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Contact: Rebecca Hale
206-346-4324
rhale@mariners.com
@RebeccaMariners

MARINERS ANNOUNCE NEXT CLASS OF HOMETOWN NINE

Cohort of incoming 8th graders to receive mentorship and financial support to continue their athletic and educational careers

A young man named for baseball Hall of Famer and humanitarian Roberto Clemente, an Eagle Scout whose family recently experienced homelessness and a 13-year-old girl whose success on the softball field has helped her overcome dyslexia and anxiety are among the new cohort of the **Seattle Mariners Hometown Nine**.

Hometown Nine is a five-year fellowship program that helps student-athletes from Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Communities achieve athletic and academic success. The Mariners provide academic, professional, and social support to encourage success in the Fellows' athletic careers and educational journeys. Each member is paired with Mariners Front Office mentors and participates in regular interactions with Mariners players. Mariners Care also underwrites the cost of elite baseball and softball training, offering young people in the program equitable access to competitive play, which can be cost-prohibitive for many families.

This year, the Mariners accepted 10 incoming eighth graders. The additional Fellow replaces one of the original Hometown Nine members whose family relocated out of state. The new cohort will be introduced during a ceremony prior to the Mariners game against the Kansas City Royals on Friday, August 27.

Hometown Nine Class of 2026

- **Denzel Abaga**, 13, Seattle, Baseball Beyond Borders
- **Diego Bell**, 13, Magnolia, City Baseball
- **Imani Brown**, 13, Auburn, JBA Cubs
- **Clemente Cotto**, 13, Seattle, Seattle Central Little League
- **Josephine Cunningham**, 13, Seattle, Auburn Acers
- **Kingston Edwards**, 13, Federal Way, Baseball Beyond Borders
- **Isabella Garcia**, 13, Renton, Washington Acers
- **Kaila Ignacio**, 13, West Seattle, Absolute Blast, Lynnwood
- **Carl Lindsey**, 13, Seattle, Baden Baseball Club
- **Jeremiah Opong-Blanks**, 13, Bellevue, Baseball Beyond Borders

Hometown Nine members will remain in the program through high school and each year, the Mariners will add nine more in-coming eighth graders to the cohort. As they progress in their academic and sports careers, events and training provided by the Mariners will be tailored to be responsive to their academic development, including college prep assistance.

Denzel Abaga is a 13-year old Eagle Scout from Seattle. He plays centerfield for Baseball Beyond Borders. Denzel lives with his mom, who is a single mother. The family briefly experienced homelessness earlier this year after the death of Denzel's grandfather. Baseball has been a source of stability and support for Denzel through the recent difficulties he's experienced. He hopes to be an example to other multi-racial teenagers with his story and inspire others to overcome adversity.

Diego Bell is an 8th grader at Catherine Blaine K-8 School in Magnolia. In his young life, Diego has experienced adversity with the death of his father of leukemia when Diego was one-year old, and the isolation of being one of the few kids of color in his neighborhood, school and Little League team. Diego is hoping to use his experience with Hometown Nine to represent the possibilities for minority kids on the baseball field with select/elite teams.

Imani Brown is a 3.9 student at Rainier Middle School in Auburn. As a member of a bi-racial family, Imani understands the experiences of his parents and other relatives with racism. He wants to "help change racism" so that future generations can be "treated equally, no matter the color of their skin."

Clemente Cotto is named for the late Pittsburgh Pirate and humanitarian Roberto Clemente. He aspires to embody the values of service and sacrifice of his namesake. A third generation ballplayer, Clemente volunteers in his community and participates in speech, debate, robotics and tap at school. Clemente hopes to unite friends from different backgrounds to create a "more friendly environment" for everyone.

Josephine Cunningham, also known as Joie, is a decorated veteran softball player. She's also an honor student at Seattle Academy of Arts and Science who loves to cook and "do science." Joie's sister is an All-State shortstop for the 2019 state champion Garfield High School softball team and she hopes to follow in her sister's footsteps and eventually play Division 1 college ball, or even become an Olympian. With her interest in science, Joie wants to work in vaccine research and help make life-saving treatments more accessible to people in under-resourced communities.

Kingston Edwards is a 13-year old shortstop and pitcher for Baseball Beyond Borders. His dad is African-American and his mom is Filipino. The youngest of four kids, Kingston says his family is the center of his world. He says he's learned about strength and resilience from his brother, Damani, who has cerebral palsy. An aspiring Major League player, Kingston hopes he can be an example to other kids that it's "cool to stay in school, cool to get good grades, cool to not use drugs, cool to play sports and give back to your community."

Isabella Garcia, a Renton 13-year old, identifies as Mexican and Chamorro, the indigenous people of Guam. She says her ethnic heritage has not only "made my food palate diverse, but also has made me appreciate who I am as an individual." In a world faced with climate change, racial inequity and the growing gap between the haves and have nots, Isabella is concerned about the impacts on the mental health of young people. She says playing softball has helped her deal with anxiety and she hopes through sports to inspire others to "be themselves."

Kaila Ignacio, is a 13-year old softball player who competes with Absolute Blast select softball out of Lynnwood. Kai says playing sports has "provided me self-confidence, the value of team and community." Diagnosed with dyslexia in the third grade, Kai has worked hard to overcome her learning disability. She hopes to be an example to create better understanding of differences and help create opportunities for others.

Carl Lindsey is a 13-year old outfielder who lives with his grandmother and brother in Central Seattle. He says "playing baseball has given me a purpose and kept me away from the street life that my parents are into." An aspiring engineer, Carl loves to figure out how mechanical things work. Conscious of racial inequities faced by Blacks and other people of color; Carl wants to help build a future where "everyone feels safe to live their lives."

Jeremiah Opong-Blanks is a left-handed pitcher and first baseman for Baseball Beyond Borders. In addition to baseball, Jeremiah plays violin in his school orchestra. His goals include attending college and potentially becoming a Major League player, where he would use his platform to "encourage equality and to donate to charities and foster homes." He wants to encourage "kindness and empathy, build and strengthen communities and create a better world for everyone."

Mariners Commitment to Social Justice and Racial Equity

Hometown Nine is a cornerstone of the Mariners commitment to ensure our communities are places where everyone can thrive. There is a sizeable gap between the health and economic outcomes of many BIPOC people and their white peers. The systems that created this gap threaten the vitality of our entire community. When everyone in our community can thrive, we can all excel together as a society.

Beginning in July 2020, the Mariners and Mariners Care, the team's nonprofit foundation, have focused efforts in four broad areas with the potential for the greatest positive impact on BIPOC communities:

- Making baseball and softball more equitable and accessible;
- Promoting positive physical and mental health for BIPOC youth;
- Accelerating equitable outcomes for BIPOC businesses;
- Advancing equity through COVID-19 response and recovery.

These efforts are advanced through philanthropic grants, sustainable partnerships, targeted allocations of business resources, investments in academic and training programs, and education and awareness-raising.

In addition to Hometown Nine, the Mariners efforts include:

Community Impact Grants-- A \$1 million, five-year commitment to support organizations that promote racial justice and social equity through policy, advocacy and community-based initiatives. To date, grants have been awarded to six organizations focused on improving physical and mental health for BIPOC youth, supporting and developing BIPOC businesses and advancing equity through COVID-19 response and recovery.

Diversity In Sports Leadership Seattle University MBA Partnership -- The Mariners and Seattle Kraken are founding partners in the Seattle University MBA in Sports and Entertainment Management (MBA SEM),

which focuses on diversifying leadership in the industry. Each year for five years, the Mariners will hire three Seattle University MBA candidates to work in various Front Office areas including communications, finance, legal, Information Technology and athletic training.

Diverse Business Partners Program-- The Mariners are changing the way we spend money on business partnerships. We aim to create more opportunities for BIPOC-owned businesses by spending at least \$2 million each year with partners for such things as concessions, promotional items, construction and numerous other aspects of the ballpark experience.

More information about the Mariners Care Foundation, Hometown Nine and other Mariners community programs is available at [Mariners.com/Community](https://www.mariners.com/community).

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