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## Unit out for year

**Nick Picoro**  
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Randy Johnson's season came to an end Friday.

The Diamondbacks left-hander will undergo another surgery to repair a herniated disk in his back, a procedure he hopes will allow him to return in time for spring training next year.

"I have no intentions now of retiring," he said. "I think for a brief moment that I proved (to myself) that I can come back and pitch effectively. I'll do it again."

Johnson, 43, will travel next week to Los Angeles, where Dr. Robert Watkins will perform his third surgical procedure on Johnson's back.

Watkins operated on Johnson in October and in 1996, when Johnson was with the Seattle Mariners.

Johnson got just nine starts out of the most-recent procedure, but during a six-start span in May and June he looked like the Big Unit of old, going 4-0 with a 2.02 ERA and striking out 51 in 35 2/3 innings. That success, he said, convinced him to be willing to go through another long rehabilitation process rather than retire.

"Through the short period of time that it was, I was pitching as good as anybody," he said. "I guess I still love being competitive, and I know I can still pitch."

"I surely don't want to end my career because I had surgery and I had to call it career because of surgery. I would much rather call it a career being healthy and being ineffective and saying, 'You know what? I can't do it anymore.' But that hasn't been the case."

Johnson's loss wasn't an unexpected blow for the Diamondbacks, who have been without him for the better part of the past six weeks, and it doesn't sound as if the team will aggressively pursue another starting pitcher in the days before Tuesday's non-waiver trade deadline.

"Our starters have the most innings and the fourth-best ERA (4.08), even with Randy in and out," Diamondbacks General Manager Josh Byrnes said.

"Our starters have done a nice job this year. I think it's like anything; you can always try to get better.

"But I think we're in a lot better shape than most teams with who goes out to start games for us."

Rookie right-hander Yusmeiro Petit has been in the rotation since July 3, and before his start Friday night, he went 2-1 with a 2.53 ERA during that span.

"I think we have enough depth in our pitching," left-hander Doug Davis said. "Losing a guy like Randy is going to hurt any rotation, but I think Petit has done a great job for us so far."

Although Petit has pitched well, Johnson was trying to work his way back. He threw three innings in a simulated game Tuesday. He said he felt that he was fairly effective in the first two innings, but his right leg - his landing leg - began to tire in the third inning, a result of his sciatic nerve being affected by the herniated disk.

That is how this injury differs from last year's.

Last season, while pitching for the Yankees, Johnson experienced pain in his back that he said he could tolerate. This injury zaps his leg of strength, he says, making him unable to pitch effectively.

"When I bend over, my hamstring, with the nerve in there, just feels like it's on fire," he said. "It affects the strength in my landing leg. Eventually, I just lose the strength."

Johnson hopes that by having the surgery now, he will recover sufficiently enough to go through a regular spring training.

How much more complicated the procedure or recovery period might be for someone such as Johnson remains to be seen.

"When you add in a third surgery and his age (Johnson is about six weeks from his 44th birthday), I'm sure there's no surgery that's a slam dunk," Byrnes said. "It's certainly necessary, and certainly a lot of people feel like this has a chance to help resolve the problem."

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