

Eye on Sports

Phlyin' South for the Spring

By Jackie Downey - Lion's Eye Staff Writer - jsd5059@psu.edu

For only the second time in franchise history, the Philadelphia Phillies will enter training camp as the reigning World Series Champs. The Phillies finished out last season with a 92-70 record and defeated the Tampa Bay Rays in the World Series. While there is no doubt that the Phillies will win the World Series in 2009, the means to achieve the title will have to change.

Pat Burrell, long time left fielder and designated hitter, is now ironically with the Tampa Bay Rays, for less than the Phillies were willing to pay him. Just how much this will change the team's dynamic will remain unknown until the start of the season. John Brazer, Director of Publicity for the Phillies, has said during an interview that the replacement for Pat Burrell, Raul Ibanez, "[Ibanez] has a reputation as a very solid 'team first' guy."

The No. 5 spot for pitching is currently up for grabs. The main players up for this spot in the rotation are Kyle Kendrick, J.A. Happ, Chan Ho Park and Carlos Carrasco. While both Kyle Kendrick and J.A. Happ were with the Phillies last season, Chan Ho Park and Carlos Carrasco are new hopefuls to the team. Chan Ho Park has played a number of professional years in the league including his prior team the Manny and Mannyless L.A. Dodgers. Carlos Carrasco is a rookie in training. The decision for the pitching position will be decided either during the workouts that are done in spring training or through the games that are played during spring training.

Chase Utley is another variable in the starting of a new season. Chase had right hip surgery in November 2008. Chase is currently meeting with physical therapists for rehabilitation five times a week at Citizens Bank Park. When asked about Chase's progress so far, John Brazer replied "Chase is progressing very well. Every day, Chase comes to the ballpark and goes through a rigorous workout routine involving stretching, lifting and running. He feels that he is ahead of schedule. If all goes well, we

might have Chase back in uniform sometime in March. We are hoping that he will be ready for Opening Day (or close to the date)." Chase has been very optimistic since the surgery and many fans would want him back for Opening Day, but the reality is that he could injure himself more if he decides to play and is not ready. Chase feels great and would like to be in the field on Opening Night against the Atlanta Braves, but he should be at one hundred percent and not rush if he is not ready.

Another spot open on the Phillies roster for 2009 is a right-handed hitter to take the place of the void left by the absence of Burrell. Many players that are up for that job include Nomar Garciaparra, Rich Aurelia, and Moises Alou are some of the media's favorites to clinch the opening during spring training. Ty Wigginton was a serious competitor for the job, but as of February 3 is signed to the Baltimore Orioles. This void is hard to fill because of the way that Burrell was able to break up the left handed batters in the lineup last season and have a decent hitting season doing it. Although the void is necessary to keep the opposing pitcher guessing at what pitches to throw to the lineup, the players mentioned above have not secured a starting position in the lineup at the start of the season.

Ryan Howard's position on the team is already cemented, but his pay is not. Ryan is currently asking for \$18 million (opposed to the \$14 million that the Phillies have offered him.) According to John Brazer, if there is no agreement among the two parties a third party will intervene and decide the outcome. Both sides seem to want to settle this without arbitration, but it is too soon to see if that will happen. Many people are talking about this when asked about the Phillies chances in 2009, and while Ryan had

a great end of the season, especially in September, and finishing first in Home Runs and Runs Batted In for the season, many people are looking at his post-season to decide the outcome from their stand point. The hits that Howard had in the post-season, although they came few and far between, were major hits that without them the Phillies might not have captured the World Series title. So when you factor in his post-season numbers, also factor in what he did to help the Phillies make the playoffs, because from a writer's standpoint the Phillies were dead in the water without his September heroics.

Finally, perhaps the most influential change is the new General Manager (GM) Ruben Amaro. Ruben, a former Philadelphia Phillies player, was officially named General Manager on November 3rd, 2008, after the former GM Pat Gillick retired from that position. Ruben attributes his knowledge of a winner from not only Gillick but the laughing stock of the GM position Ed Wade. Ed Wade was the GM of the Phillies for a long time, and Ruben has stated that the nucleus of the World Champion team was from the farm system and Wade's era. Gillick also gives Wade some credit, but Ruben has said that Pat was able to finish the job. From watching him on different shows, he seems eager and ready to guide this team to another championship in 2009. His eyes light up at the discussion of competition during spring training for pitching and batting spots. Spring training will no doubt be a very exciting and important time for the players, coaches, and fans.

Are We Surprised With the Eagles Anymore?

By Pat Grant- Lion's Eye Staff Writer - peg5021@psu.edu

After a surprising 23-11 win in New York against the "Football" Giants, the Philadelphia Eagles were riding high, with a trip to Tampa for Super Bowl XLIII in their sights. But before that, the Eagles defense received a blow to the gut and was worn down in three of the 4 quarters in Arizona against the Cardinals in one of the most disappointing NFC title game since head coach Andy Reid took over and Donovan McNabb has played in.

The Eagles quickly fell behind 7-0 after a quick drive down the field by Kurt Warner and the Cardinals. This trend continued into the 2nd quarter where the Eagles were blitzing almost every play, but Arizona countered that by running screens and draws down the sideline which made the Eagles blitz useless. The Eagles played one of their worst halves of the 2008 season and were down 24-6. The 3rd and early 4th quarters were dominated by the Eagles planting a 19-0 run on the Cardinals with 3 touchdowns, which gave the Eagles the lead 25-24 with 10 minutes to play in the final quarter. While the lead was slim, the Eagles defense called perfect blitzes and sacked Kurt Warner and forced three straight turnovers. But Kurt Warner executed a perfect 4th quarter drive down the field for 78 yards that took almost the entire quarter. After a touchdown and a

two point conversion, the Cardinals were ahead for good 32-25. Then McNabb, for desperation to keep the Eagles Super Bowl hopes alive drove his team down the field and was stopped at midfield at the 2 minute warning. On 3rd and 10, he missed his target by throwing under-throwing him. After the 2 minute warning McNabb missed Kevin Curtis who could have had a first down and in the end the Eagles fans and players were disappointed. McNabb was pretty good throwing for 375 yards and only one pick along with three touchdowns. Most people blame the defense for the loss, but they carried the team all through the playoffs.

Throughout the season the team was not able to be consistent and was not able to punch the ball into the end zone. One game that many people say that was the reason that the season was flub was the tie against the Cincinnati Bengals, where the team went into overtime and was not able to score in the end. The bottom line is, the Eagles need a big play receiver and they need to be tougher on both sides of the ball. Since Andy Reid took over, the team has been able to make the playoffs. But he needs to realize that the NFL and especially the NFC East is catching up and passing the Eagles. The Eagles need a big off-season if they want any chance of getting to the playoffs next year.



The Phillies play at Citizens Bank Park - Photo by Jackie Downey

For Flyers Injuries Plague Season

By Sean O'Connor - Lion's Eye Staff Writer - smo5084@psu.edu

The Philadelphia Flyers have, at times, seemed like the class of the NHL, this season. A tight defense, excellent goaltending, and an offense led by center Jeff Carter all gel together to form a team that few in the league can even compete with. There's a catch however; the team must have the majority of its players healthy to play at this level, and too often this season that has simply not been the case. The huge 2007 free agent pickup, Danny Briere, has missed nearly all of the season with unpredictable groin injuries, and that is just one example.

Too often this season multiple facets of the team have been watching the games from the bench without hopping the boards. The team briefly got it together for about a month in late December and early January, climbing to the top of the Atlantic Division standings. But it wasn't long until the injury bug returned to its favorite team. Briere was sidelined once more with his groin, and most recently a bout with the flu has benched

defenseman Braydon Coburn, forward Scottie Upshall, and team captain and center Mike Richards. This has led to a slide in which the team has lost five of the last eight games and slid to third in the division (sixth overall in the conference) behind the Rangers and first place Devils.

On the other hand, one bright spot for the team this season has been the emergence of Jeff Carter. The center has sparked the team and is fighting for the league lead with 32 goals scored, currently second in the league behind last season's MVP, Washington Capitals wing Alex Ovechkin. The best news yet is that Carter is only 24 and just skating into his prime, appearing ready to contribute for years to come. Another bright spot is goalie Antero Niittymaki, whose save percentage (.917) and goals against average (2.6) ranks him among the best goalies in the league. Let this officially be considered a petition for more playing time for Niittymaki, who is recently out goaltending the starter Martin Biron.

Sixers

February 11 vs. Memphis @ 7 PM
February 17 @ Indiana @ 7 PM
February 18 vs. Denver @ 7 PM
February 21 @ Miami @ 3:30 PM
February 23 @ New Jersey @ 7:30 PM

Flyers

February 12 vs. Ottawa @ 7 PM
February 14 vs. New York Islanders @ 1 PM
February 15 @ New York Rangers @ 12:30 PM
February 19 vs. Buffalo @ 7 PM
February 21 vs. Pittsburgh @ 1 PM