THE GALVESTON GROTTO

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Gremlins lock up Wilks and Buckmaster; Hall takes Vaughn and Ryan

BY **RUTHIE ALCORN** · THE GALVESTON GROTTO

Two Galveston pitchers went into the Hall of Fame this winter. Frank Vaughn was voted in by the writers in February, in his seventh year on the ballot, with 75 percent, the exact number he needed. Eric Ryan went in a week later through the Veterans Committee. Vaughn pitched 12 seasons here, from 2007 to 2018. Ryan pitched his first five here, starting in 2004. Both of them were ours before they were anybody else's.

The winter was about pitchers too. Jeremy signed the two best starters on a 102-win team to long deals. Greg Wilks, who struck out 208 in 210 innings and finished third in the Pitcher of the Year vote, signed a four-year extension worth $87.2 million that starts next season. Jeff Buckmaster, 13-6 with a 3.36, signed for four years and $60 million starting now: $6 million this season and $18 million in each of the next three. Both came up through this system. Both were drafted here, Wilks in the first round in 2027 and Buckmaster in the sixth in 2024.

I asked Jeremy how good this rotation is.

> *"It's very solid," he said. "We have some good young pitching that needs to stay healthy and perform at a high level for us to reach our goals."*

And I asked him the harder one, about 102 wins and a first-round loss to Montreal.

> *"Stay healthy and manage the end of the season rotation better," he said. "Wilks didn't get a start in that series."*

He is right about that. Wilks, our best pitcher, did not pitch against Montreal. We scored four runs in four games, and we did not see our ace once.

Here is who is gone. Danny Adams, the shortstop, worth 4.1 wins, signed with Denver for one year and $8 million. Daniel Frandsen, the other shortstop, signed with Toronto. Miguel Chavez, a catcher, went to Oahu. Galveston made no trades, and the free agents who came in were small: two catchers, Tim Wood and Josh Smith, and Tatsuya Waki at first base. Shortstop is the hole. What is left there is Matt Martin, who hit .213 in 348 plate appearances, and Dan Cadenas.

Here is who is not gone. Ashton Turner won the Most Valuable Player award again, his second in three years, and the Platinum Stick in left field. He hit .310 and stole 75 bases and is signed through 2035. Lance Fitzgerald won the Platinum Stick at third base, hit 25 home runs and drove in 102. Oscar Mitchell won the Great Glove in right. That is four of the conference's awards in one lineup, and all three players are back.

Fitzgerald's contract is the one to watch this year. He is 31 and in the last year of his contract at $35.2 million, the biggest salary on the club. After this season he is a free agent, and so are Jahiem Bryant and Jose Veras.

The farm has one real prospect close to the big leagues. Chris Hein, a third baseman taken 20th overall in last year's draft, is 25th on the game's Top 100 prospect list this morning and is in big-league camp. He hit .268 at Double-A in his first pro summer. Josh Bassett, an outfielder, is 64th, and Johnny Peterson, a pitcher, is 88th. We pick 24th in the draft this week.

In October, a few days after Montreal put us out, I asked Jeremy about long-term deals. His answer has stayed with me all winter.

> *"Long-term deals are hard to talk about right now due to the constantly wavering fan support in Galveston," he said. "Unfortunately, our budget is going to take a hit because we couldn't fill the stadium during our 102 win season. I will not comment on long-term deals, but I will say that if fan support does not improve very soon, we will consider moving the franchise out of Galveston."*

The budget did take the hit. It is $194 million this year, down from $200 million last year, and the payroll is $126.6 million. Then he signed Wilks and Buckmaster for four years each anyway. A man planning to leave would not do that. He is telling us what it costs to stay.

This island watched this club lose 113 games and then win 102. It can fill a ballpark. Opening Day is tonight. Come.

Spring went 17-15 with three ties. Rochester comes to the island tonight, the club that knocked us out of October in 2031. Then we go to Las Vegas, then come home for Fort Collins.

We won 102 games last year with almost nothing bought. We are trying it again with almost nothing bought, and Wilks and Buckmaster signed up for it.
