

Will frugal Padres shell out bucks?

by Tom Krasovic - CNS

SAN DIEGO - Padres CEO Sandy Alderson isn't predicting his club will spend large sums on free agents - but he said the midrevenue franchise has significant dollars to spend. The Padres, unlike many clubs, don't have any cementlike contracts on the books, and they've locked up the rotation's Nos. 1, 2 and 3 pitchers for under \$19 million total.

"We've got plenty of room," Alderson said Tuesday, when the Padres were free to make offers to other clubs' free agents. "We just have to find the right players."

It is an extremely weak free-agent market, though, reducing the chances of a big-splash signing that some fans have craved since the club moved into Petco Park. Whether the Padres can sign a player such as center fielder Andruw Jones, who is on their shopping list, could hinge on the player accepting a high-dollar, short-term guarantee.

"We do have a strategy that we intend to follow," Alderson said. "Again, sometimes it's a matter of opportunity. We have resources available. That shouldn't be an issue."

Many or all of the eight Padres free agents probably will sign with other clubs. One, utility man Geoff Blum, said Tuesday the Padres remain his No. 1 choice, but that he probably will sign with the Astros. "Apparently, I don't fit into the Padres' priorities," Blum said.

Bringing back left fielder Milton Bradley, who is recovering from reconstructive knee surgery, doesn't appear to be a priority for the Padres, who will retain left fielder Scott Hairston and give third-base prospect Chase Headley time in left field in spring training. "I wouldn't rule it out," Alderson said of Bradley's return, "but I wouldn't say it's likely that he will be back."

The Padres likely will make an offer to former Brewers corner outfielder Geoff Jenkins.

The Padres are pleased with their one big-dollar acquisition last offseason: Greg Maddux, who made all 34 scheduled starts and went 14-11 with a 4.14 ERA. His \$10 million salary was a bargain compared with headline-grabbing purchases by NL West rivals last offseason.

Dodgers General Manager Ned Colletti, who inherited a dynamic group of young and inexpensive players, went on an ill-advised spending binge for veterans that guaranteed \$117.5 million to Jason Schmidt,

Juan Pierre, Nomar Garciaparra and Randy Wolf. Responding to Colletti's preference for veterans, the Padres are contemplating three-team trade scenarios that would bring them young Dodgers outfielder Matt Kemp.

Not long after the Padres signed Maddux last winter, the Giants guaranteed \$126 million to Barry Zito, a finesse pitcher who had a disappointing season and will average \$19.3 million in guaranteed money the next six years.

Arizona's powerful youth movement brought the club an NL West title - not the club's biggest purchase, the \$24 million pact given to Randy Johnson, a 43-year-old pitcher who was shut down in May because of recurring back problems.

Reworking their two-year deal with Maddux, the Padres recently set the 41-year-old's 2008 salary at \$10 million.

"We're prudent buyers," Alderson said. "We're happy with the acquisition we've already made with Greg Maddux, and we expect that there will be additions."

Entering October, the Padres discussed offering Jones a salary of at least \$17 million, about \$3.5 million above his salary in 2007. But Jones' agent, Scott Boras, has talked of landing a multiyear deal at \$20 million per season. Alderson acknowledged that it would be unusual for Boras to accept a one-year guarantee.

"It's a dynamic market," Alderson said. "Let's see what happens. Who knows what the market for Andruw Jones will be? Who knows what the market will be for Mike Cameron at this point? Circumstances change. Everybody's still in play. There's no reason on Nov. 13 to rule out any possibility. You have to see how the market develops."

PADRES TO CHINA

Barring a dramatic turn, the players union and club owners expect to approve plans that will match the Padres and Dodgers for two spring-training games in China. "I expect to play in Beijing next March," Alderson said. The Padres will send a few front-line players to China but are likely to hold back prominent pitchers because of concerns that rainouts would be overly disruptive to their preparations. "There are concerns about rain," Alderson said. "Rain really affects the pitchers. There is a question of who would we take or not take."

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