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SPORTS

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

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TWINS from C1

Cuddyer gets key hit, nails runner at home

After the Twins got two hits in the first inning, Sabathia pitched six innings without giving up another, while Travis Hafner's two homers helped Cleveland build a 4-0 lead on Twins starter Brad Radke.

When Cleveland manager Eric Wedge felt forced to go to his bullpen, the game changed. And it was Mauer who stiffed the momentum.

He led off the bottom of the eighth with his second walk of the game. Cristian Guzman singled to center, sending Mauer to third.

Believer Jose Jimenez caught Stewart's comeback on Guzman's second, then Twins manager Ron Gardenhire struck hit Mike Ryan for Luis Flores.

Wedge countered by bringing in outfielder Scott Hennrich, and Mauer gave the matchup he wanted — a Michael Cuddyer against Stewart.

Cuddyer, the Twins' best hitter this spring, smashed a single up the middle and it was 1-2.

Mienkiewicz singled to right, sending Cuddyer to third, then Corey Koskie smashed a two-strike pitch over the left field fence on one bounce for a ground-rule double. It was 4-3.

Wedge brought in right-hander Rafael Betancourt to face Tomi Hunter, who had a low first strike, then smacked the second into left field to make it 4-4.

Koskie stepped to third. Jacques Jones came up with one out and a chance to score the go-ahead run but struck out on a high fastball. Matthew LeCroy, like Jones, struck out for the third time. The threat was over, and the lunch march began.

The Indians threatened to score in the fifth off closer Joe Nathan. Omar Vizquel doubled to right, and Mauer sprinted toward home.

Jones relayed to Cuddyer, who made a strong throw home. Mauer knocked the plate and applied the tag, and the inning was over.

"What a way to start the season," Mauer said.

Mauer got his first big-league hit leading off the ninth but was stranded. After the Twins bullpen weaved through five shutout innings, the Twins began a comeback that the Mauer family — and Shamer Stewart's many fans in the Twins clubhouse — might be talking about for years.

Let Ryan drive a one-out walk, Gardenhire sent in Nick Punto to run. Mauer smacked a single to right, sending Punto to third.

With runners on second and third and one out, Guzman struck out.

"All he had to do was hit hard somewhere, and he strikes out," Gardenhire said. "You go from that disappointment to 'Oh my God, Steve did it again.'"

Yes, he did. Three pitches after Guzman slunk back to the dugout, Stewart yanked a pitch from Chad Durbin into the left field stands.



Twins fans displayed their affection for Joe Mauer in his major league debut Monday night at the Metrodome.

The long-awaited debut of rookie Joe Mauer in a Twins uniform was an impressive start to his career in the majors.

Big day in big leagues

By Jim Soth and Star Tribune Staff Writers

St. Paul native Joe Mauer made his major league debut Monday night as the Twins' catcher. Facing a dominant left-handed pitcher in C.C. Sabathia, he had predictably mixed results.

> The one that got away: Mauer's first moment in the spotlight barely followed the script written by Twins marketers.

In the second inning, with a runner on third and two out, Brad Radke threw a pitch in the dirt that bounced past Mauer for a wild pitch.

Mauer displayed good form, but the ball slipped over his left arm. Mauer got to the ball quickly, but his throw slipped by Radke at the plate. Other wise, the Twins would have gotten Ben Broussard out.

In the seventh inning, Mauer did a nice job of blocking a wild pitch by Aaron Fultz, keeping the runner on third from scoring.

> First plate appearance: Mauer came up for his first big-league plate appearance as the leadoff batter in the third inning.

Sabathia walked him on four pitches, looking like he was trying to throw the ball through a back wall.

Mauer drew a partial standing ovation when he came to the plate, and another when he headed to first. He



Twins rookie Joe Mauer followed through on the swing that produced his first major league hit in the ninth inning.

drove another walk in the eighth.

> First big-league home run: In the second inning, but not as a 1 out, Sabathia threw a fastball under Mauer's chin.

Mauer worked the count to 3-1, fouled off a fastball, then struck out on a low breaking pitch, matching his high school strikeout total.

He shouldn't feel too bad. Sabathia struck out the side in the inning and had eight strikeouts in the first five innings.

> First sleight of hand: When Corey Crisp hurried down the third-base line in the eighth inning, the ball began to roll fast, then stopped on the line. Mauer flicked it toward foul territory as he picked it up, but home plate umpire John Hirschbeck didn't go for it, correctly calling the ball fair.

> First steal: Crisp stole second base. Mauer received the ball on a pickoff, but Crisp had a good jump and Mauer's throw was high so Crisp was easily safe.

> Patience, my son: Mauer drew out the Twins' five walks, displaying admirable patience on a night when he had to be crav-

ing a big hit.

NOTES

Stewart picks up where he left off

By Jim Soth and the Velle E. Neill III Star Tribune Staff Writers

Shannon Stewart is a career .303 hitter and broke him in the big leagues in 1983. He has always been considered a good player.

What he has done since the Twins traded for him last July has elevated his stature from "good player" to MVP candidate. His walk-off, three-run home run in Monday's 7-4 victory over Cleveland was the latest addition to a long list of homers he has performed in his short time in a Twins uniform.

Late Monday night, Stewart spoke of the transition from Toronto's star-billed lineup, and evoked the name of baseball great Michael Jordan.

"We had Carlos Delgado and Vernon Wells in Toronto — big stars," Stewart said. "Those are the guys you relied on, and I felt like it was my job to set the table for them."

"I was a guy who tried to do the little things. Here, in this situation, I just feel like I should try to get the job done when I have the chance. I put a lot of pressure on myself to succeed in these situations."

"In baseball, you fall seven of 10 times, at least. But you have to think of it as if you're Michael Jordan. You want to have the ball at the end of the game, you want to take the big shot."

Stewart was asked about rookie catcher Joe Mauer, who went 2 for 3 with two walks in his debut.

"I just found out he was from here," Stewart said of the St. Paul native. "I was wondering why everybody was yelling so loud for him."

"He's going to be really good. He's



The Twins will wear a patch on their uniforms this season in honor of Elnor Pothol, wife of owner Carl Pothol. She died last year.

a really good guy, handles himself really well, and I'm really happy for him, having a first game like that."

Ryan was pulled for Cuddyer, who singled sharply to center.

It was a big situation to come through in to be able to step in and succeed was great for the team and great for myself as well," Cuddyer said.

Caddyer replaced Luis Flores at second base and hooked up with right fielder Jacques Jones in the 10th, sending a relay chase home to nail Matt Lawton, who was trying to score the lead run.

> Turf testing: Cleveland had a game scheduled in Philadelphia on Sunday (it was rained out) and was unable to test the Metrodome's new field turf.

"Today it is for us," Wedge said. "We'll be out here hitting early tomorrow, and we'll get a chance to play on it tomorrow."



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On the other hand, the new turf has Twins first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz concerned that his range and reflexes will be unappreciated.

"I'm worried, but I think they can have a slow-footed first baseman now. They won't need one with range now."

> Etc.: The Twins will wear a patch — with the signature "Elnor" — on their uniforms to honor the late Elnor Pothol, the wife of owner Carl Pothol.

> Twins pitcher Aaron Fultz has switched his uniform number from 17 to 36. Pitcher Joe Roa was offered No. 17 after making the team but will keep the No. 71 he was given in spring training. "I figured I'd try something different," he said.

> The Twins opened the season with 12 players who were not on their 2003 Opening Day roster — Fultz, Joe Nauman, Carlos Silva, Brad Thomas, Jose Offerman, Nick Punto, Michael Ryan and Henry Blanco.

> Cleveland first baseman Ben Broussard will be out three to five days after hurting his leg running in on Cristian Guzman's bunt in the ninth.

> On deck: Johan Santana (12-3, 3.07 ERA last season), who will start tonight against Cleveland's Jason Davis (8-11, 4.58), won his last eight regular season starts in 2003. First pitch is at 7:10 p.m.

OPENING DAY

SEASON'S FIRST ...

Caseyism: PA announcer Bob Casey didn't wait for the first pitch to offer the first of thousands of mispronunciations.

Hit: Former Twin Matt Lawton hit Brad Radke's first pitch for a three-run homer.

Turf manifestation: In the first inning, a sharp grounder to Twins third baseman Corey Koskie sent a spray of sand off the field into the air — and his face.

Twins hit: Shannon Stewart hit Cleveland pitcher C.C. Sabathia's first pitch up the middle for a single.

New look: The Twins have a version of their scoreboard that gives pitch counts, and their new 62 yards display a full out-of-town scoreboard, something that had never been used.

How: Sabathia threw a 97-mph fastball to Matthew LeCroy in the second.

Assist: Stewart's assist on Joe Gens' third-inning fly ball, reached up ... and watched it come off the glove and into the stands.

Two-homer game: If this were hockey, Jason Hafner might have been the first star. The North Dakota native hit two homers and a double in his first three games. Hafner has facing the Twins, and hitting in the Metrodome. Last year he hit .321 with two homers against Minnesota, and .348 with one homer in the Dome.

Reminder this is real: The Metrodome will only quiet up if the Twins roll to the eighth. When Michael Cuddyer hit a two-run single, the noise returned to the game just how loud this stadium can get.

Scorecard

HOW THEY SCORED: SECOND INNING — Cuddyer — single hit off the spring left a home run to right center. Cleveland 6, Twins 0.

SIXTH INNING — Torres — single to left field, single to right center. Cleveland 6, Twins 0.

EIGHTH INNING — Torres — single to left field, single to right center. Cleveland 6, Twins 0.

NINTH INNING — Stewart — home run to left field, home run to left field. Cleveland 6, Twins 4.

THIRD INNING — Cuddyer — single hit off the spring left a home run to right center. Cleveland 6, Twins 0.

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