

Minnesota Taps VCU's Teague As Next Athletic Director

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Norwood Teague presented to Minnesota a resume packed with experience in fundraising, marketing and leadership, after six years of mid-major success at Virginia Commonwealth.

President Eric Kaler, who picked Teague to be the new director of Gophers athletics, realized the missing line: running a big-time football program. Kaler addressed the question before it was even asked at a news conference Monday to introduce Teague as the replacement for retiring AD Joel Maturi. But Kaler brushed aside the concern.

"Football is not new to Norwood," he said.

Neither was it Teague's preference to manage an athletics department without a football team. After various roles at Virginia and Arizona State, Teague became associate AD at North Carolina and spent five years there. With reassurance from a conversation with Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany, who encouraged him to take the VCU job, Teague joined the Rams with confidence he'd have another opportunity to eventually oversee the most popular of all the American college sports.

"I wanted to get back to a football job," Teague said.

Starting July 1 he'll have one, pending approval from the university's board of regents, but basketball will actually need more of his attention for now.

Head coach Tubby Smith, heralded at the time as Maturi's best career move, has yet to win an NCAA tournament in five seasons here. His contract, with two years remaining, is expected to be reworked soon.

Smith has been pushing for construction of a separate practice facility — the shiny toy almost all of the major programs have these days — from Williams Arena. The Barn, built in 1928, will need to be renovated or replaced someday, too.

"We shouldn't be the last school in the Big Ten without a practice facility," said Smith, who attended the news conference with players Trevor Mbakwe and Austin Hollins. "But I think he's the guy that can sell that dream. He has done it before."

Said Smith: "I'm fired up."

Under Teague, VCU opened a \$10 million practice facility for men's and women's basketball and other sports. Head coach Shaka Smart was rewarded with an eight-year contract worth \$1.2 million annually after the Rams reached the Final Four in 2011 for the first time in their history. Teague persuaded Smart to stay at VCU, too, after North Carolina State pursued him last year and Illinois went after him last month.

"There's nothing more important to me than close relationships with your coaches," Teague said.

He and Smart were tight enough that Teague's departure wasn't easy.

"He and I have had a tough couple of days. Me leaving certainly

TEAGUE | PAGE 13



JEFF WHEELER/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT
Norwood Teague is introduced as the next director of athletics at the University of Minnesota at a news conference at TCF Stadium in Minneapolis on Monday. Teague previously held the same position at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Ivan Rodriguez Back In Texas, This Time To Retire

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Ivan Rodriguez made one last throw from behind home plate to second base at Rangers Ballpark.

The 14-time All-Star catcher announced his retirement Monday, ending a 21-season playing career spent mostly in Texas. The Rangers then honored him with a pregame ceremony that ended with a unique first pitch.

Rodriguez initially went to the mound while Michael Young, the team's longest-tenured player, set up to receive the pitch. But that didn't seem right, so Young ran out to second base and Rodriguez, already wearing a catcher's mitt, went behind the plate to a huge cheer and made a familiar throw across the diamond.

Earlier in the day, his eyes glistened and Rodriguez spoke slowly at first when he said he wouldn't play again. It came nearly 21 years after the fan favorite known as Pudge made his major league debut as a 19-year-old with the Rangers and later played for five other teams.

"It's a very hard day for me," Rodriguez said. "It's been a great, great run. ... It's been beautiful."

Rodriguez was surrounded at the podium by his wife and his three children, including his 19-year-old son who is a prospect in the Minnesota Twins organization. He thanked his parents and brother who sat in the front row for supporting him since he started playing baseball at age 5 in Puerto Rico.

Rodriguez plans to remain in baseball in some capacity, and Rangers president Nolan Ryan said there have already been some preliminary discussions about making that happen.

"I'm always going to be in baseball the rest of my life," Rodriguez said. "I'll be in baseball, and I'll be active and I'll be doing things, you'll definitely see me around."

Rodriguez caught a major league record 2,427 games, surpassing Carlton Fisk's record of 2,226 during a game for the Houston Astros three years ago at Rangers Ballpark. It was later that season that Pudge returned briefly to the Rangers, the team he played for the first 12 of his 21 seasons.

"It was interesting to have witnessed Pudge's career and be involved in it at the start and see the player that he grew to be and



RON T. ENNIS/FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/MCT
Former Texas Rangers catcher Ivan Rodriguez acknowledges applause as Nolan Ryan, left, and Tom Grieve look on during pregame ceremony honoring the catcher's career before the Rangers game with the New York Yankees at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington, Texas, on Monday.

the impact that he had on our organization," said Ryan, the Hall of Fame pitcher who was still playing when Rodriguez made his major league debut on June 20, 1991.

The pregame ceremony before the series opener against the New York Yankees included a video of highlights from the 13 seasons Rodriguez spent in Texas. They included his first major league hit, his first home run, catching Kenny Rogers' perfect game in 1994 and some of his All-Star plays, among them the 1995 game in the stadium where he was now saying goodbye.

Rodriguez hit .296 with 311 home runs and 1,332 RBIs in 2,543 games overall with Texas (1991-2002, 2009), Florida (2003), Detroit (2004-08), the Yankees (2008), Houston (2009), and Washington (2010-11). His 13 Gold Gloves were the most for a catcher.

"The first time I threw to Pudge and saw him, I really thought he was going to be a good receiver, and he had a great arm, we all knew that," Ryan said. "I never anticipated or expected, I don't think, for him to have the career that he had and have the impact on the organization that he had. It was really exciting and fun to watch."

Rodriguez, who didn't take questions during the news conference, was part of the Rangers' first three AL West titles in a four-year span in the late 1990s. He later appeared in two World Series, with the champion Florida Marlins in 2003 when he was MVP of the NL championship series, and Detroit in 2006.

Texas won its first three AL West titles in a four-year span in the late 1990s, but didn't win a playoff series then. Rodriguez hit .332 with 35 home runs and 113 RBIs in 1999, when he was the

American League MVP.

The two-time winning AL champion Rangers have no immediate plans to retire his No. 7 jersey, but have discussed the possibility. The team did present him with a framed jersey and a crystal piece recognizing his career.

Rodriguez was only 16 years old when the Rangers signed him after a tryout camp in Puerto Rico in July 1988. Less than three years later, he was in the major leagues.

Tom Grieve, now a Rangers television broadcaster but then the team's general manager, said scouts at that camp put a radar gun that showed the short, stocky catcher throwing about 93 mph from behind the plate to second base.

Rodriguez was quickly among the team's top prospects. He was the youngest player in the Texas League when the Rangers brought him up after getting con-

stant reports that he made contact and was ready to catch in the big leagues.

"We decided to see for ourselves," Grieve said. "After five or six games, it became obvious to us that, if anything, the scouting report under-estimated how good he really was."

Ryan talked about how he initially communicated with Rodriguez, who then spoke little English. Ryan wouldn't shake his head or do anything until Rodriguez had called the pitch he wanted.

A couple of months later, Ryan took a no-hitter into the seventh inning before giving up a hit.

"After the game, one of the reporters asked Pudge about the pitch I threw," Ryan said, starting to chuckle.

"He shook me off," the Hall of Fame pitcher said the young catcher responded.

Litke

From Page 8

thing but injure an opponent. Before NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan levied the punishment, his responses to a wide range of infractions left players not just scratching their heads, but wondering what they could get away with. There was no clear logic to the nearly dozen penalties handed out — whether the discipline was matched to the seriousness of the intent or the resulting injury — but every player understood that 25 games meant Torres won't be back this year unless Phoenix plays 7 games in every series through the end of the Stanley Cup. Suddenly, everybody on the ice was

a lot more mellow, or at the very least a lot less reckless.

In MWP's case, even that glimmer of hope sends the wrong message. So does trying to fine-tune the suspension based strictly on recent precedents. Throwing an elbow generally falls into the 1- or 2-game category, but this one had nothing to do with holding onto the ball or clearing space. If Harden hadn't been already turned to the side, and instead caught the elbow full force in the cheek or eye socket, a concussion would have been far from his only problem. To get 10 games, players usually have to clearly throw punches designed

to injure opponents or fans — another infraction MWP already knows plenty about. He got 73 games for his central role in the 2004 "Malice at the Palace" brawl. Only Latrell Sprewell has come close, his 82-game sentence shortened to 68 in the 1997-98 season after an arbitrator decided trying to choke your coach wasn't as scary as it sounded (and there was no video).

Gilbert Arenas and his pal Javaris Crittenton got 50 and 38 games for drawing guns on each other after an argument over a gambling debt got out of hand in the Washington locker room, but

at least the weapons weren't loaded at the time.

Artest isn't a bad guy, at least not in the sense that he plays dirty to hang onto a job or even to settle a score. He's generous and generally well-intentioned, giving freely of his off-court time for charitable causes, not to mention going through all that trouble to change his name — "to inspire and bring youth together all around the world." And who can forget his willingness to advocate for mental-health counseling, even thanking his sports psychologist moments after the Lakers won the title in 2010.

But those counselors have had only limited success curbing the kind of outburst Artest unleashed Sunday night. Now it's up to Stern to decide if he wants to give them a chance to try once more.

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Twins: Liriano To Skip Next Start

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Twins have decided to skip struggling left-hander Francisco Liriano's next turn and give him eight days to refocus before he starts again.

Manager Ron Gardenhire said Monday he had a long talk with Liriano, who emerged "really confident" in the plan.

Gardenhire says he doesn't want to make Liriano a reliever, even temporarily. So he'll throw bullpen sessions Thursday and Saturday and return to the rotation May 1 when the Twins visit the Los Angeles Angels.

Liriano is 0-3 with an 11.02 ERA in four starts after his latest collapse Sunday. Opponents are hitting .368 against him, and he has walked 13 batters in 16 1-3 innings.

Golf

From Page 8

On the men's side, IUPUI leads the 10-team field with a 556 after scores of 265 and 291. Southern Utah and IPFW are tied for second with a 566, while Oral Roberts is fourth with a 572. Western Illinois rounds out the top five with a 577, two strokes in front of North Dakota State. Oakland is seventh with a 588, followed by UMKC (591), South Dakota State (596) and the Coyotes with a 607.

Individually, IUPUI has the top two spots as Ben Eagle leads the 50-player field with an impressive 10-under 132. Teammate Michael Davan is 7-under with a 135, while there is a three-way tie for third at 140 between Nick Cunningham (Oakland), Jack Holt (Southern Utah) and Scott Newell of Oral Roberts. In all, 11 athletes shot par or better for the first two rounds on the par 71, 7,062-yard Desert Course.

The Coyotes are led by senior Lucas Turner who is tied for 22nd with a 4-over 146. He carded rounds of 72 and 74 to lead the team. Sophomore Nolan Schmidt is tied for 29th with a 6-over 148 after firing rounds of 75 and 73. Freshman Connor McDonagh-Poh is 44th with a 153 on rounds of 75 and 78. Junior Marc Gubbels (Yankton) is 49th after a pair of 80s, while senior John Vining is 50th with a 162 on a pair of 81s.

The final round is scheduled for Tuesday beginning at 7:30 a.m. PT.

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