



# Picture of concentration

Canada skip Brad Gushue and Alberta-Jacobs skip Brad Jacobs, back left, watch a Canada shot during the playoffs at the Brier, in Kelowna, B.C., on Friday. For a full report, visit ■ GLOBESPORTS.COM

DARRYL DYCK/ THE CANADIAN PRESS/

## Blue Jays, Guerrero Jr. are swiftly entering into nobody-wins-territory

The club is trying to buy a house and the seller keeps telling the neighbours how much he wants

CATHAL KELLY  
OPINION



The one thing the Toronto Blue Jays were able to take away from their failed effort to re-sign Vladimir Guerrero Jr. before the start of spring training was that it had failed, past tense.

Guerrero talked about what had gone wrong in vague terms. Then he said he'd pick things back up after the season was over.

"I'm here and we didn't get an

agreement," Guerrero said two weeks ago. "Now they're going to have to compete with 29 teams."

Fair enough. A chore delayed is a chore completed (said no one ever, but that's how it works in sports.)

Except Guerrero isn't done. He's still negotiating, but not in private with the Jays. In public, with journalists.

Guerrero is decently conversant in English, but prefers to use a translator. We're starting to get a sense of why. In English, with a delay between question and answer, he's capable of caginess. But in his native tongue, he doesn't seem able to zig or zag. He is zagless.

So when two Spanish-language ESPN journalists began hitting him with direct questions in a live interview this week, Guerrero spilled.

"It's much less than Soto," he said of the number he put to the

Jays. "We're talking many fewer millions than Soto. More than a hundred million less ... It was the same number of years, but it didn't reach (US\$600-million). The last number we gave them as a counteroffer didn't reach \$600-million."

The obvious next question – "Can I have your car keys?" It's worth a shot.

Unconcerned that he was peeling years off his agent's life, Guerrero kept going.

"I'm looking for 14 [years]. I would like 14, 15, even 20 if they give them to me, but doing it the right way."

Twenty years? Why would any team in any sport give an extra couple-of-hundred-million dollars to a guy who will be aged 40 to 46 at the time? It's lunacy to even say it out loud. He can't be serious? Or is he?

There are two possibilities here.

The first is the Occam's razor version – athletes aren't big planners. They're thinking about right now, when their feelings are hurt and they're hot. They're not thinking about eight months from now, when they're trying to get New York (either one) to return their calls.

The Yankees gave Aaron Judge – who is the best player in baseball – nine years and \$360-million. They are not giving Guerrero – who isn't the best player in anything except the crummy team he plays on now – a 20-year and, what, \$800-million deal.

By putting hard numbers out there, Guerrero has handcuffed his representatives. Less than \$600-million – that's his number. It's a nice number, but it may still be less than where baseball's market is for 26-year-old, batting-order cornerstones by November.

This version of what's happening is manageable. Eventually,

one of Guerrero's retinue is going to get through to him that every time he speaks, he lights a pile of money on fire.

A long slump will have the same effect. If he gets on a heater and the team is winning because of it, who cares what he says.

But there's the second possibility – that Guerrero knows what he's doing and doesn't care. This is a nightmare scenario for the Jays.

By continuing to bread-crumble facts about his negotiations, Guerrero makes it impossible for the team to move on from them. A three-day story becomes a forever story. There's always some new factoid to discuss.

The Jays have been at it in Dnipro for coming on three weeks and Guerrero's non-contract has twice become the biggest news out of them. It's pretty much the only news out of them.

■ KELLY, B18

## Not knowing what would happen next, Ukrainian wrestler finds his fit in Newfoundland

PAUL WALDIE ST. JOHN'S

Maksym Volkov gently placed his hands behind Luke MacPherson's neck and shouted a few instructions in Ukrainian. Then in a series of quick moves he flipped the teenager on to the mat with a loud thud, much to the amazement of a group of around 20 children sitting in a large circle.

Volkov offered a few more instructions before the kids, some as young as six-years old, paired off to practise the moves. After a few minutes of grappling, he had them all laughing and chasing balls around the gym.

Volkov, 19, never imagined he'd be coaching kids wrestling and certainly not in Newfoundland, a place he'd never heard of until a couple of years ago when his family fled Ukraine.

He only took up coaching to earn some money to fund his own wrestling ambitions which include competing at the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. He's now so committed to the



Luke MacPherson, 16, behind, works on wrestling moves during a training session run by Maksym Volkov in Mount Pearl, N.L., last month. FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

club he founded – Night Wolves Wrestling – that he's turned down athletic scholarship offers from several Canadian universities.

"If I go to Alberta or somewhere, it's good for me but very bad for 70 athletes. I think about this every day," he said during a recent break in training. "Definitely

not all of them will become champions. But they will be disciplined, decent, better people."

When Volkov arrived in St. John's with his family in March, 2023, his wrestling career seemed finished.

He and his parents, brother and sister, had escaped the small

city of Tokmak a year earlier just as it was being overrun by Russian soldiers.

They spent a year in nearby Dnipro before Mr. Volkov's parents read an internet post about a re-settlement program for Ukrainians in Newfoundland. "It seemed to be place where you can start a new life, easier than other places," he recalled his parents saying at the time.

He thought moving to Canada might help get his wrestling career back on track.

He'd taken up the sport at the age of four after a teacher told his parents their son needed to do something to burn off his excess energy.

By the time he was a teenager, Volkov was a rising star and training under a local coach who had guided several athletes to national and European titles. He turned down offers to attend a Ukrainian sports academy to stay with the coach who became a second father.

"It's like you feel like clay, so he's shaping you," Volkov said.

They separated when Russia launched its full scale invasion on

Feb. 24, 2022. Volkov and his family headed to Dnipro while the coach, who the Globe isn't naming for fear of reprisals, stayed in Tokmak.

The two kept in touch and Volkov tried to train on his own. But it was hard to find much motivation in Dnipro. The move to Newfoundland looked like a godsend. "I was so excited. I expected wrestling to be on the highest level," he recalled.

His family settled in the St. John's area where his father took up work in construction and his mother got a job at a store.

Volkov quickly discovered that wrestling was a niche sport in Canada and that coaching was hard to find in St. John's. He almost gave up and took a job roofing houses.

In the fall of 2023 he met the owners of Rock Athletics – Nikki and Robbie Wiseman – who offered him a place to train. He dropped the roofing job, got back in touch with his coach in Ukraine and developed a gruelling training regime. Soon his talent re-emerged.

■ WRESTLER, B18