

FOUR DECADES OF SEATTLE MARINERS BASEBALL



Each month during the 2017 season, Mariners Magazine will highlight a different era to celebrate the club's 40th Anniversary. In this issue, we'll take a look at the 1992 through 1997 seasons.

(Part 3 of 6)

By Mike Gastineau



After the success of the 1991 season in which the Mariners finished above the .500 mark for the first time in their history, hopes were high in Seattle that more winning ways would continue. However, the '92 team was not that good. There were individual highlights: Edgar Martinez made his first All-Star team and hit .343 to win the first of two batting titles in his career. And rookie pitcher Dave Fleming won an impressive 17 games. Unfortunately, the Mariners won only 64 the whole season. That 64-98 record cost first-year manager Bill Plummer his job but led to the arrival of the last key piece of the Mariners team that would begin the most successful period in team history.

On November 9, 1992, Seattle hired Lou Piniella, who came to the job after three years each as manager of the Yankees and Reds, including leading the Reds to the 1990 World Series title.

Piniella's impact in Seattle was immediate, as the 1993 squad bounced back to win 82 games.

In April, Chris Bosio pitched the second no-hitter in team history in defeating Boston, and in June, Jay Buhner became the first Mariners player ever to hit for the cycle. Two future Hall of Famers hit new milestones. Ken Griffey Jr., eclipsed the 40 home run mark for the first time in his career, ending the year with 45. Meanwhile, Randy Johnson became just the 12th hurler all time to strike out more than 300 batters, leading the AL with 308.



At the All-Star Game in Baltimore, Junior hit a legendary shot during the Home Run Derby that bounced off the warehouse behind right field at Camden Yards. The Orioles placed a plaque in the location to commemorate the ball's 445-foot journey, the only time the warehouse has been hit.

The following season the Mariners lost their first five games, never got to .500, and lost 13 of their last 16 games in July to end the month 40-62. The

Ken Griffey Jr. is mobbed by teammates after scoring the winning run in game five of the 1995 Division Series.

good news: everyone else in the AL West struggled and when the Mariners caught fire in August they found themselves just two games out of first despite being 14 games under .500.

The hot streak came in the midst of the longest road trip in baseball history. When two ceiling tiles fell from the roof of the Kingdome on July 19



the facility was deemed unsafe for play. The fix would take several months and Seattle would have to play the rest of the 1994 season on the road.

However, the season would soon be truncated by a players' strike that began August 13 and didn't end until the following April, effectively canceling the 1994 World Series. But, before the strike, the Mariners played 20 road games in 21 days in six cities and won nine of their last 10 games. Johnson and Junior again provided on-field highlights. Johnson led the AL in strikeouts for the third consecutive season and Junior won the first of four home run titles.

Due to the player's strike and the time it took to settle it, the 1995 season didn't start until late April. The Mariners started right where they left off in 1994, winning six of their first seven games. But, at the end of May, Junior broke his wrist in two places while making a sensational crashing-into-the-wall "Spiderman" catch of a long fly ball. He would miss more than two months.

The Mariners managed to hang around .500 thanks in no small part to Edgar Martinez who was on his way to his second AL batting title with a .356 average. But the Angels steadily pulled away and by the time Junior returned to the lineup on August 15 the Mariners were 12.5 games out of first place. Yet, because MLB had shifted both leagues to a three-division format and added a fourth team to the postseason,

Edgar Martinez lines "the double" into the left-field corner of the Kingdome to score Joey Cora and Ken Griffey Jr.

the Mariners were very much in play for the new Wild Card playoff spot.

Seattle had acquired pitcher Andy Benes and outfielder Vince Coleman at the trade deadline, but still found themselves a game below .500 on August 23, 11.5 games back of California and four games behind Texas for the Wild Card spot.

The next day at the Kingdome, Yankees closer John Wetteland entered the game in the 9th with a 7-6 lead and retired the first two batters he faced. Then Coleman drew a walk, stole second and was singled home by Joey Cora to tie the game. Fans barely had time to sit back down before Junior launched Wetteland's next pitch into the right-field seats, giving Seattle a wild 9-7 win.

The win started a 25-11 run that included 15 come-from-behind victories, including seven where they trailed in the seventh inning and six in their last at-bat. Some of the heroes during that stretch: Buhner hit a three-run homer to beat Minnesota. Dan Wilson had a solo shot to beat Chicago. Doug Strange hit a ninth-inning homer to tie a game against Texas and then Junior drove in the game winner two innings later. Coleman hit a grand slam to tie a game against Oakland that was then won on a homer from Alex Díaz. Two days later, Tino Martinez hit a two-run

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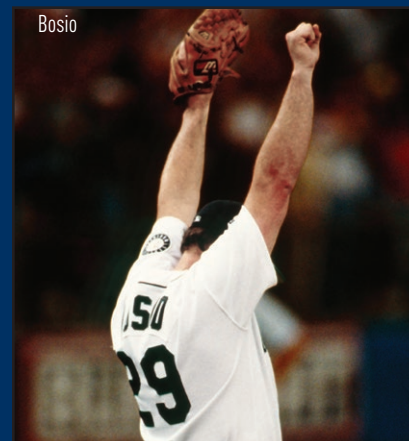
TIMELINE

1992 – Edgar Martinez wins first of two AL batting titles with .343 average.

July 14, 1992 – Ken Griffey Jr. goes 3-for-3 at the 63rd Annual MLB All-Star Game and is named MVP.

Nov. 10, 1992 – Lou Piniella becomes manager; posts 840-711 record in 10 seasons with Seattle.

1993 – Ken Griffey Jr., and Omar Vizquel each win AL Gold Glove Awards.



April 22, 1993 – Chris Bosio pitches second no-hitter in club history, defeating Boston 7-0.

June 23, 1993 – Jay Buhner becomes first Mariners player ever to hit for the cycle.

July 21-28, 1993 – Ken Griffey Jr., becomes the third player in MLB history to homer in eight consecutive games.

Sept. 22, 1993 – Dann Howitt hits a grand slam off Nolan Ryan, who hurt his elbow on the pitch – the last thrown by Ryan in his 27-year career.

Nov. 2, 1993 – Catcher Dan Wilson traded by Reds to Mariners; plays with club until 2005.

1994 – Seattle's new Spring Training home and stadium, the Peoria Sports Complex, opens in Peoria, Arizona.

1994 – Mariners become the first pro sports team with a website on the Internet; original site is named Mariners.org.



1994 – In honor of Jay Buhner's hairless dome, the team debuts "Buhner Buzz Cut Night."

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walk off to lift the Mariners to another win over the A's.

After finally moving into first place in late September, Seattle stumbled in their final weekend series at Texas, losing their final two games and falling into a tie with the Angels, necessitating a one-game playoff for the AL West crown. The

Yankees had clinched the Wild Card so the game was a true winner-take-all contest. Both teams threw their ace and, in a nice



historic twist, the Angels pitcher was former Mariner Mark Langston. Johnson countered for the Mariners and retired the first 17 batters he faced. When Seattle scratched out a run on a Coleman RBI single in the fifth inning it looked like he had all the support he would need. But the Mariners added four insurance runs in the seventh when Luis Sojo hit a broken bat cue ball shot down the first-base line clearing the bases in the process. Sojo then scored on a two-base throwing error by Langston, leading to announcer Rick Rizzs' memorable call: "Everybody scores!" The Mariners added four more runs in the eighth and when Johnson got Tim Salmon looking with two outs in the ninth the celebration was on.

The next day they had to fly to New York for Game 1 of the American League Divisional Series. That series was postseason baseball as good it gets: five games that featured dramatic home runs, heroic pitching performances, wild capacity crowds and a sensational finish. The Yankees talent overwhelmed the Mariners in Game 1. Game 2 was the longest postseason game ever played at the time, a sensational back-and-forth duel that was settled at 1:22 a.m. ET, when Jim Leyritz hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the 15th inning.

Back in Seattle, the Mariners rode the pitching of Johnson to a Game 3 win and then won Game 4 by erasing a five-run deficit thanks to Edgar Martinez's seven RBI.

Game 5 was played on October 8 at the Kingdome. Benes started for Seattle and David Cone for New York. Piniella and Yankees skipper Buck Showalter had their aces, Johnson and Jack McDowell ready to pitch, if needed.

1994 – Pitcher Bobby Ayala earns a team-high 18 saves in his first season with Seattle.

Oct. 1994 – Labor dispute between players and owners forces cancellation of 1994 World Series.

1995 – Randy Johnson records 18-2 record and 2.48 ERA and wins AL Cy Young Award.

Piniella



1995 – Manager Lou Piniella named AL Manager of the Year.

May 24, 1995 – Mike Blowers drives in 8 runs against Boston; ties team record for RBI in a game.

July 11, 1995 – Ken Griffey Jr., Randy Johnson, Edgar Martinez and Tino Martinez selected to the 66th Annual MLB All-Star Game.

Aug. 13, 1995 – Mariners sit 13 games behind first-place California Angels.

Sept. 1995 – "Refuse to Lose" becomes the unofficial catchphrase across the Pacific Northwest.



Oct. 2, 1995 – Mariners defeat Angels in one-game playoff to win AL West and reach postseason for first time in history.

Oct. 8, 1995 – Mariners defeat Yankees 6-5 on walk-off double by Edgar Martinez, scoring Joey Cora and Ken Griffey Jr.

1996 – Outfielders Jay Buhner and Ken Griffey Jr. earn Gold Glove Awards; Griffey Jr. and Alex Rodriguez win Silver Slugger Awards.

1996 – Mariners unveil TV commercials for the first time.

1996 – Club sells its first-ever game tickets via the Internet.

1996 – Mariners lead league and set club records with 993 runs scored, 343 doubles and 954 RBI.

Randy Johnson and Dan Wilson celebrate clinching a 1995 playoff berth.

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The Yankees led 4-2 in the eighth inning when Junior hit a solo homer to cut the lead in half. The Mariners then loaded the bases and Strange pinch hit for Wilson, drawing a walk to tie the game. The Yankees brought in a first-year pitcher named Mariano Rivera to get the last out of inning.

When reliever Norm Charlton gave up a double and a walk to start the ninth, Piniella brought in Johnson to a thunderous ovation from the Kingdome crowd. He quickly escaped the jam. Not to be outdone, when Rivera let the first two batters reach base in the bottom of the ninth, Showalter brought in McDowell who similarly shut the Mariners down.

After a scoreless 10th the Yankees got a run off Johnson to put the Mariners backs against the wall again. Cora led off the Mariners half of the 11th with a bunt single and scampered to third on the Junior single that followed. Edgar Martinez, who had torched Yankees pitchers the entire series, then lined a double into the left-field corner. Cora scored easily to tie the game and Junior never broke stride sprinting home from first base, sliding just ahead of the throw and triggering wild celebrations on the field and in the stands as Seattle had forged yet another remarkable comeback.

Dave Niehaus punctuated the moment in his broadcast with 10 words many Mariners fans can recite from memory: "I don't believe it! It just continues! My, oh my!"

The Mariners faced Cleveland in the ALCS, split the first two games in Seattle and won Game 3 in Cleveland, 5-2, on a Buhner three-run homer in the 11th inning. At that point, the "Refuse to Lose" magic finally ran out. Cleveland beat them three straight games to win the ALCS.

But the bond forged between the Mariners and their fans during the 1995 season, and especially those final two months was permanent.

Defying their history of good years followed by bad ones, the 1996 Mariners won a club-record 85 games, set MLB records for extra-base hits and total bases, sent a team-record five players to the All-Star Game, and drew a team record 2.7 million fans.

The Mariners spent every day from May 11 on in second place, stalk-



ing the division leading Rangers, and reeled off a club-record 10 game winning streak in September to surge to within a game. Alas, the magic of 1995 was not duplicated and the Mariners missed the postseason.

The 1997 season brought more superlatives as Seattle won 90 games and drew more than three million fans, both first-time achievements. They also dominated unlike any other time in their history, spending 122 days in first place in the AL West. In 20 previous years of baseball the team spent a total of 106 days in first place.

The Mariners were again a juggernaut on offense led by Junior who had an MVP season with 56 home runs and 147 RBIs and won the Gold Glove for the eighth consecutive year.

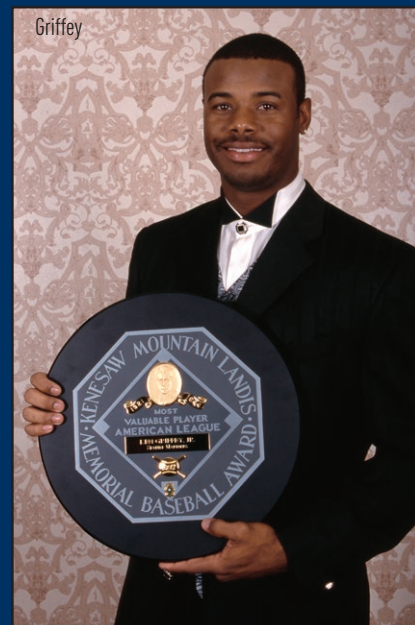
On the mound Johnson became the first ever Mariner to win 20 games. Jamie Moyer (acquired in 1996 in a trade with Boston) won 17 and Jeff Fassero won 16. The Mariners clinched the AL West with a week left in the season and, unlike 1995, were able to set their pitching up for their postseason matchup against Baltimore. But the Orioles turned the tables on Seattle in the first two games, roughing up the Mariners pitching in back-to-back 9-3 wins at the Kingdome. The Mariners won Game 3 but lost Game 4 and thus the series to end their otherwise terrific season.

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July 9, 1996 – A team record five players selected to the 67th Annual MLB All-Star Game.

Aug. 1, 1996 – Raul Ibanez makes MLB debut (first of three stints with team); Jamie Moyer joins team.

Sept. 18, 1996 – Sterling Hitchcock earns his 13th win on the season, tops for Seattle in 1996.



1997 – Ken Griffey, Jr., hits 56 home runs and drives in 147 RBI and wins AL MVP Award.

1997 – Randy Johnson becomes first pitcher in Mariners history to win 20 games in a season; finishes with 20-4 record.

1997 – Team posts its first 90-win season (90-72) and wins AL West; hits MLB-record 264 homers.

1997 – For first time ever in Mariners history, home attendance tops 3 million mark, at 3,192,237 fans.

March 8, 1997 – Groundbreaking ceremony for Safeco Field across street from Kingdome; 15,000 fans brave chilly temperatures; Dave Niehaus and Ken Griffey Jr., attend festivities; Niehaus calls the new park "the house that Griffey built."

June 1997 – Team announces creation of Mariners Hall of Fame; Alvin Davis, also known as "Mr. Mariner," named first inductee.

Sept. 23, 1997 – Mariners clinch AL West crown for the second time in three years.

Oct. 1-5, 1997 – Mariners play in postseason for second time in team history; face Orioles in AL Division Series, but lose 3-games-to-1.

Be sure to pick up the July issue of Mariners Magazine for the next installment highlighting the 40th Anniversary of the Mariners.