

MLB

Mariners' Diaz set for closer role after WBC experience

By JOSE M. ROMERO Associated Press

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — His exhilarating World Baseball Classic experience over, Edwin Diaz got back to work Sunday in preparation to start the 2017 season as the Seattle Mariners' closer.

But the memories of the WBC and Diaz's time with Team Puerto Rico were still fresh. The young right-hander struck out nine in 5 1-3 WBC innings, earning a win and two saves.

After his two innings of clutch relief in the 11-inning semifinal win over the Netherlands, a fired-up Diaz leaped off the mound in celebration.

It's the way he wants to continue to pitch this season, feeding off emotion and displaying it, as is customary among ballplayers from Latin America.

"Unforgettable. I had the opportunity to represent Puerto Rico and play with great teammates. It gave me so much satisfaction," Diaz said. "That's the way we play in Latin America, showing emotion. I think it's good for us to be real and show how we feel on the inside."

Diaz's hair is dark again after the dyed-blond look he and his WBC teammates sported. As unified as the team was in the tournament, he said, its spirited play brought together the island nation.

Diaz and many of his teammates returned to Puerto Rico for a parade on Thursday after the club's runner-up finish, then the just-turned 23-year-old rejoined the Mariners on Friday in Arizona.



Puerto Rico pitcher Edwin Diaz reacts after getting the last out to defeat the Dominican Republic in a second-round World Baseball Classic game Tuesday, March 14, 2017, in San Diego.

AP Photo/Gregory Bull



Cactus League: 19-13 (.594), 1st place Opening Day: Monday, April 3 - at Houston, 5:10 p.m.

Double-A Jackson. Diaz took over for Steve Cishek as closer last August and converted his first 11 save opportunities before ending the season with 18. He struck out 15.33 batters per nine innings, the second-best rate in the majors behind New York Yankees reliever Dellin Betances.

Cishek is coming back from hip surgery but isn't likely to pitch in April. So Diaz is set to begin the season as the Mariners' save specialist.

Manager Scott Servais said the Mariners are inclined to open the season with an eight-man bullpen, including Diaz.

"I think going through an entire season as a reliever is the next step," Servais said. "Last year at this time he was a starting pitcher for us in Double-A. He hasn't done it for a full season. I don't think you'll see the six-out save out of Eddie Diaz, but there will be times, maybe in April or May, we need four outs. And certainly early, with Cishek being down and some other things. Hopefully we're winning a lot of games in April. But I will be careful with him not to do that too often. I hope he pitches a lot in April, that means that's a good thing for us."

and play with several teammates he grew up watching on television, including Yadier Molina, Carlos Beltran and Angel Pagan. He was asked if he would compete in the WBC again.

"One hundred percent, absolutely yes," Diaz said. "It's a family and we feel like brothers."

On Sunday, Diaz pitched in his first spring training game for Seattle since March 5. Facing the Cincinnati Reds, he struck out two in his

lone inning of work. "I did good work last season and I look forward to doing that again this year," Diaz said. "My goal is to stay healthy and help the team get to the playoffs, first and foremost."

The Mariners converted Diaz into a reliever after he was named the organization's top minor-league starting pitcher in 2014 and 2015. By May of last year, the switch to the bullpen had begun, and by June, Diaz was too dominant to leave at

From Saturday

Florida State brings its defense to eliminate Oregon State

By JANIE MCCAULEY Associated Press

STOCKTON, Calif. — Ivey Slaughter jumped into the passing lane on Oregon State's first possession of the second half and swiped the ball away, then drove the length of the floor in one of those timely defensive moments that has defined her final season at Florida State.

That momentum-changing steal was a big reason the third-seeded Seminoles rallied from way behind to advance into the Stockton Regional final, beating No. 2 seed Oregon State 66-53 on Saturday to set up an Elite Eight rematch of 2015 with top-seeded South Carolina.

The Gamecocks won that one by six points.

The slick-handed Slaughter, who doesn't even consider herself the Seminoles' best defender — "She definitely is," Leticia Romero chimed in — started swiping to help Florida State discover its best defense from all angles, and

the Seminoles methodically erased a daunting deficit.

"She really changed a lot of things," said Romero, Florida State's top scorer in the game with 18 points.

Slaughter finished with a career-high nine steals, a school record in the NCAA Tournament and also a top mark ever in the women's regional round. Florida State had 16 steals total, and Slaughter also contributed 11 points and eight rebounds. She made 1 of 2 free throws with 3:41 left before Sydney Wiese missed yet another 3-point try on the other end during a tough day from deep, and Slaughter scored again to help extend her special senior season. She hopes it will end with the Seminoles reaching the program's first Final Four.

Coach Sue Semrau had a quick reminder for her team, too. "If we could convince them how good we are defensively, things could change," she said.

ACC Player of the Year Shakayla Thomas notched



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli

Florida State guard Leticia Romero, center, battles for the ball with Oregon State's Mikayla Pivec, left, and Gabriella Hanson during the second half of a regional semi-final round game of an NCAA college basketball tournament, Saturday in Stockton, Calif. Florida State won 66-53.

her third straight double-double with 12 points and 11 rebounds. The Seminoles (28-6) used an 8-0 run to put

the game away and will face top-seeded South Carolina (30-4) on Monday for a Final Four berth. The Gamecocks

beat No. 12 seed Quinnipiac 100-58 earlier Saturday at Stockton Arena.

Wiese, the Beavers' leading scorer, wound up with just nine points on 3-for-14 shooting and missed all 10 of her 3-point tries in her final collegiate game. Oregon State (31-5) missed a return trip to the Final Four.

Oregon State tied it at 46 with 6:55 to play, with Gabriella Hanson's free throws capping a 9-0 run. Then Florida State responded once more.

First, Romero led the Seminoles back into the game, and then Slaughter was key in closing it out.

Florida State trailed by 17 late in the first quarter and 10 midway through the second.

"I was stunned that we were missing the shots that we were missing," Semrau said.

The Seminoles stormed back with a big run spanning halftime — getting within 35-30 at the break before opening the third with a 16-2 burst to go ahead 46-37.

Wiese struggled to get clean looks and never got comfortable with her shot, while Oregon State was just 2 for 17 from long range and shot just 36.4 percent overall after a decorated senior class led the program to the past three Pac-12 regular season titles.

Kolbie Orum was the Beavers' lone player to score in double figures with 12.

Oregon State was the only team in Stockton not to travel cross-country, and plenty of fans made the easy trip down the West Coast to Northern California.

These teams just missed each other last March at the Dallas Regional, where Florida State lost to Baylor in the Sweet 16 and the Beavers beat the Bears to reach their first Final Four ever.

"This game had so many stretches, for them, for us, and then finally for them," Beavers coach Scott Rueck said. "The hot team wins in March, and they were that today."

SCOREBOARD

Local Slate

Table with columns for PREP BASEBALL, PREP SOFTBALL, and PREP GOLF, listing various teams and game times.

Recent Scores

Table with columns for COLLEGE BASEBALL, COLLEGE SOFTBALL, and PREP BASEBALL, listing recent game results.

Table with columns for W, L, Pct, GB, listing scores for various teams in the Western Conference, National Semifinals, and other tournaments.

Table with columns for GP, W, L, OT, Pts, GF, GA, listing scores for various teams in the Eastern Conference, National Semifinals, and other tournaments.

Table with columns for GP, W, L, OT, Pts, GF, GA, listing scores for various teams in the Metropolitan Division, Pacific Division, and other tournaments.

PREP GOLF

Today Mac-Hi at Walla Walla CC, 2:30 p.m.

PREP LACROSSE

Today Southridge (WA) at Hermiston, 5:30 p.m.

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Wednesday Blue Mountain at Yakima Valley (2), 1/4 p.m. Saturday Wenatchee Valley at Blue Mountain (2), 1/4 p.m.

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Today Blue Mountain at Pacific (2), 2/4 p.m. Friday

PGA

Dell Match Play Saturday At Austin Country Club Austin, Texas

Semifinals

(Seedings in parentheses) Jon Rahm (21), Spain, def. Bill Haas (42), United States, 3 and 2.

Championship

Dustin Johnson (1), United States, def. Hideito Tanihara (54), Japan, 1 up.

Consolation

Bill Haas (42), United States, def. Hideito Tanihara (54), Japan, 2 and 1.