

Another look at Halladay-Lee

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

THE PHILLIES' recent acquisition of Roy Halladay from the Blue Jays for staff ace Cliff Lee had the fans abuzz with predictions that the Phils would be on their way back to the World Series. Ticket sales are up and everyone — except Lee — is happy with the deal.

But the trade also raised questions about the organization's loyalty as well as its shaky relationship with the media.

Not long ago, Philadelphia was the baseball equivalent of purgatory for big-name players. Curt Schilling, another Phils ace, grew tired of pitching for a last-place club in the '90s and requested a trade to a contender. In 2000, he was dealt to the Diamondbacks, and helped lead them to a championship in 2007.

Scott Rolen, the 1998 rookie of the year and a perennial Gold Glove third baseman, couldn't wait to get out of Philly. In 2002, he was traded to the Cardinals, and he helped lead them a world championship in 2005.

Now that the Phillies have won a World Series and appeared in two straight fall classics, Philadelphia appears to be the destination of choice for some of the major league's top talent.

Halladay, with a career record of 148-76 and a lifetime 3.43 earned run average, is the best pitcher in baseball. He insists that Philadelphia is where he wanted to be and not only waived his no-trade clause to get here but also signed a below-market deal for three years at \$60 million.

LEE WAS another pitching ace who wanted to "spend the rest of my career" with the Phillies. He went 7-4 after joining the team in late July, and in five postseason starts, was 4-0.

Due to make \$9 million next season before becoming a free agent, Lee was led to believe that his agent was "working out an extension with the Phillies." But the club made only one offer — and the day after Lee's counter offer, he was traded.

That's not much of a negotiation for a pitcher who took the

team to the World Series this fall.

General manager Ruben Amaro admitted he could "have kept both" Lee and Halladay, but to do so the Phillies "would have lost seven of the best 10 prospects in the organization" and that "is not the way you do business in baseball."

The Phillies' philosophy must have changed since the days of

OPINION

Paul Owens and Dallas Green, two of

Amaro's mentors.

Back in the 1980s, the Phillies believed that when you had a shot at a world championship, you went for it.

That's why they increased their payroll significantly in 1979 when they signed free agent Pete Rose. It's why they were willing to trade Ryne Sandberg — the most highly prized prospect in a depleted farm system — for Ivan DeJesus, an established shortstop, in 1982. That decision allowed them to reach the series Classic in 1983, and the first one let them win their very first series in 1980.

Of course, current ownership

to blame.

The hosts of sportstalk radio and the writers in this city tend to treat pro sports like a life-and-death proposition. Their sometimes intrusive questions, exaggerated accounts and petty squabbles over breaking stories are legion.

At the same time, the Phillies have traditionally operated on the philosophy that they aren't going to let the media run their team on the field or in the front office. At times, the braintrust has been simply arrogant in following that policy.

Amaro cannot afford to alienate himself from the local sports media. He didn't help his cause by denying the rumors of a trade for Halladay weeks before it took place. Nor did he endear himself to interviewers with cavalier responses about payroll and prospects in future trades.

In an era when the players are physically distant from the fan base, the media provides the Phillies with the most direct connection to their fans. Whether Amaro likes it or not, the media has the potential to make his job a living hell.



From left: Halladay, Amaro & Lee: Some questions about the trade.

is quick to point out that they didn't have room on the payroll to keep Lee, who they assumed would ask for more money and more years than Halladay. But the only people who know that are Amaro, Lee and his agent.

The trade may, as Amaro insists, be just a "baseball decision," but it also raises questions about loyalty in the minds of current team members and others who might have considered Philadelphia an attractive place to play.

The other issue the trade raises is the quality of the relationship between the Phillies and the local media. It's always been an uneasy one — and both sides are

The Phillies are the only professional sports organization I've ever followed. I admire the individual personalities as well as the chemistry of the team they've put together. I'm grateful that they've brought another world championship to our city.

But I also care about the perception — and reality — of how they treat their players and conduct themselves with the media.

I hope the Phillies will continue to be the destination of choice for many talented players in the future. ★

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