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Harford County Public Library executive director Mary Hastler, left, poses as marketing and communications director Leslie Greenly Smith takes a selfie while Orioles players meet with fans during the Birdland Caravan event Friday at the Abingdon Branch. **BRIAN KRISTA/STAFF**

ORIOLES

‘I was expecting more’

Fans mixed on David Rubenstein’s first offseason as owner



Orioles fan Jason Jones, right, stands at a Birdland Caravan event at Guinness Open Gate Brewery in Halethorpe with his wife, Kelly, and son, Joshua. **JACOB CALVIN MEYER/STAFF**

By Jacob Calvin Meyer

“Fine.”
“So-so.”
“OK.”

That’s how Baltimore fans during the Birdland Caravan tour this weekend described the Orioles’ offseason.

“My general opinion is unexciting,” Orioles fan Roger Noble said.

This offseason was the first with David Rubenstein as the ballclub’s owner, and his deeper pockets gave a portion of the fan base hope. After years of mismanagement and frugality under the Angelos family, a billionaire like Rubenstein, who brought with him several other billionaires, increased the stakes for what’s possible in Baltimore.

Strictly by payroll, Rubenstein did that this offseason. Few MLB teams

UP NEXT

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Feb. 13: First full-squad workout

Feb. 22: Spring training opener vs. Pirates

March 23: Spring training finale at Braves

March 27: Season opener at Blue Jays

March 31: Home opener vs. Red Sox

added more to their 2025 payroll than the Orioles this winter, and for the first time during the Mike Elias era, Baltimore will not enter a season ranked in the bottom five in spending.

However, the Orioles let two of their best players walk in free

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Fans

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agency. They did not sign any of their young stars to long-term contract extensions. And while the Orioles spent \$96 million to add two veteran starters, a solid bullpen arm, a right-handed power hitter and a backup catcher — essentially filling all of their needs — they didn't make a splash in free agency or via trade for an ace. At least not yet.

"I wish they would've spent a little bit more and picked up another pitcher, but I see the potential in the team," lifelong Baltimore fan Kelly Jones said.

Jones, a Catonsville resident, went with her husband, Jason, and their 13-year-old son, Joshua, to a Birdland Caravan event at Guinness Open Gate Brewery in Halethorpe on Thursday. Decked out in Orioles gear, the family and the hundreds of other fans interacted with Orioles players Ryan O'Hearn, Jackson Holliday and others. They took pictures, asked questions during Q&A sessions and sat at the bar as players made

them drinks.

Jones, 43, said she was "sad to see" Anthony Santander leave for the Toronto Blue Jays. The Orioles' American League East rival paid the veteran outfielder \$92.5 million to join the club north of the border and play 13 times a season against his old team. Ace Corbin Burnes also left, signing a six-year, \$210 million contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Her husband, though, wasn't surprised. "It's kind of what I expected," Jason Jones, 44, said. "It's the way it's always been. Somebody comes up, they get through their first contract, they get big money and they're gone."

Eric Cuppett, a 48-year-old Perry Hall resident, said during Friday night's karaoke event at PBR Baltimore that he wasn't sad to see Santander go.

"I was expecting him to be gone after this season, personally," he said. "I just didn't think he was worth the money. He had one breakout season, first time hitting over 40 home runs. To spend \$90 million on that seems like a lot of money to me."

The deal Elias gave to outfielder Tyler O'Neill — \$49.5 million over three years — is the first multiyear contract he's handed out since taking over as Baltimore's GM in November 2018. But the other contracts were all similar to the ones given out under John Angelos: one-year deals for veterans. Elias signed veteran starting pitcher Charlie Morton for \$15 million, Japanese

starter Tomoyuki Sugano for \$13 million, reliever Andrew Kittredge for \$10 million and backup catcher Gary Sánchez for \$8.5 million.

Meanwhile, the New York Yankees responded to losing out on the Juan Soto sweepstakes by signing starting pitcher Max Fried to a \$218 million contract and trading for outfielder Cody Bellinger and closer Devin Williams.

Those splash moves are the ones Orioles fans envisioned when Rubenstein took over. They're the same ones they've hoped for since Elias said "it's liftoff from here" after the disappointing 2022 trade deadline.

"I was expecting more," Cuppett said. "Liftoff? Like Elias said, right? Get ready for 'liftoff'? I was expecting more. But, I am happy with what we did. I think we made some proper moves."

"I totally trust Elias," Cuppett continued. "The guy's made winners in Houston. We were already ahead of schedule as is. I'm happy with the way things are right now."

Noble feels the same way. The 76-year-old Baltimore native entered the offseason following the pain of a second straight play-off sweep with the hope of big moves. But he's not abandoning ship even though the Orioles didn't hand out a nine-figure check.

"I think I understand what Elias is doing," Noble said.

Each of the fans said they understand the Orioles also have to plan for the future. Catcher Adley Rutschman is on track to

become a free agent after the 2027 season. For Gunnar Henderson, it's after the 2028 campaign.

If the money being saved now eventually goes toward keeping Rutschman and Henderson in Baltimore, that's the right approach, according to Dan McIntyre, a 58-year-old Orioles fan from Towson.

"I think Rubenstein's got some good things going on. He's making some changes. He's getting good players. I hope he retains the young ones, but they get expensive," he said. "If he can fork out some money to keep 'em, I mean Adley and Gunnar and [Jackson] Holliday, they're the guys who are going to build the team. You've got to have that nucleus, and as long as they grow with the team, they're going to do really well."

On the other hand, if the Orioles aren't able to keep Rutschman and Henderson in Baltimore, McIntyre said that's when some fans could start to sour on Rubenstein and the organization.

"Fans would be upset if Adley goes away," he said. "Like, 'why have I been cheering for Adley for four years and now he's going to play for New York.' And then fans will get pissed at [Rubenstein]. He has to know that. He's a smart man. I think he will shell out the money for it."

Have a news tip? Contact Jacob Calvin Meyer at jameyer@baltsun.com, 410-332-6200 and x.com/JCalvinMeyer.



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