



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

Sunday, July 19, 2015

- Ninth-inning rally wasted as Twins fall to Oakland. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 1
- Twins notes: Tommy Milone to face A's, his former team. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 2
- Plouffe has locked down third base in admirable fashion for Twins. Star Tribune (Reusse) p. 3
- Three Twins postgame thoughts from LEN3: Rallies, Replay and Suzuki. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 4
- Athletics 3, Twins 2: Glen Perkins' first blown save is a loser. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 4
- Torii at 40: Twins veteran Torii Hunter's 'Rules for Staying Young'. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 6
- Postgame Twinsights: Breaking down a painful 3-2 loss to the A's. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 8
- Twinsights: Boyhood A's fan J.R. Graham returns to his 'second home'. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 10
- Twinsights: Torii Hunter gets diapers, walker for his 40th birthday. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 11
- Morning Twinsights: Ervin Santana has had low-strikeout games before. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 12
- Review: Chesney, Aldean draw record crowd to Target Field. Pioneer Press (Raihala) p. 13
- Twins' comeback attempt falls short in 10th. MLB.com (Bollinger & Lee) p. 14
- Perkins' perfect record ends with blown save. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 15
- Hunter thankful to still be playing at age 40. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 15
- Milone to face former A's teammates for first time. MLB.com (Hass) p. 16
- Vogt's RBI single in 10th lifts A's, ends Twins' four-game win streak. Associated Press p. 17

Ninth-inning rally wasted as Twins fall to Oakland

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, CALIF. – Two clutch at-bats. A late lead. Closer Glen Perkins on the mound with his sparkling save streak. The way things have gone for the Twins this season, Saturday's game looked to be locked up.

Then it all turned so quickly.

The Athletics responded with a run in the ninth inning against the Twins' indomitable closer, then Stephen Vogt's RBI single in the next inning put the Twins away as Oakland won 3-2 in 10 innings on Saturday.

The Twins were 0-34 when trailing after eight innings before their dramatic seven-run rally July 10 against the Tigers. They were set to make it two in a row Saturday.

Brian Dozier was behind in the count 0-2 to starter Scott Kazmir when he hit a grounder to the left of third baseman Brett Lawrie. Lawrie fielded the ball, spun and threw wildly to first, allowing Dozier to move to second. Kazmir was pulled after 112 pitches and 8⅓ shutout innings.

Tyler Clippard came in and got ahead 0-2 vs. Torii Hunter but plunked him on the shoulder. Mauer came to the plate to face Clippard, who had held lefthanded hitters to a .088 batting average. Clippard got ahead 1-2, but Mauer fouled off two pitches and fought back to get the count full. Clippard threw a breaking ball and Mauer hit it off the right field wall for a tying RBI double.

Rookie Miguel Sano stepped into the big moment and was unflappable, hitting a ball deep enough to right field to score pinch runner Shane Robinson.

"Joe had a really had a good at-bat," manager Paul Molitor said. "And Sano got the sacrifice fly."

Perkins got the first two outs in the ninth, then Lawrie grounded hard toward short. Eduardo Escobar made a fine diving stop, but his throw was a hair late. Then Perkins was charged with a wild pitch, enabling Lawrie to move to second. Pinch hitter Jake Smolinski, hitting .143 at the time, followed by blooming a tying RBI single to left.

Perkins' consecutive save streak ended at 28 games.

"I put myself in that spot and I didn't work my way out this time," Perkins said. "It was bound to happen. I've said all along I'm going to blow a save. I'm going to blow more than one. I've got to be able to bounce back. I'd love nothing more than to get the ball tomorrow and win a series."

Billy Burns led off the bottom of the 10th with a double to right-center off Casey Fien. On Fien's second pitch to Vogt, Burns stole third.

"The stolen base was disappointing," Molitor said. "We saw him bluff on the first pitch like he wanted to go. We tried to get their attention to slow him down. That was a big play."

With the infield in, Vogt slapped a single to left to end the game.

It was a dramatic ending for a game that began with Kazmir locked up in a duel with Phil Hughes. The Twins righthander pitched six shutout innings, but in the seventh he gave up his 23rd homer of the season, a solo shot by Billy Butler.

"I didn't think he got it all, but he got enough of it," Hughes said. "You're hoping in those games that you're not the first guy to break or make a mistake."

The Twins had the bases loaded in the first with one out, but Kazmir escaped. But when they scored twice in the ninth, both starters were off the hook.

"You have a chance to have a nice comeback," Molitor said. "We had that feeling. Two outs, two strikes there. And things just kind of went haywire on us."

Twins notes: Tommy Milone to face A's, his former team

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, CALIF. – Tommy Milone gets a chance to show his former team what it's missing. "That's the ultimate plan, regardless of the team," he said. "Go out there and stay with that roll."

Milone will face the Athletics on Sunday as the Twins and Oakland wrap up a three-game series. And Milone couldn't be any hotter, having put up a 1.84 ERA over his last seven starts. He has filled out the Twins rotation nicely as the only lefthander.

He spent parts of three seasons with Oakland, going 13-10 with a 3.74 ERA in 2012, then 12-9, 4.14 in 2013. He was 6-3 with a 3.55 ERA last season when he was sent to the minors when Oakland traded for Jeff Samardzija.

Milone was the odd man out because he had options left.

He requested a trade, and on July 31, he was dealt to the Twins for outfielder Sam Fuld. Milone posted a 7.06 ERA over 21 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings and was an afterthought during the offseason.

As it turned out, Milone needed offseason surgery to remove a benign tumor from his neck. He never used that as an excuse.

Milone made the team out of spring training was but sent to Class AAA Rochester after four starts and a 4.76 ERA with orders to throw more strikes. He forced the Twins to call him back when he gave up only three earned runs over 38 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings for the Red Wings.

Now he can show the A's how he has moved on since his departure. He won't be familiar with many hitters, though.

"It's so different," Milone said. "Most of the players I know [with Oakland] are pitchers, so that's not going to help. But it's just like any other start now. Maybe a little more incentive behind it and more excitement in being back in Oakland, but it is the same game."

Old man Torii

Torii Hunter arrived at the ballpark Saturday and found the chair in front of the stall in the visitors' clubhouse had been replaced with an adult rollator — a walker with a seat and wheels. Inside the seat was a package of adult diapers.

That's how teammates celebrated Hunter's 40th birthday. Hunter ran with the program, trying on the diapers as the clubhouse roared and then testing out the walker. He found it to be rather comfortable.

"I'm really not that old, but I understand," Hunter said. "This is awesome. The brakes [on the rollator] work, though."

Reliever Casey Fien was able to find a rollator in San Francisco and got it to the ballpark before Hunter arrived.

"Great gag gifts," Hunter said. "They know I'm going to get them back."

Hunter, after the Twins' 5-0 victory on Friday, walked around the clubhouse saying it was his last game as a thirty-something player.

"I thought he was going to get a little emotional after the game," manager Paul Molitor said. "I said, 'I can relate to that.'"

Hunter might be 40 now, but no one in the clubhouse believes that he acts or plays that way.

"To be doing what he's doing and to be wearing the same uniform size as he did when he was a rookie, from what I hear, just an incredible career," Molitor said.

Making a difference

With Miguel Sano holding down the designated hitter spot, Molitor acknowledged he will have to be more creative about how he gives Hunter and Joe Mauer time off.

Molitor added he is committed to playing Sano in the field at times. Sano, a third baseman, is learning first. He's raw over there, but Molitor believes he has the skills to play the position well.

"One thing you find out is that he's an athlete," Molitor said. "He's not just a big-bodied guy who can hit the ball."

Plouffe has locked down third base in admirable fashion for Twins

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | July 18, 2015

Trevor Plouffe had played in 120 big-league games over portions of three seasons from 2010 to May 2012 for the Twins. He had played right field, left field, second base, shortstop and served as the designated hitter. And once, on May 2, 2012, he had played third base, going 0 for 3.

Danny Valencia had put together a strong half season as a rookie in 2010 and the Twins stuck with him at third base through a subpar 2011. He was batting .190 in 2012 when the Twins sent him to Class AAA Rochester on May 9.

Plouffe became the third baseman the next night. His minor league position had been shortstop, and the assumption was the fielding part of third base should not be a difficult transition.

We judged Plouffe harshly when he struggled with the quicker reactions required to play third base. When he let a ball get past him, usually to his left, or made a bad throw, it inevitably seemed to occur at the worst possible time for a pitcher.

Plouffe had an amazing burst of power when he first started playing regularly and finished with 24 home runs. Still, the RBI total was modest (55) and the cover-your-eyes fielding ... was Plouffe really going to be a long-term answer at third base?

He looked like a place-holder for Miguel Sano again in 2013, when Plouffe batted .254 with 14 home runs and 52 RBI. If Sano had not blown out his right elbow and required Tommy John surgery, who knows what would have happened at third base in the spring of 2014?

We now know this: Sano has to look elsewhere if he's to become a regular in the field.

Plouffe turned 29 last month and has third base handled for the foreseeable future. He had 14 home runs and 80 RBI in 2014. He appears headed for 20/90 in 2015 ... solid numbers in today's low-scoring baseball.

The effort expended by Plouffe in the last three years to improve as a fielder, a hitter and a teammate places him among Minnesota's more admirable pro athletes in 2015.

PLUS THREE FROM PATRICK

Prospects the Twins could move to make a deadline deal:

*Oswaldo Arcia. The power potential remains, but Ozzie's not type of hitter to be a big-league backup getting 10 at-bats a week.

*Jorge Polanco. He's a second baseman (not a shortstop). The Twins have one of the best, Brian Dozier, for a few more years.

*Alex Meyer. He'll be 26 in January. He's gone backwards at Rochester, with 112 base runners in 63 2/3 innings in Class AAA.

Three Twins postgame thoughts from LEN3: Rallies, Replay and Suzuki

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 18, 2015

Here are three thoughts following the Twins 3-2 loss to Oakland

THE TIMING OF THIS PROBABLY ISN'T GOOD BUT.....:The Twins, to steal a term from Dan Barreiro, are becoming plucky. They were given a break in the ninth when Brett Lawrie pressed X-2 on his PlayStation and attempted a spinning throw to first on Brian Dozier's grounder. Suddenly, the Twins put together some good at-bats. Mauer came through with a booming RBI double and Miguel Sano, once again, showed he can step up in big moments. This would have been their third clutch win in a little over a week, but things went haywire in the bottom of the inning. But if the Twins can bunch good at-bats like those late in games, they will have a few more comeback wins this season. That all said, it's too bad they didn't get a big hit in the first inning or the entire scope of the game could have changed.

WHY NO REPLAY?: Billy Burns stole third base in the tenth before scoring the winning run. It looked like the play was close and deserved a replay moment. I thought Burns was safe, but I still was surprised how quickly the Twins moved on from that play. But manager Paul Molitor said the message he received from replay coordinator Sean Harlin was quick and clear. "The faster I get an answer," Molitor said, "the more I believe it."

SUZUKI ON THE TWITTER HOT SEAT?: Twitter let Kurt Suzuki have it pretty good tonight for not throwing out baserunners and providing little offense. There was a stat on ESPN recently that said he was one of the worst pitch-framers in the game. Then on Saturday a pitch from Glen Perkins bounces away from him, allowing Lawrie to advance to second and eventually score. Many of you claimed that he should have controlled the ball better. I missed the replay, so I can't offer an opinion. But Perkins took the blame. "No, he got on first and I tried to do not a slidestep but kind of in between what I would do with nobody on and a slidestep and came up short, caught my cleat on the mound and yanked it," Perkins said. "Usually when I miss with the fastball I miss in or I miss up. I spiked a heater off the dirt. It's coming in at 90 mph. I don't expect him to block that. There's just not enough time for him to do anything. I usually command the fastball pretty well and I missed that one. It was a crappy time to miss a spot. Just a bad time."

Athletics 3, Twins 2: Glen Perkins' first blown save is a loser

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. —This Saturday night was not all right for closing.

First, the Twins pinned just the third blown save on Oakland's Tyler Clippard in 20 chances this year.

Moments later, three-time all-star Glen Perkins saw his franchise-record streak of 28 consecutive saves end as well.

The Twins finally fell 3-2 in 10 innings on Stephen Vogt's walk-off single off Casey Fien.

“Feel bad for Perk,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “It’s a tough way to have a pretty impressive streak come to an end. Two-strike slider, we almost make a play. Wild pitch and a bloop. It can end a lot of ways, but that was kind of one of the uglier ways it could end.”

Vogt’s hit to left scored speedster Billy Burns, who had opened the frame with a double and a stolen base.

“The leadoff double changed the inning,” said Fien (2-4). “I had both guys 0-2 and didn’t get an out.”

The loss was just the second in the past nine games for the Twins, who were one strike away from winning in the ninth. They fell to 3-11 in one-run games on the road and 4-4 in extra-inning games overall.

At home they are 10-2 in one-run games.

Perkins had no trouble retiring the first two batters in the ninth, but Brett Lawrie reached on an infield single to shortstop and moved into scoring position on a wild pitch to pinch hitter Jake Smolinski.

On the very next pitch, Smolinski flared a broken-bat bloop that dropped between left fielder Shane Robinson and shortstop Eduardo Escobar.

“Anytime you lose a game or blow a save, I always say, ‘I want to get beat,’” Perkins said. “I want them to hit a ball in the gap or hit a home run. I put myself in that spot and I didn’t work my way out this time.”

It was just the third run Perkins had allowed in a save situation. One of the previous runs came on May 4, Perkins’ ninth save, when Vogt just missed a game-tying homer with a double off the top of the right-field wall in an 8-7 Twins victory at home.

“It was bound to happen,” Perkins said. “I said all along that I’m going to blow a save. I’m going to blow more than one. You’ve got to be able to bounce back. I’d love nothing more than to be able to get the ball (Sunday) and win a series.”

It took the Twins more than eight innings to force Oakland starter Scott Kazmir from the game. Once they did, however, they made the most of their newfound freedom.

Joe Mauer tied the game at 1-1 with a one-out double off the wall in right off Clippard, who came in holding lefty batters to an .088 average (6 for 68).

That scored Brian Dozier, who reached on a one-out infield single to third and moved up on Lawrie’s wild spinning throwing error. Clippard had hit Torii Hunter with an 0-2 slider to start his appearance after allowing the first batter to reach just seven times in his first 35 outings this year.

Hunter was held at third on Mauer’s double, and Robinson was sent in to pinch run.

Rookie Miguel Sano then followed with his first career sacrifice fly. Right fielder Josh Reddick had no chance to get the speedy Robinson as the Twins took the lead.

For the most part this season, the solo homer has been Phil Hughes’ friend, an example of limited damage and pitching to the scoreboard. Billy Butler’s one-out homer in the seventh inning broke up a scoreless duel.

Butler, the burly designated hitter who left Kansas City for a three-year deal last winter, pumped a 1-1 cutter from Hughes over the fence in dead center field.

Aaron Hicks made a leaping attempt but the ball had just enough distance to end a scoring drought of 20 innings for the A’s.

The past 10 homers off Hughes have come with no one on base. All but six of the 23 homers he has allowed this year fit that description.

All the same, Hughes has allowed at least one homer in his past eight starts and now finds himself tied with Colorado right-hander Kyle Kendrick for the major league lead in homers allowed.

The Twins loaded the bases off Kazmir with nobody out in the first. However, Sano struck out for the first of three straight times and Trevor Plouffe grounded into the first of his two straight double plays.

Plouffe, who hit a grand slam on Friday, has now grounded into 17 double plays, passing Miami’s Casey McGehee for the majors’ lead.

“Then the zeros start piling up,” Molitor said, “and you wonder how that’s going to figure into the final score.”

Over the next seven innings, the Twins managed just two baserunners: Mauer’s infield single in the fourth and Hicks’ one-out single in the fifth.

Clearly determined to atone for a poor showing on May 6 at Target Field, where the Twins pinned six earned runs on Kazmir in a 13-0 laugher, the veteran lefty allowed just five hits and struck out five while walking just one.

Kazmir, pulled after 112 pitches, has worked at least six innings in all but one of 15 career starts against the Twins, including the past nine straight.

Hughes opened with first-pitch strikes to the first 19 A's hitters he faced. He missed with a changeup to Vogt with one down in the sixth to end the streak and start a new one of four straight 1-0 counts.

That extended to Butler after he opened him with a slow curve that missed. Butler then fouled off a cutter before mashing the next one for just his eighth homer of the year and his first at home since June 29.

Butler is now 11 for 36 (.306) for his career off Hughes.

Torii at 40: Twins veteran Torii Hunter's 'Rules for Staying Young'

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

More than two decades have passed since Rod Allen first met Torii Hunter.

Then coaching for the Kane County Cougars, a Midwest League affiliate in the Florida Marlins organization, Allen couldn't help but notice a raw-but-talented 18-year-old outfielder for the Fort Wayne Wizards.

"He was vibrant then," Allen, now a Detroit Tigers television analyst, said recently. "He was young. He was athletic. Had a wiry body, loved playing the game. You could see there was a lot of promise."

Hunter turns 40 on Saturday, making him one of the oldest everyday position players in Twins history.

Still productive, Hunter recently told the Pioneer Press there's an 80 percent chance he will return to the Twins for another season in 2016. In the meantime, those who have watched him patrol right field this summer, his 17th full season in the majors, marvel at the life that remains in that slender frame.

"I've watched him mature, not only as a player but as a man, with his family and his kids," Allen said. "He has been such an ambassador for the game. For him to be able to withstand everything they've thrown his way, to still be producing the way he is -- arguably he could have been an all-star this year -- is truly remarkable."

Allen smiled and shook his head.

"I just love him," he said. "Absolutely."

Surprisingly, Hunter claimed he had never heard of Satchel Paige's famed Six Rules for Staying Young -- sometimes called Six Rules for a Happy Life -- which the hall of fame pitcher displayed on his business card long after his playing career ended.

Yet as Hunter recently heard each one read back to him, he smiled in recognition as he stood by his locker at Target Field. With perhaps the exception of No. 5, Hunter and Ol' Satch had plenty in common when it came to baseball longevity.

1. Avoid fried meats, which angry up the blood.

"I do that," Hunter said. "I've been doing it for the last 10 years or so, just trying to put in things that are live. We make our own food. Whenever you go out to eat or order room service, you don't know what ingredients they put in their food. Next thing you know, you swell up."

Hunter's wife, Katrina, makes sure he stays on course when it comes to his diet.

"She's always cooking," he said. "We try to eat at home as much as we can, but every once in a while you've got to get out of the house and go have fun with your friends. You can splurge a little bit, but most of the time I'm eating from the earth. A lot of greens, a lot of vegetables. I try to stay away from things that are boxed up or packaged or pasteurized."

Considering the grueling travel and odd hours of a professional ballplayer, that's easier said than done during a long season.

"It's tough because you live in a hotel," Hunter said. "You try to eat some kind of vegetable, a fish, to try to maintain. Small portions if you're out eating, but every once in a while I do like good food that's good to you but not good for you."

What's his favorite indulgence?

"Double warm Bundt chocolate cake," he said, grinning at the thought. "That's my 'cheat food.' "

2. If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts.

"I do colonics, to clean the stomach out and push out all the wrong stuff," Hunter said. "I do that once or twice a month in the offseason to cleanse my body. Not during the season; it would dehydrate you. You don't want that to happen in baseball."

As for the "cool thoughts" portion of Satch's maxim, Hunter interprets that as the mental side of the game.

"I've come a long way, spiritually and mentally," he said. "I think that's more important than anything in the world. If you're not mentally or spiritually strong, you won't be able to eat right. You won't be able to fight some of the temptations that come your way, whether it's food or whatever."

He smiled.

"Some might have women," he added. "Women might be the temptation."

Hold that thought, Hunter is told. Paige comes back to that in Rule No. 4.

3. Keep the juices flowing by jangling around gently as you move.

"It takes me a little longer now that I'm older," Hunter said. "I still go out and sprint. I do a lot of sprints. You might see me sprinting before day games, too. I'll go out and do seven to 10 sprints, just to keep my muscles going."

It's not uncommon for Hunter to stand in the outfield for the national anthem, hat over his heart, as he takes a break from his pregame sprint routine. He also spends time in the Twins training room before batting practice each day getting stretched out by Perry Castellano, Twins strength and conditioning coach, and Kelli Quist, the team's massage therapist.

"When they have a team stretch at 4:20 (p.m.), I make sure I'm warm before I have to be warm," he said. "I get in the whirlpool. I go in the back room and do different band exercises, hip-opening exercises, whirlpool, a massage, stretch and then go out and sprint. All of that is before we have to be outside."

Hunter also is a big believer in Active Release Techniques, which bills itself as "The Gold Standard in Soft Tissue Treatment."

He will undergo a few well-timed ART sessions during the season.

"We have a guy here in Minneapolis," he said. "When I go (home) to Texas, I meet up with my guy. I try to maintain."

Hunter jokes about having "dad strength," but you won't catch him trying to win any weightlifting contests with the younger Twins.

"I kind of got away from the heavy lifting," he said. "I do a lot of different rotation training (for flexibility). A lot of golfers do this training."

4. Go very light on the vices, such as carrying on in society. The social ramble ain't restful.

"I figured that out a long time ago," he said. "The older you get, the longer you stay out, the longer it's going to take for you to recover. Every once in a while, you want to go out with your teammates, but don't be partying too hard. You can't drink too much. You can't stay out until 5 in the morning anymore."

Dr. Hunter's prescription?

"You go out and laugh," he said, "have a good time, have your one or two glasses of red milk (wine) and you just laugh and be merry. It kind of gets you away from the game. That's part of the mental side of the game."

Does he ever talk to younger teammates about the dangers of the "social ramble"?

"I remind them," he said. "These 21-, 22-year-olds, you can't stop them from having a good time. You want them to have a good time and have a great experience but to be smart about it, because this is your job and you're here to win. You can't perform if you're intoxicated. For some people, hangovers do equal hits, but not many."

5. Avoid running at all times.

This is where Hunter and Paige diverge somewhat.

"For me, I'm more of an athlete," Hunter said. "I have to run. I have to sprint. I don't jog. Jogging, I think, makes you slow, and it pounds the body. It gives you the slow-reaction muscles."

No running foul poles for him.

"For me, when I sprint, I have quick-twitch muscles," he said. "I work 'em and I keep 'em going. That's probably one of the reasons I'm able to stay in pretty good shape and I'm able to run balls down in the outfield and run the bases pretty well."

6. Don't look back; something might be gaining on you.

Here, Hunter's eyes grew wide.

"You know my old saying: 'Only a fool looks back and trips over a rock in front of him,' " he said. "I say that all the time. It's amazing that he said that."

What does Paige's original version mean to Hunter?

"The past is the past. It's over with," he said. "Somebody wants to take your job or somebody in your family wants money -- all that stuff. It's a lot of different things."

Fifty years ago this September, Paige came out of retirement to toss three scoreless innings at age 58 for the Kansas City Athletics.

Hunter keeps climbing the Twins' franchise charts with no plans to retire just yet.

"You have to keep moving forward, making adjustments in your life," Hunter said. "That's what I try to do. The reason why I'm still playing is because I keep making adjustments and I use my past to make me better in my present and my future."

Ol' Satch couldn't have said it better himself.

Postgame Twinsights: Breaking down a painful 3-2 loss to the A's

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. —Paul Molitor said it best after the Twins fell 3-2 in 10 innings to the Oakland A's on a wild Hello Kitty Night at the worst ballpark in the majors.

"Where do you want to start with that game?" the rookie skipper said Saturday with a thin smile.

How about with Billy Burns' steal of third after a leadoff double in the 10th? The play was close, and first baseman Joe Mauer went to the mound to stall, but the opted not to mount a replay challenge.

Why not?

"We checked it," Molitor said. "Didn't get anything that gave me an indication we had a chance at reversal. Did you see something different?"

I was on deadline and only saw it once, I told him.

"It was pretty fast," he said of the counsel from video coordinator Sean Harlin. "The faster I get the answer, the more I believe it. It was pretty quick."

Considering that play put the speedy Burns on third with nobody out and the A's 2-3-4 hitters coming up against Casey Fien, I wondered if there is ever a value in challenging a call even if you doubt you have much chance at having it go your way.

This, it seemed, might have been one of those times.

"You could do that," Molitor said. "I don't know if there's a lot to gain there. If you want to argue that you have nothing to lose, it's possible. There's been some strange calls, but usually not on the side of reversals. Usually (they're) on the side of protecting the call."

—The Burns steal itself was key because the Twins felt they knew what he was up to the pitch before.

"The stolen base was disappointing," Molitor said. "We saw the bluff on the first pitch like he wanted to go. Tried to get their attention to slow him down. That was a big play."

Fien was more disappointed in giving up a pair of hits after getting the count to 0-2 on both Burns and Stephen Vogt.

"The stolen base, I was waiting for him," Fien said. "I was just worried about my pitch, I guess."

-As for the two hits off Fien, both came against lefty batters.

While he has held right-handers to a .221 average in 68 at-bats this year, lefties are now 15 for 46 (.326). That 100- point gap in his platoon splits is a concern for the team's primary setup man.

"I had both guys 0-2 and didn't get an out," Fien said. "The leadoff double changed the inning. We were busting him in the whole time. He finally turned on one, and sometimes they hit 'em where they ain't."

With Vogt, it was a 1-2 cutter that was off the plate but up. Vogt dove at it and slapped the ball to left for the winning hit.

"He was just looking away because all I was doing was going away to him," Fien said. "That ball was supposed to be a cutter and it backed up on me. So it even got out more off the plate, and he stuck his bat out there and hit it pretty good. It was up. Whenever you leave something up, it's always easier to put the bat on the ball."

-Twins closer Glen Perkins was philosophical after his first blown save in 29 chances.

Losing a franchise-record streak on a two-strike infield hit, a wild pitch and a broken-bat bloop single seems crazy, but he figures he was due.

"I didn't get a look at the bat, but I would assume from where I thought he hit it, yeah," Perkins said. "Not my first broken-bat hit. I've been pretty fortunate on balls in play over the last month, month and a half. They were bound to get an infield hit and a blooper. They were bound to happen just the same as anything else is."

Indeed, since the start of June, Perkins had given up just three hits in 13 1/3 innings. That .070 batting average was helped along, he figures, by a .107 batting average on balls in play.

"I've had a lot of balls that should have been hits that weren't hits the last month and a half," he said. "That's the way it works."

He shook his head and smiled.

"It will help me sleep at night if I think that way," he said.

-About that wild pitch, the fourth this year for Perkins and the 32nd for Twins pitchers, it came on a first-pitch fastball that looked like it nearly hit pinch hitter Jake Smolinski on the foot.

Was that a case of a cross-up between him and catcher Kurt Suzuki?

"(Brett Lawrie) got on first and I tried not a slide step but kind of in between what I would do when there's nobody on and a slide step," he said. "Came up short. Just caught my cleat on the mound or whatever and then just yanked it."

Perkins insisted the fault was his and his alone.

"The last thing he's expecting," he said of Suzuki. "Usually when I miss with a fastball I miss in or I miss up. I spiked a heater off the dirt. It's coming in at 90-whatever miles an hour. I don't expect him to block that. There's just not enough time for him to do anything."

"I usually command the fastball pretty well and I missed that one. It's a crappy time to miss a spot. You can count on one hand how many fastballs I've spiked this season. Just a bad time."

Where was the pitch supposed to be?

"Just in," Perkins said. "That's just a first-pitch fastball, just try to throw it on the inner half of the plate and get strike one," he said. "I threw it in the dirt. (Catchers) can't block fastballs in the dirt. That's on me. What are you going to do?"

-Smolinski's bloop single came one pitch after the wild pitch that changed the situation.

Instead of playing no-doubles, now the Twins needed their outfielders to play more shallow with decent speed at second in Lawrie. Smolinski, it should be noted, entered hitting .143 in 63 at-bats this year for the Texas Rangers and the A's, who recently picked him up.

Because the ball hung up a decent length of time, the question followed whether left fielder Shane Robinson, who had entered as a pinch runner in the top of the ninth, was playing too deep.

“We brought everybody in after the wild pitch,” Molitor said. “You’re kind of protecting doubles when he was on first, then we brought them in to normal depth. I think that ball was in no-man’s land. I don’t think (Robinson) had a chance at that.”

—Eduardo Escobar was unable to jump to his feet fast enough to get Lawrie after making a diving stop on a sharp grounder to start the ninth.

Was there any element of misplay on the Escobar attempt, which resulted in a close play at first?

“I don’t think so,” Molitor said. “The ball was hit so sharply. He had to extend it looked like fully to try to corral the play and just didn’t have enough time to regroup. He made a strong throw but the guy got down the line. It was a little bit of a jailbreak, as we call it. He was out front of a slider, got out of the box. It was a good play, just not quite quick enough.”

—In the end, it was just one of those nights for a team that has gone 10-2 in one-run games at home but now 3-11 in such games on the road.

“Feel bad for Perk,” Molitor said. “It’s a tough way to have a pretty impressive streak come to an end. It can end a lot of ways, but that was kind of one of the uglier ways it could end.”

All in all, a tough night for the Twins, who fell five games behind the first-place Kansas City Royals in the American League Central.

“You get a chance to have a nice comeback,” Molitor said. “You have that feeling. You get two outs, two strikes there. Then things just kind of went haywire for us.”

A garbage can full of 40-ounce bottles of Olde English “800” malt liquor was on ice in the Twins clubhouse in celebration of Torii Hunter’s 40th birthday.

After as painful a loss as the Twins have had this season, no one seemed in much of a mood for a toast.

Twinsights: Boyhood A’s fan J.R. Graham returns to his ‘second home’

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — All the memories keep flooding back for J.R. Graham this weekend as he makes his first business trip to O.Co Coliseum.

Raised about 25 minutes southeast of here in Livermore, where the Twins reliever followed in Randy Johnson’s footsteps at Livermore High School, Graham will have about 100 friends and family in the stands for each of these three games against the A’s.

He’s doing his best to ignore the humorous yells of his buddies, many of whom are clustered down the right-field line near the visiting bullpen area.

“I’m prepared for it — really prepared,” he said, smiling. “I can ignore them really well. I’m not too worried about them.”

Until Friday, Graham had never been on the Coliseum field, but the Rule 5 draft pick estimates he attended more than 50 games as a young fan. He also spent three years at nearby Santa Clara University, which gave him more time to follow the A’s.

Twins bullpen coach Eddie Guardado, raised in nearby Stockton, heard all the details from Graham shortly after the team’s arrival.

“I was telling Eddie earlier I saw the Twins play the A’s in playoff games (in 2002 and 2006),” Graham said. “I was here for the (Derek) Jeter Flip in 2001. This was almost like a second home.”

He followed the San Francisco Giants as well, but for an East Bay kid there was really no question which team would grab his heart.

“The Giants were expensive and (AT&T Park) was harder to get to,” he said. “I could always just buy a BART ticket for about 10 bucks. I got here easily for so many games.”

His first trip came at age 9, shortly after his family moved to Livermore. Then A’s right-hander Tim Hudson — “Another smaller right-hander,” Graham noted — soon became his favorite player.

“He actually flipped me a ball at one of the first games I came here,” Graham said. “I still have the ball.”

When Graham went to his first big-league spring training with the Atlanta Braves, Hudson was among his teammates. Graham made sure to tell him the story of that ball Hudson once flipped to a young A’s fan.

"I got that out of the way the first time I met him," Graham said. "It was really exciting to get to play with him and learn from him. He's a great guy."

When Hudson reached the World Series with the Giants last fall, Graham attended Game 4 at AT&T Park. He even brought the ball Hudson had flipped him all those years ago.

The Jeter play, meanwhile, remains as vivid and inexplicable for Graham as it was when he witnessed it live at age 11.

"I had a great view," said Graham, who sat with his family in the third row of the third deck, behind home plate. "You don't realize at the time how big of a play that was, especially being so young. To be such a staple image of MLB history really, it was cool to be here."

With the New York Yankees facing elimination, Jeter famously raced over from shortstop to intercept an off-line throw from right fielder Shane Spencer and make a backhand flip to catcher Jorge Posada for a huge out in a game the Yankees eventually won.

"I was thinking, 'Why is he there? What is he doing there?'" Graham said. "That's the only thing I remember thinking the entire time. I didn't even think about (Jeremy) Giambi not sliding. I was just like, 'What is he doing there?'"

The A's lost that first-round series and, for all their success, are still looking for their first American League pennant since 1990. Graham, however, insists he didn't keep his emotions in check the night Jeter broke his young heart.

"I didn't cry," he said. "I understood. Baseball is baseball. People got to win, people got to lose. I was 11, but I did not cry."

Twinsights: Torii Hunter gets diapers, walker for his 40th birthday

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. —Twins reliever Casey Fien took it upon himself to purchase the two main gag gifts for teammate Torii Hunter on his 40th birthday.

Fien walked down to Walgreens to buy some adult diapers. While in that aisle, he noticed the Ultra-Light Rollator, a fire-engine red walker with dual handbrakes.

"I was thinking about putting on tennis balls," Fien said. "That way he doesn't get out of control. He's stable."

Surprisingly Fien didn't get many strange looks at the checkout line or as he made the three-block walk back to the team hotel.

"It's Saturday in San Francisco," he said. "I thought I was the weirdo, but I wasn't."

Fien grabbed a bag of Certainty diapers made to fit those with waist sizes between 20 and 40. Hunter, who still wears the same size-34 uniform pants he modeled as a rookie in 1997, fell well within that range.

Despite the frilly edges, those underwear are definitely the men's variety, Fien insisted.

"He's got to look good for his wife," Fien said. "He's getting older. He's got to do something."

Hunter loved the gifts, even trying on a pair of diapers and testing out his walker in the clubhouse before Saturday's game.

"Great gag gifts from the teammates," said Hunter, the oldest active position player besides Ichiro Suzuki (41) of the Miami Marlins. "This walker has all the bells and whistles, but they know I'm going to get them back. They know that."

After banging out a pair of singles in his final game at age 39 on Friday night, Hunter noted the achievement.

"I thought he was going to get a little emotional," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "He said, 'Man, this is my last game in my 30s.' I said, 'I know the feeling.'"

Hunter remained suspicious of further gag gifts from his teammates.

"(Trevor) Plouffe keeps looking at me for some reason," he said. "He scares me."

Before Hunter, the last three Twins to play in their 40s were Jim Thome (2011), Ruben Sierra (2006) and Terry Mulholland (42 in 2005).

In his 20s, Hunter hit .266 with 133 home runs, 504 runs batted in, 484 runs, 231 walks and 92 stolen bases in 3,587 plate appearances.

In his 30s, Hunter hit .286 with 212 homers, 855 RBIs, 789 runs, 419 walks and 102 stole bases in 5,876 plate appearances.

“Forty years old,” Hunter said, shaking his head. “Mentally, it hurts, but I think I’m going to enjoy my 40s. It’s going to be like my 20s. I’m going to party hard.”

Morning Twinsights: Ervin Santana has had low-strikeout games before

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — As good as Ervin Santana was Friday night, it took him 27 batters to record his first strikeout.

Asked about that after his first win in a Twins uniform, the veteran right-hander smiled.

“I know. I was like, ‘Damn, can I pitch a game without a strikeout?’ “ he said. “Unbelievable. When I got one, I was like, ‘Yes!’ “

That came on a slider to No. 9 hitter Marcus Semien to start the eighth. Santana would record just one more out on his night, but Brian Duensing came on to strand two runners and eventually complete the Twins’ eighth combined shutout of the season.

Santana’s velocity was down a tick or more on the slow gun at O.Co Coliseum, but he still hit 92 mph multiple times, according to PITCHf/x.

Despite piling up 1,521 strikeouts since breaking in with the Los Angeles Angels in 2005, Santana will have these games periodically where strikeouts are tough to come by. Friday marked his eighth career start of five or more innings in which he failed to strike out more than one batter.

It happened twice last season with the Atlanta Braves. He fanned just one in six innings on July 18 against the Philadelphia Phillies, and he had the same strikeout total on June 7 in a seven-inning start at Arizona.

Before that, Santana had at least two strikeouts in every outing of more than 10 outs since July 22, 2011 (at Baltimore). He also struck out just one on two occasions in 2010 (Oct. 2 at Texas and Aug. 19 at Boston) and once as a rookie in 2005 (Aug. 15 against Toronto).

His only no-strikeout performance in a start of five or more innings came on June 26, 2007 against the Kansas City Royals.

“I kept thinking he was going to crank up the velocity a little bit,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “Talking to (catcher Kurt Suzuki), I said, ‘How’s it looking back there?’ He said, ‘It’s not like it’s coming out like I’ve seen it but he’s really hitting his spots well with all his pitches.’ I think that was his goal tonight, and he was a lot more efficient. I’m not worried about the strikeouts when the results are as they were.”

—Twins general manager Terry Ryan blamed a roster crunch in the minor leagues for this week’s release of Double-A right-hander Madison Boer, a second-round draft pick out of the University of Oregon in 2011.

“We had some space problems,” Ryan said.

Boer, 25, is a product of Eden Prairie High School who received a \$405,000 bonus as the 87th overall pick. That was the same draft that produced shortstop Levi Michael (30th overall), third baseman Travis Harrison (50th) and right-hander Hudson Boyd (55th).

The first two had to switch positions, while Boyd’s career has been stalled by weight issues and a failed drug test.

Boer, a reliever, posted a 1.62 earned run average in 11 outings for Class A Fort Myers this year, but he had stalled at Chattanooga with a 5.17 ERA over his final nine outings (15 2/3 innings). He also landed on the disabled list in recent weeks.

“I feel bad that didn’t work out,” Ryan said. “He’s a local kid. We tried. We tried him as a starter, we tried him in relief. It just didn’t work out.”

Boer’s draft round doesn’t add to the disappointment, Ryan said.

“That happens,” Ryan said of a failed second-rounder. “We don’t take that into consideration when we’re making personnel decisions. Round and all that stuff are out by the time you get to Double-A. That might be something you consider when you’re in A-ball or rookie ball.”

—Ryan was effusive in his praise of 39-year-old right-hander Scott Atchison, who also was released this week out of the bullpen at Chattanooga.

“He didn’t want to languish at Double-A forever, and I understood that,” Ryan said. “There has to be opportunity, and there just isn’t opportunity yet. We were right up front with him. We parted on good terms.”

Recommended by Twins special assistant Wayne Krivsky, Atchison threw well for the Lookouts.

"He did fine," Ryan said. "There wasn't any dropoff in his stuff. It's unfortunate because he's a tremendous guy and a great influence on anybody he's ever been around. He's been a pretty productive pitcher for awhile here, but we just didn't have the space. He's got to have an idea there would be a chance. Right now I cannot give him that."

Review: Chesney, Aldean draw record crowd to Target Field

Ross Raihala | Pioneer Press | July 18, 2015

Last year, Kenny Chesney did the unthinkable. He took a break.

After 13 tours and 15 albums, country music's biggest touring act of the new century decided it was time to recharge his batteries. While he was gone, Garth Brooks returned to action and threatened to steal Chesney's thunder, not to mention Luke Bryan and Jason Aldean, who have muscled their way into Chesney's territory: headlining stadiums.

Chesney used that time off to do more than just grow in his armpit hair. (Seriously, this guy is usually waxed all the way up to his eyebrows.) The 47-year-old made one of the better albums of his career, "The Big Revival," and returned to the road with something to prove.

Here in Minnesota, that meant Chesney didn't merely come back to Target Field on Saturday. This time around, he's headlining two nights in a row. And he packed the downtown Minneapolis ballpark on opening night with 44,152 fans, a record for the venue. Sir Paul McCartney, one of the most famous people on the planet, played the joint last summer, but it was Chesney himself who held the previous attendance record of 43,940 in 2013.

Chesney also took one of his new rivals head on and invited Aldean to co-headline. (Minneapolis is one of 10 cities where the two tours will share a stadium.) But Chesney remained the alpha and saved his performance for the end of the evening.

That meant opening acts Old Dominion, Cole Swindell and Brantley Gilbert played in the blazing sunlight to a crowd faced with numerous distractions, including keeping themselves from passing out in the steamy July heat.

Aldean, 38, lucked out and found some shade for his performance, which started just after 7 p.m. But it also meant all the fireworks that opened his show looked a bit silly in broad daylight.

Saturday marked Aldean's local stadium debut following his arena gigs at St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center in 2012 and 2014. He's improved each time he's been here, with a persona that's both smoldering hunk and party-down dude. His live vocals are better than ever, too, and his cover of Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down" coaxed out an appealing Dwight Yoakam-esque sparkle in his voice.

Lyricaly, Aldean's material is straight-up Bro Country, but musically, much of what he does sounds like '80s rock with a hint of twang. That includes the best songs from his latest record, "Old Boots, New Dirt," from the dramatic ballad "Tonight Looks Good on You" to "Sweet Little Somethin'," which is driven by a synth line right out of a Eurythmics song.

Chesney took the stage after 9 p.m. by riding a flying swing/seat over the heads of the crowd in the \$279.75 seats. Then the lights went out, giving fans the first real look at all of that impressive lighting that ringed the stage.

Compared with Aldean's swagger, Chesney offered a much more casual, if charismatic, approach. He's about partying, too, but it's more of a Jimmy Buffett-inspired version of partying.

Think secluded foreign beaches with endless blue water rather than a keg of beer in an empty field across from a pig farm. As expected, the big guns of Chesney's back catalog had the audience singing and dancing along, including "Beer in Mexico," "Summertime," "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problem" and "Young." But the crowd also loved Chesney's newest material, too, something that's unfamiliar to Brooks these days.

Like everyone else on stage Saturday, Chesney was drenched in sweat just a few songs into his set. The guy was working it. Near the end, the crowd's interest didn't really wane, but the overall energy started to lag. That's what spending a long, hot summer day drinking and dancing will do to you.

Twins' comeback attempt falls short in 10th

Rhett Bollinger & Jane Lee | MLB.com | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND -- **Stephen Vogt's** walk-off single against Twins right-hander **Casey Fien** in the 10th inning gave the A's a 3-2 victory at the Coliseum on Saturday night.

It was the second walk-off win of the season for the A's, who watched speedster **Billy Burns** lead off the inning with a double and steal third in advance of Vogt's first career regular-season walk-off hit.

"He made that inning happen," Vogt said. "What a great at-bat to battle and get the hustle double and take third. That was huge, giving us three chances to get him in from third. He's the Rookie of the Year so far this year, and he's not getting the recognition that he should be nationally, because he's been probably our most consistent player all year and he's doing it as a rookie."

The A's, who got 8 1/3 innings from **Scott Kazmir**, held a 1-0 lead entering the ninth, when the Twins got a game-tying double from **Joe Mauer** and a go-ahead sacrifice fly off the bat of **Miguel Sano** against **Tyler Clippard**. Oakland responded with a run in the bottom half of the frame, tying the game on **Jake Smolinski's** base hit off closer **Glen Perkins**, who had converted each of his previous 29 save opportunities.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Offense comes alive: Vogt's walk-off hit capped an encouraging offensive night for the A's, who ran their scoreless-innings streak to 20 before **Billy Butler** launched his eighth home run of the season in the seventh, a solo shot against **Phil Hughes**. Butler improved to 11-for-36 lifetime against Hughes. Smolinski's game-tying hit helped his new club avoid its 23rd one-run loss of the season, and the clutch hitting continued in the 10th with Burns and Vogt's heroics.

"This team's resilient and we pick each other up no matter what," Vogt said, "and I think a win like tonight can propel us to play the way we know how to play for a while."

Twins rally late but fall short: Minnesota couldn't get anything going offensively, but **Brian Dozier** sparked a ninth-inning rally by reaching on a one-out infield single and advancing to second on a throwing error from **Brett Lawrie**. Clippard came in and plunked **Torii Hunter** on an 0-2 pitch that set the stage for Mauer's game-tying RBI double off the wall in right field. Sano gave the Twins the lead with a sacrifice fly to right.

"We found a way to rally there," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Kazmir was in there and there was a misplay in the hole that give us life. Joe had a really good at-bat and then Sano had the sac fly. But I feel bad for Perk because that's a tough way to have a pretty impressive streak to end."

Twins can't cash in early: The Twins loaded the bases with nobody out in the first inning, but couldn't scratch a run across against Kazmir. Sano struck out before **Trevor Plouffe** grounded into an inning-ending double play.

Kazmir cruises: Kazmir endured a 25-pitch first inning but worked his way out of a no-out, bases-loaded jam and hit cruise control thereafter. The lefty faced the minimum in each of his next seven innings, with help from two double plays, and allowed just two hits with no walks in that span. Before he was touched for a ninth-inning run, Kazmir had not allowed an earned run in his previous 20 innings, dating to June 27.

QUOTABLE

"I always said if I get beat, I want them to hit a ball in the gap or hit a home run. But I put myself in that spot and I didn't work my way out this time. It was bound to happen. I've said all along I'm going to blow a save. I'm going to blow more than one. I've got to be able to bounce back. I'd love nothing more than to get the ball tomorrow and win a series." -- *Perkins*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Hughes has served up a Major League-high 23 homers this season, but the last 10 he's allowed have been solo shots, including Butler's in the seventh inning.

WHAT'S NEXT

Twins: Left-hander **Tommy Milone** makes his return to Oakland to start the series finale on Sunday at 3:05 p.m. CT. Milone, who pitched with the A's from 2012-14, has turned in six straight quality starts with a 1.62 ERA over that span.

A's: Jesse Chavez gets the ball for Sunday's 1:05 p.m. PT series finale against the Twins at the Coliseum. The A's right-hander is 2-4 with a 5.27 ERA over his last seven starts after posting a 2.38 ERA over his first eight starts.

Perkins' perfect record ends with blown save

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND -- After starting out the year 28-for-28 in save opportunities, Twins closer **Glen Perkins** was bound to eventually blow a save. That finally happened Saturday night in a rough way, as the Twins rallied for two runs to take the lead in the ninth against the A's, only to see Perkins give up the game-tying run on a two-out bloop single from **Jake Smolinski**. Reliever **Casey Fien** then quickly gave up a walk-off RBI single to **Stephen Vogt** in the 10th after **Billy Burns** doubled and stole third to hand the Twins a **3-2 loss**.

It's hard to fault Perkins for the loss, despite failing to protect the lead, as **Brett Lawrie** reached on a two-out infield single, advanced to second on a wild pitch and then scored the tying run on Smolinski's blooper to shallow left.

"I always said if I get beat, I want them to hit a ball in the gap or hit a home run," Perkins said. "But I put myself in that spot and I didn't work my way out this time. It was bound to happen. I've said all along I'm going to blow a save. I'm going to blow more than one. I've got to be able to bounce back. I'd love nothing more than to get the ball tomorrow and win a series."

Perkins had two strikes on Lawrie and threw him a slider, but left it just up enough that he was able to hit a grounder to shortstop **Eduardo Escobar**, who made a diving play but couldn't quite get Lawrie at first. Lawrie then advanced to second on the wild pitch from Perkins, who said he threw it too far down in the zone for catcher **Kurt Suzuki**.

"I don't expect him to block that," Perkins said. "There's just not enough time for him to do anything."

Fien relieved Perkins in the 10th and served up a leadoff double to Burns, who promptly stole third. It was a close play, but Twins manager Paul Molitor said he didn't get any indication it would be overturned so he didn't challenge it.

"We couldn't contain them," Molitor said. "Casey had a leadoff double and the stolen base was disappointing, because we saw him bluff on the first pitch like he wanted to go, and so I tried to get their attention to try to slow him down, but it was a big play."

It spoiled a strong outing from **Phil Hughes** and a two-run ninth that saw **Joe Mauer** connect on a game-tying RBI double off closer **Tyler Clippard**, setting up **Miguel Sano** for a go-ahead sacrifice fly. But while the Twins were a strike away from the win in the ninth, they saw their four-game win streak end in heartbreak.

"You get a chance to have a nice comeback and you have that feeling when you have two outs and two strikes there," Molitor said. "But things just kind of went haywire for us."

Hunter thankful to still be playing at age 40

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND -- Twins right fielder **Torii Hunter** joined some rare company Saturday, as the 19-year big league veteran celebrated his 40th birthday. He became the first Twins player to play at 40 years old since Jim Thome in 2011, and just the fourth for Minnesota dating back to 2005. He joins Miami's **Ichiro Suzuki** as the only position players in the Majors over 40.

"I'm blessed to be 40 years old and in this game," Hunter said. "I never thought I'd be playing baseball at 40. But I thank God for the opportunity and the health to go out there and play on an everyday basis and keep on performing in a kid's game. So I'm very thankful and blessed."

Hunter also received some fun gifts from his teammates, as he arrived at his locker with his chair switched out for a walker, which also had adult diapers in it. Hunter took it in stride and said he wasn't sure what else his teammates had planned for him.

"I had a lot of gifts, some senior-citizen diapers," Hunter said. "I tried them on but I think I put them on backwards. And then I got this new walker with all the bells and whistles. It's got left brakes and right brakes, so it's pretty cool."

But on a serious note, Hunter said he never thought he'd play this long in the Majors, but that his production in recent years made him want to keep going. He said he's still not sure if he'll play again next year, but said that if he does, it'll be with the Twins, as he started his career with them and he'd like to finish his career in Minnesota.

"We'll just have to see," Hunter said. "I really want to retire in a Twins uniform and hopefully that happens. That's why I'm here. So whether it's this year or next year, it'll be with the Twins."

Hunter's longevity has impressed Twins manager Paul Molitor, who played until he was 42 during his Hall of Fame career. Molitor said he's talked with Hunter about keeping him fresh throughout the season, and it's worked, as he's remained productive this season.

Hunter addressed his teammates after getting two hits in Friday's 5-0 win over the A's.

"I thought he was going to get a little emotional after the game last night, saying, 'Man, that was my last game in my 30s,'" Molitor said. "I said I know the feeling and can relate to that. You can kid about it, but there's really not that many guys who turn 40 in the game. For him to be doing what he's doing and wearing the same uniform size as he did his rookie year, it's just an incredible career and hopefully there's a lot more to come."

Milone to face former A's teammates for first time

Trevor Hass | MLB.com | July 18, 2015

Twins left-hander Tommy Milone, who pitched in Oakland from 2012-2014, will start against the A's for the first time in the series finale at the Coliseum on Sunday.

Milone (5-1, 2.84) was 31-22 as a member of the A's. He has also excelled this season, yielding two runs or fewer in seven straight starts.

Jesse Chavez (4-9, 3.40) will take the mound for the A's, looking to rebound from an outing in which he surrendered four earned runs in five innings in a loss to the Yankees on July 9. Chavez has given up at least three earned runs in four straight starts and hasn't picked up a win since June 23.

Three things to know about this game

- Chavez's nine losses are the second most by an A's pitcher before the All-Star break over the last 17 years (Joe Blanton lost 12 in 2008).
- Though Chavez's record at home is 2-4, his ERA at the Coliseum is 2.63, compared to 4.10 on the road. However, he is 1-6 with a 4.29 ERA in day games compared to 3-3 with a 2.76 ERA at night.
- Milone has only picked up one decision (a win in his first start) in six games on the road despite boasting a 2.17 ERA as a visitor.

Vogt's RBI single in 10th lifts A's, ends Twins' four-game win streak

Associated Press | July 18, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Stephen Vogt hit a game-ending single in the 10th inning and the Oakland Athletics rallied to beat the Minnesota Twins 3-2 on Saturday night.

After the teams were held to one total run in the first eight innings behind sharp pitching from Oakland's Scott Kazmir and Minnesota's **Phil Hughes**, the game opened up late.

The Twins took the lead with two runs in the top of the ninth -- only to squander it when pinch-hitter Jake Smolinski tied it in the bottom half to give **Glen Perkins** his first blown save of the season.

The A's then won it in the 10th. Billy Burns led off with a double against Casey Fein (2-4) and stole third. Vogt followed with a clean single to left to give Oakland its second walk-off win of the season.

Drew Pomeranz (4-3) pitched the 10th for the victory.

Perkins retired the first two batters in the bottom of the ninth before Brett Lawrie reached on an infield single. Lawrie advanced on a wild pitch and scored the tying run on Smolinski's bloop single to left field. Perkins had converted all 28 save chances this season.

Kazmir came within two outs of his first shutout in more than nine years. He escaped a bases-loaded, no-out jam in the first and then faced the minimum over the next seven innings.

Oakland's major league-worst 85th error of the season then helped fuel a Minnesota rally in the ninth. With one out, **Brian Dozier** hit a grounder to third base. Lawrie went to his left to field the ball, turned and threw wildly to first, allowing Dozier to reach second on a hit and an error.

That ended Kazmir's night and Tyler Clippard was unable to preserve the lead. Clippard hit Torii Hunter with an 0-2 pitch and then **Joe Mauer** tied the game with a double off the wall in right field. Miguel Sano followed with a sacrifice fly to score pinch-runner Shane Robinson with the go-ahead run.

Kazmir allowed one run and five hits in 8 1/3 innings and lowered his ERA to 2.38 on the season. He impressed the several scouts on hand from teams that could be interested in acquiring Kazmir from the last-place A's before the trade deadline at the end of the month.

Billy Butler hit a solo homer in the seventh for the A's for their only run in seven innings against **Phil Hughes**.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Rookie CF Byron Buxton remains sidelined by a sprained left thumb and has not resumed full baseball activities yet.

Athletics: Switch-pitcher Pat Venditte (strained right shoulder) threw a bullpen session -- 30 pitches from the right side, 20 from the left. The A's will have a better idea on his next step in his rehab on Sunday.

UP NEXT

Twins: Former Oakland pitcher Tommy Milone (5-1) makes his first career start against the A's in the finale of the three-game series. Milone is 15-8 with a 2.96 ERA at the Coliseum in his career.

Athletics: The A's look to reverse their struggles against lefty starters when they face Milone. Oakland has won just five of 22 games started by southpaws this season, the worst record in the majors. Jesse Chavez (4-9) looks to snap a three-start losing streak.