TIMES-CRESCENT

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE NEW ORLEANS MUDCATS BEAT

Mudcats win last seven, help shut Rochester out

BY **THÉO DELACROIX** · TIMES-CRESCENT

August came in like a brass band missing half its horns, 8-19, and by the time the month was over the question I asked in my last column, what this club was, had answered itself in the only way a season can, which is by running out. In September I asked Ryan about the 11-25 that followed the deadline. The Mudcats were 50-55 and a game out on August 1. They finished 74-88, tied for sixth in the Jade, four games short.

And then, with almost nothing left to play for, they played the most beautiful week of the year. Seven straight wins from September 27 to October 4: 9-8 in 11 innings over Las Vegas, 10-6 the next day, then three in Rochester, 7-1, 6-0 and 2-0, then 10-4 and 4-3 at home against Galveston. Rochester had been to October 10 years running. That sweep helped make sure there would not be an 11th. It did not feel good, exactly. It felt like music.

It came too late, the way the good things did all year.

Jimmy Smith was the summer in one man. Ryan paid him $27.5 million for one season. He tore his labrum in March, came back in July, and after the deadline he went 2-7 with a 5.77 earned run average and gave up 11 home runs in 57 and two-thirds innings. Then on October 1 in Rochester he threw the 6-0 game. One good night, at the end. The contract ends this month, and so does Joel King's, $20 million for 33 saves and a 4.02. The bullpen blew 30 saves this year, the most in baseball. Thirty times this summer I watched a lead walk out of the building. You learn to hear it coming.

The arm that held it up, Joe Barnes, went down on September 9 against Galveston with bone chips in his elbow and is out six weeks. He finished 9-6 with a 2.80 and 170 strikeouts in the first year of the five-year deal. In September I asked Ryan whether Barnes is his Opening Day starter. I would make him one. Jugurtha

Kimya, 25, finished 7-3 with a 2.66 and walked 33 in 152 and a third innings, and he is the best young pitcher I have covered here since the club that won in 2017. Mike Mottola won two games in the streak. Bill Dixon, 25, threw 197 and two-thirds innings and won nine.

The young men came up, which is the other thing a lost August is for. Brett Kulakowski, 23, the 13th pick in 2031, played 57 games after the deadline, hit .267 with a .358 on-base percentage, and was the Ice Conference player of the week on September 12. Michael Herr, 24, played shortstop in 56 games and hit .222. He will hit more. Andy Chenault hit .277 after the deadline and I stopped worrying about him, as I said I might. Mark Williams hit .279 and got on base at .366. Paul Woolsey, the surprise of May, hit .198 after the deadline. Travis Williams, 35, with his three Platinum Sticks, played 22 games and hit .286, and I watched every one of them.

The club drew 442 walks, fewer than every team but one. It hit 160 home runs, 27th. It was 34-32 in one-run games, which is how a club with these numbers stays near .500 for three months, and 15-31 against the other conference, which is how it stops.

On the game's Top 100 at the end of the season, New Orleans has Logan Shattuck 77th, Tom Lopez 88th and Kevin Zaragoza 92nd. They are not 2034 names either.

Ryan has never had to rebuild in 26 seasons. He spent last winter buying one more year from the veterans, and the veterans are leaving now with the year. What is left is Kimya and Kulakowski and Herr. Long season. Long winter. Then it is theirs.