

An Exceptional Talent We Should Appreciate While We Can

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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We are currently blessed to be able to watch one of the greatest baseball players in history, on the backside of the prime of his career, and no one really talks about it.

It is almost beyond description how good Ichiro Suzuki is at the game of baseball. He is among the greatest hitters of all time, possesses one of the greatest throwing arms in history and is probably one of the top 10 fastest players to ever play in the Major Leagues.

His name belongs in the conversation when people talk about the best to ever play the game. He's that good.

Ichiro was one of the first high-profile Japanese players to sign Major League Baseball contracts when he signed a free agent deal with the Seattle Mariners prior to the 2001 season. When he took the field on April 2, 2001 he became the first-ever Japanese position player to play in the Majors.

All he did in his rookie season was set the league on fire. He was voted the American League Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player by the Baseball Writers Association of America...becoming just the second player in history to win both awards in the same season (Fred Lynn, 2005).

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As a rookie Ichiro led the Majors in batting average (.350), hits (242) and stolen bases (56) and was just the second player in history to lead the Majors in average and stolen bases (Jackie Robinson, 1949). His 242 hits were most in the Majors since 1930 and he also tied the mark for most games hit in safely with 135. His 200th hit came in his 132nd game played, fastest to 200 in the American League since Al Simmons in 1925 (125 games).

Ichiro has not slowed down since.

Some of his accomplishments are mind-boggling. In 2004 he established a new Major League record for hits in a season with 262, breaking the mark of 257 set by George Sisler in 1920. He had 46 more hits than the AL runner-up, Michael Young, who had 216. This broke the record for the biggest gap between first and second in hits previously held by Stan Musial, who had 44 more hits than runner-up Dixie Walker in 1946. In August of '04 he collected 56 hits, the most hits in one month by a player since Jeff Heath had 58 in August of 1938.

Ichiro has set all kinds of records and replaced quite a few legends in the record books. 2010 was his 10th consecutive season with 200 or more hits, the most in MLB history. Wee Willie Keeler is second on this list with eight seasons, from 1894 to 1901. He also won his 10th consecutive Gold Glove, tying the record for a position player held by Ken Griffey Jr. and Al Kaline.

He also led the Majors in hits for the fifth straight season, his seventh season overall. He is the only one to ever lead five seasons in a row and has tied Ty Cobb and Pete Rose with seven seasons leading the Majors in hits in a career.

His 10 career seasons with 200 hits or more also tied Pete Rose for the career record, and broke Ty Cobb's American League record of nine.

Last season, his 10th consecutive All-Star season, he led the American League in hits (214), multi-hit games (69), games played (162), infield hits (59), singles (175) and at-bats (680).

Prior to joining the Mariners for the '01 season Ichiro played nine seasons with the Orix Blue

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Waves in the Japanese League. If you combine his seasons with Orix and Seattle he has 3,572 career hits. This would place him behind only Pete Rose (4,256), Ty Cobb (4,191), Hank Aaron (3,771) and Stan Musial (3,630) on the all-time hit list.

There are plenty more accomplishments, too many to list. Looking at his career numbers just in the Major Leagues puts him in the Hall of Fame conversation. Career .331 average, 1,068 runs scored, 2,294 hits, 265 dooubles, 71 triples, 90 home runs, 572 RBI, 470 walks, 692 strikeouts (in 6,944 at-bats, just once per every 10 at-bats), 394 stolen bases and a career .376 on-base percentage.

This season, at 37 years old, he is tied for third in hits with 50 (four behind league leader Michael Young), is tied for second in stolen bases with 11 and is tied for the league lead in multi-hit games with 18.

Ichiro is well on his way to another 200+ hit season, and could probably maintain this production for another few years. He will most likely end his MLB career with more than 3,000 hits...certain to land him in the Hall of Fame.

Not a lot of people appreciate how good Ichiro is. The guy is exciting to watch and he does things on the baseball diamond not a lot of players in history have been able to do. We have four or five seasons left to watch him play the game, so I hope everyone takes advantage and tries to see him play before it's too late.