

## Baseball season hits midpoint, players' chance to look forward

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Major League Baseball stands at its official midpoint with Tuesday's All-Star Game. Experts who had everything wrong once again have a chance to show their wisdom as they predict what will happen in the second half of the season.

### American League

**Most Valuable Player:** Bret Boone, Seattle. The Mariners are the best team in baseball, and Boone has been its best player. He already has set career highs in every offensive category while playing a fine second base. If he keeps playing at this level, he will be a most unlikely MVP selection.

**Runner-up:** Manny Ramirez, Boston. He has kept the Red Sox near first place all by himself.

**Cy Young Award:** Roger Clemens, New York. As annoying as it is to pick a Longhorn for this award for the sixth time, Clemens is having a sensational season. With Pedro Martinez injured, there is no real competition.

**Rookie of the year:** Ichiro Suzuki, Seattle. Ichiro has become a fan phenomenon while threatening to break several major league batting records. But how can this guy be a rookie when he has played for 10 years in Japan?

**"Real" Rookie of the year:** Josh Towers, Baltimore. The baby-faced Towers has gone from mid-May callup to one of the league's better pitchers.

**Manager of the year:** Tom Kelly, Minnesota. Name one starter for the Twins, just one. Most people cannot, yet Kelly has led them to a four-game lead over the mighty Indians at the All-Star break.

**Runner-up:** Lou Pinella, Seattle. Pinella had enough talent in Seattle to win, but win this often?

**Surprise of the year:** The Mariners' amazing start. Many people thought Seattle was in trouble after losing Alex Rodriguez, Ken Griffey Jr. and Randy Johnson in three straight years. They are not only contending, but are on pace to break the major league record for wins.

**Disappointment of the year:** Texas Rangers. \$252 million, .252 winning percentage.

**Most ridiculous item of the year:** Rangers pitching staff. They would have a 6.00 ERA against the Arlington Little League.

**Outrage of the year:** Joe Torre's selection of seven Yankees to the All-Star team. Rumor has it he was upset that he could not take the batboy too.

**Comeback player of the year:** Ruben Sierra, Texas. Sierra has gone from forgotten to nearly as formidable as he was 10 years ago.

### National League:

**MVP:** Luis Gonzalez, Arizona. His 35 home runs have helped the Diamondbacks to first place in the NL West. He is a classy player who is very deserving of such an honor.

**Runners-up:** Lance Berkman and Moises Alou, Houston. Both would get more attention if their team was in first place.

**Cy Young Award:** Curt Schilling, Arizona. The yearly bridesmaid to Greg Maddux and Randy Johnson finally gets his moment in the spotlight.

**Rookie of the year:** Albert Pujols, St. Louis and Ben Sheets, Milwaukee. Pujols may reset every rookie hitting mark. Sheets was the first pick in the 2000 draft and may win 20 games in the majors this season.

**Manager of the year:** Don Baylor, Chicago. How can the Cubs be in first place? Who knows? Baylor does, and he deserves the award for that alone.

**Surprise of the year:** Philadelphia Phillies. The perpetually phlopping Phils are phiting for phirst.

**Disappointment of the year:** New York Mets. Last year's NL World Series representative is in a fight too — for last place.

**Outrage of the year:** The continued presence of Derek Bell on a major league roster. The Pirates signed Bell to a

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## American, NL's best face off; Johnson emergency starter for National League

SEATTLE (AP) — On the night when all of baseball gathered to honor him, Cal Ripken delivered his own All-Star sendoff.

Ripken upstaged Ichiro Suzuki, Barry Bonds and every other big name in the ballpark, hitting a home run in his final All-Star appearance to lead the American League over the Nationals 4-1 Tuesday night.

What began as a trip down memory lane — Ripken started at shortstop, at Alex Rodriguez's suggestion — wound up with him taking a glorious trip around the bases.

It was easily the most thrilling moment in a game that saw Roger Clemens finally face Mike Piazza. There was no drama there, though someone was later hit by the shattered barrel of a bat — NL honorary manager Tommy Lasorda.

Derek Jeter and Magglio Ordonez connected for consecutive home runs as the AL won its fifth in a row. Suzuki, the most popular player in Seattle these days, singled and stole a base as the AL cut its deficit to 40-31-1.

But, it was Ripken's night. At 40, Ripken supplanted Stan Musial as the oldest player to homer in an All-Star game when he hit Chan Ho Park's first pitch of the third inning over the left-field fence.

"I swung and made good contact and the ball went out of the ballpark and I felt like I was flying around the bases," Ripken said.

Tony Gwynn, who will retire with Ripken after this season, applauded from the opposing dugout and NL starting pitcher Curt Schilling caught the moment on his camcorder.

Ever the reluctant hero, Ripken had to be coaxed out of the dugout by the sellout crowd of 47,364 at Safeco Field.

Even a freight train running on the tracks beyond the center-field wall seemed to sound a tribute to baseball's old blue eyes — a two-horn blast right after the Baltimore third baseman homered.

Later, the game was stopped as every All-Star player joined commissioner Bud Selig in a six-minute ceremony before the sixth inning to say goodbye to Ripken and Gwynn.

"It's been a great run," Ripken told the fans. Two years ago, in baseball's last All-Star lovefest, Ripken and Gwynn supported Ted Williams

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All Star Game Starting Lineups	
AL	NL
1. Ichiro Suzuki Seattle Mariners CF	1. Luis Gonzalez Arizona Diamondbacks RF
2. Alex Rodriguez Texas Rangers SS	2. Todd Helton Colorado Rockies 1B
3. Manny Ramirez Boston Red Sox LF	3. Barry Bonds San Francisco Giants LF
4. Bret Boone Seattle Mariners 2B	4. Sammy Sosa Chicago Cubs CF
5. Juan Gonzalez Cleveland Indians RF	5. Larry Walker Colorado Rockies DH
6. John Olerud Seattle Mariners 1B	6. Mike Piazza New York Mets C
7. Edgar Martinez Seattle Mariners DH	7. Chipper Jones Atlanta Braves 3B
8. Cal Ripken Jr. Baltimore Orioles 3B	8. Jeff Kent San Francisco Giants 2B
9. Ivan Rodriguez Texas Rangers C	9. Rich Aurilia San Francisco Giants SS
Pitcher: Roger Clemens New York Yankees	Pitcher: Randy Johnson Arizona Diamondbacks

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