SAN DIEGO UNION POST

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Seals go 53-37 from June 19, still miss by two

BY **TRINA BOSANKO** · SAN DIEGO UNION POST

Two games. That is how far the Seals finished from the last playoff spot in the Fire. Seventy-nine and 83. Huron got in at 81-81.

On June 19 this club was 26-46. From that day it went 53-37. Since August 1 it went 35-22. September was 17-8. It won seven straight at the end of September, including a sweep of Phoenix, a playoff club, 1-0, 3-2 and 12-5. It finished by sweeping Oahu at home. Only three clubs in the Fire won more games after the deadline, and it is going home.

So here is the question I asked in August, again. Who answers for March, April and May?

In March Alex told me this club was "expecting to be in the playoffs and competing for the Ruby Division." On May 1 it was 10-20. Ten games under in the first 30. You can play .589 baseball for three and a half months, and this club did, and you still cannot get those back.

In September, after a 9-3 sim, I asked Alex whether the Seals could decide the Ruby, with Myrtle Beach, Big Horn and Mexico City next. They took two of three from Myrtle Beach, two of three in Big Horn and three straight in Mexico City. In between, they went to Vancouver and got swept, 2-1, 4-1 and 8-4. Vancouver is in the playoffs by four games over us. Do the math on those three.

The pitching was the reason for the run. The starters had a 3.54 earned run average, third in baseball. Al Charles struck out 321 men, the most in baseball, and finished with a 2.56 earned run average, among the best in the league, and an 11-14 record. In September I asked Alex whether Pitcher of the Year voters should look past that record. They should. The record is the lineup's fault. Alex Guerra, 34, went 16-10, and after the deadline he walked three men in 66 and a third innings. Three. Gordie Wheeler had a 2.39 after the deadline.

And the bullpen I complained about in August fixed itself. Ezequiel Acevedo took the ninth and saved 17 after the deadline with a 1.46 and did not blow one. The club blew nine saves all year, the fewest in baseball.

Now the lineup. San Diego scored 623 runs, 24th. It hit .235. Trey Wood, the $176 million man starting next year, hit .292 with 31 home runs and was player of the week on September 26. Jack Withers came back from the foot and hit .291 with 11 home runs after the deadline. After that, it is a list of things that cost money. Tony Mendiola, who cost four draft picks and is owed $84 million from 2034 through 2038, hit .185 after the deadline and .221 for the season. Carlos Ayala, the third overall pick in 2026, hit .152 after the deadline with no home runs in 233 plate appearances. Alex Francisco hit .207. Craig Noftall got his 1,500th hit on October 1 in Spokane and played 34 games after the deadline.

Jessie Hughes is second on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season, and he is the only Seals name on it. He is at Medina.

Alex has $355 million going to Charles and Wood from next year, $84 million going to Mendiola, and another $101.6 million still owed to Withers through 2037. He also has a club that just proved it can win 53 of 90 when the pitching holds. Next spring the question is not money. It is whether anybody here builds a lineup to go with it.

I wrote in August that Alex had already done his shopping, for the 2034 Seals. The 2033 Seals almost made it without him.