

Phillies baseball 2010

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The little boy who idolized Richie Ashburn, watching him patrol centerfield and leg out scratch singles at Connie Mack Stadium, still lives and he's eager for the 2010 Major League Baseball season to start.

The teenager who watched the Philadelphia Phillies horrendous fizzle in 1964 knows the team will disappoint somewhere along the line.

The adult who watched the team blossom over the last several years, making two World Series appearances and winning one of them, is as eager as the little boy for the season to get underway.

So it's no wonder that, after days of TV news showing several feet of snow on the ground, it came as welcome relief to see a sports report showing the Phillies' equipment truck being loaded up, then heading south for the beginning of spring training.

The Phils have been the beast of the National League East for the last three years and we see no reason the team should not continue to lead the division again in 2010.

Jimmy Rollins, Chase Utley, Ryan Howard, Carlos Ruiz and Shane Victorino, the nucleus of the team, are together, still young, healthy and hungry for more success. With the addition of Placido Polanco, the team has added more punch to an already potent lineup. He may not be as smooth a fielder or as accurate a thrower as former third baseman Pedro Feliz, but he will hit for a higher average with more RBIs and homeruns.

Questions arise where they always show up, with the pitching staff, both the starting rotation and in the bullpen.

Getting Roy Halladay was a good move, one many fans—and General Manager Rubeen Amaro Jr.—wanted for a long time. He's considered the premier pitcher in the majors. But the yin to that yang was the loss of pitcher Cliff Lee who accounted for the only Phillies wins in last year's World Series against the New York Yankees.

Having Halladay for a full season will likely prove to be better than having Cliff Lee for only half a season, but it doesn't improve the team's chances in the post season.

For post-season improvement they need Cole Hamels to return to his 2008 form, but with a third pitch other than just his fastball and changeup. The southpaw fell off his game in 2009 to a point where he was barely mediocre, a far cry from his World Series MVP status of 2008.

The other question surrounding the rotation concerns the fifth starter. Will it be Kyle Kendrick who had a shaky 2009 or will it be Jamie Moyer who, coming off off-season surgery, will be 47 years old this season. If Moyer is serious about pitching this year, he will likely be traded to a team desperate for a fill-in starter with Moyer's mental experience.

More questions loom for the bullpen. Will Brad Lidge and J.C. Romero be healthy enough to approach their performances of 2008? We don't expect Lidge to be perfect in save appearances again, but if he's healthy he will do far better than his disappointing 2009. And all too often, relievers alternate between good seasons and bad ones. Let's hope this year is a rebound for both.

With those two healthy and Ryan Madson still pitching well as a set up reliever, the Phils will have a better bullpen in 2010 than they had in 2009. If not, there will be trouble. Acquisitions Danys Baez and José Contreras are past their prime.

Barring injuries to key players, odds are the Phillies will win the National League East again this year. Chances are good they'll make it back to the series. Will they win that? It depends on whom you ask. The little boy says yes. We hope he's right.