

Photo: © 2013 Scott Wachter/The San Diego Padres

(Above) San Diego Padres' Robbie Erlin during a game against the San Francisco Giants on Tuesday, September 3, 2013, at Petco Park in San Diego.



Photo: © Dan Coyro

A View from the Mound

Santa Cruz local and San Diego Padre's pitcher
Robbie Erlin looks ahead to a new season

By Ryan Moses

Only the most rabid baseball fans would have recognized Robbie Erlin as a Major Leaguer as he walked down the streets of downtown Santa Cruz this winter. At 6-feet tall and 190 pounds, he doesn't stand out as a guy who can throw a 90 mph fastball. Get him in a conversation, and his understated demeanor further belies his Big League credentials.

But those who have known Erlin from before his days as a star pitcher at Scotts Valley High know that he always has carried himself as a professional. And now entering his third season with the San Diego Padres, that's precisely what he is.

"His mindset is very unique," said his father, Rick Erlin, who coached Robbie his senior year at Scotts Valley. "He's not a 6-foot-6 flame thrower, but he's been able to maximize

what he's been able to do on pure mindset. He doesn't worry about things that are out of his control."

Erlin, 24, reported to spring training in Arizona with the rest of the Padres' pitchers and catchers on February 19. The lefty made his major league debut with San Diego in April of 2013, and earned a spot in the starting rotation last year after an impressive spring. He hopes to do the same this season, but it won't be easy. San Diego boasts a deep and talented pitching staff, especially after signing ace James Shields in February, and Erlin will be competing with three or four other pitchers for the final spot in the starting rotation.

Still, Erlin has already overcome the longest odds of all by just making the big leagues after he was drafted by the Texas

Rangers out of high school in 2009 in the third round. The Rangers traded him to San Diego during the 2011 season and he spent the next two years working his way up the Padres' minor-league ranks.

"Since being drafted, I've just learned how to pitch," Erlin said. "At the amateur level you can get by on your stuff. At the professional level, everybody has seen what you have to offer and it's time to take it a step further and learn how to use your pitches."

Erlin went on the disabled list with elbow soreness last May before returning in September.

(Above) Last April, before his game as starting pitcher at AT&T Park, Robbie Erlin finds time to meet with his buddies from Scotts Valley High School.

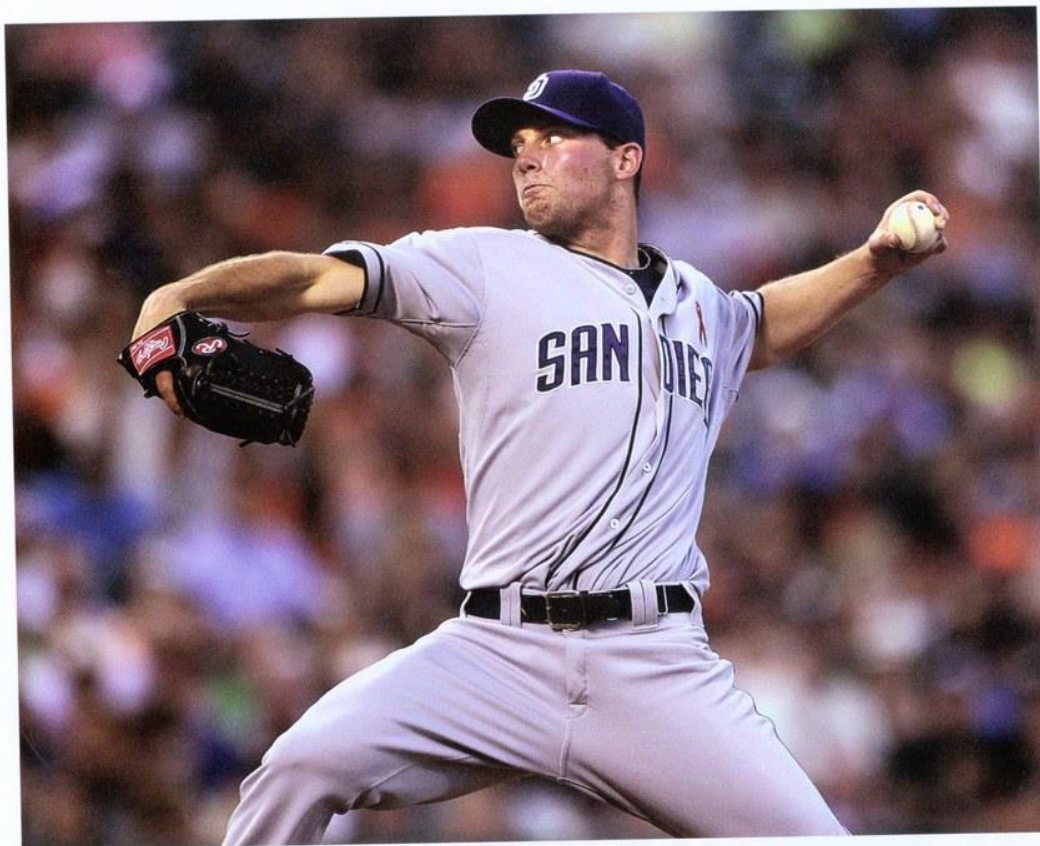


Photo: © Dan Croyro

ber to make three starts to finish out the year. He's spent the last four months in Santa Cruz this offseason preparing for the grind of another Major League Baseball season. He took a month off in October to let his body recover, and spent the last three months working out with trainer Joey Wolfe at Paradigm Sport gym, focusing on strength gains.

"You're always just preparing for the next season and then use spring training to get into baseball shape doing baseball skills," said Erlin, who has packed on 20 pounds of muscle since he was drafted. "It tends to be a pretty long season. Once it starts to wind down the body starts getting fatigued. That's why I started taking a month off — let the body completely recover and then when November comes I'm ready to get back into the gym and get after it again."

He also worked with local pitching guru and his longtime coach Dave Salter to smooth out his mechanics and refine his mental approach during bullpen sessions at Scotts Valley High with fellow Falcons graduate and Pittsburgh Pirates prospect Shane Carle.

Obviously Rick is a proud father, but he said it was a treat just as a baseball fan to see Erlin and Carle work.

"To watch two guys work out in a professional environment was something to behold," Rick Erlin said. "It's incredibly focused. Even though it's my son and Shane, and I've seen them grow up, it's really something to see how these guys have evolved. These guys don't miss their target very often, and when they do it's by a matter of inches."

Erlin has also spent time this offseason helping his dad coach the Scotts Valley team. He hopes he can pass down some of the lessons he's learned at the professional ranks to the next Santa Cruz County big leaguer.

"They ask more questions about what I'm doing than what they're doing," Erlin said. "I try to point out things that might give them an advantage and some consistency. I try to keep their minds on the process and what they're doing, and not let their mind wander to what the results could be."

But with a Major League player imparting those lessons, who can blame a kid for dreaming of what it would be like to be a pro? ■

(Above) Robbie Erlin reaches back for his 90 MPH fastball against the San Francisco Giants.

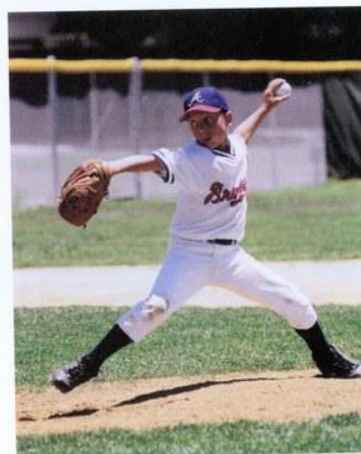


Photo: © Rick Erlin 2015

(Above) A young Erlin delivers his pitch during a Scotts Valley Little League game.