

## Go Trout fishing

# One sure way to spark Phillies revival

By William C. Kashatus

It's been six years since the Phillies made it to the postseason. The rebuilding process is moving at a snail's pace with a roster full of young unproven players. The Phillies project to lose 89-91 games this season, just like the last four years.

If Phillies president Andy McPhail and general manager Matt Klentak want to keep faith with the fans, they need to make baseball meaningful by acquiring a superstar who will inspire the team, excite a dwindling fan base, and accelerate the rebuilding process. That player is Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels, who is widely considered the best player in the game.

When McPhail and Klentak arrived in 2015 they urged patience. Losing as many as 90 games a season for a few years would be worth it as long as talented young players like third baseman Maikel Franco and centerfielder Odubel Herrera kept maturing and farm-system prospects got closer to the majors.

Klentak also admitted that the Phillies would not spend significantly on the free agent market in the near future. Chances are he meant after the 2018 season, when young power hitters like Bryce Harper of the Washington Nationals and Manny Machado of the Baltimore Orioles will be available. But why wait if Trout is a possibility?

Trout, who was Rookie of the Year in 2012, is a five-time All-Star and two-time Most Valuable Player. He hits for power and a high aver-

age. He steals bases, plays a stellar centerfield, and has a cannon for an arm. And at just 25 years old, Trout is not even close to his prime.

Not only would he excite the Phillies' dwindling fan base, but he would also add immeasurably to the club's inconsistent offense and provide a marketable franchise player for years to come.

Unlike other egotistical superstars, Trout would be an asset to the clubhouse. He's highly respected by teammates, both for his talent and the way he carries himself. His down-to-earth personality has endeared him to both sportswriters and fans.

Best of all, Trout grew up in South Jersey rooting for the Phillies and Eagles so he gets the city's passion for sports. He's already building a home in Millville.

To be sure, the "Millville Meteor" did sign a six-year, \$144.5 million contract extension with the Angels that runs through 2020 and general manager Billy Eppler insists that he won't deal his franchise player. But what if he doesn't have a choice?

The Angels have only made the postseason once since 2010, losing to the Kansas City Royals in 2014. Their current roster is talent thin and a series of costly decisions on the free-agent market has left them with the weakest farm system in baseball as well as \$160 million in obligations to pay over the next five years.

Under those circumstances, there's no telling how old Trout might be before the Angels are able

to contend again. If he wants to be released from his contract, Eppler might approve a trade, especially if it includes the right combination of prospects and major-league ready talent to rebuild his club and the cash to offset some of the Angels' considerable debt. The Phillies can offer both.

Herrera would have to be part of the package because he plays Trout's position. Outfielders Howie Kendrick and Michael Saunders as well as starting pitcher Jeremy Hellickson are also expendable being on one-year deals. Undoubtedly, one or both of the Phils' top-rated prospects — shortstop J.P. Crawford and catcher Jorge Alfaro — would also have to be part of the deal. Alfaro would be the bigger loss because Crawford's progress has slowed considerably over the last two years.

Financial compensation would be less of a problem since the cash flow from the Phillies' television deal with Comcast is worth more than \$2.5 billion and has already begun to pour in. Also, the Phils have no money committed for 2019, allowing them to defer some of the compensation.

It would be a high price to pay for one player, but it would be worth it all to watch Trout batting third and playing centerfield for the Phillies for the rest of what is sure to be a Hall of Fame career.

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