BAY SPORTS DAILY

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# Cannons finish 76-86, end run of 100-loss seasons

BY **JUNIOR ESCAMILLA** · BAY SPORTS DAILY

Seventy-six and 86. Read it again. I'll wait.

That is 17 more wins than last year. That is the most wins in the nine seasons I have covered this team. That is the end of six straight years of losing 100 games or more, and I had personally lived through every one of them, including the 41-121 one, which I still have dreams about. In March my goal for this club was fewer than 100 losses. We beat it by 14. I would like a parade. A small one. A golf cart would do.

We did not make the playoffs. It hurts, and I am a professional. On the night of September 25 we were 72-81, one game behind Baltimore and Rochester for the last wild card in the Ice, after winning two of three in Denver and two of three in Galveston. I had a group chat going. Then we went to Fort Collins, which was in the middle of a 10-game winning streak, and lost 9-6, 5-1 and 2-1. The math closed on October 4. We finished third in the Jade. Third! In the Jade!

In September I asked Leo if we could get in with 15 of the last 21 on the road. We went 7-8 in those 15 road games. Honestly? For this team I'll take it. We were 31-50 on the road for the year and 45-36 at home, and I would like to thank every single one of you who came.

The bullpen lost two closers. James Jimenez, 35, had 25 saves and a 1.16 earned run average when he tore his labrum in July. Bill Suarez took the job, saved five games with a 0.60 after the deadline, and then hurt his shoulder on September 16 and is done for the year. After that it was Bobby O'Neal and Mitchell Pool and vibes. Bobby won three games in September. We don't ask how.

The rotation is the thing I keep telling my friends about. Pat Cline, 33, on the minimum: 10-8, a 3.16, 190 and two-thirds innings, 15 home runs allowed all year. In September I asked Leo if Cline was the best

starter on the club right now. Yes. He is. Jon O'Rourke, 35, went into Rochester on October 3 and threw eight innings of one-hit ball with 10 strikeouts in a 7-2 win, and that game is a big part of why Rochester is not in the playoffs either. Petty? A little. Benito Rodriguez gave us a 3.55 in 11 starts after the deadline. Justin Davis went 7-16, and I want to tell him personally that I am still not angry.

The lineup, look. It finished 28th in runs and hit .225. It's fine. Chris McMillian, 24, hit 31 home runs and is signed through 2037, and I am getting a jersey. Tomas Ramirez stole 49 bases. Jimmy Howard hit .260 and got on base at .339 as the guy nobody expected to play. Curtis Legget, who signed two days into the season, caught 126 games. Victor Rodriguez hit .178. It's fine. We're fine.

Leo did not sell at the deadline. For this franchise that is news. We are the club everybody calls when they need cash, and this August nobody got any. We were in a race. Leo kept the team. I respect that more than I can say in a family publication.

And the farm, which I said I would stop making graphics about. I lied. One graphic. David Drake is eighth on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season. Eighth! Jeff Yocom, this summer's 10th pick, is 65th. Drake is at Sarasota, and he is not a 2034 name.

Nine seasons. I have never covered a winning team. I covered a 76-win team, and it was the most fun I have ever had in this job. Next year I want to find out what a winning one feels like.

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