

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 2004 through 2010 seasons.

(Part 5 of 6)

By Mike Gastineau



After a strong run between 1995 and 2003, in which Seattle reached the postseason four times and won at least 90 games in five seasons, the Mariners were unable to continue their winning ways through the mid-2000s. From 2004 through 2006, they posted three consecutive losing seasons for the first time since 1988-90.

While the 2004 team finished with a 63-99 mark under manager Bob Melvin, there were some memorable moments. In September, despite being out of postseason consideration, fans that came to see the team were rewarded by the performance of two legends.

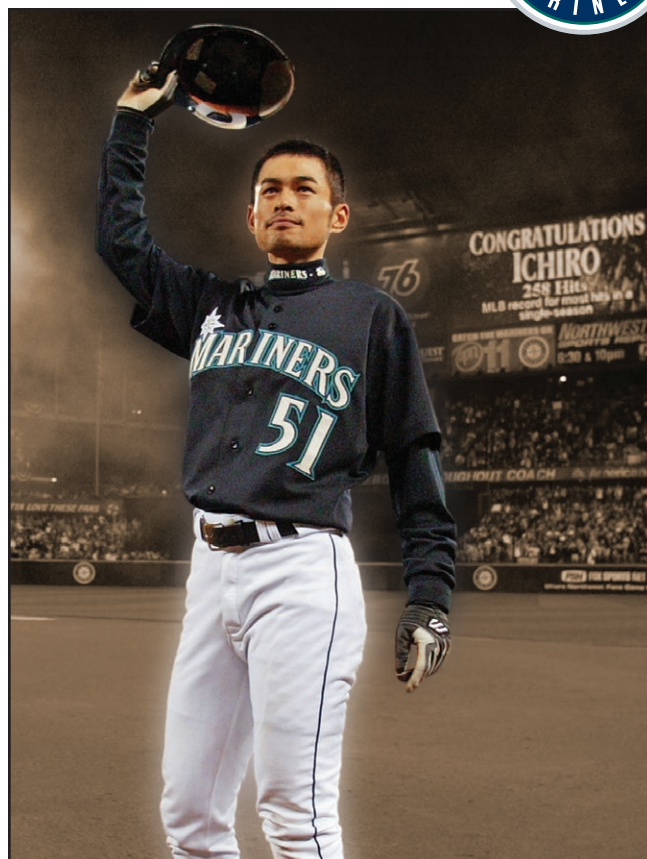
Ichiro started the season hot and stayed that way until the end. After 81 games (the mathematical halfway point of the season) he had collected 113 hits, so it seemed possible he might match or exceed his rookie year record 242 hits.

In July, he put together a 21-game hitting streak, and then followed that up with at least one hit in 33 of the next 37 games. Suddenly it became reasonable to talk about whether he could break George Sisler's Major League Baseball record of 257 hits in a season, set in 1920 when Sisler played for the St. Louis Browns. The mark had endured long enough that baseball observers believed it would never be broken. In fact, since 1930, only one player had even come close...and that was Ichiro in his 2001 rookie season.

In early September, the Mariners All-Star recorded back-to-back hitless

games for the first time since June. By September 19, he had 239 hits, but with just 13 games left to play Sisler's record seemed safe. That is, until Ichiro added 13 hits over the next four games – the start of a 13-game hitting streak during which he tied and passed Sisler's mark on the same night. On October 1, after Ichiro got the hit that broke the record, he accepted congratulations from five members of Sisler's family who were among the 45,000 fans at Safeco Field. Then he added three more hits in the final two games to establish the new record of 262 hits in a season.

As fans obsessed over one superstar's run at history, they were also wistful as they watched another end his great career. In August, Edgar Martinez announced the 2004 season would be his last. The seven-time All-Star and two-time batting champ was widely considered the best right



Ichiro broke the MLB record for most hits in a single season and set the new record of 262 hits in 2004.

handed hitter in the game from 1992 to 2001.

Seattle honored Martinez after its final home game with an on-field presentation. MLB Commissioner Bud Selig announced that the award given to the top designated hitter in the Ameri-

can League each season would now be known as the Edgar Martinez Award. The city of Seattle got into the act as well by renaming the street in front of Safeco Field "Edgar Martinez Drive."

During the offseason, the Mariners hired a new manager, Mike Hargrove, who happened to be Cleveland's manager in the 1995 ALCS against Seattle. The club also signed slugger Richie Sexson and Adrian Beltre to free-agent deals on back-to-back days in December.

Unfortunately, general manager Bill Bavasi's effort to rebuild the team in the wake of many veteran departures did not bear fruit as the 2005 Mariners lost 93 games. Jamie Moyer became a bright spot in an otherwise down year, with two career milestones separated by about six weeks. In May, he passed Randy Johnson to become the Mariners all-time leader in games won. Then, in July, he became the 25th left-handed pitcher in history win 200 career games.

Dan Wilson was the catcher for the majority of the 145 games Moyer won for Seattle. Wilson also caught the majority of Johnson's 130 Mariners wins. After suffering a knee injury in May, the veteran catcher announced he would retire at the end of the season. He rehabbed his knee to the point that Seattle was able to activate him for the

final weekend of the season. Wilson, who spent 11 years with the Mariners, caught the first inning of Moyer's final start in September and left the field to a standing ovation.

The importance of another notable 2005 moment wasn't totally apparent at the time. Two years earlier, in 2003, Seattle signed a 16-year-old Venezuelan pitcher named Felix Hernandez. On August 4, he made his Major League debut at the age of 19, and posted a 4-4 record with a 2.67 ERA to close out the season.

During the offseason, Seattle made a significant signing, inking Kenji Johjima to a contract. Johjima had enjoyed a successful career as a catcher in Japan and became the first Japanese-born player to catch in the Major Leagues. On Opening Day in 2006 he joined Ichiro in the Mariners starting lineup, making Seattle the first team in history to start two Japanese position players in the same game.

The team hung around the .500 mark and stayed in the playoff race until mid-August, when an 11-game losing streak effectively ended their season. Also in August the Mariners said goodbye to Moyer, who was traded to Philadelphia where he would become part of the Phillies 2009 World Series title team.

Looking to turn things around after three-straight losing seasons, the 2007

Edgar Martinez ended his playing career with a victory lap around Safeco Field after his last game in 2004.

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TIMELINE

Oct. 1, 2004 – Ichiro sets MLB record with 262 hits, breaking George Sisler's 1920 mark of 257; also leads AL with .372 average.



2004 – Edgar Martinez, who made MLB debut Sept. 12, 1987, retires at end of season; has annual DH Award named in his honor.

May 30, 2005 – Jamie Moyer becomes Mariners all-time wins leader, passing Randy Johnson's 130 wins.

Aug. 4, 2005 – Felix Hernandez makes Major League debut, the first of 367 starts and counting (through July 4, 2017).

Aug. 9, 2005 – Felix Hernandez wins first game as a Big Leaguer, tossing 8.0 shutout innings against Twins.



2005 – Dan Wilson retires after 11 seasons with the Mariners.

2005 – Seattle leads AL in fielding percentage, with a .986 mark.

2006 – Kenji Johjima becomes first catcher from Japan to play for MLB team; with Mariners through 2009 season.



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Mariners got off to a good start and, beginning May 25, they went 24-11 over a six-week stretch. On July 1, they won their eighth-straight game and were four games behind the Angels in the division and one game behind Detroit in the Wild Card standings.

Suddenly, however, Hargrove resigned for personal reasons, citing a dwindling passion for managing and a desire to spend more time with his family. He was replaced by bench coach John McLaren and, although the team fell short of reaching the postseason, they finished with 88 wins, their most since 2003.

McLaren was retained for 2008, but the team experienced another downturn and by the end of the season both he and Bavasi were fired. Moving into 2009 the Mariners would get a big assist from their past.

Since his departure to Cincinnati after the 1999 season, Ken Griffey Jr., had never played a game in Seattle. That changed in 2007 when the Reds visited Seattle for Interleague Play. Junior admitted he was apprehensive about the reception he would receive. He should not have worried. Seattle fans filled Safeco Field for the weekend and gave him several huge ovations during a pregame ceremony. At one point, former teammate Jay Buhner leaned in and said, "Now you know they love you, bro!"

In February of 2009 new general manager Jack Zduriencik signed Junior to a free agent contract and the greatest player in Mariners history was back in a Seattle uniform again. By now, Junior was 39 years old, but his star presence and 19 home runs provided

Jamie Moyer became the 25th left-handed pitcher in history win 200 career games in 2005.



On August 4, 2005, Felix Hernandez made his Major League debut at the age of 19.

some nostalgia to fans and helped the team win.

The Mariners also made history with their managerial hire for 2009, as Don Wakamatsu became the first-ever Asian-American manager in MLB history.

For the first five weeks of the season the team sat atop the AL West. They slumped in May, but stayed in the division race through July and in the Wild Card race until September. Overall, the Mariners won 85 games and put fun back on display at Safeco Field.

Ichiro led the AL in hits for the fourth consecutive year and finished second in batting average. The return of one superstar and the continued excellence of another led to a memorable season finale as teammates carried both Junior and Ichiro off the field.

Also that season, Hernandez emerged as an ace, breaking out with a 19-win season in which he struck out a personal-best 217 hitters.

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June 2006 – Mariners post 18-8 record, their best monthly mark since going 19-8 in May 2003.

July 11, 2006 – Ichiro and Jose Lopez selected to the 77th MLB All-Star Game.

July 23, 2006 – Adrian Beltre hits inside-the-park HR at Safeco, the last Mariners player to do so at home.

June 15, 2007 – Willie Bloomquist hits inside-the-park HR at Houston, the last Mariners player to do so on the road.

2007 – Mariners finish season with 88-74 mark, their most wins since the 2003 season.

2007 – Closer JJ Putz locks down a career-high 40 saves as Mariners closer.

2007 – Miguel Batista paces Mariners pitchers with 16 wins.



Beltre

2008 – Adrian Beltre earns second consecutive Gold Glove Award as AL 3B.

2008 – Raul Ibanez leads team with 110 RBI, his third straight season with 100+ RBI.

2009 – Ken Griffey Jr., rejoins Mariners, dons Seattle uniform for first time since 1999.



Griffey Jr.



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Heading into 2010, hopes were high that the team would build on the previous season's success. Instead, 2010 went about as wrong as 2009 went right. The Mariners spent one day in mid-April in first place, but then lost 12 of their next 14 games. Junior had elected to come back for another year but was clearly near the end of his career. He always told people that when it came time to retire he would do so quietly and with no fanfare. True to his word, he left the ballpark after a game in early June and the next day informed the Mariners that he was retiring.

As the summer progressed the losses mounted, and in early August Seattle fired Wakamatsu. One of the few bright spots in the 101-loss season was the continued emergence of Hernandez as a superstar. He finished the year with a 13-12 record but owned a miniscule 2.27 ERA and earned the AL Cy Young Award. Ichiro led the league

Dave Niehaus was named the Ford C. Frick Award winner in 2008.



Fans welcomed home the greatest player in Mariners history in 2009.

in hits for the fifth consecutive season, won his 10th consecutive Gold Glove Award and made his 10th consecutive All-Star Game appearance. In his first 10 years in the Majors he had racked up an astounding 2,244 hits.

On a sad note, Seattle lost a beloved and original member of the club on November 10, 2010, when team broadcaster Dave Niehaus died after suffering a heart attack at his home. Niehaus had been the voice of the team since the start and his style combined warmth, humor and baseball knowledge all delivered in a beautiful baritone. He had numerous catch phrases and several memorable play-by-play calls, but it was his daily delivery that won him fans all over the Pacific Northwest. A master storyteller, with the ability to weave those stories in and around the game he was describing, Niehaus made bad games interesting and good games better. Give him a great game and more often than not he delivered a work of audio art.

Two years earlier, Niehaus had been named the Ford C. Frick Award winner, which is presented to a broadcaster for "major contributions to baseball." That July in Cooperstown, N.Y., Niehaus closed his speech by saying, "There are several bigger names who have preceded me in winning this award. There will be several bigger names after me to win this award. But no one will ever be more appreciative. Thank you very much."

Mike Gastineau is a freelance writer based in Seattle. He spent over 20 years hosting a local radio show, and is the author of two books.

July 6, 2009 – Jarrod Washburn tosses one-hitter against Baltimore.

2009 – Don Wakamatsu becomes first Asian-American manager in MLB history; guides team to 85-77 record.



2009 – Mariners pitching staff records AL-best 3.87 ERA, led by Felix Hernandez 19-5 W-L, 2.49 ERA.

July 13, 2010 – Ichiro selected to his 10th consecutive All-Star Game.



2010 – Felix Hernandez dominates opponents en route to AL Cy Young Award; joins Randy Johnson as only Mariners pitchers to win Award.

2010 – Franklin Gutierrez earns first-ever Gold Glove Award as AL outfielder; Ichiro earns 10th straight Award as Mariner.

Nov. 10, 2010 – Dave Niehaus, the legendary (and Hall of Fame) voice of Mariners since the team's first season, passes away.

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