PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

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Schall arrives in center as Eagles sit two out

BY **FRANK IACOBELLI** · PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

I have watched a good many of the ones people wait on come up from the minors in this town. It goes the same way every time. The fans cheer. The writers hold their breath.

J.P. Schall is the one this town has been waiting on. Last year's first-round pick came up this summer and has played 30 games in center field. He is hitting .227, which is the number people will quote, with a .347 on-base percentage and seven home runs, which are the numbers I would quote. DSA Reports, in its list dated July 19, has him third among all the prospects in the league. In May I called him the best young player in this organization, at Laredo. He is not at Laredo anymore.

So that is the good news, and I wanted you to have it first.

The rest of it is that the 21-10 run I wrote about in May was the high tide. The Eagles were 25-23 then. They got as high as 33-25 on June 4, eight games over, and they have gone 17-30 since. They are 50-55 this morning, fifth in the Sapphire and two games behind Denver for the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference, and they have lost three straight in Oklahoma City, one of them in 13 innings.

Two games out is still two games out. I have been doing this 32 years and I know the difference between a club that is finished and a club that is close, and this is a close one.

The home runs are still coming. The Eagles have 141, fourth in baseball. Armando Jaramillo has 27 of them, seventh in the league, from the designated hitter's spot, on a $2.2 million salary. J.J. Saxton has 20. Matthew Ryan has 17 and a .368 on-base percentage at 25, and he is the one in the lineup I would build around besides Schall.

The pitching has come back to earth, and I owe you a correction of tone if not of fact. In May I wrote that Garrett Hoenie was having the best season of any pitcher in the division, and at the time he was. He was 4-1 with a 2.12 and a 0.79 WHIP. He is 6-8 now with a 4.09. He has also struck out 150 men, fourth in the league, so the stuff has not gone anywhere. The luck has. He is 31, he makes $14.6 million, and his deal ends this year.

Bill Crum and Bobby Bumby, the two 2026 draft picks I told you were holding rotation spots in May, are still holding them, and better than anyone else in the rotation. Crum is 9-5 with a 3.59. Bumby is 8-6 with a 3.73. Ricky Magolan has 24 saves and a 2.05, with 82 strikeouts in 48 innings.

And the seventh inning is still the seventh inning. The bullpen is 27th in the league and has blown 20 saves. Miguel Mendoza, 37, finished with a 7.42 and will not pitch again for a long time; the injury report has him out for more than a year. I was fond of Mendoza. I am fond of most of them at that age. It was not his year.

Now the deadline, which closes with the next sim.

Connor has made no trades this season and has posted nothing on the league's trade block or its want list. I asked him in July what kept him from changing course back in April, when the club was 6-14. The fair answer, which I will give on his behalf until he gives his own, is that he was right not to: the club went 19-9 from there to the end of May. The question now is the same question from the other direction. Two games out, with Hoenie and Eric Marchitto both on expiring deals, does he buy, sell, or hold?

My answer is hold. He is in his second season. The rotation's future is Crum and Bumby, both 25 or younger, and the lineup's is Schall and Ryan, and none of them is going anywhere. Hoenie is the only piece a contender would pay for, and trading him while two games out would tell this clubhouse something I do not think Connor wants to say yet. He gets the same full runway I have given every general manager in this job.

Down below, the league's own list of its top 100 prospects has two Eagles on it, both pitchers: Andy Taran, 20, at Corpus Christi, 19th, and Edwin Martinez at Laredo, 72nd. DSA thinks more of Martinez, sixth in the league, than his 5.54 earned run average at Triple-A does. Nick Hrabar, the catcher taken fourth overall in May, is 18 and at Stockton. The affiliates are 26th in combined record, and they have finished 25th or worse in five of the last six years.

Fifty-seven games left, 30 of them at home. Thirty-nine inside the Sapphire, six apiece against every club in it but New York.

The 2001 banner is still the only one. It is still very clean. I have decided, again, to enjoy the next 57 games, and to keep an eye on center field.