

# CATCHING UP WITH ... WILLIE BLOOMQUIST

By Mike Gastineau

If you're looking for Bremerton, Washington native, and former Seattle Mariner Willie Bloomquist, there are a few places where you might track him down.

You could start with the Arizona Diamondbacks. Bloomquist spent three years as a player with Arizona, lives in Scottsdale and since his retirement in 2016 has worked as a Special Assistant to Arizona President and CEO Derrick Hall. He works with community and corporate partners and assists with baseball and business matters relating to the club.

You could also check various youth sports and activity sites around Phoenix. Bloomquist and his wife, Lisa, have four daughters and he lists "daughter taxi driver" as one of his occupations. He laughs when it's pointed out that he's outnumbered at home.

"Sometimes there's stuff that goes on that I just don't understand," he said. "So I defer to my wife and keep moving forward and don't ask questions."

He coached one of his daughter's volleyball teams this year and despite not knowing a lot about the sport ended up doing a decent job.

"After three games of getting our faces pounded in, my competitive juices started flowing. I don't like losing and we figured a few things out and had a good season. I try to relate everything to baseball and put my own twist on it. There's no substitute for foot quickness, beating the ball to a spot and keeping a low center of gravity. Those things stay consistent no matter what sport you're in."

But your best chance to find Bloomquist might be to head to a river in Montana, a ski hill in the Rockies or a top golf resort. There, you'll find him running Elite Outdoor Adventures, a company that keeps him connected to his lifelong love of outdoor sports.

During his playing days, he and his friends would take fishing, hunting or golf trips and they would often discuss



Bloomquist's teammates. "It was always, 'What's this guy like? What's that guy like?'" he said. "They wanted to know about the guys I played with and how they acted."

A light went on for a business idea. Elite Outdoor Adventures specializes in organizing high-end adventure trips featuring sports celebrities like former Mariner Jay Buhner, UFC fighter Chad Mendes and world champion snowboarder Scotty Lago.

"It's a great adventure," said Bloomquist. "You and your friends get to hang out with a sports star, and we

take a chunk of the fee and give it to a charity [designated by the client or picked by Bloomquist]. We try to create cool experiences for people so they walk away thinking it's the most fun they ever had on a trip."

## Jack-of-All-Trades

It figures Bloomquist occupies his time with different things since that's also how he spent 14 seasons in the Majors, including nine with the Mariners. He was the ultimate do-it-all guy.

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Over the course of 1,055 career games he played every position except pitcher and catcher.

Bloomquist delivered a memorable farewell to baseball in March of 2016. He was working out in Arizona but no team was calling to sign him. He was 38 and realized his career was over.

“Not too many people know this, but my last year in Seattle I was playing with a torn tendon in my elbow. I was trying to cover that up and play through it. During the offseason, I was getting PRP [platelet-rich plasma] and that worked for a while, but it was time to walk away. My body was hurting and it was time to be done.”

On the morning of March 11, 2016, Bloomquist went to Arizona State University, where he had played college ball, and told himself that unless the phone rang during his workout with an offer, this would be his last day as a ballplayer.

He told his batting practice pitcher, “I’m not going to stop until I take a swing that’s perfect in my mind. I don’t care how many pitches it takes.”

He set up his phone to video the session. Eventually, he stepped into a



pitch and launched the ball into the Arizona sky. Bloomquist admired the shot for a moment, flipped his bat and that was that.

He wasn’t planning on showing anyone the video. He called his agent to inform him he had decided to retire and his agent said he would announce

Bloomquist’s new business, Elite Outdoor Adventures, specializes in organizing high-end adventure trips featuring sports celebrities.

the news in a few days. “Wait a second,” Bloomquist said. “Why should YOU get to announce this?”

Instead, Bloomquist posted the video on his Twitter account (@williebloom), along with the words: “Make your last swing your BEST swing. Farewell @MLB. Thank you for 14 amazing seasons. It’s been an incredible ride.”

The short video has been viewed nearly 300,000 times. “It turned out to be a pretty cool way to say goodbye to the game,” he said.

Bloomquist has kept an eye on the Mariners this year and laughs at the idea that as an employee of the Diamondbacks he’s allowed to root for them since they’re in the American League. “Unless,” he said, “we meet in the World Series or Interleague play.”

He admits that he would have liked to play more games – he averaged 75 per season – but looks back on his career with no regrets.

“I’m satisfied with my career,” he said. “My approach and my effort level never wavered. That’s what’s important. And I’m perfectly happy with that.”

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.

