

Mariners' young duo hoping to make mark in starting rotation

By **JOSE M. ROMERO**
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — The future of the Seattle Mariners' starting rotation is now, with left-hander Justus Sheffield virtually assured of a spot and fellow rising prospect Justin Dunn a top contender to join the group.

Both got a taste of the big leagues last season when they made their Mariners debuts. This season they figure to be a major part of Seattle's rebuilding process as it enters its second year following a 68-94 season.

"Every year's a step forward, but mainly this year I'm looking forward to going out there and competing and changing this thing around," said Sheffield, who was 0-1 in eight games, including seven starts, and posted a 5.50 ERA over 36 innings.

The club appears to have set expectations for Sheffield, which he appreciates. "As they should," he said. "As anyone should. Everyone has a sense of responsibility of going out there and proving what they can do."

Sheffield, 23, is in his second spring training with the Mariners. He's learned from last season that baseball is a game of failure, he said, and that he has to get past the bad outings and



Seattle Mariners manager Scott Servais watches spring training baseball practice on Feb. 13, 2020 in Peoria, Ariz.

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel, File

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— Justus Sheffield, Seattle Mariner

move forward.

"I'm going to continue to fight. I'm never going to back down from any challenge, any obstacle that's in my way," Sheffield said. "I'd

love to stay here. I love the organization and I love the direction that they're going so I'm excited to be a part of this."

The Mariners are largely

a young team, but with 42 pitchers seeing major league action and a number of prospects called up as the team struggled last season, there's a level of familiar-

ity with each other in spring training. Many players have already been minor-league teammates and bonded over having been traded from other organizations, Dunn said.

Dunn, 24, and Sheffield were teammates at Double-A Arkansas last season, and Dunn was a September call-up for Seattle and pitched in four games.

Each outing was purposely shortened. He never pitched more than two innings in a start, but came away with the sense that he belongs at the major league level.

"I have the ability to have success here," he said when asked about what he took from last season's outings. "Second, is that it's the same game. Once you slow the heart rate down and get back to playing baseball, the same game you were playing since you were young, it's the same type of game."

Dunn, who did not register a decision last season but overcame a rocky major-league debut to compile a 2.70 ERA, is aware of the competition to be in the rotation.

"Hopefully, at the end of the (spring) I'm getting on a flight to go to Seattle," he said. "But all that's out of my hands. I just have to go out there and be me and put

myself in a good position."

Mariners manager Scott Servais said Sheffield and Dunn learned a great deal from their brief big league experience, noting Sheffield "made some huge strides going forward."

"Everybody wants to bolt them together but they really are different in where they're at with their development plan," Servais said. "Both of them have a chance to really impact our future. We'd love to see it happen as soon as possible, but understand there's a timeline, you have to be patient."

Servais is looking for consistency from his young starters in 2020.

"Is that going to be there every time out? We hope over time," he said. "But being realistic, there's probably going to be some really good outings, maybe some where they struggle."

Notes: The Mariners held their first full squad workout Tuesday with 70 players taking the field, the most since Servais took over as manager before the 2016 season. Only Dee Gordon wasn't in camp as he awaits the birth of his child.

... Servais accepted some players' challenge to taste some Louisiana hot sauce Monday, and said he paid the price. "It didn't go so well," he said with a laugh.



Seattle Mariners' Ichiro Suzuki fields balls during batting practice at spring baseball training on Feb. 13, 2020, in Peoria, Ariz.

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

Haniger upbeat after offseason of surgeries

By **JOSE M. ROMERO**
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — It will be months, at best, before Mitch Haniger is ready to suit up and take the field for the Seattle Mariners.

But after three surgeries in seven months and two within the last four weeks, Haniger is in a positive frame of mind.

The 2018 All-Star outfielder said Thursday that he isn't feeling much pain from surgery in his core area in January plus a back procedure earlier this month.

"Excited to be in camp with the guys and be around everybody," Haniger said. "Hopefully I can contribute to the team as much as I can during this time that I'm not going to be on the field."

Haniger said he believes he can play at some point this season.

"I tend to and I hope so and I expect to be," he said.

Haniger, who hit .285 with 26 home runs and 93 RBIs in 2018, took time to rehash his recent timeline of medical events. It all started last June when he fouled a pitch off his groin area during a game.

Haniger went on the 10-day injured list with a ruptured testicle, and

in August went out on a rehab assignment. But he began to feel back pain and was shut down for the rest of the season.

Haniger said that early in his rehabilitation last summer he tore an adductor muscle attachment in his core, which eventually

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— Mitch Haniger, Seattle Mariner

led to his back pain. The injury went undiagnosed and he continued his work into the offseason.

He felt good enough physically in early January to ramp up baseball activities, until one morning he woke up in a great deal of pain and could barely walk. That led to the core surgery.

His back pain got worse when he started his rehab from the core procedure, and an MRI showed a herniated lower spine. So on Feb. 13 he underwent a small repair of vertebrae in his back.

"I'm really happy now that the problems are fixed. Surgery intervention was needed to fix both of those issues and now I'm really

excited that I can move forward," he said. "I have a clear plan to get back on the field. Whenever that may be, I don't know what timetables are as of right now."

The first step in Haniger's rehabilitation process from his latest surgery is

simply walking, he said, with no lifting, bending or twisting. Visibly thinner without the muscular frame he builds when in game shape, Haniger said he's learned a good deal about mental toughness. He enjoys working out and said he gets skinny if he isn't bulking up with weights.

"I think I can get through anything. Been tested in a lot of ways these last seven months," he said. "But I've done a lot of work in that department over the years and continue to put in more and more work every year."

Mariners manager Scott Servais said he's glad Haniger is at spring

training with the team. Haniger, 29, is one of the few veterans on a largely young Mariners roster.

"It's going to be a process for him just trying to get the strength back and work from there," Servais said.

Haniger's absence opens the door for Jake Fraley or Braden Bishop, two players who made their big league debuts last season, to start the season in right field as the Mariners move forward with their rebuild. Veteran Carlos Gonzalez, a three-time All-Star in camp on a minor-league deal, is also in contention.

Notes: Longtime Mariners star Ichiro Suzuki will throw out the first ball in the regular-season opener March 26 at home against Texas. The 10-time All-Star outfielder, 46 has been shagging flyballs and pitching batting practice in spring training as a special assistant/instructor. He started the Mariners' first two games last year when they opened in Japan, then retired as a player. ... Servais said left-hander Nestor Cortes Jr., who arrived in an off-season trade with the New York Yankees, is scheduled to start the first game of spring training Saturday and work a couple of innings.

Green, Mannion lead No. 24 Wildcats past Oregon State

JOSE M. ROMERO
Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Arizona rolled past an undisciplined Oregon State squad 89-63 on Thursday night.

Josh Green scored 18 points and Nico Mannion scored 12 of his 16 in the second half for the 24th-ranked Wildcats (19-7, 9-4 Pac-12), Max Hazzard scored 13 of his 15 points in the second half and Zeke Nnaji added 13 points and seven rebounds for Arizona.

The Wildcats made 10 more free throws than the Beavers (15-11, 5-9), with help from three technical fouls against Oregon State.

"They shot 15 free throws and we shot 28," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "It was about our aggressiveness."

Oregon State also committed 21 turnovers to lose for the third time in five games.

The Beavers lost leading scorer Tres Tinkle to his second technical foul for a high elbow with 13:17 remaining and Arizona up 52-40. Oregon State coach Wayne Tinkle, Tres' father, was assessed a technical moments later.

Wayne Tinkle didn't expect his son to lose his composure.

"That was uncharacteristic," Wayne Tinkle said. "But I tell you what, he's been ridden like American Pharoah all of the stinkin' league (season). And he's got to be better. He's got to play through that, but I've told people that if the way the game is being called isn't changed, then something silly is going to happen. It's very unfortunate. He's not that kind of player. He's got to keep his head about him."

After the technicals, the Wildcats took control with a 12-3 run to cruise to victory. The Wildcats won for the sixth time in seven games and are tied for second place in the conference.

Arizona avenged an 82-65 loss at Oregon State earlier in the season.

"It wasn't something we talked about, but I think as a group, we kind of had that in mind," Mannion said. "We owed them one."

Jarod Lucas scored 18 points and Kylor Kelley added 14 points and eight rebounds for Oregon State. Tinkle entered the night averaging 18.3 points per contest, but he was held to 10.

The Beavers turned the ball over four times in the first four minutes. A steal and

dunk from Green gave the Wildcats a 10-2 lead at the 16:01 mark.

"My main goal coming into the game was just try my hardest on defense, bring energy to the team and do all the dirty work and energize," said Green, who had four steals.

Oregon State went almost five minutes between baskets early in the game, but trimmed an 11-point deficit to 19-15 on a layup by Ethan Thompson with 9:33 to go.

Christian Koloko's dunk out of a timeout gave Arizona a 35-22 lead, the Wildcats' largest lead of the first half. Green scored 13 points before the break to give Arizona a 40-30 lead. Nnaji's two free throws with 15:34 left gave Arizona a 47-34 lead early in the second half, and the Wildcats maintained control from there.

Big picture

Oregon State: Plenty of observers felt the Beavers had the experience and talent to be an NCAA tournament team this season, but they will have to go on an epic run in February and March to get in. The opportunity is there for a strong regular season finish, with games at No. 14 Oregon, whom the Beavers beat once this season, and at home against struggling Stanford and California, before the Pac-12 Tournament.

Arizona: The Wildcats are right in the thick of the regular season title race, with a home game against Oregon — which fell at Arizona State Thursday — and home games against Washington State and Washington to end the regular season.

Highlight reel

Miller singled out freshman center Koloko for his play — five points and three blocked shots in 10 minutes. Soon after Tres Tinkle was ejected, Koloko swatted away a shot from Thompson, which led to Hazzard's driving layup at other end for 56-40 lead.

Up next

Oregon State: Heads north to face Arizona State Saturday night in Tempe, Ariz. The Beavers lost at home to the Sun Devils 82-76 on January 9.

Arizona: The Wildcats get a chance to atone for a 74-73 overtime loss at Oregon last month when they face the Ducks at home Saturday night.