VANCOUVER LEDGER

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Vandals sweep Mermen, then draw them in October

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WE ARE IN.

Okay. Normal voice. On the night of September 25 four clubs were tied at 77-76 for the last two playoff spots in the Fire: us, Huron, Kansas City and Mexico City. Four clubs, two chairs. Then we went to Myrtle Beach, the first-place team, and swept them in their own park, 5-3, 7-5 and 9-3. We came home and beat Phoenix 10-3, then lost the next two. We went to Spokane and won the first two, and the 8-2 win on October 4 clinched it. The Vandals finished 83-79, fourth in the Ruby, the seventh seed in the Fire.

It's our first October since 2031. You know the word. It starts with an O. I'm allowed to say it now.

And who do we play? MYRTLE BEACH. The same Myrtle Beach. They won the Ruby on a tiebreaker over Big Horn, so they host. They won the season series, 7-5. We won the last three, in their building, nine days before Game 1. It may mean nothing in October. I was there anyway.

In September I asked Ben whether we could win the series in Mexico City, where we were 2-7 this year. We lost the first two, 6-5 and 7-6 in 10, and I aged a year. Then Adam Bickler threw a 9-2 win in the third game and we never looked back. Okay, we looked back a lot. But we got in.

I also asked Ben whether Bickler is the Game 1 starter if we got in. Here are his numbers. He finished 17-10, tied with Montreal's Sam Kelly for the most wins in baseball, with a 3.33 earned run average, 236 strikeouts and 230 innings, the second-most innings of anyone in the league. After the deadline he had a 4.29, which I'm choosing not to think about. He's my Game 1 starter. You can quote me.

Now the bullpen, which is where this team has been living. David Furlong, 35, the small medical event, finished with 42 saves, tied for the most in baseball. After the deadline he converted all 14 of his chances and had a 1.10 earned run average. I take back every word about his heart rate. Jarrod Bensel went 7-0 after the deadline and 13-1 on the year, and none of those were starts. Nestor Ochoa had a 1.35 and struck out 29 in 20 innings. We were 30-25 in one-run games and 8-3 in extra innings. Don't touch it.

The rotation behind Bickler is where you hold your breath. Marty Kilby went 1-11 after the deadline. ONE AND ELEVEN. With a 4.58 and nine walks in 57 innings, which is the most unfair stat line I have ever typed. He finished 8-16 with a 3.38. Ken Reifman, the $500,000 man I keep telling you about, finished 11-6 with a 3.29. Jonathan Pietsch, we have agreed, is not discussed.

The lineup lost a piece at the worst time. Justin Dora hurt his back on September 26 in Myrtle Beach, and he might not play again this year. That hurts. He hit .281 with 13 home runs after the deadline and finished with 26. Brian Baker hit .280 after the deadline. Jared Littrell, on the minimum, hit .280 too. Alex Carrasco, who was hitting .309 on August 1, came down hard and hit .218 the rest of the way. The club batted .251 and hit 197 home runs.

THE FARM, quickly. Micah Patterson is 20th on the game's Top 100 at the end of the season. Ken Morgan, this year's second-round pick, is 44th. Kyle Gregson 47th, Roberto Acevedo 64th, Jeremy Austin 67th. Vernon, home of the Dumpster Fires, I love you.

Now the curse. You know about the curse. Thirty-three seasons, nine Octobers counting this one, and never a final. Myrtle Beach beat us the only time we met in October, in 2003, when they were San Antonio. The curse had a vote in July when nobody went to the All-Star Game. The curse did not get a vote in Myrtle Beach on September 28.

Games 1 and 2 are there on the 7th and 8th. Games 3, 4 and 5 are here. We went 43-38 on the road this year, better than at home. Of course we did.