

COVER STORY

Clock Strikes Griffey Time

Seattle Rookie, Cincy Vet Record a Father-Son First

By JIM STREET

SEATTLE—A 19-year-old center fielder with major league bloodlines and an abundance of talent threw the Seattle Mariners' short-range plans off course this spring.

Ken Griffey Jr. was so far ahead of schedule that the Mariners had to find a place for him in their lineup at least one year sooner than expected.

When Griffey reported to training camp in Tempe, Ariz., barely three months after his 19th birthday, he was given only an outside chance, at best, of earning a spot on the 24-man roster for the Mariners' season opener.

Griffey wanted to make the major league roster, but he wanted to make it more for his father—Ken Griffey Sr. of the Cincinnati Reds—than for himself.

"My dad said this probably is going to be his last season and he wants us to be the first father-son combination to play in the big leagues at the same time," young Griffey said at the beginning of spring training. "That would make him happy."

When the Mariners announced March 29 that Ken Jr. would be their starting center fielder against the Oakland A's in the Kingdome on April 3 and Ken Sr. signed a one-year, \$320,000 contract with the Reds the following day, there were smiles all around the country.

Fathers and sons have been in spring training at the same time, but never in the regular season. In the spring of 1986, for example, Hal McRae—then entering his final full season as a designated hitter for the Kansas City Royals—and his son, Brian, a shortstop who had been drafted by the Royals a year earlier, made history when they became the first father-son combination as teammates in a major league camp. But Brian was demoted quickly and the McRaes never played together in the majors.

Happiness, the word mentioned by young Griffey, is something foreign to the Mariners, who have had losing records in each of their 12 seasons. The team was badly in need of a marquee player and an infusion of new blood, but Griffey did not appear to be their man when spring training began.

The organization's thinking was that Griffey would start the season at Williamsport (Eastern) or Calgary (Pacific Coast). Griffey had never played above Double A—and he had appeared in only 17 games at that level.

Everyone at the Mariners' camp could tell just by watching Griffey in action that major league stardom was on the horizon. At the same time, Manager Jim Lefebvre and his coaches were concerned that rushing Griffey to the big leagues might be disastrous. The franchise had already had its share of disasters and no one wanted to be responsible if Griffey went into

a slump and his confidence fell to the point that he could never recover.

"If he's going to break (camp) with us," Lefebvre said midway through spring training, "he is going to play. He's not going to sit around. When he becomes part of our lineup, I want him to be there for 20 years. If we rush him, it could set him back a couple of years."

But Griffey rushed himself into the picture and the outlook for the Mariners' outfield changed almost overnight. In his pre-spring training prospectus, Lefebvre didn't even mention Griffey's name among those battling for outfield positions.

By the time the Cactus League schedule began, Griffey's status already was on the rise. And there was no stopping him.

Lefebvre had decided to play the youngster almost every game.

"I want to take a good look at him," he said. "We'll see how it goes."

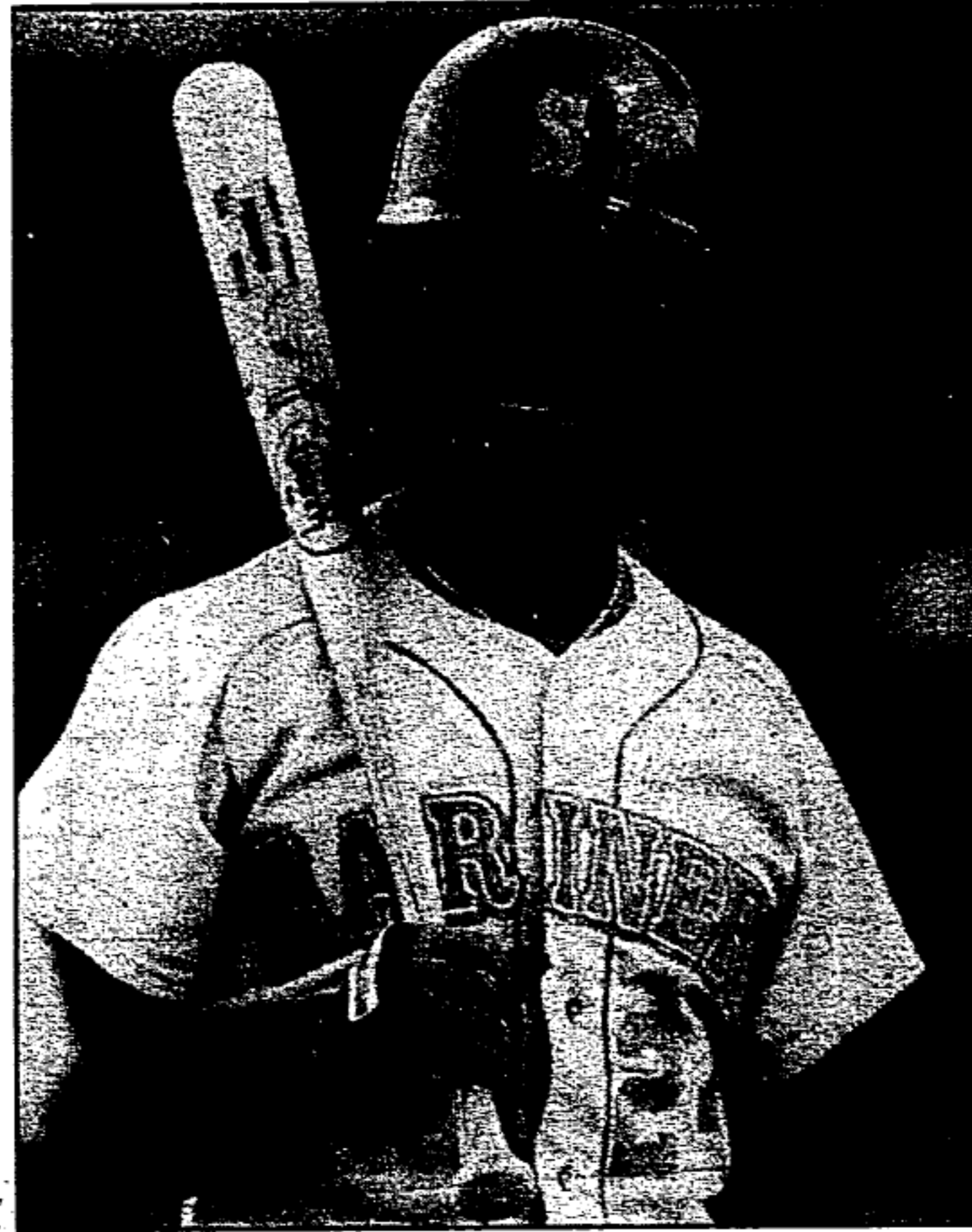
It went better than anyone expected. Even Griffey.

"I didn't expect to be playing this well," he said when he was midway through a 15-game hitting streak that was the longest in the Mariners' history for spring training.

And when the Cactus League pitching got better, so did Griffey's hitting. Skeptics were waiting for him to be overmatched, but he went through a three-week stretch in which he never went more than four at-bats without a hit.

Oh, Griffey incurred a few bumps along the road. Take, for example, his first day in camp.

While Griffey was playing catch, a baseball glanced off the tip of his glove and caromed flush into his right eye. That was the end of that day's workout.



Ken Griffey Jr. is the younger half of what will be the first father-son team to play in the majors during the regular season.

"They told me he could hit, he could run and he could throw," Lefebvre, the first-year manager of the Mariners, said with a laugh, "but no one told me he couldn't play catch."

Can he hit?

Besides the 15-game streak, Griffey set M's spring records with 32 hits, 49 total bases and 20 runs batted in. He batted .360.

Lefebvre had played the kid along March 29. Just as Griffey was convinced he was going to the

minors, Lefebvre said, "Congratulations, you're my center fielder."

"My heart started ticking again," Griffey said.

Lefebvre said Griffey simply was the best player for the position.

"I like him. I like him a lot," veteran outfielder Jeffrey Leonard said. "I think he's farther along offensively than defensively. Sure, he's young, but he kept doing things that other people weren't doing."

"The only thing we don't know about him is how he will face adversity. By having a good spring, he's trained his body and his mind, but one thing you don't train when you're doing well is to train yourself for adversity—that eight-to-nine-game slump."

"It's going to come, so we have to wait and see how he handles it."

Leonard added, "I can help him through the rough times if he wants me to help him." Then, he laughed and said, "If he doesn't, I'll coldcock him."

Do we have a real-life Roy Hobbs on our hands here?

"He's a natural," Mariners batting coach Gene Clines said, marveling at Griffey's ability. "You sit back and watch this kid and he shows you what everybody is talking about. He can do it all."

Can he run?

When Griffey gets his 6-3, 195-pound body at full throttle, he runs like a deer. Doubles for some players become triples for Griffey. The only negative thing the Mariners noticed was that Griffey, at times, failed to run hard to first base after stroking a routine ground ball. Lefebvre has talked to the youngster about that.

Can he throw?

Ask the San Francisco Giants' Brett Butler, who is no leadfoot. Butler, trying to advance from first to third on a single to center in a game in Arizona, was gunned down by Griffey on a play that wasn't really that close. The throw from center never touched the ground.

And Griffey covers so much ground in center field that tough plays seem to become routinely easy ones.

Having been born into a baseball family, young Griffey was not awed by the major league surroundings.

"Man, this is my 12th spring training camp," he was quoted as saying. "That's 10 with my dad and two on my own."

Lefebvre said, "He doesn't handle himself like a 19-year-old. He's been around major league ball players all his life."

Lefebvre, who once spent half a year as a batboy for the Los Angeles Dodgers before entering baseball himself, said that exposure to the big leagues was invaluable.

"You see these guys, talk to them, watch them and realize they are human beings just like you," Lefebvre said. "We create images that major league ball players are bigger than life. Ken feels right at home."

Griffey's growth came quickly.

After being drafted No. 1 in the country out of Cincinnati's Moeller High School on June 2, 1987, Griffey reported to Bellingham, Wash., to play for the Mariners' club in the short-season Northwest League. The 17-year-old phenom's first hit was a home run against Everett on June 17. He went on to hit three homers, drive in eight runs and steal four bases that week and was named the league's player of the week.

Despite crashing into the center field wall July 4 and suffering an injury to his right shoulder, Griffey came back to hit .453 from July 12 to August 13. He wound up sixth in the league with a .313 average and led the yearling Mariners with 14 home runs, 40 RBIs and 13 steals.

Jay Mariotti, then a sports columnist for the Cincinnati Post, visited Griffey in the summer of 1987, shortly after the youngster had survived his first 10-hour moonlight ride in the Pacific Northwest aboard the Bellingham team bus, a 1958 school bus without a bathroom.

"To be perfectly honest with you, it was a whole lot worse than I ever imagined," Griffey told Mariotti. He said he survived by climbing into the overhead luggage compartment on the bus and going to sleep.

More than once, the homesick youngster who had received a \$150,000 bonus from the Mariners was thinking of chucking his career. But phone calls to a girl friend back home in the Cincinnati suburb of West Chester, O., convinced him that he should stay on track.

Bellingham (pop. 46,380), about 90 miles north of Seattle and 20 miles south of the Canadian border. (Continued on Page 14, Column 1)

Charting the Griffeyes

KEN GRIFFEY SR.

Born April 10, 1950, in Donora, Pa.
Height, 6-0. Weight, 210 pounds.
Bats and throws lefthanded.

Years, Clubs	G.	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	Avg.
Cincinnati (1973-81, 1988)	1894	6768	1074	2015	345	74	139	794	.298
New York Yankees (1982-86)									
Atlanta (1986-88)									
N.L. Totals	1343	4791	799	1452	246	64	90	543	.303
A.L. Totals	551	1977	275	563	99	10	49	251	.285

KEN GRIFFEY JR.

Born November 21, 1969, in Charleroi, Pa.
Height, 6-3. Weight, 195.
Bats and throws lefthanded.

Years, Clubs	G.	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	Avg.
1987, Bellingham	54	182	43	57	9	1	14	40	.313
1988, San Bernardino	58	219	50	74	13	3	11	42	.338
1988, Vermont	17	61	10	17	5	1	2	10	.279
Totals	129	462	103	148	27	5	27	92	.320

Stolen bases-caught stealing: 13-6 for Bellingham, 32-9 for San Bernardino, 4-2 for Vermont. Totals, 49-17.

1989 SPRING TRAINING

Club	G.	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	Avg.
Seattle	25	89	18	32	5	3	2	20	.360

Established club record for most hits in spring training; old record, 31 by Tom Paciorek, 1981. Set club record for longest hitting streak (15 games) in spring training. Set club record for most runs batted in during spring training.

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GRIFFEYS

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der, was culture shock for a black teen-ager from the big city.

"Things are a little different here," Griffey said. "It will take some getting used to for me. It's kind of weird around here."

Griffey's first manager was Rick Sweet, who had been a catcher for Seattle, San Diego and the New York Mets in the major leagues. Sweet could see that Griffey had the tools to play center field for the Mariners, but he needed to mature.

Even the 17-year-old Griffey admitted that "I have to mature," he said. "That's why I'm here."

It was left to Sweet to explain what the youngster needed to

learn. For instance, there was the matter of his mind wandering when he was on base.

"He's been picked off twice already because he's been spectating," Sweet said. "He's got to stay ahead mentally. You can't spectate in this game."

After going to spring training as a non-roster invitee in 1988, Griffey was assigned to San Bernardino (California). He was such a hit in the Class-A circuit that San Bernardino held a "Ken Griffey Poster Night" and sold out the ball park.

When Griffey would go to bat, the public address announcer would ask, "What time is it?" The crowd would respond, "Griffey Time."

Griffey hit .338, with 11 homers

and 42 RBIs, for San Bernardino. His career was put on hold for two weeks when he suffered an injured back while trying to make a diving catch in mid-July. But his back responded to treatment and he was promoted to Double A.

Griffey played out the '88 season with Vermont (Eastern), hitting .279 with two homers and 10 RBIs in 17 games. Because of the back injury, he was restricted to duties as a designated hitter.

Ken Griffey Sr. was playing for the Atlanta Braves when Ken Jr. was drafted. Before the youngster reported to Bellingham, he made a visit to the Braves' clubhouse in Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium.

During his visit, three members of the '87 Braves made young Grif-

fey the victim of an old clubhouse prank. Glenn Hubbard, Dion James and Gerald Perry tied Griffey's shoelaces together in what amounted to an initiation ritual.

"But I got them back when they weren't looking," Griffey said. "I tied their laces."

And what did the veterans do then?

"They called me 'Rookie,'" Griffey said.

Now, he's a major league rookie, and it's Griffey Time in Seattle.

There is only one aspect of Griffey's game that the Mariners haven't seen. The slump.

"I don't know if he understands what a slump is," Lefebvre said. "I don't know if he's ever had one."

Lefebvre also realizes that if

Griffey gets off to a slow start this season, "People will say we made a mistake because he's not ready yet. That's wrong. I think he will handle a slump just fine."

Griffey says he has been in slumps before and he doesn't let them get him down.

"I remember my junior year in high school when I was hitting something like .193, but I came out of it," he said. "You see, I don't have any confidence in myself. If something goes wrong, it doesn't hurt my confidence because I don't have any in the first place. I'm shaking every time I hit, but I've always been like that."

For someone lacking self-confidence, he sure made believers out of a lot of people this spring.

'Original' Griffey: 'I Never Thought About Me Still Playing'

By HAL MCCOY

CINCINNATI—The one item that remained on the baseball wish list of George Kenneth Griffey Sr. has been fulfilled.

Griffey has played on two World Series championship teams—the 1975 and '76 Cincinnati Reds.

He has batted .300 in the majors—.305 in 1975, .336 in '76, .318 in '77, .316 in '79, .311 in '81, all with the Reds, and .306 with the New York Yankees in 1983.

What the 39-year-old native of Donora, Pa., wanted this year was to see himself and his son, George Kenneth Griffey Jr., make major league history by becoming the first father-son combination to play in the big leagues at the same time.

That became a reality in the final week of spring training when Ken Jr. was named the Seattle Mariners' starting center fielder and Ken Sr. signed a one-year contract with the Reds for his 17th major league season.

"That's something I never ever thought about when Kenny was growing up," Griffey said. "As a father, you just hope he is good enough to make it to the majors. I never thought about me still playing at the same time."

As is the spring training custom for all Reds players, Griffey did his running in the outfield after leaving exhibition games in the early innings.

As a Grapefruit League game was in progress at the Reds' spring training park in Plant City, Fla., Griffey and fellow outfielders Paul O'Neill, Eric Davis and Kal Daniels sweated through 50-yard wind sprints along the outfield warning track.

O'Neill, Davis and Daniels completed their work, but Griffey plodded on, perspiration dripping off his chin in the 80-degree heat.

When Griffey finished, Davis leaned against a bullpen chain link fence and asked Griffey, "Hey, ol' man, need some air? If you do, I'll go to the clubhouse and fetch some."

Griffey walked slowly to the clubhouse and equipment manager Bernie Stowe greeted him with, "Hi, Senior." Griffey feigned anger and Stowe said, "I could have called you senior citizen."

Cincinnati restaurateur Jeff Ruby, who was in the clubhouse, added his comments, saying, "It's

the Other Griffey."

The elder Griffey quickly corrected Ruby, saying, "I'm the Original Griffey."

Griffey is on his second tour of duty with the Reds. He was signed as a free agent last August 2 after being released by the Atlanta Braves. He played with the Reds from 1973 through 1981, then was traded to the New York Yankees in November 1981. The Yankees dealt him to Atlanta in June 1986.

Griffey Sr. was on the last Cincinnati team to win a National League West pennant. That was John McNamara's Reds of 1979.

Griffey says the references to his age, including a stubbly beard that pops out white, doesn't bother him.

"I enjoy that," he said. "It's respect. I enjoy being around these guys."

But Manager Pete Rose doesn't have Griffey around just to be the butt of jokes about nursing homes and pensions. In fact, with first baseman Todd Benzinger inoperative with an elbow injury for two weeks this spring, Griffey showed how senior citizens can play first base. He hit .333 in his first 21 spring at-bats.

"I know I was brought here to pinch-hit and fill in," said Griffey. "But, like everybody else my age playing baseball, I think I can still play regularly. I tried to show them that. That's Pete's decision. If I can help in any way—well, I get more out of giving than taking. Some get more out of taking than giving."

Griffey looks around the clubhouse and sees a vastly larger array of talent than what populated the 1979 championship team. Rose was gone, off to Philadelphia for a greener bank account. Tony Perez was freezing in Montreal.

"What I remember most about the '79 team was the way Ray Knight stepped in at third base for Rose," Griffey said, neglecting to say that he himself hit .316 that season. "I enjoyed that. Knight hit .317 and was the biggest plus. Dave Collins played center field and hit .318."

"Davey Concepcion had a great year, drove in some big runs. Perez had rubbed off on him so much we began calling him Little Doggie."

"We didn't do anything wrong that year because we couldn't af-



Ken Griffey Sr., on his second tour of duty with the Reds, thinks he can still play regularly.

ford it."

After the 1981 season, Griffey was traded to the Yankees for pitchers Brian Ryder and Fred Toliver. At the time, Dick Wagner, then general manager of the Reds, cited Griffey's bad knees as the reason for the trade. Actually, the Reds were unwilling to pay Griffey a star's salary.

"While I was in New York, 1985 and '86, all we talked about was the talent in Cincinnati," Griffey said. "And we couldn't understand this second-place stuff. We knew the Reds shouldn't be finishing second. But they have—four straight times. I can't under-

stand it."

Back in the 1970s, when the Reds experienced that winning feeling, the youngsters hanging around the clubhouse included Pete Rose Jr., Eduardo and Victor Perez, Lee May Jr., Brian McRae and Ken Griffey Jr.

The sons were called the "Little Red Machine," and, said Perez, now a Cincinnati coach, "They were wild. You had to keep after them. But they were good kids."

They were good baseball players, too. Rose's son is in the Baltimore system, May's son was the New York Mets' first-round draft

pick in 1988, McRae's son is in the Kansas City organization and Victor Perez is a center fielder at Florida State University. Young Griffey, of course, has made it to the big leagues.

"I never dreamed this would happen," Ken Griffey Sr. said. "I figured that when he signed, it would take at least four years for him to reach the majors."

Ken Sr. was a 29th-round draft pick in 1969. He reached the majors for the last month of 1973 and came up to stay in the second half of '74. When he was traded to the Yankees, he was seldom able to see his son play high school baseball at Moeller High in Cincinnati, but was able to watch him in the three years Ken Jr. was a tailback for the powerhouse Moeller football teams.

Ken Jr. passed up his senior year of football at Moeller to concentrate on his senior season of baseball, and that paid off when he became the No. 1 pick in the 1987 amateur draft.

"It was his decision," Griffey Sr. said. "I wanted to see him play (football), but he'd had baseball scouts watching him since he was 16 and all he talked about was playing baseball."

Griffey Sr. was known as the second most famous baseball product of his hometown in western Pennsylvania. Hall of Famer Stan Musial also came from Donora and was a high school teammate of Buddy Griffey, Ken Sr.'s father, in the early 1930s. Musial remembered Buddy as a left-handed third baseman and a football star.

Ken Sr. was known more for football and track in high school. That accounts for the fact that he went so late in the draft.

Griffey Sr. said his son's favorite player was Rickey Henderson, who stole 130 bases for the Oakland A's in 1982 and now plays for the Yankees. "I was just dad," Ken Sr. said.

Griffey Sr. said his son was not upset at being drafted by the Mariners, a team that has never had a winning season. "My son considers himself a winner. He feels that one day he can help turn the franchise around," Ken Sr. said.

Does Ken Sr. expect to face his son in the World Series?

"Seattle? Nah," Griffey Sr. said with a laugh. "That'll get the kid's goat. He's always calling me the ol' goat."