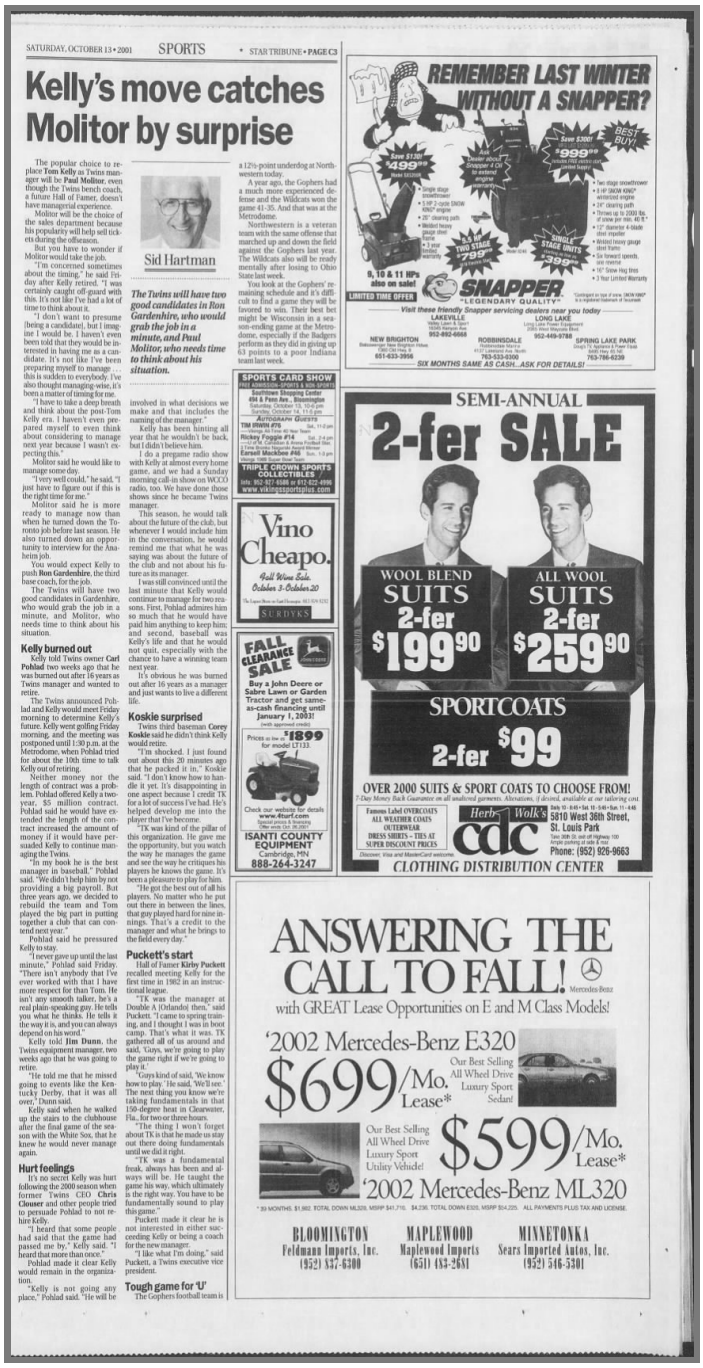

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Kelly's move catches Molitor by surprise

Sid Hartman

The Twins will have two good candidates in Ron Gardenhire, who would grab the job in a minute, and Paul Molitor, who needs time to think about his situation.

The popular choice to replace **Tom Kelly** as Twins manager will be **Paul Molitor**, even though the Twins bench coach, a future Hall of Famer, doesn't have managerial experience.

Molitor will be the choice of the sales department because his popularity will help sell tickets during the offseason.

But you have to wonder if Molitor would take the job.

"I'm concerned sometimes about the timing," he said Friday after Kelly retired. "I was certainly caught off-guard with this. It's not like I've had a lot of time to think about it.

"I don't want to presume [being a candidate], but I imagine I would be. I haven't even been told that they would be interested in having me as a candidate. It's not like I've been preparing myself to manage ... this is sudden to everybody. I've also thought managing-wise, it's been a matter of timing for me.

"I have to take a deep breath and think about the post-Tom Kelly era. I haven't even prepared myself to even think about considering to manage next year because I wasn't expecting this."

Molitor said he would like to manage some day.

"I very well could," he said. "I just have to figure out if this is the right time for me."

Molitor said he is more ready to manage now than when he turned down the Toronto job before last season. He also turned down an opportunity to interview for the Anaheim job.

You would expect Kelly to push **Ron Gardenhire**, the third base coach, for the job.

The Twins will have two good candidates in Gardenhire, who would grab the job in a minute, and Molitor, who needs time to think about his situation.

Kelly burned out

Kelly told Twins owner **Carl Pohlad** two weeks ago that he was burned out after 16 years as Twins manager and wanted to retire.

The Twins announced Pohlad and Kelly would meet Friday morning to determine Kelly's future. Kelly went golfing Friday morning, and the meeting was postponed until 1:30 p.m. at the Metrodome, when Pohlad tried for about the 10th time to talk Kelly out of retiring.

Neither money nor the length of contract was a problem. Pohlad offered Kelly a two-year, $5 million contract. Pohlad said he would have extended the length of the contract increased the amount of money if it would have persuaded Kelly to continue managing the Twins.

"In my book he is the best manager in baseball," Pohlad said. "We didn't help him by not providing a big payroll. But three years ago, we decided to rebuild the team and Tom played the big part in putting together a club that can contend next year."

Pohlad said he pressured Kelly to stay.

"I never give up until the last minute," Pohlad said Friday. "There isn't anybody that I've ever worked with that I have more respect for than Tom. He isn't any smooth talker, he's a real plain-speaking guy. He tells you what he thinks. He tells it the way it is, and you can always depend on his word."

Kelly told **Jim Dunn**, the Twins equipment manager, two weeks ago that he was going to retire.

"He told me that he missed going to events like the Kentucky Derby, that it was all over," Dunn said.

Kelly said when he walked up the stairs to the clubhouse after the final game of the season with the White Sox, that he knew he would never manage again.

Hurt feelings

It's no secret Kelly was hurt following the 2000 season when former Twins CEO **Chris Clouser** and other people tried to persuade Pohlad to not re-hire Kelly.

"I heard that some people had said that the game had passed me by," Kelly said. "I heard that more than once."

Pohlad made it clear Kelly would remain in the organization.

"Kelly is not going any place," Pohlad said. "He will be involved in what decisions we make and that includes the naming of the manager."

Kelly has been hinting all year that he wouldn't be back, but I didn't believe him.

I do a pregame radio show with Kelly at almost every home game, and we had a Sunday morning call-in show on WCCO radio, too. We have done those shows since he became Twins manager.

This season, he would talk about the future of the club, but whenever I would include him in the conversation, he would remind me that what he was saying was about the future of the club and not about his future as its manager.

I was still convinced until the last minute that Kelly would continue to manage for two seasons. First, Pohlad admires him so much that he would have paid him anything to keep him; and second, baseball was Kelly's life and that he would not quit, especially with the chance to have a winning team next year.

It's obvious he was burned out after 16 years as a manager and just wants to live a different life.

Koskie surprised

Twins third baseman **Corey Koskie** said he didn't think Kelly would retire.

"I'm shocked. I just found out about this 20 minutes ago that he packed it in," Koskie said. "I don't know how to handle it yet. It's disappointing in one aspect because I credit TK for a lot of success I've had. He's helped develop me into the player that I've become.

"TK was kind of the pillar of this organization. He gave me the opportunity, but you watch the way he manages the game and see the way he critiques his players he knows the game. It's been a pleasure to play for him.

"He got the best out of all his players. No matter who he put out there in between the lines, that guy played hard for nine innings. That's a credit to the manager and what he brings to the field every day."

Puckett's start

Hall of Famer **Kirby Puckett** recalled meeting Kelly for the first time in 1982 in an instructional league.

"TK was the manager at Double A (Orlando) then," said Puckett. "I came to spring training, and I thought I was in boot camp. That's what it was. TK gathered all of us around and said, 'Guys, we're going to play the game right if we're going to play it.'

"Guys kind of said, 'We know how to play.' He said, 'We'll see.' The next thing you know we're taking fundamentals in that 150-degree heat in Clearwater, Fla., for two or three hours.

"The thing I won't forget about TK is that he made us stay out there doing fundamentals until we did it right.

"TK was a fundamental freak, always has been and always will be. He taught the game his way, which ultimately is the right way. You have to be fundamentally sound to play this game."

Puckett made it clear he is not interested in either succeeding Kelly or being a coach for the new manager.

"I like what I'm doing," said Puckett, a Twins executive vice president.

Tough game for 'U'

The Gophers football team is a 12½-point underdog at Northwestern today.

A year ago, the Gophers had a much more experienced defense and the Wildcats won the game 41-35. And that was at the Metrodome.

Northwestern is a veteran team with the same offense that marched up and down the field against the Gophers last year. The Wildcats also will be ready mentally after losing to Ohio State last week.

You look at the Gophers' remaining schedule and it's difficult to find a game they will be favored to win. Their best bet might be Wisconsin in a season-ending game at the Metrodome, especially if the Badgers perform as they did in giving up 63 points to a poor Indiana team last week.

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