

Mets Ride Bullpen Overhaul and Rotation Might to First Place

A 21-7 May turns a .500 club into a division leader — and the two trades that quietly fixed everything came a month before the surge started.

BY MARISOL KWAN · FLUSHING LEDGER STAFF

Thirty days ago, the Mets were treading water. A 15-15 club sat 2.0 games back of first in the National League East, its bullpen had blown a string of leads, and the front office's biggest offseason question — whether this roster could hold together after three straight division titles — still felt open. May answered it. New York went 21-7 over the month, the best stretch of baseball this club has played all season, and rode it from third place into a share of first, finishing the month 35-22 (.614) and tied with Washington atop the East on games back, holding the tiebreaker on the head-to-head column.

The turnaround traces directly to two moves the front office made in the season's first six weeks. Reese Olson, a struggling back-of-rotation arm, went to Toronto on April 30 for a package of infield depth. That same afternoon, Jesus Baez — a blocked third baseman who wasn't playing anyway — went to Baltimore for closer Josh Hader, with the Orioles eating 15% of the remaining money. The stated goal at the time was to give Edwin Díaz a proven fallback option after a rough patch in the ninth inning. A month later, that's exactly what happened, and then some.

"The pen went from the thing that was going to sink this season to the reason it didn't."

Díaz himself was the bigger story. After an 0-3, shaky April that prompted the Hader trade in the first place, he was nearly untouchable in May: a 2.12 ERA, a 0.71 WHIP, and 23 strikeouts against two walks in 17 innings, with four saves mixed in around setup work. Hader slotted in as an equally dominant second closing option, converting five saves of his own with a 3.38 ERA in his first full month in orange and blue. Between the two of them, and diligent middle-inning work from Cristofer Gomez and Tyler Uberstine, New York's bullpen simply stopped blowing games — the single biggest difference between the team that limped to 15-15 and the one that ran away with May.

The rotation, meanwhile, never stopped being a strength. Tarik Skubal was the best pitcher in the sport for a month that wasn't a fluke: a 0.97 ERA and 45 strikeouts across 37 innings, five starts of empire-building dominance. Jackson Jobe backed him up at a 2.00 ERA over his own five turns, and rookie Nolan McLean chipped in a 2.57 mark.

MAY, BY THE NUMBERS	
Record	21-7
Team ERA	3.28
Team AVG	.263
Home Runs	56
Team Strikeouts (pitching)	246
Top Batter (OPS)	E. Lonzano, .767 SLG surge
Top Arm (IP)	T. Skubal, 0.97 ERA
Saves, Hader / Díaz	5 / 4

Garrett Crochet's command wobbled a bit (3.81 ERA) but he still missed enough bats (33 K in 26 IP) to keep his spot secure. Collectively, the staff posted a 3.28 ERA and struck out 246 batters in 228 innings over the month — a strikeout nearly every inning.

The lineup found its shape too. Emmanuel Rodriguez, acquired from Minnesota back in April and sidelined on a rehab assignment at Triple-A Syracuse ever since, was activated during the month and made an immediate impact — a .772 OPS in his first 61 plate appearances back, with five stolen bases. His return hasn't come at anyone's expense, either: Juan Soto kept producing in right field (.845 OPS, 8 home runs, 26 RBI over 118 plate appearances) while Walker Jenkins, who filled in admirably during Rodriguez's absence, has simply kept hitting well enough (.898 OPS) that the front office has found at-bats for all three rather than picking a winner. Edward Lanzano, the CF who inherited an everyday job he didn't ask for when Hiroshi Ishida was dealt to Seattle, quietly turned in the best month of his young career — a .333 average and .767 slugging mark in 34 plate appearances, a real sign of life after a miserable .535 OPS start.

Notably, the transaction log stayed empty in May. After nine trades in the season's first ten weeks — the Carter and Detmers pickups, the Hader and Rodriguez blockbusters, the Olson salvage job — the front office let the roster it built play itself out. Given the results, that restraint looks like the right call.

NL EAST STANDINGS — THROUGH MAY 31, 2030				
Team	W	L	PCT	GB
New York Mets	35	22	.614	—
Washington Nationals	35	22	.614	—
Atlanta Braves	30	28	.517	5.5
Miami Marlins	28	30	.483	7.5
Philadelphia Phillies	22	35	.386	13.0
Washington enters June on a 3-game winning streak of its own — the East's top two teams are dead even, and this looks like it will be a summer-long race.				

June brings no rest for a first-place tie. Washington isn't fading, Atlanta is still within striking distance at 5.5 back, and a full slate of head-to-head games with the Nationals looms before the All-Star break. But for the first time all season, the Mets look like the team that's supposed to win the division — not the one hoping to hang around long enough to make a move.