

TWINS

A fond farewell to Wayne Hattaway, the Twins' 'Big Fella'

Wayne Hattaway, a staple in the Twins clubhouse for decades, died Thursday night at age 80.

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PATRICK REUSSE

Tom Kelly was managing a juggernaut at Class AA Orlando that would win the 1981 Southern League championship. The lineup included Gary Gaetti, Tim Laudner, Randy Bush, Tim Teufel and Scott Ullger. Pitching ace Brad Havens was promoted to the Twins in June, and he was soon replaced in the rotation by second-round draft choice Frank Viola.

The Twins had taken Mike Sodders with the 11th selection in the first round. This seemed a reasonable decision, considering the Arizona State third baseman batted .424, hit 22 home runs and drove in 100 runs for a Sun Devils team that would win the College World Series.

Sodders and the Twins continued to argue money for several weeks after the CWS ended. “The word was, if Sodders ever signed, he was coming to double-A to play with us,” Bush said Friday. “Wayne was grumbling every day ... ‘another first-round hotshot, Sodders, bleep, bleep.’”

Wayne would be Hattaway, already a two-decade veteran of the Twins organization as an equipment manager. He also carried the title of “trainer” in those days of small dollars for the minors.

“We were in Memphis and out having a few beers, and ran into this guy from England who was in town for an Elvis [Presley] event,” Bush said. “He knew nothing about baseball. We convinced him to show up at the hotel the next afternoon and take the 3 o’clock bus to the ballpark.

“When we saw Wayne in the hotel earlier, we said, ‘Did you hear Sodders signed? He’s going to be here today.’ Then, we got Tom Kelly in on it, the Englishman shows up, we bring him on the bus and say, ‘Wayne, meet Mike Sodders.’”

Hattaway slapped together a uniform in the clubhouse for “Sodders,” grousing throughout. The prank finally became unraveled when the players went out to have a catch before batting practice.

“Someone made a mistake of throwing a ball to our Sodders,” Bush said. “He didn’t know what he was supposed to do. He let the baseball hit him in the chest.”

Bush had answered the phone call sadly, knowing the subject would be the death of the Twins’ legendary “Big Fella,” on Thursday night at age 80. The call concluded with laughter.

That was the pattern with other Twins who grew up in baseball with Hattaway in the minors, or in the majors when manager Ron Gardenhire arranged to have him as part of the Twins’ traveling party.

Torii Hunter was in the collection of Twins that picked up the tab for road expenses to have the retired Hattaway in clubhouses and dugouts.

“I flew into Fort Myers on July 15, 1993, wide-eyed 17-year-old kid from Arkansas,” Hunter said. “First guy I met in organization was Wayne. He shakes my hand and says, ‘I hope you’re better than our last No.1 choice.’

“The thing about Wayne, behind all the one-liners, he was an encyclopedia of baseball. We had great, long talks. He was an important friend to me.”



JEFF WHEELER — STAR TRIBUNE

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The details of baseball past were always at the ready for Hattaway. For instance: Cleveland came to the Metrodome on Sept. 21, 2001, with a six-game lead with 14 games left over the Twins in the AL Central.

Hattaway had a pregame chat with old pal Charlie Manuel, the Cleveland manager, in the visiting clubhouse. On his return, Wayne said:

“Charlie’s all nervous down there. I told him, ‘Relax. Gene Mauch couldn’t screw this one up.’”

Mauch’s Phillies blew the 1964 pennant. Thirty-seven years later, Big Fella was quick to remember.

Laudner came to the Twins organization in 1979 and picked up on this early: “If Wayne wasn’t busting your chops, you were in trouble. With Big Fella, you were either a prospect or a suspect.”

Also this: “He carried a can of cold spray with him and that was the extent of Wayne’s trainer abilities. Wrenched knee or open wound ... he put cold spray on it. He was also afraid of blood.

“We had Captain Dynamite, the fellow that blew himself up in a box as a promotion, in Orlando. The Captain is stretched out behind second base after the explosion. Big Fella runs out, there’s blood on the Captain, and Wayne passes out.”

Lie! “True!” Laudner said. “Wayne, our trainer, saw blood and fainted at second base.”

Hattaway came from Alabama and loved the Crimson Tide. Buck Chamberlain, the Class AAA equipment manager, ordered Wayne to take a road trip with the Florida instructional team on a Saturday in October. Wayne had been planning to watch the Tide in a big game on his small black-and-white TV in the clubhouse.

“Wayne was so mad at Buck, he broke the TV over a metal post,” Laudner said. “When we got back, Bushie dug the TV out of a garbage can, taped the broken screen, put iodine on the tape, and told Wayne: ‘The sound might be a little rough, but I think you’ll be able to watch the fourth quarter.’”

Curse though he did at Bush that day, it should be noted that as he lay filled with cancer and dying last week in a Mobile, Ala., hospital, he talked with a former Twins employee and said, “The guy I’d like to talk to one last time is Bushie.”

Randy Bush paused a moment when that was mentioned, and said: “I saw a note it was Wayne’s birthday [Feb.24], texted him that day and he called back. We talked for 40 minutes.”

Bushie laughed quietly and said: “Big Fella ... there’ll never be another.”

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