



CATCHING UP WITH ... **ALVIN DAVIS**

By Mike Gastineau

Jerry Dipoto and Scott Servais convened a hitting summit in Peoria, AZ. The Mariners new general manager and manager explained their philosophy on hitting and discussed implementing it throughout the team's system with a consistent message and terminology.

They found a willing recipient of their proposals in Alvin Davis.

"I have no argument with it because it's what I did as a player," said Davis. "The ability to be a tough out with two strikes was something I grew up doing so it's a natural thing for me. It's easy to make it a 'we' and that's really important."

Mr. Mariner the Mentor

In order to truly connect with a community, baseball teams need a guy that fans can rally around. The kind of guy who fans start to believe they really know even though most of them never interact with him. A guy a fan base can refer to as "our guy."

For Mariners fans, the first guy who filled that role did it so well he was

given the nickname "Mr. Mariner." Davis arrived in Seattle in 1984 after just over 200 minor league games and quickly planted his flag in the Kingdome turf. He was the American League Rookie of the Year and an All Star in his first season – in fact, he reached base in his first 47 games as a Big Leaguer. Over the next eight seasons he anchored the Mariners lineup and gave Seattle fans their first star.

Now he's helping young players in the organization as a roving instructor. He thinks being a good two-strike hitter comes down to one really simple idea: avoid getting to a two-strike count.

"Checkpoint one for us is emphasizing, demanding and teaching that our players learn to be on time for the fastball," he noted. "In the past we had way too many at bats that never should have gotten to two strikes, because we were late on the fastball and either fouled it off or missed too many good pitches."

The average fastball velocity in the last five years in baseball has gone

up by four miles per hour. Therefore, Davis said it's easy to make the case to young players that if you can't hit a good fastball you have no chance of playing in the Majors.

They say it takes a village to raise a child and in the case of Davis it took a village to teach him how to hit. Asked about mentors he rattles off the names of a dozen coaches who helped him. But he says it all started with some coaching he got at home from his brother, Bill, who is now an associate scout with the Mariners.

"He was one of the first people in my life to teach me about a hitter's count," said Davis. "He helped me understand the value of putting the ball in play. When I first started playing Little League we had two rules. You don't come home with a clean uniform because that meant you didn't play. And you don't come home with a strikeout."

The younger Davis was a talented player from the jump so the dirty

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uniform was never a problem because he always played. But what happened when he did have to come home with a strikeout?

“I’d try to find a way to avoid the conversation,” he laughed. “I’d change the subject.”

Recalling Teammates

Davis’s career with Seattle spanned from 1984 to 1992, so he was a bridge connecting some of the original Mariners to the players who carried the team to four postseasons in seven years in the decade after he retired. Two of those players were in the news this past offseason and Davis has warm memories of both guys.

Like everyone who knew Dave Henderson, Davis was stunned when the former Mariner passed away last December. He remembers his teammate as freakishly athletic.

“We used shopping carts for the dirty laundry and Dave would be walking through the clubhouse and he would just jump over one of these carts. A 6-foot-3, 225-pound man jumping from one side to the other, clearing it every time and landing on his feet like a cat. Who does that?” he asked, as he laughed again.

Davis, as a roving instructor in the organization, will work with the rest of the coaching staff to help young players improve their game.



Davis was also teammates with a young Ken Griffey Jr., a member of this year’s Baseball Hall of Fame class, and remembers being impressed with him right away.

“His skill set was off the charts, he was tooled up from the beginning. Growing up in the Reds and Yankees clubhouses helped him. He was never intimidated by the show part of the game because he grew up around it.”

Davis says Junior did one thing that bothered his teammates. He would often arrive in the clubhouse

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with a group of friends who would hang around. Eventually, Davis and other veterans told him that wasn’t always appropriate.

“He figured it out. He was always receptive to the veterans and the input we had for him.”

Late in Junior’s career Davis went to see him when the Mariners were in Anaheim. Junior spoke about how some of his young teammates didn’t know how to conduct themselves. Davis started laughing and Junior asked him what was so funny.

“That was the same stuff we used to say about you,” said Davis. “And now look at you, you’re a grown man now!”

Davis, too, is a grown man. He’s a grandfather to three kids and admits he spoils them by loosening the rules a little bit when they come over to visit. If they come over on Monday night they’ll get to enjoy grandpa’s barbecue, a weekly tradition.

Davis has such a kind, easy going nature that it’s likely any Mariners fan who dropped by his place on a Monday would be welcome to enjoy some of his home cooking, too. Just don’t tell him if you had a strikeout that day.



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