



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

September 6, 2010



Everett Herald

Monday, September 6, 2010

Is Mariners' Hernandez a Cy Young contender?

Pitcher states his case as M's beat Tribe 3-0

By Kirby Arnold

SEATTLE -- Next month, Felix Hernandez may become the perfect test case in the comparison of win-loss records with other statistical measures that have become popular in baseball.

Members of the Baseball Writers Association of America must cast their ballots for the American League Cy Young Award by the end of the season, and Hernandez's chances of being recognized as the league's best pitcher may depend upon how seriously they look at numbers beyond his record.

On Sunday, the Seattle Mariners' star right-hander posted another line of zeroes with eight shutout innings against the Cleveland Indians, plus something else -- a victory that gave him a winning record for the first time in more than seven weeks.

The Mariners beat the Indians 3-0 at Safeco Field, pushing Hernandez's record to 11-10 and lowering his earned run average to 2.30.

Among the pitchers considered favorites for the AL Cy Young _ C.C. Sabathia of the Yankees, David Price of the Rays, Clay Buchholz of the Red Sox and Trevor Cahill of the A's -- Hernandez's individual body of work has been impressive on a team that hasn't.

His 219 1/3 innings and 209 strikeouts are well above the others and only Buchholz's 2.25 ERA is lower. Cahill has a .210 opponents batting average to Hernandez's .219, along with a 1.07 WHIP (the average of walks and hits per inning) to Hernandez's 1.09.

"Does he have the wins? No," Mariners designated hitter Russell Branyan said. "But he's got everything else."

Run support has hurt Hernandez.

The Mariners scored a total of 10 runs during the time he was on the mound in his 10 losses this season. He entered Sunday with a 3.32 run support average, second-lowest in the league behind the 3.26 by the Orioles for Kevin Millwood.

The Mariners nearly reached their run support average for Hernandez on Sunday, scoring in the second inning on Michael Saunders' RBI fielder's-choice grounder with Casey Kotchman on third base, then on Branyan's big bat late in the game.

Branyan homered leading off the bottom of the sixth inning, his 23rd home run this season, and hit an RBI double in the eighth.

"More times than not, one or two runs does the trick for him," Branyan said. "It was important today to give him some breathing room when we got that second run."

Over his past six starts, Hernandez is 4-1 with a 0.20 ERA, and Sunday was the 13th of his 30 starts when he has pitched at least eight innings.

"After we scored the first one, I said, 'Pitch your game. Pitch your game,'" Hernandez said.

He did, including jams in the seventh and eighth when he cranked up his intensity. The Indians had runners on first and second with nobody out in the seventh before Hernandez got Matt LaPorta and Luis Valbuena to fly out and he struck out Chris Gimenez on a tailing, sinking two-seam fastball.

"Everything was working," Hernandez said. "I was working both sides of the plate. My fastball was pretty good and my other pitches were good, too."

By the time Hernandez got through a two-on, one-out jam in the eighth by getting Travis Hafner to line into a double play, he'd thrown 111 pitches and was finished.

David Aardsma pitched the ninth, retiring all three hitters he faced to record his 28th save and preserve the victory that pushed Hernandez's record above .500. The last time he had a winning record as July 16, when he was 7-6.

"We got shut out by Felix Hernandez. It wasn't Joe Blow off the streets," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "This guy can shut out the '27 Yankees."

M's Powell ready to pay up old debt

By Kirby Arnold

Before the Seattle Mariners end a disappointing season they hope never to repeat, there's an old dinner bet from across the Pacific that must be paid off.

Fourteen years ago, Ichiro Suzuki finished the 1996 season with the Orix Blue Wave with a .356 batting average, best in Japan's Pacific League.

Alonzo Powell, the former major leaguer who'd found his stroke and fame by winning three Central League batting titles playing for the Chunichi Dragons, batted .340 in '96.

Both had won batting titles the previous two seasons, and during spring training in 1996 they agreed on a wager for that season. The one who finished with a higher average owed dinner to the other.

"He got me," Powell said. "I thought I should have beat him but I blew it at the end of the year. I went cold. I went 0-for-22 to end the season."

Problem was, Powell never bought that dinner.

Nearly four months ago, Suzuki finally got a chance to remind him.

Powell, who'd been a hitting coach in the Mariners' minor league system since 2007, became their major league hitting coach on May 9 when the team fired Alan Cockrell.

"He remembered," Powell said. "And he also did not let me forget that while we both won three (batting titles), he went on to win seven in a row."

It has been an interesting reunion for Suzuki and Powell, two players who didn't know each other well but gained respect for each other in the mid-1990s in Japan.

Powell had spent time in the San Francisco, Montreal, Minnesota and Seattle systems with little major league playing time when he signed to play for Chunichi in 1992.

Elated with the opportunity for regular playing time that he didn't get in the U.S., Powell wasn't an instant success. He struggled with injuries his first few seasons and, at one point, the Dragons tried to send him to their minor league club.

"But fortunately for me, I had a clause in my contract that I could only go to the minor leagues if I agreed to it," Powell said. "I held a stance that I didn't want to go. The manager put me on the bench for a while and I would pinch run or play defense late in the game."

"But it just so happened that he got upset at one of our other guys one day, and he put me in a game that I never should have got in. I got a chance to hit in the seventh or eighth inning and I hit a home run."

Powell played the next day and went 3-for-4 with a home run, and he remained in the lineup.

"I think I went four days in a row hitting a home run and getting two or three hits," he said. "I ended up player of the month in the Central League. From that day forward, I basically established myself as a person who could play there every day. But it was not as easy as everybody would think it was."

Early, there were the language and cultural differences.

He spent considerable time in his apartment, especially the first year, watching TV and eager to watch highlights from major league games in the U.S.

"I'd wait a whole hour to see major league highlights, and they'd say, 'And now, we send you to India and cricket.'" Powell said. "It was a little tough at first, but as I got a little more comfortable I started to venture out. I found a nice bar-type restaurant in downtown Nagoya where they brought in guys and ladies from the U.S. to sing Motown music."

Powell remains indebted to "Toyo," the Dragons' interpreter eased his transition from the U.S.

"If there was a special place I wanted to go, my interpreter would write me out a note, 'Please take me to the stadium,'" Powell said. "I would hand it to the taxi driver and they would take me right there."

As he became more comfortable with his surroundings, he did the same with Japanese pitchers, who relied more on offspeed and breaking pitches than the power-oriented pitchers in the U.S.

"The fortunate thing for me was I'd had some success in the minor leagues and in the PCL, and once the guys establish you as a better hitter you see a lot of breaking balls and changeups," Powell said. "So I was used to it, but not to the extent of Japan, where everybody had a great breaking pitch. The good thing for me was I was a pretty good breaking-ball hitter. In a lot of ways, that contributed to a lot of my success there."

He batted .324 and won the Central League batting title in 1994, and followed it with averages of .355 in 1995 and .340 in 1996, repeating the titles in those years.

Known throughout his career as "Zo," Powell said one of his American teammates with the Dragons, pitcher Scott Anderson, used that nickname one day and several of the Japanese players snickered.

"Come to find out, in Japanese 'Zo' means 'elephant,'" Powell said.

His nickname became "Zo-san" or "Mr. Elephant," and he enjoyed it.

"When I won the batting title the first time, the tradition is to give your teammates a present," he said. "So I had some t-shirts made up of an elephant with my number, No. 30, swinging a bat."

Early in his Japanese career, Powell learned from another American player, Greg "Boomer" Wells, about a young player with Orix who was establishing himself as a hitter.

"We were playing Orix in spring training and Boomer was working with them," Powell said. "He called me to the side and said, 'You've got to watch this kid right here. This kid is going to be really, really good.'"

"We played them that day and he got a couple of hits, and from that day I kept my eye on him. As the season went on, he was on fire, and that year he ended up breaking the Japanese hits record."

The kid, Ichiro Suzuki, finished with 210 hits in a 130-game season, a Japanese record that has remained.

"We both won the batting title in each league that year, and the next spring training my interpreter talked to Ichi and he said, 'Let's do it again.' Nobody had repeated in a while," Powell said. "I said, 'OK, let's go out and do it.' We both played well and we both won."

They both led their leagues again in 1996, although Suzuki won the individual competition with Powell because his average was 16 points higher. Which, of course, earned him a dinner from their preseason bet.

Proudly, Powell plans to pay up sometime in the next month.

"To say I was able to come here and work with Ichiro, it's an honor for me," he said. "Playing in Japan was fun. I had opportunities to come back but I chose to stay. It was an outstanding chapter of my career."

It's playoff week for Everett AquaSox, Tacoma Rainiers

Posted by Kirby Arnold

So you gave up on the idea of playoff baseball around here back in June?

Forget the Mariners for a while. This could be a baseball nerd's dream week, with up to five postseason games possible in Everett involving the AquaSox and at Safeco Field involving the Tacoma Rainiers.

Tonight, the Rainiers beat Fresno 9-0 and clinched the Pacific Coast League's Pacific North Division championship.

It sends them into the PCL's Western Conference playoffs, a best-of-five series that begins with games Wednesday and Thursday at Sacramento. With renovation work having begun at Cheney Stadium in Tacoma, the Rainiers' home games will be played at Safeco Field, with Game 3 scheduled for 7 p.m. Friday followed (if necessary) by Game 4 at noon Saturday and Game 5 at 7 p.m. Sunday.

[Click here](#) for ticket information on the Safeco Field games.

The AquaSox will begin their best-of-three Northwest League Western Division series at 1:05 p.m. Monday at Vancouver before the series shifts to Everett Memorial Stadium. The AquaSox home games will be at 7:05 p.m. Tuesday and (if necessary) 7:05 p.m. Wednesday.

Mariners notes: Ups downs of a Triple-A manager

By Kirby Arnold

SEATTLE -- Daren Brown has his hands fairly full managing the Mariners the rest of this season, but he has paid close attention as his former team, the Class AAA Tacoma Rainiers, closed on a division championship in the Pacific Coast League.

Brown managed the Rainiers for 116 games and into first place in the Pacific North Division before the Mariners named him their interim manager Aug. 9 after firing Don Wakamatsu.

From afar, he watched a onetime sizable division lead come down to the final weekend. Tacoma defeated Fresno 9-0 on Sunday night to win the Pacific North Division title.

The yo-yo effect in the standings happens a lot at the Triple-A level, where rosters change often because players are called up to -- and sent down from -- the big leagues. The Mariners' roster includes 13 players who've been with the Rainiers at some point this season.

"We had an eight- or nine-game lead at some point in July," Brown said. "But with the roster turnover and the way things go there, it's going to change. It always does. Fresno is another club down there that had a 12-game lead at one point and Sacramento just clinched that division yesterday.

"Things change. You build a big lead when you're good and at some point, two or three guys are taken and it's going to change. We had a nine-game lead when we had (Chris) Seddon and (Luke) French down there winning 10 and 11 games in our rotation. You take those guys out, some other guys have to step in and sometimes it takes a little bit of time. In the end it usually all equals out."

Ichiro closes on 200

With two hits Sunday, Ichiro Suzuki needs 22 in the final 25 games to reach 200 for the 10th straight season. It would extend his own major league record for consecutive 200-hit season, and also tie him with Pete Rose with 10 seasons in a career with 200 hits and break Ty Cobb's American League record for 200-hit seasons in a career.

He singled to left field in the first inning, then got a gift infield hit in the fifth.

On that one, Suzuki grounded a ball up the middle with Josh Wilson on first base. Indians shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera caught the ball and swiped his right foot across the bag before Wilson reached it.

However, second-base umpire Hunter Wendelstedt said Cabrera didn't get the bag with his foot and everyone was safe, including Suzuki with his 178th hit this season.

Cabrera argued fairly loudly before Indians manager Manny Acta took up his cause and, eventually, was ejected from the game.

Of note

Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez didn't start for the second straight game because of an upset stomach, although Brown said he was feeling better Sunday and should be able to start today at Oakland. Michael Saunders started his second straight game in center field. ... Brown was trying to connect the dots after he heard that Tacoma catcher Eliezer Alfonzo, a "purposeful" runner at 5 feet 11 inches and 220 pounds, had hit a triple in the Tacoma Rainiers' game Saturday night at Fresno. "I'm trying to picture the Fresno ballpark to figure out how he did that," Brown said. Added Mariners pitcher, and former Rainier, Luke French: "The left fielder must have fallen down." ... Brown said pitching prospect Michael Pineda probably would remain with the Rainiers in order to experience the atmosphere of a division race and the playoffs. Pineda has been shut down for the season after reaching the innings limit the organization had set for him. ... The Oct. 2 home game against the A's will start at 7:10 p.m. The starting time had been listed as TBA on printed schedules. ... Shortstop Carlos Triunfel was placed on the disabled list because of a sprained finger on his right hand and will miss the Class AA West Tennessee DiamondJaxx' first-round series in the Southern League playoffs. Shortstop Nick Franklin was promoted to West Tennessee from Class A Clinton.

Do AquaSox have enough left?

As they enter the playoffs, Everett may not be the same team it was in the first half but the Frogs are as confident as ever

By Nick Patterson

The Everett AquaSox just completed a dominating Northwest League season. They finished with easily the best record in the league, and they set a new record for wins since the team affiliated with the Seattle Mariners 16 years ago. The Sox should be the heavy favorites to give Everett just its second championship trophy since joining the league in 1984.

But there's one question hanging over the heads of the Sox. Is there enough of the team left to turn that championship dream into a reality?

Everett begins its quest for its first title since 1985 when the Sox face the Vancouver Canadians today in the first game of their best-of-three divisional playoff series.

But the Sox are not the same team that ripped through the first half of the season. A bevy of player promotions mean that in some ways Everett is a shell of what it was during its peak.

"It's part of the business, guys get shipped through," Sox outfielder Kevin Rivers said. "The guys we have now, that's our team. We're going to roll through with them. We're going to keep playing hard and hopefully we'll come through with a big series win."

Everett was lights out during the first half. The Sox compiled a 27-11 record, finishing a whopping 10 games ahead of Vancouver and Salem-Keizer in the West Division race. Everett clinched the first-half title, and thus a playoff berth, with more than a week remaining in the first-half schedule.

But the Sox may have been a victim of their own success. Shortly after the first half ended a steady stream of players matriculated from Everett to Clinton of the mid single-A Midwest League, which is one step above the Northwest League.

And the Sox were not able to maintain their pace during the second half. Everett still had a solid second half, but the Sox finished behind Vancouver in the division.

So it can be argued that the Canadians hold the momentum. Yet Sox manager Jose Moreno is undeterred.

"We've been playing a solid season all year round," Moreno said. "The players are getting excited about playing Vancouver. It's a short series that could go either way, but we're ready. We're focused and we just have to make sure we don't try to do too much, just play the game and have fun."

Nowhere was Everett's player drain felt more strongly than with the pitching staff. A total of eight pitchers who played key roles on Everett's staff have moved on. That included solid starters Tom Wilhelmsen and Yoervis Medina, as well as bullpen dominators Forrest Snow and Stephen Pryor.

And the hits kept coming right up to the end of the season. Converted infielder Ogui Diaz was just beginning to excel after altering his delivery to throw sidearm. So naturally he was called up to Clinton last week, after being expected to play an important role in Everett's bullpen during the playoffs.

The Sox have seen those pitcher numbers replenished, either by players demoted from higher levels or promoted from rookie ball. However, none of the newcomers have performed as well as the pitchers they replaced.

"We lost a bunch of guys who helped us out a lot, but at the same time we've got guys in who helped us out since they left," said Sox starter Chris Sorce, who's scheduled to start the if-necessary Game 3. "I've been here the whole year and my start I'm going to pitch my butt off, put the game on my shoulders."

The good news for Everett is that the offense remains largely intact. The only position players who were promoted were third baseman Mickey Wiswall and outfielder Ryan Royster. Neither player began the season with the team, and the Sox had sufficient depth to deal with both their departures.

And the big bats are still here. The power-hitting pair of Rivers and third baseman Kevin Mailloux gives Everett a potent middle of the lineup. Second baseman Terry Serrano and outfielder Robbie Anston are pesky hitters who are quality table setters at the top of the lineup.

All of which is crucial for Everett as, given the lack of proven depth on the pitching staff, the offense is going to have to carry the Sox.

"One through nine, even the guys on the bench, they always come up with good approaches," Rivers said. "We're coming up with hits in the right situations. Even if the lineup is shuffled up we're not losing any power.

"We've just got to keep playing with what we have," Rivers concluded. "You can't control who leaves, who stays, you just have to play hard."

Frogs triple their pleasure

Everett turns triple play in 4-0 win Sunday

VANCOUVER, B.C. -- The preliminaries are over. Now it's time to get down to business.

In the final game of the regular season, the Everett AquaSox turned a triple play as they defeated the Vancouver Canadians 4-0 on Sunday afternoon in a Northwest League game in front of 3,984 fans at Nat Bailey Stadium.

Today the two teams, the winners of the NWL's split-season West Division titles, begin the best-of-three first-round playoff series. Game 1 begins at 1:05 p.m. at Nat Bailey Stadium. Game 2 and Game 3 (if necessary) are Tuesday and Wednesday at Everett Memorial Stadium.

The winner of the series advances to the NWL championships against the East Division winner. The best-of-three title round begins Friday.

On Sunday, the AquaSox defeated the Canadians for the second straight game and the fourth time in the last six games. Everett's John Housey (five innings) and Chris Kessinger (four innings) combined to blank the Canadians on nine hits.

Fred Bello's RBI triple gave Everett a 1-0 lead in the third inning.

In the fifth inning, the AquaSox's Anthony Phillips and Robbie Anston hit back-to-back singles and Phillips scored on a sacrifice fly by Kevin Mailloux.

Everett's Dwight Britton hit a two-run single in sixth inning to increase Everett's lead to 4-0.

In the bottom of the eighth inning the AquaSox turned a triple play. Vancouver had runners on first and second when the Canadians' Douglas Landaeta hit a ground ball to Everett third baseman Mailloux, who stepped on the bag for the force out. Mailloux threw the ball to second baseman Bello for the force out at second and Bello relayed the ball to first baseman Evan Sharpley to retire Landaeta.

AquaSox playoff breakdown

Here's a breakdown of the first-round best-of-three divisional playoff series between the Everett Aquasox, an affiliate of the Seattle Mariners, and Vancouver Canadians, an affiliate of the Oakland Athletics.

By Nick Patterson

Hitting

Everett and Vancouver have similar offenses. Neither team hits for a high average, but both teams have a patient approach at the plate.

The difference comes in the power department. Going into Sunday's game the Sox had pounded out 70 more extra-base hits than the Canadians, including almost twice as many homers. Some of that can be attributed to the home parks, as Everett Memorial Stadium is a good hitter's park and Nat Bailey Stadium is not.

Both teams have a potent slugging duo, with Everett's Kevin Rivers (right) and Kevin Mailloux matched by Vancouver's A.J. Kirby-Jones and first-round draft pick Michael Choice. But after that Vancouver doesn't have any other deep threats, while the Sox have several others who can clear the fences. Everett also has a better table-setting pair at the top of the lineup as Robbie Anston and Terry Serrano are constantly on base.

Advantage: Everett

Pitching

Everett and Vancouver put up similar numbers pitching-wise. The Canadians had a slightly better ERA, but that again may be due to park effects. Everett's pitchers were slightly better at preventing hits, Vancouver's pitchers were slightly better at preventing walks.

Everett lost a number of key pitchers during the season to promotion. However, the Sox still have a dependable trio to start during the playoffs in left-handers Edlando Seco and Anthony Fernandez and righty Chris Sorce. All three finished in the top 12 in the league in both ERA and innings pitched. Vancouver counters with right-handers Matthew Thomson and Nathan Long in Games 1 and 2, with the potential Game 3 starter to be determined. Both had quality seasons.

Vancouver's bullpen has been lights out, with the likes of Daniel Tenholder, Jacob Brown and Zachary Thornton setting up league saves leader A.J. Griffin. Everett's bullpen is thin because of promotions, with only Willy Kesler remaining who's proven himself over the course of the season. Tyler Burgoon and Eric Valdez have come on late, while Austin Hudson will be available after spending the past month starting.

Advantage: even

Defense

Everett's been a solid defensive team all seasonlong, being charged with just 82 errors going into Sunday's game. It all starts at shortstop for the Sox as Anthony Phillips is as good as it gets defensively at this level. He made just five miscues in 53 games going into Sunday. The Sox also have a solid defensive presence behind the plate in Steven Baron.

Vancouver has been far more error prone, particularly shortstop Wade Kirkland (24 errors) and third baseman Tony Thompson (20 errors). The Canadians infielders haven't received much help from their first basemen, who in games against Everett have had difficulty digging throws out of the dirt.

Advantage: Everett

Overview

Vancouver has the momentum, having won the West Division's second half. The Sox also have the disadvantage of having lost so much of their pitching staff to promotion.

However, a three-game playoff series allows the Sox to shorten their rotation and bullpen, compensating for the lack of pitching depth. And Everett has the home-field advantage, meaning a decisive Game 3 would be played in a stadium where the Sox were 30-8 this season.

Monday, September 6, 2010

Felix flabbergasts another foe –and gets rare victory

DON RUIZ; Staff writer

The Seattle Mariners scored early, if not particularly often, Sunday afternoon.

But their three runs proved to be more than enough because Felix Hernandez was on the mound, and he was close to his best.

His stuff was good enough to shut down the Cleveland Indians for eight innings before closer David Aardsma finished the 3-0 victory in front of a crowd of 22,621 at sunny Safeco Field.

“He was outstanding again,” manager Daren Brown said of his pitching ace. “Eight innings. He had a couple of innings he got into a little bit of trouble, but as I’ve said before, he seems to turn it up a notch when he’s got runners on base. Outstanding job tonight.”

The trouble didn’t amount to much.

In the sixth, Cleveland’s Michael Brantley reached third base, and was stranded there when Hernandez struck out cleanup hitter Travis Hafner for the third time.

In the seventh, Cleveland got two men on before Hernandez struck out Chris Gimenez to end the inning.

In the eighth, two men were on again when Hernandez got Hafner to hit into a double play with his 111th pitch.

“No outs, one out, two outs; doesn’t matter to him,” catcher Adam Moore said. “Nobody is going to score on him. Tonight, when a couple guys got on, you could just see it in his eyes: no chance. Nobody is going to score on him. He didn’t change his game.”

Then Hernandez took a seat and watched Aardsma wrap up things with a 1-2-3 ninth.

“I want to finish again,” Hernandez said. “But now they don’t want to let me. Aardsma is our closer, and he did a good job.”

Aardsma’s no-suspense ninth earned his 12th save in his past 16 appearances and dropped his ERA to 0.95 over that span, dating to July 11.

Meanwhile, the eight shutout innings dropped Hernandez’s ERA to 2.30, and the victory raised his record above .500 at 11-10. He allowed four hits, walked one and struck out nine.

“Felix was just way too much for us,” said Cleveland manager Manny Acta, who was ejected in the fifth inning while disputing a call at second base. “We are not a very good matchup with him. We are second in the league in strikeouts, and he is on top of the league in strikeouts.

“He was tough, typical Felix.”

Hernandez was asked what pitches were working.

“Everything,” he said. “(I got) ahead of hitters, used my whole pitches. ... I was working on both sides of the plate. My fastball was pretty good. My other pitches were good, too.”

Of course, Hernandez has pitched well this season without always emerging with a win.

And while his teammates didn’t bestow acres of breathing room Sunday – it was the Mariners’ 10th straight game scoring three runs or fewer — they did hand him a lead in the second inning.

Casey Kotchman led off with a single before moving station-to-station around the bases, scoring on Michael Saunders’ infield grounder. None of it seemed likely to make a SportsCenter highlight reel, but Hernandez was appreciative.

"Oh yeah, pretty good," he said. "After we scored the first one, I say, 'Pitch your game. Pitch your game.'"

Insurance runs came in the sixth on Russell Branyan's 23rd home run of the season and in the eighth, when Chone Figgins reached on an error and scored on a Branyan double to the bottom of the left-center field wall.

"Branyan had a couple of big hits for us," Brown said. "The key thing tonight was scoring early and then being able to tack on a couple of runs late. ... I thought we swung the bats. As a whole, I thought we've swung the bats pretty well the past couple of days. They got a couple of big hits."

Farm success may yield benefits

DON RUIZ; Staff writer

SEATTLE – Farm system success gets the attention of any Seattle Mariners manager, but the Tacoma Rainiers' divisional championship is more personal for manager Daren Brown.

The Rainiers clinched the title with a 9-0 win over Fresno on Sunday.

"It's a little different situation when you've been down there with those guys for 100 games of the season," said Brown, who was promoted from Tacoma to Seattle on Aug. 9 to replace Don Wakamatsu. "We had an eight- or nine-game lead at some point in July. But the roster turnover and the way things go there, it's going to change. It always does. ..."

"We had a nine-game lead when we had (Chris) Seddon and (Luke) French down there winning 10 and 11 games in your rotation. You take those guys out, some other guys have to step in, and sometimes it takes a little bit of time. In the end, it usually all equals out, and (I'm happy they won)."

Elsewhere in the organization, Clinton clinched Sunday in the Midwest League, West Tennessee has clinched a Southern League playoff spot, High Desert has clinched in the California League, and Everett won the Northwest League first half.

The Mariners think their prospects are learning valuable lessons amid all of that success.

The big club called pitcher Ryan Rowland-Smith back to Seattle after his Thursday start with the Rainiers, but Brown said that was a rehab assignment and therefore a special case. For the most part, the organization hopes to let the current rosters play through their league playoffs.

Brown said part of that is for those clubs, but also because pressure games are an important part of player development.

"I think you've got to learn how to win," he said. "You've got a couple of guys down in Tacoma hitting 30 home runs, we've got (Matt) Mangini hitting over .300.

"The numbers are good. But the fact that they've got a chance to celebrate means they did some things to win ballgames and ultimately beat the other three clubs in their division. That's what it's about."

SHORT HOPS

Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez was feeling ill for the second straight day and was kept out of the lineup Sunday. Gutierrez said he felt better than he did the day before and hopes to be available today when the Mariners begin a three-game series at Oakland. ... The win over Cleveland marked the Mariners' 10th shutout of the season. ... With Russell Branyan's home run in the sixth inning, he has reached base in all seven games he has played against Cleveland this season. ... Casey Kotchman's single in the second extended his hitting streak to a season-high six games. ... David Aardsma's scoreless ninth dropped his ERA to 0.95 since July 11, and gave him his 12th save in 16 appearances over that period.

ON TAP

The Mariners begin their penultimate trip of the season, which will take them to Oakland and Anaheim, Calif. Today's first pitch is scheduled for 1:07 p.m. in Oakland. Seattle's Jason Vargas (9-8, 3.55 ERA) will oppose Oakland left-hander Brett Anderson (3-6, 3.17).

Rainiers wrap up second straight division title

DELTON LOWERY; Contributing writer

FRESNO, Calif. – Tacoma got an ideal start to Sunday night's game and kept it going all the way to another ideal ending: The Rainiers are the Pacific Coast League's Pacific North Division champions for a second consecutive season.

"It feels great. Good bunch of guys out there," Rainiers interim manager Jose Castro said after the 9-0 victory at Chukchansi Park. "We were battling with Salt Lake (for the division title), and they gave us a run for it."

Salt Lake managed to stay in the playoff hunt a few hours longer after topping Reno, 6-3, in an afternoon game that ended prior to Tacoma's game, but Yusmeiro Petit made that irrelevant by pitching the Rainiers (74-68) to the division-clinching victory.

"Petit did a great job today," Castro said. "He kept us in the game, and we managed to put up some runs."

In the big game, having played parts of four seasons in the major leagues with the Florida Marlins and then Arizona Diamondbacks helped the 6-foot-1 right-hander from Venezuela.

"It did a lot," Petit said in Spanish. "It helped me control the situation, and therefore I could attack the hitters. That's a good combination, having that command and being able to control the situation."

Seven scoreless innings of four-hit ball with eight strikeouts and no walks from Petit (4-2) were more than enough for a Rainiers offense that got off to a hot start at the plate.

Tacoma jumped to a 4-0 lead on Greg Halman's solo home run in the first inning and three unearned runs in the second.

"We went up first – that's always big," said Halman, whose team-leading 33rd homer of the season rocketed well over the left-field wall. "Everybody put in a great effort. It's good to get this done on the road."

The road had been unkind for Tacoma down the stretch. The Rainiers had lost 13 of 14 road games entering this series, and a 12-inning loss in the opener continued to give Salt Lake hopes of catching Tacoma.

The Rainiers know how that feels.

"Last year, I think we were back seven games, we made some ground and got into the playoffs," said Castro, who was the hitting coach last season. "It was a great division title (last year) because of being back so many games."

Now, with one game remaining and no pressure from the specter of missing the playoffs, Castro said he'll play a few other players today and sit down and plot his rotation for the upcoming playoff series, which begins Wednesday in California against Pacific South champ Sacramento.

An error in the second inning opened up things for the Rainiers on Sunday.

With two outs and one on, Eliezer Alfonzo hit a grounder to Fresno third baseman Jesus Guzman, who let it roll through his legs to extend the inning. Dustin Ackley capitalized with a bloop double that landed just inside the left-field line to bring in two runs, and Matt Mangini hit a blooper to shallow left to bring in another run.

The offense continued to roll in the third, when two more runs scored thanks to a pair of infield singles by Mike Carp and Ackley.

A pair of two-out doubles from Carp and Justin Smoak made it 7-0 in the sixth.

Two walks and two singles plated Mike Wilson and Alfonzo in the ninth to cap the scoring.

Fresno did have runners on in the eighth and ninth innings, but Tacoma turned double plays each time. The game ended with Ackley fielding a grounder at second base. He flipped it to shortstop Tug Hulett, who threw it to Smoak to complete the double play and set off the Rainiers' celebration.

FREE SWINGING

The Rainiers struck out swinging 12 times, giving them 38 strikeouts in the first three games of this series. Tacoma struck out 16 times in the 12-inning loss Friday night and 10 times Saturday.

SHORT HOPS

Tacoma last won back-to-back division titles in 1981-82. ... Petit lowered his ERA from 5.50 to 4.85. ... The Rainiers left 13 runners on base, with at least one each inning. The Grizzlies left four on base. ... Mangini led off the fourth with a single that hit Fresno starter Henry Sosa (7-8) on his left knee and caromed into right field. Sosa was checked, stayed and finished the inning before getting relieved by Brandon Medders. ... Fresno has lost nine of its past 10 games, including four to Salt Lake that had helped keep the Bees in playoff contention until Sunday.

Seattle Times

Monday, September 6, 2010

Hernandez throws 8 shutout innings in Seattle's 3-0 win over Cleveland

By Mason Kelley

As another Mariners season heads down the stretch with more talk of the future than the postseason, there's still at least one reason to tune in every fifth day: Felix Hernandez.

When Seattle's ace is at his best, he gets teammates out of trouble. He masks mistakes.

The right-hander did it again Sunday as the Mariners blanked the Cleveland Indians 3-0 at Safeco Field in front of 22,621.

"He's been incredible," Mariners designated hitter Russell Branyan said. "You can speculate on his numbers, what they would be if he got run support or what have you, but the brunt of it is, he's pitched his butt off all year. We just haven't scored for him. But today we got a couple of runs for him, and he went out there and shut another team out."

Hernandez started by retiring the first seven batters he faced, four on strikeouts.

When he gave up his first hit of the game, Luis Valbuena's hot shot down the third-base line just past a diving Jose Lopez in the third inning, Hernandez didn't get flustered. He regrouped and forced Chris Gimenez to hit a grounder to Lopez.

When an error ensued, a bad throw from Lopez and a poor attempt at a catch by second baseman Chone Figgins, Hernandez didn't get flustered. He got the next two outs, striking out shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera to end the inning.

"He seems to turn it up with runners on base," Mariners manager Daren Brown said.

With a slim, one-run lead courtesy of Michael Saunders' RBI fielder's choice in the second, the Mariners needed Hernandez to put zeros on the scoreboard.

That's exactly what he did.

"After the first one (run), just pitch the game," said Hernandez, who is 4-1 with a 0.20 ERA his last six starts. "Do your job."

He went eight innings, giving up four hits and striking out nine. He fanned the final batter of the inning six times.

When asked what was working, Hernandez, who now leads the major leagues with 209 strikeouts, smirked and said, "Everything."

"The key was first-pitch strikes," he said. "Get ahead of the hitters and use my other pitches."

With two outs and Josh Wilson on first in the fifth, Ichiro hit what became a single up the middle. Cabrera came up with the ball and it looked like his foot caught second base, but second-base umpire Hunter Wendelstedt called Wilson safe at second.

Cabrera argued the call and Indians manager Manny Acta came out to plead his case. Eventually Acta was ejected for the second time this season, the fourth time in his career. It was a sloppy game overall for the Indians, who committed three errors.

Brayan gave the Mariners a couple of insurance runs with a solo home run to right field in the sixth and an RBI double in the eighth.

"This year it's worked out to where we haven't given him (Hernandez) a ton of support and he's having an incredible year, so more times than not, one or two runs do the trick for him," Brayan said. "I think it was important today to give him a little breathing room."

Daren Brown keeps watchful eye on Tacoma

Posted by Mason Kelley

Mariners manager Daren Brown's perspective is a little bit different when it comes to following his organization's Class AAA affiliate.

After all, he did spend most of the season as the Tacoma Rainiers' manager. So Sunday, before the Mariners' game against the Indians, Brown took a few minutes to talk about the Rainiers, who can clinch a playoff spot tonight in Fresno with a win.

"It's exciting for them and it's exciting up here," Brown said. "I know they're going to, if they get in the playoffs, play their games here (at Safeco Field). That will be good for this kids down there as well."

The minor league experience is never constant. Players get called up. For Tacoma it was guys like pitchers Chris Seddon and Luke French getting an opportunity to pitch in the majors.

Then new players, guys like pitchers Dan Cortes and Mauricio Robles, show up. So, over the course of the season, it's not uncommon for teams to go on big swings when wins and losses.

The long-term goal is player development and the ability for players to learn what it's like to go through a postseason push is important to that growth.

"I'll be happy for them if they can get it done today," Brown said.

"I think it's important for them to go through some of the things they're going through right now with big games that are on the line. Clinch, go through a celebration. That's ultimately what we'd like to do in this clubhouse at some point and I always think it's good that kids experience that."

Franklin Gutierrez sits for second straight game

Mariners center fielder Franklin Gutierrez was feeling better Sunday, but still didn't feel well enough to play.

He is available to pinch-hit if needed, but Brown said he would prefer to give him another full day off.

"He does feel a little better today," Brown said. "I did ask him if he'd be able to pinch hit a little bit later in the game. He told me he felt a lot better today, said that would be a possibility. Hopefully we'll give him the full day today. That would be a couple of days and be ready to go tomorrow."

Michael Saunders starts in center field for the second straight game.

Monday, September 6, 2010

Felix dominates as Mariners blank Tribe

Ace righty strikes out nine to take over Majors lead in K's

By Bob Sherwin / Special to MLB.com

SEATTLE -- If there is one guy on the Mariners who is always pleased to see Felix Hernandez start a game, it's the guy who finishes them.

"He makes it a lot easier for us to do our jobs," said closer David Aardsma, who earned his 28th save with a routine ninth inning in a 3-0 victory against the Cleveland Indians on Sunday.

Hernandez (11-10) scattered four hits over his eight innings, walking one and striking out nine.

"Felix goes out there and sets up hitters well. He leaves them all guessing, questioning what he's doing," Aardsma said. "Then you come in after someone just dominated them, they're down. When a team is hitting real well, you don't want to go in there because they're feeling good, they're feeling comfortable. He makes every hitter uncomfortable and that makes our job a lot easier."

What made this start different was the veritable windfall of runs that Hernandez enjoyed. Russell Branyan drove in two of them with his 23rd home run in the sixth and an RBI double in the eighth.

Hernandez has a 3.32 run-support average, second lowest in the American League behind Baltimore's Kevin Millwood at 3.26.

In his last start, Hernandez had no run support in his seven innings before his team rallied after he left for a 3-1 win over the Angels.

The Mariners have scored three runs or fewer in each of the past 10 games. That's the second-longest such streak in club history. The longest is 12 games from June 10-22, 1988.

"I've been on teams where's it's been like that for a guy for maybe 10, 12 starts but not a complete season," Branyan said. "It's unfortunate for him for his wins and losses, but you can't take away the other numbers -- his ERA, his strikeouts, innings pitched. He has been incredible this year."

Hernandez took over first place in the Majors in strikeouts (209), he's first in the AL in innings (219 1/3) and second in the league in ERA (2.30).

But he only has 11 wins, primarily because his teammates have scored just 10 combined runs in his 10 losses.

"For me, I think it's probably coincidence, not to mention a lot of times a guy like Felix, you've got to look at who he's matching up against," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown said. "When you've got your No. 1 guy, a lot of times he's going against the No. 1 guy on the other side. Especially early in the season -- the first two or three months -- that's a lot of what you get."

Hernandez also has pitched into the seventh inning for 21 straight starts. That matches Randy Johnson's club record. Johnson did his over two seasons, his final 11 starts in 1992 and first 10 in '93.

During this stretch, Hernandez is 9-7 with a 1.72 ERA.

Over his last six starts, spanning 45 innings, Hernandez has allowed just one earned run. He has a 0.20 ERA in those starts.

His 0.82 ERA for August was the second lowest by a Mariners pitcher in any month. Mark Langston has the team low, 0.50, in September 1988.

The only hits Hernandez allowed were a third-inning single to former Mariners player Luis Valbuena, a .178 hitter, along with singles by Michael Brantley, Jordan Brown and Asdrubal Cabrera.

"What are you going to do? He's the best pitcher in the big leagues today," Indians right fielder Shin-Soo Choo said. "Everything -- fastball, sinker, cutter, curveball -- he throws for a strike anytime. If you got one hit today, you had a good day."

The Mariners scored a run in the second. Casey Kotchman opened with a single to left. Ryan Langerhans' right-side groundout sent Kotchman to second and he advanced to third on Adam Moore's single to right.

Michael Saunders then bounced a grounder to second baseman Valbuena, who threw to second to start a potential double play, but Saunders beat the relay. Kotchman scored.

"After we scored the first one I said, 'Pitch your game. Pitch your game,'" Hernandez said. "Everything [was working]. I got first-pitch strikes, got ahead of hitters, used [all of my] pitches."

Hernandez did have to put down some threats. He retired the first seven batters, four on strikeouts, before Valbuena's one-out single just to the left of third baseman Jose Lopez.

Chris Gimenez then bounced to Lopez, whose throw to second was dropped for an error by Chone Figgins. But Hernandez escaped by inducing Brantley to fly out and striking out Cabrera.

He got out of a two-on, one-out jam in the eighth on a lineout double play by Hafner.

"His demeanor as soon as they get runners on -- they're not crossing that plate," catcher Adam Moore said. "He gets in there and gets after it -- no outs, one out, two outs, doesn't matter to him. Nobody is going to score on him. When a couple guys got on, you could just see it in his eyes, no chance. Nobody is going to score on him. He didn't change his game."

Mariners in the playoffs all over the farm

By Bob Sherwin / Special to MLB.com

SEATTLE -- If successful teams are a measure of a healthy Minor League system, the Mariners' player development folks must feel good about this season.

Just about every farm team in the organization has reached or has a shot at reaching the postseason.

"We've got some young kids down there. I think it's important to go through some of the things that they're going through right now," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown said. "Big games on the line, clinch, go through a celebration. That's ultimately what we'd like to do in this clubhouse at some point, and I always think it's good to experience that."

Brown is experiencing it from a distance. Brown managed the Triple-A Tacoma Rainiers for four seasons before he was elevated to Mariners manager Aug. 9 after Don Wakamatsu was fired. He remains connected to players and talks to Rainiers manager Jose Garcia frequently.

"Baseball, for me, it's always a little different from other sports," Brown said. "You play 162 games, and you're together from February to October and around the guys every day. I think it's just a little bit different when you clinch something you've been working at for six, seven months straight, and tight quarters every day -- buses, planes, everything else."

Tacoma needed a win tonight at Fresno -- or a Salt Lake City loss -- to clinch the playoffs for the second year in a row. If the Rainiers do that, they would play their home playoff game at Safeco Field beginning Friday because the renovation of Cheney Stadium has already begun.

Double-A West Tennessee and Class A High Desert both have clinched playoff spots in the Southern League and California League, respectively.

Class A Clinton is on the verge of a Wild Card spot in the Midwest League. Short season Class A Everett won the first half Northwest League title and is already playing its series.

Short season Class A Pulaski lost in the first round of the playoffs in the Appalachian League. The Mariners' Venezuelan and Dominican League teams also both reached the playoffs.

"I think you can develop players in a winning atmosphere and that's ultimately what you want to do," Brown said. "I do think it's develop players first. It's about winning here. This is where we want to win. But it's been a tough season here. It lessens a little bit when you know you've got some guys coming.

"I think you've got to learn how to win."

Winning is a bonus for the Mariners' system this season. But as Brown has seen, the system is also doing its primary job of bringing the talent along.

"Maybe they're a year, maybe two years away," he said. "But for me, being in Tacoma the last four years, I've seen the difference, especially on the pitching side when you're talking about [Dan] Cortes and [Mauricio] Robles and [Michael] Pinedas that are coming. We've got some guys that are coming. They're a little bit young, but at the same time, it gives you a little bit of hope in the future and what it could be.

"You've got a couple of guys down in Tacoma hitting 30 home runs. We've got [Matt] Mangini hitting over .300. The numbers are good. But the fact that they've got a chance to celebrate means they did some things to win ballgames and ultimately beat the other three clubs in their division. That's what it's about, and hopefully they'll get it done today."

Gutierrez out of lineup with stomach flu

SEATTLE -- Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez missed a second straight game Sunday because of the stomach flu.

"Gutti is still a little bit under the weather," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown said. "We [decided to] give him the day off. "[Saturday], he didn't feel good the whole night. He does feel a little better today. I did ask if he'd be available to pinch-hit later in the game. He told me he does feel a lot better today and that would be a possibility, hopefully. We'll give him the full day today. That would be a couple of days, and be ready to go tomorrow."

A's have been running wild on the bases

By John Barone / MLB.com

The Athletics have been running wild lately. But with 26 regular-season games remaining, time is running out on their bid to catch the American League West-leading Rangers.

Oakland enters Monday afternoon's series opener against Seattle at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum eight games back of first-place Texas. In the stolen-base department, however, manager Bob Geren's club ranks second to none since the All-Star break.

The A's 59 second-half thefts pace the Major Leagues, thanks in large part to the efforts of outfielders Coco Crisp (18) and Rajai Davis (15) and shortstop Cliff Pennington (10). Oakland is 49-24 in games it's recorded a steal this season, but 18-45 when it doesn't.

Brett Anderson won't be stealing any bases Monday. Instead, the 22-year-old left-hander will aim to prevent them after yielding four runs, one of which was earned, on eight hits over six innings in Wednesday's road loss to the Yankees.

Anderson's Monday counterpart, Jason Vargas, also absorbed a tough-luck defeat Wednesday. The 27-year-old southpaw scattered four hits across seven frames of three-run ball against the Angels at Safeco Field, marking his 19th quality start of 2010.

Vargas, who's already set career highs in starts, innings, wins and strikeouts, has logged at least six frames in all but five of his 26 outings this year.

"You can't say enough about what the guy has done," Mariners catcher Josh Bard said. "This year has obviously been a big disappointment for us as a club, but he's been one of the bright spots.

"I hope he gets the credit that he deserves, because that guy is ready to pitch every fifth day and he's doing it."

Mariners: Strong on Labor Day

Seattle has won five of its past seven Labor Day games. ... The Mariners have scored three or fewer runs in 10 consecutive contests, the second longest streak in franchise history. ... Right fielder Ichiro Suzuki needs 40 hits to overtake Edgar Martinez (2,247) for the top spot on the club's all-time list.

Athletics: Strong ERA at home

The A's boast a Major League-best 2.85 home ERA. ... Oakland has won 14 of its past 19 day games. ... The A's have clubbed 13 home runs in their past 13 contests after totaling seven long balls over their previous 26 tilts.

Worth noting

Vargas is 2-0 with a 1.69 ERA in three appearances against Oakland, including one start. He has never started a game at The Coliseum. ... Anderson is 1-1 with a 0.47 ERA across three outings against Seattle this season, holding the Mariners to a .203 batting average over 19 innings of one-run ball.

AOL Fanhouse

Monday, September 6, 2010

Mariners' Felix Hernandez Dazzles in 11th Win, Drops ERA to 2.303

By John Hickey

SEATTLE -- He didn't make the American League All-Star team and he may not get tons of support in the Cy Young voting, but Felix Hernandez is having the kind of year pitchers would die for.

Hernandez, the tower of strength in Seattle these days, threw eight shutout innings against Cleveland Sunday in a 3-0 win. It was his 21st consecutive start of seven or more innings, and the fourth time in the last six starts in which he didn't allow a run.

The 24-year-old right-hander leads the American League in innings (219 1/3) and strikeouts (209) and is second to Boston's Clay Buchholz in ERA, 2.30 to Buchholz's 2.25. This is a guy who has a chance to finish first in three of pitching's four major statistical categories.

"That would be nice," Hernandez told FanHouse. "But it's not something I'm thinking about right now. I just want to go out every game and give the team a chance to win."

Ah, winning. That's the one major category where he won't be anywhere close to the AL leaders. He has just 11 wins -- eight behind league-leader C.C. Sabathia of the Yankees -- due in large part to a moribund Seattle offense that averages just 3.17 runs per game for him. He has 10 losses and in eight of the 10 the Mariners have scored either one or zero runs. In one loss they scored two for him. In the other, three.

That's 10 games in which the Mariners have scored 10 runs total for Hernandez. And yet he keeps on throwing up zeroes inning after inning. He's thrown 15 consecutive scoreless innings his last two starts. He's had six starts in which he hasn't allowed any runs this season and another two in which he hasn't allowed any earned runs. There are four more starts where he's given up just two runs.

"He's having just an incredible year, and it's a year when we haven't given him a ton of support," DH Russell Branyan said Sunday. Branyan homered, doubled and drove in two of the three Seattle runs Sunday. "It's one of those bizarre years when we can't score for him.

"But he still goes out and shoves it up people's (rears), game after game."

Hernandez got a run in the second inning when rookie center fielder Michael Saunders brought home a 1-0 lead with an infield out. As it would happen, that was all that Hernandez would need, and he could feel it at the time, too.

"I said, 'OK, we've got a lead. Now I've got to go and do my job,'" Hernandez said. "That's all I can control; that's all any pitcher can control. Going out, throwing strikes and getting as many zeroes as you can. That's what pitching is."

Cleveland manager Manny Acta said he knew going in that Sunday had a chance to be a tough day with Hernandez on the other side.

"Felix was just way too much for us; we are not a very good matchup with him," Acta said. "We are second in the league in strikeouts and he's is on top of the league in strikeouts. He was tough. Typical Felix."

Yes, it was typical Felix. He has 27 quality starts in 30 tries, and the last 17 have come in succession. In his last six starts he's 4-1 with a 0.20 ERA.

He finished second in the AL Cy Young Award balloting last year, but this year, well ...

"I think I've been better this year," he said. "I feel better."

Seattle PostGlobe

Monday, September 6, 2010

Mariners' Hernandez pitching like a Cy Young contender again

By John Hickey

SEATTLE – For a guy who seems to have no chance to win the Cy Young Award, Felix Hernandez is putting up some Cy Young-ish numbers.

The Mariner ace threw a four-hit shutout for eight innings Sunday and closer David Aardsma did the rest with a perfect ninth inning as Seattle pinned a 3-0 loss on Cleveland in the final game of the homestand.

Hernandez pitched twice in the homestand, and those were two of the four games Seattle won in the nine games against the Twins, Angels and Indians. He didn't give up a run in either start, throwing 15 consecutive shutout innings.

In the process, he's moved into the AL lead in innings pitched (219.1) and strikeouts (209) and is second in the AL ERA race at 2.30, just a bit behind Boston's Clay Buchholz at 2.25.

"It's not easy to do what Felix is doing," right fielder Ichiro Suzuki, who had two of Seattle's eight hits, said. "Every time he goes out there, no matter what we know we have a chance to win."

And that's saying something, given that the Mariners are mired in last place in the American League West and have been for months thanks to an offense that is perhaps the worst any Seattle team has ever put together.

"He's having just an incredible year, and it's a year when we haven't given him a ton of support," DH Russell Branyan said Sunday. Branyan homered, doubled and drove in two of the three Seattle runs Sunday. "It's one of those bizarre years when we can't score for him.

"But he still goes out and shoves it up people's butts, game after game."

Hernandez got a run in the second inning when rookie center fielder Michael Saunders brought home a 1-0 lead with an infield out. As it would happen, that was all that Hernandez would need, and he could feel it at the time, too.

"I said, 'OK, we've got a lead. Now I've got to go and do my job,'" Hernandez said. "That's all I can control; that's all any pitcher can control. Going out, throwing strikes and getting as many zeroes as you can. That's what pitching is."

Cleveland manager Manny Acta said he knew going in that Sunday had a chance to be a tough day with Hernandez on the other side.

"Felix was just way too much for us; we are not a very good matchup with him," Acta said. "We are second in the league in strikeouts and he's is on top of the league in strikeouts. He was tough. Typical Felix."

For someone who has a chance to lead the league in three of the four major statistical pitching categories (his 11-10 record means he won't be anywhere close in the wins derby), the 24-year-old Hernandez seems to be taking the whole thing in stride.

"That would be nice," Hernandez said of the chance to win the ERA, strikeouts and innings pitched races. "But it's not something I'm thinking about right now. I just want to go out every game and give the team a chance to win."

The trouble is, too much of the time the Mariners haven't been giving Hernandez a chance to win. They are averaging 3.17 runs per game for him. He's lost 10 times, and in those 10 losses they've scored just 10 runs – only seven runs while Hernandez was actually in the game.

That makes life tough.

“Every game he gives you a chance to win because he’s such a competitor,” interim manager Daren Brown said. “No one wants to win more than Felix.”

That’s part of what makes his performance this year so amazing – pitching like a winner without getting the wins to show for it.

Associated Press

Monday, September 6, 2010

Hernandez stellar again as Mariners beat Indians

SEATTLE - Felix Hernandez had another dominant pitching effort and got just enough support to get a victory.

Hernandez scattered four hits in eight innings and the Seattle Mariners beat the Cleveland Indians 3-0 on Sunday.

He gave up four singles in his 111-pitch effort, walking one and striking out nine. At least for this start, Hernandez (11-10) had a fair measure of run support. In his 10 losses, the Mariners have scored a combined 10 runs for Hernandez while he was on the mound. That's one reason why he's on the fringe of the Cy Young Award discussion despite impressive numbers.

Hernandez is first in the majors in strikeouts (209), first in league in innings (219), second in the league in ERA (2.30), but tied for 41st in wins. He has the second worst run support in the league.

"I've been on teams where's it's been like that for a guy for maybe 10, 12 starts but not a complete season," Brayan said. "It's unfortunate for him for his wins and losses, but you can't take away the other numbers, his ERA, his strikeout, innings pitched. He has been incredible this year."

Manager Daren Brown tends to think his run scarcity is just coincidence.

"Sometimes I think it's coincidence more than anything else and sometimes there might be a feeling of you may not have to score very many because you know how good the guy is on the mound," Brown said.

"For me I think it's probably coincidence, not to mention a lot of times a guy like Felix, you've got to look at who he's matching up against," he added. "When you've got your No. 1 guy, a lot of times he's going against the No. 1 guy on the other side. Especially early in the season the first two or three months that's a lot of what you get."

Even when Hernandez isn't on the mound, the last-place Mariners are struggling to score runs. They have scored the fewest runs by far in baseball and have put up three runs or fewer over the past 10 games. It's the second longest such streak in club history. They went 12 games from June 10-22, 1988.

Hernandez has done what he can to keep Seattle in games. He's pitched into the seventh inning for 21 straight starts. That matches Randy Johnson's club record. Johnson did his over two seasons, his final 11 starts in 1992 and first 10 in 1993.

During that stretch, Hernandez is 9-7 with a 1.72 earned run average.

Jeanmar Gomez (3-3) took the loss for the Indians, allowing seven hits and two runs in six innings. He struck out three and didn't walk anyone.

The Mariners scored their first run in the second inning. Casey Kotchman singled then went to second on Ryan Langerhans' right-side groundout. Kotchman moved to third on Adam Moore's single to right.

Michael Saunders then hit a potential double play grounder to second baseman Luis Valbuena. He threw to second for the force but Saunders beat the relay, allowed Kotchman to score.

"What are you going to do? He's the best pitcher in the big leagues today," Indians Shin-Soo Choo said. "Everything, fastball, sinker, cutter, curveball, he throws for a strike anytime. You get one hit today, you had a good day."

Hernandez's effort was not without drama. The Indians mounted threats.

He retired the first seven batters, four on strikeouts, before Valbuena's one-out single just to the left of third baseman Jose Lopez. Chris Gimenez then bounced to Lopez, whose throw to second was dropped for an error by Chone Figgins. But Hernandez escaped by inducing Michael Brantley to fly out and Asdrubal Cabrera struck out.

In the seventh, Hernandez hit Jayson Nix to start the inning. Jordan Brown then singled. Matt LaPorta lined out to second. Valbuena flied out to left and Gimenez struck out.

Travis Hafner hit into a line-out double play to ease Hernandez out of a two-on, one-out jam in the eighth.

"His demeanor, that where he see it, as soon as they get runners on," catcher Adam Moore said of Hernandez. "They're not crossing that plate. He gets in there and gets after it, no outs, one out, two outs, doesn't matter to him. Nobody is going to score on him. Tonight when a couple guys got on, you could just see it in his eyes, no chance. Nobody is going to score in him. He didn't change his game."

David Aardsma worked the ninth to pick up his 28th save in 33 opportunities. Russell Branyan drove in a pair of runs with a solo home run in the sixth, his 23rd, and a RBI double in the eighth.

Notes: CF Franklin Gutierrez did not start for the second straight game because of a stomach ailment. He was available to pinch hit. The Tacoma Rainiers, the Mariners Triple-A team, needed to win today to determine their postseason fate. Mariners manager Daren Brown is quite interested, having managed the Rainiers the past four years before being named Mariners manager Aug. 9. "It's a little special when you accomplish something like that and it's important for those kids to go through that," Brown said.

AL Capsules

Twins 6, Rangers 5

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -In a bizarre ending, Texas third base coach Dave Anderson was called for interfering with runner Michael Young for the final out Sunday, giving the Minnesota Twins a 6-5 win over the Rangers.

Down 6-2, the Rangers scored twice in the ninth inning and had the bases loaded with two outs.

Vladimir Guerrero grounded an RBI single up the middle that Twins second baseman Orlando Hudson fielded behind the bag. Young, who had been on second, came running around third and appeared to tap hands with Anderson before stopping and scrambling back to the bag.

Young made a dive back into third and appeared to beat Hudson's throw to third baseman Matt Tolbert. But third base umpire Alfonso Marquez pointed and made the interference call, ending the game.

Blue Jays 7, Yankees 3

NEW YORK (AP) - Aaron Hill and Vernon Wells each hit two-run homers and the Toronto Blue Jays spoiled Alex Rodriguez's return to the New York lineup, beating the Yankees to halt their eight-game winning streak.

Rodriguez had been out since Aug. 20 with a strained left calf, but the Yankees sure didn't seem to miss him. They were riding their longest winning stretch of the season and 11-3 since he went on the disabled list, carrying a 2 1/2-game lead over Tampa Bay in the AL East into Sunday.

The three-time AL MVP had a pair of hits and drove in a run, but he also grounded out with a runner aboard in the first, dribbled one back to the pitcher with two on in the third, and struck out looking with a runner on third base to end the game.

Orioles 7, Rays 7

BALTIMORE (AP) - Corey Patterson homered and had three RBIs, and the Baltimore Orioles withstood four home runs by the Rays.

Baltimore took two of three from the Rays, who remained 2 1/2 games behind the first-place New York Yankees in the AL East. It was only the second time in 14 tries that the Orioles won the finale to take a three-game series.

Tampa Bay scored all its runs on homers by Ben Zobrist, Evan Longoria, B.J. Upton and Rocco Baldelli.

Royals 2, Tigers 1

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) - Alex Gordon homered and Kyle Davies beat Detroit for the first time in six home starts, leading Kansas City past the Tigers.

Davies (7-9) went six innings and allowed only three hits and one run, a home run by Casper Wells in the fifth. He walked three and struck out four after coming in with an 0-5 record and a 6.59 ERA in five starts against the Tigers in Kauffman Stadium.

Joakim Soria had two strikeouts while pitching a perfect ninth to extend his club record with 30 consecutive saves. The right-hander has not allowed a score in 17 straight innings, spanning his last 17 outings. He has converted 37 of 39 save opportunities this season.

White Sox 7, Red Sox 5

BOSTON (AP) - Gordon Beckham's bases-loaded walk with two outs pushed Chicago ahead in a four-run ninth inning that lifted the White Sox to their sixth straight win and an improbable comeback victory over the Red Sox.

The win completed a sweep of the three-game weekend series and came after Chicago trailed 5-3 entering the ninth inning and had two outs.

Victor Martinez had a two-run homer for the Red Sox, who lost both games of a day-night doubleheader by 3-1 scores on Saturday.

Red Sox closer Jonathan Papelbon (5-6) was one out away from the save, but Carlos Quentin's bloop RBI double to center cut the score to 5-4 before Ramon Castro tied it with a single.

Mariners 3, Indians 0

SEATTLE (AP) - Felix Hernandez scattered four hits over eight innings and the Mariners scored just enough runs for him in a victory over the Indians.

Hernandez (11-10) gave up four singles in his 111-pitch effort. He walked one and struck out nine. David Aardsma worked the ninth to pick up his 28th save in 33 opportunities.

Russell Branyan drove in a pair of runs with a solo home run in the sixth, his 23rd, and a RBI double in the eighth.

Jeanmar Gomez (3-3) took the loss for the Indians, allowing seven hits and two runs in six innings. He struck out three and didn't walk anyone.

Angels 7, Athletics 4

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) - Bobby Abreu hit a home run and drove in three runs, leading the Angels to a victory over Oakland, avoiding their first sweep by the A's in six years.

Mike Napoli also hit a home run for the Angels, who have still lost nine of their past 13 games. Torii Hunter and Hideki Matsui also drove in runs.

Jeff Larish drove in two runs for the A's, who lost for the fifth time in seven games. Landon Powell and Jack Cust each added an RBI.

Ervin Santana (15-9) gave up three runs and six hits to improve to 7-2 over his last nine starts. He walked four and struck out three.

Vin Mazzaro (6-8) lost his sixth straight decision after allowing five runs on six hits over 4 1-3 innings.

NL Capsules

Giants 3, Dodgers 0

LOS ANGELES (AP) -Jonathan Sanchez pitched seven crisp innings and Juan Uribe hit a two-run homer for the second straight game, leading San Francisco to a 3-0 win over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Sunday night that put the Giants within one game of first place in the NL West.

The division-leading Padres lost 4-2 to Colorado earlier in the day for their 10th consecutive defeat. The Giants have picked up 5 1/2 games on San Diego during the Padres' skid, going 5-4 during that span. It's the closest they've been to first place in the division in the last 27 days.

Los Angeles has lost six of eight heading into a three-game series at San Diego beginning on Monday.

Sanchez (10-8) yielded three hits, struck out nine and walked one to win for just the second time in his last six appearances. The left-hander was 0-5 with a 6.04 ERA in 13 previous appearances against Los Angeles.

Brian Wilson pitched a perfect ninth for his NL-leading 40th save, completing the three-hitter.

Hiroki Kuroda (10-12) gave up three runs and six hits in eight innings for Los Angeles.

Cardinals 4, Reds 2

ST. LOUIS (AP) - Matt Holliday hit a go-ahead, three-run homer to back Chris Carpenter's latest dominant effort against Cincinnati, helping the Cardinals get the victory.

The Cardinals reduced the Reds' formidable lead to seven games with 28 games to go. The two teams are not scheduled to play again this season.

St. Louis had lost eight of nine overall going into the weekend. This was its first series win since Aug. 20-22 against San Francisco.

Homer Bailey (3-3) walked Albert Pujols intentionally in the sixth inning before giving up Holliday's two-out shot on a 1-2 hanging breaking ball. Holliday fouled off two pitches before hitting his 25th homer, giving the Cardinals a 4-2 lead.

Carpenter (15-5) struck out a season-high 11 in 7 1-3 innings. He's 5-0 with a 1.78 ERA in five starts against the Reds this season and has a club-record 10-game winning streak against them dating to his last loss in June 2006.

Rockies 4, Padres 2

SAN DIEGO (AP) - The NL West-leading Padres lost their 10th straight game, with Melvin Mora hitting a go-ahead single that sent the Rockies to a win.

Mora's tiebreaking hit in the seventh inning gave Colorado its 10th win in 14 games. The Rockies pulled within 4 1/2 games of the reeling Padres.

San Diego's losing streak is its longest since a franchise record 13-game skid in May 1994. Only two teams in major league history have made the playoffs in a season that included a losing streak of at least 10 games.

Marlins 7, Braves 6, 10 innings

MIAMI (AP) - Sent to the plate after a scary scene, pinch-hitter Scott Cousins delivered a game-winning single in the 10th inning for his first big league hit and the Marlins beat the Braves.

The Braves had overcome a 6-0 deficit. They began the day with a one-game lead over Philadelphia in the NL East.

Cousins batted after Emilio Bonifacio lined a foul that struck teammate Logan Morrison in the helmet in the on-deck circle. Morrison collapsed face-down as the crowd gasped, but quickly rose and walked off the field accompanied by a trainer.

Bonifacio hit a leadoff triple against Eric O'Flaherty (3-2). Cousins batted for Morrison and singled over the head of left fielder Melky Cabrera. It was only the second at-bat in the majors for Cousins.

Mets 18, Cubs 5

CHICAGO (AP) - Ruben Tejada hit his first major league homer and drove in five runs, Ike Davis also connected and the Mets erupted for 21 hits and pounded the Cubs to avoid a weekend sweep.

The Mets' bats perked up for season highs in runs and hits even though David Wright got a day off and Jose Reyes was still nursing a strained right oblique. They scored five runs in the fifth, eighth and ninth innings while winning for just the second time in seven games.

Tejada, who had never knocked in more than a run, had a two-run single in the fifth and homered leading off the seventh.

Davis had four hits and drove in three runs while scoring three.

Brewers 6, Phillies 2

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - Prince Fielder hit his 30th home run, Randy Wolf was sharp against his former team and the Brewers beat the Phillies to snap a five-game losing streak.

Fielder's three-run shot off Kyle Kendrick (9-8) made him the second Brewer in team history with four straight 30-plus home run seasons. He helped the Brewers end their six-game road trip on a high after dropping the first five in Cincinnati and Philadelphia. John Axford tossed two scoreless innings for his 20th save.

Carlos Ruiz had two RBIs for the NL wild-card leading Phillies, who ended a five-game winning streak.

Kendrick continues to struggle and could be dropped from the rotation.

Nationals 8, Pirates 1

PITTSBURGH (AP) - Ryan Zimmerman drove in four runs, Adam Dunn homered and Jason Marquis won his second in a row after previously going winless all season as the Nationals beat the Pirates in a matchup of last-place clubs.

The Nationals outscored the Pirates 17-3 in the final two games of the three-game set for their first road series victory in 18 attempts since they won two of three against the Mets from May 10-12.

Washington did most of its damage against Pirates right-hander Charlie Morton (1-11), who gave up six runs and eight hits over 3 2-3 innings yet still lowered his ERA to 9.66 because four runs were unearned. Morton began the game with a 10.03 ERA that was the third highest in major league history at this stage of a season for a pitcher with at least 10 decisions, according to STATS LLC.

Astros 3, Diamondbacks 2

PHOENIX (AP) - Hunter Pence's three-run home run in the first inning helped the Astros beat the Diamondbacks.

Pence drove a pitch from Rodrigo Lopez (5-13) over the right-field fence for his team-high 22nd homer of the season. Michael Bourn walked to lead off the game and Jeff Keppinger followed with a single before Pence's homer.

The hit was all the Astros needed from their offense on the day. Starter J.A. Happ (6-2) held the Diamondbacks to two runs on six hits over seven innings to get the win, his third straight as an Astro after coming over in a trade with Philadelphia for pitcher Roy Oswalt. Matt Lindstrom worked a scoreless eighth and Brandon Lyon converted his 13th save in 14 opportunities for the Astros, winners of 11 of their past 14 games.

Injured Texas star Hamilton unsure of return

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -AL batting leader Josh Hamilton isn't sure when his rib injury will heal enough for him to rejoin the lineup of the AL West-leading Texas Rangers.

"I have no clue when I'll be back," he said Sunday. "I really don't. Your guess is as good as mine."

Hamilton ran into the left-field wall at Minnesota on Saturday and bruised his ribs. He said all he can do for now is apply ice and hope he feels better.

"I feel like I've been in a car wreck," he said.

Hamilton said he felt the same way last year after running into a wall at Toronto, an injury that forced him to miss 13 games.

Hamilton is hitting .361 with 31 home runs and 97 RBIs.

"Right now I want to get to a point as quickly as possible where I can swing, where I can do other things on the field (and not going to make me have any setbacks," the All-Star outfielder said. "When I get to that point, I'll get after it."

Neither Hamilton nor Texas manager Ron Washington could put a timetable on when the slugger may return.

"With those ribs, you've got to give him a few days," Washington said. "I'm not going to question Hamilton. I'd say it is day-to-day."

The Rangers lead Oakland by eight games and have 26 games left in the regular season.

Texas' Cliff Lee will have next start delayed

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -The Texas Rangers will take a cautious approach with pitcher Cliff Lee and he will not make his scheduled start Tuesday at Toronto because of a sore back.

Lee, who the Rangers acquired earlier this season from Seattle, threw a bullpen session on Sunday and his back loosened up. Lee only threw in the outfield on Saturday and reported some continued discomfort in the area of his back where he recently got a cortisone shot.

Rangers officials said Lee is capable of starting on Tuesday at Toronto, but they have opted to be conservative as Texas works to clinch the American League West title. It is unclear whether Lee's start will be simply pushed back a day or two or whether his turn in the rotation will be skipped.

Lee is 10-8 this season with a 3.37 earned run average, but is 2-5 with a 4.69 ERA since coming to the Rangers from the Mariners.

Prior pitches scoreless inning in Triple-A debut

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) - Mark Prior struck out two batters in a scoreless inning Sunday in his debut for the Triple-A Oklahoma City RedHawks.

Prior stranded the bases loaded after allowing a pair of singles and walking a batter in the fourth inning of Oklahoma City's 9-1 loss to the Omaha Royals. It was the first game for the former first-round draft pick and All-Star pitcher after signing a minor league deal with the Texas Rangers.

Prior is trying to make a comeback after two shoulder injuries forced him to miss the 2007 and 2008 seasons. The right-hander went 42-29 in five years with the Chicago Cubs and was an All-Star in 2003.

He started his comeback in the independent Golden Baseball League last month before being acquired by the Rangers.

ESPN.com

Monday, September 6, 2010

HERNANDEZ HOLDS INDIANS SCORELESS OVER 8 INNINGS

Felix Hernandez scattered four hits over eight innings to earn the victory in the Mariners' 3-0 win over the Indians. That might not fit the traditional criteria for a shutout; let's face it, we don't see many of those in the Era of the Pitch Count. But it was the 21st time that Hernandez started and didn't allow a run in his five full seasons in the majors. That ties Jered Weaver and Jon Lester for the highest such total in the American League during that time. Johan Santana leads the majors with 26.