



People

Diamond Jim

The Cubs' general manager engineered the team's remarkable breakout season. Now can he lead them to the promised land?

WHEN THE KEY FIGURE in last season's Cubs turnaround fell down the steps of his Park Ridge home in January and severed the quadriceps muscle from the patella tendon on his left knee, few fans worried that the team's fortunes would take a tumble. That's because Cubs vice-president and general manager Jim Hendry hasn't been relying on a bat and glove (or his legs) to win games since his playing career ended 27 years ago at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama.

Now in his tenth year with the Cubs, Hendry, 48, has proven to be sure-footed in climbing the front-office ladder, finally taking over team president Andy MacPhail's GM title during the dismal 2002 season. Hendry didn't get much notice until last season, when he lured manager Dusty Baker to Chicago and made a series of successful trades to patch holes in the lineup. "I'm the rare fortunate guy who gets to become general manager at the same place where he ran the draft in the minor leagues," Hendry says. "If it doesn't turn out well, I'm the one to blame—nobody else."

By his own admission, Hendry did not have the talent to play in the major leagues, but he developed a shrewd eye for spotting it. In his 12 years as a high school and college coach, Hendry sent 26 players to the professional ranks. His

success at Creighton University—in 1991, he took the team to the College World Series—led to a scouting and rookie league management position with the Florida Marlins before he landed on the western shore of Lake Michigan.

Three days after surgery on his knee, Hendry was back in the office where many predecessors have labored in futility for decades. He has a simple explanation for the team's more recent shortcomings. "The Cubs went from the 1991 draft to the 1998 draft without producing one everyday position player," Hendry says. Under his direction, the farm system has become the team's strength, as evidenced by the emergence of draft picks such as Kerry Wood, Mark Prior, and Corey Patterson.

Though a new breed of GMs relies heavily on computer-generated statistics, Hendry says, "I'm more of an old-school

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guy. Good judgment can't always be made on a computer. Sometimes it's about getting to know the young man, getting to know his character."

As the 2004 season begins, the annual optimism is springing from an unusual source—Vegas oddsmakers, who have picked the team as a favorite to represent the National League in the World Series. "I don't put a lot of stock in that," Hendry says. "But it's an acknowledgment that last season's team wasn't a one-year wonder." Fingertipping a list of his recent acquisitions—among them, catcher Michael Barrett, first baseman Derrek Lee, relief pitcher LaTroy Hawkins, and, of course, the long-awaited Greg Maddux—Hendry says this season's squad is better. He won't guarantee, however, that 2004 will be the year the Cubs finally shrug off the Billy Goat curse and win the World Series.

"But if I have to leave here without us winning it, I'll be very disappointed," he says. "I don't want to do just well enough to keep the job. I want the whole thing."

—PAUL ENGLEMAN

PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHEW GILSON