

Sexson & Beltr  won't propel Seattle to top spot unless the starting staff proves to be better than advertised



2. Seattle Mariners: For a couple years there the Mariners seemed to do fine under Manager Lou Piniella and without blue-chips stars Randy Johnson, Ken Griffey Jr. and Alex Rodriguez. That was until 2004, where the Mariners won just 63 games compared to 99 losses in a division that had three teams win 89+ games.

Name to Remember: Felix Hernandez - The 18-year-old right handed pitcher has enormous qualifications for a starting job right now. He does not get rattled easily, is smooth on the mound, kind of cunning, too. Could be the man the Mariners have been looking for to anchor this staff... come 2006-07.

One position the Mariners are clearly weaker at is DH. That's because longtime designated hitter Edgar Martinez chose to retire following the conclusion of last season. Martinez, a fringe Hall-of-Famer, hit 309 home runs and drove in 1283 runs during his Major League career. Replacing him there will be Scott Spiezio, formerly of the Angels. One interesting note about Spiezio is that he plays in a metal band called Sandfrog. He'll be getting a look at DH along with Raul Iba ez, who could go from outfielder to DH if Jeremy Reed is able to progress right into the starting lineup, and Bucky Jacobsen. Versatile infielder Willie Bloomquist (.245AVG 10 doubles 13SB), considered a valuable utility player, will take Pokey Reese's place in the lineup until the veteran returns off the 15-day DL. Dominican Republic rookie Wilson Valdez may also get some time at shortstop or pinch hitting early in the season. Barrington, Illinois' own Dan Wilson is in a Mariners uniform once again this season, his 13th, to back up Miguel Olivo and provide good defense behind the plate in crucial parts of games.



Seattle added infielders Richie Sexson and Adrian Beltr  during the off-season, both of whom can pound at home runs at will.

When you talk about the Mariners the one guy you absolutely must talk about is Ichiro Suzuki. My question why haven't we heard this guy's name for AL MVP? All you hear about is the power hitting outfielders like Manny Ramirez, Vlad Guerrero, etc.

Heck, he's been overshadowed on his own team this off-season by Beltr  and Sexson. **I mean all the guy did last season was connect for 262 hits, that's all.** I mean all the guy did was break a record many thought was unattainable, now is he up for the task of .400? It's an interesting proposition, though I'd venture to say he will hit around .385 instead. Nobody has a cannon of an arm like he does. His throws to the plate are superbly accurate, his hitting technique is extraordinary, and very few people realize how powerful he really is. If he wanted he could hit upwards of 20 homers in addition to stealing 35+ bags. Provided Randy Winn plays in 150 games and has another season with 600+ at-bats, he can drive in about 90 runs in the #2 hole. Not many players can say that, but with Ichiro, Mr. Winn can while attempting to punch his ticket to the mid-summer classic.

One guy whose production is beginning to dip [and was also mentioned in Jose Canseco's book] is Bret Boone, Seattle's prized second baseman. On April 6th he turns 36 and he's coming off an average season as far as batting average goes (just .251). All that matters to Manager Mike Hargrove and company is that he does not lose a step defensively and can continue to pound out 20-30 home runs. Olivo did a lot better with the White Sox than the Mariners. Many wonder whether he will be able to re-discover any type of stroke he had at one point in Chicago. These two want to be above .250, or they and the pitching might keep them back.

Doubt Seattle's rotation has even one all-star player. However, they will benefit more this season thanks to better run support. Jamie Moyer is coming off a 7-13 season with an ERA well over 5.00. Moyer can throw some slow junk that confuses even the best of hitters. Question is will Joel Pineiro, Aaron Sele and Gil Meche throw heat, and are Ryan Franklin (4-16) and Bobby Mandritsch going to be better than a combined 10-19? Maybe, and probably are my answers --- also look for Eddie Guardado and Shigetoshi Hasegawa to return to top-notch for in '05.

Bottom Line: Seattle surprisingly has more depth this year than they did a season ago. I think because of that, if Sexson is to suffer an injury or Beltr  struggles at times, they will be able to make do. It all comes down to whether or not the starting pitching can give them sufficient innings to keep them above Texas Oakland, and possibly earn them a spot in the playoffs as a WC or division winner.

**Projected Order: RF Ichiro Suzuki
LF Randy Winn
3B Adrian Beltr 
1B Richie Sexson
2B Bret Boone
DH Raul Iba ez/Scott Spiezio
CF Jeremy Reed
C Miguel Olivo
SS Pokey Reese**

**Projected Staff: L Jamie Moyer
R Joel Pineiro
R Gil Meche
R Ryan Franklin
L Bobby Madritsch**

Pick: 2nd in the AL West; win about 85 games and tie with Texas for second.