PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

MARCH 28, 2033 · THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES BEAT

Eagles sign Sims and a camp full of veterans, open in Chicago

BY **FRANK IACOBELLI** · PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

Gavin Sadler is 38 years old and in an Eagles uniform this spring. He was a third-round pick in 2013, he made 15 starts for Memphis last year with a 4.42 earned run average, and Connor signed him in January for one year and $4.8 million. I watched him throw in camp more than I watched anybody else, which will surprise no one who has read me for long.

He was one of many. The Eagles signed a long list of free agents this winter, almost all of them on short deals. Colby Sims, a right fielder from Fort Collins, got the biggest: two years and $29.6 million, with a player option. Estevan Gonzalez, a second baseman, got three years and $15 million. Then the one-year deals: Roberto Garcia, who started 24 games for Oahu, Sadler, Darius Valentine, Freddie Pritchard, Bill Carstensen, Ben Massie, Mike Shealy and Trevor Jordan. Most are past 30. Sadler, Shealy and Valentine are 34 or older.

Going the other way were the three best players to leave. Garrett Hoenie, who struck out 213 and was the club's most valuable pitcher last year, signed with Oklahoma City for two years and $32 million. J.J. Saxton, who hit 27 home runs, went to Kansas City for five years and $95 million. Eric Marchitto signed with Mexico City for four years and $36 million. Miguel Mendoza, who pitched 43 innings out of the bullpen at 38, retired.

Seventy-one wins, then a camp full of veterans. Is Connor trying to win this year? The roster gives a fair answer of its own. These are one-year contracts for men who can pitch the innings Hoenie and Marchitto pitched, and they cost a club that had about $65 million coming off the books very little in the years that matter. The payroll is $98.6 million against a budget of $168 million. Only $53 million is committed beyond this season.

I think this is a general manager buying time for his young players, not buying a pennant. That is a reasonable thing to do in a third season, and I said in October he would get his runway. He is still on it.

The young players are the reason for the time. Andy Taran, who is 20 and threw 138 innings at High-A with a 3.44 earned run average, is 23rd on the game's Top 100 prospect list this morning. Edwin Martinez, 25, is 70th and is at Triple-A; DSA Reports had him 11th in its December list. Nick Hrabar, the catcher taken fourth overall last May, is 78th. And this week the Eagles are on the clock in the draft with the 13th pick.

Nearer the big leagues there is Ralf Fox, a second baseman who hit .296 at Triple-A and is in camp, and Matthew Ryan, who hit 27 home runs and walked 106 times at third base and was the most valuable player on the club. Ryan makes $3.3 million and is 26. Armando Jaramillo hit 39 home runs as the designated hitter. Both are on one-year deals.

Then there is Mike Dunfee, who is 34, hit .194 in 238 plate appearances last year and is owed $22 million this season and next. I have a soft spot for veterans. I do not have one big enough for that contract.

Spring went 14-19.

The Eagles open in Chicago, then come home for Toronto and Baltimore. The Sapphire won 106, 94 and 92 at the top last year. Philadelphia won 71 and finished seventh. The 2001 club won the first championship this league ever played, in my second month on the job. The banner is still the only one. I will be watching Sadler all the same.