NORTHERN COLORADO SUN

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Roosters replace Goers with Cobb, $67 million, two weeks before opener

BY **DALE KIRKPATRICK** · NORTHERN COLORADO SUN

The catching position is where this winter changed, and it changed late. Chris Goers, who had 515 plate appearances last year and was the most valuable position player on the club at 3.0 wins, reached free agency in November and is still unsigned. For most of the winter Fort Collins had nobody to replace him but Danny Cazares and a 34-year-old named Luis Velazguez, signed in January for $1.2 million. Then, on March 16, the Roosters signed Mark Cobb from Myrtle Beach for four years and $67 million: $14 million this season, then $17 million, $18 million and $18 million, with a player option.

Cobb is a different kind of catcher. Goers hit 17 home runs. Cobb hit seven in 582 plate appearances last year, with a .258 average and 76 walks, and was worth 1.5 wins. The club is paying for the on-base percentage and the glove and giving up the power. Whether that is the right trade depends on a lineup that scored 604 runs last year, fewest of any club that finished at .500, and that also lost Javier Camarillo, who won the Great Glove at first base and drove in 81. He is unsigned too.

Until Cobb, the winter was small, and I think it was meant to be. The two big contracts were signed last summer. Jesse Beck, who finished second for Pitcher of the Year, begins his five-year, $140 million deal this season at $28 million. Jose Alvarado begins five years at $11 million a season. Andres Maldonado is signed through 2035. Committed beyond this season: $323.4 million. That is a front office that had already decided who its core was and spent the winter on the edges: Sergio Soto, Danny Kimball, Luis Nieto and Cory Montgomery, all on short deals.

The departures were bigger than the arrivals, other than Cobb. Colby Sims went to Philadelphia. Terry Leitch, who threw 109 innings with a 2.97 earned run average, signed with Oahu. Roger Lippincott went to Phoenix and Gustavo Lopez to Tampa Bay.

So the major league roster opens with one important new piece and the same problem it has had since August. The rotation is good. Beck struck out 217 in 176 innings. The bullpen has Bill Barker, who saved 34 games with a 2.38 and is in the last year of his deal at $22 million. The offense is what decided last September, when the club scored six runs in its last six games and missed the postseason by one.

The farm is where the most has changed, and it changed in the right direction. The Farm Report's December list ranked this system first in the league. DSA Reports ranked it second. This morning the game's Top 100 has seven Fort Collins prospects on it: R.J. Blum sixth, Carlos Bueno 22nd, Jose Aguilar 32nd, Leo Gatica 39th, David Santiago 50th, Cory Pineda 82nd and Rich Rico 100th.

Blum is the closest. He is 24, the eighth overall pick in 2026, and made 28 starts at Triple-A Salt Lake City last year. His earned run average was 4.25 and he walked 56, and the walks are the number that will tell you when he is ready. Gatica, also at Triple-A, struck out 8.8 per nine innings at Double-A. Pineda is in big-league camp and is the outfielder this organization has been developing to play every day. He hit 19 home runs at High-A last year. Bueno, a second baseman who hit 14 home runs in 282 plate appearances at Low-A, is the best hitter in the system and is at least three years away.

That is the mechanism, then. The pitching arrives first, in Salt Lake City, this summer. The hitting the major league club needs arrives later, one man at a time, and Cobb was signed to cover the years in between.

Tim signed Cobb a few days after I asked him whether a quiet winter was the plan. The Roosters pick 16th in the draft this week.

Spring went 18-12 with five ties. The Roosters finished 81-81 last year, one game short of October. New Orleans comes to Fort Collins tonight, then the Roosters go to Denver and Galveston. Cobb catches a staff he has never caught before.