GRAND STRAND SPORTS

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE MYRTLE BEACH MERMEN BEAT

Mermen win the Ruby on a tiebreaker, host Vancouver

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Division champions.

Read it twice. I did. Then I called my mom.

The Mermen finished 91-71. So did Big Horn. We won the season series, seven games to five, so the Ruby is ours. First division title since this club came to the beach. First October since 2028, when it was still in San Antonio and I was still covering it there.

It was not pretty at the end.

On October 5 we were a game up on Big Horn with one to play. We lost 1-0 in Phoenix. Big Horn won in Mexico City. I watched the out-of-town score like it owed me money. Then somebody pointed out the tiebreaker, and I sat down on the floor.

The last sim went 2-7. Vancouver came here and swept us, 5-3, 7-5 and 9-3. Then we lost two of three in Big Horn and two of three in Phoenix. That's the part that keeps me from buying a parade float.

But before that? Oh, before that.

Erik Fisher came up in August, just like Daryl said he would. "Full on compete mode," Daryl called it. Fisher hit .304 with a .400 on-base percentage, seven home runs and 34 runs batted in, and he was player of the week on September 5. Then the club won 11 straight from August 29 to September 10 and went 11-1 in that sim.

I asked Daryl if this was the team he pictured.

> *"Yes, Still got areas we need to improve," he said, "but we have full control of 75/80% of the roster for the next 3/4 years. And have money next year to fix any holes."*

Three or four more years of this. Okay. I'll allow it.

On August 1 Daryl got Pio Takami and Danny Ortega from Virginia for a third- and a fifth-round pick next year. Takami hit .298 with 13 home runs and a .526 slugging percentage after the deadline. Best deadline pickup in the Ruby, and I'm not even being a homer. Okay, a little.

Then Israel Flores tore his meniscus against Big Horn in early September, and he's out four months. He had 4.5 wins worth of value this year. I asked Daryl who plays third.

> *"Mario Cabao will take over Dutys at 3rd with Captain Fabricio Ehrlich handling back up/ Days off," he said. "Not the Ideal fix but its the best I have going forward."*

Honest. I like honest. And there's more bad news for October: Trent Erickson, who stole 56 bases this year, got hurt in the last week and is out about four weeks.

The lineup can take a hit, though. The Mermen scored 759 runs, the most in baseball, and batted .259, also the most. Eric Campbell hit .320 after the deadline. Willie Martinez, last year's final MVP, signed here for the minimum, hit .298 and stole 18 bases after the deadline. Rodolfo Pintasilgo hit 23 home runs. Bill Sanchez hit 24.

On the mound, nobody in baseball gave up fewer home runs, 136. Mark Christensen finished 15-7 with a 3.28. Robby Ayala had a 2.85 after the deadline and Chris Breuninger a 3.12. Steven Alexander finished with 42 saves, tied for the most in baseball. Sergio Higuera and Rogelio Rodriguez have both pitched about 29 innings since August 1 and given up two earned runs each. Kevin Lindroth had a rough two months, a 6.43 and four blown saves, and I'm going to send him a nice card.

Now Vancouver. The same Vancouver that swept us here last week. We won the season series, 7-5, but they won the last three. The two clubs met once in October, in 2003, when this club was in San Antonio and won in five.

Games 1 and 2 are here on the 7th and 8th. And the farm, quickly, because you know I can't skip it: Melvin Batres 10th on the game's Top 100, Greg Mullins 23rd, Lear Eichhorn 50th. Next year is going to be fun too. But this week is the one I've been waiting for since I moved here.

Come early.