CHICAGO CITY WIRE

AUGUST 1, 2033 · THE CHICAGO BLACK SOX BEAT

Sox ship Mills to Phoenix for first-rounder, young arm

BY **VERA NOWAK** · CHICAGO CITY WIRE

The way this one came about was simple enough. In January Mike got Jason Mills from Toronto for three pitchers. In April he told me Mills was "a piece to be moved at the deadline." Last month I asked if that still held, with Mills sitting on 21 home runs and a .375 on-base percentage.

> *"I do plan on moving him before the deadline," Mike said.*

He did not wait long. On July 18 Mills went to Phoenix, along with a 2035 third-round pick and half of what is left on his contract, for Phoenix's 2035 first-round pick and Jeff Whittington, a young pitcher who is 3-0 with a 1.12 earned run average in three starts at the Rookie level. Mills gave Chicago 93 games, an All-Star Game and a .506 slugging percentage. What he brought back goes on the pile with the three first-rounders this club used in this year's draft, and you can see what the summer was for.

The cash went the same way. Mike sent Phoenix $6.5 million in June for a 2034 second-round pick. When I asked if buying picks was the plan now, he said, "If the opportunity presents itself then strike while the iron is hot." Chicago has the smallest payroll in the league, $68.7 million against an average of $145 million, and it is using the room the way another club uses a good scouting department. Carlos Norena went to Denver for Gustavo Perez, an outfielder now at Naperville, along the same lines.

You would think a club doing all that would be falling apart on the field. It was 14-26 on May 13. It has gone 35-30 since. It is 49-56, sixth in the Sapphire, two games behind Tampa Bay for the last playoff spot in the Ice, and it won five straight in late July, the longest streak of the year, after Mills was gone. It has won 31 of 54 at our place and 18 of 51 on the road, so if you bought tickets this summer you got the better of the deal.

The bats are still the hard part. The club has scored 377 runs, 29th in baseball, and its .359 slugging percentage is 31st. Katsutoshi Wada has 20 home runs and walks enough to get on base at .362. Victor Gonzales is back up to .267 and has stolen 21 bases. Chris De Lorenzo has 37 steals and a .198 average. Bill Aboulafia is hitting .198 too. With Mills gone, Wada is the only regular left with more than nine home runs.

The pitchers from inside the building have kept it respectable, and that part I never get tired of. Logan Bates, the ninth-round pick who makes the minimum, has a 3.09 in 20 starts. Travis Nelson has a 3.22 and 128 strikeouts, also on the minimum. David Espino, 26, has 24 saves and a 1.90. Ramon Renteria has taken his 22 starts and has a 5.02. Hector Cantu and Paul Hassett are on the injured list.

And then Isaiah Cunning came up. He has made two starts for the big club and they did not go well: 0-1, 10.80, eight and a third innings. He had a 2.16 at Peoria. One of the young arms Mike talked about has arrived, a bit earlier than the plan said, and I would not read much into eight innings.

The rest of the plan is further off, and it is growing. Roberto Garcia is fifth on the game's Top 100, and Ryan Chapman, the 14th pick in the draft, is 17th. Edwin Rodriquez is 73rd and Nate Weitzman 88th. That is four names on that list, and Garcia is in Rookie ball at Griffith on a club that is 21-7. Mike said next year. It looks like he meant it.

Three in Myrtle Beach, then Oahu at home.
