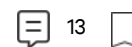


Remembering Wayne Hattaway, Twins' one-of-a-kind 'director of player morale'



By Dan Hayes (/author/dan-hayes/) May 5, 2020



In more than 50 years with the organization, he was known to be quick, witty, brash, well-informed and unrelenting in his evaluation of all things Twins. No matter his status, if a player was struggling, Twins “director of player morale” Wayne Hattaway wouldn’t hesitate to crush them.

What initially shocked many of the players and coaches targeted by Hattaway, who passed away Thursday at age 80 after a brief battle with cancer, was the source of the criticism. Whereas he was surrounded by a clubhouse full of chiseled athletes, the longtime minor-league equipment manager/clubhouse attendant/trainer stood 5-foot-5 and weighed 130

pounds. He often limped his way through the clubhouse and featured a high-pitched voice with a southern twang that was a constant target for players looking to retaliate along with a burly mustache some have described as “eerie.”

Yet if you were a member of the organization who crossed paths with Hattaway, there were more chances than not you loved the man they affectionately came to know as “Big Fella.”

“If you messed up, he was going to tell you about it,” former outfielder Jacque Jones said. “He always had the ear of the organization, so he knew what was coming down the pipe before you did. When Wayne talked, you listened. Whether you liked it or not, you listened because he was very knowledgeable of what was going on, and he was an All-Star at ragging.

“Kirby (Puckett) wasn’t exempt. (Kent) Hrbek wasn’t exempt. Torii (Hunter) wasn’t exempt. I wasn’t exempt. No one was exempt from Wayne’s ragging or his wrath.”

Though his criticisms could be harsh, Hattaway did it out of love in a way that left a lasting impression on the organization and its players. He was a baseball lifer and the Twins were his home.

“(Hattaway) was a baseball fan,” former bench coach Steve Liddle said. “He loved the game and the game loved him back. He was meant for the game. He had a simple mind and because the game is meant to be kept simple, players just adored him. He always told them.

“He was cutthroat.”



Dick Bremer
@dbremer_pxp

The term baseball lifer is thrown around far too liberally. Wayne Hattaway was a baseball lifer. He was as likeable as he was memorable. The Twins lost a piece of their history and personality. Odd to say it since he so fondly agitated everyone but may he rest in peace.



98 6:30 PM - May 1, 2020

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Twins communications director Dustin Morse said Friday he could only piece together parts of an official record of Hattaway's different roles with the Twins. What is certain is that Hattaway began as a 12-year-old batboy in 1952 for a Mobile Bears squad that featured former player and manager Don Zimmer. Hattaway spent a handful of years working for Mobile before, according to @TwinsAlmanac, he joined the Twins organization in 1962 (<http://twinsalmanac.com/waynehattaway/>) as an equipment manager for the Triple-A Dallas Rangers. From there, Hattaway spent the next 30-plus years working in the minors until age slowed him down.

Along the way, Hattaway met nearly every farmhand who came through the organization. Not only did he leave lasting impressions upon player after player, Hattaway developed critical relationships and gained years of baseball know-how.

“He wasn’t afraid to talk the game,” former general manager Terry Ryan said. “He probably had as much history as anybody (in the organization). When you’re around Tony Oliva or Rod Carew or Harmon Killebrew — he had enough knowledge that he could go toe-to-toe on a discussion about anybody.

“He had his ear in that clubhouse and if the manager had a discussion with the farm director or the general manager, Wayne probably knew that. He would have inside information on a lot of things, but was good enough to hold it within until the player was notified. He had enough instincts about clubhouse protocol. He had a lot of information.”

In the early 2000s, late in Tom Kelly's run as Twins manager, the club unofficially brought Hattaway to the majors. He worked all home games and sometimes traveled on road trips with players. The arrangement continued when Ron Gardenhire took over as manager in

2002. Knowing the levity he provided in the clubhouse, Gardenhire kept Hattaway, who had been his clubhouse attendant when he managed at Double-A Orlando, as part of the staff.

“We became really good friends,” Gardenhire said. “When you’re in the grind, you need relief from just the everyday (of) going out there and fighting. Guys get upset. You’re going to have those moments. Honestly, he could turn it into something different in a heartbeat.

“Somebody’d get mad, guys pushing each other. Big Fella would come in and say something stupid like, ‘Why don’t you two fight? Neither one of you can hit.’ He always had the right line for the right moment and everybody would shut up and start laughing and they’d walk away.”

‘Who is this guy?’

Hunter immediately laughed when he recalled the first time he met Hattaway back when he was 17. The 20th overall pick of the 1993 amateur draft a month earlier, Hunter was set to debut in the Gulf Coast League. Upon arriving at the team’s Fort Myers, Fla., facility, Hattaway fired at will on Hunter.

“Wayne said, ‘I hope you’re better than the last first-rounder,’” Hunter said. “I was like, ‘What? Who is this guy?’

“He was definitely a different character. You grow to love him because he’s so funny. He’s quick. He’s witty.”

There was no differentiating for Hattaway. Anyone wearing a Twins uniform was a target. And regardless of how bad the situation was, Hattaway didn’t refrain from attacking.

“Baseball is kind of infamous for having those characters,” former reliever Matt Capps said. “I guess there’s so much downtime that the characters and uniqueness really has an opportunity to shine. Big Fella is something else. I enjoyed (the trash talk) coming in even after blowing a save or having a bad game. You come in and just the light-heartedness — ‘It’s OK. With you, it won’t be the last time. You’re just not that good.’

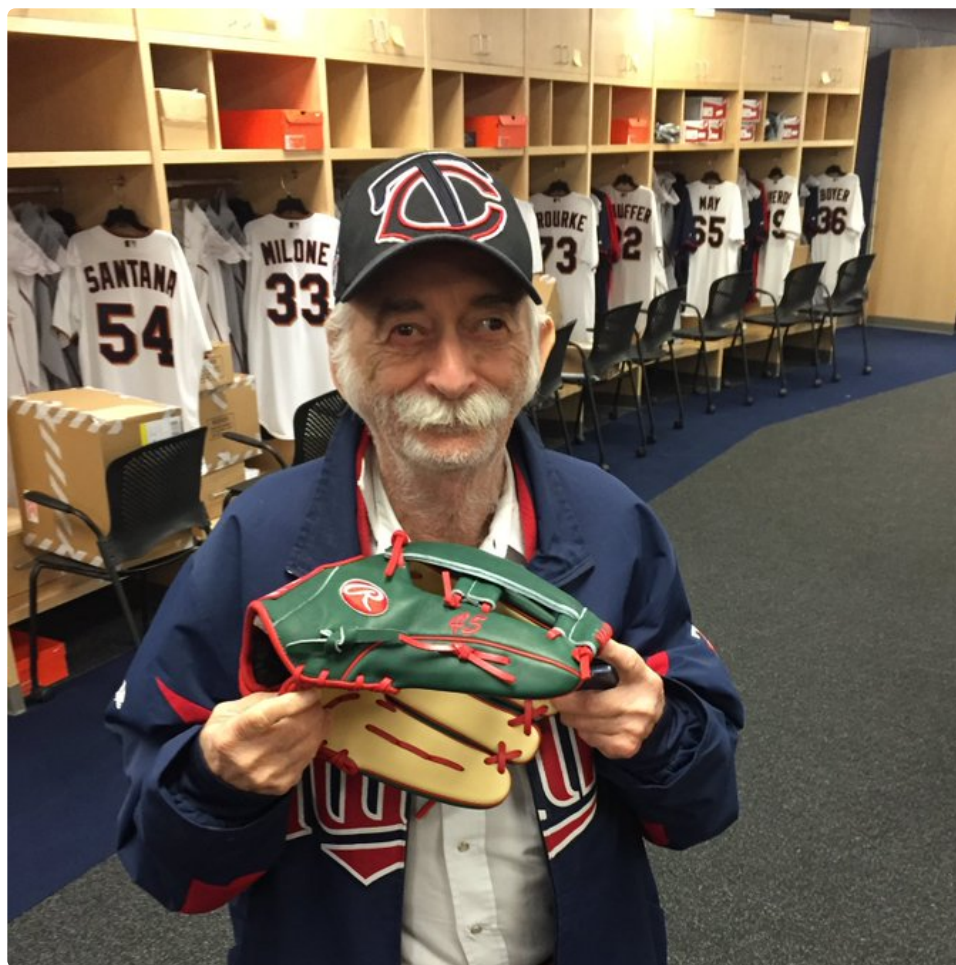
“There’s something about it. You know what? I’m playing baseball. This is not the end of the world. He had a way of making you remember that or realize that.”

Phil Hughes



@P.Hughes45

Saddened to learn of the passing of longtime Twins clubhouse attendant “Big Fella” Wayne Hattaway. His infectious laughter and positive attitude will be greatly missed. RIP Big’n



667 10:22 AM - May 1, 2020

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Though the lines could be harsh, players enjoyed each as Hattaway had many years to polish them. No matter the situation, Hattaway had a zinger ready to go.

“He would always say something about your batting average or the game you’d had last night,” ex-outfielder Josh Willingham said. “Hey, Big ‘Un, you got three more strikeouts in you?”

Hunter is able to quickly repeat Hattaway’s lines one after the other. The two grew close during the first part of Hunter’s career with the organization. He often took Hattaway, who slept in the clubhouse every spring, out for meals just to get him away from the facility.

“Don’t worry about anything,” Hunter said in his best Hattaway voice. “Don’t worry about it. It’s not you. It’s the scout that signed you.”

The audacity to say the things he did left Jones to describe Hattaway as having the “biggest ballsack ever.”

But Hattaway’s style didn’t always sit well with everyone. His poor timing rankled a few feathers along the way. A minor-league catcher during his playing days, Liddle recalls experiencing a rough stretch and not taking the criticism too well.

“We’re in Columbus, Ga., and it’s about 100 degrees,” Liddle said. “I’ve had a tough series and lo and behold, Big Fella is walking by. He’s trying to get up everybody’s uniform ... A few minutes passed and he came by and my locker was right beside a Coke machine. He said, ‘You’re taking this way too hard. It’s not your fault. It’s the scout that signed you. You shouldn’t even be here.’ When he said that, I grabbed him by his leg and by his chest and threw him up on top of that Coke machine. I wouldn’t let him down and I wouldn’t let anybody get him down.

“Every day I would see him from that time on he’d say, ‘You’re not mad at me are you, Big Un? You’re not mad at me are you?’ He was a character.”

For as much as Hattaway liked to prod, he was equally sensitive. As Gardenhire noted, Hattaway spent the rest of the day apologizing to anyone he ragged hard enough to upset.

Capps appreciated the reset.

“He was the first one to greet you when you walked in the next day,” Capps said. “That helped. It wasn’t like you walked in the next day and he was pissed off at you for losing the game or blowing the save. Whatever, it’s a new day.”

Vignettes of Big Fella

One of the reasons Hattaway has as many fans as he does is that he took crap as well as he gave it. He provided his teammates’ ample targets.

“Him being somebody that likes to pick on everybody and me being somebody that’s going to give it right back, we had an instant kind of connection,” Willingham said. “He enjoyed the attention. He laughed. He knew he had some areas where people could really pick on him.”

For starters, there was the height. At 5-foot-8, Puckett was on the smaller side for baseball and yet he towered over Hattaway. Then there was the high-pitched voice, which raised a few decibels anytime Hattaway got excited. Everyone tried to imitate it.

“You weren’t anybody with Minnesota if you didn’t try to impersonate Big Fella,” Jones said. “I hated him (at first). I’m coming out of college and I go to Fort Myers and I’m trying to get acclimated to pro ball and I’ve got this old guy with this big old beard and dark glasses and he’s walking around and just ripping on everybody. The more I was around him and saw he was ripping on everybody else, I just fell in love with him. He just lightened the mood being in A-ball.”

Hattaway’s appearance had a way of doing that. His glorious mustache was on full display on several Orlando Twins baseball cards in the late 1980s.

“It was to the point where it was kind of eerie,” Gardenhire said. “Watching him eat wasn’t the most fun thing you’d ever seen in your life because the mustache was hanging down there.”



The Twins Almanac

@TwinsAlmanac

Condolences to the family and friends of [#MNTwins](#) clubhouse legend Wayne Hattaway.

What's your favorite Big Fella story?twinsalmanac.com/waynehattaway/

Wayne Hattaway – The Twins Almanac

Longtime Twins organization equipment manager, trainer, and clubhouse attendant Wayne “Big Fella” Hattaway got his first job in

twinsalmanac.com

73 7:31 AM - May 1, 2020

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Liddle remembers knowing what meals to expect based on what was left in Hattaway's mustache.

"I didn't even know if he had teeth," Liddle said. "You could tell what soup we had each day by what was in his mustache. It was kind of a soup filter."

That's just one in a lengthy list of stories of Hattaway his former colleagues fondly remembered, including:

— The time Hattaway was needed on the field because Captain Dynamite, a traveling minor-league pyrotechnic lounge act, required medical attention:

"(Captain Dynamite) would blow himself up with some Styrofoam after the game around second base with a little bit of dynamite," Liddle said. "One night, something went wrong and something cut him. They asked if we had a trainer and Wayne came running out there because he was also the trainer, even though he wasn't certified. Wayne saw that blood and he passed out. They ended up carrying Wayne off and Dynamite walked himself off."

Said Gardenhire: "Wayne ran out there and saw blood and passed out. Right out on the field. That's the story and I'm sticking to it."

— The time the clubhouse TV didn't fare well after a kicker for Hattaway's beloved Alabama Crimson Tide missed a game-winning field goal try as time expired:

"Wayne had been sweeping," Liddle said. "When he missed that field goal, the broom handle went right through the TV. I guess Randy Bush and a couple of the guys got the TV out of the dumpster and taped it back together with leg tape and I guess Big Fella went on a big rampage after that too."

— When the team's training staff recognized Hattaway for his efforts with a clubhouse ceremony around or during spring training 2011:

“We threw a celebration for the one-millionth towel folded,” Capps said. “It was just kind of a running joke how many towels he had folded in his life and in his career. They did a little celebration for him. I just remember the event and kind of celebrating it and thinking that this arbitrary day was the one-millionth towel. It was fun.

“He was a big part of (the camaraderie). Everybody loved Big Fella. He was more a part of a team without being a player on the team than anybody I’d ever seen.”

— Hattaway’s knack for finding different uses for fungo bats:

“He would mix the Gatorade with a fungo bat and turn around and stir the soup with the same bat,” Liddle said. “If you walked in and saw an orange or blue fungo bat, you would know it’s his bat for stirring the Gatorade.”

— When Willingham and his father got Hattaway a field pass before No. 15 Texas A&M upset No. 1 Alabama 29-24 on Nov. 10, 2012:

“He was in hog heaven,” Willingham said. “He wore a suit. He wore his cowboy hat. It was a sight to behold.” ...

Then the elevator to the club level broke.

“It’s a long haul up there,” Willingham said. “We started up that ramp and he needed to take a break. We stopped and took a break. It was five minutes before kickoff. I’m like, ‘Let’s go.’ He could not go any more. We stopped about halfway and he was like, ‘I’m about to have a heart attack.’ ‘We gotta go.’ He put his arm around me and his arm around my dad and we were literally dragging him up that ramp. His cowboy boots were dragging on the toes.”

Already 72, the vision problems Hattaway was experiencing made a difficult game a little more challenging.

“I’m getting mad because ‘Bama is losing and playing like crap and every time there’s a play he’s like ‘What happened, Big ‘Un?’” Willingham said. “That went on the whole game.

“We took him back to his hotel. When he got out of the car he said, ‘Don’t doubt Nick Saban. He knows what he’s doing. Oregon and Kansas State are both going to lose and Alabama is going to win the championship,’ and that’s exactly what happened.”



Hattaway with Josh Willingham at the Texas A&M-Alabama game in 2012. Despite a Crimson Tide loss, Hattaway correctly predicted a national title for his favorite squad. (Courtesy of Josh Willingham)

— When the Twins invited Hattaway to attend the 1987 World Series (he also went in 1991) and he wore a black cowboy hat adorned with a feather and signed by George Strait along with a red duster jacket a la “The Outlaw Josey Wales” star Clint Eastwood:

“He came walking out on that Metrodome floor with that big long overcoat on and his cowboy hat,” Gardenhire said. “It just didn’t get any better. Moments are always tense in those series and there’s a lot of nervous energy. When Wayne walked out everybody just started hooting and clapping and hollering.”

Said Liddle: “People in the airport thought he was Richard Petty.”

— That time that Hunter’s son, Torii Hunter Jr., signed a letter of intent to Notre Dame instead of Alabama, which also recruited him to play football:

“All we talked about is Alabama football,” Hunter said. “I guess there was an article when (my son) was speaking with Alabama. (Wayne) read it and said, ‘Hey, your son has decided to come to the light. It’s where God lives.’ When he signed with Notre Dame he said, ‘He’s going to the pit of hell.’”

— When the trainer got too caught up in his player morale role to effectively do his real job:

“He was one of those guys that rubbed pitchers down before they took the mound,” said Ryan, who was also a minor-league pitcher in the Twins organization in the 1970’s. “He’s ripping you as he’s talking to you and rubbing you down. He said, ‘I’ll see you in about a half-hour, Big Fella.’ He never thought you were going to get very far in a game. I said, ‘I appreciate that, Wayne. Unfortunately, you rubbed the wrong arm down.’”

— When Willingham saw Hattaway give a Minnesota-born starting pitcher a pep talk right before he took the mound:

“This kid was nervous,” Willingham said. “He was young and he was nervous and (Hattaway) walked over to him and goes, ‘Hey, Big ‘Un, I’ll see you about the second inning.’ He left it just like that and sure enough this kid went out and got shelled and he was pulled in about the second inning.”

— When Liddle, acquired by the Twins in 1987 in a minor-league trade, discovered on his first day Hattaway didn’t really clean uniforms:

“Everybody went into the shower with their uniforms on because Big Fella didn’t do laundry,” Liddle said. “You had to wash your uniform in the shower while you were wearing it after the day and then hang it up and then wash your body.”

Said Gardenhire: “He made his own budget and wanted to save money. He would only put like a cup (of detergent) for 40 uniforms.”



Hattaway with then-Twins manager Ron Gardenhire, in 2006. “He always had the right line for the right moment and everybody would shut up and start laughing,” Gardenhire said. (Jim Mone / AP)

‘All about the Big Boy’

Long after they’d moved on, Hattaway remained in touch with his close friends. He was a fixture in the Twins clubhouse and returned every summer through the 2018 season.

Hunter said he and Hattaway, a cancer survivor who found out it had returned after he fell and broke his hip several weeks ago, stayed in close contact over the years. The two spoke once a month in the offseason.

“We’ve spent a lot of time on the phone in the offseason and wintertime just talking about life, the future, what’s going on in the organization,” Hunter said. “I was blessed to have Wayne Hattaway in my life.”

Liddle heard from Hattaway more than anyone. Back in 2010, Liddle reprogrammed Hattaway's flip phone and put himself as the contact that was dialed when Hattaway held down the number six. Often when Hattaway was attempting to dial 6-1-1, he'd ring Liddle instead.

"About 3-4 times a month up until he got sick, I would get a call from Big Fella and he was thinking he was calling Verizon because he left his finger on the six too long and it would always dial me," Liddle said. "I'd say 'Hey, Big 'Un, it's me, man. I'm not Verizon.'"

Liddle considers himself fortunate to have another connection to a man who made life in the clubhouse that much more enjoyable.

"He kept everything in perspective for the players," Liddle said. "That was how Gardy liked it. It was part of the culture he brought. Play the game the right way. Respect the game. And don't take it too serious because we've got to do it again tomorrow. Wayne was kind of the poster child for that."

Gardenhire last saw Hattaway on Feb. 24 in Lakeland, Fla., when he came to visit the Detroit Tigers in spring training.

The club purchased two cakes for Hattaway's 80th birthday and celebrated. Over the past few days, Gardenhire said many former Twins teammates have retold a few of the clubhouse fixture's legendary stories to honor him yet again.

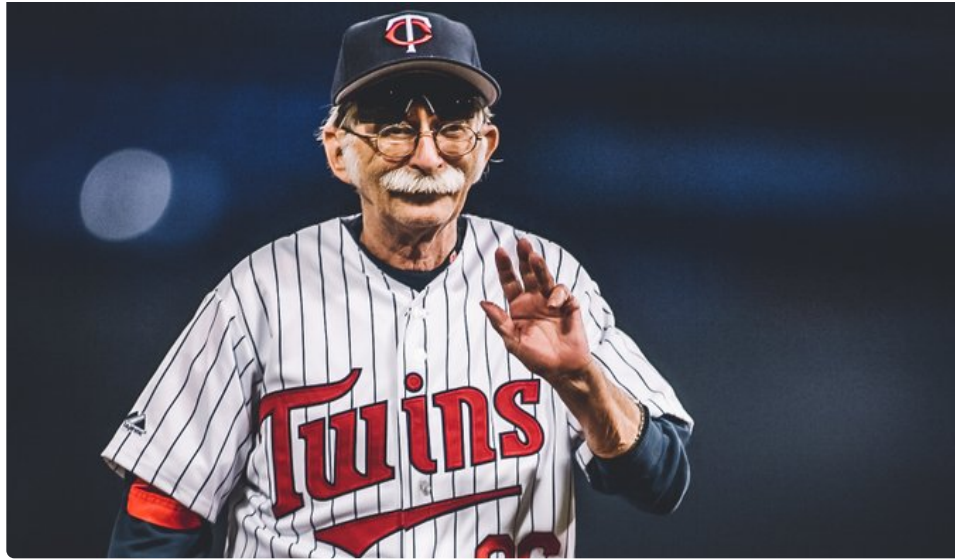
"When we brought him up, it was (because we wanted to) keep him around," Gardenhire said. "He was a blast. My coaches all grew up around him. We all just loved him and the players knew him. He was in a perfect system because they all had him in the minor leagues and they all knew Wayne and they knew he was going to give them grief and they loved it. They laughed. He kept us entertained. He was a fixture for a long time.

"A lot of people are talking and texting. It's all about the Big Boy."



Minnesota Twins
@Twins

We are saddened to hear about the passing of former Twins Clubhouse Attendant, Wayne Hattaway. RIP Big Fella.



3,784 9:36 AM - May 1, 2020

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(Top photo of Wayne Hattaway, in 2012: David Banks / Getty Images)

Dan Hayes ([author/dan-hayes/](#)) is a staff writer for The Athletic covering the Minnesota Twins. Dan joined The Athletic after 5 1/2 years at NBC Sports Chicago and 8 years at The North County Times, where he covered the Chicago White Sox, San Diego Padres, four World Series, the NBA Finals, NHL Stanley Cup Final, NASCAR, UFC, Little League World Series, PGA and the NFL. Follow Dan on Twitter [@DanHayesMLB](#) (<https://twitter.com/DanHayesMLB>).



13 COMMENTS

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Tom M. May 5, 3:34pm

Dan thanks for the article. Characters like Wayne were originated in baseball, and there aren't many left. I was always amazed looking in the Twins' dugout how much access that guy had; now I know why.



Corey H. May 5, 3:52pm