

THE SPORTIER

Nightmare in Philly

The 2020 season, and the ensuing offseason, have been disastrous for the Philadelphia Phillies. Leading up to the 2020 season, the Phillies made a big splash by signing former Mets pitcher Zack Wheeler to a five-year, \$118 million contract. This deal came last offseason after the Phillies chased their pursuit for a title. They acquired arguably the best catcher in all of baseball, JT Realmuto, via trade from the Miami Marlins two years ago, while they also signed 2015 NL MVP Bryce Harper to a 13-year, \$330 million deal that set a record at the time. In 2018, Phillies owner John Middleton said that they had prepared to be a "little bit stupid" with their spending leading up to the 2019 season, and they did indeed pour assets, money and prospects included, to make a push to the playoffs. Unfortunately, their efforts resulted in a 4th place finish in the NL East with an 81-81 record. Much of this could be attributed to their porous pitching staff, both their starting rotation and bullpen. In 2019, the Phillies had the 5th worst starting pitching ERA and carried the 10th worst bullpen ERA. Fast forward to December 2019, the Phillies pick up a star pitcher in Wheeler to insert into their rotation. Approaching the \$208 million luxury tax, the Phillies were clearly in win-now mode. In addition, their superstar catcher Realmuto only had one more year under team control, so 2020 was primed for a Phillies World Series run. Despite a shortened season, when it was anybody's season to win, coupled with the expanded playoffs, the Phillies collapsed, finishing 3rd in their division with a record of 28-32. The issues arose again from pitching, with their #2 starter Aaron Nola falling apart halfway through the season, and another disastrous bullpen season. Their bullpen, ranking the worst in both ERA (7.06) and opponent batting average (.315), was horrific for the Phillies, which is even more disappointing considering that the newly-acquired Wheeler had a career year. It is clear that all the Phillies need to do is negotiate for some decent relievers, and they should be a contending team, right? Unfortunately, the Phillies have reached their peak already, and have already shot themselves in the foot.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the already full-to-the-brim Phillies who did not have any money to spare. After the 2020 season, owner John Middleton said that the team had lost \$145 million as a result of the pandemic. With limited flexibility and the financial losses this season, Middleton informed people in his front office that they would not have money to resign Realmuto long-term, veering from the original intention of the franchise when they had acquired him via trade. Even worse, there is potential that Realmuto signs with a division rival, the New York Mets. To make matters even worse, if that is even possible, it has been reported to ESPN that the Phillies are listening to offers for Zack Wheeler, their current second-highest paid player. With two stars of the team possibly disappearing, without achieving any success, it begs the final question regarding their superstar outfielder Harper: will he stay? Harper signed the massive 13-year deal with the team that included a no-trade clause and no opt-outs, seemingly committed himself to Philadelphia for the remainder of his career. Coming off two unforeseen non-playoff seasons, with the potential for Harper's two most valuable teammates to leave him after such short stints, Harper surely does not want to spend the rest of his career on a team that has already said that they are unable to spend to full capacity. Harper, who is only 28-years-old, has much of his career left, and even though it may have been a mistake on his part to lock himself into a long-term contract without the potential to test the market, Harper may very well waive his no-trade clause to escape a franchise that cannot build around one of the best in the sport.

The Phillies had a great plan, in theory. Acquire multiple superstar and star players, lock them up, and have a great future ahead. Unfortunately, step two could not be executed because, even though the pandemic hit them hard, they put all of their money into one basket.

Opinion: Wizards Improve With Acquisition of Russ

Guest Editorial by Peter Kasper

The Wizards fleeced the Rockets in the Russell Westbrook for John Wall trade - even with the Rockets getting a protected first rounder. Don't get me wrong, I like John Wall as a player. Or maybe I should say *liked*. He is now a 30-year-old point guard who is coming off a major Achilles injury and hasn't played in almost 2 years. Oh yeah, he also makes about \$40 million per season.

Russ is another ball dominant, 30 something (he just turned 32) year old point guard making about \$40 million per. The difference, however, is that Russ can still play. He averaged 27 points, 7.9 rebounds and 7 assists per game last year while playing with arguably the league's most ball dominant player (more on that later). And he averaged a triple double the previous three seasons. Not bad for a 6'3" point guard.

Wall may be a better fit with the aforementioned ball dominant player (James Harden), but don't count on it. Harden pushed Chris Paul out of Houston, and now Russ. Wall will probably be next. By now you can probably tell I'm not a huge Harden fan, and I don't think that Wall is the answer. I do, however, think Russ will fit nicely with the real star - Bradley Beal.

This deal is not groundbreaking for either team - it had to happen. But you heard it here first - the Rockets take a step backward and the Wiz take a big leap forward this coming season.

Sources:

[ESPN](#), [ESPN](#), [ESPN](#), [amNY](#), [Bleacher Report](#), [MLB](#), [PhillyVoice](#), [Phillies Nation](#), [SB Nation](#), [CBS Sports](#), [Spotrac](#), [Baseball Reference](#), [Baseball Reference](#)