

MOSTLY QUIET ON BASEBALL'S FREE AGENT FRONT

By Bruce Penton, March 05, 2018

'Collusion' is a hot word these days in the world of American politics, but it's also being whispered around Major League Baseball as dozens of solid major leaguers wait patiently for their agents to strike a deal with a team willing to shell out millions of dollars for their services.

Actually, 'collusion' is a word to be avoided among Major League teams, because it's a word that cost owners millions of dollars in the 1980s after an arbitrator found them guilty of deceitful practices that kept free agents from signing massive contracts.

Today, the 'C' word has been replaced by what owners call the Double C — cost consciousness — to explain why so many free agents are still unsigned. In a normal off-season, a player coming off a 25-home run season would be wined and dined by a number of MLB teams before bringing his talents, his family, his agent, his chauffeur, his masseuse, his banker, his financial advisor and his pizza delivery man to his new city. Invariably, the player — a veteran, obviously, because young players haven't built up resumes to command large contracts — performs well below expectations because: a) his talents are eroding with age; b) he has so much money in the bank that motivation to excel is, except in rare instances, lacking.

Team owners are in the business because they love baseball, but even moreso because they love making money, and the realization has occurred to many of them that their team might be able to contend without expensive free agents, going instead with lower-paid younger players.

But what team couldn't use the services of slugger Carlos Gonzales (32 years old and a .288 career batting average)? How about pitching? Jake Arrieta, coming off a 14-10 season with the Cubs, is available, as is Lance Lynn (71 wins in the last five seasons with the Cardinals). Slugger J.D. Martinez, 45 homers with Detroit and Arizona last year, was ignored until Feb. 19 when finally signed by Boston.

Columnist Greg Cote in the Miami Herald ripped the new Marlins ownership and Derek Jeter, their front man, for breaking up a potentially competitive team for the sake of profits, leaving the fans out to dry. The Marlins got rid of sluggers Giancarlo Stanton (59 HR) and Marcel Ozuna (37 HR), along with talented starters Christian Yelich and Dee Gordon, in exchange for cheap contracts and 'prospects.'

The new ownership's prospectus to investors, Cote wrote, shows a \$68 million profit for the Marlins in 2018, which should bring in a whack of investment cash from some of Florida's wealthy retirees. Maybe that prospectus can be taught to track down fly balls, or lash a curveball to centre.

- Former Anchorage Daily News deskier Roy Neese, via Facebook, after the U.S. topped Canada to reach the gold-medal match in men's curling: "That's like the U.S. beating Italy in pasta-making."
- Vegas Golden Knights twitter feed: "QUESTION: If the Canadiens get a goal and **Jeff Petry** gets an assist on a nice pass, do they ever call it a Petry Dish?"
- **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com (Hampton, Va.): "As is my quadrennial habit, I wonder if the four-man bobsleds at the Winter Games come with cup holders."
- **Brad Dickson** of the Omaha World-Herald: "According to the North Korean medal tracker, **Kim Jong Un** won every single Winter Olympics medal."
- Dickson again: "It's getting bad. Now it turns out that Russia colluded to determine the outcome of the Winter Olympics figure skating competition."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "Top three reasons Olympic viewers love curling: 3. The game has a peel; 2. It's great with takeout; 1. Action is end to end."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "At the Olympics, a Russian bobsled pilot, who wore a t-shirt that said, 'I Don't Do Doping', tested positive for a banned substance. Her name is **Ivana Cheatsmyassoff**."
- Kaseberg again: "At the Olympics, the Canadian ice dancing pair of **Tessa Virtue** and **Scott Moir** skated to a score of the Rolling Stones, Santana and the Eagles. 'That was a perfect 10,' said the year 1976."
- Headline at TheOnion.com: "Uphill skiing competition enters sixth day."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Soccer parent's lament: Our kid patterns his game after **Ronaldo**, but his bedroom is totally **Messi**."

- Canadian curler **Brent Laing**, to **Ted Wyman** of the Winnipeg Sun, after a Russian counterpart failed a doping test at the Winter Olympics: “Beer and Advil, those are the only painkillers I’ve ever heard of for curling. I imagine it wasn’t that. Hopefully not, or else I’m in trouble.”
- **Michael Rosenberg** of SI.com, on the U.S. sitting sixth in the medal count halfway through the Winter Olympics — behind Russia: “Which isn’t even officially here. I was pretty fired up about that. That’s like losing a bar bet to an empty stool.”
Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca