

# Kerfeld looking for fresh start

## Punkish Astro pitcher lights up College Station

By Anthony Wilson  
Sports Writer

It was only fitting that the lone member of the Houston Astros who sports a punk haircut, worships the Jell-O in his contract took the mound at Olsen Field Monday night. Because if Charley Kerfeld had played major college baseball, he would have undoubtedly done it in an Aggie uniform.

After appearing in 11 games for Houston in 1985, Kerfeld's career took off in 1986. That season the 6-foot-7, 250-pound right-hander posted an 11-2 record with seven saves and a 2.59 earned run average as the Astros made an unsuccessful championship run.

Kerfeld finished fourth in the National League's Rookie-of-the-Year voting. His outrageous comments and childlike exuberance made him a media darling. His future seemed so bright he needed a pair of wild sunglasses to match his hairdo.

But the 1987 season rained down on him like a hailstorm of gopher balls. He reported to spring training overweight and was shelled consistently in the team's first 11 games. By April 26 the Astros had sent Kerfeld and his 0-2 record and 9.24 ERA packing to Tucson, the team's AAA team.

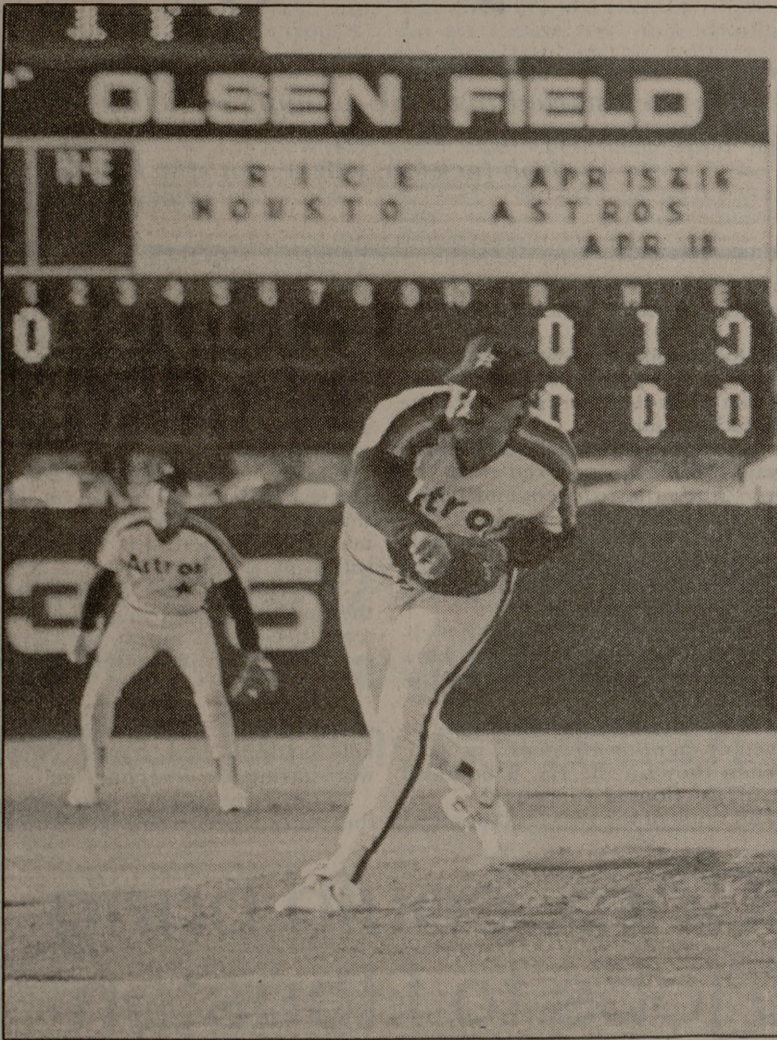
Kerfeld didn't reappear in the Dome again until July 11. When he did, the old magic seemed to have disappeared. His high strikeout total for the season was an embarrassingly low three.

However, after spending the following off-season shedding some unwanted pounds, Kerfeld arrived in Kissimmee, Fla. in top form and pitched 11 scoreless innings this pre-season. But he hurt his arm the last week of the pre-season and started the season on the disabled list.

As his stay on the DL comes to an end, Kerfeld is desperately trying to strengthen his arm to keep from returning to the minors for more rehabilitation. His start against the Aggies was a big stepping stone in that process.

"I think this game means more to me than anybody here in the stands or on the other team," Kerfeld joked during batting practice. "I've got to get myself back in gear to get a spot back on the team. There's nothing guaranteed. I've got to get a good performance tonight and then maybe one or two more simulated games."

"I feel about 75-80 percent. This is the first game I've actually pitched in a month. It's going to be kind of odd getting out there again. But you've got to start all over again somewhere."



Houston starting pitcher Charley Kerfeld unloads a pitch against the Aggies Monday. He hopes to bounce back from a lackluster season.

Photo by Jay Janner

Kerfeld realized that although the exhibition contest was meaningless to his teammates, the game meant a lot to A&M's team. Since college baseball has been compared to lower-level minor league ball and the Astros are one of the better teams in the National League, the contest would seem to be a gross mismatch. However, Kerfeld was taking precautions not to take A&M lightly.

"I've never seen them (A&M) play," Kerfeld said. "You never underestimate anyone. This means a lot to these guys. This is the game of their lives actually, because a lot of these guys will never get a chance to play pro baseball. They can say, 'I got a hit off of Charley Kerfeld,' and it will mean something to them for the rest of their lives. It means something to a lot of these people. A lot of

these people came to see Charley Kerfeld pitch.

"It means something to me, believe me," he continued. "I don't want to get embarrassed out here — that's for damn sure. It could happen. I hadn't really thought about it, but all of my teammates have been needing me about it. They've been saying, 'Don't get rocked by the college kids. You've got to come back on three days rest to get the scrubbenies.' That's the four guys who I usually pitch against on the side."

A&M would have seemed to have been a natural haven for a fellow with Kerfeld's unabashed wacky personality. But beside rooming with former A&M baseball player Rob Swain in junior college and hearing lots of Aggie jokes, Kerfeld didn't

know much about A&M. He said he was never interested in college and that if his baseball career hadn't panned out he would have returned to his home state of Nevada to work in a casino.

"I'm 24 now," he said. "I've got two years in the major leagues — a pretty good start. I decided I'd take a chance making some money playing baseball or I'd go work 9 to 5. It worked out for me, but for a lot of my friends, it didn't work out."

"I'd probably be dealing blackjack or craps back home in Nevada. No question I'd rather be here. I can go home to Nevada and gamble during the winter."

Playing with his idol, strikeout king Nolan Ryan, has been one of Kerfeld's biggest baseball thrills. The 41-year-old Ryan has been both a father figure and a professional role model for Kerfeld.

"I watched Nolan throw a no-hitter on the TV when I was in about the fifth grade," he said. "That tells you how awesome he is. I'm here standing with him now about 10-12 years later. That's one of a kind right there. They broke the mold."

Kerfeld said the secret to Ryan's success are his strong legs.

"If Bo Derek's a 10, then Nolan's got a pair of 11s," he said. "That's for sure. Those legs are something he's worked hard to get."

Although Kerfeld would seem to benefit from the recent poor performances of several of the Astros' relievers, he is more concerned with achieving the ultimate in team success — a world championship.

"It (poor pitching) might help my situation a bit, but the team comes first," Kerfeld said. "If the team wins and goes to the World Series, that's what you play for. I don't play for Charley Kerfeld to get 20 wins or a thousand saves. If Charley Kerfeld loses 10 games and doesn't win one, and we go to the World Series, then I'm happy. That's what we're here for."

"I got in professional baseball wanting one thing out of it — a World Series ring. I haven't got that so I'm not happy yet. You see these guys walking around with these World Series rings and it means more to them than anything."

Of all of Kerfeld's pranks and eccentricities, his orange Jell-O demand is perhaps his most famous. He put the gelatin to use in a practical joke but refuses to reveal the details.

"Ahh, you can't put that in the newspaper," he laughed. "There was some stuff done with it, but it's not out for syndicate copy."

# Astros voice opinions on road trip to A&M

By Anthony Wilson  
Sports Writer

What do you suppose a major leaguer does on his days off? Hit the golf course for a round or two? Spend some time with the wife and kids? Or maybe just stay home and catch up on the soaps and game shows?

After a weekend homestand and road trips to Atlanta and Cincinnati, the Houston Astros travelled to Aggieland to play A&M in an exhibition game on their first day off since the beginning of the season. Here are some of the Astros' reactions:

"It gives people who probably wouldn't have a chance to see us play see us in person. It's good for them for us to come down here. You always enjoy your off days. But if it's for a good cause, it's all right." — center fielder Gerald Young.

"I don't think they mind at all. They understand what it's for. It

gives us a chance to pitch some people who haven't had a chance to pitch." — Manager Hal Lanier.

"I'd rather be at home. But I'm glad to come out here and try to get some of these people at Texas A&M to be Astros fans. That's the only good thing about it. Anytime you have a day off you wish you could go off and play golf or something. I would be home with my wife spending the day with her or going fishing." — left fielder Billy Hatcher.

"If I wasn't here today I'd probably be playing baseball with my two boys (8-year-old Jacob and 3-year-old Tyler.) This will be Jacob's first year in Little League." — pitcher Bob Knepper.

"Now that I'm here, it's kind of fun. Everybody always wants a day off. But we're going to play hard, have some fun out here and have a good time. If I weren't here I'd probably out with my wife going to a movie or doing something relaxing." — third baseman Chuck Jackson.

# Rangers end Indians' streak with 3-0 win

CLEVELAND (AP) — Jose Guzman pitched six shutout innings and Larry Parrish drove in two runs with a bases-loaded single Tuesday night as the Texas Rangers beat Cleveland 3-0, ending the Indians' five-game winning streak.

The loss was only the second in the last 13 games for the Indians, who at 11-3 are off to their best start since 1966.

Guzman, 2-1, struck out three and walked one and allowed only four singles in six innings despite having been bothered by the flu for several days.

Rookie Jose Cecena pitched 2 1/3 innings and Mitch Williams got the last two outs for his fifth save.

The 25-year-old Guzman did not allow a runner past first base until the sixth, when Julio Franco walked and took second on Willie Upshaw's single.

Both runners advanced on a groundout before Guzman got Joe Carter on a grounder to third to end the inning.

Scott Bailes, 1-1, took the loss, the first defeat for a Cleveland starter this season.

The Rangers scored twice in the first on Parrish's single, after they loaded the bases on a single by Jerry Browne, a two-out double by Pete Incaviglia and a walk to Pete O'Brien.

Incaviglia's double came on a pop-up to shallow right that eluded second baseman Franco.

Texas added a run in the second when Cecil Espy doubled, stole third and scored on Browne's single.

It was the Rangers' second shutout of the season. Last year, Texas' first shutout was on June 9.

# Without a doubt, Bass is at home in the Astrodome

By Anthony Wilson  
Sports Writer

Two weeks ago Houston Astros outfielder Kevin Bass may have been singing these lyrics to a song popularized by Frank Sinatra: "Start spreading the news! I'm leaving today! But I DON'T want to be a part of it — New York, New York..."

Rumors had emerged that the Astros were sending Bass to the Big Apple in exchange for the Yankees' Dave Winfield. Bass didn't want to leave Houston, but was powerless to do anything to prevent a trade. If it weren't for Winfield's 10-plus years of major league experience which gives him the right to veto any trade, Bass would probably be wearing pinstripes today.

"What can I do about it," Bass said Monday before the Astros exhibition game with A&M at Olsen Field. "It (trades) happens in this game. I definitely wasn't for the trade. I'd like to stay. I'm happy here and I've been successful here. But what can you say? Nothing really. If you have to go, you have to go. You have no say in the matter. He does, but I don't."

An All-Star in 1986, Bass had the best season of his career that year when he hit .311 with 20 home runs and stole 22 bases. Bass' statistics tailed off a bit in most categories, but he did drive in 85 runs.

Bass has spent most of this early season on the disabled list with a pulled hamstring but has come off the bench to make major contributions to the Astros' fast start. Bass is hitting at a .333 pace with 11 RBIs including a grand slam against the Cincinnati Reds. The level of his play is surprising to many considering his injury and the trade talk distractions. Bass credited his performance with his strong faith.

"The Lord does wonderful things," Bass said. "I just tried to remain strong and put all of that

rumor talk and injury stuff behind me and try not to let it effect me. The Lord heard my prayers. That's all I can say. I was called upon, and I was just able to do the job."

Houston Manager Hal Lanier said he doesn't think the rumors has effected Bass psychologically.

"I don't think it's messed up Kevin's head too much," Lanier said. "Anytime there's trade talks going on doesn't mean we contacted other people. It just means that people are talking to each other. That's the way professional baseball is. You talk to a lot of ball clubs about different people."

The Astros' outfield with Bass in right, Gerald Young in center, and Billy Hatcher in left has been called the team's strongest point by many critics. Each player is entering the prime of his career, so Bass is puzzled about why Houston's braintrust would consider splitting up the trio.

"The pudding's in the mix," Bass said about the outfield. "We definitely have a good shot and a good opportunity for the (World) Series this year. But who knows what the front office thinks? They're always trying to improve the ball club so who am I to say they're wrong?"

Hatcher agreed that dismantling the team's outfield could be a mistake. Hatcher said that each has learned how to play with the others and that their speed is an asset to the team's stadium.

"The outfielders have to complement one another," Hatcher said. "I think we complement each other very well because all three of us do pretty much the same thing. Kevin might have more power than Gerald or myself, but we complement each other. I think we're going to be a good outfield for the Astrodome. We're going to have our moments. You put us in a small ballpark and it's not going to help us with all that speed. But put us in the Astrodome and we can show off."

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