

The Mariner Muse

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



Mariners Retrospective: *June 13, 2014*

M *What could've happened if we'd rolled that double play?* **A New Column: Anthony Davis**

Baseball is a game of big moments and small moments. It moves through clearly defined periods of action: pitches, swings, and balls in play. Big decisions are decided by small calls that may be as close as an inch or as far as a mile: safe or out, fair or foul. These sharp, decisive moments are broken up by the white noise of a pitcher staring in for his sign, a mound visit, or a pitching change. Such segmentation forces the game to develop...p.2 →,

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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...slowly, allowing for us fans to intensely dissect and analyze specific individual moments and analyze how they contribute to the game as a whole, or even the season as a whole. This also allows for speculation about what could have been if one moment went slightly differently. And that can lead to hours and hours of questioning what *would* have been.

That is exactly what this recurring column is about: wondering what could have been for the Mariners if one thing had turned out differently at different points in the team's history. In each, I'll set the scene for the moment, describe what really happened, discuss the moment of question, and then examine what might have played out if things had gone differently. And then shake my head in regret at participating in this depressing exercise.

The first "what-if" moment can be summarized as so: if the Mariners were able to successfully execute a 6-4-3 double play in the ninth inning on June 13th, 2014, they would have gone to the playoffs that year and then consequentially had one of the most fun rosters of 2016. They did not execute this double play, and Elvis Andrus scampered home for the lead and eventual win.

The Mariners then finished one game back in the wild card race in 2014. So, hypothetically, if we are able to roll that 6-4-3 and win in the bottom of the ninth (or in extras), we finish tied with the A's in the Wildcard and play a one-game playoff for the second Wildcard spot. This then would inspire faith in the ownership to stick with Jack Z and ol' Lloyd through the 2015 hiccup-added



season and to drop some bags in free agency. Jack signs Bartolo Colon to bolster the back end of the rotation and drives up the brinks truck for Yoenis Cespedes to handle left field. The Mariners quickly become the most fun team ever. But of course, this is only if we roll up that 6-4-3 double play at home against Texas in June.

The year is 2014, Lloyd "George" McClellan (I know it's McClendon) is the manager, Felix is a dominant ace and James Jones plays in over 100

No baseball? No problem.

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games. On the evening of June 13th, the Mariners faceoff against the Texas Rangers at Safeco. Facing Felix is Nick Tepesch, whose name sounds more like a sound effect than a name. Things start off well for Felix: he cruises through 8 innings with minimal trouble. But Tepesch also thrives, only allowing two hits in over six innings to a Ners lineup that included Stefan Romero, Brad Miller and Cole Gillespie.

The game goes to the ninth scoreless. Felix records an out but then walks Elvis Andrus, who swipes second and third. After walking Shin Soo-Choo to put runners at the corners, Fernando Rodney comes in and gets his double play ground ball...but Choo slides hard into second, which allows hitter Adrian Beltre to leg out the fielder's choice and thus for Andrus to score. Joakim Soria comes in and shuts the door in the bottom half of the ninth and the Ners go



home with the L.

So what might have unfolded if we could have rolled that double play? Let me hypothesize. Adrian Beltre does not leg out the fielder's choice, Cano manages to throw him out through

The Happiness Meter: How We Feelin'?

MM Editors

Title	Anthony	Patrick	Travis	AVG
Offense (0-40)	37	35	34	35.3
Starters (0-20)	13	14	14	13.6
Relievers (0-20)	16	16	16	16
Defense (0-10)	8	9	9	8.6
Management (0-10)	7	6	8	7

Editors AVG: 80.25

MM Twitter Followers

Grade:	% Votes	Value
A "Great" 95	20%	19
B "Good" 85	70%	59.5
C 75	10%	7.5
D 65	0%	0
OVERALL: (Median)	--	86

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TOTAL HAPPINESS: 83.25/100 (Grade: B)

Last MM:
N/A

the slide. It goes to the bottom of the ninth, but Ron Washington doesn't want to use his closer until the save is possible. He leaves in Shawn Tolleson, who promptly walks James Jones, who then comes around to score on a Robinson Cano double down the left field line. Felix leads the team out of the dugout to celebrate with Robbie – and the Ners go home with the W.

Now the rest of the season plays out the exact same as it did: the team survives a five-game losing streak at the end of September and win game 162 to hold onto a tie with Oakland for the final Wildcard spot. A single game pre-Wildcard playoff is to be played -- the biggest game the Mariners have played since 2001. But Felix had to pitch 5 ⅓ innings the day before. He isn't available. Neither is Paxton. Hisashi Iwakuma would be throwing on three days rest -- he *may* be available out of the bullpen. McClellan shows some cajones and hands the ball to Taijuan



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Walker, who fares fine against Jon Lester (remember when he was on Oakland?), managing to get through four innings only allowing a home run to Josh Donaldson. Iwakuma takes it from there and cruises until the final frame. Meanwhile, Lester struggles the third time through the order and Kyle Seager breaks the game open with a bases-loaded double. Fernando Rodney closes the ninth with a bow and arrow into the night sky...and Ners plays another day.

The real Wildcard game is slightly less in our favor. With no time in between games, the M's have no choice but to go with Chris Young against James Shields (the *good* James Shields) and the Royals (the *good* Royals). Things do not go well for Young, who was skipped in his final regular season start, and Kansas City pulls away. Despite a solid effort by the Mariners bullpen,



the Royals' buzzsaw of 2014 shuts down the Seattle lineup and ends all hope for an ALDS and beyond.

Nevertheless, heads are high. The first playoff appearance for the Mariners in over a decade belies confidence going into the 2015 season.

However, the 2015 season proceeds similar to real life: the team underperforms the heightened expectations despite the addition of Nelson Cruz and pressure is on Jack Z and Lloyd. However, with a shiny "playoff" appearance now under their collective belts, they manage to hold on to their jobs through the season and 2016 looks to be their last chance. With his back up against a wall, Jack decides he has no other choice than to spend ridiculous sums of other people's money in free agency. Showing a blatant disdain for injury concerns and a massive value on having a fun baseball team, Jack Z signs both Yoenis Cespedes and Bartolo Colon. Yoenis then alternates between hitting bombs and spending time on the DL, while Bartolo ambles through the year, anchoring the 5th spot in the rotation by going 12-12.



It is here where I will stop this exercise in hypotheticals and take stock of what just happened. What different direction might the franchise have gone if we had just turned that 6-4-3 double play in the 9th inning of June 13, 2014? Acquiring Big Sexy and La Potencia is swoon-inducing enough, give me one more second to continue to bask in this lovely alternate-Mariners universe.

Let's see here: bloggers and reporters are still forced to spell Zduriencik, the Mariners never fall to the title "Team with Longest Postseason Drought" after the Buffalo Bills make the NFL playoffs in 2018, Felix gets his first taste of the playoffs, Taijuan Walker remains with the team, the entire farm system is not traded for an entirely different farm system and Shawn

Tolleson's career ERA goes up a few points. Lloyd McClendon is remembered fondly instead of as the guy-before-Servais. Jack Z is not thought of as Bill Bavasi-esque, but rather as the guy who built the first Mariner playoff team in forever and brought in Yoenis, Nelson, and Bartolo.

Quite the results for executing a double play in a game in June.



How Have The Starters Looked So Far?

Travis Smith

All 4 starters who began this season in the rotation have now pitched – and two of them have pitched twice. How did they look, and what might we expect in the future? Travis Smith gives them each a grade and offers some analysis of what he observed.

Felix Hernandez: B

Night and day. Opening Night was an A-grade, but Wednesday afternoon was a C-. I'll start with the bad: Felix' performance against the Giants was simply awful. (Duh). What appeared to happen was that, in the early innings, he was trying to pitch around the Giant hitters and wound up walking them instead. When he pitched to contact, they rolled over or popped the ball up. However, as the walks continued to increase, circle the bases, and eventually score, The King dug himself deeper and deeper into a hole – and then the San Francisco hitters changed their approach. The 4-run cushion allowed them to recognize that Felix now *had* to pitch to contact if he was to keep the Ners in the game at all, so (instead of waiting out at bats and walking), they sat on the early fastball and absolutely destroyed it. If Felix can feel more comfortable pitching to contact early in the game, he'll do far better.

This leads me into the good: on Opening Night, we saw a brand new King – and a King that I'm excited to see (hopefully) develop throughout the season. Instead of relying on fastballs and pitching to strike batters



out, Felix felt comfortable using off-speed pitches *in* the zone. The Cleveland hitters didn't K – but they didn't make great contact, either. Part of this came from pitching to contact, part of this came from the fact that he is now using three different wind-ups: a drawn-out wind-up, a normal wind-up, and a quick pitch. As the velocity on his fastball continues to drop, Felix will have to continue straying from the heater (which he threw only 13 times on Opening Night) and rely on deception techniques to effectively pitch to contact. Johnny Cueto – who bested Felix on Wednesday – has been doing this for a number of seasons, and it's worked...so hopefully The King will be able to move past the horrors of San Francisco and continue to develop this new style.

James Paxton: B-

James Paxton looked decent in yesterday's start against Minnesota, giving us flashes of his 2017 self with a 97 mph heater and great movement on his off-speed stuff. However, James Paxton's issue is that he's pitching as if he *is* his 2017 self. What I mean by this is that he is approaching hitters as if they do not quite take him seriously yet – as if they don't recognize that The Big Maple has emerged as one of the top starters in the AL. This means that hitters are now targeting early fastballs, waiting to jump on a mistake instead of trying to work the count and raise his pitch totals. It took the Twins a few innings to do this – and even then, I'll say that Pax really only made one mistake in the game – but the Indians were all over him from the get go. Paxton needs to be cerebral with his upcoming starts and not be afraid to go to off-speed pitches early to keep hitters off-balance and guessing...because the league appears to now know that James' fastball is the real deal.



Mike Leake: A

Leake appears to have picked up right where he left off last season: giving up runs early, and then settling down nicely. Dave Sims had him quoted as a guy who "wants to go as far as he can" in each game – and seeing as he's the most stretched out of all of our starters right now, the fact that he went 7 innings against one of the best lineups in the AL is a great sign (let alone the fact that he only gave up 2 runs and won the game). Leake has shown that he's a horse –

and perhaps even more interesting, he is yet to have a so-called *bad* start on the Ners (the most runs he's given up is 3). Very excited for his outing tomorrow in frigid Minnesota.

Marco Gonzales: A-

The Muse has now made an offer to the Seattle Mariners to purchase sole possession of the Marco Gonzales' changeup. More people need to take notice of this thing. Marco will not blow people away like other change-throwing lefties such as Johan Santana – nor will he pinpoint slow pitches à la Jamie Moyer or Greg Maddux. Instead, he relies on his change to *move*, dipping away from lefties and cut into righties...and in his first start of the season, that thing was working. Gonzales did give up the three run dinger in the 7th inning – but up until then, he was mowing down a good Giants lineup in a way that we would be extremely lucky to have from our 4 starter for the rest of the season. Meanwhlie, Marco (like Leake) worked into the 7th inning. How nice would it be if the bottom of the rotation continued to go deep in games...especially if the top continues to not be able to escape the 5th?

