



The Voice of Reason

Mike Gastineau

MARINERS' HITTING MACHINE KEEPS ON SWINGING

Thump. WACK!

It's an early Arizona morning in February.

Thump. WACK!

It's between innings during a July game.

Thump. WACK!

It's the day after Christmas in the batting cage beneath the stands at Safeco Field.

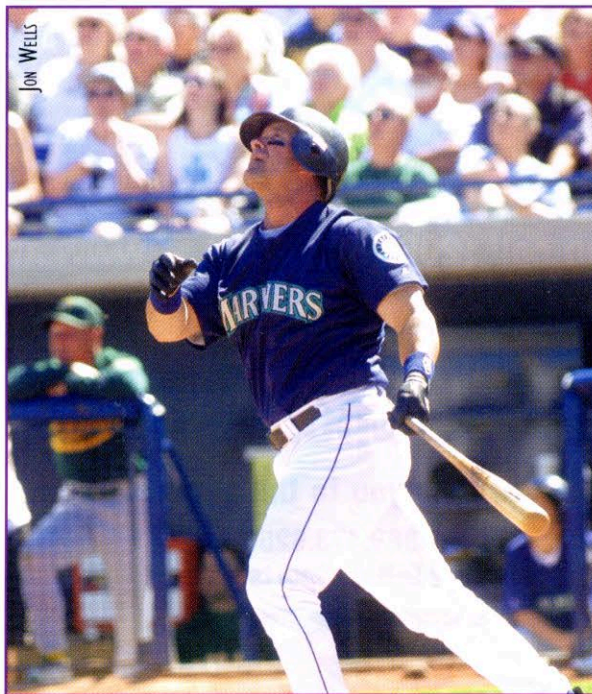
Edgar Martinez is working. He's hitting pitches from a pitching machine in a cage. He's lifting weights. He's studying other hitters. He is, at the age of 39, still trying to get better. Still keeping Father Time at arm's length. And he loves every minute of it.

"I truly enjoy working out and getting ready for the season," Martinez says after a morning workout in Peoria, Arizona. "Plus I feel that it's my responsibility to be in the best condition to play during the season."

2001 was a glorious year for M's fans. But for Martinez, statistically, it was more or less just another year. He hit .306 (his lowest average since 1994 but still above .300 for the seventh consecutive year). His home run total was 23 (down from the career high 37 he hit in 2000 but much closer to his average of 28 per year over the past seven years). He had his second best year ever in terms of RBI and doubled 40 times (an increase of 9 over his doubles total from 2000).

Is it possible that at this point in his career, Martinez is getting better? Well, he isn't getting worse. Ask him how he does it and he uses his favorite four-letter word. Work.

"You work hard. You have to have good work habits. It's not going to happen by just showing up. If you have good work habits and you play to win, good things will happen. And I think those are the keys for success."



Edgar Martinez

That, and an unfailing self-confidence. Ballplayers are confident by nature. But that confidence is gained at different times in their careers. Martinez lists confidence right next to work in terms of how to be a success in the game.

"Once you have a good year you start believing that you can repeat it again. That confidence starts building. It only takes one year. Now you know you can do it and you expect to do it well. So you can get hot as a hitter for a week and you reinforce that confidence. That's what it takes. Do it one time and now you know you can do it."

You might think Martinez became con-

fident in 1995 when he hit a career high .356 and delivered the biggest hit in Mariner history against the Yanks. Or maybe in 1992 when he won his first American League batting title. Or perhaps during the three year stretch in the late '80s when he raked PCL pitchers to the tune of a .345 average. But it goes back earlier than that.

Ask Martinez when he became confident he could hit and then look into the eyes of a natural born hitter as he answers.

"Since I was a kid, for some reason I had this ability to hit. Since I was a kid that confidence was built. I love the game so much, every chance I had I would go practice somehow. So by playing and by working hard I kept building that confidence. In every league I played I always had that confidence. It was built since I was a kid."

Martinez has the ability, like many great athletes, to improve people around him. Bret Boone readily credits him as a major reason for his breakout 2001 season.

"I'm not saying Edgar's the whole reason but he was definitely a part of it," says Boone who spent lots of time studying Martinez last year.

"It wasn't so much what we said or what we talked about but watching how he hits and how he prepares to hit. Watching him in the on deck circle. Watching him before the game. Watching how he goes about hitting. And I really did kind of study him. I do some things now that he does."

Martinez returns the compliment when asked what hitters he watches when he's struggling or in need of advice citing Boone along with John Olerud and Ichiro. Martinez says he looks for hitters that are consistent because they do something right on a consistent basis.

Martinez has three batting titles to his

Continued on page 41

GILICK from page 5

A master stroke by Gillick. Sure, Vazquez may turn out to be a good one, but he wasn't going to be starting for the M's in 2002 and his trade value would certainly have gone down had he remained with the M's as a reserve. Tomko never fulfilled his potential in two seasons with Seattle and it was time for him to move on. Lampkin was 37 and expendable because the M's don't have room for three catchers. Moving Tomko and Lampkin saved the M's \$2.2 million in salary to use towards acquiring other players. Davis, just 25, was the No. 2 draft pick in all of baseball in 1995. While his bat hasn't developed as quickly as hoped, he's shown power and is a good defensive backstop. Arias adds infield depth and Serrano provides insurance in the event of pitching injuries.

• *Traded RHP José Paniagua, LHP Brian Fuentes, and RHP Denny Stark to Colorado for 3B Jeff Cirillo.*

Another great trade as the M's get one of the top third basemen in the majors for three guys who were eminently disposable. Cirillo, a resident of Redmond, Washington, the past ten years, is signed through 2005 with a club option for 2006, so he'll be sticking around.

While it would be nice to have Fuentes back now that Norm Charlton will miss all of the 2002 season, this deal was still a steal.

• *Signed free agent starter James Baldwin, who had been with the Los Angeles Dodgers.*

Baldwin, just a year and some removed from being the White Sox's #1 starter, brings the risk of injury, but also has a big upside. For a reported \$1.25 million (about 25% of what Baldwin made last year), this is a great gamble. Provided he stays healthy, Baldwin should be able to approximate what Aaron Sele did the past two regular seasons. And he can't be any worse than Sele (0-6 lifetime postseason record) was in October. Plus, the M's have an option on Baldwin for 2003.

• *Signed free agent reliever Shigetoshi Hasegawa, who had been with the Anaheim Angels.*

Another good signing and another bargain. Hasegawa, who's averaged over 80 innings out of the Angel 'pen the past five seasons, should be an improvement over the erratic Paniagua. The M's also hold a 2003 option on Hasegawa.

• *Signed free agent outfielder Ruben Sierra,*

who had been with the Texas Rangers.

Another gamble, but given the M's need for power and the way Sierra produced last year for Texas, why not take a flyer? What's the worst that can happen? Ruben gets hurt or turns back into the Ruben Sierra of 1996-2000? If he does, Mark McLemore will be ready to take on additional playing time and Kenny Kelly, who'll start the season at Triple-A, is coming fast and could be ready by June anyway.

• *Traded third baseman David Bell and \$400,000 to San Francisco for infielder Desi Relaford.*

With the M's acquiring Cirillo to take over at third base, there was no room for David Bell, so Gillick found a willing trading partner in the Giants. With the M's just looking to dump Bell and his high salary, it was a pleasant surprise that Gillick was able to get a useful player like Relaford back in the deal. Relaford had a breakout season with the Mets in '01, hitting .302 with extra-base power he hadn't previously displayed. He's a switch-hitter, can play many positions, and has speed. The \$400,000 represents the differences in the 2002 salaries of Bell and Relaford.

MARTINEZ from page 13

credit, the '92 and '95 AL titles and the 1988 PCL crown. He knows how hard it is to maintain the kind of average it takes to lead a league. Which is why he's amazed even more than most people about Ichiro.

"To win seven batting titles," Martinez laughs as he refers to Ichiro's stint in the Japanese League, "I don't care where

you win them, you have to be a special player. You have to be someone who excels and stands out in everything you do. He takes pride in his work."

Work. Pride. Confidence. Three words that pretty accurately sum up Martinez's career. Will that career result in a plaque at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown? Experts disagree. Some say he simply won't have the career numbers neces-

sary. Others say that as the game's premier designated hitter he should be included.

But really, the Hall of Fame argument can wait. Martinez is signed through the 2003 season. And he's got work to do.

Thump. WACK!

Catch Mike Gastineau from 3 to 7 PM on Sportsradio 950 KJR-AM.

FANS from page 18

town. But the Yankees, who have won 38 pennants and 26 World Series, who collect superstars the way some people collect bottlecaps, and who are quickly turning our Mariners into a 21st century version of the old hapless Brooklyn Dodgers by handily beating them two years running in the ALCS, well, these guys deserve our abuse.

For too long the Yankees have sucked the good fortune out of the rest of the world. Last season, when the fates and Tony Womack decreed a different outcome, they flinched, flailed, gave a small

bleat of protest, and then spent \$171.25 million to upgrade. The playing field, which was already tilted in their favor, got tilted some more. Why not? They're the Yankees.

As fans, we can do nothing about this. But at least we can be loud and angry when they come to town.

Remember that final series in October? Remember how they crushed us? Remember how they dashed our hopes of listening to Dave Niehaus broadcast his first World Series? Remember what their fans chanted?

The worst part is, the fans were right. There was no Game Six, and our 116 wins during the regular season meant nothing in October. The Yankee fans were loud, clever, and acted as one.

I repeat: we should all act like Yankee fans when the Yankees come to town.

Which is April 26, 27, and 28.

Welcome back. Let's make some noise.

Erik Lundegaard writes The Grand Salami's player profiles. He also writes for The Seattle Times, Washington Law & Politics, and Slate.