

CATCHING UP WITH ... MARK LANGSTON

By Mike Gastineau

If Mike Trout isn't the best player in Major League Baseball these days, he's certainly in the discussion. The young Angels outfielder appears poised to do damage for a long time, and as if his youth and natural talent weren't enough, he has a secret weapon helping him in the hitting cage.

Mark Langston's grandson.

Let that sink in for a minute. The Mariners fifth-winningest pitcher of all time is now a grandfather. "I can't believe it myself," Langston said. His three-and-a-half-year-old grandson is named Ever and can sometimes be found before Angels games putting baseballs on a tee for Trout to hit.

Langston won 74 games for the Mariners from 1984 to 1989, ranks in the top five in almost every Seattle pitching category, and was part of a talented young group who literally came up together from the minors to the Majors.

"It seemed like our entire Double-A team from Chattanooga just went 'Pop!' and we were all up with the Mariners trying to figure out survival in the Big Leagues together," Langston recalled. "Alvin Davis, Harold Reynolds, Darnell Coles, Jim Presley, Ivan Calderon and Dave Valle. It was fun to share the ups and downs with all the guys you had been with at the lower level."

Two guys from those Seattle teams were particularly influential in Langston's career.

"Alvin was my roommate on the road and was my closest friend. He was always my Yoda, the calming voice for everything that went on in my world."

The other guy was Dave Henderson. Langston, who threw 200 or more innings in 10 of his 16 Major League seasons, is proud that he was able to pitch deep into games, and he credits Hendu with helping him achieve the mindset that made that possible.

"My first year, he came up to me after a start where I came out early and told me I had to program myself to go nine innings. He said, 'There are two things that are going to happen. Either they'll take the ball out of your hand when they don't want you anymore or you'll walk off after the game and shake hands with everybody. Those are the only two options.'"

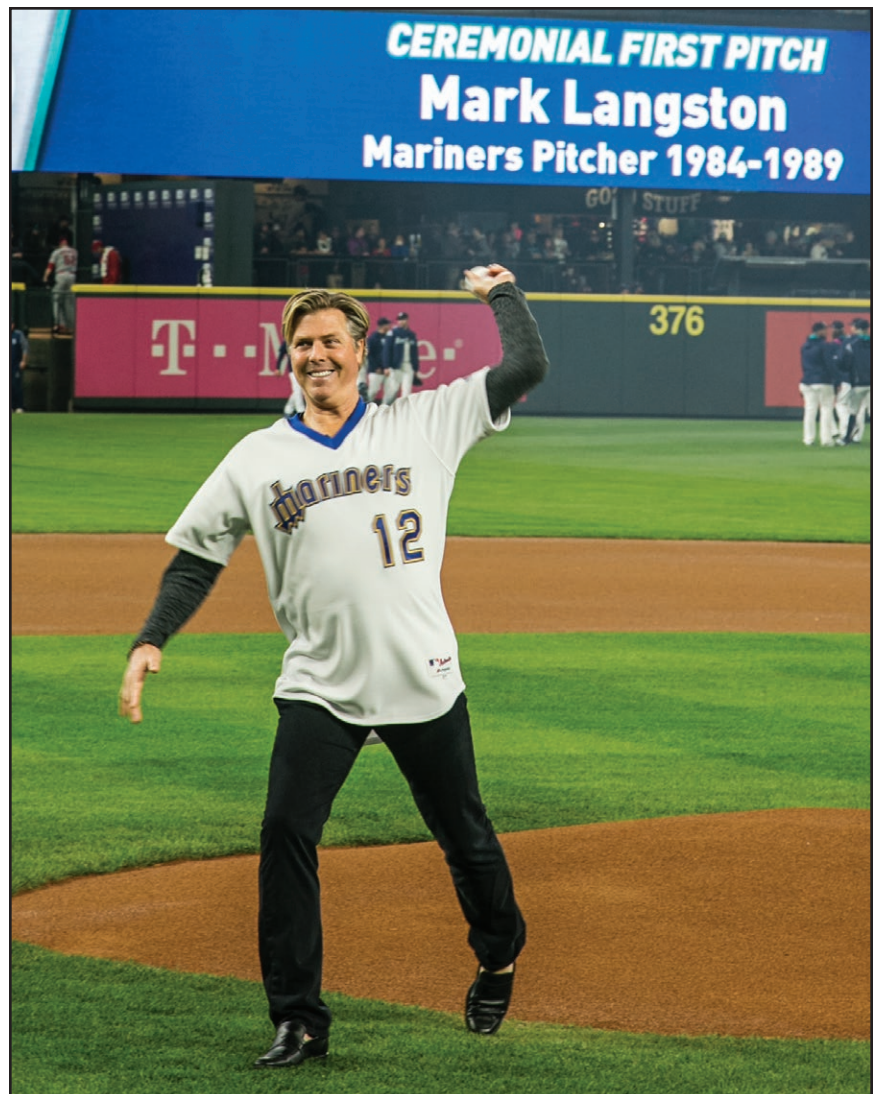
Langston says Henderson drove home his point by constantly repeating

one of his favorite sayings: "Go nine, drink wine."

Henderson became more than just a baseball advisor to Langston. They were neighbors, became friends and helped each other on home improvement projects.

"I had an unfinished basement and my dad, who was a construction wizard, came up to help me finish it.

(continued on page 88)



(continued from page 87)

Hendu and I were his assistants. We had power tools, nail guns, stuff we had no business using. We were nailing some wood and Hendu took the nail gun and pressed it, and 'BAM!' a nail shoots into the wood. He looked up and had the biggest smile on his face and said, 'I'm going to have fun with this thing!'"

Langston said from that point on Henderson was enthusiastic about the project. "He'd come over in the morning with his utility belt on with

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hammers, screwdrivers and everything else you needed. He'd be banging on the door yelling, 'C'mon, it's time to go to work.'"

Langston was a key figure in two important moments in Mariners history, both involving Randy Johnson. In late May of 1989, he was part of a five-player trade between Montreal and Seattle. The Expos got Langston and Mike Campbell, and the Mariners picked up Johnson, Gene Harris and Brian Holman.

Six years later, he and Johnson would cross paths again when Langston was the starting pitcher for the Angels in the one-game playoff against Seattle to decide the AL West in 1995. He kept the Angels close through the

first six innings. But in the seventh, Luis Sojo cue-balled Langston's 107th and final pitch down the right-field line for a bases-clearing double. Langston is comfortable talking about the moment 22 years later, although he hadn't seen it again until recently.

"I'd never seen any footage from that game until last year. I was somewhere on the road and looking around on YouTube when a clip of the entire game popped up in the menu. So I sat in my hotel room and watched every pitch. There were a lot of little things that happened in the game that I had forgotten. I had lots more traffic on the basepaths than I remembered."

Langston remembers flinching when Sojo's bat broke on the swing, fearing he'd get hit with splintered shrapnel. He thought he had gotten out of the inning and was surprised when the ball skittered past J.T. Snow at first base. And to this day Langston says he's not sure what compelled him to cutoff Tim Salmon's throw into the infield.

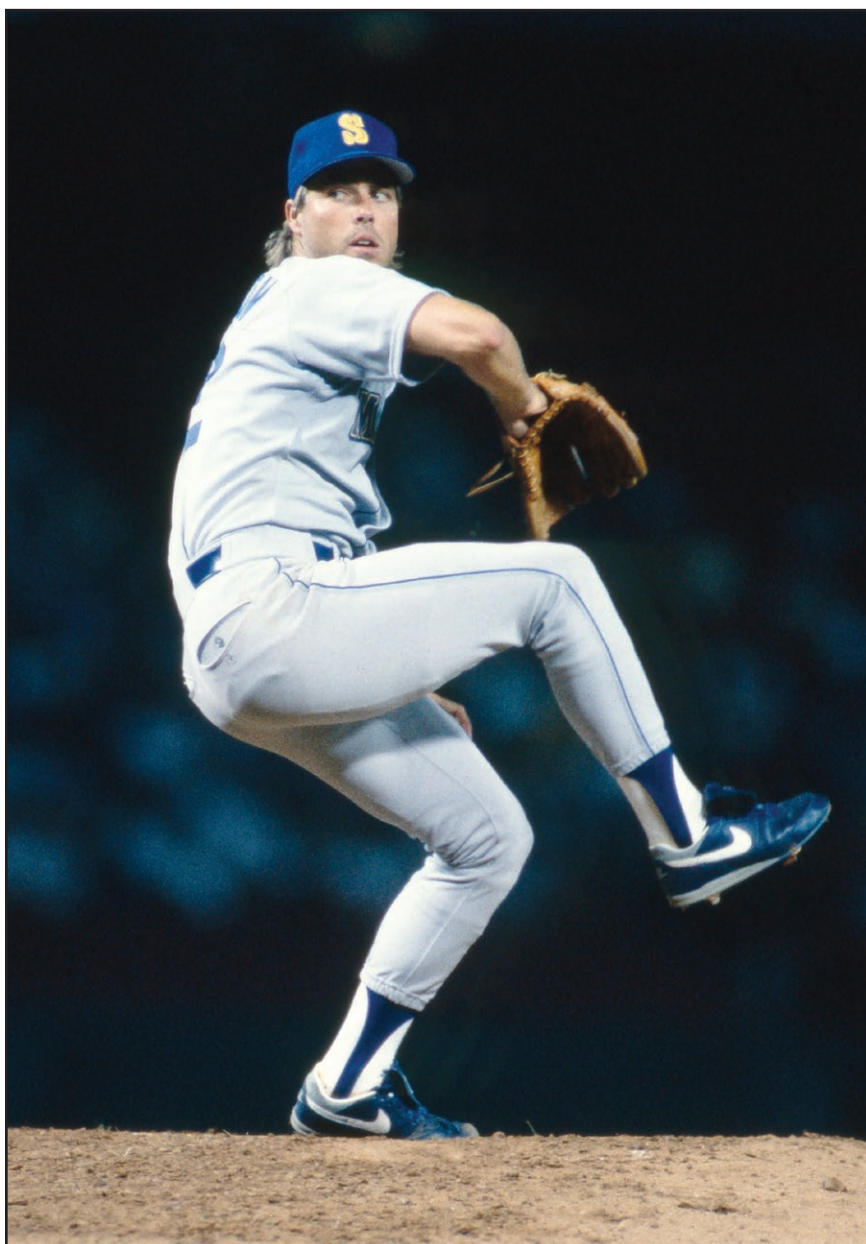
"Salmon goes under the bullpen benches, has to find the right ball because there are three balls sitting there and he throws a perfect strike which, for some reason, I chose to cut off. Then, I threw a bullet right past our catcher."

That error allowed Sojo to scamper home and Langston says by that point he was so mad he felt like physically blocking the plate to prevent Sojo from scoring. It's a sad coincidence that one of the great moments in Mariners history came at the expense of one of their first big stars.

These days, Langston spends six months out of the year working on the Angels broadcasts. The other six are spent with his family and doting on his young grandson. When Langston brought Ever to the ballpark last year Trout put him to work as his batting tee assistant.

"Now, Mike Trout is all he ever talks about," Langston laughed. "I had two daughters [Katie and Gabbi]. Now, I have a boy and get to do baseball and boy stuff with him."

You get the feeling Ever will one day appreciate that his grandpa won 179 Major League games. Even if Mike Trout is his favorite all-time player.



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