



## CATCHING UP WITH ... RAUL IBANEZ

*By Mike Gastineau*

Because he had the good fortune of being teammates with Edgar Martinez early in his career, Raul Ibanez would often go hungry after games. From 1996 to 2000 Ibanez played in just over 200 games with the Mariners while shuttling back and forth between the Majors and minors. He likes to joke that he was “the 26th guy on a 25-man roster.”

Sometimes he'd play, most nights he didn't. Regardless, whenever the game ended he'd be hungry. But when he made his way to the clubhouse kitchen he'd see Martinez changing from his uniform into workout clothes. So, Ibanez would do the same thing and choose a postgame workout over a postgame snack.

“The best hitter, a guy I admired, was outworking me,” Ibanez said. “What I gained from being around guys like Edgar and Jamie Moyer was seeing that it was no accident they were great players. They were the hardest working guys in the room and I learned a lot about longevity from them because their lives were examples of how to prepare and play.”

### **Pursing His Dream**

Longevity is a fair word to attach to Ibanez who had a 23-year professional baseball career that began when he was a 37th round draft pick by Seattle in 1992. After the draft he was sitting in the organization's rookie league

clubhouse in Arizona while a coach explained the facts of life. He told them to look around because only one or two of the 40 guys in the room would ever play in the Majors. Ibanez had a quick reaction in his mind.

“I remember thinking, ‘Me and who else?’”

Ibanez would eventually make it to the Big Leagues and spend 19 seasons primarily as an outfielder. But, in his early days, the Mariners wanted him to be a catcher (he caught over 150 games as a minor leaguer) and he doesn't regret for one moment putting on the so-called tools of ignorance.

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“Being a catcher made me a better defender, a better hitter and a better teammate,” he said. “I learned how to recognize pitch patterns. I was able to discuss things better with pitchers. It’s how I learned the game.”

Ibañez also credits the guys he played with in the first of three different stints with the Mariners as showing him what baseball and life were all about. The clubhouse in those days included Ken Griffey, Jr., Jay Buhner, Dan Wilson, Martinez, Moyer and others Ibañez idolized.

“They were the players I wanted to become, but they were also people I wanted to be like. It’s important for an organization to have quality leaders and mentors, and those guys made an impact on my life.”

Something else that impacted his life in a fun way was the Mariners decision to use the Warren Zevon song “Werewolves of London” as his walk-up music. He admits that to this day hearing the song has a Pavlovian-like effect on him.

“Immediately,” he laughed. “That’s the power of music. I hear it and I can feel a crisp, 55-degree night, and I’m walking up to the plate with the crowd chanting ‘Rauuuuuuul.’”

## Giving Back

Now, it’s Ibañez who is making an impact on the lives of young players. He’s a Special Assistant to Dodgers President of Baseball Operations Andrew Friedman. They first met in 2011 when Friedman worked for Tampa Bay. The Rays were pursuing Ibañez as a free agent when the two



Ibañez (right) with one of his Mariners mentors, Jay Buhner.

*“It’s important for an organization to have quality leaders and mentors.”*

—Raul Ibañez

met for lunch. The lunch stretched into a three-hour conversation and by the end of the day Ibañez had reached two conclusions – the Rays were not going to sign him as a free agent and he had met a valuable new friend.

By the time Ibañez retired in 2015 Friedman was working for the Dodgers. After another lengthy conversation he agreed to join Los Angeles for a job that allows him to see the game from several different vantage points.

He travels to affiliates, sits with team officials in the draft room and in meetings around the trade deadline, checks out potential draft picks, offers advice to young players and helps coaches with problems.

“I enjoy getting the chance to impact young players,” said Ibañez. “It’s

funny because sometimes I’ll say something, and I’m not even sure it means anything to a player. Then, a year later he’ll tell me, ‘Hey, remember when you said this? You were right.’”

Ibañez is a huge Pearl Jam fan and counts band members among his friends. At a 2009 concert in Philadelphia, and again at a show in Seattle in 2013, singer Eddie Vedder dedicated a song to him. “Those are real ‘pinch yourself’ moments,” he said. Now he’s hoping his Dodgers schedule allows him to travel to Seattle in August to see the band play at Safeco Field.

“These guys are fantastic. They’re salt of the Earth and among the best people I’ve ever been fortunate to be around. They do great work through their music and they do great work on a humanitarian level, too. It’s a beautiful thing.”

Ibañez said he’s open to anything in terms of a long-term goal. Short-term, he said he simply wants to get better at everything he does.

“I’m learning so much about all sides of baseball. Some of the greatest things about life have been taught to me by this game. As a player I was on this quest for mastery. Now I get to pour that into these other areas of my life. That’s the greatest gift in the world – the passion and the drive. That’s what keeps you going, keeps you aggressive, hungry and aspiring.”

Seattle fans cheer on Rauuuuuul at Safeco Field.



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