



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

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Miscues are no deterrent as Twins pull it out in 10th

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune 5/19/11

OAKLAND, CALIF. - Their offense is nowhere near being as productive as it should be, and the defense continues to give away outs. But the Twins have won back-to-back one-run games on the road, which can be chicken soup for their tormented souls.

They hung in long enough Wednesday night for Oakland to hand them the winning run in the 10th on the way to a 4-3 victory. They beat Seattle 2-1 on Tuesday and have consecutive wins for the first time since May 4 and 6.

Pinch hitter Delmon Young singled to right to lead off the 10th, then went to third when Athletics first baseman Daric Barton fielded Alexi Casilla's bunt and threw it into center field while trying to go for the force play at second.

One out later, Young scored on a sacrifice fly by Trevor Plouffe.

"Well, we've played a lot of close games and have not come out on top enough," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "Tonight, we had some big hits, we had to execute, and we had to make some big pitches."

This came after the Twins experienced more of those moments that have doomed them over and over this season. It occurred with two outs in the second inning, when starter Carl Pavano failed to cover first base on a grounder to second and a throwing error by Plouffe kept Oakland's inning alive. The A's turned the mistake into two runs for a 2-1 lead -- and some Twins players had that here-we-go again look on their faces.

The Twins have been in that situation more times in seven weeks than they would care to be in an entire season, which is why this season has been like no other since Gardenhire took over as manager in 2002. The Twins give away outs and opponents often capitalize when they do.

But on Wednesday, the Twins kept playing.

They retaliated in the top of the third. Casilla led off with an infield single and smartly advanced to third on Denard Span's double to left.

That brought up Plouffe, and he atoned for his error with a two-run single to center that gave the Twins a 3-2 lead.

Pavano tried to shake off his mistake with three scoreless innings. He was putting the ball where he wanted it, meaning he was able to set up hitters and keep them off balance. Pavano looked more like the pitcher who won 17 games a year ago than the one who entered Wednesday with an ERA near 6.00 and who admittedly was second-guessing himself on the mound.

Then he made a mistake to start the sixth. Barton banged a double off the wall in right, then advanced to third on a flyout. Hideki Matsui, a steady run producer his entire career in two continents, lined a single to right on the first pitch, tying the score at 3-3.

Pavano left after seven innings with a solid line: three runs, one earned on six hits with no walks.

Glen Perkins and his newfound power replaced Pavano in the eighth. He gave up a leadoff single to Cliff Pennington, but forced Pennington out at second on David DeJesus' sacrifice attempt, a close play that replays showed was correct.

Perkins went on to pitch a scoreless eighth, then got the first out of the ninth before Joe Nathan came on. He promptly gave up a double to Kurt Suzuki and intentionally walked Ryan Sweeney.

Behind 3-0 to Mark Ellis, Nathan rallied for a strikeout. Behind 2-0 to Connor Jackson, Nathan got a groundout to end the inning, and for his efforts, he was rewarded his first victory since Aug. 21, 2009.

"He made some great pitches, which is what we're looking to see out of Nathan in some big spots," Gardenhire said.

Harmon to boy in hospital: 'Maybe I'll hit you a couple.' And sure enough...

Paul Walsh, Star Tribune 5/19/11

This is the stuff that legends are made of.

Eight-year-old Jack Guiney, hospitalized in New York for weeks with burns over half of his body, greeted his hero as he strode into the room on May 20, 1964.

It was Harmon Killebrew. The Twins slugger was in town for a two-game series with the Yankees.

Killebrew gave an autographed baseball to Jack, who pulled a ball glove from under his pillow and said, "Would you autograph my glove, too?"

After a little baseball chatter -- "I'm a shortstop," the bandaged boy said -- Killebrew made a deal with the lad: "If you hurry up and get well, the next time I'm in town, I'll take you out to the ball park and you can meet all the fellows."

With the afternoon game near, Killebrew said it was time he headed head to the stadium.

"I'll watch you on television," the blue-eyed, freckle-faced youngster said from his Manhattan hospital bed.

"Maybe I'll hit you a couple," Killebrew responded.

Sure enough, he did just that, starting with a two-run home run in the first inning. The second homer came on his last at-bat, a solo shot in the eighth inning, capping off the Twins' 7-4 victory.

The New York Daily News and Jack's father arranged the visit for the boy, whose altar boy robes caught fire as he was lighting candles at his parish church in Brooklyn. The newspaper's bedside photo appeared in the Minneapolis Morning Tribune the next day and was sent across the nation on the UPI picture wire.

Jack soon left the hospital and indeed was Killebrew's guest in New York nearly four months later when the Twins played the Yankees on Sept. 12, 1964, posing together for news photographers along the rail before the game. Killebrew gave him one of his bats.

And this time, Jack saw for himself Killebrew's awesome power when the Twins star belted a two-run homer deep into the left-field stands in the first inning.

Guiney is now 55 years old and lives in Queens, not far from where he met his childhood idol. That hospital visit 47 years ago "lifted my spirits. I watched the whole game from my hospital bed. I was shocked" when Killebrew made good on his two-home run call.

"[Last week] I was listening to the radio and heard he was sick," Guiney said. "I said a little prayer when I heard that."

Guiney said he took the news of Killebrew's death Tuesday pretty hard and can attest to what "they said in the paper -- that he was a great ballplayer but a greater human being."

Hartman: Treeless batter's eye hasn't helped Twins

Sid Hartman, Star Tribune 5/18/11

Twins batters wanted the removal of the spruces from center field, but so far it hasn't appeared to help them any.

Twins President **Dave St. Peter** was very reluctant to remove the beautiful trees beyond the center-field fence at Target Field, but he had to do so to please Twins players who claimed the trees made it difficult to hit.

Hitters also wanted the Twins to move in the fences, but St. Peter was not going to change the dimensions of the ballpark. Moving in the fences would have had a negative effect on the Twins pitching staff as well.

Well, it might not have anything to do with the removal of the 14 spruce trees growing back there, but for the first 15 home games the new batter's eye has not done any good for the Twins batters. Of the key Twins from 2010 and '11, only **Jason Kubel** and **Jim Thome** have shown an increase in average compared to the first 15 home games of 2010. All the other key hitters have gone down. And Thome's numbers aren't really reflective of his contribution since he has been hurt.

And the Twins' 15-game home record is also a disaster, as they opened 10-5 at Target Field in 2010 but are 4-11 this season.

Kubel struggled at .188 (6-for-33) through the first 15 games at Target Field last year, while this year he is hitting .310 (18-for-58). Thome hit only .214 in the first 15 home games last year, in which he played 10 games. This year, he is hitting .278 with five RBI but has played in only five games.

Justin Morneau, whom I believe is playing daily despite being more injured than some of the Twins players on the disabled list, is not doing that badly at home this year, hitting .281 and seven RBI, having picked it up lately. Last year, he got off to a terrific start at .360 with eight RBI.

Michael Cuddyer is hitting .255 at home with two home runs and five RBI. Last year through 15 games, he was hitting .281 with five home runs and 17 RBI.

Denard Span is hitting .302 at home with one RBI this year compared to .339 with eight RBI in 2010.

Joe Mauer, whom some people in the Twins organization expect to sit out for some time even though the catcher is rehabilitating in Florida, played in nine of the 15 games last year because of a bruised left heel, hitting .313. This year, he has played in only four games at home, batting .250.

And **Delmon Young**, who came off the disabled list last week, has hit .226 with three RBI at home, having played in eight of 15 games. Last year, he played in 13 of the first 15 games, batting .263 with five RBI.

Check the total of the seven players, and you find that they had eight home runs, 53 RBI and 46 runs through 15 home games last year. This year, the totals are four home runs, 32 RBI and 24 runs.

True, you can blame the injuries, with Young, Mauer and Thome all having been on the disabled list. And as a group, the seven players are only hitting 10 points lower at home this year (.279) than they did at this point last year (.289).

But they aren't scoring runs, aren't hitting with runners in scoring position, aren't hitting home runs and are often even struggling just to get on base. Yes, changing the batter's eye has not been the solution for the Twins' star players at home.

Jottings

• Apparently, according to Timberwolves officials, Target Corp. hasn't made a decision yet whether it will continue to hold the naming rights on Target Center when its contract runs out at the end of September. The Wolves have 14 years left on their lease with the city and would prefer a 14-year naming rights contract. There had been rumors that Sanford Health of

Sioux Falls, S.D., which has a one-year contract for a billboard on the side of the building, would be a candidate, but apparently that's not the case. Life Time Fitness, which has a health club in the arena, is reported to be one of the leading candidates if Target doesn't renew. The Minneapolis St. Paul Business Journal reported that the present agreement called for \$18.75 million over 15 years, and also that the Wild is being paid \$3 million a year by Xcel Energy for naming rights to the St. Paul hockey arena.

- Before deciding to withdraw from the NBA draft, Gophers junior center **Ralph Sampson III** worked out at camps in Chicago and New Jersey. It was Sampson's uncle who called Gophers coach **Tubby Smith** with the news that Sampson decided to remain in school and play college basketball this season. ... Bemidji State and Augustana (S.D.), both of the NCAA Division III Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference, will be the two exhibition foes for the Gophers this fall at Williams Arena. Bucknell, a team that lost 81-52 to eventual champion Connecticut in the first round of the NCAA tournament but won 23 of 25 games before that, will open the regular season against the Gophers Nov. 11.

- The Gophers baseball team played its last game ever in Siebert Field on Tuesday, beating North Dakota State 8-5. Coach **John Anderson** said that the University of Minnesota officials in charge of facilities would have never allowed a game to be played at the field had the officials checked it. Anderson has scheduled 36 games at the Metrodome for next year, including the annual Dairy Queen Classic that will include Nebraska, New Mexico State and West Virginia. The Gophers also will play Nebraska at home in 2012 as a conference foe. This year's team can clinch a Big Ten playoff spot by winning one game over Ohio State at Target Field this weekend.

- Gophers wrestler **Dylan Ness**, the younger brother of former Gophers NCAA champion **Jayson Ness**, qualified at 145.5 pounds for the U.S. Senior World Team Trials June 10-11 in Oklahoma City.

- The Houston Chronicle reported last week that Rockets General Manager **Daryl Morey** narrowed his candidates for the team's head coaching position to three: former Wolves coach and VP **Kevin McHale**, former Wolves coach **Dwane Casey** and former Nets coach **Lawrence Frank**. After being fired by McHale in 2007, Casey left the NBA to travel overseas and study European techniques, rejoining an NBA team in 2008 with the Dallas Mavericks as their top assistant under coach **Rick Carlisle**. The Mavs are now playing Oklahoma City in the Western Conference finals. It was also reported by ESPN's **Marc Stein** last week that the Golden State Warriors are looking at Casey for their coaching vacancy. McHale has been working as a television analyst but hasn't coached since finishing up with the Wolves at the end of the 2008-09 season.

Jim Thome, Jason Repko a weekend away

La Velle E. Neal, Star Tribune 5/18/11

OAKLAND, CALIF. - The Twins hope to have designated hitter **Jim Thome** and outfielder **Jason Repko** available by Monday, when they open a six-game homestand.

Thome, working his way back from a strained left oblique and slight back strain, took five at-bats during an extended spring training game in Fort Myers, Fla., on Wednesday.

Twins minor league field coordinator **Joel Leppel** is monitoring workouts in Fort Myers and told manager **Ron Gardenhire** that Thome's swing still needs to get sharp. So instead of bringing Thome up to pinch hit in the weekend interleague series at Arizona, Thome will stay in Florida and get his hacks in.

"He's still working on his timing," Gardenhire said. "He's getting five or six at-bats like every other day. Getting 10, 15 more at-bats is going to be a good thing for him, rather than coming up and getting one at-bat a day in Arizona."

Thome will continue to play in games until Sunday, then fly to the Twin Cities.

Repko, working his way back from a strained right quadriceps, went 0-for-4 on Wednesday playing for Class AAA Rochester. The plan is for Repko to fly to town Sunday night as well. The Twins will have to make roster moves to make room for both players.

More injury updates

- Infielder **Tsuyoshi Nishioka** is getting his sprint work in as he continues to work out the soreness in the left fibula he fractured on April 7.

"[Tuesday] he came in sore [to] the touch," Gardenhire said. "[Wednesday] was a lot better. That's a good sign. That means the soreness is starting to move itself out."

Nishioka also is doing some light turns on the bases. Once he is able to run them at full speed -- still a few days away -- he will be just about ready to play in games.

- Catcher **Joe Mauer** began his workouts Wednesday in Fort Myers. He's getting in running work as well, and trainer **Dave Pruemer** said Mauer's shoulder and elbow are getting better. But there's still no timetable for Mauer to play in any games.

- Lefthander **Jose Mijares**, on the 15-day disabled list because of a strained elbow, is scheduled to start throwing Saturday.

Young sits again

Outfielder **Delmon Young** on Wednesday was on the bench for a second game in a row, after striking out nine in his previous 11 plate appearances.

But he delivered a big pinch hit in the 10th inning off former Twins teammate **Brian Fuentes**, singling and eventually scoring the winning run in a 4-3 victory over the Athletics.

Gardenhire said Young's problems are a combination of a lack of patience and lack of timing.

"Delmon's scuffling along here," Gardenhire said before the game. "Let him get some work in BP and get out there, relax a little, watch a couple [of games] and then get back to it."

Friday's funeral

The entire Twins coaching staff will attend **Harmon Killebrew's** funeral in Peoria, Ariz., on Friday. Two buses will be at the team hotel to transport players who wish to attend the service. Twins officials will fly in from the Twin Cities. The service is scheduled for noon Central time.

Target Field the best

Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal and Sports Business Daily have named Target Field the sports facility of the year. It was selected over Amway Arena (home of the Orlando Magic), Arrowhead Stadium (Kansas City Chiefs), Consol Energy Center (Pittsburgh Penguins), New Meadowlands Stadium (New York Giants/Jets) and Red Bull Arena (New York Red Bulls).

Twins postgame: Nathan in pressure role. Plouffe has short memory.

La velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune 5/18/11

Joe Nathan is not a thinker on the mound. He rarely shakes off his catcher.

And he didn't bat an eye when catcher Drew Butera signaled for a breaking ball with two on in the ninth and a 3-2 count to Mark Ellis.

“(Butera) definitely was the only one who had that idea,” Nathan said. “He was the only one in the park who knew,;;

Nathan followed orders and threw a breaker that, uh, might have been a little inside. But not in home plate umpire Ted Barrett's world. Strike three. Conor Jackson followed with a ground out to end in the inning, then the Twins won 4-3 in 10.

“Pretty filthy in a do-or-die situation,” Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said.

Who else can Twins manager Ron Gardenhire trust in late innings these days. He has decided to use Nathan later in games,

Nathan has made progress since taking himself out of the closer's role last month. He's missing the plate by smaller margins. He's not yanking his slider down and off to the left of home plate. He did throw a bad slider to Kurt Suzuki in the ninth that turned into a double, but he feels he's getting better. He's using his curveball more, and was willing to throw it when asked in a tight situation.

“It is not all there yet,” Nathan said, “but it is getting there. It's going to be some time to get things where I want. But these outings give me more confidence every time I go out.”

Sounds like Nathan is going to go out later in games as a set up man to closer Matt Capps. Nathan, by the way, got the win, his first since Aug, 21, 2009 at Kansas City.

PLOUFFE SHAKES IT OFF

Not a fan of these late night west coast games, They are deadline killers. We write a story, grab quotes, throw a couple in and hope it reads well.

If this game would have been at Target Field, and there would have been time to work at this craft, I would have written about Trevor Plouffe, who shook off a throwing error in the second inning to drive in three of the Twins' four runs.

His throwing error came after Carl Pavano failed to cover first on a grounder, so runners moved to second and third then scored on Kevin Kouzmanoff's single. That gave Oakland a 2-1 lead.

Plouffe shook off the error and came through with a two-run single in the next inning. Then his sacrifice fly in the 10th allowed Delmon Young to score the winning run. That run was set up by Daric Barton's awful throw after fielding Alexi Casilla's bunt.

Plouffe has a couple weeks to prove he's ready for this level. His play on Wednesday helped his cause.

“I knew I was prepared,” he said. “I took a million ground balls before the game. Made a bunch of throws before the game. One just got away from me. Earlier, maybe last year or earlier in my career, I would have dwelled on it and made a couple more errors and had a couple of bad at-bats. Hopefully, That's something I've put past me. I think I have, having a short memory and knowing that I'm prepared.”

Etc.

Delmon Young's single snapped an 0-for-12 skid.

Denard Span's double snapped an 0-for-11 skid.

Danny Valencia is in a 0-for-16 skid.

Justin Morneau barely had more assists (8) than Vancouver Canucks goals (7).

Killebrew funeral is Friday, with Target Field memorial on May 26

Paul Walsh, Star Tribune 5/18/11

A public funeral for Harmon Killebrew will be Friday in Arizona, with a memorial service to be held at Target Field the following Thursday, the Hall of Famer's family and the Twins announced Wednesday.

Killebrew died Tuesday from esophageal cancer in Scottsdale, Ariz. The former Twins slugger was 74.

A public funeral is scheduled for Friday morning at Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Ariz., a Phoenix suburb. That evening, the Twins begin a three-game series with the Arizona Diamondbacks in Phoenix. Burial is scheduled for Monday in Killebrew's hometown of Payette, Idaho.

Next Thursday, a public memorial service will be held at Target Field starting at 7 p.m. Specifics about the service are pending. That day is an off day for the Twins.

Family members said that in lieu of flowers, donations in Killebrew's memory can be sent to the nonprofit Harmon Killebrew Foundation "Legacy Program" at P.O. Box 14550, Scottsdale, Ariz. 85267, or by visiting harmonkillebrewfoundation.org.

Legend of MLB logo: Designer says it wasn't supposed to be Killebrew

Dave Campbell, AP 5/19/11

MINNEAPOLIS - Harmon Killebrew, so the story went, was such the slugger that the silhouette of his intimidating pose at the plate was the basis for Major League Baseball's official logo.

There is no question that Killebrew, who died this week at age 74 following a fight with esophageal cancer, was quite the hitter. The Hall of Famer's 573 home runs prove just that.

Killebrew, however, rather innocently helped spread a myth that his image was the source of MLB's red, white and blue icon that dates back more than 40 years.

As fans, friends and family have attested this week, the gentle man they called "The Killer" was as genuine and trustworthy as they came, so Killebrew didn't make up some fib to exaggerate his fame. He simply misunderstood, until a conversation a few years ago with the logo's actual creator.

Major League Baseball spokesman Pat Courtney confirmed Wednesday that Jerry Dior was the designer of the three-toned image of a ball approaching a helmeted batter.

In a phone interview with The Associated Press, Dior fondly recalled a warm conversation with the affable Killebrew before which he was nervous about telling him what he knew.

Dior, now retired at age 79 and living in New Jersey, said he made the image in a few hours one day in 1968 for the marketing company he worked for then with a magic marker and a piece of layout paper. He took a couple of magazine photos and drew it.

"It was supposed to be a nondescript kind of design," Dior said. "That was the criteria of the whole project."

In a 2008 interview with ESPN.com, Killebrew said he was in the commissioner's office one day in the late 1960s when a man was marking up with a sketch pencil a photograph of Killebrew at bat and told him of the plan to produce a new MLB logo.

"Then the logo came out, and it did look like me," Killebrew told ESPN.com. "The only change was the angle of the bat. They changed that to kind of make it fit more into the design."

Killebrew said in the interview he never got that artist's name or asked for or received confirmation the logo was in his likeness. Killebrew said Bowie Kuhn, on the MLB committee that selected Dior's design for the logo before he became commissioner, told him before he died that he couldn't remember if Killebrew's pose was indeed the inspiration.

But the legend lived on.

Until Dior and Killebrew spoke as part of that ESPN.com story on the logo mystery.

"I told him he wasn't the figure in the design. It was nondescript. He asked me if I was sure, and I said yes," Dior said. "It was a great phone call. It was really, really nice. He seemed like a nice person."

Added Dior: "He's a great guy. I was sorry to see him pass away."

In a society — and an industry like professional sports — where newer is often seen as better, Dior said he's proud that his work has remained in place for so long.

"It hasn't changed a bit. The only thing that changed is the color," Dior said.

He acknowledged that he's not 100 percent certain the logo wasn't at least indirectly inspired by a Killebrew photo or some subconscious image imbedded in the designer's mind.

"I had a bunch of photographs. I can't swear that it wasn't Harmon," Dior said.

Killebrew was, without question, the basis for the logo of the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association, an organization that began in 1982.

MLBPAA public relations director Nikki Warner confirmed Wednesday that the three-frame silhouette is based on photos of Killebrew, who was a big part of helping the group get started and became a major supporter. He and Bob Feller were team captains last year in the "legends game" put on by the MLBPAA in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Also on Wednesday:

_ The Twins announced they'll hold a public memorial service for Killebrew at Target Field the night of May 26. His funeral at Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Ariz., will also be open to the public on Friday morning. The family has scheduled a private burial service for Monday in Killebrew's hometown of Payette, Idaho.

_ Killebrew's family issued a statement thanking fans for their support and prayers, asking that instead of flowers they send donations to the "Legacy Program" at Killebrew's foundation in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Carl Pavano helps put Minnesota Twins on two-game roll

John Shipley, Pioneer Press 5/19/11

OAKLAND, Calif. - Carl Pavano regained the form that won him 17 games last season, and his teammates rallied against former teammate Brian Fuentes in the 10th inning as the Twins on Wednesday night earned consecutive victories for the first time in more than two weeks.

Delmon Young opened the 10th with a pinch-hit single and scored the winning run on Trevor Plouffe's sacrifice fly.

Matt Capps retired the side in the 10th for his seventh save as Minnesota beat Oakland 4-3 in front of 15,355 at Oakland Coliseum.

Young started the 10th with a single to right and moved to third on an error by A's first baseman Daric Barton, who fielded Alexi Casilla's sacrifice bunt and threw the ball into center field, moving the runners to second and third with no outs.

After Denard Span grounded out to first, Plouffe drove a high fly ball to medium right. Young scored standing up. It was a big at-bat for Plouffe, who opened the gates for two unearned runs in the second with his two-out error. The rookie finished the night 2 for 4 with three RBIs.

The Twins led 1-0 and 3-2 before finally putting the A's away. They beat Seattle 2-1 on Tuesday, snapping a nine-game losing streak that plunged them 13-1/2 games behind Cleveland in the American League Central.

The Twins still may have had baseball's worst record (13-27) when Wednesday's game started, but they had the chance to win consecutive games for the first time since they won three in a row May 3-6. And Pavano gave them a chance.

The veteran right-hander entered the game a disappointing 2-4 with a 5.98 earned-run average in the first season of a two-year, \$16.5 million free-agent deal signed last winter, and without a quality start since April 24, when he gave up three runs over seven innings in a 4-3 victory over Cleveland.

But he was sharp Wednesday, giving up three runs on six hits over seven innings, though only one run was earned. He struck out two, walked none and threw 95 pitches, 67 for strikes.

For the second straight night, Minnesota opened the scoring in the first, a rarity all season, when Jason Kubel hit a two-out double and scored on Justin Morneau's single to center. It was Kubel's team-leading 11th double and Morneau's 11th RBI.

Oakland took the lead with two unearned runs in the second. Span robbed Hideki Matsui of at least a single with a sliding catch of his line drive in the right-center gap, and Casilla scooped a liner by Kurt Suzuki off the dirt for the second out, bringing up Ryan Sweeney with two outs and nobody on.

Sweeney legged out an infield single to second, but Pavano followed by getting Mark Ellis to ground harmlessly to short. Plouffe fielded the grounder cleanly but sailed the throw over Morneau's head, sending Sweeney to third and Ellis to second.

Kevin Kouzmanoff followed with a sharp single to left to score both runners and put the A's up 2-1.

Plouffe atoned for his mistake the next inning with a two-run single. Casilla led off with a single to deep short, and leadoff hitter Span followed with a double to center. With Casilla at third, Plouffe sent a single up the middle to score both and give Minnesota a 3-2 lead.

That stood until the sixth, when Barton led off with a double off the wall in right and moved to third on Josh Willingham's deep fly ball to right-center. Matsui followed with a sharp single to right that tied the score 3-3.

Up next: Twins at A's, 2:35 p.m. today, FSN, KSTP-AM 1500

Francisco Liriano shows his no-hitter was no fluke

John Shipley, Pioneer Press 5/18/11

OAKLAND, Calif. - Just when you're ready to give up on Francisco Liriano, he pulls you back in.

His 2011 season has been one of highs and lows, and if it's been mostly lows, the highs have been pretty spectacular. And the Twins left-hander believes he might be turning the corner after starting spring training with a shoulder problem that set him back more than anyone realized.

His nine-strikeout, one-walk performance in a 2-1 victory over 2010 AL Cy Young Award winner Felix Hernandez and the Seattle Mariners on Tuesday night reminded everyone how good Liriano can be, and that his no-hitter May 3 at Chicago was not a last hurrah for a pitcher who has spent the past few years trying to recapture the brief magic of his rookie season.

Since then, he's been good (14-10, 3.62 earned-run average last season) and occasionally ugly (5-13, 5.80 ERA in 2009). But Tuesday's victory, coupled with the no-hitter, indicate Liriano, 27, is far from done. The win against one of the major leagues' best pitchers snapped the Twins' nine-game losing streak.

"We had to have a performance like that," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "With who he was matched up against, you had to have it; that guy is not going to give up anything. And (Liriano) stepped up and did it."

It was the kind of performance the Twins will need much more of if they're to rebound from their worst start since 1995 and defend their 2009 and 2010 Central Division crowns. They signed Liriano to a one-year,

\$4.3 million contract hoping he would help lead the way.

And if he can't be spectacular every night, the Twins at least would like to see Liriano level off to a happy medium. In his three victories, he has given up eight hits in 22-1/3 innings and has a 1.20 ERA; in his five losses, he has surrendered 25 hits in 20-1/3 innings and has an 11.50 ERA.

The discrepancy is twofold, Liriano said. One, he started the season pitching to contact, that very Twins Way of approaching a game, and one contrary to his nature. Two, it's been only recently that he has felt fully recovered from the sore shoulder with which he arrived at spring training in February.

"The first couple games, I was pitching different from the way I used to pitch - pitching to contact. That's not the way I know how to pitch. And I wasn't feeling that good pitching like that," he said.

The sore shoulder, the result of overworking it during the offseason, set him back more than anyone knew. Trying to build stamina - until the no-hitter, he had never completed a professional start - he lifted barbells and threw a lot of pitches.

"It didn't work," he said.

Instead, it knocked him out the first week of spring training, and it has taken until recently to fully recover.

"It killed me," he said. "When I started throwing in a game, I felt like I hadn't been throwing in three months. So, it took me awhile to find my release point, everything. And my shoulder bothered me at that point, too. It wasn't 100 percent. But I'm getting there."

There is no more pain, he said, just occasional tightness, something that has led to some bad performances this season. Common perception is that Liriano has such great stuff that his major issue is mental; Liriano said it's not that simple.

Mind and body can't be separated.

"Sometimes, when my body doesn't feel that well, I can't control myself - I try to do too much, I put too much pressure on myself," he said. "Instead of pitching with what I have that day, I try to create something that isn't there. It's mental and physical."

After the no-hitter, Liriano took a brief pounding against Detroit, giving up four runs on four hits and three walks before leaving after three innings because of illness. He couldn't catch his breath and felt weak.

That start, Gardenhire said, should be taken out of the equation.

"He threw a no-hitter, and then he got sick from the flu and couldn't breathe on the mound," he said. "That's pretty much a time you want to take a pitcher out, when he can't breathe. That's not a bad outing; he was sick."

Twins catcher Drew Butera is solid behind the plate, but he ranks last in major league hitting with .108 average

John Shipley, Pioneer Press 5/18/11

OAKLAND, Calif. - No one expected Drew Butera to hit .300 this season; he's a catch-and-throw guy, one of the best in baseball, manager Ron Gardenhire said. Still, no one expected this.

Butera's batting average is an eyesore even on a team batting a major league-worst .225. Through Tuesday's games, his .108 average was the worst in the majors for any batter with more than 47 at-bats.

"He hasn't swung very good," Gardenhire said.

Butera was promoted to the big leagues out of spring training in 2010 and has been there ever since, and he's in no danger of going back to Class AAA Rochester, Gardenhire said.

"Offensively, it's a work in progress," the manager said. "He's not Joe Mauer when it comes to swinging the bat; we know that, and we just need to get the most out of him we can. He can catch it and throw it with anybody in baseball, and that's where he makes his money."

Butera has a terrific arm and has consistently earned praise for the way he calls his game. As a rookie, he became Carl Pavano's personal catcher as the right-hander went 17-11 with a 3.35 earned-run average, and he was behind the plate for Francisco Liriano's no-hitter May 3 at Chicago.

Still, he's not happy being known only for his glove.

"They say everything I do offensively is a plus, but I like to hit," he said. "I like getting hits; I like helping the team offensively. So, no, it doesn't affect me when people say, 'Well, he's here for his defense,' because I know I can hit."

Butera isn't the only catcher struggling at the plate. Four Twins catchers, including Mauer, have combined to bat .135 with no home runs and eight runs batted in this season.

Butera played 49 games as a rookie, batting .197 with 13 RBIs. This season, he already has 26 games under his belt. That wasn't the plan, Gardenhire pointed out. Mauer hasn't played since April 12 and is in Fort Myers, Fla., rehabbing his way back from leg weakness.

"Drew's our backup catcher," the manager said. "He's supposed to be your backup catcher, with Joe Mauer catching five days a week and Drew catching one day a week. If you're relying on Drew to be your offensive dynamo, it's just not going to happen. That's just not his skill level."

Still, Butera expects more of himself.

"It's always tough to struggle, but it's just one of those things you go through, and if you let it weigh on you it just gets worse," he said. "For me, the only way to get out of it is to keep working hard - take extra swings in the cage, another BP, whatever it takes.

"It's something hitters go through at times, and I'm going through it right now."

Young gets to "relax": Delmon Young was given a second straight night off, replaced in left field by rookie Ben Revere, a left-handed bat Gardenhire liked against A's starter Brandon McCarthy.

"As you saw, Delmon's scuffling along here - let him get some work in BP and get out there, relax a little, watch a couple (of games) and then get back to it tomorrow and see what happens," Gardenhire said.

Young is batting .062 (1 for 15) with 10 strikeouts since returning from the disabled list May 13. Revere is probably playing his last few games with the Twins for a while because outfielder Jason Repko is expected to return for the homestand that starts Monday against the Mariners.

Gardenhire stressed he hasn't given up on Young, who led the Twins with 112 RBIs last season.

"We definitely need Delmon," he said. "We need Delmon to get in there and get his swings."

Killebrew services: Two buses will be available to take team personnel to Friday's memorial service in Peoria, Ariz., for Harmon Killebrew, who died of cancer Tuesday at age 74. The Twins will be in Arizona for a three-game interleague series against the Diamondbacks.

Burial will be Monday in Payette, Idaho, and the Twins will hold a memorial service at 7 p.m. May 26 at Target Field.

Briefly: Designated hitter Jim Thome is expected to return from the disabled list in time to play Monday against the Mariners. He's in Fort Myers getting at-bats in extended spring training games while recovering from a strained oblique muscle.

Harmon Killebrew family, Minnesota Twins announce funeral and memorial plans

Pioneer Press, 5/18/11

The Harmon Killebrew Family and the Minnesota Twins have announced plans for funeral services and burial of late Twins legend Harmon Killebrew.

The funeral service will be held at 10 a.m. Friday at Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Ariz. Burial will be held Monday in Payette, Idaho.

The Twins will hold a memorial service at 7 p.m. May 26 at Target Field.

Additional details on the memorial service will be released when they become available.

Memories of Harmon keep flooding in

Patrick Rousse, 1500ESPN.com 5/19/11

The electronic mailbox has been stuffed with memories of Harmon Killebrew this week, as Twins fans responded to the death of the great slugger and grand gentleman. Here are a few:

FROM JIM HOCH/

"I used to sit in the old Twins Room below Met Stadium. The son of Joe Bilcik, manager of the dining room, was a good friend of mine.

"Harmon would come in after the game and have a coke with us. I was about 13 and in awe of sitting next to him. He was the nicest guy in the world. He became my favorite Twin, forever.

"At the playoffs a couple years ago, I had the chance to sit next to Harmon. I reminded him of our previous meetings and explained my connection to the Twins Room.

"Harmon looked at me and said, 'I heard Joe Bilcik passed away a couple of years ago. I was very sorry to hear that.'

"I thought, 'Wow, this guy is genuinely sorry that Joe passed on and he really does remember him.'

"After the game I looked up Harmon in the VIP tent and asked him if we could have a picture together. He said, 'Let's go outside where the lighting is better.' "

FROM PAT THOMPSON/

(Note: Pat was a long-time colleague of mine at the St. Paul newspapers.)

"Hands down, Harmon was the nicest athlete ever.

"I will always remember Harmon Killebrew Day, the brainchild of Bob Fowler and the Twin Cities baseball writers (when Harmon came back in 1975 as member of the KC Royals). We really didn't do it justice, but the thoughts behind it were well intentioned. I still chuckle at the green-tinted poster of Harmon we sold for \$1 to raise money. Deep down, Harmon was very moved.

"My other favorite Harmon story is when I filled in on the Twins' beat for a road trip to Texas and Detroit. The Twins played Memorial Day and took the Tuesday off, so Herb Carneal invited me to join him and Harmon for a round of golf at Colonial _ courtesy of Interlachen pro Billy Kidd's phone call to set up green fees, carts, clubs and shoes.

"We played nine holes and marveled at the power of Harmon's drives. His short game was not memorable, like his bunting, and I laughed myself silly on the ninth hole when Herb announced, 'Harmon and I should not have to add a stroke for going in the water in front of the green. We didn't know it was there.'

"Then, when we were reclaiming our newly shined street shoes, Herb came up, stuttered a minute and said to Harmon and me that Bill Kidd had forgotten to make the phone call.

"A Hall of Fame ballplayer turned telecaster and a radio broadcaster dug into their wallets , while the sportswriter dipped into his week's expense account to cover the bill.

"After a so-so stay in Texas, the Twins flew to Detroit with a late-night arrival in the brand new Renaissance Hotel. Riding up the elevator with manager Gene Mauch, Harmon turned to Mauch and said as he was getting off on his floor, 'Gene, you are liable to lose a couple of ballplayers in this hotel.'

"Mauch, out of respect to Harmon, waited until the elevator door closed and said, 'I'd like to lose a couple of those ballplayers.' "

FROM RICK VAIL/

"Did you know Harmon was going to Oregon on a football scholarship to replace George Shaw, the All-American quarterback that threw the first Vikings score in history, if he had not signed with the Washington Senators as a bonus baby?"

"Harmon wore No. 12 in high school and wanted that number when he came to the Senators. It was already taken taken by Wayne Terwilliger, and Harmon was assigned No. 25.

"Over the next two years, Terwilliger was gone and Harmon was able to wear his favorite No. 12. Then, he was sent to the minors in 1956, and when he returned, the dastardly Tex Clevenger had taken No. 12. That allowed Camilo Pascual to take No. 17, by the way.

"Tex wouldn't give Harmon the number, so Killebrew took Mickey Vernon's old No. 3. So, if it weren't for Tex Clevenger, we would be honoring No. 12.

"Now the rest of the story as Harmon told me: His mother was cleaning the attic one day and found an old jersey she had made for Harmon in grade school for the basketball team. She had taken one of his grandfather's undershirts and sewn the No. 3 on the back.

"Maybe it was fate."

FROM COLLEEN HOLM/

"I went to Cooperstown with my two sisters for the induction of Kirby Puckett. We got there a day early, checked out the museum and walked around the village.

"We walked by a table where Ernie Banks, Yogi Berra and Harmon were signing autographs. Could there be three better ambassadors for baseball?"

"We were the only people at the table. Everyone else seemed to be down the street, gathered around Pete Rose. We had a nice conversation and finally Harmon said, 'Where are you girls from?'"

"We all grinned and told him 'Minnesota,' and Harmon smiled and said, 'Come on over here and take your picture with me.'"

"The next day we cheered Kirby and cried when Bill Mazerowski faltered 40 seconds into his speech. But the best part of that trip was getting the chance to meet Harmon."

Twins Daily: Trevor Plouffe makes up for errant throw in win over A's

Phil Mackey, 1500ESPN.com 5/18/11

A throwing error by [Trevor Plouffe](#) cost the Minnesota Twins two runs in the early going, but the young shortstop made up for it with his bat by delivering three RBIs and the go-ahead sacrifice fly in a 4-3, 10-inning win over the Oakland A's on Wednesday night.

The skinny

Plouffe's fielding blunder cost the Twins early, but his bat later made up for the gaffe.

With a runner on first and two outs in the second inning, Plouffe fielded a routine groundball off the bat of Mark Ellis and sailed the throw over first baseman [Justin Morneau](#)'s head. Ellis advanced to second base and lead runner Ryan Sweeney advanced to third, and Kevin Kouzmanoff then drove them both in with a base hit to put the A's (22-21) up 2-1.

Plouffe avenged the mistake in the top half of the third inning, delivering a two-RBI single up the middle to put the Twins (14-27) back in front 3-2.

Then, with the game tied 3-3 in the top of the 10th inning, Plouffe connected for a deep fly ball to right field off closer [Brian Fuentes](#) to score [Delmon Young](#) from third base.

Turning point

Pinch hitting for [Drew Butera](#), Young came in and delivered a leadoff single in the 10th inning. [Alexi Casilla](#) followed by dropping down a sacrifice bunt, but first baseman Daric Barton's throw to second sailed into left field, allowing Young and Casilla to advance into scoring position.

[Denard Span](#) grounded out harmlessly to first base, but Plouffe followed with the go-ahead sac fly.

Numbers game

2: Strikeouts for starting pitcher [Carl Pavano](#), which is one more punchout than he had in his previous three starts combined. Pavano pitched seven solid innings, allowing three runs (one earned) on six hits and zero walks.

7: Saves for closer [Matt Capps](#), who pitched a clean 10th to lock things down.

2: Games in a row Young has sat on the bench to start the game. In five games since returning from a rib injury, Young is now 2-for-17 with 10 strikeouts.

88: Plate appearances between extra-base hits for the Twins prior to [Jason Kubel](#)'s first-inning double.

Health report

- Manager [Ron Gardenhire](#) [told reporters](#) that DH [Jim Thome](#) (strained oblique) and OF [Jason Repko](#) (strained right quad) are both expected to be activated in time for Monday's game at Target Field.
- C [Joe Mauer](#) (weakness/soreness) remains in Fort Myers where he will continue to rehab.

On deck

Right-hander [Nick Blackburn](#) (2-4, 3.70) enters Thursday's series finale against Oakland (2:35 p.m., 1500 ESPN) on a roll, posting a 1.74 ERA with 14 strikeouts and nine walks in his last three starts (20 2/3 innings). Perhaps most importantly, however, is Blackburn's 50% groundball rate, which is what he relies on most, with help from defenders.

With Dallas Braden shelved for the season following April shoulder surgery, right-hander Tyson Ross (3-2, 2.50) has done a solid job as the replacement, allowing three earned runs or fewer in each of his five starts so far. Ross has also given up just one home run over that span.

Coming up

- Friday: at Arizona, 8:40 p.m. LHP [Brian Duensing](#) (2-3, 4.61) vs. RHP Ian Kennedy (4-1, 3.05).
- Saturday: at Arizona, 9:10 p.m. RHP [Scott Baker](#) (2-3, 3.99) vs. RHP Armando Galarraga (3-4, 5.91).
- Sunday: at Arizona, 3:10 p.m. LHP [Francisco Liriano](#) (3-5, 6.12) vs. RHP Daniel Hudson (4-5, 4.03).

Twins to hold memorial for Harmon Killebrew on May 26 at Target Field

Tom Pelissero 1500ESPN.com 5/18/11

Target Field will host a public memorial service for Harmon Killebrew at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 26.

The Minnesota Twins announced the plan on Wednesday, a day after Killebrew [passed away](#) after a battle with esophageal cancer. The legendary slugger was 74.

Additional details about the memorial will be released once they're available, the team said.

A public funeral service will be held at 10 a.m. Mountain time on Friday at Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Ariz., near Killebrew's home in Scottsdale.

Killebrew will be buried in a private ceremony on Monday in his hometown of Payette, Idaho.

In lieu of flowers, the Killebrew family urges fans to make a donation to the Harmon Killebrew Foundation's "Legacy Program." Donations can be made by mail to P.O. Box 14550, Scottsdale, Ariz., 85267 or online at www.HarmonKillebrewFoundation.org.

Twins, Blackburn look for three straight

Alan Ferguson, AP 5/19/11

The Minnesota Twins are on the verge of matching their longest win streak of a trying season, but they may have to produce a few more runs to accomplish that feat.

That may not be easy as they'll face surprising Tyson Ross in Thursday's finale of a two-game set with the Oakland Athletics.

Despite averaging 2.3 runs in its last six games, Minnesota (14-27) managed to record consecutive wins for the fourth time this season with a 4-3 victory in 10 innings Wednesday in Oakland. Trevor Plouffe went 2 for 4 with a career-high three RBIs, including the go-ahead sacrifice fly.

"As easy as you lose games you can win games," Plouffe said.

The Twins, hitting .207 over their last 11 contests, previously won three in a row May 3-6 and matching that streak might prove tough against Ross, who is 2-0 with a 1.69 ERA in his last four starts. He gave up two runs and six hits over a career-high 7 1-3 innings in Saturday's 6-2 win over the Chicago White Sox.

"He's learning how to pitch," catcher Kurt Suzuki told the team's website. "We all knew he had great stuff and now he's not trying to go too fast. He's slowing himself down. Quality location, making quality pitches and good things happen."

Ross (3-2, 2.50 ERA), who has never started against Minnesota, joined the A's rotation after Dallas Braden needed season-ending surgery on his left shoulder.

"We'll miss Dallas for sure," reliever Brad Ziegler said. "At the same time, I feel like we haven't missed a beat with Tyson. Everybody always talks about in basketball that when one guy goes down, it's not like you're playing four on five. Somebody else comes in, and that's the same case here."

Like Ross, Minnesota's Nick Blackburn (2-4, 3.70) has also thrived lately, going 1-0 with a 1.74 ERA in his last three starts

Blackburn pitched a season-high 7 2-3 innings Saturday against Toronto and retired 17 straight during one stretch of that game. However, he also gave up a tying triple to one of the final batters he faced.

"That kind of spoils what would've been a pretty good outing," he said. "I still feel pretty good. I made some pretty good pitches and all that stuff, but the fact that it ended that way is still pretty frustrating."

Blackburn might not have much better luck Thursday as he's 0-4 with a 7.99 ERA in last five starts against Oakland. The right-hander, though, gave up an unearned run and six hits during a 1-0 defeat at Target Field on April 9.

He might catch a break in this matchup with Coco Crisp possibly out of the lineup due to personal reasons. The A's outfielder, who is 8 for 16 in his last four games, is 5 for 11 in his career against Blackburn.

"I'm not positive if he'll be back tomorrow, but hopeful," manager Bob Geren said.

Delmon Young has the Twins' only hit against Ross, but he is 2-for-17 with 10 strikeouts since returning from the disabled list. He's also been held out of the lineup for consecutive days but might return Thursday.

"Delmon was scuffling along, and this gives him a chance to take (batting practice) and get out there and relax a little bit and watch a couple (games)," manager Ron Gardenhire told the team's website. "So we'll let him get back in there tomorrow."

Morneau determined to regain MVP form

Tyler Mason, FSNorth.com 5/19/11

The long road back hasn't been easy for Justin Morneau.

The Twins first baseman and former MVP missed the second half of the 2010 season after a concussion knocked him out on July 7. As a result, Morneau had an abbreviated spring training, playing in just 11 games before the 2011 season began.

To make matters worse, a viral infection kept Morneau out of a handful of games in mid-April. While battling the flu, he lost 10 to 12 pounds, not all of which he's gained back yet.

"He's definitely still thin," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "You can see it in his face and everything else. It's a process."

Slowly but surely, however, Morneau is showing signs of progress. He recently had a five-game hitting streak, picking up seven hits — four doubles — during that stretch. His average still sits at .231, and he's driven in 11 runs in 36 games. But Morneau said he's trying to focus on the positives as he works his way back.

"There's good days and bad days," Morneau said. "Moral victories don't really matter, but this game is so much related to confidence that you have to look for something good. If you sit there and reflect on the bad over and over, it's going to eat you up.

"I've been through that before, we've all been through it. You learn from it and what you need to do to get out of it and we kind of have to figure that out and just believe it."

"He's missed a lot of baseball. He was out for a long time and he didn't have a full spring training," Gardenhire said. "I think he's probably going about what you'd expect. He's starting to put better swings out there."

Twins center fielder Denard Span can sympathize with what Morneau is dealing with, in a way. In 2009, Span suffered a period of dizzy spells that kept him out for most of June. He returned to full form after some time off, but not without first overcoming both physical and mental hurdles.

"I've kind of been through what he's going through a little bit with having a head-type injury," Span said. "It's just going to take time. I think slowly but surely as the season goes on, as he mentally starts getting in shape and gets back used to the grind every day that he'll be fine."

Morneau said during Minnesota's series with Toronto that Saturday was the first time he tried to fully work out to regain his weight and strength. But Morneau also kept baseball — and his on-the-field struggles — in perspective. Morneau was shaken by the news of former Minnesota Wild player Derek Boogaard's death last Friday. Morneau, an avid hockey fan, knew Boogaard on a personal level.

Four days later, Twins slugger Harmon Killebrew — who served as a mentor to Morneau over the years — lost his battle with cancer at age 74. It was announced on Friday, the same day as Boogaard's death, that Killebrew was ending his fight with the disease and entering hospice care.

"There's a lot worse things in the world, as we've seen the last couple days," Morneau said last weekend. "It's one of those things where you come in and feel lucky you get to put on a uniform and you feel blessed and you believe good things are going to happen."

The struggling Twins are hoping Morneau will be at least close to the player he's been throughout his career. Morneau, who turned 30 on Sunday, is a four-time All-Star. Before his concussion last year, he put up MVP-like numbers: 102 hits, 18 home runs and 56 RBIs in 81 games — exactly half of an MLB season.

"Everybody knows what he's capable of doing," Span said. "It's just a matter of just getting him back where he needs to be, because we know he can carry this team."

"We've got a few guys in the middle of the lineup that have to knock in runs and have to get it done when it's going their way, and he's one of them," Gardenhire said of Morneau. "All you can ask is that they go out there and work their tail off."

Gardenhire has said he doesn't want to put added pressure on players like Morneau or Jason Kubel as the Twins continue to sputter on offense. At the same time, Morneau realizes he's a big piece of the puzzle if Minnesota is to climb out of the cellar and get back in the race before it's too late.

"I expect a lot more out of myself and I'm sure everyone expects a lot more out of me," Morneau said. "But I'm not going to come in feeling sorry for myself because I'm hitting whatever. I'm going to come in tomorrow, same thing I did today, believing we're going to win a baseball game and good things are going to happen. That's all you can do."

Bullpen, Perkins shine in Twins win

Tyler Mason, FSNorth.com 5/19/11

The Minnesota Twins have been searching for a set-up man all season, and they may have found one in Glen Perkins.

For the second game in a row, Perkins pitched a scoreless eighth inning. In Wednesday's 4-3 win against Oakland, Perkins helped preserve a 3-3 tie by recording three outs in the eighth and another out in the bottom of the ninth before giving way to Joe Nathan.

The left-handed Perkins picked up two strikeouts in the eighth after allowing a leadoff single to Cliff Pennington. He fanned Daric Barton and Josh Willingham to end the inning, and came back out in the ninth to retire left-hander Hideki Matsui.

Perkins needed 16 pitches — 12 strikes — to get four outs Wednesday. In Tuesday's win against Seattle, he threw nine pitches to retire the side in the eighth, including strikeouts of Michael Saunders and Chone Figgins.

In 22 innings pitched in 2011, Perkins has allowed just three earned runs — only one of which came in an eighth-inning appearance.

Perkins was primarily a starter for Minnesota in 2008 and 2009, making 43 starts in those two seasons. In 2010, however, Perkins pitched in just 13 total games, with only one start. Wednesday was his 20th relief appearance this season.

After a scoreless 1 1/3 innings Wednesday, Perkins' earned run average dipped to 0.82.

"Perkins did a really good job," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "Our bullpen came in and battled."

With a tie game in the ninth, Gardenhire called on Nathan instead of closer Matt Capps. Nathan worked out of a jam after giving up a one-out double to Kurt Suzuki. He intentionally walked Ryan Sweeney, struck out Mark Ellis and got Conor Jackson to ground out to send the game to extras.

Since Nathan took himself out of the closer's role earlier this season, the Twins have tried to work him into more high-pressure situations. He certainly had one Wednesday, and responded with a scoreless ninth.

"We've kind of kept him away from situations that we're trying to let him get his feet back on the ground," Gardenhire said of Nathan. "We've got to start pushing the envelope here and start getting him into situations where he can really help us."

After Minnesota took a 4-3 lead in the top of the 10th, Capps closed the door with a 1-2-3 bottom of the inning for his seventh save of the year. The last at-bat didn't end easily, however, as Barton sent a deep fly to right on a 3-2 count for the game's final out.

"I was just coming right after him. I felt like if I could throw something other than a fastball over the plate, he was going to swing," Capps said. "I think he was on the same page as me and put a good swing on the slider there. Fortunately for me and for us, he didn't hit it well enough to get it out of here."

—Several injured Twins players continue to make progress, with a few nearing their return from the disabled list. Designated hitter Jim Thome (strained oblique) and outfielder Jason Repko (strained quadriceps) will re-join the Twins on Sunday and are both expected to return on Monday. Second baseman Tsuyoshi Nishioka (broken leg) has begun running, and catcher Joe Mauer (bilateral leg weakness) is continuing his workout program in Florida.

—The Twins announced funeral and memorial plans for the late Minnesota slugger Harmon Killebrew, who passed away Tuesday after a battle with esophageal cancer. Killebrew's funeral service will take place Friday in Peoria, Ariz., and is open to the public. His burial — a private service — will take place Monday in Killebrew's hometown of Payette, Idaho. Twins fans in Minnesota will have the chance to pay their final respects to one of the franchise's all-time greats on Thursday, May 26 with a public memorial service. The event is set to begin at 7 p.m. at Target Field in Minneapolis.

—Twins head athletic trainer Rick McWane will be one of the trainers for the American League at this year's All-Star Game at Chase Field in Phoenix. McWane, in his 23rd season in the Twins' organization, will be joined on the AL training staff by Chicago White Sox assistant trainer Brian Ball. The All-Star game will take place on July 12.

Target Field named sports facility of the year

FSNorth.com 5/18/11

Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn. – Target Field has been named The Sports Facility of the Year by Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal and Sports Business Daily. The award was announced at the 2011 Sports Business Awards Ceremony, tonight in New York City. The Sports Facility of the Year Award is given to new, renovated or established sports facilities in North America whose primary function is hosting and staging sporting events.

"The Twins are honored to have won such a prestigious award," said Dave St. Peter, Twins President. "We are immensely grateful to our many partners like Populous, Mortenson Construction, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Ballpark Authority, whose collaboration, ingenuity and support helped make Target Field such a landmark facility."

To win the award, the Twins and Target Field bested other great facilities including Amway Arena (home of the Orlando Magic), Arrowhead Stadium (home of the Kansas City Chiefs), Consol Energy Center (home of the Pittsburgh Penguins), New Meadowlands Stadium (home of the New York Giants/Jets) and Red Bull Arena (home of the New York Red Bulls).

"Target Field is a ballpark beloved by its fans, offering a wonderful benefit to its community and now honored by industry leaders," said Earl Santee, Populous Senior Principal. "We knew from the outset it would be a great project. It's nice to receive validation as the best sports facility in the country; one that is a model to be revered and studied for future stadia development."

Launched in 2008, the Sports Business Awards were established by SportsBusiness Journal and SportsBusiness Daily to celebrate and recognize the leaders, visionaries and day-to-day practitioners who personify excellence in the business of sports.

Plouffe focused on doing his job

Tyler Mason, FSNorth.com 5/18/11

Trevor Plouffe felt ready for spring training. He even went down to Fort Myers early to make sure he was prepared.

But for all the work the 24-year-old Twins shortstop put in, it didn't translate into results on the field in spring. Plouffe hit just 7-for-34 (.216) with one walk, one extra-base hit and three runs batted in. He struggled in the field as well, committing a team-high five errors. No other Twin had more than two errors this spring.

"It was very frustrating. I worked my tail off during the offseason to get ready," Plouffe said. "I think quite possibly I over-prepared and was trying to do things that I normally don't do. I was trying to be someone that I wasn't."

Hoping to head north with the Twins after the spring as Minnesota's every-day shortstop, Plouffe instead started his season with Class AAA Rochester. The Twins chose to go with Alexi Casilla at shortstop, not Plouffe.

Instead of getting down on himself, Plouffe responded by putting up impressive numbers with the Red Wings. In 78 at-bats, Plouffe hit .282 and slugged .590, with six homers -- a team high at that point -- and 13 RBIs.

"Once I took a step back and realized what was going on, I decided that the only thing I can do is do myself and make sure I'm prepared and the game will take care of itself," Plouffe said. "That's what I've been doing."

And on May 3, Plouffe got the call that he was headed up to Minnesota. The Twins put designated hitter Jim Thome on the disabled list with a left oblique strain, and Plouffe was recalled from Rochester to fill the roster spot.

Since then, Plouffe has made seven starts at shortstop and is batting .269/.406/.462 with a pair of RBIs and a home run. Twins manager Ron Gardenhire has said Plouffe has the opportunity to become Minnesota's every-day shortstop.

"I told him when he came up here, it's your turn to take it and run. You're going to go out there and play," Gardenhire said. "If you're healthy, you're playing. I'm going to put you at shortstop. Do with it what you can."

"I feel like it's mine, and it's mine to lose," Plouffe said of the starting shortstop role. "I'm just going to go out there and try to keep getting on base and just field the routine plays and be a shortstop, be out there and do my job."

Plouffe, a first-round pick of the Twins in 2004, had a handful of short stints in the majors in 2010, making his debut on May 21. He played three games in May, four in mid-June and three in August before being called up when the roster expanded in September. Offensively, however, Plouffe never found a rhythm last year, as he finished the season hitting just .146 with a .143 on-base percentage.

One year later, Plouffe said he's learned from those experiences in 2010.

"Sometimes you first get up here and it can seem like it's going a million miles an hour," Plouffe said. "You've got to realize that it is the same game. You have to prepare for it the same way and just slow it down."

Plouffe was held out of the lineup for several games as he dealt with a hamstring injury. He returned May 13 for the first game of a three-game series against the Blue Jays and started all three games over the weekend. He went 1-for-3 Sunday with an RBI double and two runs scored. And after his shaky spring in the field, Plouffe has yet to commit an error in 21 combined games between Rochester and Minnesota.

"The hamstring thing, I think it's OK," Gardenhire said. "He said he felt good (Friday) night. I want him to play. I want to see what we've got, see what he can do. It's his turn."

Killebrew memorial services

FSNorth.com 5/18/11

Harmon Killebrew's family and the Minnesota Twins have announced plans for funeral, burial and memorial services to honor the legendary Hall of Famer who died Tuesday at age 74.

-- Funeral service (open to the public): 10 a.m. (Mountain time), Friday, May 20

Location: Christ's Church of the Valley, 7007 West Happy Valley Road, Peoria, Ariz. (623) 376-2444.

-- Burial service (private): Monday, May 23

Location: Payette, Idaho

-- Memorial service (open to the public): 7 p.m., Thursday, May 26

Location: Target Field, Minneapolis

Additional details on the memorial service will be released when they become available.

Hot starters get nod in afternoon series finale

By Nick Kosmider, MLB.com 5/19/11

When the A's confirmed they would lose starter Dallas Braden -- as expected -- for the season after surgery to repair a torn anterior capsule in his pitching shoulder, a magnifying glass hovered its way above Tyson Ross.

Oakland's 24-year-old right-hander, who is 3-2 with a 2.50 ERA in eight games -- five starts -- this season, has been tasked with taking over the rotation spot of the staff's elder statesman. But if others are upping their expectations for the young pitcher, Ross said it hasn't affected him.

"I haven't thought about it very much," Ross said. "I just want to come away from every start a little better and just learn something to build off of. I've done a pretty good job of that so far. As long as I continue to learn and keep growing as a pitcher, I think I'll be all right."

Ross answered the bell in a big way his last time out against the White Sox, when he gave up two runs on six hits in 7 1/3 innings, while striking out a career-high eight and walking one.

The righty will aim to take the next step in his progression on Thursday, when the A's wrap up a two-game series against the Twins and starter Nick Blackburn.

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki has been impressed with the way Ross has taken his duties in stride.

"We all knew he had great stuff, and now he's not trying to go too fast," Suzuki said. "He's slowing himself down. Quality location, making quality pitches and good things happen."

Blackburn, too, has been performing well of late. He struck out a career-high eight, while surrendering two runs over 7 2/3 innings against the Blue Jays in his last start. The right-hander, who didn't factor into the decision in that outing, retired 17 in row at one point.

"I think we're getting a pretty good grip on my mechanics right now, said Blackburn, who has a 1.74 ERA with 14 strikeouts over his last three starts. "Everything is coming out of my hand pretty good right now. I'm throwing all my pitches for strikes and, obviously, you can build on that."

Twins: Reinforcements coming

The Twins much-maligned offense has help on the way.

Minnesota manager Rod Gardenhire said designated hitter Jim Thome and outfielder Jason Repko are expected to be activated from the disabled list in time for Monday's game against the Mariners.

Thome, plagued by a strained oblique, hasn't played since April 30, and Repko has been on the disabled list since May 2 with a strained right quad.

A's: Bailey to rehab in Triple-A

The A's strong bullpen may not be far from receiving even more firepower.

Two-time All-Star reliever Andrew Bailey, who has not pitched for Oakland this season due to a right forearm strain, will begin a Minor League rehab assignment on Friday with Triple-A Sacramento.

Bailey threw 19 pitches in a scoreless inning of an extended spring training outing in Arizona on Tuesday and said his arm feels good, but A's manager Bob Geren isn't putting an exact timeline on the reliever's return to the big club.

"We're just going to go one outing at a time, and see how he bounces back, how he responds and plan it out," Geren said.

Worth noting

- With a spotless inning of work on Wednesday, A's reliever Grant Balfour extended his scoreless innings streak to 13 1/3 innings. His longest scoreless streak is 14 2/3 innings from June 8-July 9, 2008.
- David DeJesus went 0-for-5 on Wednesday, breaking a streak of 25 straight games with a hit against Minnesota.
- Twins late Hall of Famer Harmon Killebrew, who passed away on Tuesday, will be remembered at a funeral service at Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Ariz., in a ceremony open to the public on Friday at 10 a.m. There will be a private burial service on Monday in Payette, Idaho, the 11-time All-Star's hometown.

Plouffe delivers extra-inning win for Twins

Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com 5/19/11

OAKLAND -- The Twins have seemingly had their fair share of bad breaks this season.

But finally, they were able to come through and capitalize on a mistake, as A's first baseman Daric Barton made a crucial error in the 10th inning, and the Twins took advantage by scoring the winning run on a sacrifice fly by Trevor Plouffe in a 4-3 win over the A's on Wednesday at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

Barton simply airmailed a throw to second base on a sacrifice bunt attempt by Alexi Casilla -- after a pinch-hit single from Delmon Young -- to put runners at second and third. Plouffe didn't disappoint, as he lifted a sac fly to right field to plate the go-ahead run that held up, as Matt Capps notched his seventh save to preserve their second straight win.

"We've been playing an awful lot of close ballgames and not coming out on top enough," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "Whether it's one-run [wins], we're just in the mode where we just want to win games and series. And we had a really nice win last night, and we bounced back today against a good team we always seem to have a lot of battles with."

Plouffe was certainly able to battle and drove home a career-high three runs, despite making a mistake of his own in the second inning on a throwing error that led to two unearned runs.

But it was the final run he drove home that was the biggest, as he lifted a 1-0 changeup from former Minnesota left-hander Brian Fuentes into right field to score Young, who had a big hit to open the inning despite starting out the game on the bench for the second straight night after being hitless in his previous 12 at-bats.

"I was just looking for a ball over the plate, because with the infield in there are so many holes in the infield, and so many things you can do with the ball," Plouffe said of his final at-bat. "The first changeup was high and slow, and I missed, and the second one I was able to time a little better."

But Plouffe wouldn't have had that chance if it weren't for a little bit of luck for the Twins, as Fuentes and Barton were both a little too aggressive on Casilla's bunt attempt and nearly collided, forcing Barton to throw high to second base,

"It looked like both Fuentes and Barton went for it," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It kinda landed close to where either one could catch it, and Barton spun and threw and I think their bodies were a little bit close together and it might have affected the throw. They were both doing their jobs. That's a tough play to fall behind on, but I never believe one play here or there necessarily wins a game when we play 27 outs, or even 30, as we did tonight."

It came after a solid effort from right-hander Carl Pavano, who tossed seven effective innings, allowing three runs (one earned) on six hits and no walks along with two strikeouts.

So even though he was stuck with a no-decision, Pavano was more than happy with the way things went.

"It's a win," Pavano said. "The guys played great. We got those runs and we let them back into the ballgame, but our relievers shut them down and we got that extra run and Capps closed it out. I'll take that every time."

The Twins struck first with a run against A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy in the opening frame, as Jason Kubel doubled with two outs and scored on a single from Justin Morneau.

But the A's came back with two runs in the second, keyed by a throwing error by Plouffe at shortstop that allowed Mark Ellis to reach second and Ryan Sweeney, who singled with one out, to advance to third. Kevin Kouzmanoff helped the A's capitalize on the error with a two-run single to left field.

Minnesota, however, regained the lead in the third, when Casilla led off with a single and went to third on a double by Span. Plouffe was then able to redeem himself by plating two runs with a bouncing single to center field.

"That's what you want," Plouffe said of bouncing back from his error. "I was fortunate [to] come up with less than two outs with runners at second and third, and I was able to do that twice tonight. Obviously, it's in the back of your mind, but I'm not sure I was thinking about [that] the whole time."

Oakland tied the ballgame up in the sixth on an RBI single by Hideki Matsui that scored Barton, who doubled off the right-field wall to open the inning.

And they threatened to score in the bottom of the ninth against right-hander Joe Nathan, after he entered with one out in relief of Glen Perkins, who tossed 1 1/3 scoreless frames.

Nathan immediately gave up a double to Kurt Suzuki before intentionally walking Ryan Sweeney, but was able to strike out Mark Ellis looking and induce pinch-hitter Conor Jackson to ground out to quell the potential rally.

Nathan picked up his first win since Aug. 21, 2009, and in the process the Twins also won consecutive games for the first time since winning three straight May 3-6.

"As easy you can lose games, you can win games," Plouffe said. "We lost nine in a row, and who's to say we can't go out there and win nine games in a row. That's our mindset right now."

Twins set to begin Interleague Play on Friday

Brewers, D-backs, Dodgers, Giants and Padres on 2011 slate

By Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com 5/18/11

The Twins have historically used Interleague play to buoy their record with plenty of success against their National League counterparts over the years.

Minnesota has an impressive all-time record of 140-106 in Interleague play, keyed by a four-year stretch from 2006-09 when it went 43-19.

They're certainly hoping to repeat that success this season, as the Twins have struggled so far this season, but begin Interleague play on Friday against the D-backs at Chase Field.

This year, Minnesota plays four clubs from the National League West -- the D-backs, Padres, Giants and Dodgers -- while also playing six games against the Brewers.

Milwaukee is the club's natural rival in Interleague Play, which makes sense given the proximity and their history with the Brewers playing in the American League before joining the National League in 1998.

The Twins also travel to San Francisco in June to play the defending World Series champs, while also hosting the Dodgers in a rematch of the storied 1965 World Series that ended with Los Angeles winning in seven games.

The Twins will also look to fare better than they did last season, as they finished with a losing record against the National League for the first time since 2005.

Last year: The Twins went 8-10 in Interleague Play last season. They won series against the Phillies and Rockies, but lost four out of six against the Brewers. They also went 1-2 against both the Mets and Braves.

All-time: The Twins have generally fared well in Interleague play, with their best record in a season against the National League coming in '06, when they won 14 of 16 en route to winning the AL Central by one game over the Tigers. Their worst record was in 2000, when they went 7-11.

@ D-backs, May 20-22: The Twins have had some success against the D-backs in the past, with an 8-4 record in four Interleague series. They last played each other in 2008, when Minnesota swept Arizona in three games at the Metrodome, and have an all-time record of 4-2 at Chase Field.

Padres, June 17-19: The Twins will welcome the Padres to Target Field for the first time, as San Diego last traveled to Minnesota in 2005, when the Twins lost two out of three at the Metrodome. The Twins, though, have an all-time record of 6-3 against the Padres in Interleague Play.

@ Giants, June 21-23: Minnesota will head west to play the defending World Series champs at AT&T Park for the first time since 2003. It marks just the third time the two franchises have met in Interleague play, with both teams having a 3-3 record against each other.

@ Brewers, June 24-26: The Twins and Brewers have a long history, considering Milwaukee played in the American League until switching leagues in 1998. The Twins carry a 221-208 advantage overall against the Brewers, and have gone 15-15 at Miller Park and 36-32 in Interleague contests.

Dodgers, June 27-29: Minnesota and Los Angeles have only met six times in Interleague play, but their most famous meeting came in the 1965 World Series, when the Dodgers won the title in seven games. The Twins have a 4-2 record against the Dodgers in Interleague Play, and welcome them to Minnesota for the first time since 2006.

Brewers, July 1-3: The Twins finish Interleague Play by hosting their rivals for three games at Target Field. Minnesota won two out of three at home against Milwaukee last year.

Players to Watch:

Delmon Young, LF (.346, 5 HRs, 43 RBIs): Young has feasted on National League pitching in his career, including last season, when he hit .348/.380/.485 with 19 RBIs in 18 games.

Denard Span, CF (.255, 3 HRs, 9 RBIs): Span is having a breakout season, but in a small sample size of 23 Interleague games, he's batting more than 20 points worse than his overall career average.

Francisco Liriano, LHP (8-3, 2.80 ERA): Liriano has historically fared well against the National League, including in 2006 when he went 5-0 with a 1.80 ERA in five Interleague starts.

Nick Blackburn, RHP (4-3, 5.04 ERA): Blackburn has scuffled a bit in nine career Interleague starts, and it was evident last year, when he posted an 8.24 ERA in four starts against the Senior Circuit.

Thome and Repko set to return on Monday

By Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com 5/18/11

OAKLAND -- Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said designated hitter Jim Thome and outfielder Jason Repko will be activated from the disabled list before Monday's game against the Mariners at Target Field.

Thome had five at-bats in an extended spring training game for the second straight day on Wednesday, while Repko went 0-for-4 in his second game with Triple-A Rochester after going 2-for-5 with a homer on Tuesday.

"Thome is going to join us at home, and the plan is the same thing for Repko," Gardenhire said. "We just want them to get through the weekend. Repko needs at-bats and Thome definitely needs more at-bats, and this gives them the opportunity."

Gardenhire said Thome is better suited to get at-bats down at the club's Spring Training complex to get his swing in order, rather than be activated this weekend when the club plays the D-backs in interleague action at Chase Field, as he'd only serve as a pinch-hitter with no designated hitters in National League parks. Thome is scheduled to play in his next rehab game on Friday.

Young gets a day to clear head

OAKLAND -- Left fielder Delmon Young was held out of the lineup for a second consecutive day, as he's had problems at the plate since being activated from the disabled list on Friday.

Young went just 1-for-16 with 10 strikeouts and a sacrifice fly over his last 17 plate appearances, so Ben Revere started in left field for a second straight night.

"As we saw, Delmon was scuffling along, and this gives him a chance to take BP and get out there and relax a little bit and watch a couple [games]" Gardenhire said. "So we'll let him get back in there tomorrow."

Gardenhire also said he's liked what he's been seeing from Revere, who brings a contact-orientated approach and speed to the lineup.

"I like the speed and the run-around a little bit, but we definitely need Delmon to get in there and get his swings," Gardenhire said. "It was just back-to-back days to get a breather and a mental break, and we'll go from there."

Target Field named sports facility of year

OAKLAND -- Target Field was named "The Sports Facility of the Year" by Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal and Sports Business Daily at the 2011 Sports Business Awards Ceremony on Wednesday in New York City.

"The Twins are honored to have won such a prestigious award," said Twins president Dave St. Peter. "We are immensely grateful to our many partners like Populous, Mortenson Construction, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Ballpark Authority, whose collaboration, ingenuity and support helped make Target Field such a landmark facility."

Target Field won the award over Amway Arena (home of the Orlando Magic), Arrowhead Stadium (home of the Kansas City Chiefs), Consol Energy Center (home of the Pittsburgh Penguins), New Meadowlands Stadium (home of the New York Giants/Jets) and Red Bull Arena (home of the New York Red Bulls).

"Target Field is a ballpark beloved by its fans, offering a wonderful benefit to its community, and now honored by industry leaders," said Earl Santee, Populous Senior Principal. "We knew from the outset it would be a great project. It's nice to receive validation as the best sports facility in the country; one that is a model to be revered and studied for future stadia development."

Worth noting

OAKLAND -- Twins trainer Dave Pruemer gave another rundown of the Twins' injured players before Wednesday's game against the A's.

Left-hander Jose Mijares (left elbow strain) is scheduled to throw on Saturday, after his MRI revealed no damage on Tuesday.

Catcher Joe Mauer (bilateral leg weakness) began his workouts at the club's Spring Training complex in Fort Myers, Fla., and participated in baseball activities such as batting practice and throwing drills.

Second baseman Tsuyoshi Nishioka (broken left fibula) also resumed sprinting drills, and is inching closer to running the bases at full speed, which is likely the last step he needs before playing in rehab games.

"Running the bases hard will probably [be] one of the last things to go," Pruemer said.