PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

MAY 23, 2033 · THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES BEAT

# Old arms hold up; Eagles sit one game off the line

BY **FRANK IACOBELLI** · PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN

Every spring for 32 years I have gone to camp looking for the old pitcher nobody else wanted, the one who turns out to matter in August. This year Connor signed a whole camp full of them, and three are earning their keep.

Mike Shealy is 35 and has a 1.71 earned run average in 21 innings, with 29 strikeouts. Darius Valentine is 34 and has a 1.35. Gavin Sadler, the 38-year-old I watched more than anybody in camp, has taken the ball every fifth day, 10 starts, 55 and a third innings, 4-3 with a 4.55. That is not the line of a Pitcher of the Year, which he once was. It is the line of a man earning his $4.8 million.

I said in March that Connor signed a camp full of veterans to buy his young players time. So far the veterans have bought it, and the young players have done some of the buying themselves.

Bill Crum, 25, a first-round pick in 2026, is 4-3 with a 2.39 earned run average. Ben Massie has a 2.61. Danny Meighan was the league's Rookie of the Month for April and has pitched 29 innings out of the bullpen with five walks. The staff is 13th in earned run average and sixth in fewest home runs allowed. For a club that lost Garrett Hoenie this winter, that is a good deal more than I expected.

So here is where it stands after 48 games: 23-25, fifth in the Sapphire, seven games behind Boston and Montreal, and one game behind Fort Collins for the last playoff spot in the Ice Conference.

At home they are 15-9. On the road, 8-16. They were 6-1 in one-run games in late April. They are 8-5 now, and the record has drifted toward even with them.

The hitting is the reason they are not higher. Philadelphia has scored 177 runs, 24th in the league. Armando Jaramillo has 11 home runs and a .514 slugging percentage, and he is the one man in the lineup a

pitcher has to think about. Alfonso Cordova is at .274. After that the averages drop off.

Matthew Ryan, last year's most valuable player on this club, is hitting .206. Colby Sims, the biggest signing of the winter, two years and $29.6 million, is hitting .181 with six home runs. J.P. Schall hit two home runs in the 16-3 win in Chicago on March 29, then went on the injured list on April 1 and has not been back.

And then there is Mike Dunfee. In March I wrote that I did not have a soft spot big enough for his contract. He is hitting .258 with seven home runs and a .448 slugging percentage, at 34, a long way from the .194 he hit last year. The contract is still too much. I was wrong about the man.

The draft added one more arm. With the 13th pick the Eagles took Josh Richards, a pitcher. Edwin Martinez, at Triple-A, is 66th on the game's Top 100, and Nick Hrabar, the catcher from last year's draft, is 78th. Andy Taran has slipped to 69th from 23rd in March.

Two in Cincinnati, then four at home with Fort Collins, the club holding the spot this one wants. Connor is in his third season, and his club is playing games in May that the standings care about.