

Ichiro Suzuki

Professional Baseball Player



Ichiro Suzuki, often known simply as Ichiro, is a Japanese outfielder for the Seattle Mariners Major League Baseball team. He was born October 22, 1973, in Toyoyama, Nishikasugai, Aichi Prefecture, Japan.

Ichiro moved to the United States in 2001 after playing nine years for the Orix Blue Wave in Japan's Pacific League. When the Blue Wave posted him after the 2000 season, Seattle won Ichiro's rights and he signed a contract with the Mariners. He became the first Japanese-born everyday position player in the Major Leagues. Ichiro did not miss a beat in his transition. He immediately established himself as one of the premier players in the Major Leagues, surpassing his accomplished career in Japan.

2004 was his most impressive offensive season yet, as he set several MLB records, including a new all-time, single-season Major League record with 262 hits. Ichiro, equipped with one of the strongest and most accurate throwing arms in the league, is generally recognized as one of the best defensive outfielders in baseball. He has won a Gold Glove award in each of his first six years in the majors, all six as an outfielder.

Ichiro is the first MLB player to join The Golden Players Club. He was also voted the 2007 All Star Game MVP, going three for three and hitting the event's first ever inside-the-park home run.

Ichiro is arguably considered today's best hitter. He has both tremendous hitting and fielding abilities. In 2001, Ichiro finished first in batting average and stolen bases and was the first player to accomplish this feat since Jackie Robinson. He holds many Mariners club records, some of which include: most multi-hit games, most infield singles, and most games hit safely.

Early Life

At age seven, Ichiro joined his first baseball team and asked his father, Nobuyuki Suzuki, to teach him to be a better player. The two began a daily routine that included throwing 50 pitches, hitting 200 pitches from Nobuyuki, fielding 50 infield balls and 50 outfield balls, and hitting 250–300 pitches from a machine.

As a Little Leaguer, Ichiro had the word "concentration" written on his glove. By age 12, he had set professional baseball as his goal and, while he apparently shared his father's vision, he did not enjoy their training sessions. Nobuyuki claimed, "Baseball was fun for both of us." But Ichiro later said, "It might have been fun for him, but for me it was a lot like *Star of the Giants*," a popular Japanese manga and anime series that told of a young boy's difficult road to success as a professional baseball player, with rigorous training demanded by the father. According to Ichiro, "It bordered on hazing and I suffered a lot."

When Ichiro joined his high school baseball team, his father told the coach, "No matter how good Ichiro is, don't ever praise him. We have to make him spiritually strong." While in high school, his cumulative batting average was .505, and his cumulative home run total was 19. Among the strength drills he performed in training there were hurling car tires and hitting wiffleballs with a heavy shovel. These exercises helped develop his wrists and hips, adding power and endurance to his thin frame. Yet, despite the production of outstanding numbers in high school, Ichiro was not drafted until the fourth and final round of the professional draft in November 1991, because many teams were put off by his small size of 5' 9" and 124 pounds.

Career in Japan

Ichiro made his Pacific League debut in 1992 at the age of 18, but he spent most of his first two seasons in the farm system because of his manager's refusal to accept Ichiro's unorthodox swing. The swing, nicknamed 'pendulum' because of the pendulum-like motion of his leg, shifting the weight forward as he swung the bat, was considered to go against conventional hitting theory. He was eventually moved to the leadoff spot for the Blue Wave, where his immediate productivity dissolved any misgivings about his unconventional swing. He set a Japanese single-season record with 210 hits in 130 games for a then-Pacific League record.

It was during the 1994 season that he began to use his given name, "Ichiro" instead of his surname, "Suzuki" on the back of his uniform. Suzuki is the second most common surname in Japan, and his manager introduced the idea as a publicity stunt to help create a new image for what had been a relatively weak team, as well as a way to distinguish their rising star. Initially, Ichiro disliked the practice and was embarrassed by it, but "Ichiro" was a household name by the end of the season and he was flooded with endorsement offers.

In 2000, Ichiro was still a year away from being eligible for free agency, but the Blue Wave were no longer among Japan's best teams. They would probably not be able to afford to keep him and would lose Ichiro without compensation in another year. Because of this Blue Wave allowed him to negotiate with Major League clubs. Ichiro used the posting system, and the Seattle Mariners won the right to negotiate with him with a bid of around \$13 million. Ichiro signed a three-year, \$14 million contract with the Mariners and became the first Japanese position player in the Major Leagues.

Career in Major League Baseball

On November 9, 2000, Ichiro was acquired by the Seattle Mariners for a contract worth roughly \$14 million. Ichiro's move to the United States was viewed with great interest because he was the first Japanese position player to play regularly for a Major League Baseball team.

Aided by Major League Baseball's decision to allow All-Star voting in Japan, Ichiro was the first rookie to lead all players in voting for the All-Star Game. At season's end, he won the American League Most Valuable Player and the Rookie of the Year awards, becoming only the second player in MLB history to receive both honors in the same season. In addition to being a six-time Gold Glove winner, Ichiro was also a seven-time All-Star selection from 2001 to 2007.



Ichiro's career is followed closely in Japan, with national television news programs covering each of his at bats, and with special tour packages arranged for Japanese fans to visit the United States to view his games. Between 2001 and 2004, Ichiro amassed more hits (922) than anyone in history over any four-year period.

It is quite clear that Ichiro Suzuki is deserving of his superstar image and that his hard work and dedication at a young age to the game of baseball has helped him be where he is today- at the top of professional baseball.

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