

The Mariner Muse

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

Which position is more depressing: LF or Catcher?

Patrick Leary

Part I: The Left Field argument

M The history of the Seattle Mariners is a depressing, rather pathetic tale. However, in most aspects, you can find some sort of silver lining.

Case in point: the team has made the playoffs just four times in 40 years, and all four of those years are within a seven-year span. That said, two of those years, the magical 1995 season and 116-win 2001 season are some of the most magnificent years imaginable without a World Series title at the end of them.

Positionally, you can argue that the Ners have always struggled to find a good centerfielder, but for the entire 90s they had one of the two or three best of all time in Ken Griffey Jr. He has 83 career WAR by the way. That's just fucking *unfathomably* good. First base has been in and out of quality...Olerud and Tino were always decent...but Richie Sexson was whatever.

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Simsisms Are Back!

Check out page 2 for the top 5 obscure quotes from the Ners' broadcaster during May.

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.

But when off-days roll around, everything goes out of whack. You've lost your regular 3-hour dose of baseball, and quite often you don't know how to cope.

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Yet there are probably two positions in franchise history where you can't find any bright spots: Left Field and Catcher. But let us ask: which is a more desolate wasteland?

Note: This is probably the point of the story when you, the beautiful (and nostalgic) reader, gasp and scream: "BUT DAAAN WILSON!" Just wait. We'll get to that in Part II. Just know, we haven't forgotten about him.

Part I: Left Field

In my younger days (I'm only 23, but bear with me) I wanted to start a Mariners blog on my



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Top 5 Simsisms of May

We at MM absolutely love Ners broadcaster Dave Sims. He has one of the best spirits in the game, has an extensive knowledge of baseball history, and is a pretty good broadcaster to boot. But there's one thing in particular we love about Dave...he has a – well, let's just call it a “tendency for the obscure.” At least a few times a game, you're gonna hear something weird come out of Dave's mouth. We call them “Simsisms,” a tongue-twister of a word to label the brain-twister phrases he lets loose here and there. Every month, MM will break down the best Simsisms that we heard. We can't catch them all (if you hear one, please let us know!) but the ones we do catch are normally pretty darn good. The top 5 Simsisms from May are:



“The Mariners’ disabled list looks like the Manhattan phonebook.” (5.17)

Classic Dave. He clearly wanted to find another way to reference something being packed, and landed on the Manhattan phonebook. Which left us thinking: does the Mariners’ broadcaster still use phonebooks?



“Storage almost full! Storage almost full!” (5.2)

If I told you that Mike Trout's trophy case could be compared to an iPhone nearing its storage capacity because it's so full, would you believe me? Dave Sims would.



“Hopefully it's one that he can just rub out later tonight.” (5.30)

Two things about this one worry the hell out of us. First, if Dave doesn't know what “rub one out” can also mean, that's alarming. Second, if he *does* know – and still chose to use it as a reference to Ben Gamel finding a way to heal a small injury – that's *really* alarming.



“Dan! Ya need oxygen, pal? How heavy was that piano?!” (5.3)

As an “On this date in history” highlight showed the ever-famous image of Dan Wilson rounding the bases for his inside-the-park-grand-slam, Dave decided not to comment on the awesomeness of the situation or the obscurity of the feat...but instead on Wilson's apparent fatigue. And how does one normally do that? Bang – you got it: carrying a piano.



“One of the many streetcars here in Toronto...and as far as I know, none of them are named *Desire*.” (5.11)

This one brought us to our knees. Absolutely nothing extra was required in this broadcasting bit – a simple set-up shot before an inning, in which advertisements flashed over b-roll of the Toronto light-rail system. Yet at times these can bring the best out of Dave, for there always comes that awkward ten or so seconds after the sponsors disappear, and just the b-roll remains. Dave always feels like it's necessary to fill this time with some sort of joke, or clever comment. In this case, streetcars cued up a Tennessee Williams play. Stellaaaaa!!!

Current Happiness Meter...According to Your Editors

Title	Anthony	Charlie	Patrick	Travis	AVG
Offense (0-40)	33	33	35	35	34
Defense (0-10)	8	8	8	9	8.25
S. Pitching (0-20)	14	14	10	15	13.25
R. Pitching (0-20)	15	10	14	15	13.5
Management (0-10)	7	7	8	9	7.75

Notes:

Offense: *Is Mike Zunino...good? Is Danny Valencia...good? ~Anthony*

Defense: *Powell's catch yesterday sealed off another good stint for our pretty darn good defense. ~Travis*

Starting Pitching: *Better ERA than the Chicago Cubs...and then you've got Bergman, Gaviglio, and the ever-amazing Miranda. ~Charlie*

Relievers: *Strong contributions from guys like Lawrence. Diaz has settled back in. ~Patrick*

Management: *Gotta give the guys credit for finding a steady-ish rotation in this mess. ~Patrick*

TOTAL HAPPINESS: 76.75/100 (Grade: C)

Last MM:
54.5 (+22.25)

own, but wasn't very creative or clever with coming up with names. I for one think "Mariner Muse" is a significantly better name for a Mariners blog than "Way out in Left Field," but for purposes of this piece, I'm going to dig up the name of my old blog – which, if you'd like to read (it also features MM writers Charlie and Anthony), give it a Google. I bet I wrote some stupid stuff about liking Casper Wells.

Anyhow, the reason I named it that is because the Mariners' historical situation in left field is just that: way out in left field, or (for the metaphorically uninitiated): "American slang meaning unexpectedly odd or strange." You would expect the Mariners to have had one star left fielder, or multiple consistent ones in 40 years – but oddly and strangely, they have not.

A quick way to illustrate this is to look at games played in an individual season. Only three times in the 40-year history of the franchise has a single player played more than 150 games in left field for the Mariners in an individual season. Those three feats were accomplished by two different players, Phil Bradley in 1987 and Raul Ibanez in 2006 and 2008.

Bradley had a fairly unremarkable eight-year, 18.5 WAR career in the 80s. He spent the first

five of those with the Ners and actually had a really stellar 1985, where he was worth 4.8 WAR, was an all-star, and finished 16th in MVP voting. He followed that up with a pair of seasons with WARs in the low threes and throughout his Ners career he consistently hovered around .300.

Statistically, what jumps out to me the most about Bradley is how awful his defensive WAR in left field was. In his four full seasons with the Mariners, he sacrificed between 0.6 and 1.6 WAR defensively each year, which paints an awfully ugly picture about the man's defense.

Bradley's offensive consistency and one year of elite play wasn't enough to make the M's any good in any of his full seasons, as 78 was the most wins the Ners accumulated in one season during those years. Obviously, they never made the playoffs – that's not something they're allowed to do outside of 1995 through 2001.

Ibanez had three separate stints with the Mariners, but his most relevant and significant one is the five-year stretch from 2004 to 2008 where he was worth just a shade under 15 WAR. Ibanez was great in that stretch, hitting between .280 and .304 in each season and topping 100 RBI three times.

His best season with the team is probably that 2006 season, where he hit 33 homers, drove in 123 and hit .289 on his way to finishing 21st in the MVP voting (I didn't know it goes that high).

Ibanez is probably the best left fielder the team has ever had, but where that designation becomes problematic is when you actually look at the kind of "left fielder" he was. Because if there's one thing Raul Ibanez did not do well, it was play defense.

Ibanez, like Bradley, almost always sacrificed significant WAR value defensively. Strangely, the only time in his career he didn't do this was in 2006, when he was worth 0.3 WAR defensively. More common for his career was his 2007 season, which was still a good offensive season for him but only amounted to 1.7 WAR because he sacrificed a whopping 2.3 WAR with poor defense.

That's not even his worst defensive season by WAR with the Mariners or for his career. In 2011, two years removed from his only career all-star appearance with the Phillies, he was a defensive liability to the tune of -3.1 WAR and actually was worth -2.0 overall (yuck). When he returned to the Mariners in 2013 and had that amazing age 41 season, he was worth -2.6 WAR even though he only played 100 games in the outfield (yuck).

As Lookout Landing put it in a 2011 post about the team's history in left field, Ibanez "spent four of five seasons in left field, but he didn't exactly play left field. He was more stationed in left field. The way troops are stationed along the demilitarized zone but don't actually do anything. They're just there to make faces at the other side and raise alarm should an attack come across."

I don't think I could sum up just how terrible Ibanez was defensively any better than that, so I won't choose to.

Outside of Ibanez and Bradley, the team's history in left is a bleak, checkered one. Even the best seasons in Mariner lore featured bizarre combinations in that one particular outfield spot.

Example: 1995, the season that saved baseball in Seattle, featured Griffey in center, everyone's drunk uncle (Jay Buhner) in right, and 11 different left fielders. Eleven! I'm not making that number up. The team only started 12 different pitchers that year. Of that group, Darren Bragg played the most and Vince Coleman made the most starts. Coleman didn't even join the team until August 15.

In 2001, the Mariners boasted the best top to bottom lineup in franchise history, but its one notable hole was – naturally – left field. Ichiro was the AL Rookie of the Year and MVP in right, Mike Cameron was an all-star in center, and Al freaking Martin was the team's primary left fielder. Martin made by far the most starts, but Stan Javier played a fair amount of left field as well, while Mark McLemore parlayed his super utility role into roughly two dozen starts. Still, absolutely no consistency.

More recent Mariners teams have been an even darker black hole in left field. In 2011, for example, Ichiro and Franklin Gutierrez fairly regularly manned two of the three outfield spots. But in left field, 11 men got starts, with at least 15 each going to Carlos Peguero, Milton Bradley, Mike Carp, Trayvon Robinson, Greg Halman (RIP) and Casper Wells.

I can go on, and I will. The next year, eight players made a start in left field, with five of them starting more than 20 games. Those five men were Carp, Robinson, Wells, Michael Saunders, and the most hated Mariner of all time, Chone Figgins.

The Mariners had two near playoff misses in the 2010s in 2014 and 2016. Both times, the team was eliminated in the season's final series. In 2014, the team decided Dustin Ackley was worth 127 starts in left field, even though he sported a .293 on base percentage and he was backed up primarily by Cole Gillespie, who for the life of me I cannot remember a single thing about.



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Where Are They Ner?

Kazuhiro Sasaki | Closer

Ner from: 2000-2003

Best Ner Moment: Kazuhiro was the closer for the 2001 squad that dominated the league and our hearts. His split-finger fastball was appropriately nicknamed “The Fang,” and was absolutely nasty. He posted 45 saves that year, made the All-Star game and finished 19th in MVP voting. But the best moment has to be when he closed out win 116 by [striking out Alex Rodriguez](#) with a split in the dirt that Dan Wilson somehow caught. Suck it A-Rod. Go Kaz.



Where MM Guessed He Is Ner: When I think of Kazuhiro Sasaki I can only think of the contrast between him and Ichiro. Sasaki was much louder and outgoing than the reserved outfielder, but I imagine once the competitive juices began to ebb, Sasaki got back to his roots and became a simple farmer. Instead of the bright lights of Safeco and the pumping bass of “Zombie Nation” blasting through the PA system, he now enjoys a nice summer breeze over his fields and tending to his chickens, all of which are named after MLB batters he once struck out.

Where He Actually is Ner: I wish I was creative enough to come up with any of this, and it is way better than being a farmer. But since leaving the Ners in 2003, Kazuhiro has had an extramarital affair with Japanese model/actress Kanako Enomoto, who is 13 years younger than him (and a total bombshell), became a partial owner of a Japanese auto racing team, and produced a techno music album called “Break New Ground,” for which he sang lead vocals. (I swear I am not making this up). Also, the techno album isn’t trash (I might have made that up).

In 2016, the Ners turned the keys over to Nori Aoki, who heated up late in the season but was demoted to Tacoma in both June and August. When Aoki wasn’t around, the team played Seth Smith in the wrong corner or mashed together a bizarre platoon of Guillermo Heredia (before he was the dopeness), Shawn O’Malley (before his appendectomy) and the injured-ass version of Gutierrez.

These days, Heredia plays left pretty much full-time – but Jarrod Dyson was *supposed* to, before Leonys Martin’s swing broke completely. While GMo is objectively (and subjectively) awesome and producing a pretty

solid WAR (1.8), he brings limited pop to a traditional power hitting position, and a lion share of his value is tied to defense and speed. It’s not clear whether he or Ben Gamel or Mitch Haniger or *any* of the Mariners’ outfield prospects are long-term answers in left.

So while most of the Mariners history is devoid of fun, value and success, I would argue that left field is the deepest, darkest black hole of them all. Yet is it actually? In part II of this segment, we will take a look at the *other* dark, depressing, position in Ner Lore: Catcher. Tune in next MM for Part II – and we will let *you* decide which position has been worse.

Fin.

Trade Tree: Carlos Silva

Travis Smith

FOREWORD: This is a short Trade Tree – because there’s simply nothing good to say about it.

On December 18, 2009, it was announced that the Chicago Cubs and Seattle Mariners had agreed on a trade that would send Outfielder Milton Bradley to Seattle in return for Starting Pitcher Carlos Silva and \$9 million. It was a comical deal, because both teams knew they were getting rid of garbage – and receiving garbage in return.

The Mariners had seen enough of Silva, the larger-than-normal-if-not-downright-chubby Venezuelan right-hander (pictured on the right). He stunk in Seattle, going 5-18 and amassing a WAR of -2.8 over 2 years. The Cubs had seen enough of Bradley (pictured below), because he was a terrible person on and off the field.

A [Bleacher Report article](#) put it this way: by acquiring Silva, the Cubs “Finally get rid of Milton Bradley.” By acquiring Bradley, the Mariners have “No more Carlos Silva.” So – how did the trade end up for the Ners? Just so bad.



Somehow, Silva went 10-6 for Chicago with a 2.1 WAR...a classic “response” to a person being traded away from Seattle. Meanwhile, Bradley hit .209 in his 2 years with the M’s, posting a -0.1 WAR. He also was just a terrible, terrible human being, having now been cited for 5 (more) accounts of domestic abuse, 9 accounts of physically beating his wife, 4 counts of spousal battery, 2 counts of criminal threats, and 1 count of assault with a deadly weapon.

Silva signed here and there, but never played in the bigs again season with the Cubs. He weirdly ended his mediocre career on a high note.

Bradley, meanwhile, is currently serving a 32-month sentence for all of his recent convictions. Woof.

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