

# The Edgar Way

## EXTRAORDINARY WORK ETHIC AND DISCIPLINE HAVE GUIDED A STELLAR MLB CAREER AND HALL OF FAME RECOGNITION

By Eric Lucas

**T**he pinnacle moment in Seattle Mariners history came Sunday evening, October 8, 1995, at the old Kingdome. The Mariners were behind 5-4 in the bottom of the 11th inning in the climactic game in the first playoff series in franchise history. The opponents were the storied New York Yankees, who at the time had more World Series titles (22) than the Mariners had years in baseball (18). More than 57,000 fans, long starved for meaningful excitement, were shaking the concrete dome to its foundation. And to heighten the significance, the very continuance of Major League Baseball in Seattle was in jeopardy.

Designated hitter Edgar Martínez strode to the plate. “No worries,” he says now, looking back. “I just did what I always do.”

Sound pretty casual? Because it’s Martínez, it is, indeed, low-key. Never mind that the moment was fraught with import and sky-high with tension. In fact, two innings prior, he had struck out against ace pitcher Jack McDowell. But he approached his next at-bat as methodically as he had almost every plate appearance in his previous five years in the big leagues and as he would throughout the rest of an 18-year MLB career for which he was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame earlier this

year. This is how he did it, both that night in 1995 and during all of his years in Major League Baseball:

*Calm, positive focus.* “Playing at the highest level is about confidence,” Martínez explains.

*Visualize a hit, and never mind the strikeout.* “I’m someone who doesn’t see failure as negative,” he says. If you strike out at anything, eradicate negative self-talk.

*Remember the pitcher’s tendencies, and be ready.* McDowell had struck out Martínez two innings before on a split-finger fastball. “I said to myself, ‘Here it comes. It’s got to be the split.’”

Martínez knew—he *knew*—McDowell would send a splitter shimmying toward home plate. The pitcher did exactly that, and Martínez roped a double into the left field corner.

Mariners infielder Joey Cora was on third base, and scored easily. Seattle’s breathtaking young star, future Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr., was on first base. When he slid across the plate, just beating the throw from the outfield, the Mariners won the American League Division Series. The stadium erupted. Seattle went wild. The Mariners stayed in the Emerald City. And, eventually, the city replaced the Kingdome with Safeco Field, now T-Mobile Park.

Martínez hit a double, and Northwest baseball was saved.



*Seattle Mariners designated hitter Edgar Martínez brought an iconic stance and focus to the plate with each at-bat.*



The 1995 Mariners celebrate after Edgar Martínez's game-winning double in the 11th inning of their October 8 playoff game against the New York Yankees advanced Seattle to the American League Championship Series.

“Yes, I was there,” recalls longtime Seattle sports writer Art Thiel, of Sportspress Northwest, about the 1995 playoff climax. “That was sports drama unlike anything before or since in Seattle.” The episode is so iconic in Seattle and baseball history that it has its own Wikipedia page: “The Double (Seattle Mariners).”

All because Martínez had chanced to stroll through a bookstore a couple of years before that moment. He spied a self-help book, and everything changed. He began studying positive visualization and affirmation, and incorporated those disciplines into his other baseball work, such as lifting weights, studying pitchers intensely, even weighing each of his bats to ensure it was consistent with the others.

If you were to look for something that symbolizes the Edgar way, it would be the *Hammering Man* statue at the entrance to the Seattle Art Museum—steady, hard-working, reliable, focused.

“Edgar was not the naturally gifted athlete who could beat out an infield single,” observes Thiel. “His dedication to the exercises and disciplines of his success—it was relentless and astonishing.”

Griffey writes in the introduction to Martínez's newly released book, *Edgar: An Autobiography*, “When I think of my friend Edgar Martínez, I think of his incredible work ethic. It took a little longer for people to realize how good he was. But when you put his numbers up against everyone else's, you see how consistent he was. I'm thrilled we're going to be teammates again, in the Hall of Fame.”

Very few human pastimes enjoy the mythic status that baseball does in the United States. “Baseball is the story of

American life over the past 150 years,” enthused the British magazine *The Economist* in a recent essay. “What sets it apart is the cultural heights to which the game's mythologizing has lifted it.”

The Hall of Fame is thus the Valhalla at the peak of American culture. Of the 20,000 or so players who have ever stepped on a Major League field, only 329 have been chosen for the Hall of Fame. Now Martínez is among them.

His election to the Hall was never a sure thing, as Griffey's was. Martínez won the American League batting title twice—posting .356 in that amazing 1995 season, the first designated hitter to do so. He had a lifetime average of .312, led the league in runs batted in (145) in 2000, was an All-Star seven times, and is in the top 100 all-time in extra base hits, largely on the basis of



**“THE FIRST KEY IS AWARENESS—IF I WAS NEGATIVE, ANXIOUS, STRESSED, I HAD TO REVERSE THAT NEGATIVE SELF-TALK TO POSITIVE.”**

his 514 doubles, the signature Martínez hit. Despite all that, he waited 10 years to win HOF status—in his final year of eligibility.

Baseball zealots such as Hall of Fame voters equivocated for years over whether designated hitter—like relief pitcher a generation earlier—was an authentic position whose practitioners deserved Hall of Fame status. Supporters of DH legitimacy argued that being asked to go up and hit after sitting on the bench for long periods is actually more difficult than being out in the field half of every inning.

Injuries drove Martínez from third base to the dugout for good in 1996, where he had years of opportunity to practice the mental disciplines he adopted.

In retrospect, that defining moment in 1995 was historic, not just in the Seattle universe, but in the wider world of Major League Baseball. The deciding game featured seven eventual Hall of Famers—Martínez, Griffey, Randy Johnson, Mariano Rivera and Wade Boggs, plus broadcasters Dave Niehaus and Phil Rizzuto. All at one ballpark in a pivotal game—magical, to say the least. All seven are not just talented baseball professionals, they are also colorful, interesting characters.

When you look closely, Martínez may be the most intriguing of them all:

- He's the first Hall of Famer who spent most of his career as a designated hitter, the still-debated position found (so far) only in the American League.
- He's not flashy; nor is he a genetically gifted superstar athlete. He didn't play on a college team. He was never drafted. He grew up with his grandparents in Dorado, a small city in Puerto Rico, idolizing Roberto Clemente, and his first baseball contract was a \$4,000 deal that wouldn't cover an hour of today's galactic



*Martínez spent several years after retirement working as a batting coach of the Seattle Mariners.*

arrangements for young phenoms.

- He spent all or part of seven seasons in the minor leagues, bouncing back and forth from farm team to farm team, and from the minors to Seattle

and back, not finding a permanent home at the MLB level until 1990. Had he never tried professional ball, he might have stayed in Puerto Rico, where he had a decent job with advancement prospects working for Westinghouse.

- He overcame a physical disability—strabismus, a condition that prevents his eyes from working in tandem—that required daily eye exercises throughout his career. Among other things, he could not read or watch TV for several hours before a game.
- When he finally made it to Seattle for good as a third base-

### THE EDGAR FILE

- **1963:** Born in New York City.
- **1965:** Moves to be with his grandparents in Dorado, Puerto Rico.
- **1982:** Signs a developmental contract with the Seattle Mariners organization.
- **1983:** Begins his professional career with the Bellingham Mariners.
- **1990:** Joins the Seattle Mariners roster full time as a third baseman, and leads the team in hitting.
- **1992:** Wins the American League batting title, the first Seattle Mariner to do so.
- **1995:** Earns second batting title; Mariners win first-ever playoff series.
- **2000:** Leads the American League in RBIs, with 145.
- **2004:** Retires; wins Roberto Clemente Award. Seattle renames South Atlantic Street, adjoining the Mariners' home-field, Edgar Martínez Drive S.
- **2017:** The Mariners retire his number, 11.
- **2019:** Elected to National Baseball Hall of Fame; inducted July 21 in Cooperstown, New York. —E.L.



The Mariners formally retired Martínez's number, 11, on August 12, 2017.



## EDGAR HONORED

Pay tribute to one of baseball's great players on Edgar Martínez Hall of Fame Weekend.

**Friday, August 9**—First 40,000 fans through the gates receive a bobblehead featuring Edgar holding a replica of his Hall of Fame plaque.

**Saturday**—A pregame ceremony honoring Edgar starts at 6:30 P.M. (7:10 P.M. first pitch) First 40,000 fans receive a replica Hall of Fame plaque.

**Sunday**—First 40,000 fans receive an Edgar Martínez Drive S. replica street sign.

man in 1990, one particularly bad day (four errors in a single game) led him to be racked with self-doubt and anguish, just when it seemed he was on his way to a permanent slot in the big leagues. That's when he picked up the self-help book and began to study mental disciplines that were not, to put it mildly, common in a traditional enterprise like baseball.

He taught himself to reject negative thoughts—no more of “That was stupid to swing at that pitch.”

“Yes, it's true that some people are faster and stronger,” he writes in his autobiography. “But the mind is a great equalizer.”

He incorporated visualization techniques into life outside the ballpark. For instance, having decided he wanted to hit .350, he began looking for that number almost everywhere he went.

“I wanted to hit for a very high average,” he recalls. “So, driving up and down I-5, I'd look for license plates that had numbers above 350 on them.

“The first key is awareness—if I was negative, anxious, stressed, I had to reverse that negative self-talk to positive. Actually, I had started this long ago. When I was a kid in Puerto Rico, hitting rocks with a stick in the backyard, my subconscious mind was creating a belief. It's a home run! You win every single time.

“Our subconscious mind is the most important part of our mental makeup,” Martínez explains. “It's like an ever-present tape recorder. It records all our experiences, and they shape our beliefs. I think we all know this, but so many of us don't practice it.”

**LONG AFTER HIS 2004 RETIREMENT,** Martínez spent three years as the Mariners' batting coach, from 2015 to 2018, and he laughs when asked if he drilled his charges in positive self-talk strategies.

“Well, big-league baseball players don't like to seem weak. But in reality, in baseball, you fail often. So failure is not something negative.

“We as players have the talent,”



# Now Leasing! Modern Apartments Reserved for Adults 55+

Embark On Your Next Adventure

Schedule your private tour today **833.512.6838** | **MarvelleSC.com**

Concierge Services | Coffee Bar & Bistro | Club Room & Chef's Kitchen  
Game Room | Lush Outdoor Courtyard | Fitness Center & Spa Services

Visit Our Welcome Center 406 BAKER BOULEVARD SUITE 160 | TUKWILA, WA 98188



Martínez writes in his autobiography. “That’s why we made it to the big leagues. But how we use those skills, it’s all in the head.”

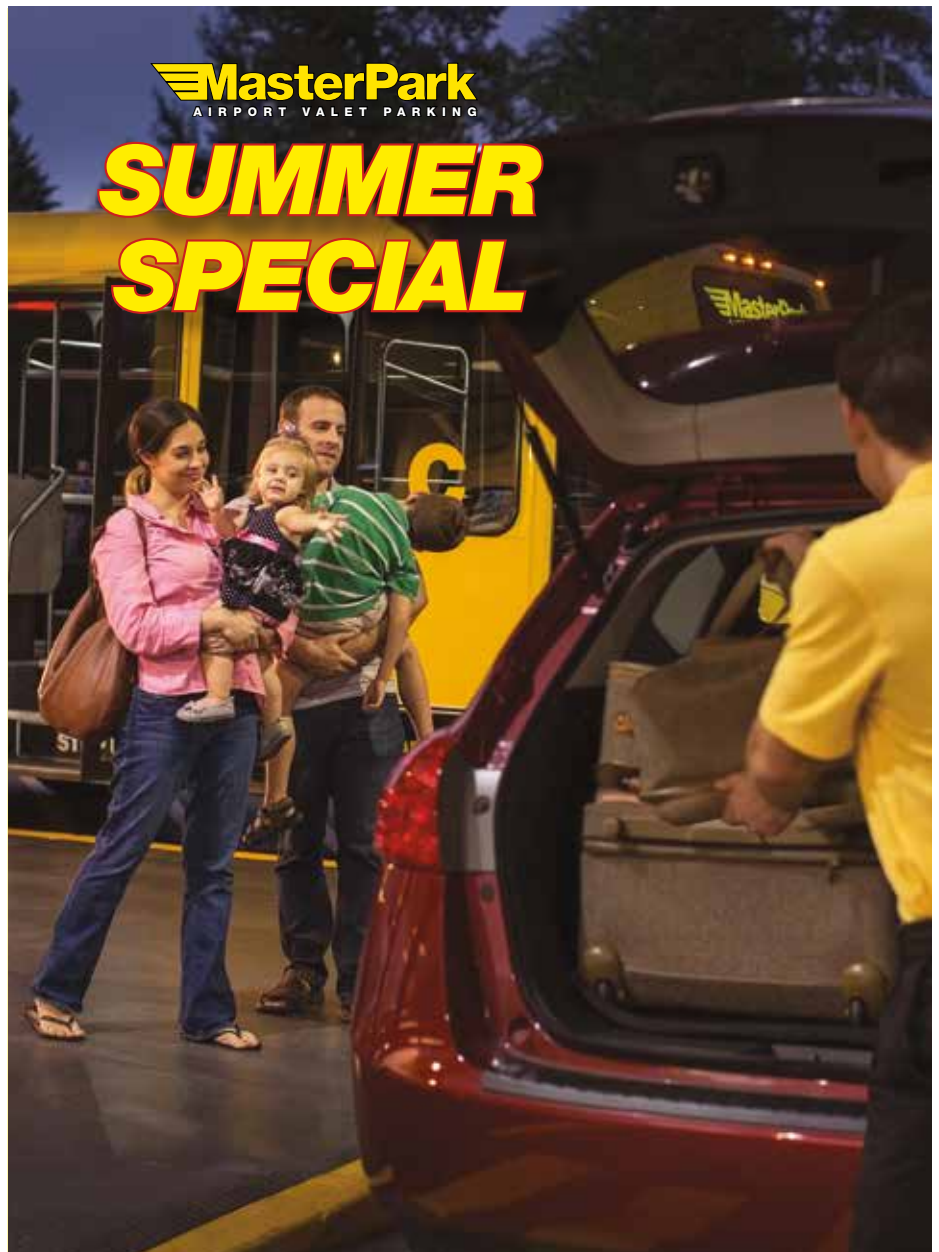
Martínez also stresses consistent focus and attention to detail, such as his famous habit of weighing his bats himself to be sure they were right. This meticulous approach also began in his childhood—his grandfather, Mario Salgado, made a living operating a number of transportation businesses, and spent a great deal of time diligently maintaining the vehicles he relied on. Martínez helped.

Practicing his grandfather’s attention to detail, and applying the mental disciplines he adopted in 1990, Martínez stayed put in the big leagues, won the American League batting title in 1992 at .343—the first Mariner ever to do so—and retired in 2004 with a total of 2,247 hits. Since then, he and his wife of 27 years, Holli, have enjoyed life in the Seattle area, raising their three children and working on nonprofit causes such as child health and literacy. His business career has included founding an embroidery firm and a bank, and he declares himself well satisfied with life.

As for the Hall of Fame, he says, “It’s a great honor. I was nervous, but that’s OK, you know?”

Yes, we do know, if we heed the Edgar way. It’s simple, but it’s not easy. It’s an attitude that deserves a place in any Hall of Fame. ✂

*Eric Lucas lives on San Juan Island. Like thousands of Seattle-area residents, he claims to have been at the Kingdome on October 8, 1995. More likely he was in the Kingdome for the fourth playoff game on October 7, when Martínez hit two home runs for 7 runs batted in and an 11–8 win that evened the series.*



**MasterPark**  
AIRPORT VALET PARKING

# SUMMER SPECIAL

## Closest, Most Convenient Valet Locations Serving SeaTac Airport.

We know that air travel can be a trying experience. MasterPark’s 4 Valet Parking locations and MPark Self-Parking provide SeaTac Airport’s premier parking service. 24-hour shuttles provide the shortest time from your vehicle to airline departure gates. Avoid the high cost of airport terminal parking, MasterPark is the fast, easy, safe and reliable choice. Please visit [masterparking.com](http://masterparking.com)



## VALID THRU OCTOBER 31, 2019!

Valid at all MasterPark Parking Locations. Must present coupon to receive discounted rate. Offer not valid in conjunction with any other offer.

- LOT A 18220 International Blvd.
- LOT B 2907 South 170th St.
- LOT C 16025 International Blvd.
- Garage 16826 International Blvd.

**10% OFF**  
Expires OCT 31, 2019  
Code #2135

Try MasterPark’s New **MPark** Self Park Location. \$9.95 per day for long term and discount parking. For more information visit [mparkseatac.com](http://mparkseatac.com)

