

C2 · SPORTS · STAR TRIBUNE · TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2006 ·

the rotation

TODAY: REUSSE • WED: 10,000 STORIES • THU: Q&A • FRI: WEEKEND SPOTLIGHT • SAT: PERSPECTIVES



DADDY (TONY OLIVA) SAID WHEN I GET TO FIRST BASE, I'M SUPPOSED TO SAY HELLO. »

Kirby Puckett, to the Angels' Rod Carew, after his first big-league hit

patrick reusse between the quots

Not a bad place to play

The BCHL is the second tier of professional hockey and spread across the continent. If you're a player stuck in this league, the preference probably would be to play for the Fort Myers Iceblades in southwest Florida.

"We have great weather and big crowds," forward Reggie Berg said. "This is the best spot in the BCHL... and probably better than most of the places in the AHL."

Berg was a standout for Doug Woog's last group of Gophers. He came to Fort Myers for the 1999-2000 season and stayed for three years. Then, he headed to Germany, where his plan was to play hockey and also to do some academic work that he hoped would lead to law school.

"Things happen," he said. "My dad got sick. I came home to be near him and worked downtown [KBC Dahn Rauscher] for a while. I found out I wasn't ready to quit playing hockey. I came back here in the fall of 2003."

Berg has missed most of this season because of a right wrist injury that can be traced to the WCHA playoffs in 1999. He's back now, rejoicing a team that's a perennial powerhouse.

Berg is married to Christy Eggart, from Andover. "We first met because our fathers were business partners," he said.

The Bergs have an 11-month old son, Les, and Christy is pregnant with a girl who is due in August. They are moving from a townhouse to a three-bedroom home in one of those golf-housing complexes east of Fort Myers.

"We're still trying to sell the townhouse, so hopefully some Minnesotan looking to get out of the cold will come down and buy it," Berg said.

Baseball respite for Roof

Phil Roof, a longtime manager in the Twins' farm system, took a leave from Class AAA Rochester last season to be with his wife, Marie, as she battled cancer. She died this winter.

This left Roof as the main caretaker for

PATS ON BACK

Chance that Illinois hoops fans would trade Bruce Weber (88-14) to get back Kansas' Bill Self. **Verdict: A half-Pat**

A: Strong, B: Not good, C: Probable, D: Excellent

Tommy Klemenz, Marie's 45-year-old brother who has Down syndrome. Tommy had moved in with the Roofs in 1980. The four Roof daughters were in elementary school. It took awhile, but they also became pals and protectors of Tommy.

Roof has retired from the Twins to stay home in Paducah, Ky. He's now in spring training for a two-week stay — in uniform — at the Twins' invitation. His daughters are caring for Tommy, who has been having a tough time since Marie's death.

"There also was a problem with his medication," Roof said. "Tommy's been off his game for quite a few months. He used to stay up until 11 p.m. or midnight, watching any game that was on TV with me."

"Now, he's not interested. The only thing he will watch is Kentucky basketball, and only if they are ahead. If they get behind a few points, Tommy balks."

"He's doing his best. We all love him."

Making an impression

The Twins' big-league staff knew nothing about Jose Mijares, 21, a husky Venezuelan lefty added to the 40-man roster after pitching only

66 1/3 innings in Class A last season. They have now seen him twice — against college hitters (Cococorria-St. Paul) and Sunday against Boston — and the reaction has been positive.

"There were supposed to be some attitude issues there, but he's done all his work here," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "And that's pretty good stuff he throws."

Mijares' curveball is particularly impressive. He's also appears to be in better shape, after weighing in at 231 pounds on a 6-foot frame at the end of last season.

Kelly tutoring Sierra

Former manager Tom Kelly, a defensive first baseman of Doug Mientkiewicz quality in his day, was giving a seminar on the position to 40-year-old Ruben Sierra on Monday on the half-field adjacent to Hammond Stadium.

Sierra has played 2,172 games in the big leagues — and not one inning at first base. "Never, ever at first base, not even in the winter leagues," he said. "But I don't think it will be a problem."

That's probably optimistic. Sierra appears to be too stiff-legged to have the footwork required at first base. It makes more sense, if the Twins want to get Sierra a full game occasionally, to put him in right field and play Michael Cuddyer at first base.

"I'm an excellent athlete," he said. "I still can run and play the outfield. I'm 40, but I feel like a 20-year-old."

Barring injury, Sierra will be on the Twins' Opening Day roster, with Jason Kubel — coming off a year missed because of knee surgery — likely headed to Class AAA Rochester for the first few weeks of the season.



«THAT MARION JONES IS THE MAN WITH THE COWBOYS.»

Twins legend Lew Ford, during batting practice, talking about his favorite NFL team and misfiring on sport and gender with RB Marion Barber III.

the daily buzz



Who will blink first? NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue or players union chief Gene Upshaw?

4X4 A LEGACY OF LABOR WOES

The NFL is just the latest league to arrive at the brink of madness.



	NFL	NHL	NBA	MLB
The situation	Players want bigger share of money; owners don't want to share with each other.	Labor standoff caused the league to shut down after the 2003-04 season.	In 1998, owners were concerned about escalating salaries and locked out players.	A huge rift between owners and players led to a strike in 1994.
The impact	There will be no salary cap in 2007 without new deal.	2004-05 season lost; salary cap won for owners.	League played condensed schedule, salvaged year.	World Series cancelled for first time in 90 years.
The quote	The Vikings' Matt Birk: "It's had pub for the league. It's bad for all of us."	Doug Risebrough, Wild GM: "We cannot take fan support for granted."	Charles Barkley: "We've done a great disservice to the game."	Bud Selig: "We hope our fans never again have to go through the heartache."
The sport now	Owners will vote today; structure of NFL could change.	Better product and structure, but exposure is low.	Averted another lockout with deal last June.	Mary fans came back; some are still angry today.

SOURCES FOR MEMORIES
It's a natural instinct. As someone slips away from us, we focus on memories of that person at his or her best. There are numerous examples throughout today's pages of remembering Kirby Puckett. Here are a few more places you can go:

• www.baseballhalloffame.org is perhaps the best outside resource. **Just log on and type "Kirby Puckett."** The No. 1 link will bring you to a page where you can see an image of his Hall of Fame plaque, view the ballot from the 2001 vote, when Puckett and Dave Winfield were inducted, and download Puckett wallpaper for your computer.

Most important, it has a video montage of his career highlights — a scarcity on the Internet — that includes footage of his home run in Game 6 of the 1993 World Series. You can also see the official transcript of his speech from His 2001 Hall of Fame induction. It's the No. 5 link from the "Kirby Puckett" search. Included is this passage: "It just matters how you play the game. And I played it with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might. I played the game and tried to live my life in a way that would make the people that I love and care about proud."

• http://mlb.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/events/mlb_hof.jpg has a photo slide show of Puckett in his best moments.

• www.baseball-reference.com offers a complete statistical breakdown of his career. Seeing the number of top 10 finishes he had in virtually every conceivable statistical category is just another reminder of what a well-rounded hitter he was.

• www.amazon.com has numerous Puckett-related products for sale, including baseball cards, an autographed bat, a biography, posters and a VHS tape of 1987 World Series highlights.

briefly

AUTO RACING



Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory got in the spirit Monday.

Charlotte picked for NASCAR Hall of Fame

NASCAR's first Hall of Fame will be built in downtown Charlotte, within miles of the race shops and sprawling mansions that make the region an epicenter of the sport.

The selection of Charlotte as site for the \$107.5-million hall ended a yearlong race against two other cities in which the city's leaders campaigned hard for an attraction expected to lure hundreds of thousands of NASCAR fans. Officials hope the hall will open in 2009.

"In the end, you look at what's going to be best in the long run," NASCAR chairman Brian France told a crowd of about 1,000 people at the city's convention center on Monday.

The other finalists were Daytona Beach, Fla., and Atlanta.

TENNIS

Nasdaq-100 Open will debut replay use

The ATP and WTA Tours have decided to use instant replay starting with the Nasdaq-100 Open in Key Biscayne, Fla., in two weeks, officials said Monday. This year's U.S. Open will be the first Grand Slam event to review disputed calls electronically.

Eight-time Grand Slam champion Andre Agassi said in a statement. "This new technology will add a whole new dimension to the game."

Because of the cost — more than \$100,000 at Key Biscayne — instant replay will be used only on the stadium court there, and on the two show courts at the U.S. Open.

Players will be permitted two challenges per set, and a third if there's a tiebreaker. Video screens visible to players, umpire and fans will allow everyone to see the replay result at the same time. The process is expected to take less than 30 seconds, and officials believe replays may speed up matches because there will be fewer arguments.

SLED DOG RACING

Iditarod mushers nearing Finger Lake

Iditarod dog teams headed toward a cabin on Finger Lake on the second day of the 1,100-mile race to Nome.

After starting Sunday in Willow, about 60 miles north of Anchorage, many teams competing in the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race passed overnight through the first two checkpoints of Yentna and Silovetna.

One of the most popular stops Monday was at or near Finger Lake, one of 24 checkpoints along the trail. The cabin is about 120 miles up the trail from Willow.

Rookie **Byran Beaz** of Anchorage was the leader, followed by **Ramy Brooks** of Healy and **Melanie Gould** of Talkeetna.

A \$795,000 purse awaits this year's top 30 finishers. The winner will earn \$60,000 and receive a new pickup valued at almost \$45,000.

AROUND THE HORN

Bicycle racing: Tom Boonen

Belgium won a sprint at the finish in Saint-Amant-Montrond and took the overall lead after the first stage of the Paris-Nice race. All but nine of the nearly 170 riders finished in the same time as Boonen. Bonnes enabled Boonen to take first place overall ahead of American **Bobby Julich**, the defending champion who won Sunday's prologue.

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