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Major league baseball

Twins

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This is the same pitcher who shrugged his way to 20 victories in 1991, and had shrugged his way to a 9-24 record since mid-September 1992, before reversing his fortunes for a few glorious hours last night.

Everyone else in the clubhouse said Erickson had more zip on his fastball and break on his slider. Erickson disagreed, then offhandedly mentioned the kind of minute change that can make or break a career.

"I was messing around in the bullpen, and I started to hold my slider a little differently, the way I used to," he said.

It was that slider that looked like his most effective pitch. It was that slider that ended one of the most combative at-bats of the night — Erickson vs. former Twin Brian Harper, with whom he had a public dispute last season.

In the eighth inning, Erickson started with two strikes against Harper, then threw three balls. Harper fouled one off, then had to be looking for Erickson's favorite pitch, his sinking fastball. Erickson threw "a nasty, nasty slider," said Twins manager Tom Kelly, that froze Harper.

"Harp got a nice ovation to start the game," Kelly said. "He didn't get many cheers at the end."

Erickson entered the game with a 1-3 record and a 7.48 ERA. He has been among the league leaders in hits allowed since the beginning of '93, and all of baseball had theorized about his struggles.

Scouts have said Erickson would have to rely on a changeup to regain his dominance, but he threw just "two or three" last night. "I basically used my two pitches — fastball and slider," Erickson said.

Erickson called the alteration on his slider "a touchy thing." Any no-hitter could be described similarly.

No Twin had pitched one since Dean Chance at Cleveland on Aug. 25, 1967. Jack Kralick had the Twins' first, against Kansas City on Aug. 26, 1962, and Chance had pitched a five-inning no-hitter against Boston on Aug. 6, 1967.

Erickson had thrown the Twins' two most recent one-hitters. He combined with reliever Mark Guthrie to limit Chicago to one hit on Sept. 24, 1991, at the Metrodome, and pitched a complete-game one-hitter at Boston on July 24, 1992.

"This was a remarkable feat," Kelly said. "He pitched a game I was glad to be here to see."

Erickson received a standing ovation as he took the mound in the ninth. He worked the count to 2-and-1 on pinch hitter Jody Reed, then coaxed an easy grounder to second. He went to 1-and-1 on Alex Diaz, then coaxed an easy grounder to first.

Bill Spiers and Turner Ward walked, bringing up Greg Vaughn, who entered the game 5-for-11 with two home runs in his career against Erickson.

He fouled off the first pitch, took a ball and a strike, then lifted a soft fly to left.

Alex Cole raced in, and shortstop Pat Meares raced out, waving his arms. Cole caught it, avoided Meares' roll-block, and Erickson lifted his arms into the air, almost halfheartedly, before first baseman Kent Hrbek started the party.

"I seriously thought they would run into each other," Erickson said of the last out. "Those guys are still relatively new, and there have been a few times they've come close to doing that ... I don't know. It's not like I've practiced reacting to one of these."

Erickson long has hinted that he needs sterling fielding to win in the Metrodome, where the turf often turns the ground balls he elicits into hits. Even after a no-hitter, he seemed worried.

"I probably won't sleep until 8 a.m.," he said.

Whom would he call first? "I didn't call after giving up seven runs in two innings," he said. "I won't call now.

"I'm happy," he said, actually looking like it. "I still say nothing is greater than the World Series. It's such a team game. Pitchers take all the heat when things go wrong. I could stand here and gloat, or tell everybody they were wrong, but it's not worth it.

"I could give up five runs in the first my next time out. I'm just going to enjoy it tonight."

Then he smiled again. Really.

Number 4

A look at the four no-hitters thrown by Twins pitchers:

Pitcher	Date	Opponent	Score
Scott Erickson	4-27-94	Milwaukee	6-0
Dean Chance	8-25-67	at Cleveland	2-1
Dean Chance*	8-6-67	Boston	2-0
Jack Kralick	8-26-62	Kansas City A's	1-0

*Five inning game

Star Tribune Graphic

Staff Photo by Marlin Levison

Scott Erickson threw to the plate as he worked for the first out in the ninth inning.

No-hitter/ No one discussed the gem

Continued from page 1C

Last September, the Twins had cases of champagne on hand to celebrate Dave Winfield's 3,000th career hit. The best the players could provide Erickson on such short notice was a beer shower, and a chorus of "Hooray for Scotty, Hooray for Scotty."

Erickson tipped his cap to his teammates with this simple acknowledgment: "Thanks, guys."

But it was Erickson who was due the largest debt of gratitude in a season of disappointment and growing fan disinterest.

"It's fun to get that noise back in the Dome," said first baseman Kent Hrbek. "There were only 17,000, 18,000 people there [actually 17,988], but they got loud. A lot of people are going to say, 'I was there,' just like in '87 and '91 [when the Twins won the World Series at the Dome]."

The Twins' pitching has been the worst in the majors this season, and Erickson has struggled as much as anyone. Erickson gave up the most hits and runs in the majors in 1993, and he took a three-game losing streak to the mound last night, during which he had compiled an 8.80 ERA in 15⅓ innings. Erickson's last complete-game victory was on Sept. 23, 1992, and his last shutout was on Aug. 8, 1992.

"I was just as nervous out there as I was in '87 and '91," Hrbek said. "I wanted it bad for him, because I think our pitchers have taken a beating enough this year."

Said Kirby Puckett: "I was nervous, man. I was just glad that he got it. Scotty's taken so much abuse. 'He ain't the same this, he ain't the same that.' A lot of abuse, man. I'm happy for him."

Erickson walked three batters and hit one. He threw 129 pitches, 71 of them for strikes. He got the first two batters in the ninth — pinch hitter Jody Reed and Alex Diaz. He walked the next two hitters, Bill Spiers and Turner Ward, before Vaughn hit a 1-and-2 pitch to short left.

The ball appeared well within range of Cole. But there was some suspense when shortstop Pat Meares kept charging toward left. At the last minute, Meares hit the ground and tumbled out of Cole's way.

"That ball was not going to drop," Meares said, smiling. "I've seen that ball drop before, and I wasn't going to stop until I heard [Cole] call me off."

The game produced the usual amount of superstition. No one mentioned the possible no-hitter to Erickson, and catcher Matt Walbeck said teammates performed the perfunctory tasks of taking the same seat on the bench after each inning.

"No one wanted to ruin it for him," Walbeck said.

The span between Erickson's gem and Chance's no-hitter in 1967 was the third-longest for a team in major league history. The longest is by the New York Mets and San Diego Padres, neither of whom have had a no-hitter.

And the long wait couldn't have ended at a better time for the Twins.

"This is the type of thing — I'm not predicting anything — but this is something that can get a team on a roll," said Meares. "A guy puts out that type of effort, and things can turn around for you."

Erickson's outing doesn't shock Twins

By Jim Souhan
Staff Writer

The Twins entered Wednesday's game against the Milwaukee Brewers with a 7.41 ERA, the worst in baseball by almost a full run. They had given up three or more runs in every game this season, and were starting righthander Scott Erickson, who has ranked among the leaders in hits allowed for a year-and-a-half.

Yet nobody expressed shock that Erickson pitched a no-hitter in last night's 6-0 victory, even though Twins general manager Andy MacPhail was surprised that anyone could pitch one in the Metrodome.

It hadn't happened before.

"It's an amazing game, isn't it?" said MacPhail, who 24 hours earlier had looked distraught over his team's pitching. "I've never seen one of these in all my days, and to see one here ... well, I would have never imagined it."

MacPhail had heard all of the theories about Erickson — the consensus being that he has great stuff but needs to locate it better, or offset it more effectively with off-speed pitches. MacPhail was told that Erickson had talked about altering his grip on his slider, and asked if one small change could produce dramatic results.

"I think tonight is evidence of that," MacPhail said. "If one pitch is a little better, it sets the other pitches up. I think the results speak for themselves.

"I think the important thing is we needed a good start. But I didn't expect anything so grandiose."

Puck defends Erickson

Many of Erickson's teammates have supported him vociferously during his struggles.

"I'm proud of Scotty," said outfielder Kirby Puckett, who had four hits. "He's taken a lot of flak, heard a lot of bad things. It's nice to see this. I'm happy for him."

Twins notes

Tense moments

There were a few interesting moments along the way.

Brewers second baseman Jose Valentin tried to bunt for a hit in the sixth, not a tactic Miss Manners would condone during a possible no-hitter. In the seventh, left fielder Turner Ward swung on a 3-0 count. If there were a baseball handbook, it would say that a team down 5-0 should try to draw walks.

Ward's grounder hugged the first-base line. Twins first baseman Kent Hrbek fielded it and stepped on first. Ward pointed foul, hoping to persuade first-base umpire Dave Phillips, but Phillips ruled it a fair ball and an out.

There were few hard-hit balls. In the first, Alex Diaz led off with a liner to center, and Spiers hit a bullet directly at Twins third baseman Scott Leius. In the eighth, Hrbek made a nice stop and did a Mexican hat dance while corralling Kevin Seitzer's smash, then sprinted — yes, sprinted — to first for the out.

To Carneal, talk of landmark a no-no

Herb Carneal is a traditionalist. The Twins announcer never mentioned that Scott Erickson had a no-hitter until the final out of the game. In the eighth inning he casually told listeners there were "three zeroes" on the scoreboard for the Brewers. In the top of the ninth, Carneal's broadcast partner, John Gordon, said, "There's a lot of excitement here." But Gordon, too, avoided mentioning that Erickson was on the verge of a no-no.

A listener tuning in late to the game knew that Erickson was pitching well, but didn't know how well ... until the very end.

Most recent no-hitters

The major leagues' most recent no-hitters by team, with pitcher or pitchers, opponent, score and date:

American League

Twins/ Scott Erickson vs. Milwaukee, 6-0, April 27, 1994

Baltimore/ Bob Milacki (6 innings), Mike Flanagan (1), Mark Williamson (1) and Gregg Olson (1) vs. Oakland, 2-0, July 13, 1991

Boston/ Dave Morehead, vs. Cleveland, 2-0, Sept. 15, 1965

California/ Mark Langston (7 innings) and Mike Witt (2), vs. Seattle, 1-0, April 11, 1990

Chicago/ Wilson Alvarez at Baltimore, 7-0, Aug. 11, 1991

Cleveland/ Len Barker, vs. Toronto, 3-0, May 15, 1981 (x)

Detroit/ Jack Morris, at Chicago, 4-0, April 7, 1984

Kansas City/ Bret Saberhagen, vs. Chicago, 7-0, Aug. 26, 1991

Milwaukee/ Juan Nieves, Baltimore, 7-0, April 15, 1987

New York/ Jim Abbott vs. Cleveland, 4-0, Sept. 4, 1993

Oakland/ Dave Stewart, at Toronto, 5-0, June 25, 1990

Seattle/ Chris Bosio, Boston, 7-0, April 22, 1993

Texas/ Nolan Ryan, vs. Toronto, 3-0, May 1, 1991

Toronto/ Dave Stieb, at Cleveland, 3-0, Sept. 2, 1990

Note/ x-perfect game

The breakdown

Here's a breakdown of the results Scott Erickson, known as a pure groundball pitcher, got during his no-hitter last night:

Ground balls/ 14, including one double play.

Flyballs/ popups/ four

Walks/ four

Strikeouts/ five

Hit batters/ one

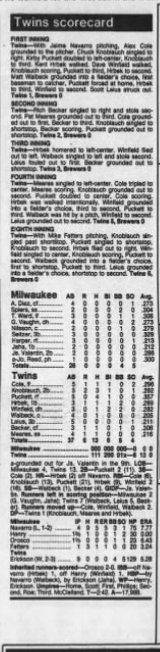
Line-outs/ three

No-hitters vs. Brewers

A list of no-hitters against the Milwaukee Brewers:

Date	Pitcher	Team	Score
April 27, '94	Scott Erickson	Twins	6-0
June 18, '74	Steve Busby	K.C.	2-0

Twins scorecard



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