SAN DIEGO UNION POST

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Seals give two firsts, two seconds for Mendiola, then $84 million more

BY **TRINA BOSANKO** · SAN DIEGO UNION POST

Four draft picks and $84 million. That is what Tony Mendiola cost this winter.

In January Alex sent Chicago San Diego's first- and second-round picks in 2033 and again in 2034 for the shortstop. Then in February he gave Mendiola a five-year extension, $16.8 million a year from 2034 through 2038. Mendiola is 29. He hit .239 with 16 home runs for the Black Sox and was worth 3.3 wins. He is a good player. He is not a four-picks-and-$84-million player.

I asked Alex what Mendiola means to this team. He went straight to the glove.

> *"With Craig Noftall moving over to second base we expect to have elite defense in the middle infield for the foreseeable future," he said.*

Noftall is 34. He hit .226 last year and struck out 141 times. He is signed for two more years at $7 million each. The foreseeable future, at second base, is two years.

The first-round pick that would have been San Diego's in this week's draft, No. 14, is Chicago's now. So is next year's.

The question was whether this is a playoff team. Alex didn't hedge.

> *"This team is expecting to be in the playoffs and competing for the Ruby Division," he said.*

Here is what that team looks like. Al Charles struck out 343 batters last year, the most in baseball, went 17-12 and is in the last year before free agency at $10.4 million. Trey Wood hit 33 home runs, won the Platinum Stick as the designated hitter, and is also a year from free agency. Chujiro Doi won the Platinum Stick at catcher, is 34, and signed back for two years. Jack Withers, who drove in 102, is the highest-paid player on the club at $28.4 million and is signed through 2037. Adrian Jones, a starter who went 5-15 for Memphis, signed in March.

That is the whole winter. No major league free agent of any size. A shortstop bought with picks and then bought again with money.

The Seals won 80 games last year and finished 11 games behind Big Horn. They scored 648 runs, fewer than all but a handful of clubs, and allowed 691. Mendiola helps the second number. Nobody was added to help the first.

The farm is two names. Jessie Hughes, a pitcher taken seventh overall in 2029, is fourth on the game's Top 100 prospect list this morning after a 1.27 earned run average in 10 starts at Double-A last year. He is at Triple-A now. Willie Perez is 91st. I have watched this organization trade away or ignore enough kids to stop counting on any of them. Hughes will have to show me in San Diego.

The payroll is $159.8 million against a budget of $196 million. Wood, Charles and Craig Turcios, $37.2 million between them, all come off after this season.

Spring went 14-17 with four ties. The Seals open in Myrtle Beach, then come home for Vancouver and Big Horn. Alex says playoffs. He has the best strikeout pitcher in baseball and a year to keep him. Somebody should start working on that now.