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Hernandez brothers leading Martin towards playoffs

As the top starter at Martin for the last two seasons, Robert Hernandez has made it a habit to suppress his nerves when he takes the field. The senior pitcher does get butterflies every once in a while when his little brother, freshman Edgar Hernandez, is on the mound.

With five games left in the regular season, the duo is helping Martin inch closer to its first appearance since 2013 when Robert was a sophomore reliever on a team that made it to the third round of the playoffs.

"We've been playing with each other since little league," Robert Hernandez said. "It's exciting to have my brother on the team. I see a lot of potential in him. He just needs to get a little more experience."

Robert is the clear No. 1 starter as he has been for nearly two seasons. But the Tigers' second starter has been in flux all year, rotating between a few younger pitchers, including Edgar, who is third on the team with six appearances.

"Any time you have good pitchers, brothers or not, that's a good thing for a baseball team," Martin head coach Jorge Tijerina said. "Being that they're brothers and such good kids as well makes it more special."

Having brothers on the same team isn't that uncommon across the city. But what makes the Hernandez brothers unique is that Robert will be leaving a legacy that Edgar hopes to fill in the near future.

While the nerves are real for Robert when Edgar is on the mound, the feeling isn't reciprocated. The younger Hernandez knows that when Robert is toeing the rubber every week, the Tigers are in good hands.

"I feel confident that he's gonna do a good job when he's pitching," Edgar said. "It feels really special to be on the same team as my brother."

In Robert's first season on the varsity squad in 2013, he was used as a reliever instead of starting. His first ever start was a complete game performance in a 3-0 loss to Edinburg North before district play started that year.

He took a big step forward in his junior year and was tied with Eddie Rodriguez, who now plays at TAMU, with 11 starts and led the team with a 2.21 season ERA and three wins.

Unsurprisingly, this season has been even better. With a 2.11 ERA and six wins he's one of the main reasons the Tigers are in a playoff position. Robert has started six of the 10 district games this season and he's had an ERA of 2.00 or lower in all of them.

"Robert is the type of kid that is very coachable and respectful," Tijerina said. "Now Edgar coming up is kind of the same mold. He's very hardworking and respectful with a lot of potential. It's a joy to coach kids like that."

Edgar is 1-2 with a 5.92 ERA in four appearances this season. His one win came at the Edgewood Tournament on March 3 in a 3-0 win against San Antonio Sam Houston.

The two brothers grew up playing little league together and Edgar said the transition to the high school level has been hard, but having his old brother with him in his first season as helped him make the jump up.

"I look up to him and he's taught me how to control the ball and throw more strikes," Edgar Hernandez said. "I'm confident I'm a good pitcher and I'm confident I can do my job. Pitchers throw harder in high school and are better players."

Robert has been nothing but supportive. Despite being jealous that his brother is left-handed, this senior said as long as Edgar does his part and the defense helps him out, he's more than capable of being a top starter in years to come.

There are four teams battling for the final two spots in the playoffs and the Tigers are tied for third place with Somerset, one game up on Cigarroa and CC Winn. All but one of their final four games, however, are against teams in the playoffs or fighting to get there.

Of the nine players that have at least one pitching appearance this season, seven are freshmen or sophomores. Although the Tigers will be sad to see Robert graduate after this season, the Hernandez pitching tradition is in good hands with Edgar.

"If you're a competitor, you're going to look at what your brother did and try to outdo him," Tijerina said. "Not in a wrong way, but in a good way where you want to establish your own name and follow in your brother's footsteps."