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Mariners Look Unlikely To Make Playoffs With Management Turnover and Weak Batting

Daniel Truog, Sports & Opinion Editor

The leaves are changing and the QFC on Broadway has put their Halloween candy out head-scratchingly early, which to Seattle baseball fans means one thing; the Major League Baseball postseason is soon to begin.

Bizarre harbingers of seasonal change aside, the Seattle Mariners are closing out a season with a strong start that took a turn for the worse after June. After losing a ten-game divisional lead, the team is currently hanging by a thread in the fight for the final spot in the AL Wild Card.

This is a far cry from where the Mariners stood back in June. The team had a ten-win lead over their division back on June 18 but slowly squandered their regional dominance over the rest of the summer.

The Mariners' pitching staff has been their strongest point throughout the year. Luis Castillo, George Kirby, Logan Gilbert and Bryce Miller represent one of the strongest pitching rotations in the MLB with an ERA of 3.39.

Logan Gilbert has been a standout, pitching a complete game July 4 and an eight-inning game Sept. 7. After pitching those eight innings, he let in just two runs after hitting a Cardinals player and giving another a perfect home run. A total lack of any runs scored by the Mariners' offense during those eight innings turned a fantastic display of pitching prowess into a loss.

"Right now, it feels terrible," Gilbert said after the defeat. "I mean, tomorrow, I'm probably going to see more of the big picture. But we lost the game, obviously on that pitch. So that's something I really feel like it's on me."

Furthermore, Luis Castillo's left hamstring strain during the Mariners' Sept. 8 game against the St. Louis Cardinals represents another potentially damaging blow to the team's playoff hopes. Castillo has been a key starting pitcher for the Mariners, starting 30 games prior to his injury. As of Sept. 25, it is not known if he will return before the end of the season. Castillo left after throwing his 59th pitch.

"That last pitch is when it felt worst, so that's when I decided to just stop so it wouldn't get any worse," Castillo said.



Zam Ortega

The Mariners have been unreliable at the plate at best. Julio Rodríguez has the highest batting average on the team with .262, but the pitching staff has had very little offensive backup. Rodríguez, who debuted on the Mariners in 2022, has had a slower than usual season despite being one of the team's bigger stars.

Rodríguez also had a critical baserunning error against the New York Yankees Sept. 18. Rodríguez was in scoring position in the 10th inning with the Yankees ahead by only one run. A flying bat thrown by Randy Arozarena displaced Rodríguez, who was easily thrown out since he thought the ball was out of play. This may have cost the Mariners a crucial game in their playoff run.

Management turnover has been another source of inconsistency behind the scenes. Team President Jerry Dipoto announced that the team would be firing its manager, Scott Servais, Aug. 22. Dipoto's decision was motivated by the team's decline after the lead early in the season.

"This has not been a terrific run for us over the last two months and it was a very difficult decision to make, but I thought one that our team was in need of. We need a different voice and a different direction," Dipoto said.

Dan Wilson, who played for the Mariners for 12 seasons as a catcher, was named as the team's new manager. Wilson told reporters after the announcement that he appreciated Servais' work but was ready to get to work righting the ship.

"I want to do the best job possible to help these guys get all of us back to the playoffs and in the quickest route possible," Wilson said.

Seattle sports fans have been clinging to tenuous playoff hopes for years. Many of the same issues that brought the team down this season plagued them in their 2023 playoff miss. That season, they ranked second in the Major Leagues for strikeouts, while only ranking 12th for runs scored.

Back in 2022, the Mariners made it into the playoffs for the first time in 21 years. A brief wave of baseball enthusiasm swept the city but quickly crashed against the rocks of the Houston Astros. The Mariners' final loss that season came in game three of a five-game series against the Astros. The crushing 1-0 loss came after 18 innings, emblematic of the team's pitching strength with no batting momentum to match.

The true challenge may fall to Mariners fans, rather than their players. Year after year, Seattle sports fans muster hope for a team whose bats fail to connect regardless of how many strikeouts they are capable of. Here's to persistence in the face of crushing mediocrity.