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Angels make Erstad first pick

NEW YORK (AP) — California looked to the future and took outfielder Darin Erstad with the first pick in Thursday's baseball draft. Oakland has more immediate plans for pitcher Ariel Prieto, a Cuban defector it selected.

Erstad, the punter for national champion Nebraska, may not make it to the majors for several years.

"There is no timetable," said Bob Fontaine, the Angels' assistant vice president of scouting and player personnel. "Everybody's on their own timetable. And the day that he's ready to play in the major leagues is when he's ready to play in the major leagues."

"When you give him that timetable, you just put an artificial deadline on him. Sometimes, that extra pressure is not fair to either the team or the kid. So, we won't put a timetable on him."

Erstad, a 20-year-old outfielder, hit .410 in 57 games for the Cornhuskers this year with 20 doubles, 19 homers, 76 RBIs and 11 steals.

"This is a great opportunity," Erstad said. "The last couple of days, I had a good feeling about it. It's a great feeling to get that call. I'm really excited about getting started."

Erstad, drafted by the New York Mets three years ago after he finished high school, has two years of football eligibility remaining, but probably won't kick again.

California had been expected to choose him and probably will have to pay a signing bonus of more than \$1.55 million, the amount it cost the New York Mets to sign last year's top pick, pitcher Paul Wilson.

"Whether I'm the first pick or

the 20th pick, I'm not going to change my approach to the game," he said.

Prieto, who defected to the United States, was ruled eligible for the amateur draft by the commissioner's office even though he's pitching for Palm Springs in the independent Western League. While previous Cuban defectors were free agents, baseball officials decided to make them draft-eligible starting this year, even though they're professionals.

Prieto's age is believed to be from 25 to 28, and many scouts say he could be in the majors this season. He is 2-0 with 0.00 ERA at Palm Springs in two starts covering 10 1-3 innings. He has allowed three hits, struck out 16 and walked one.

Thirteen players in the first round were taken from colleges and 14 from high schools. Thirteen were pitchers. A total of 507 players were taken through 18 rounds Thursday.

Teams will continue drafting through Saturday. The rest of the draft probably will be released June 12. The delay is to prevent college coaches from using the draft list as a recruiting tool.

San Diego used the second pick on Ben Davis, an 18-year-old catcher at Malvern Prep outside Philadelphia. He quickly signed a contract with the Padres that included a \$1.3 million signing bonus. Davis, a switch-hitter, was batting .507 with six homers and 37 RBIs in 71 at-bats.

"The No. 1 thing is his arm strength," said Davis' high school coach, Mike Rooney. "He's been clocked at 86, 87 miles per hour as a pitcher. That kind of arm strength is remarkable behind the

plate."

Davis' brother, Glenn, was drafted in 18th round by Minnesota last year and is the starting first baseman for Vanderbilt.

Jose Cruz Jr., a 21-year-old outfielder from Rice who is a son of former major leaguer Jose Cruz, went to Seattle on the third pick. Cruz hit .377 with 16 homers and 76 RBIs in 223 at-bats for the Owls.

The Chicago Cubs then took right-hander Kerry Wood from Grand Prairie High School in Texas, who is considered as advanced as some college pitchers. He's 12-0 with a 0.77 ERA and 139 strikeouts in 72 1-3 innings. He throws in the mid-90s and is scheduled to pitch Saturday in the regional finals of the Texas high school championship.

"Even though he's only 17 years old, his poise and mound presence are similar to those of an experienced college pitcher," said Al Goldis, the Cubs' director of scouting.

Florida used the sixth pick on outfielder Jaime Jones of Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego. Jones has hit .452 with 12 homers, 32 RBIs and 26 steals.

Texas then selected Florida State right-hander Jonathan Johnson, who is 11-3 with a 2.95 ERA and 125 strikeouts in 125 innings for the Seminoles. He is scheduled to pitch Friday against Oklahoma in the College World Series opener, and said he expected to make it up to the majors quickly.

"When they put this kind of money into a player, they don't expect to waste my time and their time in the minors," he said.

Wilson, a Florida State pitcher, was the top pick last year. David Yocum, another Seminoles pitcher, was chosen by Los Angeles with Thursday's 20th pick.

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