HURON DAILY BEACON

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Herons swap catchers, add Albrecht, let Smith go to New Orleans

BY **LORRAINE PETROSKY** · HURON DAILY BEACON

The last thing most people here remember Jimmy Smith doing is moving with the tying run on third in Game 5. He signed with New Orleans in January for one year and $27.5 million.

In October Daniel told me he wanted him back. "Jimmy smith is someone we would like to resign," he said. "But with alot of large contracts already given out if we do resign smith its not gonna give us alot of wiggle room financially. The goal is to make a good team while being financially free for the next few years, im not sure we are gonna be able to do both."

Smith went, and the money went elsewhere in smaller pieces.

The catcher changed. Billy Cover, who won the Great Glove behind the plate last year, signed with Mexico City for four years and $45 million. Huron signed Francisco Rodriguez from Baltimore for three years and $26 million, about $8.7 million a year. Rodriguez hit a home run in the conference championship series in November and was worth 2.0 wins.

First base got Jeremy Albrecht, who came from Chicago in February for a 2034 second-round pick, a 2035 first and a 17-year-old pitcher. Albrecht drove in 104 runs and stole 59 bases last year and is in the last year of his deal at $5 million. In December Gregg Quinn came from Denver, one of the two relievers Jay used in the highest-leverage spots, for Luigino Sacchi. Bill Garcia, a reliever, signed for two years and $14 million. Dennis Hansen stayed, for three years and $27.5 million.

The rest is the club that won 82 games. Nick Agins finished second for Pitcher of the Year with a 2.58 earned run average and 221 strikeouts and was worth 7.4 wins. His five-year deal, $150.8 million, begins this season. Armando Ramirez hit 31 home runs. Egidio Vercesi hit 33 and finished second for Rookie of the

Year. Manny Pineda, who is 33, is in the last year of his contract at $35.2 million, the largest salary on the club.

Two years ago this club won 99. Last year it won 82. Which one shows up this year? Nobody can answer that in March, and I have stopped trusting anyone who tries. In 2017 Huron won 115 and went home. In 2020 it won 84 and won everything.

The farm has one name on the game's Top 100 prospect list this morning: Matt Ray, an outfielder, 77th, who hit 19 home runs between Double-A and High-A and is in big-league camp. DSA Reports ranked the system 23rd in December. Huron picks 19th in the draft this week. Its first-round pick in 2035 now belongs to Chicago.

The payroll is $182 million against a budget of $214 million.

Spring went 13-19 with three ties. The season opens in Richmond, against Virginia, the club that put Huron out of October in 2029 and again in 2031. Then Southland comes to Huron, then the Herons go to San Juan, the champions. Nine games, three opponents, and one of them has put this club out of October twice in four years.