

# 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 1984 through 1991 seasons.*

*(Part 2 of 6)*

**By Mike Gastineau**

By 1984, the Mariners were undergoing a subtle, yet important transformation. Prior to that year the majority of their players had been acquired from other organizations via trade, free agency or the expansion draft. But by 1984 the roster featured an abundance of players developed through Seattle's system. Players such as Alvin Davis, Spike Owen, Jim Presley, Phil Bradley and Dave Henderson, as well as pitchers Mike Moore, Mark Langston, Matt Young, Ed Vande Berg and Edwin Nuñez all became big contributors during this season.

None, however, was bigger than Davis, who played just over 200 minor league games before reaching the Majors. The first baseman homered in his second Big League at-bat and went on to collect hits in 18 of his first 20 games. He was an All Star and was named the American League Rookie of the Year. Second place in the voting went to Langston, who became the fourth first-year hurler, and second Mariner, to lead the AL in strikeouts on his way to a 17-win season.

The emergence of young stars energized the fan base. In 1985 the team moved back over the one million mark in attendance and never again would fall below it. Two more farmhands, Harold Reynolds and Dave Valle, both enjoyed increased playing time in back-



up roles. The team, however, continued to look up at the .500 mark, finishing with a 74-88 record for the second year in a row.

1986 began with one of the more memorable opening nights in Mariners history. Presley hit a two-run home run to tie the game against the Angels in the bottom of the ninth, before blasting a grand slam one inning later to send the crowd of 42,121 home happy. 1986 was also the first and only time the Mariners named a team captain with the honor going to Owen. However, despite the influx of talented young play-

In 1988 Harold Reynolds earned his first of three Gold Glove Awards with Seattle.

ers over the middle part of the 80s, the 1986 season went south in a hurry. The Mariners changed managers (Crandall was replaced by Chuck Cottier who was replaced by Dick Williams) and general managers (O'Brien giving way to Hal Keller who was replaced by Dick Balderson). And just four months after naming Owen team captain they sent him and Henderson to Boston.

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The Mariners finished the season with 95 losses and the only bright spot was that they would have the top pick in the 1987 Draft.

A lot of great things happened to the 1987 Mariners. They posted their best record ever, albeit a 78-84 mark. Reynolds emerged as a young star at second base, led the AL in stolen bases and joined Langston on the All-Star team. Langston won a club record 19 games and Davis, Presley, Phil Bradley and Ken Phelps all put together strong seasons, as well as rookie Mickey Brantley, who hit .302 with 14 homers. Speaking of rookies, a young third baseman named Edgar Martinez got his first taste of the Majors and hit .372 during September.

The Mariners did all this in stylish brand new uniforms, moving away from the no-belt, no-buttons look of the 1970s to button-down jerseys and belted pants.

But through the lens of history all these events were dwarfed by what took place in New York City on June 2, 1987, when the Mariners selected a Cincinnati high school outfielder named Ken Griffey Jr., with the first pick in the first round of the draft.



Jay Buhner hit 304 homers over 14 seasons with Seattle.

Junior began his career, one that would end in Cooperstown, in Bell-ingham, Washington, where he hit 14 home runs and drove in 40 runs in 54 games while hitting .313 in the Northwest League. That he was even drafted by the Mariners had required a little skullduggery on the part of the team's scouting staff.

Owner George Argyros argued that the team should use the top pick to take pitcher Mike Harkey from Cal State Fullerton. His reasoning was that a college level player would help the Big League team sooner than a high schooler. However, the Mariners scouting department felt they had a once-in-a-lifetime player and fudged their reports a bit to nudge Griffey's ranking above Harkey's. Argyros finally consented and Junior became a Mariner.

Selecting Junior was the first of four major player moves the Mariners made over three years that would shape the face of the franchise for the next decade.

The second happened the next year in the midst of another season that started with promise, but quickly devolved into chaos. The Mariners split their first eight games, but never again reached .500. Williams' managerial style might best be described as abrasive and in early June he was fired and replaced on an interim basis by first base coach Jim Snyder.

By late July, Balderson was relieved as GM and replaced by Woody Woodward. Balderson's last move was a little noticed trade that sent Phelps to the Yankees in exchange for a minor league outfielder named Jay Buhner.

While fans were sad to see Seattle native Phelps go, they obviously had no idea that the trade would be one of best moves in team history. The lopsided deal lives on in popular culture after a memorable scene in the TV comedy "Seinfeld," where one of the show's characters, Frank

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## TIMELINE

**Sept. 7, 1984** – Catcher Dave Valle makes MLB debut; plays with Seattle through 1993.



Davis



Langston

**1984** – Alvin Davis and Mark Langston finish 1-2 in AL Rookie of the Year Award voting.

**July 16, 1985** – Phil Bradley selected to the 56th Annual MLB All-Star Game.

**1985** – Gorman Thomas belts 32 HRs, wins AL Comeback Player of the Year.



Martinez

**Sept. 12, 1987** – Edgar Martinez makes MLB debut; collects 2,247 hits with Seattle before retiring in 2004.

**1987** – Mariners lead AL with 48 triples; set club record with 174 stolen bases and 39 complete games.

**1987** – Mark Langston earns first-ever Gold Glove Award by a Mariners player.

**July 21, 1988** – Yankees outfielder Jay Buhner traded to Mariners for Ken Phelps; hits 304 homers over 14 seasons with Seattle.

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Costanza, meets George Steinbrenner and bellows at the Yankees owner, “What in the hell did you trade Jay Buhner for? He had 30 home runs and over 100 RBIs last year. He’s got a rocket for an arm. You don’t know what the hell you’re doing!”

By 1989, the Mariners had a new manager in Jim Lefebvre and a new center fielder in Griffey Jr. The 19-year-old rising star played 127 games and famously lined the second pitch he saw as a Big Leaguer, from Oakland ace Dave Stewart no less, into center field for a double. A week later in his home debut at the Kingdome he hit the first pitch he saw from Eric King of the White Sox over the left-centerfield wall for a home run.

The '89 team started slow, played above .500 for a few games in May, but ultimately lost 89 games in a season pockmarked with injuries to just about every key player, including Junior.

Junior’s show-stopping arrival notwithstanding, the biggest day of the season may have come on May 25 when Seattle sent Langston – their winningest pitcher ever at the time – to the Montreal Expos for three pitchers: Brian Holman, Gene Harris and a 6-foot, 10-inch flamethrower named Randy Johnson.



Ken Griffey Sr. and Jr. hit back-to-back home runs; first time in MLB history by father and son.

The following season, Junior was front and center for another memorable moment when he and his father hit back-to-back home runs in a game at Anaheim Stadium. The Mariners had signed Ken Griffey Sr., in August and the duo became the first father-son pair to play for the same team. Their homers were hit to almost the exact same spot in left-centerfield. Senior went first and scored Reynolds with his two-run homer. Four pitches later, Junior nailed his solo shot.

For only the second time in history the team sent two players to the All-Star Game, as Junior and Johnson were selected to the AL team. For Junior, it was the first of 11 consecutive All-Star Game appearances.

Johnson authored the first no-hitter in Seattle history on June 2 against Detroit. The Big Unit walked six and threw 138 pitches while holding the Tigers hitless in front of just over 20,000 fans at the Kingdome.

The 1990 season also marked the full-time arrival of Martinez. He originally signed with the team in 1983. Despite posting great numbers, particularly in 1987, '88, and '89 at Calgary in the AAA PCL, he was held back until the Mariners traded Presley to Atlanta before the season.

The 1991 Mariners were the first in club history to finish the regular season with a record above .500. The 83 and 79 mark was celebrated as a milestone that was a long time coming. For the first time, Seattle had four starting pitchers – Johnson, Holman, Rich DeLucia and Bill Krueger – who won 10 games or more. In addition, the Mariners bullpen recorded the second best ERA in the league, at 3.16. Junior led all MLB players in votes for the All-Star Game and posted his best year yet, hitting .327 with 22 homers and 100 RBIs.

The Mariners now had the nucleus of a team in place that would eventually lead them on an unimaginable run during the mid-90s.

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**1988** – Harold Reynolds earns first of three Gold Glove Awards with Seattle.

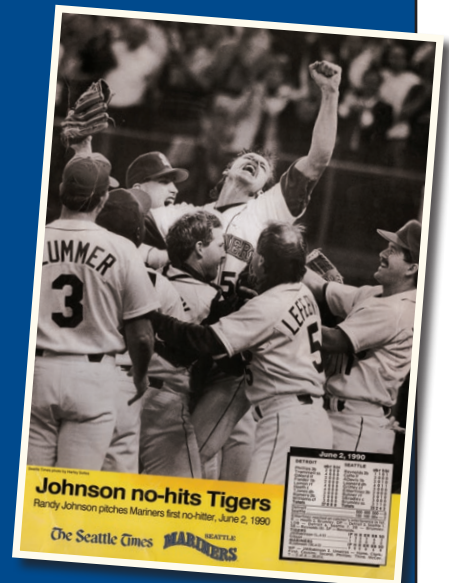
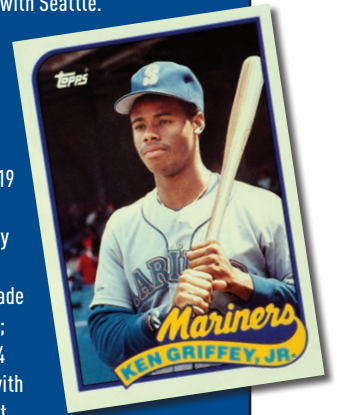
**April 3, 1989** – Ken Griffey, Jr., #1 pick in 1987 June Draft, makes MLB debut at 19 years old.

**May 25, 1989** – Randy Johnson joins Mariners in trade with Montreal; records 130-74 career mark with team over next decade.

**Oct. 5, 1989** – Mariners purchased by partnership of Jeff Smulyan, Emmis Broadcasting, Michael Browning and Morgan Stanley Group, Inc. Smulyan assumes role of Chairman.

**1990** – Mariner Moose debuts; 10-year-old Ammon Spiller of Ferndale, Wash., wins contest to name mascot.

**Sept. 14, 1990** – Ken Griffey Sr. and Jr. hit back-to-back home runs; first time in MLB history by father and son.



**June 2, 1990** – Randy Johnson pitches first no-hitter in club history, beating Detroit 2-0.

**1990** – Mariners Care, the team’s non-profit foundation, is launched.

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