ARIZONA REPUBLIC-JOURNAL

MARCH 28, 2033 · THE PHOENIX FIREBIRDS BEAT

Firebirds sign Miyamoto from Japan, bring Weasner home

BY **AUGIE SALCIDO** · ARIZONA REPUBLIC-JOURNAL

Kevin Weasner was the second overall pick in the 2025 draft, and he was ours. He never played a big-league game for Phoenix. He played all six of his seasons for Rochester, and this winter he came back. Five years, $73.9 million. He is 29 now, a shortstop with a good glove who was worth 3.1 wins for the North Stars last year... and Brendan brought it up himself.

I asked Brendan whether this is a playoff team, after a 76-win season and a seventh-place finish. He gave me the long answer, which is the kind I like, so here it is.

> *"We are hoping that Usami and Kevin can get us over the line but we have added a few other pieces too," he said. "Of course Weasner was originally a Firebird when we drafted him back in 2025 so we know his capabilities especially with his glove. Miyamoto is of course an unknown quantity coming over from the Japanese league but our scouting team like him a lot. Of course we lost Gonzalez and Samayoa to free agency so we have had to rebuild our starting rotation in the close season. We've added some experience too with the return of Wally Gulledge and the addition of Roger Lippincott. We are hoping the changes can get us higher in the division and hopefully a play off spot."*

Usami Miyamoto is the big one. He signed in December for four years and $89.6 million, $20 million this season and $23.2 million in each of the next three, and he has never thrown a pitch in this league. He is 27.

Brendan's scouts like him. I have learned over 22 years on this beat not to argue with the scouts in March, and to remember in September what they said.

The rotation needed him. Dan Gonzalez, who was worth 3.4 wins, signed with Southland. Juan Samayoa went to Big Horn. Kyler Baxley left too. That was three of the four men who made the most starts here last year. Robby Morales is still here, 14-7 with a 3.05 earned run average and the most valuable pitcher on the club, signed through 2036. After Morales and Miyamoto come Lippincott, who went 13-11 with a 4.22 for Fort Collins, John Williams from New Orleans, and Gulledge, who is 34.

James Rucks, who won the Great Glove at second base, signed with Montreal. Mike Taylor, who pitched 60 innings at 34, retired. The lineup keeps Jose Zavala, Juan Mujica, who stole 65 bases, and Bryce Mosely, who hit 31 home runs. Weasner goes in the middle of the infield.

This winter the Hall of Fame took Eric Ryan through the Veterans Committee. He pitched here in 2008 and 2009... a Galveston man in the Hall, but he wore our colors for a while, and some of us remember.

The farm has four names on the game's Top 100 this morning: Casey Morris 36th, Tristan Miller 61st, Willie Villalba 66th and Chris Ma 95th. Phoenix picked ninth in the draft this week and took Jeff Whittington, a pitcher.

The payroll is $141.4 million against a budget of $182 million.

Spring went 11-18 with six ties, which I am going to forget about.

Brendan has run this club since 2001, one of the five men still in the chair they started in. He wants higher in the division and maybe a playoff spot. I wrote the 2030 division title as a turning point and it was not one. I am trying not to do that again. But Weasner is home, and the opener is tonight in Mexico City, and I will be watching the shortstop.