

LEVELED BOOK • P

Ichiro Suzuki

**Multi
level
J•M•P**

Written by
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Ichiro steals third base in a game against the New York Yankees.

Table of Contents

October 1, 2004	4
Born to Play	5
Japan's Favorite Player.....	7
Coming to the United States	10
Setting Records	13
Glossary	16

October 1, 2004

Good evening, baseball fans. We have an amazing game tonight. The Seattle Mariners are battling the Texas Rangers. It's the bottom of the third inning. The crowd here in Seattle is on its feet. Everyone has come to see Ichiro Suzuki make history.

The count is three balls and two strikes. You can feel the excitement. The Rangers' pitcher winds up. . . he delivers. . . Ichiro hits it up



*the middle. Holy cow! It's a base hit. . . number 258. Ichiro just broke baseball's all-time **record** for hits in a single **season**. The crowd is going wild!*

Ichiro waves to the cheering crowd after his record-breaking hit.



Ichiro practices his batting before a game.

Born to Play

Playing baseball is what Ichiro does best. He was born in **Japan** on October 22, 1973. His father wanted Ichiro to become a great baseball player. He made his son practice up to four hours a day, every day, year round. Sometimes Ichiro practiced when it was too cold to grip the bat.

His father also made his right-handed son bat from the left side of the plate. That way, Ichiro would be closer to first base. Ichiro and his father didn't always get along, but Ichiro still worked hard.

Ichiro, which means "first boy," learned well. In high school, he woke up at 3:00 A.M. to do his chores. He wanted to make sure he had enough time to play ball and study.

All that hard work paid off. When Ichiro was eighteen, the Blue Wave baseball team chose Ichiro to play for them.

A photograph of Ichiro Suzuki in a batting stance, wearing a dark jersey with "MAINE" on the front, white pants, and a batting helmet. He is holding a bat and is positioned on a baseball field.

ICHIRO SUZUKI

Height: 5' 11" (1.8 m)
Weight: 170 lbs (77.1 kg)
Position: Outfielder
Bats: Left
Throws: Right
Date of Birth: Oct. 22, 1973
Born: Kasugai, Japan



Ichiro hits a game-winning home run while playing for the Blue Wave in 1996.

Japan's Favorite Player

Ichiro played for seven years with the Blue Wave in Japan. He led the team to its first **championship** in 1996. Ichiro also led the league in hits seven years in a row. He played in seven straight **all-star** games. In time, he became one of the most famous people in the country.



One of Ichiro's many ads hangs over a busy shopping area in Tokyo, Japan.

Ichiro's fans couldn't get enough of him. They saw him on TV. They saw him in ads. They liked his hair and the way he dressed. Ichiro wore sunglasses and a backward baseball cap. He played catch with fans.

Ichiro was so popular that his father built a museum. The museum holds thousands of things from Ichiro's life. These include his report cards, clothes, and video games.



Fans in Tokyo watch Ichiro on television.

Later, when Ichiro began to play in the United States, many of his fans followed him. They watched his games on television. Some fans even flew across the ocean just to see him play. When Ichiro returned to Japan for a visit, it was always an event.

Japan's Pastime

People in the United States love baseball. So do the Japanese. They have been playing the game since the late 1800s. They organized their first pro team in 1920. They started their first league in 1936.



Babe Ruth sits with batboys during an all-star game in Japan in 1934.



Many pitchers fear Ichiro's swing.

Coming to the United States

Ichiro loved playing in Japan. Yet he wanted to show that he was in the same league as Americans. He was thinner and smaller than most American players. He also didn't hit the ball hard. Instead, he slapped at it with his bat.



Ichiro steals a base in 2001. He is one of only a few baseball players who use their first names on their jerseys.

Ichiro joined the Seattle Mariners in 2001, becoming the first non-pitcher from Japan to play in the United States. He didn't play that well in spring training. Things changed when the season began. As a **rookie**, Ichiro had an amazing .350 batting average. He led the American League in hits with 242. He stole 56 bases and scored 127 runs.

Ichiro was so good that he won the American League Rookie of the Year Award. He also won the Most Valuable Player Award (MVP). A rookie player rarely wins both.



Ichiro was one of the top players in the game. He played with the Mariners until 2012, when he was traded to the New York Yankees.



Ichiro has won many awards. (Top) Ichiro holds the All-Star MVP award he won in 2007. (Bottom) Ichiro accepts a Gold Glove award in 2010.

Setting Records

Ichiro won two MVP awards and two batting titles while playing in the United States. He also won ten Gold Gloves for great defensive play. Ichiro doesn't hit many home runs. Still, he led the league in singles ten years in a row.

Ichiro by the Numbers					
Career Batting Statistics					
Year	Team	Hits	Home Runs	Runs Batted In	Batting Average
2001	SEA	242	8	69	.350
2002	SEA	208	8	51	.321
2003	SEA	212	13	62	.312
2004	SEA	262	8	60	.372
2005	SEA	206	15	68	.303
2006	SEA	224	9	49	.322
2007	SEA	238	6	68	.351
2008	SEA	213	6	42	.310
2009	SEA	225	11	46	.352
2010	SEA	214	6	43	.315
2011	SEA	184	5	47	.272
2012	SEA	105	4	28	.261
2012	NYN	73	5	27	.322
Total		2,606	104	660	.322

Source: ESPN

Yet it's one hit in 2004 that Ichiro remembers most. On October 1, he made hit number 258. Ichiro finally broke the record for single hits in a season that had been set by George Sisler in 1920. Afterward, Ichiro ran to the seats near first base. There sat Sisler's 81-year-old daughter. Ichiro bowed to her, a sign of respect in Japan. "My father would have been delighted," she said. "He would be so happy to know such a fine young man was doing so well."



George Sisler

George Sisler's daughter congratulates Ichiro on breaking her father's record.



Ichiro waves to his fans after breaking George Sisler's record.

Ichiro has become one of the most feared hitters in baseball. Not too bad for a skinny guy who is smaller than most of the other players.

"Through my career, I think this is the best moment," Suzuki said at the time. "I can't really put it into words."

Glossary

all-star (<i>adj.</i>)	made up of the best athletes, performers, or participants (p. 7)
championship (<i>n.</i>)	a contest to decide a winner (p. 7)
Japan (<i>n.</i>)	an island nation east of China in the Pacific Ocean (p. 5)
record (<i>n.</i>)	a measurement of an event or achievement that has never been exceeded (p. 4)
rookie (<i>n.</i>)	a person who is playing his or her first year in a sports league (p. 11)
season (<i>n.</i>)	a certain time of the year when something usually happens, such as a sport being played or a type of weather taking place (p. 4)

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