

The Mariner Muse

Your (off)-daily source for Seattle Mariners commentary and general thoughts on baseball

The forgotten feat of the '03 Rotation

Patrick Leary

The 5 Starters Who Completed Something Never Seen Before

M Before announcing they would skip the fifth spot in the rotation after Monday's off-day, the Mariners were headed for the possibility of these five pitchers making consecutive starts: Ariel Miranda, Yovani Gallardo, Chase De Jong, Dillon Overton and Christian Bergman.

That thought is horrifying, but more crucially to my point, it's not at all what the team planned as recently as six weeks ago. In one turn of the rotation, four guys from the projected Opening Day rotation missed starts, with the assumed fifth starter, Gallardo, the only healthy one.

Sure, the team has been horribly unlucky, but the sky isn't totally falling in on the season yet. The team enters this off day just two games under .500, and yet if Bergman starts soon he'll be the eighth man in just over a month to start for the Ners, and that doesn't even account for Miranda replacing Drew Smyly in the rotation a few days before the season.

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Happy Off-Day!

Here at the Mariner Muse, we try to return a bit of what you miss on days when the Ners don't play. For baseball is beautiful in its rhythmic repetition, its methodic frequency: a ballgame a day keeps the doctor away.

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The Mariners' heyday, roughly estimated to be 1995 to 2003, is mostly remembered for its incredible offensive talent. Not many people think of that era's final groups of starting pitchers, the 2003 rotation, as legendary. But the fact is, that group achieved something truly special never seen in modern baseball before – and something that likely won't happen again, considering circumstances that fell rotations like this year's.

The 2003 Mariners starting rotation, consisting of Jamie Moyer, Freddy Garcia, Joel Piñero, Ryan Franklin and Gil Meche, made every single start. Let that sink in for a second. Those five players started all 162 games of the 2003 season.

For context, that *has never been done* since Major League Baseball expanded its schedule to 162 games in 1961. And frankly, it's *Next*



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Current Happiness Meter...According to Your Editors

Title	Anthony	Charlie	Patrick	Travis	AVG
Offense (0-40)	30	33	25	32	30
Defense (0-10)	9	8	8	8	8.25
S. Pitching (0-20)	18	14	14	17	15.75
R. Pitching (0-20)	17	12	14	16	14.75
Management (0-10)	8	7	7	9	7.75

Notes:

Offense: *Is...is that Danny Valencia hitting the baseball? Danny Valencia, who hit .287 last year in Oakland? If this keeps up, we good. ~Travis*

Defense: *Hands team is for real right now. ~Anthony*

Starting Pitching: *It's in shambles, but damn it De Jong, Overton, & co keep finding ways to win. ~Charlie*

Relievers: *Can't believe I'm gonna say this, but Nick Vincent's numbers are incredible. ~Travis*

Management: *Doing all they can with these injuries. Bergman's call up was big. ~Patrick*

TOTAL HAPPINESS: 76.5/100 (Grade: C)

Last MM:
65.25 (+11.25)

surprising that it's even happened once. The sheer dumb luck needed for all five starting pitchers to stay healthy over the course of a six-month season while pitching well enough to stay in the rotation is staggering.

And even that's not enough to accomplish what that 2003 team did. Eight other teams have had all five starters make 30 or more starts over the course of a season, but none of those rotations made all 162 starts, and some of them came up short because of the smallest of quirks.

The most recent and excruciating example of that comes from the 2012 Cincinnati Reds, who, given how bad the Reds are these days (although they're starting hot this year), surprisingly won 97 games. The motley crew of Johnny Cueto, Mat Latos, Bronson Arroyo, Homer Bailey (what a terrible name for a pitcher) and Mike Leake all stayed healthy for a full season and all pitched well enough to stay in the rotation, with the top four all posting <2 WAR seasons and Leake hanging on as the fifth starter.

But still, those five guys only managed to make 161 starts. Their history was undone on August 18, the only day the Reds played a doubleheader during that entire season. With four straight games played before that day and the nearest day

off 12 days away, Dusty Baker opted not to start Mat Latos on three days rest and screw up his entire rotation, and called up minor leaguer Todd Redmond to start. Redmond got hit hard and lost, and the rotation resumed as constructed for the remainder of the season.

This isn't an article about the Reds, but that example just goes to show how difficult it is to do what the 2003 Mariners did. The Reds had every uncontrollable factor go well with their pitchers, but a rainout on May 1 resulted in the August doubleheader that caused everything to go to shit.

So how the hell did the Ners do it? They stayed healthy, pitched extremely well, and avoided unfortunate schedule quirks. They played a doubleheader on June 8 against the Mets, but the unscheduled game was a makeup for a rainout on the day before and June 9 was a day off to travel back to Seattle to face the Expos (RIP) on June 10.

More than anything, Pat Gillick put together a rotation of five pitchers who all had solid (if not pretty darn good) Major League careers in one way or another. In 2003, some shined, some struggled, but the group all made it through the 90-win season together.

The Aging Ace

Jamie Moyer

Age: 40

Starts: 33

Record: 21-7

ERA: 3.27

WAR: 4.8



For the slow-throwing Moyer, 2003 was arguably his career year. That's pretty rare for a 40-year old player. But 2003 was the only time Moyer made the All-Star Game, and he posted career bests of 21 wins and a 3.27 ERA. That said, it was only his fourth best by WAR.

Moyer was undoubtedly the team's ace. Although Freddy Garcia made the opening day start, his struggles (which we'll discuss in a moment) and Moyer's success made this Moyer's rotation to lead.

The aging southpaw struggled in his first start of 2003, yielding eight runs (six earned) to the A's and failing to finish the fifth inning. After that though, Moyer ripped off a run of phenomenal starts, including seven straight wins from the start of May through early June. In the second game of the aforementioned June 8th doubleheader, Moyer shutout the Mets over seven innings to improve to 10-2 and drop his ERA to 2.92.

He hit a rough patch in late June, losing three straight to the Braves and the Angels twice, but from June 30 on, Moyer went 11-2. He finished at least the fifth inning in every one of those starts and racked up 12 quality starts, including one in all five of his September starts.

You might expect the Ners to give the 40-year-old starter some rest at some point, but Moyer never pitched on more than five days rest throughout the entire season. He only missed his turn in the rotation one time, and that was around the all-star game, in which he threw a perfect fourth inning in his only ever midsummer classic appearance.

Moyer was truly an iron man, and his nearly 5

WAR season put him third on the team in that category, only behind Bret Boone, who hit 35 homers and drove in 117, and Ichiro, who hit .312 (actually not very good for peak Ichiro) and stole 34 bases.

It was Moyer's last great season with the Mariners, and while he'd win 16 games with the Phillies in 2008, he'd never reach the heights of 2003 again.

The nominal ace (...who kind of sucked)

Freddy Garcia

Age: 26

Starts: 33

Record: 12-14

ERA: 4.51

WAR: 1.4



Garcia is remembered for a lot of things in Seattle. He was electric as a rookie in 1999, made consecutive all-star teams for the stellar 2001 and 2002 Mariners, and was the Venezuelan precursor to Félix Hernández. What he's not remembered for is a generally bad 2003 that presaged the end of his tenure in Seattle a year later.

Just a season removed from leading the American League in ERA in 2001, the Ners penciled Garcia in as their Opening Day starter. But Garcia struggled out of the gate, falling to 1-3 with a 5.09 ERA on April 16. After a string of three quality starts, Garcia was shelled at Safeco by the eventual American League champion Yankees, giving up nine runs in less than three innings. By late May, Freddy was 3-6 with a 5.90 ERA and some truly awful starts under his belt.

Garcia appeared to find his form after that, however, winning six straight starts to improve to 9-6 and drop his ERA to 4.28 on June 24. But July and early August completely reversed that, as Garcia lost his next six decisions and his ERA



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ballooned back to 5.45. He would finish the season with a run of quality starts, but it wasn't enough to save his season...or the team's, for that matter.

It would be Garcia's worst season in his 20's, and he was traded to the White Sox the next year as the franchise collapsed. In case you were wondering whether that trade was shit, it was! Miguel Olivo, Mike Morse and Jeremy Reed all were bad and I don't have the mental fortitude to look up their depressing stats.

Garcia would go onto struggle to stay healthy in his 30s, having just one strong season (in 2011 with the Yankees) after 2006. He never made an all-star game or placed in the Cy Young voting after 2002.

The Rising Young Star

Joel Piñero

Age: 24

Starts: 32

Record: 16-11

ERA: 3.78

WAR: 3.1



The 2003 season wasn't Piñero's breakout season. That was 2002, when he nearly hit 5 WAR and forced his way into the rotation from the bullpen in late April. But 2003 was his first season as a full-time starter, and he didn't disappoint.

Piñero's first 10 starts of 2003 were decent. He went 4-4 with a 4.41 ERA to open the season, 4.41 ERA to open the season, never having a truly great start *or* awful one, always pitching between five and eight innings.

His 11th start of the year turned the tide. On May 30 in the Metrodome, he threw a complete game shutout against the Twins, allowing just four hits, two walks and striking out a season-high 12 batters. It was a flash of Piñero's true potential that would continue to crop up of the next two months.

On the back of that May 30 CGSO, Piñero went

at least six innings in every start in the next two months. On July 31, he threw seven shutout innings against the Tigers at Safeco, and left that start at 13-5 with a 3.03 ERA.

That day would be the high point of his season, if not his career. As the Mariners collapsed in August and September, so too Piñero fell apart. He lost all five of his starts in August and didn't have a quality start in any of those defeats.

After he broke the string of consecutive defeats in a no-decision Mariners win on Sept. 2, the Ner threw Garcia on short rest on Sept. 7 to give Piñero seven days off between starts. Garcia lost a close game, but Piñero appeared to bounce back because of the time off, throwing a complete game to beat the Rangers in his first quality start since July.

Ultimately, Piñero still won his last two starts of the season, but it was too little, too late for the Mariners, who needed more from Piñero in his horrid August.

Piñero would stick with the Ners for another three years, each more excruciating than the next. The Mariners let him go at the end of 2006, a year where he amassed -2.00 WAR and a 6.36 ERA, and while he had a small resurgence in 2009 and 2010 with the Cardinals and Angels, he would never approach the heights of his early 20s again.

The future closer

Ryan Franklin

Age: 30

Starts: 32

Record: 11-13

ERA: 3.57

WAR: 3.3



Of anyone in this historic start-making rotation, Franklin is definitely the unlikeliest, given what he was before *and* after 2003.

Before 2003, Franklin had been a nice bullpen piece for the 116-win team as a 28-year-old rookie. In 2002, he started games for the first

Where Are They Ner?

Charles Gipson | Outfielder

Ner from: 1998-2002

Best Ner Moment: Gipson specialized in late game heroics, either on the base paths or in the outfield. On September 10, 2001, in a 5-1 game against the Angels, he turned a Tim Salmon double that would have scored two into a game-ending diving play, saving Arthur Lee Rhodes from a tough outing and locking up win #104 for the 2001 Ners.

Where MM Guessed He Is Ner: This could go many ways: Gipson was known for speed, defense, and being clutch...whatever that means. Our guess? Postmates delivery driver. Hear me out on this: who do you want delivering your late night Thai food, Charles Gipson or Milton Bradley? Gipson would get it to you fast, he would get you exactly what you ordered and he would be reliable. Bradley, I imagine, would forget the crab rangoon, blame the restaurant for making him late and you'd always wonder if he took a bite of your pad see uw.

Where He Actually Is Ner: Charles has done some moving up in the world: he went from pinch runner/utility man/member of the hands team to Chairman of the Board at Children 4 Tomorrow, a small non-profit based in Houston that works to prevent emotional and mental abuse in children. He also works as athletic director of Xavier Educational Academy, which is also in Houston. Finally, according to his LinkedIn, Charles also recently returned from working in the Middle East to develop morale, welfare, and recreational programs for the military and civilians. That's awesome. Go Charles.



time, but was still a reliever primarily, making 30 appearances from the bullpen as opposed to just 12 starts.

Franklin's season is a textbook case of advanced statistics being more effective than wins and losses. While his 11 wins in '03 were the least among the five starters, his value to the team was arguably only outstripped by Moyer.

Case and point: while Franklin emerged from April at just 1-2, he threw at least six innings in every start. In fact, for the first three months of 2003, Franklin threw at least six innings in 15 of 16 starts, with the only exception being a May 15 game in Cleveland that was delayed after three innings by rain.

Eating innings was Franklin's greatest contribution to the 2003 season. He'd get hit around occasionally, and even led the American League in home runs allowed. But not including the rain-shortened start, Franklin fell short of 18 outs just three times. His crown jewel start came on July 23, when he threw a complete game shutout with just two hits to beat Oakland.

Weirdly, 2003 was Franklin's only good year as a starter. In 2004 and 2005 with the Mariners, Franklin went 12-31, with an ERA hovering around 5.00.

After he left the Ners, Franklin became a full-time reliever once more, never making a start after 2005. His return to the bullpen was fairly

anonymous before he seized the closing job for the Cardinals in 2008 and made the 2009 all-star game during a 38-save campaign. Still, by then Franklin was 36, and he was out of the majors two years later.

The other guy

Gil Meche

Age: 24

Starts: 32

Record: 15-13

ERA: 4.59

WAR: 1.7



What do you remember about Gil Meche? He strikes me as so incredibly average as a Mariner. To be honest, my biggest memory of him is that absurd contract the Royals gave him after he left Seattle without a single 2 WAR season.

The crazy thing about Meche making every start for a whole season is that he hadn't pitched in the major leagues for two years because of problems with his rotator cuff and AC joint.

Nonetheless, Meche came out of the gates red hot. He had three straight scoreless starts to end April and continued to rack up quality starts into May and June. On June 20, a seven-inning scoreless no-decision bumped his ERA down to 2.89 with a 9-3 record.

Meche's struggles began in July. From July 6 to July 19, Meche had three consecutive starts with losses and five runs allowed. He hit another rough patch at the same time as Piñero in August, giving up four, five, and seven runs in consecutive losses.

All that said, Meche's worst stretch came during his final three starts of the season. The Rangers tagged him for eight earned runs in 2.1 innings on Sept. 16 and he only pitched one inning on Sept. 21, giving up five runs to Oakland. Lou Pinella brought him back three days later and he made it through five innings, but the Mariners didn't score for him.

Meche would go on to be extremely average for the Ners for the next three seasons, before

breaking out with the Royals in 2007 and 2008. Those years included an all-star appearance, 9.2 WAR and 34 starts each year. He retired prematurely before his age-32 season in 2011.

. . .

At the end of the day, this feat is thoroughly impressive, made more impressive by the fact that the 2003 Mariners rotation doesn't contain any hall-of-famers. Sure, Moyer was fantastic, Garcia was still near his young peak, and Piñero, Franklin, and Meche all chipped in with seasons that would be above average for their careers.

Additionally, extreme rotation stability like this usually translates to success. Of the nine teams to have all five starters make 30 starts in the modern era, every team won at least 81 games, and seven of the nine won 90 games.

According to Fangraphs, from 2011 to 2013, teams on average needed 10 different starting pitchers over the course of a season, and that sample includes two teams in the 5x30 start club. The 2017 Mariners are well on their way there and could easily get to a dozen given their stockpile of 4A pitchers and talented prospects in the high minors.

With that context, it's truly stunning to think that five average-to-good pitchers made every start over the course of the '03 season. As unlucky as the team has been since 2001, this was one time when every bounce truly went its way. *Fin.*

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Trade Tree: The 2005 Draft & A Bunch of Shit

Travis Smith

FOREWORD: This Trade Tree takes a slightly different approach compared to the past two. Instead of an examination of players in an original trade and seeing what has developed since, I am going to discuss someone in the Ners organization and re-work how they got there...and through doing so, show you who they once were – and who they once could have been. So:



Caballero (2011)

Do you know who Luis Caballero could have been? Do you know who Luis Caballero is?

In a minor league affiliate far, far away, there stands a young man named Luis Caballero. He works as an infield coach for the recently-created Mariners Dominican Republic Academy, buried *deep* in the Seattle system. Caballero never really had much of a shot in the pros: his four years in the Ners organization saw him bounce between the Clinton LumberKings, High Desert Mavericks, Everett Aquasox, Jackson Generals, and then various other minor league squads such as the (incredibly named) Bakersfield Blaze. In 2015, Caballero retired from baseball. On March 29, 2016, he was named to the staff of the Clinton LumberKings...and then eventually drifted off to the DR. But let's re-trace Luis' track.

The Ners acquired Mr. Caballero as the ever-promising "player to be named later" part of a trade in which they sent infielder Jack Wilson to the Braves on August 31, 2011 – a transaction that Lookout Landing [described](#) as a "gift" to Atlanta, since the M's received a "tiny bit of salary relief" and a player who would "surely be of little consequence." (They were spot on).



Wilson & Snell (2009)

Jack Wilson, meanwhile, arrived in Seattle in 2009 as one of two "prized" pieces of a mid-season trade with the Pittsburgh Pirates – with the other piece being dear Ian Snell. Snell went 0-5 in his first few months with Seattle and was quickly ushered to the bullpen, where his baseball career then perished. (It's all pretty much summed up in [this SB Nation article](#)). Wilson, meanwhile, went on to win the 2009 Fielding Bible Award (the poor man's Gold Glove), and then do pretty much nothing but turn a couple of nifty double-plays with the one and only Chone Figgins. But the biggest piece of interest in this Trade Tree is the guy that the Ners had traded to Pittsburgh *for* Snell and Wilson.



Clement (2003)

Meet Jeff Clement. (Or perhaps I should say, retrieve Jeff Clement from that over-stuffed chest under your bed labeled "Mariners We Don't Talk About Anymore"). In his 2 years with the Ners, Jeff played in 75 baseball games, hit .237, and posted a WAR of -1.2. Despite the poor numbers, Jeff was once *the* Mariners prospect, having been drafted...wait for it...3RD OVERALL in 2005, behind Justin Upton (#1 to Arizona) and Alex Gordon (#2 to KC).



Clement being drafted third overall is simply amazing, because 2005 was chalk-full of supreme baseball talent. Would you like me to walk you through a couple of other players that were drafted below Clement, AKA people the Ners could have drafted INSTEAD of him? No? I'm going to anyway.

With the 4th pick in the 2005 MLB Draft, the Washington Nationals selected Ryan Zimmerman. Entering 2017, Zimmerman had already shown that he was great: a career .278 hitter with 36.2 WAR, he has won two Silver Slugger awards at third base. But 2017 has been another level for Zimmerman: he currently leads all baseball in RBI (34), HR (13), and Batting Average (an astounding .435). Could'a been Clement.



With the 5th pick in the 2005 MLB Draft, the Milwaukee Brewers selected Ryan Braun. Yea, there's that weird 2013 steroid thing, but nothing can take away from the fact that Braun has been the face of baseball in Milwaukee for essentially the past decade. A 6-time All-Star, he also won the NL MVP in 2011 and has posted a 44.6 career WAR. Could'a been Clement.

There are a couple of other notables lingering in the selections following, including Troy Tulowitzki (44.1 WAR) and Cameron Maybin (11.4 WAR)...but the guy who was selected 11th overall is what makes me angry.



With the 11th pick in the 2005 MLB Draft, the Pittsburgh Pirates selected Andrew McCutchen. Andrew McCutchen is good. Real good. He was the 2015 NL MVP, is a 5-time All-Star, a 4-time Silver Slugger, and hits a career .292 with a 37.4 WAR. *How* did Andrew McCutchen fall to 11th in this draft? How did the Mariners think *Jeff Clement* was the answer to everything...and passed up on McCutchen, Braun, and Zimmerman?

Le sigh. Obviously, it is impossible to know exactly how draft picks will turn out (shoutout to Dustin Ackley), but damn...this one *really* hurts. In a minor league affiliate far, far away, there stands a young man named Luis Caballero. Caballero was once Jack Wilson, who was once Jeff Clement, who all along could have been a +35 WAR player.

Aaaaaaaa damnit.

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