

PAGE C10 • STAR TRIBUNE

SPORTS

SAURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2001

### TOM KELLY RETIRES

# It's not just Gardenhire or Molitor

By Jim Souhan  
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Tom Kelly and Paul Molitor are the two most obvious candidates to replace Tom Kelly as the Twins manager, and Kelly is believed to have received the most attention as the likely successor.

Other signs indicate Molitor could become the leading candidate if he wins the job, but Molitor says he is uncertain how he wants to proceed.

"I have thought about managing from time to time, and I thought I definitely was not ready some time ago, and still feel in a somewhat not very right now at this time," Molitor said. "I'm not sure it's something I'm interested in or not interested in. All I will say is that my family is a factor, whether it can be done or not, I don't

know, but it is a factor. I just don't know if it is a positive or negative."

Twins General Manager Terry Ryan said the search for Kelly's replacement will be as quick as simple as many Twins fans probably expect.

"We're going to explore inside the organization and outside the organization and see if we can get quality people in the organization we will certainly consider and we've got people outside the organization that I'm sure I'll be hearing from."

"Once you hear an announcement like this, I'm sure there's a pretty good chance my phone will be ringing."

Ryan said he did not have a timetable in mind. Asked for names of internal candidates, Ryan said, "I'm not going to get specific. When it comes to internal candidates, you don't know who's going to emerge."

"This is an attractive job right now

to leave for other opportunities. Gardenhire has an excellent reputation and has been covered for other managerial jobs, and Molitor would have the support of some players."

"We're going to explore inside the organization and outside the organization and see if we can get quality people in the organization we will certainly consider and we've got people outside the organization that I'm sure I'll be hearing from."

"Once you hear an announcement like this, I'm sure there's a pretty good chance my phone will be ringing."

Ryan said he did not have a timetable in mind. Asked for names of internal candidates, Ryan said, "I'm not going to get specific. When it comes to internal candidates, you don't know who's going to emerge."

"This is an attractive job right now

to leave for other opportunities. Gardenhire has an excellent reputation and has been covered for other managerial jobs, and Molitor would have the support of some players."

"We're going to explore inside the organization and outside the organization and see if we can get quality people in the organization we will certainly consider and we've got people outside the organization that I'm sure I'll be hearing from."

"Once you hear an announcement like this, I'm sure there's a pretty good chance my phone will be ringing."

Ryan said he did not have a timetable in mind. Asked for names of internal candidates, Ryan said, "I'm not going to get specific. When it comes to internal candidates, you don't know who's going to emerge."

"This is an attractive job right now

to leave for other opportunities. Gardenhire has an excellent reputation and has been covered for other managerial jobs, and Molitor would have the support of some players."

"We're going to explore inside the organization and outside the organization and see if we can get quality people in the organization we will certainly consider and we've got people outside the organization that I'm sure I'll be hearing from."

"Once you hear an announcement like this, I'm sure there's a pretty good chance my phone will be ringing."

Ryan said he did not have a timetable in mind. Asked for names of internal candidates, Ryan said, "I'm not going to get specific. When it comes to internal candidates, you don't know who's going to emerge."

"This is an attractive job right now

### CURRENT PLAYER REACTION

## Players shocked by the timing

By Jim Souhan and LaVelle E. Neal III  
Star Tribune Staff Writers

Current Twins players reacted with shock to Tom Kelly's departure. One Twin even went so far as to say he had "let it go."

"Doug," said struggling closer LaTroy Hawkins, "I did let it go. I'm not sure that's exactly how I feel about it."

Twins first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz couldn't muster that much emotion when first informed of Kelly's decision. "Wow," Mientkiewicz said. "I'm sure I can't be mad about it."

Hawkins was representative of the players who gained Kelly's favor, and his clubhouse had to change his mind. Kelly never criticized him this season, even as Hawkins' basic, muck-inning helped kill the playoff hopes.

Mientkiewicz was representative of the players who chafed under Kelly's sarcastic, tough-love leadership before learning to play for him, and to appreciate him.

"I thought when this group of guys came together in '99 that that would be TK's last year," Mientkiewicz said. "To deal with what he had to deal with when we all came up there together was a nightmare. I thought for sure he'd come back. In fact, I made a bet that he was going to sign at three years old."

At the end of the season, Mientkiewicz, vice president of Kelly, went into Kelly's office. "I said, 'I want to be your three-hole hitter for the next three or four years — what can I do to make myself better?' He said, 'You do me everything you possibly could. So I figured he'd come back."

"We were through a lot personally, and the way he treated me this year, I couldn't have asked for anything more from a manager. He stuck up for me, he was always there for me. He was phenomenal. He was there to put me on the back when he thought you needed it."

Kelly had his detractors among young players, especially top prospects who thought they deserved immediate playing time. Todd Helton criticized him many times. David McLary, class AAA lefty, including Mientkiewicz — criticized him during the summer of 2000. But once a player earned Kelly's trust, Kelly would fight for him. Hawkins said a young player has to show a willingness to work on shortcomings — and learn how to handle his criticisms — to play for Kelly.



Tom Kelly congratulates Joe Mays after Kelly wins 1,000th game, being pitched on Nov 7, 2000.

"Some guys never could handle that when he made a big deal about things," Hawkins said. "I think some of the guys felt it might happen." Mays said, "We didn't talk about it a whole lot. We tried to do the best we could at the end of the year and give him some incentives to come back."

Friday, long after Kelly had concluded his own conference, Twins third baseman Garry Kniskern walked up to Kelly and shook his hand.

"TK, it's been an honor to play for you."

Many Twins felt that way Friday.

## Maybe this is for the best of everyone

By Jim Souhan and LaVelle E. Neal III  
Star Tribune Staff Writers

A Chicago radio station called Minnesota early Friday afternoon. The folks on the air wanted an explanation. They wanted to know why there seemed to be so much change in the Twins Club about the departure of a manager who won 14 percent of the time over the past seven seasons.

The one of the reasons will never quite understand that, no matter what happened after the second of two managerial games, Tom Kelly will always hold a hallowed place in Minnesota sports history. Anybody who would a hardy in the Minnesota, at a sports bar or in a car in the living room, in 1987, could testify to why. Anybody who knows the meaning of these words of 1991 — "And we'll see you in Minnesota night" — also could explain why.

And so Kelly will be hailed locally, even though the odds might appear made around the country. In Minnesota, there will be no surprise, maybe even shock, that Kelly has decided to step aside after 13-plus seasons as Twins manager. Some fans literally grew up with Kelly as the Twins manager, and don't know anything else.

There also will be people who are not going to stick around to perhaps think the job that he seemed to start, to being the franchise back to respectability, that maybe the time is right. Perhaps this is the perfect time for Kelly to step away.

"It's been a fantastic ride for me," Kelly said Friday. "I feel it's time for me to step aside."

For the better part of eight seasons (1993-2000), Kelly had the Twins where he felt they were, at least didn't matter what they did together. If part of the reason Kelly stepped around this season was to prove he still could manage if given the chance, that mission was accomplished.

He got something back in 2001.

If part of the reason he stuck around was to make a statement to the doubters — Chris Chelers and other more subtle members of the organization — that he could work with younger players, he certainly made his point with the first half of this season. Twins center fielder Torii Hunter has said many times this season that after the first day of spring training, Kelly was a different, less distant, manager than in the past.

The team responded. It's the old chicken-egg argument. Was Kelly's new approach brought about because he sensed he finally had something to work with? Or did Kelly's new approach bring about a change in the young players that allowed them to relax and play better? Maybe it was some of both.

Maybe some of it was that a few players grew up, and finally mastered the art of working with Kelly.

Yet it was clear again Friday during Kelly's news conference that he still does not identify with his current players the way he did with the old gang. Games that he did play produced two World Series rings, that is not an surprising.

But given that he has spent the past three years trying to ship the current group into shape, it seemed curious to not name a single current player as the best recent memory lane.

Kelly went out of his way to laud one of Hrbek's trademark plays, heading down the right field line, and with his back to the infield, snagging pop flies. Kelly said nobody had come close to doing it since, though center fielder Doug Mientkiewicz has made the same play — and several others — repeatedly during a cold-Clay-worship season.

It was a small thing — but with Hrbek at the news conference, the manager was in part playing to the audience — yet so telling.

Perhaps this is the perfect time for a new manager, one who has a different generation of players stuck in his memory bank.

What better time for Paul Molitor, this season because an increasingly active voice connecting with players in the clubhouse, to move in? Evidently, the Twins could lose this promising talent to another franchise if he does not get a chance to move up. And Kelly made it clear Friday he was wanting to get a little relief anyway.

Maybe this is the best of both worlds.

Kelly gets to leave on his terms — not exactly on top, but having been allowed to re-establish his evidence — with management begging him to stay, rather than sending the mixed signals of a year ago.

The Twins players get the opportunity to take the next step by listening to Hrbek, the knowledgeable voice in Molitor, who might also be less inclined to compare them to the incomparable players that produced two Game 7s.

— Dan Barreiro is a columnist for Star Tribune.



Dan Barreiro

### FORMER PLAYER REACTION

## Kelly's decision catches Hrbek by surprise

By Jim Souhan  
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Tom Kelly kept his decision to retire secret from even his favorite players.

"I traveled with him last Monday," Ken Hrbek said. "He never mentioned a word about it. I was shocked. I thought he was having fun."

"I mean, you could see the wear and tear on the guy in the dugout during a tough game, but TK had a great way of lighting through it. He'd finally had enough of it. He's going on to bigger and better things — although I've seen his gut swing, and it's not bigger and better. It's never had, really."

"If I can give him any advice on retiring, he's going to have a blast, because I'm having a blast."

Hrbek's reaction to Kelly's retirement was typical of Kelly's former players, at least those who won championships for him. They were shocked, perhaps briefly saddened — and then happy that Kelly, 51, is retiring young enough to enjoy life outside the dugout.

"He was great for me," said Kirby Puckett. "He's a great friend, and I know everything is going to be all right for TK. He's one of the best managers in the game of baseball, ever. He came in here in '86 and '87 and took a team that nobody gave a chance to the World Series. Then we went from worst to first in '91. We'll go down in history together."

"I'd like the Timberwolves or Vikings win it. We're the only guys around who have won it all in



Kirby Puckett jokes with Tom Kelly after his announcement Friday. Puckett said he has no interest in being a candidate to replace Kelly.

this team. We did exactly what he told us to do, and we won."

Kelly could be aloof with players.

"Maybe he lost some players," said former pitcher and Twins broadcaster Bert Blyleven. "Maybe some players have gone through the cracks — the Todd Walkers, the Chuck Knoblauch, guys like that. But all in all, I think you have to look where the club is now. Are they better than last year? Definitely."

Gladden remembers Kelly leading the Twins to the '97 pennant.

"I loved playing for him," Gladden said. "In the seventh or eighth inning, you'd look down the bench and know that your manager is going to lead you to the right way."

Hrbek compared Friday to another prominent day in Twins history — the day Puckett announced his retirement.

"Nobody knows the Twins without TK," Hrbek said. "It's the same thing as losing Kirby Puckett — it's of the same magnitude."