



Submitted Photo
The Astoria seventh-grade tournament team. Front row, from left, Julia Norris, Hailey O’Brien, Libby Whitsett, Liz Barnett, Dakota Morris and Tailleigh Cole. Back row: Brooklyn Hankwitz and Baylee McSwain.



Submitted Photo
Astoria fifth- and sixth-grade girls basketball team.

Astoria youth teams head to state

The Daily Astorian

The Astoria girls seventh-grade tournament basketball team qualified for and will compete in the Oregon Middle School State Basketball Championships for the second year in a row, March 7 and 8 in Redmond, Sisters and Bend.

The team qualified by taking second in the St. Helens Volcano Classic tournament in January.

Astoria took part in seven

tournaments over the last two months. The team took second at a Seaside seventh-grade PBL tournament; finished third in a seventh-eighth-grade combined PBL tournament that included wins against Seaside and Warrenton eighth-grade teams; and took the third-place trophy at a Clatskanie eighth-grade tournament with a win against the Woodland, Wash., eighth-grade team to take third.

Astoria finished the season Feb. 21 and 22 at a Seaside

PBL tournament with wins over Rainier, Roosevelt and Banks, and one loss.

The team is coached by Rob Niemi, Nathan Hankwitz and Pat O’Brien. The team is holding a car wash fundraiser from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday at Astoria Ford, 710 W. Marine Drive.

Astoria’s seventh-grade girls team also had a successful Astoria Middle School season, going 11-1. They were coached by Mark Thompson.

More on the way ...

After taking second and third in the Seaside tournaments in late January, the Astoria fifth- and sixth-grade girls basketball team swept the last two weekend tournaments in Clatskanie, finishing in first place at both events.

The team also qualified for the upcoming state tournament in Central Oregon, March 7 and 8.

The girls are coached by Emily Schuerger and Stacey Matthews.

SCOREBOARD

PREP SCHEDULE	
TODAY	
Boys Basketball — Crook County at Seaside, 7 p.m.; Union at Knappa, 6 p.m.	
Wrestling — OSAA State Tournament, Portland Memorial Coliseum, all day.	
SATURDAY	
Girls Basketball — Wahkiakum at Ilwaco, 2 p.m., at WF West HS, Chehalis	
Wrestling — OSAA State Tournament, Portland Memorial Coliseum, all day.	



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson
Seattle Mariners' Nelson Cruz waves as he walks onto a stage to help show off the team's new alternate Sunday uniforms during an unveiling Jan. 23 in Seattle.

Cruz steps into power hitting role with Mariners

By JOSE M. ROMERO
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. (AP) — Few Mariners were happier to see Nelson Cruz in Seattle’s clubhouse than Felix Hernandez.

The Mariners’ ace knows how difficult an out Cruz can be. Not only has Cruz broken up a Hernandez no-hit bid, the slugger is tied with the Yankees’ Mark Teixeira for most home runs against the 2010 Cy Young Award winner with five.

“He reminded me of those things,” Cruz said Wednesday. “It’s fun. Anytime you compete with one of the best pitchers in the game, you want to be your best. That’s what I did every time I faced him.”

And the Mariners paid a hefty sum for the best home run hitter in baseball last season, signing Cruz to a four-year, \$57 million free-agent contract in December.

“I want to be part of a winning team, and this is the best choice I could make,” Cruz said.

There isn’t much question that Cruz can provide the punch at DH that the Mariners missed in 2014, when Kendrys Morales and Corey Hart each barely hit above .200 and combined for only 13 homers and 45 RBIs.

Cruz, coming off a 2013 season in which he was given a 50-game drug suspension his involvement in the Biogenesis scandal, had an All-Star season for the Orioles. He hit .271 with 40 homers and 108 RBIs.

The 34-year-old designated hitter’s career numbers at pitcher-friendly Safeco aren’t



AP Photo/Charlie Riedel
Seattle Mariners' Nelson Cruz bats during spring training baseball practice Thursday in Peoria, Ariz.

smashing — nine home runs, 19 runs batted in, .234 average in 52 games — but the Mariners aren’t worried.

“This guy’s a good hitter. He hits home runs but he’s also a good hitter,” manager Lloyd McClendon said. “He has the ability drive in runs. I suspect that he’s going to be just fine.”

Cruz said he ignores the talk that he will struggle to hit as many home runs in Seattle.

“I try to hit line drives. If they go out, they go out. All I can do is what I can do,” he said.

Cruz knows several of his new teammates well. In all or parts of eight seasons with the Texas Rangers, he faced the Mariners often as an AL West rival. He also represented the Dominican Republic twice in the World Baseball Classic, playing with Seattle teammates Robinson Cano and Fernando Rodney in 2009 and 2013.

“They’re the leaders,” Cruz said of Cano and Hernandez. “They’re the head of the team, and I don’t know

anyone better to follow than those two guys.”

Notes: The Mariners held their first full-squad workout Wednesday, with position players taking batting practice. ... LHP Danny Hultzen pitched his second bullpen session of the spring in his return from surgery on his throwing shoulder that caused him to miss the entire 2014 season. ... McClendon said one messages he wanted to share with entire team before the workout is that even though expectations are very high he doesn’t want them to get caught up in that. “We’ve got to get prepared and get ready for the grind of a 162-game schedule, and it starts (Wednesday). It doesn’t start in April,” he said. ... Newly-acquired Rickie Weeks will play mainly left field in camp, McClendon said. Weeks had been a second baseman with Milwaukee, his former team. Another newcomer, OF Justin Ruggiano, will get a look in center field to spell regular CF Austin Jackson on occasion.

Elias hopes to prove himself

PEORIA, Ariz. (AP) — Roenis Elias began spring training last February as a pitcher who had never started a game above Double-A. He wound up earning a spot with the Seattle Mariners as a surprise fifth starter and went on to win double-digit games.

A lot has changed this time around, right?

Well, not quite.

“There’s not a lot of difference between this year and last year,” the 26-year-old lefty said Sunday through a trans-

lator. “Last year I didn’t come in with a spot. This year you could say the same thing.”

With four rotation spots seemingly spoken for, Elias finds himself locked in a battle for Seattle’s last starting slot.

“You still have to work hard and keep improving,” said Elias, who was 10-12 with a 3.85 ERA in 29 starts. “Even if I say I’m ready for that spot, if I don’t prove it they’re not going to take me with them.”

Stars Felix Hernandez and Hisashi Iwakuma will take two

slots. Third-year pro James Paxton enjoyed a breakout 2014 — in 13 starts he had a 3.04 ERA. Manager Lloyd McClendon said the team traded for J.A. Happ with every intention of the lefty being a starter.

That leaves room for just one more.

In other circumstances, Elias might have the job secured. But highly touted 22-year-old Taijuan Walker and others are looming.

“You just go out and do what you have to do,” Elias said.

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