

With 10 Days to Go, "Signing Strasburg" Watching Kicks Into High Gear

Written by Maury Brown
Friday, 07 August 2009 02:15



Late, at the end of the MLB trade deadline last Thursday, the Washington Nationals moved two players off their roster, that in and of themselves might not have been done solely to sign Stephen Strasburg, but certainly won't hurt in those efforts.

The Nationals, in the last minutes of the trade deadline moved left-handed pitcher Joe Beimel and cash considerations to the Rockies for two minor leaguers in right-handed pitchers Ryan Mattheus and Robinson Fabian. That move was followed by the last minute deal to send first baseman Nick Johnson to the Marlins for left-handed pitching prospect Aaron Thompson.

To fill the roster slots, on Friday, the Nationals recalled outfielder Elijah Dukes and selected the

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\$85,000 major league contract of right-handed pitcher Jorge Sosa from Syracuse of the Triple-A International League, which depending on how long he is on the major league roster could be as much as \$280,000. Dukes was signed to a 1-year, \$411,500 contract, just \$11,500 over the league minimum.

The Nationals, with the first pick in this year's draft, selected Strasburg, the pitching phenom from San Diego State, and ever since, questions of signability have swirled.

As noted in [Valuating Stephen Strasburg](#), the Nationals and Strasburg's agent, Scott Boras, are going to have to lock horns in order to get a deal done:

The first question involves how much Boras is seeking and where the deal might actually land. Reports have had Boras centering around a 6-year deal between \$25M-\$50 million. Boras has come up with the stratospheric figures based upon Daisuke Matsuzaka, who received a \$52 million contract from the Red Sox after doling out a \$51 million posting fee. The argument Boras is making is that the 21-year-old Strasburg is worth more than Matsuzaka at 28. Also, Boras believes that if Strasburg were on the free agent block, he might garner more still. Remember, the record to date is 5/\$10.5 million doled out to Mark Prior.

This sets up a clash of cultures as [Stan Kasten isn't exactly keen on player agents](#) to begin with. The Nationals are going to focus on the landmark Prior figure and surely will try to push the lofty \$50 million figure back and Boras isn't going to accept the \$25 million floor figure. As with most all contract negotiations, the agreed upon salary figure will be somewhere in the middle. One NL exec has predicted \$30 million.

Going back to the trade deadline, Nick Johnson was at the end of a 3 year, \$16.5 million deal that paid him \$5.5 million this year. That Nationals talked to Johnson, who has been oft injured, about a multi-year extension, and in the end, the sides passed. Joe Beimel had a 1-year, \$2 million deal that rolls off the books, as well.

It seems that the Nationals decided not to re-sign these two players for reasons outside of the Strasburg signing, but it certainly does not hurt. Having Johnson and Beimel off the books *does* add extra payroll flexibility to allow the Nationals to get Strasburg under contract. After reportedly missing out of getting Aaron Crow under contract last season due to a \$500,000 gap,

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the Nationals will be under pressure to make the deal happen.

So, beyond whether the Nationals and Boras are fully engaged in the amount Strasburg gets inked, here's some other issues to consider...

As noted, the Nationals passed on signing Aaron Crow last season, which created noise in the press about the dynamic of the organization with Jim Bowden being a large part of that equation. With Bowden resigning/being forced out, the Nationals no longer have Bowden's abrasive personality as an excuse. That, and while Crow was the cream of the crop last year, Strasburg is considered to be one of the best prospects to come along in some time. How would it look if the Nationals don't get him under contract?

And while the Nationals have strung together 5 wins in a row, they are still have the worst record in baseball at 37-72 (.339), 5.5 games below the Royals who sit at 42-66 (.389), the Nationals seem well on track for ending the season as the worst in baseball, possibly at an historic level. That would setup them up for the first pick in next year's draft, as well where the likes of Cameron Bedrosian, Alex Meyer, Yordy Cabrera, AJ Cole, or possibly – just possibly – SI cover kid, Bryce Harper, the Vegas high schooler that can not only catch, but smash the ball with power. Word is Harper is looking to possibly get his GED a year early, thus making him eligible in 2010, as opposed to 2011.

So, the past (Crow), and the future (a good shot at next year's #1 pick) influences the present (Strasburg). The signing deadline is Aug. 17, a scant 10 days from now. Between now and then there will be much speculation about how the process is going, but don't look for any clear signs as to how the contract negotiations are going until possibly (you guessed it), August 17.



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