

**Seattle would be ecstatic if addition of Japanese catcher Johjima is half as good as the one Ichiro from back in 2001**



**3. Seattle Mariners (69-93):** Lets briefly re-visit last year's preview, shall we? Our 'Name to Remember' was then 18-year-old Mariners right-hander Felix Hernandez. In addition to having "enormous qualifications for a starting job right now," the following was said.

"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." How prophetic did all turn it out to be? Well, besides the already established Ichiro (franchise record 12 triples) doing his thing, Hernandez was one of the few bright spots in a season filled with tough losses that resulted in another last place division finish.

Drawing comparisons to Doc Gooden, Hernandez (1.00WHIP, opponents .203BA and 77K) averaged seven innings per start in 12 appearances. His ability to stretch a game out, even with low run support or a high pitch count, should enable the bullpen to rest more. The rest of Seattle's staff comprises of aging, throw-slowng yet hard to hit lefty Jamie Moyer, Gil Meche, Joel Pineiro and the newly acquired Jarrod Washburn. Moyer, 43, would be a great add to an NL team if Seattle isn't competing because he throws slow junk that, believe it or not, bothers most impatient batters. Having a couple prospects like Jesse Foppert allows them to make one of their starters expendable if the team is out of the race around late July. Over in the bullpen, J.J. Putz and Rafael Soriano each have an effective fastball pitch. They will compete to set up closer Eddie Guardado (36 saves), still one of the game's steadiest when at full strength. In short, the bullpen wasn't the problem last year and shouldn't be in '06.



**One of the most complete players in the game, Ichiro smacks more than 200 hits annually and has shown a cannon for an arm out in right field.** (Photo Courtesy: AP)

What was a problem in '05? An under performing offense, injuries and a low K total by the starting pitchers. With the acquisition of Washburn and a full year from Felix

the cat – they hope to solve that problem. Injuries are close to impossible to predict. And on offense, it's a wait and see deal. Manager Mike Hargrove knows this club must take better advantage of multi-run homer opportunities when they present themselves. Last season, Seattle was 14<sup>th</sup> in AL batting average and on-base percentage, and 13<sup>th</sup> in run scored and dingers. Third baseman Adrian Beltre and first baseman Richie Sexson together came over from the National League before last year, showing on other teams that they can pound home runs at will. Question is will they, though? I firmly believe Beltre's production may make or break the M's offense. Unlike his MVP-type '04 campaign, Beltre failed to drive pitches tight and inside on his hands in the opposite direction. That had to have been something he tried to address during the winter. Adding Carl Everett and Matt Lawton seems like decent moves on paper given their track record. However, Everett has been known to blow up at times and Lawton was caught using steroids in '05. The one off-season addition Seattle is really banking on to help them is catcher Kenji Johjiima. Communication is the key word for him. His bat was said to be exceptional outside the states; speaking the language now becomes his top task. Handling pitchers won't be easy for him. The middle of the infield is suspect to a certain degree, while Raul Ibanez, center fielder Jeremy Reed and utility player Willie Bloomquist are going to be valuable to the team morale no matter what happens. Some teams have problem handling adversity and I'm interested to see what they do when a winning streak is put together. Their longest one in '05 was just four games – they'll need the streaks to come more often and sustain for a longer period of time.

**Bottom Line: With three All-Star players in its lineup and three or four pitchers capable of winning double-figure games, the M's have no business settling for 69 wins. Seattle has seen attendance drop three consecutive years and a third straight 90-loss campaign would be devastating for the franchise. It would probably even make some of the premier players – like an Ichiro – disgruntled. Another season like the last one and Hargrove could be in jeopardy of losing his job.**

**Projected Order: RF Ichiro Suzuki  
SS Yuniesky Betancourt  
LF Raul Ibanez  
1B Richie Sexson  
3B Adrian Beltre  
DH Carl Everett  
C Kenjii Johjima  
2B Jose Lopez  
CF Joe Borchard**

**Projected Staff: L Jamie Moyer  
R Joel Pineiro  
L Jarrod Washburn  
R Gil Meche  
R Felix Hernandez**

*Pick: 3<sup>rd</sup> in the AL West; finish on the outside of the playoff picture.*