

APR 29, 2002

PRIZE CATCH WITH HIS FEARLESS FIELDING AND A SUDDENLY SIZZLING BAT, TWINS CENTERFIELDER TORII HUNTER HAS BEEN A GEM FOR HIS ENDANGERED BALLCLUB

JEFF PEARLMAN

Were there a checklist for Minnesota Twins centerfielder Torii Hunter's qualifications as an emerging major league star, it would go something like this:

Speed--check.

Hustle--check.

Instincts--check.

Nifty glove work--check.

Leaping ability--check.

Strong arm--check.

Cup--

Cup?--uhh....

Torii Hunter does not wear a cup. Never has. Sitting by his locker in the Twins' clubhouse on a recent afternoon, he knocked on his uniform pants, in the groin area, to prove the point. There was nary a sound.

When Hunter was a 14-year-old shortstop in a Babe Ruth League game, he says, a grounder took a sharp bounce and struck him in the groin. He immediately fell to the ground, screaming in pain. "You'd think I'd have learned my lesson," he says, laughing, "but to me, it's about toughness. In this sport you can't be afraid."

Although such a philosophy might take the 26-year-old Hunter from bass to soprano, it explains his arrival as one of the American League's top defensive centerfielders and a 2001 Gold Glove winner. This season he has added punch to match his prowess afield. At week's end he was leading the league in batting (.405), tied for fourth in home runs (six) and tied for seventh in RBIs (16). Hunter's all-around play was a big reason that the low-budget Twins (at just over \$40 million, Minnesota has the fourth-smallest payroll in the majors) were atop the American League Central Division after sweeping a three-game series with the Cleveland Indians.

Hunter has no fear. "To catch a ball," he says, "I'd commit suicide." In 1999, his first full season as a Twin, he earned a spot in his pitchers' hearts by routinely robbing hitters of extra bases with acrobatic catches before crashing into the outfield wall at breakneck speed. To those who had followed his career, it was nothing new. On June 21, 1997, Michael Coleman, an outfielder for the Double A Trenton (N.J.) Thunder, smoked a shot to deep centerfield at Trenton's Waterfront Park. Just as the ball was leaving the stadium, Hunter, playing for the New Britain (Conn.) Rock Cats, leaped, stole Coleman's would-be home run and then crashed through the eight-foot-high plywood wall like a rock through construction paper. "That catch," says Al Newman, Hunter's manager at the time and now Minnesota's third base coach, "is the most athletically impressive play I've ever seen."

Upon landing outside the stadium, Hunter was greeted by a fan walking by. "Dude," the fan said, beer in hand. "where the hell did you come from?"

Hunter didn't flinch. "I came from inside, man," he said. "How ya doin'?"

In Minnesota's second game this season, a 1-0 win over the Kansas City Royals at Kauffman Stadium, Hunter made a catch in the seventh inning that not only preserved the road win but also was, as Twins catcher A.J. Pierzynski called it, "one of the best grabs Torii's come up with--and there have been tons of them." K.C. designated hitter Mike Sweeney had blasted a mammoth shot to dead center. "It was out of the stadium," says Pierzynski. "I was sure of it." But at the last possible second Hunter leaped, twisted his glove over the wall and came down with the ball in his glove and a smile from cheek to cheek. "My first reaction was, Man, did he have another ball in his pocket or something?" says Pierzynski.

Hunter's defensive secret is no secret at all. Ever since he was a boy, growing up on the crime-infested east side of Pine Bluff, Ark., Hunter has possessed, in the words of his older brother, Taru, "freaky, insane athleticism. I remember when he was 12 and I said, 'Throw me the ball as hard as you can.' When I caught it, my glove popped like a firecracker."

During his junior season at Pine Bluff High, in a game against Little Rock's J.A. Fair High, Hunter stole two home runs by leaping up against and reaching over the outfield fence. On the second theft he caught the ball and tumbled over to the other side. Another time, on a rainy day at Lake Hamilton High in Pearcy, Hunter hit what Pine Bluff coach Billy Bock says "must be the longest home run ever by a high schooler." The ball, says Bock, was out of the stadium before Hunter ran halfway to first base, clearing an outfield light pole and a building. Later that evening Bock received a phone call from the Lake Hamilton coach: Hunter's home run had landed in the mud--550 feet away. "God's word, that's a true story," says Bock. "Torii's no myth."

Until his junior year Hunter had never seriously imagined himself as a professional ballplayer. Not only was his best sport football--Hunter was Pine Bluff's starting quarterback for two seasons--but he also had no reason to think major league teams were interested in a skinny outfielder from an Arkansas town. But before long Hunter was hearing that he was a sure first-round pick in the June 1993 draft.

On draft day 50 relatives converged on the Hunters' home, where Torii's mom, Shirley, an elementary school teacher, and dad, Theotis, an electrical engineer, raised their four sons. Torii, hoping to stay close to home, walked around in an Atlanta Braves T-shirt. But right before the 20th pick was made, the Twins called. The Twins? "I really didn't know who the Twins were," says Hunter. "I mean, I knew Kirby Puckett, but I didn't even know where they were located." Later that afternoon a Little Rock television station followed Hunter to a mall, where the producer thought it would be neat for Torii to buy his first Twins cap. One problem: "None of the stores sold their hat," Hunter says, laughing. "It was a rough start."

It got rougher. After signing for a \$450,000 bonus, Hunter batted .190 for the Twins' affiliate in the Gulf Coast rookie league, swinging at pitches way out of the strike zone and seemingly trying to hit every ball out of the park. It was a recurring theme over the next four seasons: Hunter tantalized the organization with catch after miraculous catch but drove coaches crazy with a reckless approach to hitting. As a result, Hunter says, numerous minor league instructors insisted that he follow their directions. "It got to the point where I was listening to everybody," he says. "I would try hitting the ball the other way because a coach told me to. Then someone would tell me not to hit it the other way. Then I should. Then I shouldn't. It was killing me."

While playing for New Britain in 1997, Hunter, batting in the .220s, seriously considered quitting baseball to attend college. But whenever he thought about Pine Bluff, he was reminded that his struggle was nothing compared to the tough streets of the old neighborhood, where gangs took over the corners and drugs were the currency. "How could I give up," Hunter says, "when my life was so good and so many people back home were battling to make it every day?"

Near the end of the 1997 season Newman called Hunter into his office. "Congratulations," he said, "you're going to the Show." The next evening Hunter was at Camden Yards with the Twins for a game against the Baltimore Orioles. He returned to the minors after appearing in that game as a pinch runner, but the trip accomplished what management had hoped. "Ever since then I've been a better player," Hunter says. "I knew what it was like to play in the big leagues, and I badly wanted to get back."

In 1998, with his grip down to the knob and his confidence soaring, Hunter batted .282 for New Britain and then .337 for Triple A Salt Lake. The next year he made the Minnesota roster, and except for 55 games with Salt Lake in 2000, he has been with the Twins ever since. Last year Hunter hit .261 with 27 home runs and 92 RBIs.

Now that Ron Gardenhire has replaced Tom Kelly as manager, Hunter expects even bigger things. "I have a lot of respect for T.K., but a lot of us felt like he was on some sort of power trip with the younger players," says Hunter. "You could hit five bullets to the shortstop, but you couldn't play if you didn't go the other way. It was definitely uncomfortable. This season things feel fresh. It's exciting to be a Twin."

And exciting to be Torii Hunter. In June 2000 Torii and his wife of five years, Katrina, moved from Pine Bluff to The Colony, Texas, outside Dallas, where they built a 3,600-square-foot house chock-full of Nintendos and PlayStations and Xboxes. The couple has a six-year-old son, Torii Jr., and also raise Torii's six-year-old son, Monshadrik. (Hunter has two other sons, Cameron, 9, and Darius, 7. Both live with their mothers in Pine Bluff.)

Sometimes, when he is standing in centerfield during the national anthem, Hunter looks all around, overwhelmed by the thought that he is being paid \$2.4 million this season to play baseball. Soon enough, a screaming drive will come his way, and Hunter will go balls to the wall to catch it.

COLOR PHOTO: JOHN BIEVER Streaking Torii Hunter's hot bat has kept him busy on the base paths for the Twins this season. [T of C]

COLOR PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES PORTO Real grabber Hunter has been known to go over and even through walls to snare would-be homers.

COLOR PHOTO: ANN HEISENFELT/AP Stepping out This spring the Metrodome throngs have thrilled to Hunter's .400 hitting and the Twins' run to the top of the AL Central.

MAY 30, 2005

TORII HUNTER

TWINS CENTERFIELDER

ALBERT CHEN

ON PLAYING CENTERFIELD I'll do anything to get that little white ball. I'll put my life on the line. But you have to keep in mind where you're playing. The Metrodome is kind of dangerous. You jump up, and when you come down, you can land on these sharp metal poles that they have [supporting the fence]. You can hurt your shoulder, you can hurt your chin. A few years ago I crashed against the unpadded wall at Fenway Park, and the next thing I knew, I was on the ground and my body was all shook up. I stayed in the game, but the next day I couldn't move.

ON HIS MOTIVATION AS A FIELDER When I don't have any hits at the plate, that's when I'm really [teed] off. That's when I'm going to try to take hits away from everybody.

ON BEING A FOOTBALL PLAYER AT PINE BLUFF (ARK.) HIGH To me, playing in the secondary and playing in the outfield are the same thing. I was a free safety and a cornerback. When you're out there in centerfield getting balls, it's like trying to get an interception. You react to a hit like you're reacting to a pass, and crashing into the wall is like getting hit after a pass.

ON DETROIT DH DMITRI YOUNG'S EARLY-SEASON PREDICTION THAT THE AL CENTRAL WILL COME DOWN TO THE INDIANS AND THE TIGERS He's a good friend of mine, and I know he knows better than that. I got on him for it, told him, 'What'd you say that for? You know we're good.' He said he was 'just going by what happened last year,' when the Indians and the Tigers both improved significantly. But he learned his lesson. When the Tigers came to Minnesota last month and we swept them, he went back to the media and was like, 'Ohhhh, I was just kidding. Those Twins are still good.'

ON MINNESOTA'S OFF-SEASON LOSSES I was very disappointed that we didn't keep [shortstop] Cristian Guzman and [third baseman] Corey Koskie. Cristian was like a brother to me; I had played with him since 1998 in Double A. I didn't think anyone could fill their shoes at short and third, and it still hasn't happened. We're getting the job done with our starting pitching, and we're getting the runs we need to get.

ON HIS SON TORII JR.'S FOURTH-GRADE BASKETBALL TEAM Last year they went undefeated and were beating guys pretty bad, so this year they moved up and played against older kids. They were a bunch of fourth-graders playing sixth-graders; it was the only way they were going to get better. They went 4-4 this year, losing games by only a few points, so I'm proud of them. My son is really good, but I think he's a better baseball player. Too bad he hates baseball.

ON STEROIDS [The Congressional hearings] were unnecessary. We're headed in the right direction. People have to understand that we're not like the NFL, we're just starting this process from the beginning, and it's going to take time. The first thing we've got to do is get rid of steroids [on the street]. If you stop it there, then we're going to stop this thing. --As told to Albert Chen

A FOUR-TIME GOLD GLOVE WINNER, HUNTER, 29, HAS A TEAM-HIGH 12 STOLEN BASES FOR THE TWINS (25-17), WHO TRAIL CHICAGO BY FIVE GAMES IN THE AL CENTRAL

"MY SON IS A REALLY GOOD BASEBALL PLAYER. TOO BAD HE HATES BASEBALL."

COLOR PHOTO

Photograph by Steve Wewerka

COLOR PHOTO

BOB ROSATO (WILLIS)

"I like the action, the spears flying through the air."--Dontrelle Willis,Marlins pitcher, page 42

TWINS

Torii Hunter: 'I didn't want to leave the Twins'

Star center fielder Torii Hunter signs a five-year, \$90 million deal with the Los Angeles Angels -- but there was more to it than money, he says.

By Joe Christensen (<https://www.startribune.com/joe-christensen/10644611/>) Star Tribune |

NOVEMBER 29, 2007 — 10:35AM

The parade of high-profile athletes leaving Minnesota continued Thursday, when All-Star center fielder Torii Hunter agreed to a five-year, \$90 million contract with the Los Angeles Angels.

In the end, the Twins' best offer -- three years for \$45 million -- wasn't even close. The team bid goodbye to the seven-time Gold Glove Award winner who had been a beloved personality during its run of four division titles in five seasons.

"He has been a true professional," Twins General Manager Bill Smith said. "He's been a great player on the field. He's been great in the community. He's a tremendous person off the field. I'm appreciative of everything he contributed to this organization."

The news came less than four months after the Timberwolves dealt Kevin Garnett to Boston and within the same three-year span that saw the Vikings unload Randy Moss and Daunte Culpepper.

Unlike the other stars, Hunter, 32, left via free agency, but the move might be a precursor to the Twins trading Johan Santana, who can become a free agent after next season.

As much as the Twins hate losing top players, the Hunter negotiations -- or lack thereof -- showed the team's continued unwillingness to bend to baseball's market pressures.

"I didn't want to leave the Twins," Hunter said. "I just felt like they were ready to leave me. They thought I was too old to do a five-year deal."

Hunter rejected the Twins' three-year, \$45 million offer in August. Three months passed without a new proposal.

Hunter entertained five-year offers from the Chicago White Sox, Texas Rangers and Kansas City Royals before the Angels swooped in, unexpectedly.

The Angels made the announcement after midnight Wednesday. Smith said he had to call Hunter on Thursday morning to confirm the news.

"I was surprised that it was the Angels," Smith said. "I think they kind of came out of left field. I think everyone was surprised at how quickly it happened."

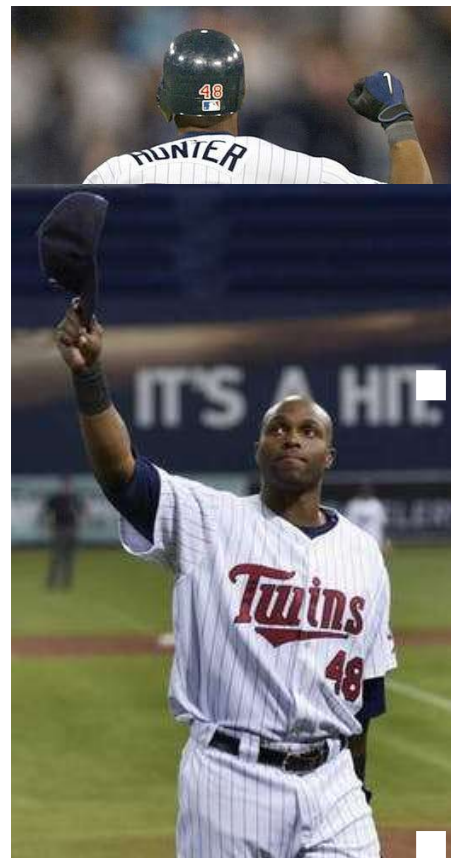
A year ago, on Nov. 22, 2006, the Angels signed free-agent center fielder Gary Matthews Jr. to a five-year, \$50 million deal. Stacked with other outfielders, the Angels still were desperate to bolster their offense, so they made a late push for Hunter.

"They were nowhere in sight prior to Tuesday," said Hunter's agent, Larry Reynolds. "We were thinking we were going to make a decision next week. But this call from the Angels changed all that because they basically said this offer's on the table for one day."

Hunter made his decision without having one last conversation with the Twins. But Reynolds had called Smith late last week, hinting that other teams were getting serious.

Twins never faltered

Perhaps the Twins were waiting for a counter proposal from Hunter, but they never changed their original offer.



A.J. OLMSCHIED, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Torii Hunter

"They dealt with us in a first-class manner, and I think we did the same with them," Smith said. "He got a tremendous offer. I'll just leave it at that.

"I didn't comment during the negotiations, and I don't think it's beneficial for anybody to start commenting on it now."

Because Hunter is a Type-A free agent, the Twins will draw the highest level of compensation for losing him, getting the Angels' 2008 first-round draft pick (No. 27 overall) and a compensation pick between the first and second rounds.

The White Sox and Royals each made offers for about \$75 million. Hunter said he was close to a deal with the White Sox at one point, and the Rangers agreed to an option for a sixth year that would have brought their package to \$84 million.

Then, the Angels entered with an offer that included a no-trade clause.

"They told me, 'Look, we want you to be our center fielder,'" Hunter said. "And they gave me an amount of money that my momma and all my friends would have slapped me if I turned it down."

Hunter said he's had great respect for how the Angels play the game ever since they defeated the Twins in the 2002 American League Championship Series.

"The money is one part because it blew everybody out of the water," he said. "The other part is they want to win. They play the game the way I like it. The outfield is perfect. The grass is perfect. You can't beat that. The sun is perfect. Every night it's 70 degrees."

Hunter lives in the Dallas-Fort Worth suburb of Prosper, Texas, so the Rangers offered a chance to play near home. In that respect, the Angels were the next best choice, since they play in the Rangers' division and make three trips to Texas each year.

But Minnesota had become a home for Hunter, too. The Twins made him a first-round draft pick in 1993 and signed him out of high school in Pine Bluff, Ark. He went on to bat .271 with 192 home runs and 711 RBI over parts of 11 seasons with the Twins.

"There's no hard feelings or anything like that," Hunter said. "I wish I could have stayed with the team that I grew up with since I was 17. I wanted to stay with them from Day 1, no matter what people are trying to say that I wanted to leave regardless."

As fate would have it, the Angels open 2008 at the Metrodome on March 31, meaning the next time the Twins play a real game, Hunter will be there -- wearing the opposing uniform.

For the Twins, at least they won't be facing Hunter 18 times a year, as they would have if he would have signed with the White Sox or Royals.

"He joked about that," Smith said. "He said it's probably better for everybody that he's out of the division. And I guess that's probably a good thing for all of us."

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Joe Christensen, a Star Tribune's sports team leader, graduated from the University of Minnesota and spent 15 years covering Major League Baseball, including stops at the Riverside Press-Enterprise and Baltimore Sun. He joined the Star Tribune in 2005 and spent four years covering Gophers football.

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JoeCStrib

Hunter's bubbly gift to Royals broke MLB rule

MINNESOTA TWINS 14y

'What in the world?' Browns pounce on Steelers from jump with 28 first-quarter points

CLEVELAND BROWNS 3h - Jake Trotter

pagne gift violated



ESPN.com news services

Apr 24, 2007



Maybe a thank-you note would have sufficed.



[Torii Hunter](#)'s gift of expensive champagne to the [Kansas City Royals](#) has the [Minnesota Twins](#) outfielder in some bubble trouble.



Hunter's gift of four bottles of Dom Perignon, which he had delivered to the Royals clubhouse this past weekend, was meant as a reward for the Royals sweeping the [Detroit Tigers](#) last September, allowing the Twins to come from behind to win the American League Central. The gift fulfilled a promise Hunter made last fall.

But baseball has rules about this sort of thing.

Namely, rule 21-b, which proclaims "Any player or person connected with a Club who shall offer or give any gift or reward to a player or person connected

with another Club for services rendered ... in defeating or attempting to defeat a competing Club ... shall be declared ineligible for not less than three years."

And after "The Cheater's Guide to Baseball Blog" reported the violation, the Twins got a phone call from the commissioner's office about the proffered bubbly. And the Twins found themselves in an awkward position -- having to call the Royals to ask that the champagne be returned.

Luckily, the Royals hadn't popped the corks yet.

Hunter said he wasn't aware of the rule. "I do good things," he said, according to the Star-Tribune of Minneapolis. "If you want to make a good thing into a bad thing, then so be it."

Twins GM Terry Ryan wasn't aware of it either.

"I'm to blame as much as anybody because I didn't know the rule," Ryan said, according to the Star Tribune. "We'll end up righting the wrong. We've already contacted the Royals. They're going to return the goods, and hopefully that'll be the end of it."

Ryan called Hunter's gesture "an honest mistake," according to the Star-Tribune. But he acknowledged that the rule is designed to avoid any tampering between teams and that Major League Baseball isn't about to let that slide with a slap on the wrist for Hunter and the Royals.

"Integrity of the game; it's as simple as that," Ryan said, according to the newspaper. "This is an honest, trivial exchange, but it could grow into something different if you let it get away."

Ryan said he didn't anticipate punishment.

The rule is posted inside the Twins' clubhouse, but Hunter said Tuesday that he didn't know about it until this week. The MLB public relations office had no comment Tuesday, because officials were still gathering information.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Cleveland Browns pounce on Pittsburgh Steelers from jump with 28 first-quarter points



Jake Trotter
ESPN Staff Writer

8:34 PM ET



The start to the [Cleveland Browns'](#) first playoff game in 18 years couldn't have gone more perfectly on Sunday night.

On the contest's initial play, [Pittsburgh Steelers](#) center [Maurkice Pouncey](#) snapped the ball over the head of quarterback [Ben Roethlisberger](#). After a scramble for the ball, Cleveland's [Karl Joseph](#) recovered it in the end zone,



giving the Browns a 7-0 lead just 14 seconds into their wild-card playoff game at Heinz Field.

According to ESPN Stats & Information data, the last time the first play from scrimmage resulted in a defensive touchdown in any game came in Week 1 of 2018, when [Sam Darnold](#) threw a pick-six on his first career pass with the [New York Jets](#).

THAT WAS QUICK.

: <https://t.co/vcgHu2syur> [pic.twitter.com/Y3Xn6Dhl0S](https://t.co/Y3Xn6Dhl0S)

— Cleveland Browns (@Browns) *January 11, 2021*

It didn't take long for the Browns to add to it. [M.J. Stewart Jr.](#) intercepted Roethlisberger on the ensuing drive, and [Baker Mayfield](#) made the Steelers pay with a 40-yard touchdown strike to [Jarvis Landry](#). It was the first time the Browns scored 14 points in the first quarter against the Steelers since 2000, a game Cleveland went on to win.

JARVIS. LANDRY.

: <https://t.co/NyBDmNclTK> [pic.twitter.com/DESCrHfqWx](https://t.co/DESCrHfqWx)

— Cleveland Browns (@Browns) *January 11, 2021*

[Kareem Hunt](#) extended the lead to 28-0 with a pair of touchdown runs, the latter set up by another interception of Roethlisberger. The Browns are the first team to score 28 points in the first quarter of a playoff game since the Raiders against the Oilers in 1969.

Another one for [@Kareemhunt7](#)!

: <https://t.co/NyBDmNclTK> [pic.twitter.com/oCs0Wq9V6I](https://t.co/oCs0Wq9V6I)

— Cleveland Browns (@Browns) *January 11, 2021*

The start shocked a few notable names on social media:

what in the world

— JJ Watt (@JJWatt) [January 11, 2021](#)

Well when a coach say start fast it don't start no faster than that.

— Gerald McCoy (@Geraldini93) [January 11, 2021](#)

Wow hahahaha

— T.J. Ward (@BossWard43) [January 11, 2021](#)

Somebody need to investigate that lol...ain't no way this game could start like that. Pouncey is a ALL PRO...we ain't never seen him do that lol

— Jerraud Powers (@JPowers25) [January 11, 2021](#)



— Christian Kirksey (@Kirko58) [January 11, 2021](#)

80!!!!!!

— Odell Beckham Jr (@obj) [January 11, 2021](#)

This is a video game wth is going on this is weird I'm speechless pretty sure the whole world is shocked bc I never seen anything like this in my life not in the NFL! 🤪🤪🤪

— King me (@sammywatkins) [January 11, 2021](#)

Ok, don't look now, but analytics says the final score will be... [#Math](#)

112-0

Same old Nrowns

— Joe Thomas (@joethomas73) [January 11, 2021](#)

That man @Kareemhunt7 is so nice 🤔

— Patrick Mahomes II (@PatrickMahomes) [January 11, 2021](#)

Sheeesh.... Cleveland is sick n tired of being sick n tired

— ROBERT MATHIS The1st (@RobertMathis98) [January 11, 2021](#)

I have thought all season how hard it would be to be a coach or player at home watching. Certainly a head coach. But this?!? Man. This game would be the way to do it 😊

— Jacob Tamme (@JacobTamme) [January 11, 2021](#)

Oh my gosh u just now at seeing the game what in the world

— Marlon Humphrey (@marlon_humphrey) [January 11, 2021](#)

I will not be surprised if the Steelers came back👁👁

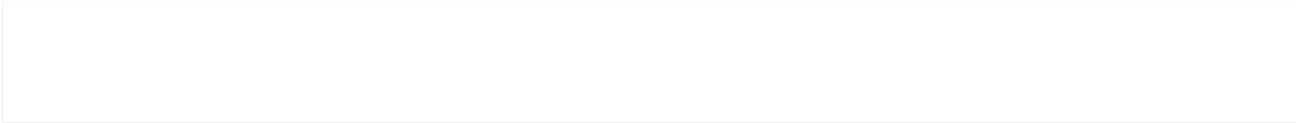
— ⚡Primetime!!!⚡ (@Joe_MainMixon) [January 11, 2021](#)

Yep this one is over 😊

— ⚡Primetime!!!⚡ (@Joe_MainMixon) [January 11, 2021](#)



ADVERTISEMENT



Change Of Fortune

By MIKE DIGIOVANNA

FEB. 17, 2008 | 12 AM



TIMES STAFF WRITER

PROSPER, Texas -- It seems fitting that Torii Hunter chose this burgeoning North Dallas suburb to build his dream home, a 19,900-square-foot, Mediterranean-style estate that sits on 20 acres, 3 1/2 of them covered by a lake.

Growing up five hours east of here in gritty Pine Bluff, Ark., a small city notorious for its big-city problems -- gangs, drugs, poverty, violent crime -- the Angels' new center fielder did anything but prosper, at least, economically.

Hunter's father, a Vietnam veteran, was addicted to crack cocaine and blew too many paychecks on drugs and booze, his habits eventually costing him his job as an electrician for the local railroad.

Theotis Hunter would disappear for weeks at a time, his family never knowing if he was dead or alive, and during one of those benders, Torii found his dad passed out on a crack-house floor.

ADVERTISING



Shirley Hunter struggled to pay the utilities and keep her four boys clothed and fed on an elementary school teacher's salary and a prayer.

There were days Torii and his brothers knocked on neighbors' doors, asking for food, or hid in the back of the house when bill collectors came.

Rock bottom, Hunter said, came in 1997, when he opened the season with the Minnesota Twins' double-A affiliate in New Britain, Conn.

His first-round, \$450,000 signing bonus from 1993 spent -- \$60,000 built an indoor practice facility for the Pine Bluff High baseball team, the rest went to support himself, his family and a child -- Hunter was broke when Twins minor leaguers broke camp.

"I didn't have money for the first month's rent, so me and my roommate slept in front of the stadium in a car -- a Geo Prizm -- for two weeks," said Hunter, who left the Twins to sign a five-year, \$90-million deal with the Angels in November.

"I had no help. We couldn't afford \$19 a day for a hotel room. We'd wake up in the morning, hang out in the mall all day, come to the stadium and take a shower."

Now look at him. Hunter, who will join the Angels for their first full-squad spring-training workout in Arizona on Wednesday, can bathe in any of 11 bathrooms, and he and his wife, Katrina, sleep in a large master suite that has a sunken den, fireplace and a view of the pool and Jacuzzi.

The entrance to the two-year-old, six-bedroom home, which is around the corner from former NFL star Deion Sanders' palatial estate, features a grand foyer with marble floors, Roman columns and a 40-foot-high rotunda.

There's a home theater with an 85-inch television, surround sound and leather seats, a game room with a pool table, bar, three flat-screen TVs and a trophy case, an indoor basketball court and batting cage, and a workout room with a hyperbaric chamber.

There are his-and-hers garages -- Torii's includes a burnt orange 1964 convertible Impala -- and his-and-hers offices, Torii's featuring a switch under a shelf that, when flipped, turns a bookcase into a secret door.

Down a hidden hallway, a heavy door opens to a small room with a bench and a phone.

"This is the panic room," Hunter, 32, said. "The walls are concrete, eight inches thick, that go deep into the ground, the door is bulletproof, and the phone line can't be cut.

"If we ever have a tornado or a hurricane, we'd go in here . . . but it's also from growing up in the 'hood. My upbringing has me worried about a lot of stuff, and when we first moved out here, there weren't many houses, it was kind of isolated. Safety is first."

As a teenager in Pine Bluff, Hunter carried a gun -- "For protection," he said, "not to rob anybody" -- but here in Texas, he's beginning to feel safe at home.

"Every time I drive up to the house, I look at it and thank God, because being from Pine Bluff, with all the things I've seen and gone through, to see how far I've come . . . it's kind of like a fantasy, a dream," Hunter said. "After we moved here, we really thought about what the word 'prosper' means."

Hunter was 13, in the eighth grade, when he realized his father had a serious drug problem. Theotis -- and Torii's Chicago Bulls jacket -- were missing for two weeks, and one morning both reappeared, the jacket on a chair and Theotis sleeping on a couch.

"I grabbed the jacket, went to school, raised my hand to answer a question and something fell out of the pocket -- ting, onto the floor," Hunter said. "It was a crack pipe. I picked it up real quick and told the teacher I had to use the restroom."

"I got in there, picked up the back of the toilet, wiped my fingerprints off the pipe, dropped it in the toilet and closed it up. I was in tears. I can't even explain to you how hurt I was. It was tough to look at your dad after that. You definitely look at him different."

Then there was that hellacious night in October 1994. Home after his first full pro season, Hunter found his Ford Explorer -- and his father -- were missing.

Five days later, Torii found the truck parked at a crack house.

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He went in, and, seeing Theotis passed out on the floor, Torii went into a rage, throwing fists at everyone in the room.

That night, Hunter and a friend, Basil Shabazz, a former Pine Bluff star who was a top prospect in the St. Louis Cardinals system, drove to the University of Central Arkansas in Conway.

While Hunter visited a cousin in a dormitory, Shabazz fell asleep in the Explorer. Police knocked on the window and Shabazz, thinking he was being robbed, pulled a gun.

Shabazz was handcuffed, Hunter was pulled from the dorm, and a search of the car uncovered a marijuana joint and a pipe sprinkled with crack, which belonged to Theotis.

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Torii was released the next morning on \$2,500 bail, and charges were eventually dropped, but Shabazz was released by the Cardinals, and his athletic career was eventually cut short by a football injury at Arkansas Pine Bluff.

“Basil made some pretty bad choices,” Hunter said, “but I still feel like my dad had something to do with him being released.”

Hunter said Theotis, who got hooked on heroin in Vietnam, has disappeared for a week or more at least 20 times over the years. Theotis fathered three children outside his marriage, he was fired from his job in 1998, and Shirley divorced him in 1999.

“You have an understanding of where he might have been when you find out you have [half] brothers you didn’t know you had,” Hunter said. “But it was tough when he was missing. You’d sit at home, you couldn’t do your homework, you couldn’t do anything.

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“After two or three weeks of searching every corner, asking a drug dealer or a friend if they’ve seen your dad, it dawns on you that your dad is dead.”

After battling drugs and depression for decades, Theotis seems to have turned a corner. Torii moved Theotis out of Pine Bluff, buying him a townhouse in Frisco, Texas, two years ago, and Torii is convinced his dad has been clean for about 10 months.

Theotis, now 56, is at Torii’s house almost every day, cooking Southern dishes, picking up 12-year-old Torii Jr. from practice and attending games, and helping him with school projects.

“I feel good, but it’s hard,” said Theotis, who has Torii’s big grin and easy laugh. “I’ve got to get all the demons out of me, stay positive and take life one day at a time. But I didn’t have a few demons. I had a legion of them.”

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Torii always thought if he made the big leagues, he could cure his father, but Theotis has been in and out of rehabilitation “at least 10 times,” Hunter said, with limited results.

“Money doesn’t solve anything,” Hunter said. “It gives you the means to pay for the rehabs . . . but the best rehab is love, and that’s what we’re trying to show him.”

There is still pain. All those years of neglect took a toll.

“I can’t ever recall my dad coming to any of my games or anything like that when I was a kid,” Hunter said. “I know he worked, but some days he was off, and he just didn’t come. . . .”

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Hunter’s eyes turn toward his office window. He stares into the distance. His voice trails off.

Does it still hurt today?

“Sometimes, yeah,” Hunter said, fighting back tears. “I’m human. To think about it is sad. But I know there’s another kid out there going through the same thing. I want to tell him to keep his head up, stay strong, keep God close, and everything will be all right.”

This is why Hunter, who for years hid his family secret, began opening up about his turbulent past in 2005. He hopes to inspire kids from troubled environments.

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“I want to let people know that, like everyone else, I have problems,” Hunter said. “It may not be a drug problem, but everybody has problems. I want people to know they’re not alone.”

Especially his son.

“Everything I did not have or did not do or did not see, I make sure my son has it, does it or sees it,” Hunter said. “I talk to him about life. We laugh, we have deep conversations about finances, girls. I never had that with my father, and I felt I was behind on a couple things because of that.

“I don’t want my kids to go through what I went through. That’s why I fly home on off days for [Torii Jr.’s] games. I don’t want my son to be 25 and say, ‘You were never at my games, you never talked to me.’ ”

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There was one benefit to having a drug addict for a father. It was a strong deterrent to Torii, his older brother, Taru, and younger brothers Tishque and Tramar.

“When you look at your father and see what it does to him, as a kid, you do not want to fall into that kind of living,” Hunter said. “That was something I ran away from. It scared us . . . and at the same time, it may have saved us.”

The pull of drugs was strong in Pine Bluff, a town of about 55,000 people on the Arkansas River, 40 miles south of Little Rock.

An abundance of pine trees and a scarcity of tall buildings downtown give Pine Bluff a rural feel, but those looks can be deceiving.

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Any scent from the pine trees is usually dwarfed by the odor spewing from the smokestacks of the two paper mills that flank the town, and urban problems have plagued the city for years.

The 2007 edition of Cities Ranked and Rated, which ranks the best places to live in the U.S., rated Pine Bluff No. 361 out of 373 metropolitan areas, mostly because of a violent crime rate that is nearly twice the national average.

Murder is so prevalent that years ago locals began calling the town “Pine Box,” as in, be careful, or you’ll end up in a pine box. Hunter knew about a dozen people, including several close friends, who were killed in gang shootings.

“The temptation to deal drugs, to do drugs, is so evident in this town because for every drug dealer that gets taken off the streets, there are three or four who want to take his place,” said Keith Brown, who lives in Pine Bluff and is one of Hunter’s best friends.

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“But the thing is, Torii is a strong-willed person. He had the talent, the determination and the love for the sport, so he would never risk getting in trouble and missing a practice or a game.”

Torii spent most of his childhood in a brick home, which Hunter still owns but is now vacant, on Belmoor Avenue. The neighborhood has a middle-class feel until you notice the sprinkling of homes that have been abandoned, torn down or are in disrepair.

Some houses on Belmoor have bars over the windows for protection; next door to Hunter’s house, on each side, there are cars parked on the front lawn.

“This is an OK place to live, but things still happen,” Brown said last week, standing in Hunter’s old yard. “You can turn a corner, cross a street, be near the projects, and boom, you’re in harm’s way.”

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Brown, who recently graduated from Arkansas Pine Bluff and is working on his teaching credential, knows all too well. His older brother, Cedric, was shot and killed after a barroom dispute in 1991, when Keith and Torii were 15.

“That changed our lives,” Brown said. “After that, everyone started looking out for each other.”

Especially Taru Hunter, who joined the Crips as a teenager but did everything he could to keep Torii, who was beginning to shine on the baseball field, away from gangs.

“He wanted me to excel, so he put his name out there as one of those tough guys on the street,” Torii said of Taru, now 35 and a personal trainer in the Dallas area. “Guys would see me and say, ‘That’s Taru’s brother, leave him alone.’ He was my protector.”

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Hunter also took measures to protect himself. Though he squirms a bit when asked, he admits he carried a weapon as a kid.

“I’m a very honest guy, the past is the past, but everyone I knew had a gun, and so did I,” Hunter said.

Did he ever shoot it?

“Now on that,” he said, “I’ll plead the Fifth.”

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Hunter wonders sometimes how he survived.

“I hung out with gang members, I’ve seen bullets ring out, bullets whiz right past me -- I’ve seen my brother’s car get shot up, but he never got hit,” Hunter said. “All you can do is go by faith.”

Shirley Hunter tried to keep her kids busy, sending them straight from football to basketball, from basketball to baseball and track, and over the summer, she’d help organize neighborhood games.

She did much of this while commuting from a teaching job in Little Rock from 1982 to 1987, Torii’s Little League years. Shirley finally got a job teaching second grade in Pine Bluff in 1987 and remains there today.

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“She’d rush home, fix us food, get us to practice or games, and she did it with four boys, pretty much on her own,” Hunter said. “She was a perfect lady.”

Torii was not perfect. Though he and Katrina began dating in high school and were married at age 21, Torii fathered two children, boys who are now 13 and 12, by other women.

“I was young, I didn’t have that fatherly advice,” Hunter said. “Now, that’s what I give my kid.”

Hunter gives so much more. After signing a four-year, \$32-million contract with the Twins before 2003, he bought townhomes and cars for all three of his brothers, who now live in Frisco, the town next to Prosper.

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He bought new homes for his mother -- a 7,500-square-foot home in a gated community on the outskirts of Pine Bluff -- and his mother-in-law. Shabazz and his family live rent-free in Hunter's previous residence, a 3,500-square-foot home in The Colony, Texas.

Hunter and his wife created the Torii & Katrina Pine Bluff Community Fund, and Hunter donates hundreds of tickets each year for disadvantaged kids to attend games.

"If I didn't make it to the major leagues, my dad would still be on drugs, my mom would be living in an apartment, and my brothers would still be in Pine Bluff," Hunter said. "I'm so thankful. Helping your family out . . . it brings tears to your eyes."

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Mike DiGiovanna is a sports writer who contributes to the coverage of the Dodgers, Angels and Chargers for the Los Angeles Times. He won Associated Press Sports Editors awards for feature-story writing in 2017 and game-story writing in 2001 and Orange County Press Club Awards for feature and game-story writing in 1996 and 1997. A native of East Lyme, Conn., and a graduate of Cal State Fullerton, he began writing for The Times in 1981. He has been covering Major League Baseball since 1995 and spent 19 years as the paper's Angels beat writer and two on the Dodgers.

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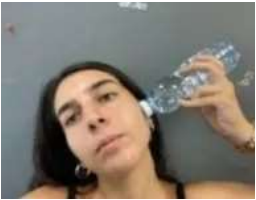
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L.A. Angels OF Torii Hunter Encounters Gun-Drawn Police in His Own Home

GABE ZALDIVAR

APRIL 4, 2012

<https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1132901-torii-hunter-angels-of-held-at-gunpoint-by-police-for-robbing-own-house>

1/4

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[Torii Hunter](#) was held at gunpoint by police officers, in his own home.

[Corona Del Mar Today](#) reports police responded to an alarm at Hunter's residence.

From there, they did their due diligence and found there was nothing to the alarm. Police spokeswoman Kathy Lowe confirmed this in an email, via [Corona Del Mar Today](#):

“Officers made contact with the resident at the location and cleared the call 'unfounded.'

That is one account, and one side of a story that will only become clearer in the next few days. What we do know is that Hunter was just as shocked to have the police in his home and not quite as distressed as he should be that they drew their guns on him.

De'Andre Hunter with the big dunk



Hunter took to Twitter to give his followers a play-by-play of what was going down.

It all starts with this [tweet](#):

“My alarm went off in my house while I was in it. 20mins later I saw cops checking out the scene. Went outside and they drew there guns on me”

— [Torii Hunter \(@toriihunter48\)](#) [April 4, 2012](#)



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Videos you might like

It then gets a little uncomfortable and not the least bit frustrating for fans with this [tweet](#); thoughts of injustice abound:

“**"They didn't believe I lived here in Newport coast so they walked me upstairs at gunpoint to get my ID."**

— Torii Hunter (@toriihunter48) [April 4, 2012](#)

He then throws us all [for a loop](#):

“**"When I showed him my ID, he said I'm an angel fan hope u guys have a great season. ARE U KIDDING ME!!!!!! Lol"**

— Torii Hunter (@toriihunter48) [April 4, 2012](#)

He then goes on to say that he is thankful the cops protected him and made reference that his alarm system works rather well.

What?

You can judge from the comments in his Twitter feed that people were appalled at the fact that police would detain an innocent man in his own home and draw their guns on him.

There was also the frustration of Hunter laughing this off. How could *he* not be appalled?

Well, that gets answered the more Hunter [tweets](#):

“**"It was my fault that the alarm went off anyways. I just thought it was cool to let u guys know my awkward moment for today."**

— Torii Hunter (@toriihunter48) [April 5, 2012](#)

Finally:

“**"The cops that were here today had there guns drawn but pointed downward in for safety. Those guys handled the situation like trained**

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— Torii Hunter (@toriihunter48) April 5, 2012

Don't believe everything you hear, and only half of what you see. Twitter is an amazing tool that gives us instant access we could only dream of, but the thoughts of civil atrocities have been washed away as a superstar athlete tries to wave his hands and say, "I was only kidding."

In light of the Trayvon Martin tragedy, you could tell fans on Hunter's feed were ready to call out for an obvious moment of overzealous policing.

In the end, Twitter is a tool to show glimpses, but not the entire picture.

We are left to take Hunter on his word that the police were nothing but professional.

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Hunter says black Latino players are 'impostors'

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Hunter talks about race



Associated Press

Mar 10, 2010



PHOENIX -- [Los Angeles Angels](#) center fielder [Torii Hunter](#) insists he meant no harm toward Latino players when he recently referred to them as "impostors" while discussing the number of African-Americans in the major leagues.



Hunter's original comments were made two weeks ago in one of a series of USA Today roundtables about baseball and published in Wednesday's editions.



"What troubles me most was the word 'impostors' appearing in reference to Latin American players not being black players. It was the wrong word choice, and it definitely doesn't accurately reflect how I feel and who I am," Hunter posted on his Angels-sponsored blog Wednesday afternoon.

"What I meant was they're not black players; they're Latin American players. There is a difference culturally. But on the field, we're all brothers, no matter where we come from, and that's something I've always taken pride in: treating everybody the same, whether he's a superstar or a young kid breaking into the game. Where he was born and raised makes no difference."

Hunter has long been known as one of baseball's sincere, good guys.

A call to USA Today's Bob Nightengale, the article's author, was not immediately returned.

In the report, Hunter was quoted as saying: "People see dark faces out there, and the perception is that they're African-American. They're not us. They're impostors. Even people I know come up and say: 'Hey, what color is [Vladimir Guerrero](#)? Is he a black player?' I say, 'Come on, he's Dominican. He's not black.' ...

"As African-American players, we have a theory that baseball can go get an imitator and pass them off as us. It's like they had to get some kind of dark faces, so they go to the Dominican or Venezuela because you can get them cheaper. It's like, 'Why should I get this kid from the South Side of Chicago and have Scott Boras represent him and pay him \$5 million when you can get a Dominican guy for a bag of chips?' ... I'm telling you, it's sad," he said.

White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, a Venezuelan, scoffed at Hunter's remarks before Wednesday's game against the [Oakland Athletics](#). Angels spokesman Eric Kay said Hunter will not further discuss the subject.

"I was laughing because when he said, 'They go there and sign for potato chips,' I said, 'Well, we've got Chapman. They gave him \$12 million. [Cincinnati actually agreed to a \$30.25 million, six-year contract with pitcher Aroldis Chapman.] We've got [prospect Dayan] Viciedo. They gave him \$10 million. I remember in my time, one scout goes [to Venezuela and] 30 players show up. Now, 30 scouts go there and one player shows up. In our country, we play baseball. That's no choice. Here you can play basketball, you can be another athlete, you can do so many things when you have the opportunity. And that's why there's not many [African-American] players out there."

There has been some concern about the number of African-American baseball players. Many blacks are choosing to play other sports instead.

Black players accounted for 10.2 percent of major leaguers in 2008, the most since the 1995 season, according to the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports.

"I keep saying a lot of times, in 10 more years American people are going to need a visa to play this game because we're going to take over. We're going to," Guillen said.

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Cleveland Browns pounce on Pittsburgh Steelers from jump with 28 first-quarter points



Jake Trotter
ESPN Staff Writer

8:34 PM ET

The start to the [Cleveland Browns'](#) first playoff game in 18 years couldn't have gone more perfectly on Sunday night.

On the contest's initial play, [Pittsburgh Steelers](#) center [Maurkice Pouncey](#) snapped the ball over the head of quarterback [Ben Roethlisberger](#). After a scramble for the ball, Cleveland's [Karl Joseph](#) recovered it in the end zone, giving the Browns a 7-0 lead just 14 seconds into their wild-card playoff game at Heinz Field.

According to ESPN Stats & Information data, the last time the first play from scrimmage resulted in a defensive touchdown in any game came in Week 1 of 2018, when [Sam Darnold](#) threw a pick-six on his first career pass with the [New York Jets](#).

THAT WAS QUICK.

: <https://t.co/vcgHu2syur> [pic.twitter.com/Y3Xn6Dh10S](https://t.co/Y3Xn6Dh10S)

— [Cleveland Browns \(@Browns\)](#) [January 11, 2021](#)

It didn't take long for the Browns to add to it. [M.J. Stewart Jr.](#) intercepted Roethlisberger on the ensuing drive, and [Baker Mayfield](#) made the Steelers pay with a 40-yard touchdown strike to [Jarvis Landry](#). It was the first time the Browns scored 14 points in the first quarter against the Steelers since 2000, a game Cleveland went on to win.

JARVIS. LANDRY.

: <https://t.co/NyBDmNclTK> [pic.twitter.com/DESCrHfqWx](https://t.co/DESCrHfqWx)

— [Cleveland Browns \(@Browns\)](#) [January 11, 2021](#)

[Kareem Hunt](#) extended the lead to 28-0 with a pair of touchdown runs, the latter set up by another interception of Roethlisberger. The Browns are the first

team to score 28 points in the first quarter of a playoff game since the Raiders against the Oilers in 1969.

Another one for @Kareemhunt7!

: <https://t.co/NyBDmNclTK> pic.twitter.com/oCs0Wq9V6I

— Cleveland Browns (@Browns) [January 11, 2021](#)

The start shocked a few notable names on social media:

what in the world

— JJ Watt (@JJWatt) [January 11, 2021](#)

Well when a coach say start fast it don't start no faster than that.

— Gerald McCoy (@Geraldini93) [January 11, 2021](#)

Wow hahahaha

— T.J. Ward (@BossWard43) [January 11, 2021](#)

Somebody need to investigate that lol...ain't no way this game could start like that. Pouncey is a ALL PRO...we ain't never seen him do that lol

— Jeraud Powers (@JPowers25) [January 11, 2021](#)



— Christian Kirksey (@Kirko58) [January 11, 2021](#)

80!!!!!!

— Odell Beckham Jr (@obj) [January 11, 2021](#)

This is a video game wth is going on this is weird I'm speechless pretty sure the whole world is shocked bc I never seen anything like this in my life not in the NFL!! 🤪🤪🤪

— King me (@sammywatkins) [January 11, 2021](#)

Ok, don't look now, but analytics says the final score will be... #Math

112-0

Same old Nrowns

— Joe Thomas (@joethomas73) [January 11, 2021](#)

That man @Kareemhunt7 is so nice 🤝

— Patrick Mahomes II (@PatrickMahomes) [January 11, 2021](#)

Sheeesh.... Cleveland is sick n tired of being sick n tired

— ROBERT MATHIS The1st (@RobertMathis98) [January 11, 2021](#)

I have thought all season how hard it would be to be a coach or player at home watching. Certainly a head coach. But this?!? Man. This game would be the way to do it 😊

— Jacob Tamme (@JacobTamme) [January 11, 2021](#)

Oh my gosh u just now at seeing the game what in the world

— Marlon Humphrey (@marlon_humphrey) [January 11, 2021](#)

I will not be surprised if the Steelers came back👁👁

— ⚡Primetime!!!⚡ (@Joe_MainMixon) [January 11, 2021](#)

Yep this one is over 😊

— ⚡ *Primetime!!!* ⚡ (@Joe_MainMixon) *January 11, 2021*

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Nine things you didn't know about new Tiger Torii Hunter

By

[Dan Holmes](#)

– November 16, 2012



Nine-time Gold Glove winner Torii Hunter will play right field for the Tigers in 2013.

On Wednesday it was revealed that the Detroit Tigers were signing free agent outfielder Torii Hunter to a two-year deal. The acquisition shores up a big hole for the team – the corner outfield spot and the need for a strong right-handed bat.

Hunter is an exciting player who is well respected in baseball. His addition to the Tiger lineup will make the team even better in 2013. He is one of the best defensive outfielders in the history of the game and he has great extra-base power from the right side of the plate.

Here are nine things you probably didn't know about the newest Tiger.

1. The I's have it

Apparently there's no special story behind Hunter's unique spelling of his first name. "I think, when my mom filled out the paperwork after I was born, she accidentally put two 'I's," Hunter has said. That's okay, Detroit fans are used to strange configurations of letters looking at you Jhonny Peralta).

2. He's built for Comerica's wide-open spaces

A gazelle in the outfield, Hunter has long strides that make it look as if playing defense is easy. He'll fit in perfectly at Comerica Park, which has one of the largest outfields in baseball. Tigers fans who are used to seeing the shaky play of Brennan Boesch, Delmon Young, and Ryan Raburn in the corner outfield spots will be delighted to watch Hunter. He won nine Gold Gloves for the Twins and Angels, one of the largest totals for any outfielder in baseball history.

3. Only current Tiger to have played in Tiger Stadium

Back in 1999, the final season of Detroit's Tiger Stadium, Hunter was just getting a feel for the big leagues. It was his first season as a regular in the majors for the Twins and he made the most of his opportunity. On April 15, in a game at The Corner, Hunter belted his first major league home run, a solo blast off Detroit righty Brian Moehler in the 5th inning. The ball soared into the lower right-center bleachers. It was just the 15th game of Hunter's career, but it's surely something Torii has never forgotten. As of his signing, Hunter will be the only member of the Tigers who ever played at Tiger Stadium.

4. Torii emulated Bo

Hunter grew up in a large, middle class family in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where he excelled at football and baseball. One of his sports heroes was Bo Jackson, who starred in both sports professionally. Like Bo, Hunter was also a great sprinter in high school. He's not as fast as he once was, but Hunter remains one of the quickest and best baserunners in the game. When he, Quintin Berry and Austin Jackson are in the Tiger outfield, few fly balls will fall in. Tiger fans may wonder about Hunter's age,

since he'll turn 38 in 2013, but no need to worry. Hunter keeps himself in tremendous shape – he's a sculpted athlete with long, strong legs, a fantastic throwing arm, and power that comes from those legs and his chest. He has been fairly healthy his entire career and has appeared in at least 140 games in nine of the last 12 seasons.

5. As a teenager he got help from Clinton

In 1992, the 16-year old Hunter was chosen for the U.S. Junior Olympic baseball team. When he could not afford the expenses that were associated with being on the squad, Torii wrote a letter to Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. Shortly, a check for \$500 arrived in the mail from Clinton.

6. Plays with emotion

Throughout his stellar career, Hunter has displayed his passion for the game. The Tigers are getting a player who will smile, laugh, and willingly interact with the fans. But Hunter also has a fiery competitive side that can pop up. Early in his career with Minnesota he had famous run-ins with manager Tom Kelly, with whom he never had a good relationship. Hunter was suspended once when he became enraged after being hit by a pitch. But those incidents occurred early in his career, Hunter is more mature now. However, he will show emotion on the field when things are going well and when they are not. For Tigers fans who at times felt like the team was sleep walking through the regular season in 2012, that might be a welcome addition.

7. Home run milestone on the horizon

Torii needs only three homers to reach the 300 mark for his career. This will mark the second straight season that a Detroit player will have reached the 300-HR milestone, Miguel Cabrera having done it in 2012. Prince Fielder is 40 shy of the mark. Not since the Tigers had Eddie Mathews on their roster for parts of the 1967 and 1968 season have they had three players with so many homers in their career. The trio back then was Mathews (with more than 500), Al Kaline, and Norm Cash.

8. Memorable catch against Bonds in All-Star Game

In 2002, Hunter became the first Twin to start in center field at an All-Star Game since Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett. It was quite an honor for the young player. In the very first inning of the game, played in Milwaukee, Hunter went back on a deep fly ball off the bat of Barry Bonds, leaped at the wall, and took a home run away from the slugger. In a playful moment, Bonds grabbed Hunter and lifted him over his shoulder in mock disgust after the play. The catch helped catapult Hunter onto the national scene as a star player. That was the All-Star Game that infamously ended in a 7-7 tie when the teams ran out of players in extra-innings.

9. Helped sink Tigers to Wild Card spot in 2006

In 2006 the Tigers surprised many in Jim Leyland's first season by owning baseball's best record for most of the year. Unfortunately, the team faded down the stretch and squandered their AL Central lead to the charging Minnesota Twins. On the final day of the regular season, as the Tigers were being swept in their weekend series against the Royals, Hunter helped the Twins defeat the White Sox to clinch the AL Central title. Hunter smacked a two-run homer in the 4th inning to give the Twins a 3-0 cushion. As a result of the Minnesota victory, the Tigers were relegated to the wild card spot, though they went on to defeat the Yankees and A's to advance to the World Series.

Comments

comments

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About Dan Holmes

The editor of Vintage Detroit Collection blog. Dan Holmes is the author of *Ty Cobb: A Biography*. He previously worked for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, NY, and worked for Major League Baseball as a web producer. He contributed to *Sock it to 'Em Tigers: The Incredible Story of the 1968 Detroit Tigers*, and *Deadball Stars of the American League*. Visit his personal blog at danholmes.com, or check out [Baseball Egg](#), where he writes about baseball history and news.

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Torii Hunter: Having gay teammate would be 'difficult'

By [Dayn Perry](#) Dec 30, 2012 at 4:44 pm ET • 1 min read



Tigers outfielder Torii Hunter recently addressed a controversial subject. (Getty Images)

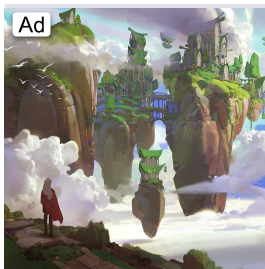
Kevin Baxter of the *Los Angeles Times* has written [an insightful piece on the life of the gay athlete in professional sports](#). As part of his reporting, Baxter sought out comments from a number of straight athletes on the subject, and here's how he summarized his conversation with veteran [Tigers](#) outfielder [Torii Hunter](#):

Like in the New England Patriots' locker room. Earlier this season linebacker Brandon Spikes sent out a tweet claiming to be homophobic "just like I'm arachnophobic. I have nothing against homosexuals or spiders but I'd still scream if I found one in my bathtub."

Spikes later said he was joking. But former Angels outfielder Torii Hunter, among baseball's most thoughtful and intelligent players, isn't kidding when he says an "out" teammate could divide a team.

forbidden by the holiness code of Leviticus), and when he talks about potential problems within the clubhouse, he may well be correct.

On the other hand, if straight ballplayers allow themselves to be sundered by the mere *presence* of an openly gay teammate, then that says more about their shortcomings than it does about the audacity of the gay teammate to, you know, be himself.



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Cleveland trades Francisco Lindor, biggest star from another core that couldn't quite end team's title drought

By [Matt Snyder](#) Jan 8, 2021 at 9:43 am ET • 4 min read



00:00 / 00:00

In trading superstar shortstop [Francisco Lindor](#) and frontline starting pitcher [Carlos Carrasco](#) to the [Mets](#) on Thursday, another championship core has come and gone in Cleveland without ending what is now the longest World Series drought in Major League Baseball.

This isn't to say that the ballclub won't find its way into contention in the near future or even win the World Series soon, but if it does, it'll be with a different core that came so close this last half-decade. This core joins an impressive list of Cleveland baseball nucleuses that couldn't get over that one final hump since the 1994 strike.

This latest group provided enough success without actually winning the World Series to mean it was a total gut punch. Again.

Things started with future Hall of Fame manager Terry Francona taking over for the 2013 season. The Indians went to the wild card game that year with a bit of a different nucleus from the championship core, but we either saw regular time from or caught glimpses of the likes of [Carlos Santana](#), [Jason Kipnis](#), [Michael Brantley](#), [Corey Kluber](#), [Bryan Shaw](#), [Cody Allen](#), [Danny Salazar](#), [Carlos Carrasco](#) and [Trevor Bauer](#).

Despite losing Carrasco and Salazar from the rotation before the playoffs, Cleveland won the AL pennant and had a 3-1 lead in the World Series before the more-talented [Cubs](#) stormed back to take the title.

The 2017 Cleveland ballclub was even better. Ramirez became a star, Lindor developed his home run power and the rotation was in much better shape heading to the postseason. That team won 22 games in a row late in the season and finished with an AL-best 102 wins. After a dramatic, 13-inning win in Game 2, a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five ALDS against the [Yankees](#) seemed insurmountable, but the Yankees came back to win it.

The 2018 division title just led to a three-game sweep in the ALDS. The 93-win 2019 season wasn't good enough to make the playoffs. The Yankees swept Cleveland, 2-0, in the Wild Card Series last season.

The only holdovers from a legitimate championship nucleus are Ramirez and catcher [Roberto Perez](#). Sure, some others are around, but it's only Ramirez and Perez among 2016-17 key contributors.

They'll now try to move forward and build another championship-level contender around Ramirez, Cy Young winner [Shane Bieber](#) and the rest of what should still be a formidable rotation, along with help from the likes of [Josh Naylor](#), [Amed Rosario](#), [Andres Gimenez](#) and more.

This is not, however, the same window of contention that they had in 2016-17. That window is closed and has to be such a bummer for the long-suffering Cleveland fans.

On the flip-side, Major League Baseball in Cleveland since the aforementioned strike has been exponentially better than it was before for decades.

Before the 1994 strike, there had only been three postseason appearances: A World Series title in 1920, a World Series title in 1948 and a World Series loss in 1954.

And then, they were one of the best teams in baseball for over a half-decade. From 1995-2001, there were six playoff berths in seven seasons with two AL pennants. And the star-power. Hoo boy, the star-power. Albert Belle, Jim Thome, Eddie Murray, Manny Ramirez, Kenny Lofton, Carlos Baerga, Omar Vizquel, Orel Hershiser, Charles Nagy, Jose Mesa, Sandy Alomar, David Justice, Roberto Alomar, Travis Fryman, Juan Gonzalez, Chuck Finley and a host of other big names were part of the nucleus at different times throughout this run.

And yet, zero World Series titles.

There was also a short-lived window in the mid-2000s behind [CC Sabathia](#), Travis Hafner, Grady Sizemore and [Victor Martinez](#) that saw Cleveland again in Game 7 of the ALCS. But no World Series ring.

The latest window is closed, even if Jose Ramirez and Shane Bieber are around to help bridge the gap.

One of the most rewarding things about being a die-hard sports fan is getting to see your favorite team win the championship. For the rest of your life as a fan, you get to look back fondly and remember the players who got the job done. That group is special to you for the rest of your life. In Cleveland, this past group was just another special one that will, unfortunately, not evoke the same memories. It's too bad. It was a true championship core.

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