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NEWS

O's strengthen roster with Amaral, reliever add depth, right arm

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Needing a more flexible bench and additional right-handed relief, the Orioles agreed to terms yesterday with utility player Rich Amaral on a two-year contract and pitcher Ricky Bones on a one-year deal.

Amaral, who signed for \$1 million, had spent his entire eight-year career with the Seattle Mariners. He appeared in only 73 games last season because of injuries, his fewest since 1992, and batted .276 with one homer, four RBIs and 11 steals in 12 attempts. Most attractive to the Orioles, he played first, second and third base, and all three outfield positions.

"He's an ideal guy for us," said general manager Frank Wren. "He's also pretty good offensively. He's not limited to being a speed-defensive type player."

Amaral, a career .278 hitter, began the season on the disabled list with a strained back muscle. He made a return trip Sept. 8 with a pulled left calf muscle and didn't play the rest of the year. The Mariners and St. Louis Cardinals were interested in signing him but wouldn't offer a second year.

"It's always great to be on a team that has a chance to win, and when you look on paper, Baltimore has a very good chance of being one of the best teams in baseball. That's exciting for a player," said Amaral, who will be 37 on Opening Day.

"I've always loved playing in Baltimore. I love Camden Yards, the atmosphere there, and the city has always been a fun place to go.

When I thought about my choices, there aren't too many better places than that."

Amaral provides insurance in case center fielder Brady Anderson goes down with another injury, and he can serve as a late-inning defensive replacement at a variety of positions. With a 76 percent success rate in stolen bases (97-for-128), he's also an ideal pinch runner for manager Ray Miller.

"Whatever Ray wants me to do, I'll do. That's kind of what I've been doing the last six years. I just try to stay ready. It doesn't matter to me," Amaral said.

Bones, 29, was signed as a minor-league free agent by the Kansas City Royals on May 25 and appeared in 32 games, going 2-2 with one save and a 3.04 ERA. A former starter, he will be playing for his sixth team since breaking into the majors with the San Diego Padres in 1991. He'll also be reunited with pitching coach Bruce Kison, who previously held the same job with the Royals.

"Mainly we see him as a middle man with the ability to swing and be a spot starter. If he does something different than that, great," Wren said.

Orioles scouts have been watching Bones pitch in Puerto Rico. "Deacon Jones said he was throwing very well," Wren said.

To make room on the roster for Amaral and Bones, the Orioles didn't tender contracts to outfielder Willie Greene, infielder Jesse Garcia and left-handed closer Carlos Medina. Garcia, one of the organization's top middle-infield prospects, and Medina were re-signed to Triple-A contracts and invited to spring training. The club had no interest in retaining Greene, whom they were unable to trade during the winter meetings.

NOTE: The Orioles completed their minor-league coaching staff by naming Duffy Dyer as manager of rookie-league Bluefield. Dyer, a former major-league catcher, had been Oakland's third base coach in 1996 and its bench coach the past two seasons. Before that, he was Milwaukee's third base coach for seven years under Phil Garner and former manager Tom Trebelhorn, who recently was hired as the Orioles' farm director. Dyer replaces Andy Etchebarren, who was named manager at Single-A Frederick.

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