TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

OCTOBER 6, 2033 · THE TORONTO GRIFFINS BEAT

Griffins close on seven straight, crash the Ice field

BY **HOLLIS WEIR** · TORONTO SPORTING LIFE

I have never covered a Griffins postseason game. I started on this beat in 2024, and the last one was in 2022. On Friday I will cover my first, in Denver, and I would like to thank Alex Moralez, Albin Giolitti, Dave Nuttall and about 40 other people for that, in roughly that order.

On the night of September 25 the Griffins were 72-81, one game behind Baltimore and Rochester for the last wild card in the Ice, with nine to play. Then they went to Chicago and lost the first two, 4-0 and 3-1. I wrote most of a column that night about next year. I am glad I did not file it.

They won 6-3 in Chicago on September 28. They came home and beat New York 10-0, 10-0 and 8-4. Then they went to Somerville, to the best team in the conference, and won 15-7, 6-2 and 4-1. Seven straight to end the season, 59 runs scored and 17 allowed. The win on October 4 clinched it. The Griffins finished 79-83, fifth in the Sapphire, the seventh seed. A losing record and a playoff spot, and I will take both.

Alex Moralez was the bat. On August 1 he was on the injured list hitting .158, and I was trying to be gentle about it. After the deadline he hit .257 with a .372 on-base percentage and 17 home runs in 56 games, and in the last sim he went 10-for-29 with five home runs and 12 runs batted in. Blake Elmore, the 24-year-old catcher, hit 14 home runs after the deadline. That is two people in this lineup slugging over .550 in the stretch. I did not think there would be one.

Brandon bought help on August 1, and the help showed up. Angel Diaz hit .302 after coming over from Southland for a third-round pick. Danny Badillo hit .276 at third. Billy Moorse played shortstop and Adam Dirks pitched out of the bullpen with a 3.18. In September I asked Brandon whether he had bought enough.

> *"I certainly hope so. Time will tell," he said. "We tried to keep our key prospects and picks while moving some of the extra capital we had. I want to establish a long running dynasty, not all in for 1 playoff push."*

He did keep them. David Tucker is 27th on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season and Chase Williams 31st. Nick Knight went to Cincinnati in the Badillo deal, and I will miss writing about him.

Then there is the staff, which was the reason I believed in this team when I had no business to. Albin Giolitti was the Ice Conference Pitcher of the Month for August and finished 13-10 with a 2.91 in 207 and a third innings. He walked 32 men all year. He won the last game, the 4-1 one in Somerville, and he started the first of the 10-0 games too. Brent Michalski, 25, was the Rookie of the Month for August and had a 2.29 after the deadline. Andrew Halama had a 2.87. Tim Elizalde threw 217 and a third innings, more than anybody on the staff, and finished 14-14, which is about what this lineup does to a pitcher. Dave Nuttall, my January guy, finished with 22 saves. You brought signs. I saw them.

Chris Wilson came back to earth. He hit .249 after the deadline and finished at .297. In September I asked Brandon what was going on with him.

> *"Nothing is going on," Brandon said. "He was playing out of his mind all season and it was unrealistic to expect him to keep it up for the whole season. He's still our best bat and we will continue to rely on him as we push for playoffs."*

They pushed. They are in.

Now the hard part. Denver won 97 games, has won six championships and has been to the postseason 16 years running. We played them four times this year, all in June, all at their place, and won one. This franchise has met Denver in October four times, three of them as the New York club, and lost the last three. The 2022 series, the last time we were here, went seven. Toronto was 30-51 on the road this year, which is the worst of any playoff club, tied with Galveston. Games 1 and 2 are in Denver. Games 3, 4 and 5 are here, and Toronto was 49-32 at home.

So come out. Bring a sign for Moralez this time. Nuttall has one already.