

C6 • SPORTS • STAR TRIBUNE • THURSDAY, AUGUST 2, 2007

twins | 35W Bridge Collapse

News-worthy sports days quickly get put in perspective

• REUSSE FROM C1

There still were options for a sports columnist for Thursday's edition. The Twins had four consecutive victories and two consecutive nights of dissonance in the clubhouse. Suddenly, the much-praised Ryan was taking more heat from his cycle and more huge headlines for the sports section. Joe Christensen, one of our baseball writers, came up with the best 'twins story of this season: Johan Santana, the game's best pitcher, ripping General Manager Terry Ryan and ownership for choosing to subtract Castillo and add nothing to the team at the trading deadline.

Any other morning, that story gets the big spotlight on our sports page and a couple of sidebars go with it. On Wednesday morning, it was competing for page C1 space with Tuesday afternoon's official confirmation that Minnesota's most monumental trade since Fran Tarkenton came back from the New York Giants in 1972 had been completed.

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hour later, the camera people were pulling out plugs, wrapping coats and hustling hither and yon.

"What gives?" I asked.

"Didn't you hear?" one of these fellows said. "The 35W bridge by the university collapsed. It's bad. Real bad."

The camera people and TV reporters were gone in a couple of minutes. I packed up, went to the parking ramp behind Target Center and exited to go... where?

I wound up crossing the Hennepin Ave. Bridge, took a right on Main Street and headed down the cobblestone street. There were a few people still sitting in the sidewalk areas in front of cafes. But mostly there were folks in running clothes, and on bikes, and even pushing baby strollers headed toward the end of the road — where Main Street dead-ends maybe 150 yards from the 135W bridge.

We saw the smoke, saw the bridge and its downward angle, moved off the street to make room for the emergency vehicles.

Several young men in Twins jerseys were standing in a field, as close to the bridge as the police tape would allow.

"There were 10 of us going to the Twins game in two cars," Matt Ryan of Little Canada said. "We were a couple of minutes from the bridge. Then, traffic basically stopped. We couldn't figure it out. Someone in the car next to us said, 'The bridge collapsed.' So we took the next exit and came down here. I can't believe it."

Tim Gagne from Roseville, the grandson of Verne, was in the group. "I woke up this morning and saw what Susana had said and I was so mad at the 'twins," he said. "I was just cussing. And now you see this — hear how bad it might be — and I feel kind of silly for being that upset."

Johan's mad. Garnett gets traded. It doesn't mean as much as we think, does it?"

His friend Scott Walsh from St. Paul said: "Doesn't mean a thing."

Wolves owner Taylor would agree. He postponed the news conference and also revealed that his granddaughter had been on the bridge when it collapsed. "She called," Taylor said, meaning she was safe.

« JOHAN'S MAD. GARNETT GETS TRADED. IT DOESN'T MEAN AS MUCH AS WE THINK, DOES IT? »

Tim Gagne, Roseville



A scene of rescue, shock and debris at the site of the I-35W bridge collapse Wednesday in Minneapolis.

Twins decide to play game, keep people off streets

• BRIDGE FROM C1

"We were driving along, chatting away and because we were talking, we missed the exit," Levine said. "We found out after we got to the ballpark that if we hadn't missed that exit, we would have been on the bridge at the time of the collapse."

"Hearing that shook me to the core."

At 7:08 p.m., after the two teams exchanged lineup cards,

Twins public address announcer Adam Abrams informed the crowd about the bridge's collapse. The Twins asked for people's prayers, Abrams said, and he reminded fans to leave calmly if necessary and to keep cell phone use to a minimum.

Within seconds of that announcement, the Twins usual upbeat pregame music started, and the players took the field to roaring applause. The crowd was later announced at 24:880.

"The Twins made the right call," said Jim Schintz, a fan from St. Paul. "The last thing the rescue teams needed was a bunch of people streaming out of this building and onto the streets."

Throughout the game, announcements were made alerting fans of street closings and alternate routes home.

St. Peter said, to his knowledge, all of the Twins players and families were safe.

"We have a lot of folks — obviously fans, season ticket holders, front office employees, concession workers — that were impacted by this," he said.

"It's a tough night to play baseball. From what we know at this point, everybody in our front office is accounted for, but I don't know if we'll know that until tomorrow or the next day."

Staff writer Melissa Rosenzberg contributed to this story.

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distance running

BADWATER ULTRAMARATHON



Blake Benke, a Wayzata native who lives in New York, finished the 135-mile Badwater Ultramarathon about 5 p.m. July 24. He was eighth overall with a time of 30 hours, 56 minutes and 59 seconds.

Runner braves desert heat in 135-mile race

• California's Badwater Ultramarathon poses the ultimate challenge to a few dozen elite runners each summer. It is a challenge to be savored for Blake Benke.

By STEPHEN REGENOLD • Special to the Star Tribune

The bitter pill that is the sport of ultramarathon — foot races of 50 miles or more — is unusually hard to swallow in Death Valley National Park, where each July the Badwater Ultramarathon attracts 85 men and women to run 135 miles through the desert sands and to the mountains beyond.

Indeed, sun bakes almost all life from the sand in Death Valley, where the lowest point of elevation in the Western Hemisphere slumps like a crater on Mars, rocky and dead, a basin encrusted with salt, baking in heat that can rise past 120 degrees on a common day.

But for racers such as Blake Benke, a 30-year-old Wayzata native, the bottom of Badwater Basin marks the beginning of a journey many years and many training miles in the making.

"I've wanted to do Badwater for years," said Benke, now a resident of New York City who started running marathons while attending the U.S. Naval Academy. He later joined the Marines and competed in triathlons.

"Badwater seemed like the ultimate man against nature challenge," he said.

Billed as "the world's toughest footrace," the Badwater Ultramarathon follows roads for 135 miles from Death Valley, through three mountain ranges, and up and down thousands of feet of elevation to finish at a trailhead on Mt. Whitney in California at 8,360 feet. Runners go nonstop, tromping through the day and night past tall dunes and over mountain passes.

Average finisher times break during the entire event.

Daybreak brought renewed energy for Benke, and as he approached Lone Pine, a town at the base of Mount Whitney, a surge of adrenaline took over.

"I had one of the fastest times up the final leg," Benke said, referring to the mountain climb up to the 8,360-foot finish line at the Whitney Portal trailhead.

He finished Badwater about 5 p.m. July 24, completing the race in 30 hours, 56 minutes and 59 seconds, taking eighth place overall.

Benke starts a new job next month in New York, where he lives with his wife, working in finance. Badwater, he said, was the pinnacle of his running career so far.

"I'll probably cut back on the racing," he said. "Maybe just marathons and 50-milers from now on."

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Blake Benke