He also lost six games. In extra innings this year the Blues were 3-14. That is a number I have thought about more than I would like.

The pitching is still the trouble, and it is the same trouble I wrote about in March and May and August. The club gave up 803 runs, more than any team in the league but one. The starters had a 5.30 earned run average, last in baseball. The staff gave up 237 home runs, the most. Mike Rosen threw 126 and a third innings, gave up 32 home runs and struck out 49. Travis Byrd, the first-round pick, was the bright one: a 2.89 in his last 11 starts. D.J. Bakker went to the bullpen and had a 2.43 there.

The hitting held up its end, as it did all year. Jonathan Murrell, on the minimum, finished with 30 home runs and 98 runs batted in at 26. Nachman Cohen hit .277 after the deadline. Vicente Chavez hit nine home runs in 53 games after the deadline. The club batted .248, 12th in baseball, and nobody in this town will believe that unless they look it up. Casey Schnake hit .240 and is owed $20 million again next year.

I have covered this franchise for 33 seasons now, in Nashville and in Memphis, through one good year and a great many like this one. I have heard about a new plan every five years or so. This is the first one I have seen come with five names on that list and a general manager saying in plain words that one of them is playing second base in April.