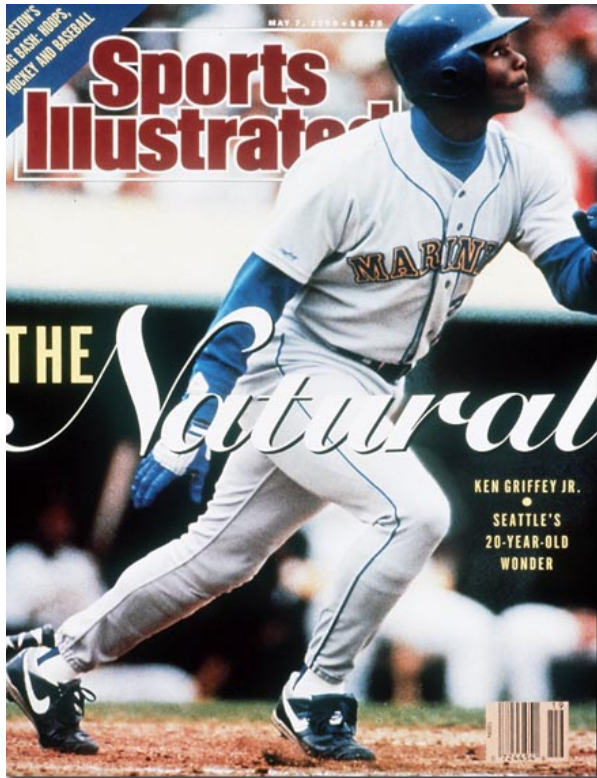


The Mariners went from being everyone's potential dark horse playoff team to a team that just saw a lot of dark days in '08. The M's 61-101 record got both the manager and general manager fired and left Seattle fans wondering what the hell happened. The team traded top prospect Adam Jones for Erik Bedard and spent over \$40 million on Carlos Silva, and the two combined for 10 wins and 19 losses. Nice. The '09 Mariners welcomed back Ken Griffey Jr., but do they have a chance of competing in the AL West? David Buona gives us his thoughts.



### 2008 Recap:

The Mariners went from being everyone's potential dark horse playoff team to a team that just saw a lot of dark days in '08. The M's 61-101 record got both the manager and general manager fired and left Seattle fans wondering what the hell happened. The team traded top prospect Adam Jones for Erik Bedard and spent over \$40 million on Carlos Silva, and the two combined for 10 wins and 19 losses. Nice.

### 2009 Outlook:

New manager Don Wakamatsu comes from the A's after serving as their hitting

coach, and I've already mentioned their lack of power in a previous column, so don't be surprised if Seattleites make their Starbucks a little Irish by the end of season. The good news is that feelings of nostalgia will be all around as Ken Griffey, Jr. makes perhaps his final career stop in the city where it all began twenty years ago in 1989.

**Hello:** RHP David Aardsma, 1B/3B Russell Branyan, INF Chris Burke, INF Ronny Cedeno, OF Ken Griffey, OF Franklin Gutierrez, DH Mike Sweeney

**Goodbye:** UTIL Willie Bloomquist, OF Raul Ibanez, RHP J.J. Putz

**If the Seattle Mariners Were an 80's Movie They'd Be:**

*The Money Pit.* Starring Erik Bedard as the hole in the floor with the rug trapping Tom Hanks inside it, Carlos Silva as the disappearing staircase, Kenji Johjima as the extremely flammable electrical system, Adrian Beltre as the collapsing chimney, and Jarrod Washburn as the floor through floor falling bath tub. Seriously, this team is a poster child of our modern day economic problems. Surely Obama has a financial bailout plan for them. Then again, probably not, but maybe if they were the Cubs or White Sox.

**The 2009 Projected Lineup:**

RF Ichiro Suzuki  
2B Jose Lopez  
LF Ken Griffey, Jr.  
3B Adrian Beltre  
1B Russell Branyan  
C Kenji Johjima  
DH Mike Sweeney  
CF Franklin Gutierrez / Endy Chavez

## SS Yuniesky Betancourt / Ronny Cedeno

The Mariners went out and added a little bit of speed and a little bit of power to their club, which was necessary with the loses of Raul Ibanez and the ineffectiveness of Jose Vidro and Richie Sexson, who were both released last year and are currently part of America's 10% unemployment rate.

The power will be supplied by Ken Griffey, Jr., Russell Branyan, and Mike Sweeney. Branyan will probably play first base and mash out 30 dingers, but he has Rob Deer Disease, and will probably also strike out close to 175 times if given 500 at bats. Griffey is 39 and his power and batting average have dipped precipitously over the last couple seasons, but maybe a homecoming can add a little spark in a bat that .249 with 18 homers last year. Sweeney hasn't played in over a hundred games since 2005, and hasn't played in 150 since 2000, but he's a career .299 hitter and since the Mariners batted .265 as a team last year, he should help improve that number.

The speed will come from new outfielders and infielder Franklin Gutierrez and Endy Chavez, and second baseman/ shortstop Ronny Cedeno. Gutierrez was acquired for Luis Valbuena from the Indians, and while he's a great center fielder with adequate speed (9 steals), a .248 average just isn't going to cut it in the majors. Chavez stole 34 bases four years ago for Montreal, but he's become a bit of a journeyman, with the Mariners becoming his fifth team in five years. Cedeno seems to play well when given the opportunity, but in Chicago over the last few years there hasn't been much of one. He'll be stuck behind Jose Lopez and Yuneisky Betancourt in Seattle, but while Lopez will be hard to overcome (.297, 17 HR, 89 RBI), Betancourt has never run away with the shortstop job, hitting .279 but only walking 17 times in 576 plate appearances.

Ichiro Suzuki batted .310 with 43 steals and 103 runs, but he's starting the year on the DL with an ulcer. After a 101 losses last year, who can blame him. Third baseman Adrian Beltre certainly isn't worth his \$13 million a year salary, but he's a decent third baseman, batting .266 with 25 homers and 8 steals in '08. Fellow

underachiever Kenji Johjima held off highly touted AAA player Matt Clement for the catching job, but if he hits like he did in '08 (.227), he shouldn't get too comfortable.

### **The 2009 Projected Rotation and Closer:**

RHP Felix Hernandez

RHP Erik Bedard

RHP Carlos Silva

RHP Jarrod Washburn

RHP Ryan Rowland-Smith

RHP Brandon Morrow

Ace Felix Hernandez has never truly lived up to the "next big thing" billing bestowed upon him when he premiered in '05 at the age of 19. Nevertheless, a 3.45 ERA and 175 strikeouts in 200 innings is still pretty good, but not Cy Young material just yet. Then again, he doesn't even turn 23 until Wednesday, so I guess he's not doing too bad for himself.

The rest of the staff is made up of three overpriced veterans and one standard fifth starter, Ryan Rowland-Smith. Last year Rowland-Smith pitched 118 innings and had a 3.42 ERA, but most of those were thrown out of the bullpen, so you expect an appropriate upward fluctuation. The overpriced veterans are Bedard (\$7 million), Silva (\$8 million), and Washburn (\$10 million). That's a total of \$25 million bucks for a 15 wins and 33 losses. Not exactly money well spent. Silva and Washburn can be counted on for more of the same in '09, but lefty Bedard could be and has been special, but only if his back, hip, shoulder, and elbow can keep him off the DL for any prolonged period of time. He only made 15 starts last year and has been plagued all spring training with injuries.

The new full time Mariners closer will be Brandon Morrow, who was supposed to be the number two or three man in the rotation before he and the club realized that his arm just can't go more than a few innings at a time without wanting to fall off. He's flamethrower and should do well as long as the appendage can stay attached. Last year he struck out 75 in 64 innings, which is roughly how many innings he'll probably through if he can stay off the D.L.

**So Magic Eight Ball, will the Mariners remain at the bottom of the A.L. West and continue to cast a fog over the already overcast city of Seattle?  
&quot;Signs point to yes.&quot;**