

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 1998 through 2003 seasons.
(Part 4 of 6)

By Mike Gastineau

Fresh off their second postseason appearance in three years, the Mariners looked to keep the good times rolling in 1998. However, they got off to a bad start and never recovered. After blowing a 9-3 lead to Cleveland on Opening Night and losing 10-9, Seattle dropped nine of their next 12 games. They briefly nudged over the .500 mark in May but spent most of the year below .500. Mariners ace Randy Johnson posted a 9-10 record in the first half before being traded to Houston for three unknown minor leaguers at the end of July, though fans would soon come to appreciate Freddy Garcia, John Halama and Carlos Guillen. One highlight of note: Alex Rodriguez became only the third player in MLB history to hit 40 home runs and steal 40 bases in a single season.

1999 brought the proverbial best of times and worst of times to the organization. On the field Seattle started slow, spent much of the year hovering around .500 and never challenged before finishing in third place.

On the positive side they moved into their new home, Safeco Field, in July. On June 27 they defeated Texas in the final game ever at the Kingdome, highlighted by one more Edgar Martinez double and one more Ken Griffey Jr. home run. Then, on July 15, Seattle played San Diego in the inaugural game at Safeco. A sellout crowd of 44,607 filled the new park on a beautiful evening as Seattle fans enjoyed Big League baseball outdoors for the first time since the summer of 1969.



For the second consecutive season the Mariners found themselves having to make a difficult decision about a superstar player. As the season ended, Junior informed the team that he was planning on leaving Seattle after his contract expired in 2000. He wanted to play and train closer to his Florida home. The Mariners could let him play one year and then leave as a free agent, or trade him and attempt to get talent back.

They chose the latter, but the man making that trade would not be Woody Woodward, as he was also leaving Seattle after a decade as the team's GM. New GM Pat Gillick was tasked with trying to get value for Griffey who, at the 1999 All-Star Game, had been one of four active players named to Major League Baseball's All-Century Team.

Jamie Moyer throws the first pitch in the Inaugural game at Safeco Field.

The Mariners eventually sent Junior to Cincinnati for center fielder Mike Cameron, pitcher Brett Tomko and a pair of minor leaguers. Disheartened Mariners fans couldn't believe it. However, it helped somewhat that just four days into the 2000 season Cameron robbed Derek Jeter of a home run with a sensational leaping catch over the wall. Announcer Dave Niehaus excitedly exclaimed, "I hate to say it, but that catch was Griffeyesque. Make it Cameronesque now!"

What really helped fans move on was that the Mariners started winning again, thanks in part to Halama and Garcia, who combined to win 23 games; Guillen, who became a dependable utility infielder; and Cameron,

who slugged 19 homers and played outstanding defense.

Meanwhile, Rodriguez and Edgar Martinez belted 41 and 37 homers, respectively, and Jay Buhner hit 26, including his 300th career shot. The team hit a club-record 11 grand slams, including an individual-record four from Martinez.

The 2000 team was strengthened by pitcher Aaron Sele (from Poulsbo, WA), who won 17 games and made the All-Star team, and Seattle native John Olerud, who anchored first base and had a strong season.

Another free agent acquisition made headlines around the globe as Seattle signed Japanese born reliever Kazuhiro Sasaki, who had spent 10 years in the Japan's Nippon Baseball League. He saved 37 games and was named the AL Rookie of the Year.

The team got off to a fast start, spent much of the year in first place, then finished a half game out of first but claimed the Wild Card thanks to a team-record 91 wins.

Facing the White Sox, Seattle won the first two games in Chicago, and then hosted Chicago for the first postseason game in Safeco Field history. The Mariners completed the sweep in dramatic fashion with a 2-1 win when Guillen bunted Rickey Henderson home from third in the bottom of the ninth.

Seattle faced the New York Yankees in the ALCS and won Game 1, 2-0, behind strong pitching from Garcia, Henderson's RBI single and a home run from Rodriguez. In Game 2, Halama and reliever Jose Paniagua held New York scoreless through seven

With Guillen's bunt in the bottom of the ninth, The Mariners swept the White Sox in the 2000 ALDS.



Mike Cameron robs Derek Jeter of a home run at Safeco Field.

innings. But after 16 scoreless innings the Bronx Bombers exploded for seven runs in the eighth capped by a two-run homer from Jeter to win 7-1. The Yankees won the next two games in Seattle to go up 3-games-to-1. Seattle's bats came alive in Game 5 with a 6-2 win behind homers from Olerud and Martinez, while Garcia won his second game of the series.

Back in New York, the Mariners grabbed an early 4-0 lead with back-to-back doubles from Rodriguez and Martinez, and Guillen's two-run homer, but New York erupted for six runs in the seventh and went on to win the game, 9-7, and the series 4-games-to-2.

After the season ended, Rodriguez signed a free-agent contact with Texas. Losing three superstars in three seasons should be the kind of blow from which a team can't recover, but the 2001

Mariners memorably proved otherwise.

Before the 2001 season Seattle signed Japanese superstar Ichiro Suzuki and free-agent second baseman Bret Boone. For the most part, the rest of the team stayed the same and but no one was ready for what happened next.

The Mariners won a record 20 games

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TIMELINE

March 31, 1998 – 57,816 fans pack The Kingdome on Opening Day against Cleveland, setting the club's single-game attendance record.



1998 – Ken Griffey Jr. leads the AL with 56 home runs for the second consecutive season.

1998 – Jamie Moyer leads the team with a 15-9 record, 3.53 ERA and 234.1 innings pitched.

April 29, 1999 – Seattle crushes Detroit, 22-6, setting a club-record for runs in one game, including 11 in the 5th inning.

June 27, 1999 – Mariners play final game at the Kingdome, beating Texas, 5-2, as Freddy Garcia earns the win.



July 15, 1999 – Mariners play Inaugural Game in front of 44,607 fans at Safeco Field, but lose 3-2 to the Padres.

July 17, 1999 – Russ Davis hits first home run and Raul Ibanez hits first grand slam in Safeco Field history.

July 31, 1999 – Randy Johnson is traded to Houston for then-minor leaguers Freddy Garcia, Carlos Guillen and John Halama.

1999 – Brian L. Hunter leads the league with 44 steals.

1999 – Mariners draw crowds of 40,000 or more in 36 of the 42 games played at Safeco.

April 7, 2000 – Mike Cameron robs Derek Jeter of a home run with a leaping catch over the center field wall.

June 13, 2000 – Pitcher Gil Meche fires a one-hitter at Kansas City to beat Royals, 7-0.

Oct. 1, 2000 – Mariners clinch Wild Card berth on last day of regular season, with 5-2 win against Angels.

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in April, and then 20 more in May. Summer came and they kept winning. They didn't lose three in a row until September and became the first AL team in 53 years to lead the league in hitting, pitching and fielding. They showed a preternatural ability to start rallies with two outs, leading to a slogan among players and fans alike: "Two outs, so what?"

Ichiro was brilliant. He led the AL in hitting (.350), stole 56 bases and set a rookie record with 242 hits. Meanwhile, Boone became the first second baseman ever to hit over .300 with 30 or more home runs.

Seattle's pitching was impressive. Jamie Moyer became the second Mariner to win 20 games, Garcia won 18 and Paul Abbott enjoyed a career year with 17 wins, while Sasaki posted a team-record 45 saves.

Seattle fans weren't just rewarded with a great team and a record-setting season. The All-Star Game returned to Seattle for the second time and eight Mariners were named to the AL team. Garcia earned the win and Sasaki the save in a 4-1 victory. Jeff Nelson worked an inning and got credit for a hold, Ichiro and Cameron both had base hits, and Martinez, Olerud and Boone appeared in the game.

The Mariners roared out of the break and won their team record 92nd game on August 23. On September 10



Ichiro led the league in hitting (.350) and set a rookie record with 242 hits in 2001.

they beat the Angels to improve to 104-40. MLB then cancelled games for eight days in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. When games resumed, Seattle clinched the AL West on September 19. After the game, the team met at the pitcher's mound for a brief prayer. An American flag was brought out and the players then walked around the field, saluting and thanking their fans, waving the flag and celebrating their championship in an appropriate dignified manner. For all the 2001 team accomplished on the field, this simple gesture meant a great deal to baseball fans across the country.

Two weeks later Seattle defeated Texas to win their 116th game, tying the 1906 Chicago Cubs for the Majors all-time single season wins record.

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Oct. 6, 2000 – Seattle sweeps White Sox with 2-1 win in first postseason game in Safeco Field history, behind pitching of Aaron Sele; Mariners advance to ALCS to face Yankees.

2000 – The Mariners hit a club-record 11 grand slams, including an individual record four from Edgar Martinez.



2000 – Japanese pitcher Kazuhiro Sasaki joins Mariners, records 37 saves, earns AL Rookie of the Year Award.

2000 – Future Hall of Famer and MLB steals king Rickey Henderson joins the Mariners in May and swipes 31 bases in 92 games.

May 23-June 8, 2001 – Mariners reel off 15 consecutive wins to set a team record.

May 28-August 6, 2001 – Paul Abbott records a single-season, team-record 10 consecutive wins.

May 30, 2001 – Mark McLemore steals four bases against Baltimore to tie a club record.

July 10, 2001 – Seattle hosts the All-Star Game. Manager Lou Piniella and eight Mariners appear on the AL squad. Future Hall of Famers Cal Ripken Jr. and Tony Gwynn honored during the game with the Commissioner's Historic Achievement Award.

Sept. 24, 2001 – Jamie Moyer ties Abbott's team record of 10 consecutive wins in one season.

Oct. 6, 2001 – Mariners tie Major League record, also held by the 1906 Chicago Cubs, with their 116th win.

Oct. 15, 2001 – Seattle defeats Cleveland, 3-1, in Game 5 of ALDS to advance to ALCS for the second consecutive season.





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In the AL Division Series, Cleveland went up 2-games-to-1. Facing elimination, the Mariners got a great start from Garcia and bullpen help from Nelson, Arthur Rhodes and Sasaki, plus a two-run homer from Martinez to clinch a 6-2 win and force a Game 5 in Seattle.

The Mariners won that game with almost the exact same pitching recipe. Moyer worked six innings, and Nelson, Rhodes and Sasaki were untouchable as Seattle won 3-1, getting all the offense they would need on a bases loaded double from Mark McLemore.

For the second consecutive year Seattle faced New York in the ALCS. The Yankees won the first two games in Seattle, but the Mariners recovered with a 14-3 romp behind Moyer's pitching and homers from Boone, Buhner and Olerud.

Game 4 was a nail biter. Abbott was unhittable but also walked eight batters in five innings. The game remained scoreless until Boone's solo shot gave Seattle a 1-0 lead in the eighth, but New York countered with a Bernie Williams solo homer, and then won the game in the ninth on a two-run homer from Alfonso Soriano.

The Yankees clinched the series the following evening in less dramatic fashion with a 12-3 win to put an abrupt end to an otherwise incredible record-setting season.

On Opening Day of 2002 the Mariners hung their third AL West championship banner at Safeco Field. But this one, to honor the 2001 team, carried a special border on the bottom that simply read "116 Wins."

The 2001 Mariners tied the 1906 Chicago Cubs for the Majors all-time single season wins record with 116.

The 2002 Mariners kept winning, stayed in first place until late August and won 93 games, but finished in third place in the tough AL West.

When the season ended Seattle said farewell to Piniella, who informed the team that he wished to move back to his native Florida. He still had one year left on his contract so the club worked out a unique deal in which Piniella, as a manager, was traded to Tampa Bay for outfielder Randy Winn and infielder Antonio Perez.

Piniella's impact on the team was dramatic. Under "Sweet Lou" the Mariners had seven winning seasons in 10 years, won three AL West titles and earned a Wild Card appearance.

The following year, Bob Melvin was hired as manager, and for the fourth consecutive year Seattle won more than 90 games. But, like 2002, 93 wins weren't enough and the Mariners ended up three games behind the division champion A's and two games behind the Red Sox for the Wild Card spot.

In a rare occurrence, Seattle's five-man rotation of Moyer, Ryan Franklin, Joel Pinero, Garcia and Gil Meche started every game of the season.

Between 2000-2003, the Mariners completed one of the most successful four-year runs in baseball history, winning 393 games. They also drew over 13 million fans in the process. At the end of the season, Gillick, the architect of that run, announced he was stepping down as GM.

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2001 – Dan Wilson sets a team record for a catcher with a .999 fielding percentage, committing just one error in 744 chances during the season.

2001 – Ichiro named AL Rookie of the Year and MVP. He and Mike Cameron earn Gold Glove Awards. Ichiro, Bret Boone and Edgar Martinez earn Silver Slugger Awards. Lou



Piniella named AL Manager of the Year and GM Pat Gillick named the MLB Executive of the Year.

May 2, 2002 – Facing the White Sox in Chicago, Mike Cameron becomes just the 13th player in ML history to hit four home runs in a game (in four consecutive at-bats).

2002 – Seattle sets its all-time single-season attendance mark, welcoming 3,540,482 fans into Safeco Field.

May 2003 – Edgar Martinez named AL Player of the Month, the fifth time he's won the award in his career.



June 1-Aug. 22, 2003 – Shigetoshi Hasegawa compiles a 28.2 innings pitched scoreless streak, fourth longest in team history and tops among relievers.

Sept. 22, 2003 – Randy Winn hits an inside-the-park home run off Angels pitcher Gary Glover at Anaheim.

2003 – Seattle's five-man rotation of Jamie Moyer, Ryan Franklin, Joel Pinero, Freddy Garcia and Gil Meche start all 162 games.

2003 – Jamie Moyer leads the team with 21 wins, the second time in his career he topped 20 wins in a season.

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