

# Scouting up some talent

By William C. Kashatus

**T**he Phillies continue to struggle through a nightmarish season that once promised a return to the playoffs. An impatient fan base is blaming general manager Ruben Amaro Jr. for the team's inability to contend, but the fault is not his alone.

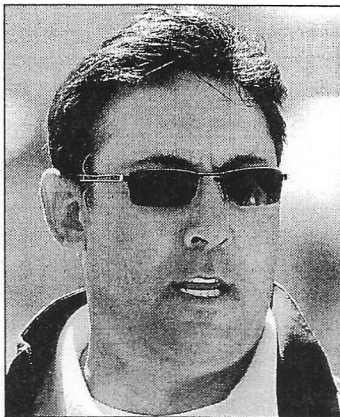
The success of any franchise is based on its ability to field a highly competitive team at the major-league level while developing prospective talent at the minor-league level. That ability allows the organization to replenish the big-league squad when injuries occur and veterans fail to produce.

It also relies heavily on a scouting department that can identify and sign amateur and professional talent. It's the kind of scouting the St. Louis Cardinals enjoyed, as it allowed them to retool after winning the 2006 World Series and win another championship in 2011.

Unfortunately, the Phillies do not enjoy the same advantage, and it has come back to bite them, despite Amaro's efforts to fill the void through trades and free-agent signings.

Since his hiring after the 2008 season, Amaro has been largely successful in providing manager Charlie Manuel with the talent he's needed to return to the World Series. Another National League pennant in 2009 and three division titles reflect the fact that he has done the job he was hired to do after Pat Gillick retired as general manager in 2008.

At that time, team president Dave Montgomery had a choice between Amaro and former assistant general manager Mike Arbuckle. Montgom-



**Ruben Amaro Jr.**

CARLOS OSORIO / Associated Press

ery made the right decision based on the talent he had at the major-league level. Amaro, as an assistant general manager, was trained in contract negotiations. That skill and a hefty budget allowed him to sign and retain such proven stars as Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee (twice), Roy Oswalt, and Raul Ibanez. Without those stars, it is doubtful if the Phillies would have been able to return to the postseason from 2009 through 2011.

Arbuckle, on the other hand, was an astute scout who had come to the Phillies in 1992 after a very successful tenure as scouting supervisor with the Atlanta Braves. In Philadelphia, he drafted such stars as Ryan Howard, Cole Hamels, Jimmy Rollins, Chase Utley, Pat Burrell, and Ryan Madson. By 2008, he'd provided the organization with the core of a perennial contender and a highly rated farm system. Thus Arbuckle was expendable.

Since Amaro's scouting experience was more limited, the Phillies gave him two assistant general managers who supposedly knew how to identify prospective talent: Marti Wolever, who's

been responsible for the amateur draft, and Benny Looper, who oversees the professional and amateur scouting assignments. In addition, Amaro relies on Mike Ondo, director of professional scouting, for the draft.

These three individuals are most responsible for the dearth of major-league-ready position players in the farm system. Had they and their scouts been better judges of talent, the Phillies would have the minor-league personnel to replace unproductive players in the parent club.

Despite the failure of his scouts, Amaro was extremely successful in hoodwinking other organizations into dealing their stars away for the mediocre Phillies farmhands. Lee was originally acquired from the Cleveland Indians for Carlos Carrasco, Jason Donald, Jason Knapp, and Lou Marson; Oswalt from the Houston Astros for J.A. Happ, Anthony Gose, and Jonathan Villar; and Halladay from the Toronto Blue Jays for Michael Taylor, Kyle Drabek, and Travis d'Arnaud. Knapp and d'Arnaud have yet to crack the big leagues, and the others have done little to impress their current major-league teams.

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity for another world championship has closed. The Phillies have an aging team and few, if any, minor-league position players ready to step in to fill the talent void. Amaro would do best to retool for next year. That is, if he can find someone in his scouting department to help him.

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