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# Hrbeck hangs it up

Here's a sample of what people were saying about Kent Hrbeck on Thursday.

### Insiders/

I just think he's a person that you admired because of his ability and the way he gave it all on the field. To me, I used to love to see him play first base. He was a master around first base. He should have a bunch of Gold Gloves.

Charlie Gutman, former Twins owner

A lot of my friends, when they found out Kent was retiring, said, "Good, now he can play softball and drink beer with us." I don't know what my Mom's going to do. She used to go to just about every game.

Kerry Hrbeck, Kent's sister

### Insiders & fans react

He's a throwback. He played the game hard, and he had a good time. I'm going to miss him. He's a good man.

Rick Steimazzek, bullpen coach

I just wish he had stayed in better shape, from a fan's point of view. But that's him. He just wanted to play ball and not worry about the rest of it.

Gene Larkin, former teammate

In the early days, when I didn't know him too well, I was an advocate of him getting into great condition. Then I realized that wasn't Kent. He didn't feel comfortable doing things that way. Who knows if he could have done better? You can't say. He did fine as it was.

Ron Simon, Hrbeck's agent

When they brought him up from Class A, I said, "You've got to be kidding me." But he won that [first] game with a homer in the 12th, and he kept the club loose. I think he's the type of kid that if he feels like he's hating the ballpark, it's time to go.

Billy Gardner, former Twins manager

In my opinion he's one of the great gloves at first base I've seen in 60 years of pro ball. He was a lucky break for me. I was tipped off by a concessions manager whose son played against him.

Angelo Oddulini, the scout who signed Hrbeck

He lives in the Land of 10,000 Lakes and he wants to fish in all 10,000 of them. I can't blame him.

Kirby Puckett, a teammate since 1984

### Fans/

My wife and I were married Oct. 24, 1987, the same day as Game 6 of the World Series. We had portable TVs in the pews during the ceremony. Following the ceremony, about 150 people crammed into a teeny bar to watch the game. When Hrbeck hit the grand slam, he literally saved our wedding party. He got more toasts than we did. If we would've lost, our party would've been the biggest downer. I owe Hrbeck a huge debt for saving our wedding party that day.

Brian Park, St. Paul

With Hrbeck retiring, the Twins have added another loss to their losing season. No. 14 meant 13 seasons of memories. Hrbeck had Ken Griffey Jr.'s power, Will Clark's glove and Frank Thomas' patience, all in one.

Andre Dhouwong, Brooklyn Park

Hrbeck meant a great deal to me because he played baseball as though it were a game, not a business.

Andrej Hinding, St. Paul

I worked with Kent's dad at Minnegasco. I remember [Hrbeck] coming in from Visalia. He came to work for Minnegasco at the end of the season. He worked with me one Saturday on my cleanup crew and he was a good worker. I'll always remember the joy he brought to his dad.

Bob Hartwell, Edina

Kent Hrbeck, great baseball player? Not a great one reflected in statistics so much as in the imagination of the local sports media. I looked up 'overrated' in my dictionary and I found an 8-by-10 glossy of Hrbeck.

Al Nelson, Crystal

The local media has certainly overrated the hometown boy.

Red Samson, Anoka

It's a shame that so many people will look back at a great career and say "what if." All you have to do is look back and marvel at what has been.

Scott Johnson, Karpis

Kent Hrbeck hugs team owner Carl Pohlad after the Twins won the AL championship in 1987.

Staff Photo by Brian Peterson



## First baseman a special player to Kelly

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different kind of pain that Hrbeck felt on Thursday. It came from the heart, not the knee.

Hrbeck was making it official. The legs could not get him where he needed to go anymore. This would be his last season. The home boy who left Twins fans rich with memories — a home run in his first big league game, that grand slam in Game 6 of the 1987 World Series, insurmountable over-the-shoulder stabs down the right field line, that once-in-a-lifetime takedown of Ron Gant in Game 2 of the 1991 World Series — was retiring at the end of the season.

It was possible that, with the impending strike, this could be his last week of major league baseball.

Hall of Fame talent? "I sure think so," Kelly said.

Book it. For 15 years, Kelly has watched Hrbeck's sweet stroke at the plate, his no-in-any-textbook instincts at first base, seen it all long enough to know that this was talent worthy of Cooperstown. The talent, and the longstanding relationship, moved Kelly to do some things that he never thought he would do, and ones he will never do again.

After the 1989 season, Hrbeck was a free agent, and other teams, including the Detroit Tigers, came calling. Kelly can still remember roaming the halls of a Nashville hotel during the winter meetings, mediating, negotiating, almost begging Hrbeck to stay with the Twins.

"I can still remember pacing the hotel halls, going back and forth between the room and [agent] Ron Simon's, back and forth, hoping that something could get worked out. Basically, I did everything but beg. Well, actually I think I did beg. A player like that, everything he did for me as a manager, you're going to appreciate. I don't know that I would do that again for anybody else. I'm

not sure I'd ever get that involved again."

It took the home boy 30 minutes in the basement with his wife, Jeanie, to decide that the extra \$1.5 million the Tigers had offered was nice, but not enough. He liked it here.

In the end, the home boy stayed home, and helped the manager win another World Series. But there was something nagging at the manager. As good as Hrbeck was — it remains utterly absurd that he has never won a Gold Glove award — as much fun as he was to be around, as helpful as it was to have a star who refused to act like anything but your average Joe in the clubhouse, there was always the question of how great he

might have been. Hall of Fame-great, for his good and for the team, too. People have talked about his shoulder injuries, as if that had something to do with his weight.

"Sometimes, two plus two does not equal four. Those injuries just had to do with him diving. That's like a running back going through the line and tearing up a knee. That's going to happen regardless of the shape you're in.

"But you wondered about the knee, and some other nagging injuries where maybe he wouldn't have had so hard a time. So I felt like I needed to bring some things up. [Hrbeck] didn't say much. I think he was kind of surprised by the whole thing because it wasn't really anything I had ever done before."

"Yet Kelly did not feel better when he walked out of the meeting. He felt downright lousy. On that day, he was the one who felt the pain."

Remember talking to Andy after that and telling him that I felt very bad doing what I did," he said. "I did not enjoy it at all, and I have to tell you that I told myself that day 'I would never do it again. And I didn't."

"I will say that in some ways, as far back as we go, it was just a different situation than any other I've ever been around."

Kelly, a baseball purist, always may wonder the same thing some of us will: what Hrbeck might have been. But it is safe to say that, come next April, the manager will also miss who Hrbeck was. Believe it or not, Hrbeck, so will those of us who wanted more.



Staff Photo by Jeff Wheeler

Hrbeck hams it up during a team photo session.

## The class of '82: Where are they today?

In 1982, the Twins won only 60 games and lost 102. Yet the season is remembered for being a time when a group of young players went through a baptism of fire and emerged as the team's core. A number of those players went on to make key contributions to the Twins, and other teams, for years to come. Some still are playing. Here's a quick look at those players.

**Tom Brunansky:** Acquired in a May 1982 trade. Made the AL All-Star team in 1985 and was a key member of the 1987 World Series champions. Traded to St. Louis for Tom Herr in 1986, a trade poorly received among Twins fans. Recently traded from Milwaukee to Boston, where he has hit nine homers in the last two months.

**Randy Bush:** A serviceable DH and outfielder who spent his entire career with the Twins. He

broke in during 1982 and retired last year. He sometimes filled in at first base when Hrbeck was injured.

**Jim Eisenreich:** Batted .303 in 99 at-bats, a rookie season that was shortened by his battle with Tourette's syndrome. Twins doctors didn't diagnose the condition, and he played only 14 more games for the team, joined the Royals in 1987 and currently plays for Philadelphia.

**Terry Felton:** OK, he wasn't a rookie in 1982, but he won O-13 and ended his career with an O-16 record — a major league mark for most bases by a pitcher who never recorded a victory.

**Gary Gaetti:** Hrbeck's best buddy in the '80s. Made the jump from Class AA Orlando and hit 25 home runs as a rookie third baseman. Played for the '87 world champions and left via free

agency after the 1990 season. Now starts at third base for Kansas City.

**Tim Lincecum:** Also made the jump from Orlando, where he hit 42 homers in 1981. Never took the starting job in the way that people expected he would, but stayed with the Twins through 1989. Starred in baseball and football at Park Center High School.

**Frank Viola:** Moved into the rotation during 1982, when he posted a 4-10 record and 5.21 ERA. Went on, of course, to much bigger and better performances. Won MVP of the 1987 World Series. Traded to Mets in 1989 for a package of pitchers, including current closer Rick Aguilera. Currently on disabled list after arm surgery for injury suffered while pitching for Boston.