

Mariners now only team never to reach World Series

By **TIM BOOTH**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — And then there was one.

The Washington Nationals are off to the World Series for the first time in franchise history after sweeping the St. Louis Cardinals on Wednesday night, becoming the final National League team to reach the Fall Classic and leaving a single team with the distinction of never playing for a title.

Congratulations, Seattle Mariners. Not only do you have the longest playoff drought in professional sports, but you are now the only team that hasn't been to a World Series.

Since the Mariners came into existence in 1977, there has been a void. Despite lineups that included the likes of Ken Griffey Jr., Ichiro Suzuki, Randy Johnson, Edgar Martinez and Alex Rodriguez, they have just four playoff appearances in their history, all coming between 1995 and 2001.

The Mariners have been to three American League Championship Series and were sent home each time. The city has never experienced a major league ball game beyond Oct. 22.

Seattle's 1995 playoff run may have saved baseball in



In this Oct. 5, 1997, file photo, Seattle Mariners' Alex Rodriguez sits in the locker room following their 3-1 loss to the Baltimore Orioles in Game 4 of the American League Division Series at Camden Yards in Baltimore.

AP Photo/Doug Mills, File

the Pacific Northwest. But as memorable as that was, it didn't end in the World Series. Same for 2001, when the Mariners tied a major league record with 116 wins in the regular season only to be dispatched for the second straight year by the New York Yankees in five miserable games in the ALCS.

Mariners fan Bob Simeone, a season-ticket holder since 1985, said attention

focused on the team for its World Series futility is similar to what happened a couple of years ago when Seattle inherited the longest postseason drought.

"We went through a wave of this when the Buffalo Bills made the postseason. ... So, we had that," said Simeone, the commissioner of the Seattle Mariners RBI Club, a group of die-hard fans. "It's a little bit like the

1995 story. You can only bring it up so many times and it starts to get tedious."

The woebegone franchise has become somewhat of an afterthought in a city where all the other professional teams have won titles — and almost all coming since the Mariners were last in the postseason in 2001.

The Seahawks broke through with their first Super Bowl win after the 2014 sea-

son. The WNBA's Seattle Storm won championships in 2004, 2010 and 2018. The Sounders won the MLS Cup title in 2016. And the Seattle SuperSonics were the first of the city's franchises to claim a title with their championship in 1979.

Now, the Nationals' unlikely playoff run this year has added the Mariners to a notable list of teams in the four major sports who

have yet to reach a championship game or series.

Cleveland, Jacksonville, Detroit and Houston have never reached the Super Bowl. Minnesota, Memphis, New Orleans, Charlotte, Denver and the Los Angeles Clippers have never made the NBA Finals. And Winnipeg, Arizona and Columbus are all still waiting for their first Stanley Cup Finals appearances.

But in baseball, it's only Seattle. And there is little sign the drought will come to an end anytime soon. In the bigger picture of where Seattle sits as a franchise, the World Series is a pipe dream.

The Mariners are in the midst of a full rebuild with the hopes of becoming competitive by the 2021 season, but there's no guarantee that the prospects Seattle is relying on will become play-off-caliber talents in just a couple of years. By that time, it will have been 20 years since Seattle was last in the postseason.

At this point, just being in a playoff game would seem like a satisfactory accomplishment.

"The best thing about this postseason is looking at the depth of the four squads and you realize what it takes," Simeone said. "It's a long mountain to climb, that's what it really boils down to."

Ravens' Thomas respectfully gears up for return to Seattle

By **DAVID GINSBURG**
Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — Over the course of nine NFL seasons with the Seattle Seahawks, Earl Thomas picked off 28 passes, earned a Super Bowl ring and was selected to the Pro Bowl six times.

Those are some of the memories the standout safety will take across the country before he faces his former team Sunday as a member of the Baltimore Ravens.

"They gave me my first shot. I won so many games

there, grew up as a young man there," Thomas said Wednesday. "So I'm always going to respect that organization and always going to be a part of it."

The 30-year-old Thomas started 125 games in Seattle, but his 2018 season began with a training camp holdout and effectively ended when he extended his middle finger toward the Seahawks bench while being carted off the field with a broken leg in Week 4.

Thomas, however, views his exit as the result of the

team's desire to save salary cap space while retaining their linebackers.

"I feel like they were kind of trying to phase me out," Thomas said.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll has a different take on the circumstances surrounding Thomas' departure.

"I wish he could have played with us and we could have stayed together forever. But it didn't work out that way," Carroll said. "We parted ways. That's it."

After losing safety Eric Weddle to free agency, the

Ravens were delighted to provide Thomas with a four-year, \$55 million contract. The deal surprised him, not just monetarily but in who offered it.

"I thought maybe the Cowboys, to be totally honest," he recalled. "I thought that's what the story was looking like until the money got funny."

And so ended a successful run in Seattle that included seven playoff appearances, two Super Bowl games and a brutish defense nicknamed "The Legion of Boom."

"He went on and pursued another opportunity, got a great shot with the Ravens," Carroll said. "Earl was an incredible competitor, and I loved coaching him. I think it will be fun playing against him."

Seattle's loss has been a boon to the AFC North-leading Ravens (4-2). Thomas already has an interception and 19 tackles in addition to providing leadership in the locker room and on the field.

"He has taken to the whole thing," coach John Harbaugh said. "He believes in

what we're doing and how we're doing it, culture-wise and football-wise. I love being around him. I love his demeanor. I love his desire to be great, and I think it's rubbing off on the guys."

Thomas has no idea what to expect from Seattle fans who cheered for him for the better part of the past decade.

"I thought about it late at night," he said. "Hopefully they respect what I've done and I get a couple of cheers, not too many boos. Whatever happens, happens. But hopefully it's love."

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