

Rangers LHP Harrison not likely ready for opener

Written by Administrator

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SURPRISE, Ariz. (AP) — Matt Harrison concedes that he likely won't be ready to pitch for the Texas Rangers by opening day.

The left-hander, who hasn't thrown in a week because of stiffness in his neck and back, just hopes things are different from last year. He was the opening day starter then, but made only one more start.

"Kind of trade-off from last year," Harrison said Sunday. "Only making two and miss 30, and miss two and make 30, that would be nice."

Even though Harrison is feeling much better after switching beds, he was still returning to Texas to be examined by the specialist who did both operations last year for a herniated disk in his lower back.

"I think at this stage, based upon the initial symptoms that he reported, we just wanted to make sure we're all clear before we ramp up again," Rangers assistant general manager Thad Levine said.

Harrison had also been scheduled to throw live batting practice last Tuesday and wanted to pitch, but the Rangers held him out of that as a precaution because of neck stiffness.

Two days later, he was scratched again from a throwing session with stiffness in his back.

An MRI showed no immediate cause for concern, but the Rangers scheduled an appointment with Dr. Drew Dossett, who wasn't available until Monday because he was at the NFL combine.

"I think for sure the bed was an issue. Since I've gotten out of that bed and switched beds I haven't had any issues," Harrison said. "Everybody usually feels sore the first couple of days

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just getting back acclimated to running around out there."

Harrison won 18 games and was an All-Star in 2012, then got a \$55 million, five-year contract. He had never had any back issues before last spring, and still made his first two scheduled starts.

After going 0-2 with an 8.44 ERA, Harrison got two epidural injections and a second opinion before two operations in a matter of weeks.

Harrison threw for a couple of months with no problems before camp this year, so he expect to have to completely start over when he is cleared by the Rangers to throw again. He hopes he's able to make his season debut no later than the middle of April.

"This little setback set them on high alert and they're probably going to slow it down a little bit," he said. "Which I hate because going through a healthy offseason and being ready to go it's tough to get shut down. But it's early."

Levine said the Rangers put a lot more value on having Harrison healthy for the stretch drive late in the season than a start in April.

"We're not panicking," manager Ron Washington said. "He is feeling better. He's not feeling what caused us to shut him down anymore, so hopefully when the doctor sees him, it was just was some residual from everything he had done."