THE STRAIGHT LINE

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE SOMERVILLE MONEYLINE BEAT

Moneyline win Sapphire at 98-64, draw Baltimore again

BY **PRIYA RANGANATHAN** · THE STRAIGHT LINE

Plus-177. Seven hundred fifty-six runs scored, 579 allowed, the best run differential in baseball by 38 runs. Ninety-eight wins, the Sapphire title, the top seed in the Ice by one game over Denver, and the club's 28th postseason in 33 seasons. That is the regular season, and by now you know what I think the regular season is worth here. It is worth exactly what it buys, which is home field and a team you would rather not play.

Since August 1 the Moneyline went 34-23. In August I worried about a 14-17 record in one-run games and 17 blown saves. After that they went 11-7 in one-run games and blew five more. The bullpen did not get better so much as it got used differently. Tim Snyder lost four games between August 28 and September 11 and has thrown three innings since. Jason Shannon picked up the late saves, and Gilberto Toledo finished with a 2.30 in 58 games. I said in August that the bullpen prevented runs and still gave leads away. It gave away fewer of them once the ninth stopped belonging to one man.

The worst week was the first one in September. Boston came in and swept three, 3-2, 4-2 and 2-1. The five-game lead that left was enough. The club went 9-3 the next sim, including a sweep in New York and three straight in Chicago, and JR's club clinched the division on October 2 with a 7-2 win over Philadelphia. Then it lost the last three at home to Toronto, 15-7, 6-2 and 4-1, with Toronto playing for its season and Somerville already in. I would not read anything into that, and I expect you will anyway.

The rotation is the reason I believe the number. Chase Martin went 3-0 with a 1.57 in five September starts and struck out 51 in 28 and two-thirds innings. He finished 12-4 with a 2.64 and 246 strikeouts, tied with Montreal's Sam Kelly for second in baseball, in under 147 innings. That is 15 strikeouts per nine. Bob Reyes finished 11-3 with a 2.63. Jared Stephens, called on for nine starts after the deadline, had a 2.02 in

them. Behind those three it is thinner: Kevin Speakman had a 4.96 after the deadline, Mark Buescher a 5.02 and Gene Brewer, the call-up I asked JR about in September, a 5.52 in six starts. In a seven-game series that is a problem only if it gets to Game 4.

The lineup tells the story I keep telling. The young half carried it. Steve Frey hit 33 home runs. Randy Sorto hit .319 with 11 home runs after the deadline. Dave Tyler finished with 18 home runs, 91 runs batted in and 28 stolen bases at shortstop. The old half did what the old half does in October in Somerville, which is be expensive. Chase Posey came back from the abdominal strain and hit .328 in 18 games. Antonio Reyna strained a ligament in his knee on September 16 and has played one game since. Todd Taylor broke a bone running the bases on August 9 and is done for the year. Jason Sage is out four to five months.

Reyna is 38 and Snyder is 36. Between them they made $54.8 million this year, and both contracts end when this postseason does. I have been slow on this club's age twice before. Not this time. If this is the last October for either of them in this uniform, it should be said before it starts, not after.

The farm, for those keeping the other ledger: six names on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season, led by Sebastian Croslin at 16th and Elliott Staley at 25th. JR could have spent them in July. He did not. That is the one move of his summer I cannot grade yet.

The opponent is Baltimore, for the fourth year running. We swept them in the first round in 2030, they swept us in 2031, and we beat them in seven in the conference series last October. Seven meetings since 2014, four for Somerville. This year they won the season series, 7-5, and outscored us 56-51 while finishing 20 games behind us. A sample of 12 says very little. Seven games say more, and they start here on October 7, in a park where the Moneyline went 52-29.