

Sports Opinion



Mitch Sherman

Erstad takes it all in stride on path to top

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Nine tired baseball players, half-dressed and dirtied with grass and tobacco stains, encircled a pair of tables in the Anaheim Angels' clubhouse Saturday night, eating off paper plates, playing cards and talking quietly.

Seven more Angels ate near their oversized lockers at Kauffman Stadium after Anaheim's 7-3 loss to Kansas City. Two players talked with a small group of reporters and several others headed in and out and of the showers at the far west end of the contemporary locker room.

Then there was Darin Erstad.

The first pick of the 1995 Major League Draft faced his locker, staring at his gray and navy blue No. 27 jersey. He didn't talk. He didn't smile. He just thought.

Soon Erstad stood. He peeled off his white T-shirt, unveiling an upper body noticeably larger than it was two years ago when he last wore a Nebraska uniform, and he headed for the shower, never altering his trademark, tight-lipped expression.

That is Darin Erstad. If Anaheim had won Saturday, he would have acted the same way. If Erstad had knocked in the winning run or collected four hits, he would have acted the same way.

Kansas City ace Kevin Appier, a seven-year major-league veteran, tormented Erstad the way the 22-year-old Angel someday soon will baffle opposing pitchers and managers. He's already started his hit parade, batting .333 through 16 games in his first full big-league season.

He shows the poise and wisdom reserved for veterans, yet in many ways he's still a lot like a rookie. Three hours before flying out to left field in his first plate appearance Saturday, the humble youngster chatted with three reporters near the office door of Anaheim Manager Terry Collins.

"What are you, a hero around here or something?" Angels' first-base coach Dave Parker barked in Erstad's ear while reaching for a cup of coffee. "You get some hits already?"

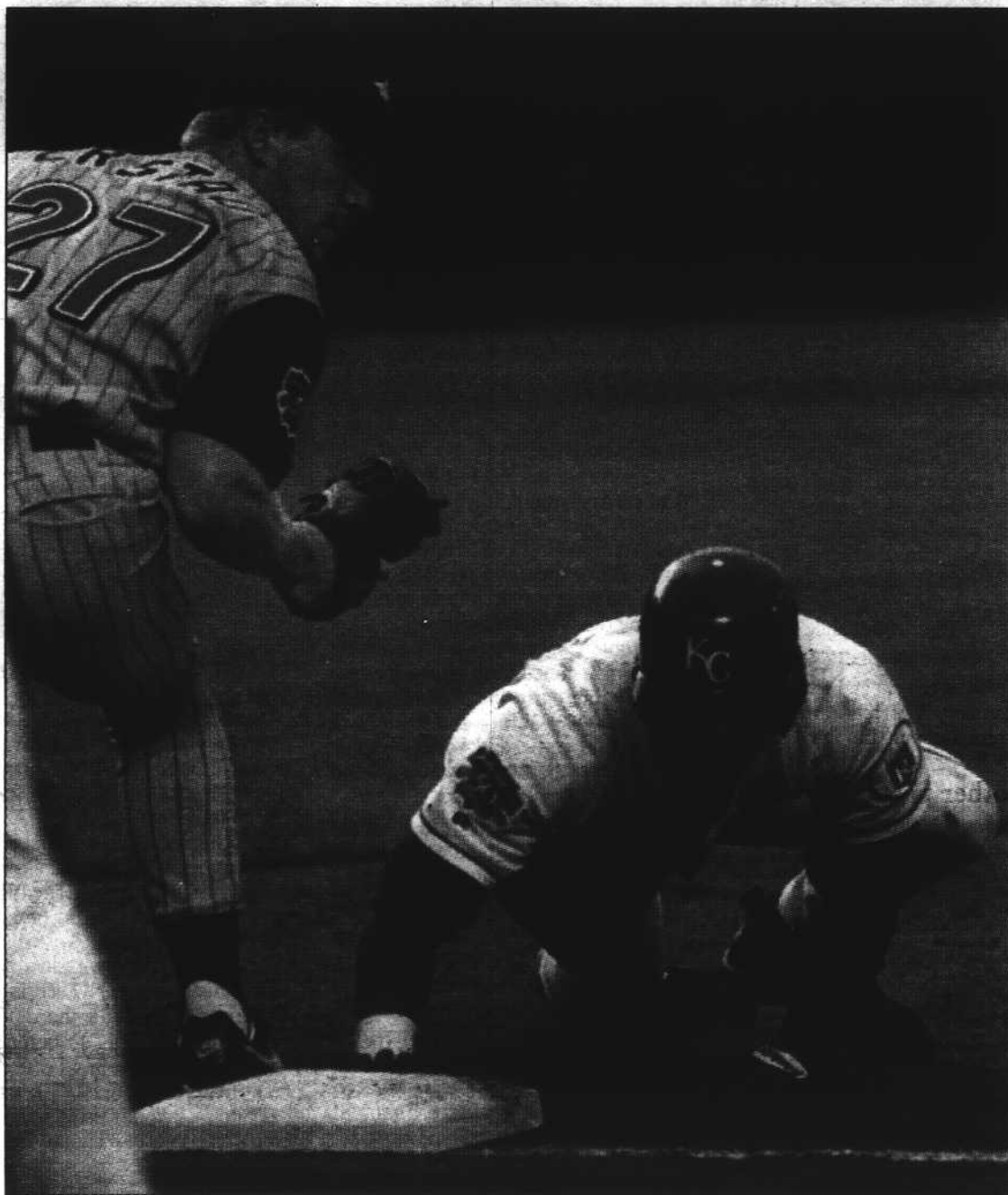
"What all do you talk about? It can't be your looks."

Erstad took the razzing in stride, much like he does everything else. Even life in Los Angeles hasn't rattled the impossible-to-faze Erstad, who has chosen down-to-earth Fargo, N.D., as an offseason home. And after a year in Southern California's fast lane, he still doesn't do much more than drive to and from Anaheim Stadium every afternoon.

"I have no interest in going out and seeing the sights," he said. "But I'm happy. I just want to play. If we're winning, great. That's what it's all about."

For Erstad, there is nothing else.

Sherman is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.



RYAN SODERLIN/DN

DARIN ERSTAD tries to tag the Kansas City Royals' Bip Roberts on Saturday. Erstad has adjusted well to playing first base this season, Anaheim manager Terry Collins said.

Erstad grasps new position

BY DAVID WILSON
Staff Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — All Darin Erstad wants to do is play.

When newly hired Anaheim Manager Terry Collins called him last winter and asked him about moving to first base, Erstad — who had never played the position before — saw his opportunity.

"They all told me that he could run and that he's going to be a good outfielder," Collins said. "But we had a good outfield and I wanted to get him in the lineup."

With the help of future hall-of-famer Eddie Murray, Erstad learned the new position and committed no errors in spring training. The 22-year-old also batted .274 and knocked a team-high four home runs, cementing his spot in the Anaheim lineup and establishing himself as one of the American League's best young hitters.

An offseason trade sent gold glove first baseman J.T. Snow to San Francisco — opening up a spot in the lineup. Collins wanted Erstad to fill the hole.

"I was pretty much told that (the position) was mine to lose," Erstad said. "But I had to prove that I could play there. Fortunately, I was good enough."

Sixteen games into the season, Erstad is batting .333 and has proven himself as a solid defensive first baseman.

"He's got a different makeup than a lot of young players."

TERRY COLLINS
Anaheim manager

"He's already made half a dozen outstanding plays," Collins said. "This is no longer a conversion. This guy is a good first baseman."

Murray, who has spent the majority of his 20-year career at first base, agreed that Erstad is a natural at the position.

"There have been very few things that I've had to teach him," Murray said. "I just try to get him to think ahead of time — to know what you're going to do with the ball before it's hit to you."

"I think if anybody came and saw him play first base at this particular time, they wouldn't believe that he had just come over there. He's just really taken to it."

Erstad said he's enjoyed learning from Murray.

"Eddie Murray has been great,"

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RYAN SODERLIN/DN

ERSTAD IS BATTING .333 after 16 games this season.

Eight Huskers picked

Booker highlights selection of eight players in NFL Draft.

BY MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

Relief, excitement and happiness were the emotions of eight former Nebraska football players as they learned their football careers will continue in the National Football League.



The eight — which was the most Cornhuskers taken in the NFL Draft since 1980 when the draft was 12 rounds — all said they are looking forward to the chance at continuing their football careers.

"I'm prepared to play," former Husker cornerback Michael Booker said. Booker was the highest NU player selected in this year's draft being the 11th overall selection by Atlanta.

Please see DRAFT on 11

Nelson sticks two titles

BY GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

Two feet, one mat and no hops, wobbles or shakes.

In gymnastics, those ingredients make a stuck landing.

At the NCAA Individual Event Finals, it made Marshall Nelson a two-event national champion.



The sophomore from Greeley, Colo., won the high bar and parallel bars titles Saturday night at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City, Iowa.

"That's the biggest thing at finals," Nelson said. "All the routines have enough difficulty. But if you stick your dismount, then you have a good chance of winning."

Nelson also finished fifth on the vault and 10th on the pommel horse. His finishes on vault, parallel bars and high bar made him the first Nebraska gymnast since Richard Grace and Dennis Harrison in 1994 to be an All-American in three events.

Nelson set the pace for the Cornhuskers who did not qualify for the team portion of the championships but still made an undeniable mark on

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