

MLB

Cruz steps into power-hitting role with Mariners

By JOSE M. ROMERO
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — 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



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File

In this Dec. 4, 2014, file photo, Nelson Cruz poses for photos as he displays his new Seattle Mariners jersey after he was officially introduced by the team in Seattle. Cruz goes through his first workout on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2015, as the Mariners hold their first full squad workout.

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 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 Rang-

ers, 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 message 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 Rugiano, will get a look in center field to spell regular CF Austin Jackson on occasion.

Moncada arrives at Red Sox training facility

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Yoan Moncada arrived Wednesday at the spring training headquarters of the Boston Red Sox, another step toward completion of a hefty contract for the 19-year-old Cuban.

The Red Sox and Moncada’s agent reached an agreement earlier this week on a deal with a \$31.5 million signing bonus, a record for an under-23 international amateur player. Moncada had physical exams scheduled this week in both Florida and Boston, before the contract can be finalized. His representative, David Hastings, said earlier this week he hoped the deal would be finalized by Friday.

Wearing a white T-shirt, jeans and sneakers, Moncada entered the club’s spring training complex in Fort Myers just after 8 a.m. and walked straight into the offices.

Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said there’s still not a signed deal in place with Moncada.

The Red Sox will pay \$63 million to get him, due to a 100 percent tax required by Major League Baseball for exceeding their international signing bonus pool allotment.

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