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Profile: Stinson traded his catcher's mask for safety goggles

Ex-Mariner will catch the last Kingdome pitch

Once in a dark restaurant in Seattle, Bob Stinson was offered a free meal because he was mistaken for Seattle Mariners manager Lou Piniella. But looks aren't all the two men have in common.

Stinson, a maintenance mechanic in the airplane jack shop in Everett, Wash., was the first catcher for the Seattle Mariners expansion team — the player who caught the first pitch thrown by Diego Segui on April 7, 1977, in the then-brand-new Kingdome.

"I'll be catching the last (ceremonial) pitch at the Kingdome, too," Stinson said. "Segui and I will both be back in our old-style uniforms, taking part in the final day festivities June 27." That is the last time the Mariners will play in the domed stadium, which is being replaced by a new ballpark with a retractable roof.

Stinson was the number-one draft choice for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1966. His playing career also took him to St. Louis, Houston, Montreal, Kansas City and finally Seattle.

"One year with the Mariners, I hit 11 home runs — two of them game-winning grand slams," Stinson said. "But what I remember most of all was the good feeling I got every time I put on that professional baseball uniform."

Stinson, who was nicknamed "Scrap Iron" because he was so durable, left professional baseball in 1980 when the Mariners released him.

"I knew I couldn't play baseball forever," Stinson said. Even before his release from the Mariners, Stinson cultivated relationships with people at Boeing with an eye toward a second career here. Eventually, he was hired and now Stinson is a 14-year Boeing veteran.

Stinson misses playing baseball, but he's kept involved in the game over the years. He spends his free time doing one-on-one coaching for both boys and girls, and donates the proceeds to charity or buys sports equipment for under-privileged children. He puts on baseball clinics and participates in the Baseball Fantasy Camp at the Mariner's spring training facility in Arizona.

He coached his three children, two boys and a girl, all of whom are successful in baseball in some way. He also plays in charity golf tournaments, and participates in professional baseball team reunions and old-timers games.

Stinson was recently interviewed for a KING-TV special about the opening of the new ballpark. The program will air in the Puget Sound area July 12.