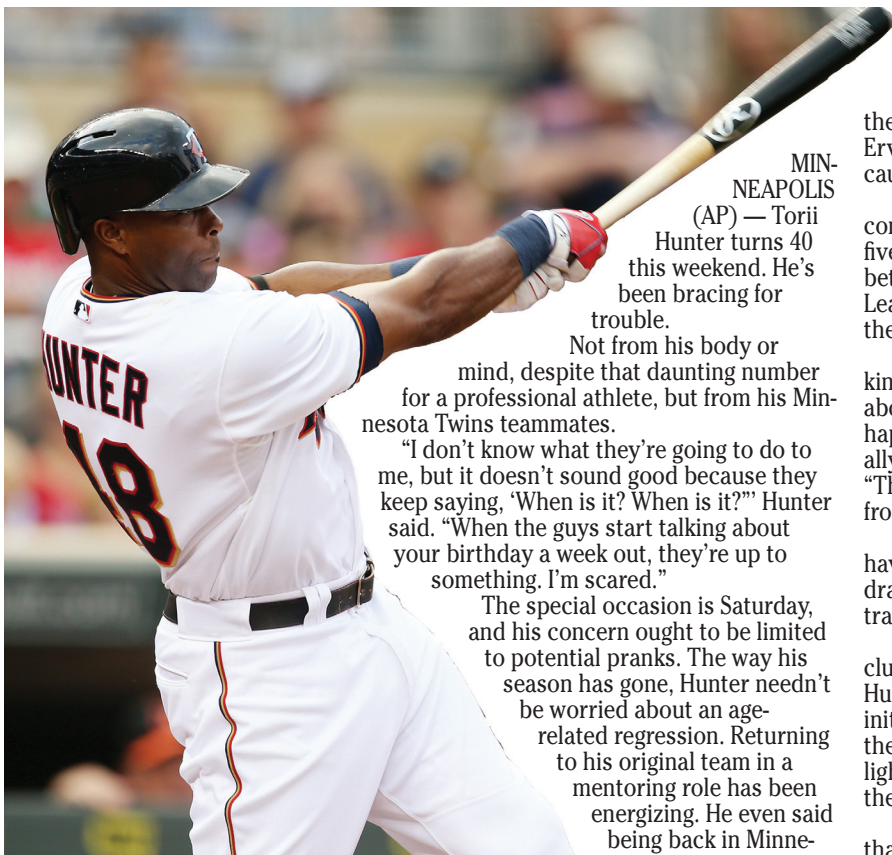


Hunter's Leadership Has Lifted Twins, And So Have His Homers



LEILA NAVIDI/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/TNS
Minnesota Twins right fielder Torii Hunter (48) hits a home run against the Baltimore Orioles during the first inning on Monday, July 6, 2015, at Target Field in Minneapolis. Hunter, who resigned with the Twins before the 2015 season, celebrates his 40th birthday this weekend.

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Torii Hunter turns 40 this weekend. He's been bracing for trouble. Not from his body or mind, despite that daunting number for a professional athlete, but from his Minnesota Twins teammates. "I don't know what they're going to do to me, but it doesn't sound good because they keep saying, 'When is it? When is it?'" Hunter said. "When the guys start talking about your birthday a week out, they're up to something. I'm scared."

The special occasion is Saturday, and his concern ought to be limited to potential pranks. The way his season has gone, Hunter needn't be worried about an age-related regression. Returning to his original team in a mentoring role has been energizing. He even said being back in Minnesota has made him feel younger.

The Twins, though, have been the ones experiencing the rejuvenation. Their 49-40 record was the

second-best in the American League before the All-Star break, and Hunter's presence has played a real part.

"He's a very funny guy. He knows how to play the game. He's a leader, you know?" Twins pitcher Ervin Santana said. "Everybody follows him, because he's doing a lot of the right things."

Signing Hunter to a one-year, \$10.5 million contract gave the Twins a durable right fielder, a five-time All-Star who has played just as well if not better in his 30s than in his 20s. Another reason: Leadership for a team that averaged 96 losses over the last four seasons.

"The mentality that he brings in, that we've kind of embraced, of that short memory, forgetting about yesterday, forgetting about the game that happened an hour ago, that's something that's really helped us," third baseman Trevor Plouffe said. "That's kind of been the difference in the team from the years past."

For outfielders Byron Buxton and Aaron Hicks, having another fellow former Twins first-round draft pick has been invaluable. Hunter's impact has transcended his position group, too.

His affable, jokester nature has given the Twins clubhouse the kind of life it hadn't had since, well, Hunter was here the last time a decade ago. He has initiated an elaborate ritual following victories by the Twins at home, featuring fog machines, laser lights and dancing in the middle of the room for the unofficial player of the game.

"I just go out there and do what I have to do that's a part of me, and I always want to make guys around me better," Hunter said.

Santana played with Hunter for five seasons with the Los Angeles Angels. He'd love to have a few more together.

"The way he's treating himself, the way he's eating, he can play four more years," Santana said. "I tell him that all the time, and he's like, 'Stop.' I'm

like, 'I'm right, dude.'"

Hunter is the second-oldest active position player in the majors, behind only Ichiro Suzuki, who at 41 is a part-timer for the Miami Marlins. Two of the seven 40-plus pitchers are currently on the disabled list.

His range in the outfield isn't what it was when he was collecting nine Gold Glove awards with the Twins and Angels. His career-high errors total is five, established last year with the Detroit Tigers, and he had four by the All-Star break. His .312 on-base percentage projects to the third-worst of his 19 major league seasons.

Still, he has 14 home runs, a pace that would give him 25, the most since he went deep 28 times in his last year with the Twins in 2007. He's driving in runs at the same rate he has in that span, too. Last Saturday against the Tigers, he hit a two-run homer into the third deck at Target Field, a place only a few right-handed sluggers have reached. In the ninth inning that night, he made a tumbling catch of a sinking line drive.

"I've been really, really pleased," manager Paul Molitor said, citing aloud his estimates of Hunter's statistics. "It's just a lot of production. Good at-bats. When you hit him second, he knows what to do there as far as taking pitches and using the whole field. And he can still ambush a fastball."

Hunter gave his performance a C-plus midseason grade. He's just as determined to keep satisfaction from saturating the team, with a road trip to Oakland and Los Angeles facing the Twins after the break and the Kansas City Royals still leading the AL Central division by a healthy margin. That the Twins have even found themselves in this conversation, though, has a lot to do with their ageless leader.

"When you're producing," Molitor said, "it's a lot easier to lead."

Basketball | NBA Summer League

For Most, It's A Basketball Job Fair

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Think of NBA summer league like this: A job fair where nobody wears a tie.

For a few of the 450 or so players on this year's teams at the three respective summer leagues — Orlando, Salt Lake City and Las Vegas — jobs for next season are guaranteed. They'll be in the NBA.

The vast majority, they don't know where the next check is coming from.

Justin Dentmon might be the quintessential example of what it's about.

By the time training camps start this fall, Dentmon will be 30. He's played in eight NBA games for three franchises, never lasting long at any stop. In Las Vegas, he's part of the D-League Select squad, and he knows the odds against him are stacked higher than a 10-foot rim.

Still, his mission is simple: Get noticed by an NBA team. Any NBA team.

"The door might be halfway closed," Dentmon said. "But it's not closed yet. When it closes, I'll stop."

That's the mantra for just about everyone at summer league.

Whether it's unknown players, young referees trying to climb the ladder, video guys or coaches aiming to break through, summer league is one giant collection of dreamers.

Sounds right. After all, it is Vegas.

"It's been the right time for some other people,"

Dentmon said. "It hasn't been my time yet. It's coming. I believe that."

Players all around him have different backgrounds, but the same hope.

THE VETERAN

Keith Bogans is 35 years old, the oldest player on a roster in Las Vegas. He was a McDonald's All-American before some guys in summer league were in kindergarten. He's made his money. And he's still here, trying to get back.

"My goal is to just be around the game," Bogans said. "I'm in the best shape of my life."

He knows he's a longshot to get return; his last NBA appearance was in January 2014. The Trail Blazers essentially think of him as a coach of sorts helping mentor the young players.

He's not looking to coach — yet. "I still want to play," Bogans said.

THE YOUNGSTER

Joe Jackson sounds worried.

He overcame injury to be the D-League's Most Improved Player last season. He was a four-year standout at Memphis, went to the NCAA tournament four times, had a 24-point game in 2014 against Shabazz Napier and eventual national champion Connecticut.

At 6-foot-1 and 171 pounds, some think he's too small for the NBA.

"You wait and you wait

and you know you belong, but there's so many politics and prejudging," Jackson said.

So he went to the D-League. The game got slower. He got smarter. He has a degree, but isn't thinking about any other career. Any real opportunity that comes his way, he's taking.

"Live and learn," Jackson said. "When you're fighting for your shot, you fight a lot of monsters."

THE ESTABLISHED

Henry Walker expects he'll be in the NBA this season. He's got a partially guaranteed contract to return to the Miami Heat, with whom he made 13 starts in 24 appearances last season.

He's on Miami's summer roster but isn't playing because of a sprained ankle.

"It's already been a long two months off," Walker said. "Sometimes you want to just go up against guys again."

Walker has been in the NBA for parts of five seasons already, first with Boston and then New York. He went nearly three years without an NBA opportunity before Miami brought him back, and he's not looking down on being in summer league whatsoever.

"Nothing comes easy," Walker said. "I was just looking forward to proving that I belong on a team. That's all it is, opportunity. That's all you need is opportunity. As you get older, you start to realize certain things aren't in your control anyway."

THE RECOVERING

Josh Harrellson came to Las Vegas to get seen.

He's been in 75 NBA games with New York, Miami and Detroit, last appearing on Feb. 1, 2014. Surgery to repair two bulging disks in his back interrupted his NBA career — and after playing in summer league with Phoenix, he's hoping someone gives him another shot.

"It's about getting out there, showing people that I'm healthy, that I'm back and that I'm just myself," the 6-foot-10, 275-pound Harrellson said. "They know what I can do. They know I can play. I needed to show them I can still run."

When Harrellson got told he needed surgery, there was a real concern that his NBA career was over. But he said after two days, he was able to walk without pain. Eight months later, he was back on the court, wound up playing in China and now just wants that phone to ring.

"I think I'll get a camp invite," Harrellson said. "My main goal is to get a contract out of this. Even if it's a partial, just something."

THE LAST SHOT

Jerome Randle knows time is running out.

He was the Pac-10 player of the year in 2010, a year after James Harden won the award. He thought that meant the NBA would call.

He's still waiting. "It's very discouraging," said Randle, a 5-foot-10, 175-pound guard who's on Milwaukee's roster in Vegas. "I have a family to take care of. I love the game, so whether it's in the NBA or overseas, I just want to play the game. My dream is still to make to the NBA."

He's seen the world — Turkey, Israel, the Ukraine, China and Belgium, plus he's spent time in the D-League. At 28, he needs the big break — now.

"This is my last summer that I felt I was going to really try," Randle said. "It's a wear and tear on my body. ... I'm not frustrated. I just want to keep working hard and hopefully something happens."

A rules official corrected him. "Basically I forgot they changed the rule that ... if the ball moves while you're putter is down and it's not caused by you, basically caused by the wind, it's not a penalty," Bowditch said. "I went from making a pretty soft 5 to a really mad 6 to a felt-like-a-birdie 5 again."

Bowditch picked up a shot on the Road Hole even though he made a bogey.

The Australian was addressing a short putt for bogey on No. 17 when the ball moved slightly. Bowditch backed away, flung his putter to the ground and looked away in despair, thinking he would get a penalty shot.

A rules official corrected him. "Basically I forgot they changed the rule that ... if the ball moves while you're putter is down and it's not caused by you, basically caused by the wind, it's not a penalty," Bowditch said. "I went from making a pretty soft 5 to a really mad 6 to a felt-like-a-birdie 5 again."

JIMMY'S THRILL: The scorecard will show Jimmy Walker with a 68 that put him at 4-under 140. The card shows a birdie on the 12th hole.

The number doesn't show the thrill he got out of that birdie.

The 12th hole was playing 343 into a hurting wind. Walker chose 5-iron off the tee because he feared a drive would come too close to the bunkers. From there, he faced another 5-iron he had to thread through the bunkers. The yardage was irrelevant. It was the epitome of links golf.

The shot came off perfectly, splitting the bunkers, down a swale and up the slope onto the green about 10 feet away. Walker turned to caddie Andy Sanders with a big smile and said, "That was cool."

"It was the only shot I could play to get it close. You just see it, and it was exactly how I pictured it," he said. "That's that links golf brings out of you. It takes imagination and wherewithal."

ROAD HOLE REDEMPTION: The 17th hole yielded no birdies and played to an average score of just over 4.8 in the opening round. That wasn't surprising. It

Big Weekend Arrives For Favre, Joining Packers HOF

BY GENARO C. ARMAS

AP Sports Writer

The great thaw is nearly complete. The big weekend in Green Bay is finally here for Brett Favre.

The former quarterback renowned for his durability and gunslinger mentality will be inducted into the Packers Hall of Fame and have his No. 4 jersey retired on Saturday. It's a day some Packers fans thought they might never see.

The sides have mended their relationship after a messy split that stemmed from the "will he or won't he retire" drama that led to a once-unthinkable exit from Green Bay in 2008.

But Saturday begins a green-and-gold celebration of a storied, 16-year tenure with the Packers that helped revive of one of the NFL's marquee teams.

"I think it's huge," Mike McCarthy, Favre's last coach with the Packers, said during minicamp. "There (are) some monumental moments for this organization and obviously he has quite a few of them. He deserves to be honored the right way."

With the kind of fanfare befitting for a player who had a flair for the dramatic, both on and off the field.

The induction ceremony for old No. 4 will take place in the Lambeau Field atrium. The roughly 67,000 seats for fans to watch on video boards

inside the stadium bowl have long been sold out.

Tickets, of course, cost \$4. Net proceeds were to go to the Favre 4 Hope charity.

Now 45, Favre will also participate in a charity flag football game on Sunday at the University of Wisconsin's Camp Randall Stadium. The event will pit former Packers against noted retired NFL players including former Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb.

A scheduling conflict at Lambeau and the game's proximity to training camp, which starts in less than two weeks, prevented the game from being held in Green Bay.

Returning to Lambeau for the event might have made the weekend perfect for Favre. Still, this is a moment that he has been looking forward to for some time.

"To say a whirlwind would be probably an understatement. It's going to be a lot of fun. Much anticipated obviously. Not only from our end but I think from everyone else," Favre said earlier this year.

The rumblings in Titletown began a decade ago after the Packers took Aaron Rodgers in the first round of the 2005 draft. Favre wasn't thrilled that the team had found his heir apparent, and fans initially treated Rodgers with skepticism.

Rodgers took over in 2008 after Favre was traded to the Jets. Favre retired briefly, then came back with the Minnesota Vikings for a two-year stint starting in 2009 that finally finished his career.



Favre

Golf | British Open Notebook

A Big Rain, A Flooded Course; Irish Amateur Dunne In Hunt

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland (AP) — Steve Williams was on the Old Course early Friday to check the pin positions for the second round. On his way back in, the caddie for Adam Scott wasn't sure there would even be a second round.

"I watched the second hole flood in seven minutes," Williams said.

The rain was so heavy that the first and 18th fairways were filled with large puddles. Sand bags were placed along streets along St. Andrews to avoid flooding.

Imagine the plight of Jaco Van Zyl, Mark Calcavecchia and Marcel Siem. They were first off Friday morning and had to play the first hole before the R&A suspended play for more than three hours.

"Good thing is we had a down breeze," Van Zyl said. "Otherwise, we would still be out there. Very interesting this morning."

Some players headed back to the Old Course Hotel and waited in their rooms. Van Zyl had some coffee, looked out the window and workers trying to drain the course and said, "Grateful you're not out there playing golf."

It reminded Padraig Harrington of that Saturday at Muirfield in 2002. Play was not interrupted that day, and 10 players — Tiger Woods included — shot in the 80s.

"Unfortunately, the town of St. Andrews drained out the first fairway," Harrington said. "So they really couldn't go."

Still to be determined is how the third round will play out. The 42 players who didn't finish were to return at 7 a.m. Saturday. The cut was likely to be even par, and the R&A said the third round would be threesomes.

The forecast Saturday was for gusts up to 40 mph until the wind begins to ease slightly in the late afternoon.

AMATEUR HOUR: Paul Dunne was worried more about making his numbers than the cut. The approach paid off when the Irish amateur ended up in an improbable spot on the leaderboard of the British Open.

The 22-year-old who followed in the footsteps of countryman Graeme McDowell by attending the University of Alabama, Birmingham, seized the opportunities when they came on his way to a second straight 69 that left him just four shots off the lead.

"I wasn't thinking about cuts or finishes or anything, I just tried to go out and put a number in my head and play," Dunne said. "Because once you start thinking about making the cut, it's very easy to drop shots, because you have them to play

with if you are a few shots inside. So I knew what scores I wanted to make on every hole, and that's just kind of how I tried to go about it."

The fifth-place finisher at the NCAA tournament had his college coach, Alan Murray, on the bag and family and friends in the gallery at the Old Course. He did just a bit of scoreboard watching, but was more concerned about getting his name on it than seeing who was leading.

"I had about a 20-footer for birdie on 15 and there's a scoreboard there and I knew if I made that I'd get on the first page of the leaderboard," Dunne said. "It didn't make me nervous, it just kind of made me excited."

Dunne would give a shot back on the next hole, but a birdie on 18 made sure he would have a later tee time on Saturday. The wind is expected to blow hard on the weekend, and Dunne is eager to see how he will respond.

"It'll be a new experience, but I'm not 100 percent sure how I'll handle it," he said. "Hopefully I'll just take it like second nature, but you never know."

Dunne is expected to be a member of the British Walker Cup team later this summer, and said he will turn pro after that on the European Tour.

BOWDITCH BOGEY: Steven

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