

Former Falcon On The Move

The Pittsburgh Pirates traded former Falcon Nyjer Morgan and reliever Sean Burnett to the Washington Nationals for reliever Joel Hanrahan and outfielder Lastings Milledge on Tuesday afternoon.

Morgan is considered the key to the deal for Washington. He was acquired to improve the team's outfield defense, which ranks among the worst in the National League.

Morgan spent the summer of 2000 in Kelowna, playing for the Falcons.

The Nationals have been unhappy with their outfielders for quite some time. They have come to the conclusion that Adam Dunn and Josh Willingham belong in the American League as designated hitters, and Elijah Dukes makes too many fundamental mistakes.

The Nationals see Morgan as a center fielder/leadoff hitter. Washington also likes his hockey attitude. He once played with the Regina Pats of the Western Hockey League during the 1999-2000 season.

Morgan, who will wear uniform No. 1, was playing left field and batting second for Pittsburgh. Entering Tuesday's action, Morgan was hitting .277 with two home runs, 27 RBIs and 18 stolen bases.

"I'm a little shocked, but it's business," Morgan said. "I'm just very happy that I opened up somebody's eyes and that somebody wanted me. I look at it as a positive thing, not a negative thing. I definitely loved going to war with [the Pirates]. It's just unfortunate that I have to go.

"Basically being a 33rd-rounder, I'm not even supposed to be here. In my eyes, to be able to open up somebody's eyes and knowing that they want me to be their guy is a beautiful thing. It's unfortunate that I have to leave the black and gold. I loved being here."

With Morgan in the fold, Willie Harris will be back on the bench. However, acting general manager Mike Rizzo vowed that Harris would not be stuck on bench.

"Willie Harris brings a lot of energy to our club. He will get his share of at-bats," Rizzo said.

The Nationals also get younger in the bullpen with Burnett on board. He will be a middle reliever for the team. Burnett

appeared in 38 games and had a respectable 3.06 ERA for Pittsburgh entering Tuesday. The Nationals have not ruled out making him a starter, a role he had when he was drafted by the Pirates in the 2000 First-Year Player Draft.

"We are open for business" said a happy Rizzo. "We improved two of our greatest needs. We have a great character guy in Morgan. We have our center fielder."

Hanrahan and Milledge did not fit in the team's long-term plans. Hanrahan lost his job as a closer twice because he was often hit hard. Most people in the organization felt that his fastball was too straight and he relied too much on his slider.

Asked if a change of scenery was good for him, Hanrahan said, "It could be. But I can't say that it is or not. It never really hurts to get a change of scenery, and it's good to know that somebody else likes you, even when you're not doing your best right now. That's a positive."

Lack of defense and inconsistency at the plate are the reasons Milledge has been in the Minor Leagues since mid-April. In seven games, Milledge, who was acquired from the Mets in December 2007 for catcher Brian Schneider and outfielder Ryan Church, was 4-for-24 with an RBI for the Nationals.

It also didn't help that Milledge was late for a meeting the day before Opening Day in Miami.

According to sources, both Rizzo and manager Manny Acta threatened Milledge with a trip back to the Minor Leagues in the wake of the incident. The team ended up sending him down April 14.

"I don't think things went right for him this season," Rizzo said. "He had a very slow Spring Training and a slow beginning of the season. I think we asked him to do things that he possibly wasn't capable of doing. Putting him in a center field position and the leadoff position when he possibly wasn't ready for that at this point in his career didn't help, then being the competitor that he is, he really was pressing to improve and to play well."

Rizzo is far from done in terms of making deals. He is looking for a starting shortstop. The Nationals feel that Cristian Guzman, who is on the trading block, has lost a few steps with his glove.

The Nationals are alarmed that Guzman is having a difficult time getting ground balls to his left.

Washington wants young starting pitching in return for Guzman, who has one year left on his contract.

The team doesn't have to acquire a shortstop -- at least for the rest of the season. It can go with Alberto Gonzalez, who was hitting .326 with a home run and 12 RBIs entering Tuesday.

The team is also looking to trade Dukes, and that may be hard to do because he comes with a lot of off-the-field baggage. Whom the club wants for Dukes is not known.

Other Falcons playing in pro ball are:

Chicago White Sox

R- Ryan Lee, 2006-2007, (Cal Poly), Bristol White Sox

Cleveland Indians

High A - Heath Taylor, 2006, (Oklahoma), Kinston Indians

Seattle Mariners

AAA - Andy Baldwin, 2000, (Oregon State), Tacoma Rainiers

Texas Rangers

MLB - Chris Davis, 2005, (Navarro College)

AAA - Nate Gold, 2000, (Gonzaga), Oklahoma City RedHawks

Florida Marlins

SS - Matt Montgomery, 2006, (UC Riverside), Jamestown Jammers

Milwaukee Brewers

High A - Jim Henderson, 2001, (Tennessee Wesleyan), Brevard County Manatees

Pittsburgh Pirates

High A - Ray Chang, 2000, (Rockhurst College), Lynchburg Hillcats

St. Louis Cardinals

AAA - Jess Todd, 2005, (Arkansas), Memphis Redbirds

San Diego Padres

High A – Sawyer Carroll, 2006, (Kentucky), Lake Elsinore Storm

R - Wade Olabisi, 2008, (Stanford), AZL Padres

San Francisco Giants

AA - Brooks McNiven, 2001, (University of British Columbia), Connecticut Defenders

SS – Ryan Mantle, 2007, (Missouri State), Salem-Keizer Volcanoes

Washington Nationals

MLB - Nyjer Morgan, 2000, (Walla Walla CC)

SS – Clayton Dill, 2007, (Missouri Baptist), Vermont Lake Monsters

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