

Hernandez entering critical last season of Seattle contract

By JACK MAGRUDER
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — Every day for several years, Felix Hernandez has walked past large photos of himself and Randy Johnson — the Seattle Mariners' only Cy Young Award winners — in the hallway leading to the clubhouse of their spring training complex.

King Felix will make those walks for perhaps the last time this year, with a bigger goal as motivation.

"I know this is my final year, but I don't think I am done," the 33-year-old Hernandez said on Tuesday following Seattle's first spring training workout. "I think I



AP Photo/Charlie Riedel
Seattle Mariners players walk to a practice field during spring training baseball practice on Tuesday in Peoria, Ariz.

can do a lot of good things, and it is going to be a push for my Hall of Fame career. It means a lot. Now Edgar

(Martinez) is in the Hall of Fame. We'll see."

Hernandez, who has 168 victories and a career 3.34

ERA, is trying to reverse recent trends entering the final season of a seven-year contract that calls for a \$27 million salary.

His fastball average velocity dropped to a career-low 90.4 mph last season and his ERA was a career-high 5.55 in 29 outings. He briefly was moved to the bullpen for his lone career relief appearance, a move that did not sit well.

But as spring training begins, Hernandez has a spot in the starting rotation, even if it is not as his customary No. 1.

"I don't care what happened last season," he said. "This is a new year. I came here ready to go. Let's see

what is going to happen."

Yusei Kikuchi, Mike Leake and Marco Gonzales are the top three in the Mariners rotation, and left-hander Wade LeBlanc pitched well last season. Top prospect Justus Sheffield was acquired from the Yankees in the James Paxton deal, although he is likely to start the season in the minors.

Hernandez will look to recover from a second half in which he was 0-7 with a 6.44 ERA in his last 10 appearances. His percentage of swinging strikes was at a career low, and opponents' contact on pitches in the strike zone was a career high. "He's struggled the last

few years. We'll see what it brings," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "Felix is a competitor. He is a very proud player, like many veteran players are. He wants to get back to doing his thing. We are going to let him."

With a lower velocity has come adjustments. Hernandez began the changes last season, when he threw 27.9 percent curveballs, the highest percentage of curves in his career. The rate was double than it was when he was blowing hitters away with 96-98 mph velocity.

"You have to keep adjusting until you are on the top, and certainly Felix has been on top before," Servais said.



AP Photo/Nati Harnik, File
This June 28, 2018, file photo, shows Oregon State Adley Rutschman hitting an RBI single to score Cadyn Grenier during the third inning of Game 3 against Arkansas in the NCAA College World Series baseball finals in Omaha, Neb.

Here are 10 key players to watch in college baseball

Associated Press

Ten players to watch in college baseball this season:

C Adley Rutschman, Oregon State

Rutschman is widely projected as the No. 1 overall pick in the Major League Baseball draft in June. He batted .408 over 67 games and turned in one of the best individual performances in College World Series history, setting a record with 17 hits and batting .567 with 13 RBIs while earning Most Outstanding Player for the national champion Beavers.

1B Andrew Vaughn, California

One of the best offensive seasons in program history led to Vaughn winning the Golden Spikes Award as national player of the year. His .402 batting average ranked third in Cal history, and he matched the program record and was second nationally with 23 home runs.

3B Casey Martin, Arkansas

Martin, who along with teammate Heston Kjerstad formed the best freshman combination in the SEC, batted a team-leading .345 with 14 doubles and 13 home runs. Martin upped his game in the NCAA Tournament, leading the Razorbacks with a .352 average, including .357 in the CWS. He had eight hits

in his first at-bats in Omaha.

LHP Graeme Stinson, Duke

The 6-5, 260-pound junior throws mid to upper 90s, owns the best slider at this level and is poised to be the first college pitcher taken in the draft. Stinson moves to the top spot in the rotation after working mostly as a reliever last season.

OF/DH Bryant Packard, East Carolina

It's going to be tough for the left-handed hitting junior to top last year. He led the American Athletic Conference in batting average (.406), hits (89), slugging percentage (.671) and total bases (147) and ranked among the league leaders in on-base percentage (.462), home runs (14), runs (51) and RBIs (50).

OF/IF Austin Martin, Vanderbilt

The sophomore might be the most versatile player in the country. He made 58 starts last season at six different positions. The Commodores' leadoff man batted .338 for the season and a team-best .308 in SEC games, and his 22 stolen bases were most in the conference.

RHP Andre Pallante, UC Irvine

The junior was a unanimous All-American who led the Big West with a 10-1 record in 15 starts, all but one lasting fewer than six

innings. His 1.60 ERA was best in the Big West and sixth in the country, and he struck out 115 in 101 1-3 innings.

C Shea Langeliers, Baylor

Another top draft prospect, Langeliers enters his third year starting as the best defensive catcher in the nation, having thrown out 23 of 33 base stealers and posting a .994 fielding percentage. His walk-off RBI single gave Baylor its first Big 12 Tournament championship, and he set career highs with 18 doubles, 11 home runs and 44 RBIs.

RHP Max Meyer, Minnesota

Meyer and staff ace Patrick Fredrickson will be in the spotlight again for a Gophers team that lost five everyday players. Fredrickson was 9-0 and named Big Ten pitcher of the year. However, there's more onus on Meyer to repeat what he did last year, when he set a school record with 16 saves.

LHP Zack Thompson, Kentucky

Thompson had a fantastic freshman season, but an arm injury caused him to miss his first seven starts in SEC play last year. He's fully recovered, having raised eyebrows last summer when he pitched a combined 8 2-3 shutout innings for the USA Collegiate National Team.

Bane: Following a family tradition

Continued from Page B1

when she was a junior.

And it doesn't end there — cousin Ammarae Broncheau played basketball for the American International Sports Teams, Inc. in Austria in 2014. She's currently a guard for the women's team at Blue Mountain Community College.

"As a mom, you're just super proud to see your son continuing that legacy," Rosenberg said. "Our family motto is, 'We're as strong as our roots.' It's great to celebrate that we all have this in common."

Rosenberg remembers her experience with the Worlds Sports Exchange as an eye-opening one, and is excited for her son to see the world like she did.

And when Bane received his invitation last fall, he said it was a no-brainer. He knew he had to follow in his family's footsteps.

"The main thing my family told me was, 'You need to go. There's nothing like it,'" he said.

"I'm not just representing Oregon; I'm representing Pendleton."

Bane's flight departs on Sunday, July 7, and he'll

return on Wednesday, July 17. But before he can board, he'll need to raise some funds — \$4,600 to be exact. The first \$2,000 is due on March 1.

The family has set up a donation account at the Columbia State Bank under "Down Under Donations," and another at downundersports.com/ZUK-DPO. Their deadline is Wednesday, May 1.

"Between his athletic schedules, word of mouth is the only thing we have the time for," Rosenberg said. "I'm excited for (Zaanen) to represent our city."

BRIEFLY

Free Fishing Weekend set

Planning a fishing trip on President's Day weekend? You're in luck.

On Saturday, Feb. 16 and Sunday, Feb. 17, no licenses or tags (including a combined angling tag or a Columbia River Basin endorsement) are required to fish, crab, or clam anywhere in Oregon for both residents and non-residents.

All other fishing regulations still apply, including closures, bag limits, and size restrictions. During this time of year, Oregon Fish and Wildlife recommends fishing for winter steelhead on the coast, stocked hatchery rainbow trout in the Willamette Valley and mid-coast lakes, and ice fishing in northeast and southeast Oregon.

For the latest on fishing conditions and regulations, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife's report is updated online every Thursday.

EOU Trapshooting Club to host Shamrock Shoot

The Shamrock Shoot is loading up for another round. The Eastern Oregon University Trapshooting Club-hosted event will host its second annual contest on Friday, March 15 and Saturday, March 16 at the La Grande Gun Club.

The Trapshooting Club is inviting all middle and high school students to participate in the event. They promise awards for the competition's top performers in a number of categories.

"It's a great opportunity to talk with prospective students and show them what EOU has to offer," said Club Advisor John Shorts in a statement.

Shorts anticipates over 100 competitors from at least three different states to come and take part in the event.

Practice opens on Friday, March 15 at 3 p.m., with a Buddy Shoot event to follow at 6 p.m. Campus tours for students and families will be held on that day at 1:30 p.m., 3 p.m. and Saturday at 11 a.m.

Registration is \$40 per participant before March 8. Any registrations after that date will cost \$45. Shooters may also register on the day of the event until 9 a.m. at the check-in table. Day-of registers will be assigned to the final group.

Checks are payable to the EOU Trapshooting Club. Registration and details are available at eou.edu/shamrock-shoot.

Youth Basketball Night coming to the Moda Center

Tickets for the Hermiston Youth Basketball night are now on sale.

The event, at the Moda Center in Portland, will take place during the Trail Blazers game on Saturday, March 9 at 7 p.m.

Tickets begin at \$25, and those who purchase before Friday, Feb. 15 are entered to win an autographed basketball from all of the Trail Blazers. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://fevo.me/hpr>.

All children aged 5-14 are eligible for the Blazers' Court of Dreams Clinic — an hour long-program at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 9 taught by a Blazers instructor. The program teaches basketball fundamentals and offers scrimmage time on the court. Photo opportunities are available during the lesson.

Registration can be found on the Hermiston Parks and Recreation website.

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