EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

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Stogies win 103, most in franchise history, open with Huron

BY **NÉLIDA CRUZ BETANCOURT** · EL NUEVO DÍA DEPORTES

One hundred and three. Write it on the wall at the Humidor, next to the banner from last October. It is the best record in baseball this year, and it is the most games this franchise has ever won, in Louisville or here. The old mark was 102, in 2011, when this club was still the Rivermen and most of the people in our stands had never seen it play.

They have seen it now. The Humidor drew 44,064 people a night this year, third in the league. On September 30 the club clinched the Topaz in Southland, and I am told you could hear the bars on Calle San Sebastián from the harbor that night too.

Since August 1 the Stogies went 42-15. Twenty and 7 in August. Twenty and 5 in September. Four straight sims of nine wins or more. In September I asked Chuck what the difference was, after a 35-13 run since mid-July. Here is what I have seen. The young men hit. The bullpen closed. The rotation got better in the one place it needed to.

Start with the young men, because they are ours. Frank Mildner, 25, on the minimum, finished with 44 home runs and 121 runs batted in, the most in the league. After the deadline he hit 18 home runs and slugged .574. In September I asked Chuck whether Mildner is his MVP. He is mine. Adam Rall, 24, the sixth pick in 2031, hit .284 after the deadline and finished with 24 home runs. Chris Whittington, 25, hit 27 with 95 runs batted in. Mike Boller, 35, the grown-up in the room, hit .310 after the deadline. The club batted .258, second in baseball, and slugged .428, also second.

Then the bullpen. D.J. Zaccardelli was the Fire Conference Pitcher of the Month for September: 10 saves in 10 chances and a 0.77 earned run average. He finished with 40 saves. After the deadline he blew one. David Fisher had a 1.46 in 37 innings. John Campbell had a 1.07. Jerry Vargas had 10 holds.

And the rotation found Tom Edwards. He moved into it in August and made 10 starts with a 1.36 earned run average, 5-0, 64 strikeouts in 53 innings. Dustin Potter went back and forth between the rotation and the bullpen and had a 2.11. Jonathan Mendoza and Isaiah Logan each made 33 starts. In August I said the pitching was the short part. It is less short now.

In April Chuck told me the extra-inning record was "luck so far, it will likely even out." It did not. The Stogies finished 15-4 in extra innings and 36-20 in one-run games, and they won more games on the road, 52, than at home, 51. I have stopped waiting for it to even out. I have started enjoying it.

Now, Huron. Huron beat us this year. Eight times in 12. Huron swept us in our park in April, 5-4, 5-2 and 9-0, and swept us again in theirs a few weeks later. We took two of three from them twice after that. Huron won 81 games and got in on the last day of the season with a 1-0 win in 10 innings. This franchise has met Huron three times in October, all in the Louisville years, 2005, 2006 and 2007, and Huron won two of them.

Last October we were the 82-win club that nobody wanted to play, and we won four series, every one of them starting on the road. This October we are the club with 103 wins, and the first two games are here, on the 7th and 8th. I know which of those I would rather be. I also know Huron.

The Humidor will be full. It has been full since April. Come anyway, and bring somebody who has never been.