

Obscura Fantasy Focus: I love a bargain, and **George Kirby** coming off a career-worst season screams a bargain to me. Even with a poor season, Kirby's career strikeout-to-walk rate is 6.68, which is more than a strikeout better than Jacob deGrom (5.37) and Chris Sale (5.30), the all-time leaders in that category.

SEATTLE MARINERS

Let's get it out of the way: that was a *tough* loss.

It was a tough loss in the moment, when George Springer crushed Eduard Bazardo's second pitch into the leftfield seats in Toronto. It was tough in the immediate aftermath, as the Mariners failed to get a baserunner over the last two frames that would've at least gotten the game (and the series) back into the hands of Cal Raleigh. And it was tough in the retrospective, because you could look back at all of the small moments in the ALCS where it felt like momentum or fate had finally – and deservedly – swung in the favor of the Mariners.

So here's a positive note: the Mariners are very strong candidates to challenge for the pennant again in 2026.

You can't say that about every team. You can't say that the Blue Jays are strong favorites to win the pennant, not in that division. No one knows what's happening between the Tigers and Guardians and Royals. The NL East might go to the Phillies again, but it might go to the Braves or Mets. I don't think the Brewers are better than the Cubs.

The Mariners feel fine. They feel...pardon the maritime pun...very anchored at the top.

The Mariners have J-Rod and Big Dumper and Randy Arozarena and Josh Naylor. They have Dominic Canzone and J.P. Crawford and Leo Rivas and Victor Robles. Their rotation is going to be some sequence of Bryan Woo, George Kirby, Logan Gilbert, Luis Castillo, and Bryce Miller. Andrés Muñoz will be closing games in 2026, and Seattle will have Eduard Bazardo and Gabe Speier and Matt Brash supporting him. The team has Colt Emerson, who had a short stint at Triple-A as a just-turned-twenty-year-old, and all he managed was two homers and two doubles in six games: he's going to be a star.

Eugenio Suárez and Jorge Polanco were critical cogs to the success of the 2025 Mariners, and they might not come back. That's OK: the Mariners will be a strong team with or without them.

But my general point is simple: the Mariners, at least at this distance, look like the team with the *best* chance to win their division again in 2026. They have an extremely strong core of talent: terrific hitters, excellent starting pitching, a fantastic bullpen, and some young talent coming up.

If the 2025 season ended in bitter disappointment, the 2026 season is still very much there for the taking.

So how can the Mariners do it?

I'll start with a question: how many runs did the Mariners leadoff hitter score?

The Mariners last season had J.P. Crawford or Randy Arozarena batting leadoff. After that, they flip-flopped Julio Rodríguez or Cal Raleigh in the second and third spots of the batting order. Given Cal Raleigh paced the AL in homeruns (62) and RBI (125), and given that Julio Rodríguez had a 32 homer, 95 RBI campaign, how did the leadoff hitters do at scoring runs? Where do you think they ranked?

The Mariners leadoff hitters scored 82 runs in 769 plate appearances, the third lowest mark in the majors:

Rank	Team	Leadoff Runs
30	Rockies	76
29	White Sox	79
28	Mariners	82
27	SFG/BAL	86