



Members of the Twins' all-time team enjoy a laugh. In back row, from left, are Kirby Puckett, Kent Hrbek and Tony Oliva. In front, from left, are Earl Battey, Frank Viola and Tom Kelly.

TWINS from C1 Pregame ceremony honors 40th anniversary team

Kelly was the first to be introduced, receiving a standing ovation as he stepped in from the right field bullpen. Every honor he received a rousing ovation. Not surprisingly, the loudest and longest went to fan favorite Kirby Puckett.

"I had goosebumps because I had a chance to play with most of these guys," former pitcher Bert Blyleven said. "I know what each individual meant to baseball, not just to the Twins. I think every one of them are very class individuals."

The 29-minute ceremony ended with a highlight video and group picture. Afterward, the dignitaries gathered around the dugout, mingling as if they never wanted to leave.

"It's awesome to think about what's represented out there with the records and achievements and World Series champions," said former third baseman Gary Gaetti. "There is a really great baseball tradition here if you stop and think about it. There are some of the legends of the game."

Yet even the fuzziness of the event could not escape the tight grip of reality. No one needed a shot of truth serum to understand the return of the former greats will not guarantee a return to the glory days of yesteryear.

"As a former player, it's tough to see what's going on," pitcher Jim Kaat said. "It's disappointing."

The Twins entered Saturday's game against Toronto tied for the second-worst record in the American League and closing in on an eighth consecutive losing season.

"As a former player, it just rips you apart to see that," first baseman Kent Hrbek said. "I lost 102 ball games one season [1982]. It's no fun. We used to sit in the dugout and try to count how many people were in the stands."

"So what's to be done? Several of the honorees said the Twins need to follow the same blueprint for success they used in building World Series champions in the 1987 and 1991. Build from within and then add free agents that can help cement the team."

Oliva said the team has a strong core of young players. He said Twins brass, fans and media simply need to be patient and wait for the returns.

"We are on the right track," Oliva said. "Baseball is like any other business. It goes in circles. We're not far away from being a contending team. I'm not panicking yet. I think next year we're going to be right there in the money."

Curious choice of words, considering cash flow seems to be the primary argument for why the Twins can't succeed. Several players said it's simply too difficult for the Twins to compete with the deep-pocketed teams such as the Yankees, Atlanta and Cleveland in today's economic structure. Those teams stockpile talent while the Twins can only hope to groom it.

"It's probably hard to attract the free agents that would make a difference," Gaetti said. "Obviously the economics have changed

Twins All-time Team

- **Manager:** Earl Weaver (1969-74)
- **Catcher:** Earl Battey (1963-67)
- **First base:** Earl Battey (1963-64)
- **Second base:** Red Carter (1967-78)
- **Shortstop:** Greg Gagne (1983-92) and Dale Gribble (1967-67)
- **Third base:** Norm Macdonald (1961-74) and Dale Gribble (1967-86)
- **Outfield:** Bob Adams (1961-73), Tony Oliva (1962-79) and Kirby Puckett (1964-95)
- **Designated hitter:** Paul Molitor (1978-88)
- **Pitcher:** Steve Busby (1982-93)
- **Utility player:** Dave Thoe (1966-72)
- **Relief pitcher:** Tom Seaver (1973-75), Jim Lefebvre (1963-66) and Jim Perry (1963-72)
- **Left-handed pitcher:** Bert Blyleven (1967-83) and Jim Kaat (1967-83)
- **Right-handed pitcher:** Steve Carlton (1969-80), Jeff Blauser (1987-88) and Al Worthington (1984-88)

since the time we started out. The [Twins] have good young talent. I'm sure they're an exciting team to watch. But you got to have the pieces to the puzzle that really make the difference."

Hrbek said it will be a tough climb back to the top. But not an impossible one.

"We were considered a small-market team and were able to be successful," Hrbek said. "You never say never. There certainly has been some nonparity among teams as far as the Yankees and Braves and a few other teams. But it can be done."

Several former players applauded the efforts of new Twins CEO Chris Clouser, who has taken a proactive approach in trying to rejuvenate the organization.

"He is a real positive person," Hrbek said. "I don't care if you're pumping gas, dipping ice cream cones or whatever, good things are going to happen if you have a positive attitude. I like what he's doing as far as trying to get a new ballpark."

Ab, yes. The Dome: The root of all evil. Or, at the very least, a crummy place to watch a baseball game.

Clouser has visited several cities with new ballparks, and he has formed a group called Minnesotians for Major League Baseball, a citizens group interested in building a baseball stadium.

As with any discussion about the Twins, the conversation this weekend focused on finding a way out of the place that nobody wants to call home.

It's not a baseball atmosphere," Hrbek said. "I made a tour to some of the newer ballparks a few years ago. Man, what a difference it makes. People loved going to the ballpark. It's an experience. People in Minnesota don't like going to the Dome to watch a baseball game."

Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig reiterated the need to build a new stadium during his visit last month. He said it will be tough for the Twins to survive in the Dome if baseball's owners and players union approve sweeping recommendations made recently by a blue-ribbon panel. The panel also said that some struggling teams might need to be moved.

"It's hard to imagine not having baseball here," Kaat said. "I don't think that will ever happen, because I don't think there is any place for them to go. But I don't know if there are any magical answers for what needs to be done."