

Mantei happy just to pitch in // Sox reliever's shoulder OK

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Matt Mantei won't be in a familiar role, but he's not worried about it.

After working as a closer the last two seasons with Arizona, the 31-year-old Mantei - who agreed to terms with the Red Sox on Wednesday - will now become Keith Foulke's set-up man. That means Mantei will be coming out of the bullpen in the seventh or eighth inning instead of the ninth.

The position opened up when the Red Sox declined to offer arbitration to Scott Williamson, their set-up man in 2003.

"I see myself as an eighth-inning guy to get the ball to Foulke," Mantei said during a conference call yesterday. "It's going to be a pleasure to work with Foulke and Mike Timlin. I love watching Foulke pitch."

Mantei became the Diamondbacks' closer in 2003 after Arizona sent B.K. Kim to Boston for third baseman Shea Hillenbrand. Mantei finished that season 5-4 with 29 saves, a 2.62 ERA and a career-high 68 strikeouts in 55 innings.

"Boston was in the top three teams that I was attracted to this winter," Mantei said. "Theo (Epstein, Sox GM) was definitely a factor in me coming over. Curt Schilling, too. He knows the kind of environment I like to pitch in.

"He told me that pitching in Boston is like pitching in a playoff-like atmosphere. It's tremendous. It's exciting. That's the kind of atmosphere I love."

Mantei was placed on the disabled list in May with tendinitis in his right shoulder, and had season-ending shoulder surgery June 24. The surgery was "minor to clean up some things," Mantei said, adding that he'll be ready for spring training.

"I already started my long-toss regimen," Mantei said. "I am going to be 100 percent (when spring training starts). I am reporting early and am going to work on my arm speed. I am going to work with Foulke on my changeup."

The changeup will be the reliever's fourth pitch. He has a fastball that can hit the mid-90s, a curveball and a slider.

No matter what his role, Mantei's focus is on winning.

"Bottom line, this winter I didn't care what my role was going to be," he said. "I'm more concerned with winning. If I have to pitch in the seventh or eighth inning, I am going to do it. I am going to treat the eighth inning just as it was the ninth."

In 1998, Mantei made the jump to full-time major leaguer with the Florida Marlins. He posted a 3-4 record with nine saves and 63 strikeouts in 54-2/3 innings.

Since then, Mantei has posted an ERA of 2.96 or lower in four of his seven seasons, and has allowed only 29 home runs in 296-1/3 innings - an average of one every 10-1/3 innings.

NAME: BOSTON RED SOX

ART: PHOTOS

PHOTOG: FILE PHOTO

CUTLINE: (1) Mantei (2) Recent Red Sox acquisition Matt Mantei says he'll be ready for spring training

following surgery.

Caption: Matt Mantei won't be in a familiar role, but he's not worried about it.

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