



CATCHING UP WITH ... **BRIAN HUNTER**

By Mike Gastineau

Like any guy who spent 10 years in the Majors, Brian Hunter occasionally got fooled by a good pitch. But it was a curveball he saw as his playing days wound down that led him to where he is today.

Hunter spent time in the Big Leagues with six teams, including most of 1999 with the Mariners. By the early 2000s, as he contemplated what he would do next, one thing he had already eliminated was becoming a coach.

“When I was a player I told people I would never be a coach,” he said. “I didn’t foresee myself ever doing it.”

But during his final season as a player, he began to notice something. The phone calls he was getting from his 12-year-old son, Lucas, increasingly became reports on everything Hunter was missing.

“It was always, ‘Daddy, you missed this game. Daddy, you missed this school event.’ I got tired of those types of phone calls.”

Hunter’s parents split up when he was 12. Now, with his own son the same age and giving him clear signals that he wanted him around more often, Hunter began to focus on being a good dad. If that meant coaching, ok.

He moved back to his hometown of Portland, Oregon, and began coaching his son’s team. He and his brother also started a youth baseball organization called the DH Foundation (dhfoundation.org). He soon realized he liked coaching and was benefiting beyond getting to spend time with his son. He learned the art of being patient with young players.

“I know for a fact my son made me a better coach,” he said. “The guys I’m coaching now are about his age. So I was around millennial kids a lot and I have a good understanding of what makes those guys tick.”

Lucas Hunter eventually grew up, went to college, and is currently playing in the Frontier League for the Traverse City Beach Bums. His skipper in

Michigan is Dan Rohn, who coached and managed in the Seattle organization from 2001 to 2006.

With Lucas on his way, Hunter found himself with time on his hands. In 2015, when then-Mariners Director of Player Development Chris Gwynn contacted him, he agreed to join the coaching staff at Single A Everett in the Northwest League, where he spent two seasons.

Hunter grew up a Mariners fan and remembers catching a baseball during batting practice at a game he attended as a kid. In 1999, he played 121 games for Seattle and was involved in two memorable incidents.

When Detroit arrived in Seattle in April, Hunter was their starting center fielder. Two games into the series, after batting practice, he was told he had been traded to the Mariners.

“Wow, that happened kind of quick,” he laughed, when asked his

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first thought. “I remember walking across the field and going into the Mariners clubhouse. They already had a jersey for me with my name and number on it.”

He played for Seattle that night as a defensive replacement. The next day, he started in left field and had three hits as the Mariners drilled the Tigers, 22 to 6. His pride still wounded a bit from the trade, he couldn’t help but rib his friend and now former teammate, Tony Clark.

“I singled and got to first and told Tony, ‘Man, I feel bad for you guys. Do you mind if I steal second base?’” He did that on the next pitch.

Hunter also made the final putout in Kingdome history on June 27, 1999, when he snagged a fly ball off the bat of Texas hitter Rusty Greer. He singled in the first inning of that game and scored when Ken Griffey Jr., launched his final Kingdome home run, and the Mariners went on to beat the Rangers, 5 to 2.

He says batting practice that year was particularly interesting. He was in the Mariners first hitting group, so he spent time in the cage with Junior, Alex Rodriguez and Edgar Martinez.

Hunter played 121 games for Seattle in 1999.



“A-Rod’s dropping bombs everywhere, Junior’s dropping bombs everywhere, and Edgar’s hitting line drives all over the field. Then I get in and it’s like ‘pop, pop, pop,’” he laughed. “Dud fireworks!”

Hunter also has the distinction of sharing his name with another player. Brian R. Hunter spent nine years in the Majors (including in 1996 with Seattle) and arrived three years before Brian L. Hunter. The odd coincidence led to an early problem.

“In 1993, I was in my first Big League camp,” said “L” Hunter. “I received a player’s licensing check for \$10,000. It had my name on it, so what am I supposed to think? This is for me! I didn’t know why I got it but I appreciated it. I was making minor league money, so that check was spent before I got it. About a week later I get a phone call. ‘Uh...yeah...sorry...that was for the other Brian Hunter and you’ve got to pay us back.’”

The payback Hunter is con-

Hunter led the American League in steals in 1996 and 1999.

cerned with now is imparting base running knowledge to the players on the club’s minor league teams. It’s his passion (he led the AL in steals in 1997 and 1999) and he credits Seattle Director of Player Development Andy McKay and Minor League Field Coordinator Mike Micucci for believing it’s important to teach players how to get better at it.

“I know how it changes the game. We just witnessed it in game seven of the [2016] World Series. Kris Bryant scored for Chicago from first base on a double. Cleveland’s José Ramirez got picked off. In a one-run game, that’s huge.”

Hunter says the club’s organizational approach is to emphasize the role that base running plays in every game, the effort level necessary after contact and a mindset of always looking for the extra base.

In addition to taking extra bases, Hunter is optimistic that the Mariners are ready to take a step forward this year in the American League.

“John Stanton and Jerry Dipoto are serious about winning. You can tell by the way they act and the moves they made. We’re trying to win right now. That’s the goal.”

That, and good base running.

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.