

KING FELIX STANDS UP TO BULLIES

Children's book featuring Felix Hernandez, the King's Court and the Mariner Moose takes on cyberbullying.

By Rebecca Hale

*"Moose is a fool.
He wears double zero –
He could not count in school!"*

With that fictional Tweet from a rival mascot, the Mariner Moose finds himself in a situation that some studies say affects one out of every three school-aged children in the U.S. But unlike most targets of bullying, the Moose has some powerful allies – Felix

Hernandez, his Seattle Mariners teammates and a ballpark full of fans – who are willing to stand up to the bully and defend their friend.

That's the plot of a new children's book, *Rise with King Felix*, by Jarrett Mentink, PhD. The book is written in verse and is aimed at an elementary school audience. The premise is based on scholarly research supporting the so-called "bystander" approach to intervening in and disrupting acts of sexual violence, domestic violence and even bullying.

The book was commissioned by Comcast as part of its Internet

Essentials program that provides Internet access to low-income families with children.

"If we bring connectivity to people, we have a responsibility to address their concerns around the use of the technology," says Walter Neary, Comcast's Senior Director of Communications.

Cyberbullying & Internet Safety

Recent research has identified online bullying as the number one Internet safety issue for today's connected children. *Rise with King Felix* aims to

Above Left: A new book, starring Felix Hernandez, helps kids face up to cyberbullying. Above Right: Felix and Seattle hip-hop artist Macklemore teamed up in 2014 for the anti-bullying #ChangeTheGame campaign.

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give parents and children tools to help them respond in a positive way if they encounter cyberbullying.

About 9% of kids today say they've been the victim of cyberbullying, everything from mean text messages to sharing rumors, gossip or embarrassing photos or videos by text, chat or on social media.

Anne Collier, Executive Director of The Net Safety Collaborative, and an advisor to Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter, says bullying in general, and cyberbullying in particular, is "not an epidemic. But when it does happen, it can be pretty devastating to a kid."

Resulting problems can include headaches, anxiety, depression. Kids who are targeted by bullying behavior may be more likely to skip school, get poor grades and have lower self-esteem.

But Collier notes the majority of kids don't participate in bullying behaviors and can be a powerful force to fight it if they are empowered to stand up for their peers.

"They can do that publicly, the way The King did, or the way the (King's) Court did, or they can do it quietly, behind the scenes. Just reach out to the person and say, 'Is there anything I can do to help you?' Or, 'Tell me what's going on.' Kids who have been bullied say that what helps more than anything is just to be heard," says Collier.

The Mariner Moose is cyberbullied on MarinersVision at Safeco Field by a rival mascot.

Rise with King Felix

Mentink, who is an assistant professor of Health and Human Performance at Seattle Pacific University, has written nine children's books on a variety of topics, eight of them featuring professional athletes.

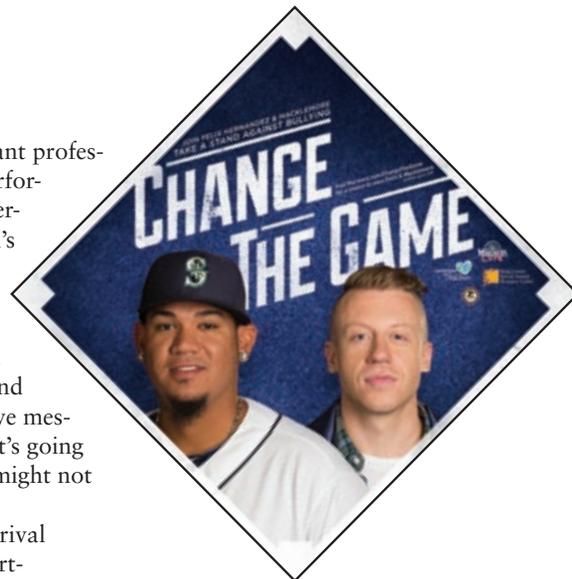
"Anytime you can take an athlete that kids look up to and respect, and share that positive message via that athlete, I think it's going to reach kids that otherwise might not be reached," says Mentink.

In *Rise with King Felix*, a rival mascot, the Titan, sends a hurtful Tweet about the Moose, then he hijacks MarinersVision, the huge HD videoscreen at Safeco Field, to post an embarrassing photo of the Moose for all to see.

Felix, who is pitching in the game that night, stands up for the Moose and with the aid of his fastball, wrecks Titan's attempts to humiliate the Moose further. The King's Court, Felix's personal cheering section, spells out a message of support: "No haters in Safeco," and Felix says that people who make fun of others aren't cool, and declares "My house of Safeco is a bully-free zone!"

The story is illustrated by Mentink's frequent collaborator, artist Patrick Carlson.

Books will be distributed to students at Seattle area elementary schools this spring with the goal of reaching kids at an early age with a message about treating each other with respect, something Jarrett, and his wife, *ROOT SPORTS*™ anchor Angie



Felix Hernandez and Seattle musician Macklemore joined forces in 2014 to urge kids to "take a stand against bullying."

Mentink, discuss with their young sons, ages 11 and nine.

"We try to regularly talk to them about posting things online and about making wise decisions and always to treat other people with respect, the way they'd like to be treated as well," says Mentink.

#ChangeTheGame

In 2014, Felix and Seattle musician Macklemore teamed up for #ChangeTheGame, a public service campaign and curriculum for middle schoolers with an anti-bullying theme that asked students to "be kind, stay positive, and support each other."

This book, in a sense, is a continuation of that effort, and this time, Internet safety expert Anne Collier says, it comes with a message of empowerment.

"Whether it's through research or reading a children's book to your child before bed, it's a good way to deliver the message to both the reader and the listener, the adult and the child, this is what 'Upstanders' look like," says Collier.

And when people see the behavior modeled by someone else, they're more likely respond in kind. "We've all got to take care of each other," says Collier.

If you would like more information about safeguarding your child's online activities, please log onto InternetEssentials.com, StopBullying.gov or NetFamilyNews.org.

Rebecca Hale is the Mariners director of Public Information.

