

COVER STORY

A Complicated Game?

Not the Way It's Played by Kirby Puckett

By TOM POWERS

TWIN CITIES—A New York media type once raced up to Minnesota Twins outfielder Kirby Puckett, thrust a microphone near his face and asked, "Kirby, what is your philosophy of playing center field?"

Puckett looked at the microphone, looked up at the interviewer, shrugged and said, "Catch everything."

Baseball, as played by Kirby Puckett, is not a complicated game.

"At the plate, swing at everything," he said with a laugh. "Play hard every day. That's it."

Who's to argue? In a season in which several American League outfielders are putting up big numbers, Puckett's figures may be the most impressive. As August drew to a close, he was leading the league with 57 multiple-hit games, 269 total bases and 177 hits. In addition, he was batting .351 with 19 homers and 91 runs batted in. Throw in his 10 assists and you have numbers worthy of Most Valuable Player consideration.

"Well, I don't know," said Puckett. "It would be a great honor. But out in Oakland, Mr. Jose Canseco may be a 40-40 man (40 homers and 40 stolen bases). You have to tip your hat to him, especially if Oakland wins the division. And don't forget (Boston's) Mike Greenwell and Mr. (Wade) Boggs. . ."

Clearly, Puckett is a legitimate MVP candidate. He is having his best season in what already has been an illustrious career.

"All I ever wanted to do was make the major leagues and be successful," he said. "The rest of it, the Gold Gloves, the Silver Bats, is all icing, anyway."

Obviously, Puckett has made it big in "The Show," as he often refers to the big leagues.

And in the process, Catherine Puckett's "baby boy" has gone from the obscurity of a Chicago ghetto to the mega-wattage of the national spotlight.

From the assembly line at a Ford Motor plant to the World Series.

"I'm the same person as I always was," Puckett said. "The big money hasn't changed me. I

have more material things, but I'm the same person I was when I was 12 years old."

Then, flashing his trademark smile, he jumped up and ran out to play catch with one of the ball boys, four hours before the start of that night's game.

Some things have changed for Kirby Puckett. He can't go out to dinner with his wife, Tonya, or to the movies, or even for a walk without being recognized and, consequently, besieged by autograph seekers and well-wishers.

"Anywhere," Puckett emphasized. "And it doesn't matter what city I'm in—Toronto, Milwaukee, Cleveland. . . That's part of the job, I guess. I'm thinking of wearing a wig like George Brett does."

Then he would simply look like Kirby Puckett wearing a wig. At 5-8 and 215 pounds, his barrel-chested body with the sparkplug legs wouldn't be easy to disguise.

"Oh, man, I wouldn't wish this body on any of my teammates," Puckett said recently in the Twins' clubhouse. "I wouldn't put them through that. They'd be crying all the time."

Those players near his locker laughed as "Puck," as he's called by those who know him well, carried on. Asked if he would trade bodies with Kent Hrbek, Puckett looked out the corner of his eye to make sure the Twins' big first baseman was listening, then pretended to go into shock. "Are you kidding me?" he asked, aghast.

Then there was the time this season when Twins pitching ace Frank Viola lost a game in the Metrodome for the first time in two years. As Viola was surrounded in front of his locker by hot camera lights and reporters scribbling notes, Puckett stomped around the clubhouse in mock anger.

"Frankie, I can't believe you lost. How can you do that?" he hollered. "There's going to be a lot of kids who don't get any sleep tonight, Frankie. You stink."

Viola, who could barely talk because he was giggling so hard, finally got into the spirit of things and yelled over the cameras. "Thanks for all your support today, Puck. How many hits did you get?"

"None," Puckett shouted back, still wearing a fake scowl. "I figured I didn't have to get any hits with you pitching, Frankie. You're not human. I'd have bet my house on this one and you let me down."

If Puckett has an enemy, anywhere, that person has yet to stand up and be counted. Tom Mee, the Twins' longtime director of media relations, said Puckett and Harmon Killebrew are the two most popular players in the Twins' history.

"Killebrew was a bona fide American hero, the Daniel Boone of his day," said Mee. "Kirby is the guy everybody wants to touch. He's been popular here since Day One. And while Harmon had his detrac-

tors, I don't think I've ever heard a single detractor when it comes to Kirby."

Not among the Metrodome faithful, which projects to 3 million strong this season. Not among his teammates, who can't say enough about the guy. And especially not among the kids, who go crazy around Puckett, probably because he's not much taller than they are.

As Twins General Manager Andy MacPhail said, "He's just the type of guy who makes you smile."

Recently, Twins right fielder Randy Bush recounted his first meeting with Puckett for the Orange County Register.

"We'd heard about this phenom that was going to join us," Bush said. "Well, here he comes with that body. So we were all kind of snickering for a minute."

"Later, during batting practice, I thought I'd go over and say something to him, settle him down. Instead, he came up to me and said, 'Hi, Mr. Bush, I'm Kirby Puckett. I've heard a lot of good things about you.' He knew who everybody was."

That was May 8, 1984, in Anaheim. Puckett, who had just been called up from the Twins' Triple-A team in Toledo (International), became only the sixth player in American League history to distinguish his major league debut by getting four hits in a nine-inning game. That capped a hectic couple of days.

"We were playing in Old Orchard Beach (Me.) and (Manager) Cal Ermer came to my room and said, 'Congratulations, kid, you're going to "The Show." I froze,' Puckett recalled. "I said, 'Who? Me?' He said, 'Hell, yes.' I ran across the street and had a victory beer."

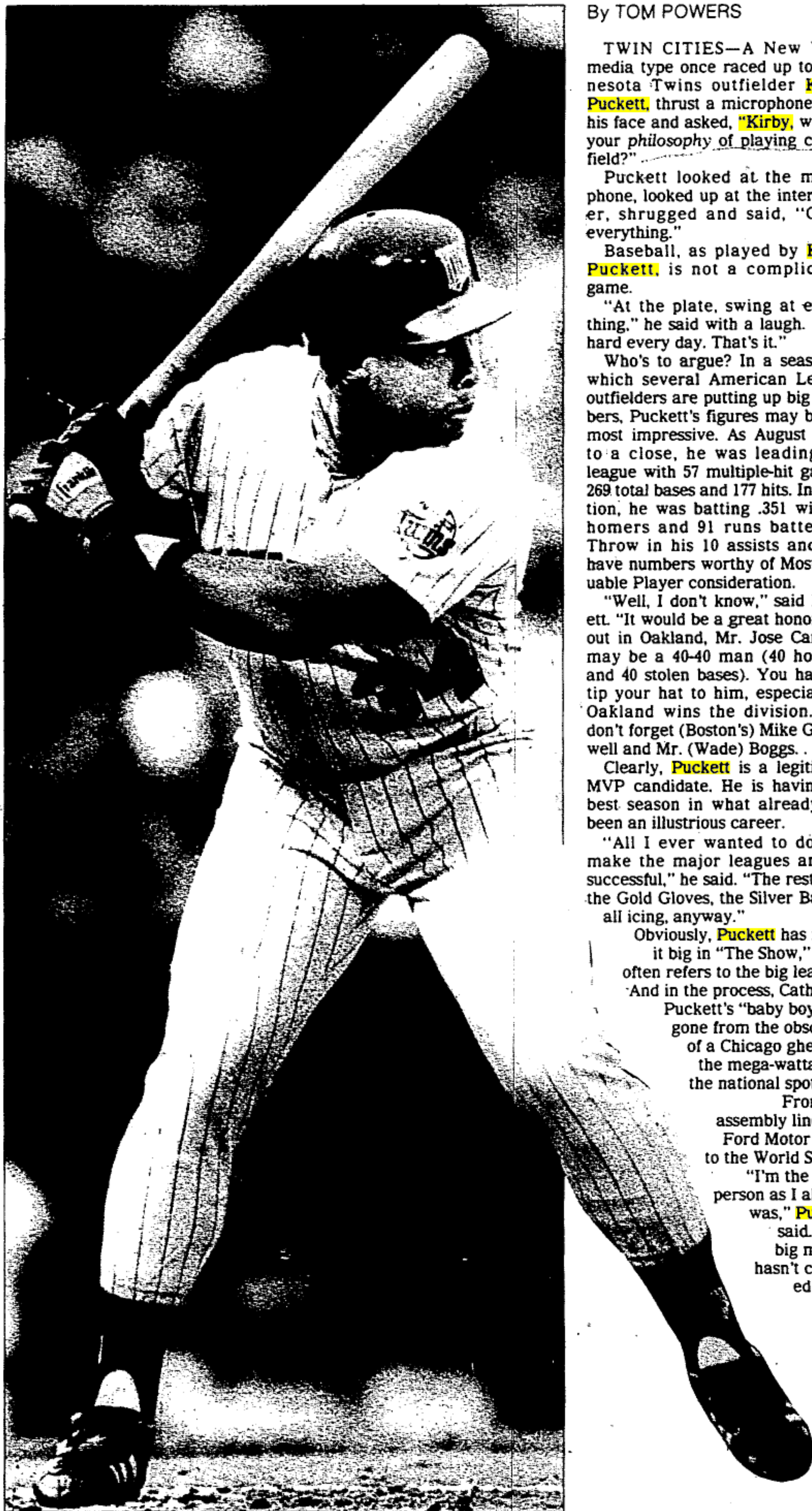
"I had to fly all the way to Anaheim. I had \$10 in my pocket and all my clothes were in Toledo. I left Maine about 6 a.m. and had to switch planes in Atlanta to get to California. Well, first the windshield cracked or something. Then the defroster didn't work. We just sat and waited. We were delayed four or five hours, and when I finally got off the plane (in Anaheim), there was nobody there to meet me."

Then 23, Puckett began his major league career in something less than high style.

"I had no idea how far the stadium was," he said. "How do I get there?"

"I got in a cab and said, 'Anaheim Stadium.' The guy gave me a look like this," Puckett said, making a quizzical face. "I told him up front I had only \$10 to my name and explained to him who I was. We got to talking and he congratulated me and everything."

"When we got there, I left everything in the cab and ran in to get my meal money to pay him. The Twins said they'd pay for it. It was \$60. I told them it was \$85, you know, and tipped the guy \$25. I still



The Kirby Puckett philosophy is easy to remember: "Play hard every day. That's it."

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COVER STORY

wish I had gotten his name."

As it turned out, Puckett arrived too late to help the Twins that night. It was the next day when he began making his mark.

"I hit a bullet to (shortstop Dick) Schofield," Puckett said, replaying his first major league at-bat. "I said, 'Oh, man, the big leagues are going to be tough.' Next time up, I hit a line drive up the middle. I ended up 4 for 5. It was great."

It was the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

In 1979, Puckett, then fresh out of Calumet High School on the South Side of Chicago, went looking for a job. He found one at the Ford Motor plant on 130th Street.

"It was so far from where we were that if you missed the one bus, there wouldn't be another one," Puckett said. "It took 90 days to get in the union. They kept me on for something like 89 days and then laid me off."

It was another tough lesson in the ways of the world, although by that time, he was pretty well schooled in such matters.

The youngest of nine children, Puckett grew up about four blocks from Comiskey Park in a housing project called the Robert Taylor Homes. Newsweek once described that little corner of purgatory as "the place where hope died."

"In our most recent national studies, this is the No. 1 most depressed and violent area in the country," Sgt. Robert Beardon, a Chicago police officer, told the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

That is where Puckett learned to play baseball.

"There were so many people," he said. "Sixteen floors to a building, 10 apartments to a floor. No telling how many people lived in an apartment."

"But I was always out playing,

not seeing what trouble I could get into. And I had five older brothers that took care of me. My brothers saw to it that nobody messed with me. To me, a real good time was getting up real early in the summertime and going out and playing baseball all day. As early as I could wake up, I'd take a bath and then I was out the door."

Not out to green fields with pitchers' mounds, but to hard concrete, with squares drawn on the walls of decaying buildings to serve as strike zones.

Puckett went on to become a star, albeit a scrawny one, at Calumet High.

"I didn't have too many scholarship offers after high school," said Puckett, who finished in the top 20 percent of his class academically. "Not too many scouts would come to watch black baseball teams play in the ghetto."

So he wound up at the Ford plant, working by day and playing ball by night. But about the same time he got laid off at the plant, he received a scholarship offer from Bradley University.

"Everything went great," Puckett said. "Then, three weeks later, my dad passed away."

William Puckett, who died from a heart attack, had railed against the poverty around him, working two 40-hour-a-week jobs. It finally paid off when Kirby was 12 as he packed up the family and moved it to a little better neighborhood.

"I wanted to quit school and take care of my mom," Puckett said. "I called and told her I was coming home. She told me, 'No, no, you're still going to make it big. You're going to be good one day.'"

Puckett finished out that year at Bradley, then transferred to Triton Junior College in River Grove, Ill., to be closer to home. That's where the Twins found him. Jim Rantz,



In center field? "Catch everything."

Minnesota's director of minor leagues, more or less stumbled upon Puckett when he went to see his own son play.

"He stood out," Rantz said of Puckett. "It wasn't because he had a home run, a double, stole two bases, threw a guy out at home and had a shaved head, either. The enthusiasm he had on a miserably hot night, when everybody was dog tired... That was the thing you noticed."

To Puckett, a good pitch is any one that he can reach. He walked

only 32 times in 624 at-bats last year and seven of those walks were intentional. In 1986, he batted 680 times and drew just 34 walks.

This season, he may outdo himself. With one week left in August, he had walked only 19 times in more than 500 at-bats.

In a recent game in Detroit, Puckett stepped in against Jack Morris with the bases loaded and two out. He singled to right, driving in two runs and breaking open the game. Later, he admitted he had swung at a pitch over his head.

"I'm 5-8 and he threw that ball 5-10," Puckett said.

Twins hitting coach Tony Oliva marvels at Puckett, who, in his first four seasons in the majors, had 165, 199, 223 and 207 hits. Oliva doesn't try to change a thing.

"Anyone who gets 200 hits a year, I don't care how he gets it," Oliva said. "Some people say maybe if he gets 75 walks a year... But if he takes 75 walks, he might strike out 50 more times, too."

"I prefer to see him swing up there instead of seeing a guy who takes two strikes right in there. I'd rather see him aggressive. And he hits the ball. When he hits the ball hard, it's going out of the ball park. I've seen him hit home runs on pitches over his head."

And on pitches that are close to the ground, or outside, or...

Puckett's main power alley is right-center field. Usually, if he connects with a fastball, it will scream toward that gap. Homers that he pulls to left are off breaking pitches or change-ups.

"If you can hit breaking balls good, you can hit .300," Oliva said. "Puckett can hit both the curve and the fastball. You can fool him one time. The second time, he is right there waiting for you."

"The other thing is that ball players mature at 29 or 30. He's 27. He

has one or two more years to learn more about himself. He can be better."

Since coming up to the big leagues four years ago, Puckett already has undergone a metamorphosis at the plate. After hitting no home runs in 1984 and just four in '85, he pounded 31 and 28 in the next two seasons. Some people think he changed magically overnight from a singles hitter into a power hitter, but there were many hours of back-breaking work involved.

In the spring of '86, Puckett and Oliva worked at it every day after everyone else had headed home.

"When you want to be good at something, it takes awhile," Puckett said. "But it worked out pretty good."

Puckett refined his power stroke by keeping his weight back, then launching his body into the pitch with a high leg kick.

Defensively, Puckett specializes in throwing out runners and going airborne to reach over fences and take away home runs from opposing hitters. He did that eight times last year, when he helped lead the Twins to the world championship.

"I used to surprise myself, going over the fence to take a home run away," Puckett said. "Now everybody expects it of me and I expect it of myself, now that I know how to do it."

Thus far, Puckett has lived up to everyone's expectations. So look closely the next time he comes up to the plate and you'll see an embodiment of the American Dream. He's gone from a kid who used to hit tin-foil baseballs on the streets of Chicago to a million-dollar player in the big leagues.

Batting titles? MVP awards? Those are just the icing for Puckett, whose hard work already has paid off with a cake in The Show.

Fun Comes From Being Well-Armed

TWIN CITIES—Ask Kirby Puckett what he enjoys doing most on a baseball field and he doesn't hesitate in answering.

"Throwing a guy out at

the plate," said the Minnesota Twins outfielder. "Now that's fun."

Puckett, whose hitting alone makes him a candidate for the American League's Most Valuable Player Award, exhibited an-

other dimension in the Twins' 4-1 victory over the Tigers in Detroit August 16. Besides driving in two runs with a bases-loaded single, he made a perfect throw from center field to nail Lou Whitaker at the plate.

"Puckett's throw was the play of the game," said Twins Manager Tom Kelly. "It gave us a chance to score some more runs."

The Twins were leading, 2-0, in the fourth inning when Whitaker bunted for a single, advanced to second on a grounder, then tried to come home on Alan Trammell's single to center. Puckett rifled a perfect throw to catcher Tim Lincecum, who held on to the ball despite being bowled over by Whitaker.

"With most outfielders, there wouldn't be a play," said Lincecum. "But with Puckett, there is a play. He has a great arm."

Puckett talked modestly about his big defensive play.

"In that situation, it was my job just to hit the cutoff man," he said. "If he likes it, he lets it go through. That's what happened, and it skipped right to Timmy's mitt."

It was just Kirby Puckett having some more fun.



Cutting 'em down at the plate. Now that's fun.

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BASEBALL

CAN'T BUY HAPPINESS

Cal Ripken and Kirby Puckett weren't swayed by number status; they settled for less to stay home

By PETER PASCARELLI

You don't hear much talk nowadays in baseball about traditional virtues such as loyalty and community. They're about as rare as a player asking for a pay cut.

More than 350 players changed teams last offseason. Players who spend their entire careers in one city can be counted on one hand. And though the lust for free-agent money is a big reason for all this mercenary movement, teams are just as guilty. Because of budgets and because of the need to make some offseason news, clubs are more than willing to shuffle bodies to and fro.

Then there's the tale of two guys named Kirby Puckett and Cal Ripken Jr., who had the chance to leave their towns and didn't, whose ties to their communities in Baltimore and Minneapolis-St. Paul were so strong that they signed for what undoubtedly was less than what they would have commanded had they played out their free-agent opportunities.

Let's hasten to add that there's no need to take up a collection for Puckett or Ripken. Both ended up signing contracts that will pay \$30 million over the next five seasons. Cynics surely will ask what difference another few million might make.

Tell that to the majority of players who worked the market to squeeze every possible dime out of free agency.

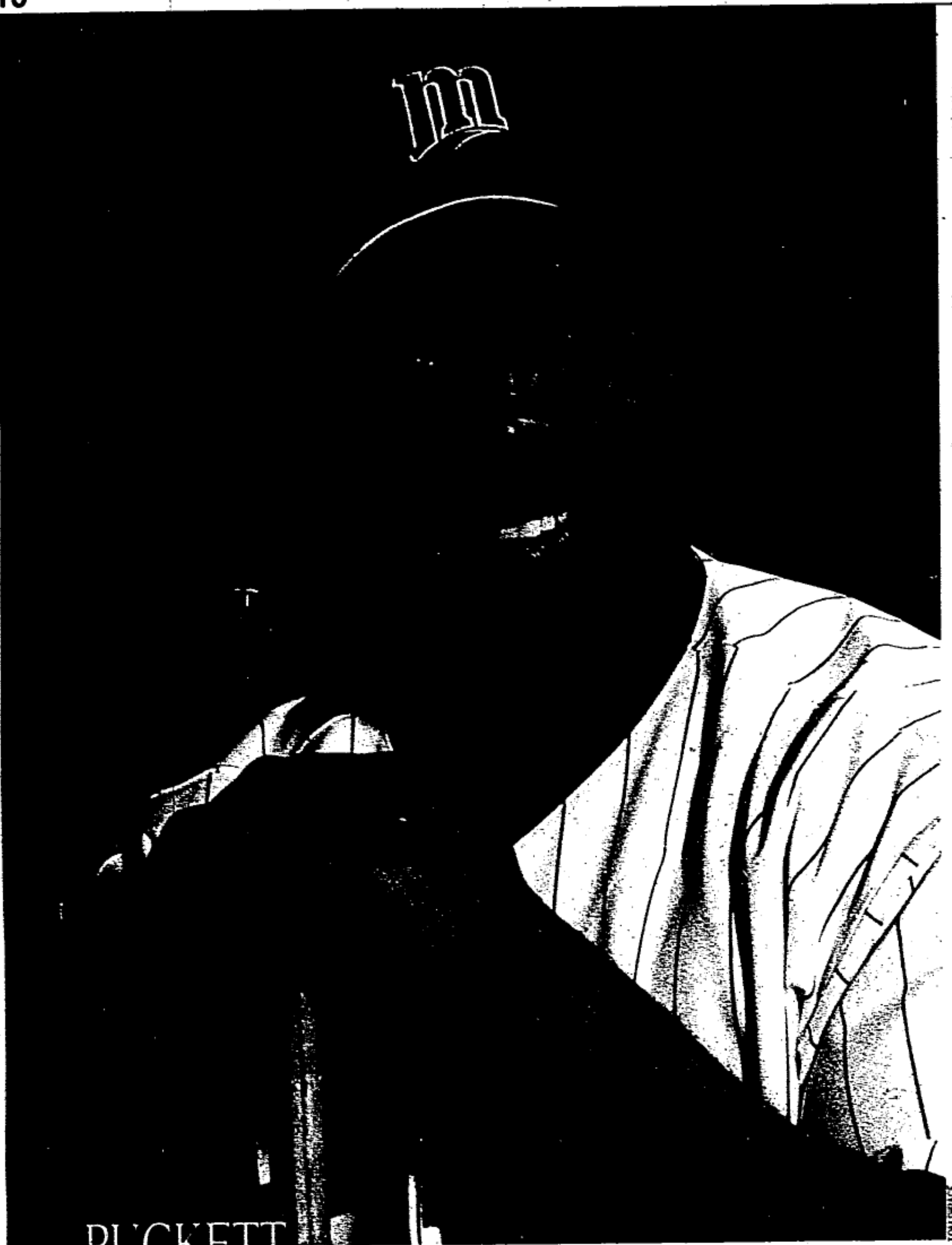
The fact is these were two special cases last season, two players of superstar magnitude who could have written their own ticket and elected instead to limit their options because they were happy where they played.

If that sounds unremarkable, then you haven't been following professional sports the last few years.

RIPKEN

"Baseball had always been something that separated us as a family because my dad was away so much when I was a kid. Then baseball became something that brought us all back together."

Due to a lack of photographic contrast, this page did not



PUCKETT

"I knew guys would probably get more than what I signed for with the Twins. But I bet five or six years from now, I'm going to be a lot happier."

Ripken never filed for free agency, signing his contract with Baltimore late last season after negotiations consumed nearly a year. Puckett re-signed with Minnesota last winter after filing for free agency and opening negotiations with at least two other teams — Boston and Philadelphia.

How much more would they have made if they had played the free-agent dollar game to the limit? That's difficult to gauge, especially in Ripken's case.

Coincidentally, Puckett and Ripken are represented by Baltimore attorney Ron Shapiro, one of the top half-dozen baseball agents. Shapiro has long been known within baseball as one of the more reasonable agents with which to deal. But, like anyone in his business, his first obligation is the bottom line — something he tended to over the last year to the tune of more than \$80 million worth of contracts.

"It's tougher to judge whether Cal would have gotten more on the open market than he ended up signing for," Shapiro says.

"If his season had not been as difficult for him and he had put up his usual numbers, I think he might have gotten more on the open market. Don't forget that he is a shortstop, a position that is much in demand. And he is a remarkably durable talent.

"Kirby's situation is a little easier to figure. Given the way the market went last winter, Kirby clearly would have gotten offers of at least \$35 million and quite probably even higher."

Shapiro, who has been doing baseball contracts for nearly 20 years, says the situations of Puckett and Ripken made for the toughest deals he has had to negotiate.

"Both had their own complications, but the two situations were quite similar in many ways," Shapiro says.

"First of all, for both men, this was easily the biggest business de-

cision they would likely make in their lives. But they were very emotional decisions. They both have very deep ties within the community.

"Kirby has a ticket program in the community in which he buys and distributes over 30,000 tickets. He also is active in all kinds of charities. Cal has helped create an adult literacy program in the city plus a ticket program and extensive charitable involvement. These are real commitments these guys have in their cities.

"Plus, they have built great relationships with the fans which are unique nowadays. These are two players who totally identified with the cities in which they perform.

"Any one of those aspects represents very powerful pulls on the player. Taken together, they represented from my point of view the greatest challenge I've ever had in this business."

Puckett's negotiations began during spring training last season, and early in the summer he was ready to accept an offer of \$27.5 million over five years. "I was all set to sign then, even though Ron warned me that it was below what the market might bring," Puckett says. "But I wanted it done and I wanted to stay in Minnesota and I was taking all that into consideration."

However, at the last minute, Twins Owner Carl Pohlad took the offer off the table and talks virtually ceased.

"Kirby didn't allow it to affect him on the field," Shapiro says. "It was clear to anyone that he wanted to remain in Minnesota. And I think most people expected that in the end, the Twins would not chance exposing him to other clubs."

However, the Twins let the clock run and Puckett took the plunge by filing for free agency. "I never stopped wanting to stay with the Twins, but there reached a point where I had to protect myself on the business side," Puckett says.

"And once I filed, I owed it to myself to see what was out there. If for some reason the Twins weren't going to be there for me, I had to look for the best situation that might be out there."

Shapiro was faced with some obstacles on the open market. "On the one hand, Kirby and I made the decision that we would not have any club make us a financial offer until we had decided to make a commitment to them," Shapiro says. "And Kirby also felt strongly about not making any teams feel used, which is why we wanted to visit the cities secretly. That didn't work because our visits got into the papers.

"No one would believe that Kirby actually would leave Minnesota. That's why we started visiting clubs that had expressed some interest. We had to see if the interest was real."

Puckett was pleasantly surprised with what he found. He visited Boston, and the Red Sox came away with the definite feeling they had a shot. "We definitely felt that if Kirby wasn't going to stay in Minnesota, we had an excellent chance to sign him," Red Sox General Manager Lou Gorman says.

And Puckett came away from his visit to Philadelphia feeling good about the Phillies. "I really liked the idea of the Phillies," Puckett says. "For one thing, a lot of their guys like Lenny Dykstra, John Kruk, Darren Daulton and Dave Hollins are my kind of players, all out from the first pitch."

Phillies General Manager Lee Thomas maintains the Phillies never made Puckett a firm offer. But Thomas and Owner Bill Giles made it clear through repeated calls to Puckett and Shapiro how interested they were.

Philadelphia and Boston were believed ready to make five-year, \$35-million offers when Puckett returned home to Minnesota for some soul searching with his wife, Tanya. "It was time to make a decision, as difficult as it might be," Puckett says.

Twins G.M. Andy MacPhail called Puckett and was shocked when Puckett told him that he was seriously weighing offers. That's when MacPhail called Pohlad and told him the chances of retaining Puckett were slipping away.

"Two days later, all of us, Kirby, Tanya, Andy MacPhail, my assistant Mike Maas, had dinner at Carl Pohlad's house," Shapiro says. "And for the first time, I think everyone realized the feelings Kirby had for the Twins. By that time, the papers were talking about him leaving and the pressure was beginning to really get tough. That's when the Twins made a \$30-million offer."

Shapiro later laid out the options to Puckett. "He would likely have been guaranteed anywhere from \$35 million to 37 million somewhere else," Shapiro says.

But by then, Puckett knew the decision he would make. "Hey, I knew some guys would likely get more than me, but we had a chance to get \$30 million and stay where I wanted to be," Puckett says. "All of a sudden, it became an easy decision."

Shapiro came away from the process with even more respect for Puckett. "When a player of his magnitude enters the free-agent market, there is a lot of pride on the line," Shapiro says. "There's a lot of 'if he gets 40 (million) and I get 30 then he's getting a higher score' kind of thing."

"But I believe that my job involves not just working with dollars, but also working with values. And in Kirby's case, I feel lucky he was doing the same thing. You always want to get the best possible situation for your client, but sometimes your client is just looking at the money."

Even though Puckett is back in Minnesota, the Phillies' Thomas came away impressed by how Puckett handled himself.

"We've been in free-agent things over the last few years when we've come away feeling used, feeling as if we were included in the talks only to jack up the price," Thomas says.

"However, our dealings with Kirby Puckett were very different. We felt flattered that he wanted to talk to us and I came away with the feeling that while he was genuinely torn about the possibility of leaving Minnesota, if it didn't work out with the Twins, we would have had a shot at signing him. He wanted to go to a place and a community where he felt he could make a difference, and I think we made a good impression.

"But there was never any pressure in the whole thing. There was never a time when he asked us what our price would be, never any hint that we were bidding against someone else. It was obvious to me his first choice was staying put. But it also was obvious that this was a guy who wasn't just shopping himself to the highest bidder."

Ripken's negotiating position was in a sense more difficult than Puckett's. He was raised an Oriole, growing up in the Baltimore area and born to a father who was part of the Orioles' organization for nearly 30 years. As Ripken said many times during the process, "I'm an Oriole, it's been part of me since I was born."

Such statements created something of a bargaining disadvantage, especially until Ripken reached the point where he could declare free agency. Though Ripken never wanted to leave Baltimore, he also wanted the Orioles to treat him fairly according to prevailing market conditions.

"I had to make my contract decision based on what was best for me and my immediate family," Ripken says. "There was no question that I wanted to stay in Baltimore, but I had to look at it as a business decision as well."

Although Ripken won't acknowledge it, those close to him say the time it took to complete his negotiations (Shapiro says the talks stretched over 333 days) took its toll on Ripken, who last season had the worst year of his career. Throughout the talks, Ripken steadfastly refused to comment on the negotiations and was stung when there were published reports on the talks that appeared to be leaks from the club's side.

"Cal's goal was to remain in Baltimore at a fair price," Shapiro says. "And he never made a public statement about going elsewhere. Those factors likely made the club feel it had a special advantage because until he reached the point where he had to decide to file for free agency, no one felt he would go somewhere else."

Baltimore's rather tortured dealings with Ripken finally ended in him re-signing last August. But in the months following Ripken's eventual signing, the Orioles fired his father, Cal Sr., his third-base coach and did not offer a contract to his brother, Billy.

Ripken says he refuses to believe the club dealt with him cynically by making sure he was under contract before canning his father and brother. "If that's exactly what happened, if all those things were connected, I'd really be disgusted," Ripken says.

"But there's no way for me to know that. And I refuse to believe that is what happened."

However, the way things turned out for the Family Ripken have somewhat soured Cal's storybook career with the Orioles. And while Ripken is the consummate professional on the field, he admits it is difficult to put the past totally behind him.

"You know, you dream of being a pro ballplayer and you make it," he says. "Your dad is a coach and you know the odds are against your ending up on the same team. Then your brother comes up and the odds are against him making the major leagues. And I felt we beat all those odds."

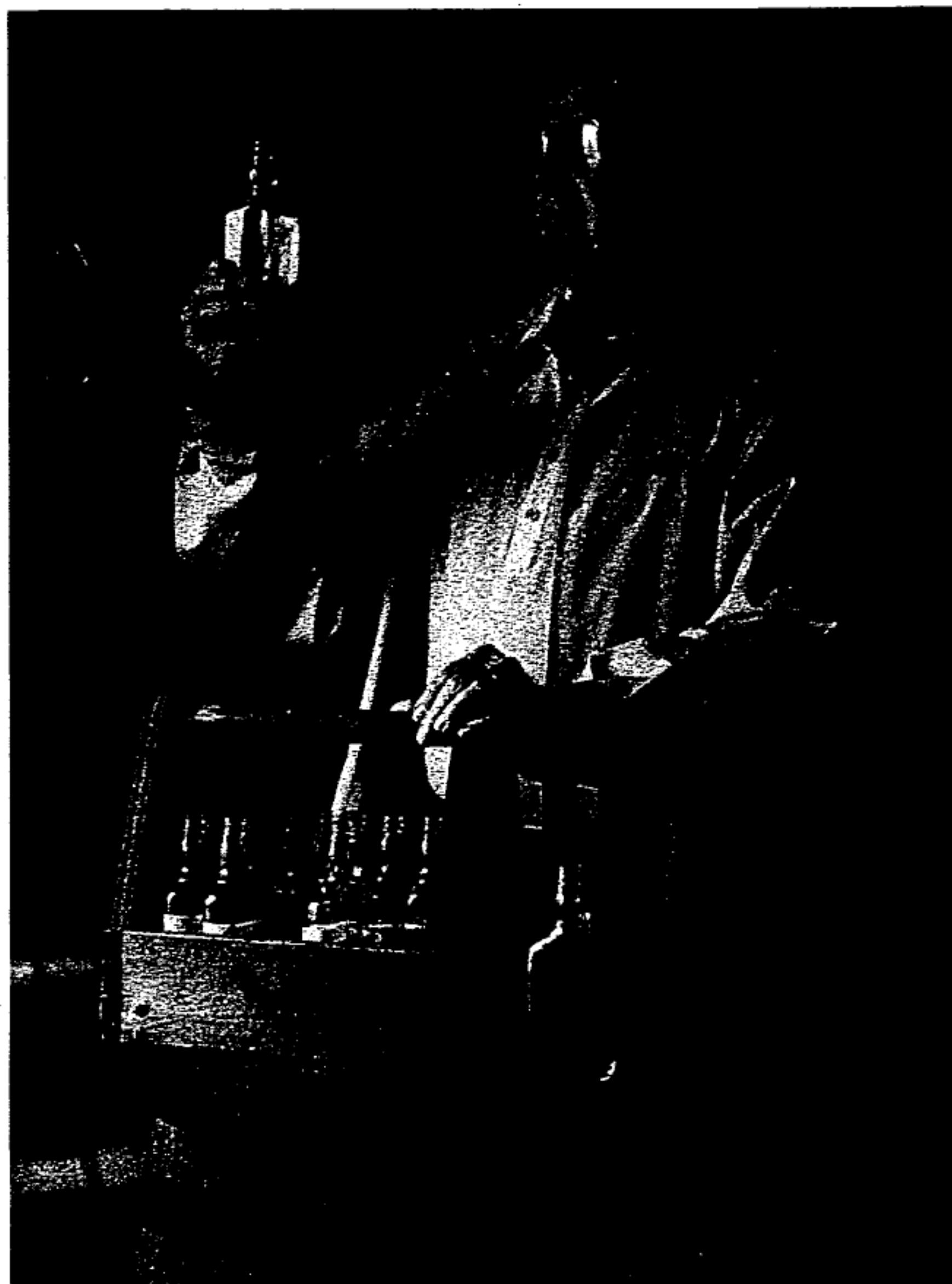
"It was all kind of nice because baseball had always been something that separated us as a family because my dad was away so much when I was a kid. Then baseball became something that brought us all back together. My dad was there if I needed him, and so was my brother. The whole experience certainly remains a positive, but there's also some hurt that goes with it."

However, Ripken remains an Oriole for life just as Puckett likely will end his career in Minnesota. In an age when tradition is often measured in annual increments, two of baseball's true stars chose the comforts of home over the glitzy free-agent stage.

That such loyalty and such feelings have become so rare perhaps underlines better than anything else what's wrong with modern baseball.

Peter Pascarelli is a contributing writer who covers baseball for THE SPORTING NEWS.

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"tired" arm after starting 10 of the first 11 games. Schofield responded with a three-run homer in a 5-4 win over Minnesota. "Nothing bothers me. I just go out and play," said Schofield, 1-for-7 before that start. "I like to play every day, but it's up to No. 3 (Manager Gene Mauch)." Schofield quickly hit two more homers, meaning that nine of the 15 in his career have come in April.

Burleson had a dull pain in his shoulder, but said he didn't consider the problem a setback in his recovery from a variety of injuries dating back to 1982. "It's fatigued from overuse, is all," the Rooster said. "No use doing something silly at this point. I want to be around in September."

Yes, that was Reggie Jackson on top in the American League batting race with a .469 average through April 22. Jackson had five homers through April 27. When Reggie hit No. 535, off the Twins' Burt Blyleven, he passed Jimmie Foxx for seventh place on the all-time list and was one short of Mickey Mantle. Kirk McCaskill fanned a career-high 12 in his two against Oakland April 22. Rupert Jones was batting only .121 (4-for-33) but ranked among the Angels' leading run producers with 11 runs scored and three RBIs. He had drawn 11 walks.

Rookie Wally Joyner couldn't explain his first-inning success against pitchers he'd never seen before. Joyner, leading the league with 19 hits after 14 games, was 6-for-11 with three walks in first at-bats. "Usually it's the other way around, because they know what they throw and I don't," he said. Joyner also proved durable. He was on crutches after jamming his right ankle on a fifth-inning play at first one day, but was back in the lineup the next day. George Hendrick got his 1,000th career RBI on a bases-loaded walk. Don Sutton allowed six homers in his first three starts. Going back to 1985, he was 0-for-6 bidding for career victory No. 296. Terry Forster, signed as a free agent on April 16, beat Minnesota in relief four days later for his first A.L. triumph since August 8, 1976, when he was with the White Sox.

TOM SINGER

WHITE SOX



John Cangelosi and Wayne Tolleson, the first two batters in the Chicago White Sox lineup, were on base 45 percent of the time the first two weeks of the season, but they were not being driven home very often by Harold Baines, Carlton Fisk and Ron Kittle. In losing five of six games to the Boston Red Sox, the White Sox had no help from the middle of the order. Baines, Fisk and Kittle were a combined 7-for-72. Fisk suffered the indignity of having beer dumped on him in Fenway Park as he chased a game-winning double into the left-field corner. Fisk, who played nine seasons for the Red Sox, said, "I'm disappointed. I never thought that would happen to me here. Now, if I was wearing a Yankee uniform, yes, I could understand that."

Tolleson had a 10-game hitting streak that included five straight two-hit efforts. He also was leading the White Sox in runs batted in.

Third baseman Tolleson and usually reliable shortstop Ozzie Guillen had combined for nine errors through April 21. When Greg Walker went on the disabled list, the first baseman automatically lost \$50,000 from a games-played clause in his contract. Walker last season tied Don Buford's club record of 163 games. He had been in 178 straight over two years when his right wrist was injured April 14.

MARINERS



Depending on which side you were looking from, the Seattle Mariners either ran into some tough pitching or the opposition ran into some poor hitting. After scoring eight runs off California's Don Sutton in the first inning April 15, the Mariners scored just nine runs in 62 innings during a six-game losing streak. In only six of those 62 innings did they get more than one hit and they never had more than two hits in an inning. The team batting average went from .290 to .231 in a week. The stretch reminded hitting coach Deron Johnson of a similar slump the National League champion Phillies went through in 1983. The Phils were held scoreless for 42 consecutive innings. The opponent scored in the first inning eight times in Seattle's first 13 games. The M's lost six of those games. Karl Best (sore elbow) came off the 15-day disabled list two weeks into the season, but fellow relievers Roy Thomas (elbow) and Edwin Nunez (shoulder) were still disabled. Manager Chuck Cotter said he had a dream that ended with Gorman Thomas playing the outfield, cutting a ball off in the gap and hitting the cutoff man perfectly. "Just when I was about to find out who we were playing, my daughter came into the room and woke me up," Cotter said. Thomas has not played any regular position since his rotator cuff surgery in 1984.

ATHLETICS



Manager Jackie Moore moved Jose Canseco into the No. 3 spot in the Oakland A's batting order April 20 and the rookie slugger responded by hitting a double, two singles and driving in a pair of runs against Seattle. Moore decided to keep Canseco ahead of Dave Kingman in the batting order, and the next night Canseco clubbed a pair of home runs to right field and drove in four runs as the A's beat the California Angels. "I don't know a manager in his right mind who would play around with that right now," said Moore, who had already used Canseco at the cleanup, fifth and seventh spots in the order. Carney Lansford, the A's regular third baseman, started his first game at first base since 1977, when he played for El Paso in the Texas League. Lansford was having trouble getting bats from Hillerich & Bradsby, which makes the Louisville Slugger, and was relating his woes to announcer Ray Fosse during a postgame show in Minnesota. A fan, Areck Madden of Newark, Calif., heard the program and recalled that Lansford had given him

a bat two springs ago. Madden sent the bat by Federal Express to Minneapolis. Lansford autographed it, expressed his appreciation to Madden and returned the bat along with an autographed ball. Lansford is switching to the Adirondack bat, made by Rawlings.

The A's three victories in Seattle gave them their first sweep of a road series since September 1984, when they swept a series in Texas.

Donnie Hill hit his first two homers this year in domed stadiums—in Minnesota and Seattle. Hill recollected that five of his seven homers in the majors have been in domes. In a two-game stretch, leadoff man Tony Phillips doubled once, singled six times, walked once and was hit by a pitch in 11 plate appearances. Joaquin Andujar earned his first American League victory as he beat the Angels, 6-2, on April 21. He left the game after six innings with a 2-1 lead and a three-hitter. Moore used eight different lineups in the first 12 games. Right fielder Mike Davis missed five games with a strained left hamstring. Lefthander Tim Lincecum, who had been projected as a starter in preseason plans, was sent to Tacoma (Pacific Coast). He had pitched in only two games. In his first appearance, he gave up a grand slam, a single and walked three.

RANGERS



The Texas Rangers are flexing new muscle. In their first 13 games, they boomed 20 home runs and they still hadn't had a favorable wind at Arlington Stadium. At their 249-homer pace, the Rangers seemed certain to erase the club record of 140 homers, set in 1979. First baseman Pete O'Brien and third baseman Steve Buechele had four long balls apiece through April 23. Reserve catcher Darrell Porter, whose only two hits were home runs, gave part of the credit for the Rangers' muscle to George Dubets, the club's strength coach in spring training. "He did a great job of getting people into the weight program," Porter said. "On a lot of clubs you'll see two or three guys doing the weights. We must have had 18 to 20, maybe more, in George's program." The Rangers lifted free weights for upper body strength and used a Nautilus program for overall conditioning. Buechele's power streak stretched back to September of 1985, when he hit five homers in 23 games. Coupled with the four homers in 42 games this season, he had nine in a 35-game span. Toby Harrah missed five games when his mother, Mrs. Glenna Harrah, died in Ohio. A 10-1 victory over Toronto marked the fourth time the Rangers had scored 10 runs or more this year. They did it five times in '85. Bobby Witt had been winless as a pro—he was 0-6 at Tulsa (Texas) after signing with the Rangers out of the University of Oklahoma last June—before he beat Toronto. According to the Rangers, the last pitcher to record his first pro victory in the majors was David Clyde, the onetime Texas phenom who beat Minnesota on June 27, 1973, at Arlington Stadium.

Puckett Has Homer Spree For Twins



Kirby Puckett

TWIN CITIES—Seattle's hard-throwing righthander, Mike Morgan, had allowed the Minnesota Twins one hit while facing a minimum of 18 batters over the first six innings April 22.

Kirby Puckett led off the seventh and, on a 2-and-1 pitch, the righthanded batter hit a laser shot into the seats in right-center field at the Kingdome. Puckett's home run started the Twins to a 7-1 victory.

The next day, Puckett opened the game with a homer off Seattle's Mike Moore. And when California visited the Metrodome the last weekend in April, Puckett connected off Don Sutton and Ron Romanick. In 19 games through April 27, Puckett had seven homers, the major league high. He hit a total of four in 289 games in 1984 and '85.

For much of last season, Puckett seemed incapable of hitting the ball to the left side of second base. During spring training, he still seemed to be restricted to a right-field stroke.

Then, the season started and Puckett began to pull the inside pitch to left and drive the outside pitch to right center.

"Before, Kirby believed he was a punch hitter," hitting coach Tony Oliva said. "Now, he's working on driving the ball. He can do it because he is strong. He realizes he can do it."

"If not this year, then next year Kirby will hit 15 to 20 home runs and bat .315 or .320. He will keep doing that every year."

The Twins were so concerned about Puckett's inability to pull the ball that they spent the exhibition schedule trying to find another leadoff hitter. Manager Ray

Miller wanted to move Puckett to the No. 2 spot in order to take advantage of that right-field stroke.

All of a sudden, with Puckett's increased power and versatility as a hitter, that no longer seemed a problem. If Puckett was going to be moved in the order, it might be to No. 3—a more favorable RBI position. Puckett was proving to be Twins' top clutch hitter, delivering a series of run-scoring, two-out hits.

"With two outs and guys on base, I try to be a little more selective about pitches," Puckett said. "Then, I try to put the ball in play so we've got a chance to get something out of it."

Puckett has been putting line drives into play. "Kirby's been hitting the ball so hard it's unbelievable," Miller said. "The best thing is he's been hitting it hard to all fields."

The Twins' front office was disappointed last winter when Puckett dropped out of supervised workouts that were being held at the University of Minnesota. Puckett joined teammates for one workout at the university, then decided to work out on his own at a local health club.

His plan seems to have worked. **PATRICK REUSSE**

Pettis Riding Elevator

ANAHEIM—Gary Pettis has his Gold Glove. But will he ever get the lead out of his bat?

That question was on the mind of Manager Gene Mauch, who had a seemingly ideal leadoff man, but couldn't afford to use him at the top of the California Angels' lineup.

Pettis, the Angels' swift and surehanded center fielder, opened the season as the No. 9 hitter. He has also been used at No. 8 and No. 7, and has made occasional visits to the No. 1 spot.

The elevator routine displeased Pettis. "I would love to hit in the leadoff spot, whether I'm going bad or not," he said. "When I'm not hitting first, it seems to me I'm missing part of the game."

Said Mauch, "I guarantee he doesn't want to lead off any more than I want him to lead off."

The problem is Pettis' bat. He tends to take too big a cut at the ball. Because of Pettis' defensive skills and his speed, his .257 average last year would have been acceptable—had he not struck out 125 times.

Two weeks into the season, he led the team with 10 strikeouts,

and his average was down to .236. Other facets of his game were affected. Pettis was a sub-500 runner (he was caught four times in seven steal attempts) for probably the first time in his career. Mauch even criticized Pettis' concentration in the field.

"I think about offense more than anything else," Pettis admitted. "That could be part of the problem. I tend to rerun every at-bat over and over in my mind. Mauch doesn't want me to hit the ball to the outfielders, but in front of them."

The manager has lectured Pettis. In the winter of '84, so did former National League batting champion Harry Walker, the guru of contact hitting. Now, it's Moose Stubing's turn.

The California batting coach's goal is obvious. "Ideally, we'd like to have Pettis bat first," Stubing said. "He leads off and we have maybe 110 to 115 runs and 70 stolen bases."

Then, Stubing spent another night watching Pettis swing from the ears and miss—and he sighed. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us."

TOM SINGER

COVER STORY

at a Time

getting the respect they deserve. He attributes the lack of endorsement offers to the Twins as reflective of the upper Midwest market. And he doesn't think that's all bad, either.

"Look at the New York Giants," Kelly said, referring to the winners of the Super Bowl game in January 1987. "What did they have, 11 books? But if somebody throws \$30,000 in your face and asks if you can write a book, what are you going to say? No? If you can make \$30,000, it's hard to say no. So you take the time to do it, maybe when you should be working out and getting ready for the season."

"Being from the Midwest helps. If we were in Los Angeles or Anaheim or the East Coast it could be worse."

Kelly gives a lot of responsibility to his coaches. "I'm not smart enough to do it all myself," he said. He gives Dick Such almost complete free reign with the pitching staff. He relies on Rick Stelmazek to coordinate spring camp. Rick Renick and Wayne Terwilliger handle traffic on the basepaths. And former Twins slugger Tony Oliva, who has had so much surgery he doesn't have knees anymore, is the hitting coach.

During spring training, former major league manager Ralph Houk is a member of the staff, offering opinions and evaluations here and there and spraying tobacco juice all over everything. "I'm under a lot of pressure," Houk cackles.

Kelly and the coaches also are very close. Such, for example, had been under fire before Kelly came aboard in '87. But the new manager insisted that Such remain.

"When you see a guy like Dick Such, who was on the hot seat a year earlier, you realize what it means to win," Kelly said. That was his response when he was asked what was the best part of winning the World Series.

Kelly went on to say, "When you see a guy like Twig (Terwilliger), who won't leave the clubhouse, who is still in front of his locker crying at 2 a.m., still in uniform... That's what I enjoy about winning."

It's the same with the players, a talented bunch of cut-ups who worry about one another more than about themselves as individuals. Ask Kirby Puckett about winning and he'll say he was happy for the guys like Joe Niekro, who have been around awhile.

"I've only played four years, man," Puckett said, almost as if he

doesn't yet deserve a championship.

"I have never seen a bunch of guys so loose," Puckett added. "There is a great camaraderie here. We love being around each other. Guys on other teams tell me everybody goes their separate ways. Everybody here goes with everyone else. You have nine and 10 guys going someplace together."

As for just how loose this group is, consider this: In the seventh game of the World Series, as Minnesota trailed, 2-1, in the fifth inning at the Metrodome, the Twins were busy pulling-off an elaborate prank on veteran public address announcer Bob Casey.

"Can you imagine?" Casey said, still getting indignant at the thought of it. "The seventh game of the World Series. What if we had lost?"

Casey is stationed in a tunnel behind home plate. Should he need to use the restroom facilities, he must scoot over to the Twins' dugout. Between halves of the fifth inning last October 25, Casey ran over there, figuring he had two minutes and 30 seconds of ABC commercial time before having to be back at his post to announce the next batter.

But the Twins locked him in the john until 10 seconds before air time! On being released, Casey angrily raced back to his post, where his phone was ringing furiously. He grabbed it and barked a hello, only to get an earful of shaving cream. Livid, he grabbed a nearby towel to wipe off his ear, only to get a headful of shaving cream.

Even home plate umpire Dave Phillips was laughing so hard he nearly fell down. Meanwhile, the next hitter was waiting to be announced.

"I was so damn mad," Casey says even today.

No matter. Casey made an appearance at camp in Orlando, Fla., this spring and was greeted by Renick, whose hand was outstretched as if he were welcoming a brother. Casey responded to the greeting—only to get a handful of shaving cream.

Of course, there was the time that Gladden, whom Hrbek calls Wrench "because he looks like he just crawled out from under your car," had Tom Brunansky paged in an exclusive restaurant so he could give him an earful of shaving cream on the house phone.

Loose bunch? Hrbek wants to try professional wrestling when he is

done playing ball but can't decide if he wants to be a good guy or a bad guy. Gladden has been quoted as saying his hero was Evel Knievel.

Byleven enjoys personally testing a teammate's soup with his fingers, while Viola might toss his chewing gum into the mix for texture.

The thing to remember about these guys, though, is that they can play. First of all, they can catch the ball. When somebody hits it, chances are one of the Twins will catch it unless it goes over the fence.

Minnesota made fewer errors than any team in the league last season. The Twins can cover a lot of ground, from the acrobatic fielding of Hrbek at first, to Gary Gaetti's diving stops at third, to Puckett's leaping over the center field fence to pull down what would have been a home run.

Secondly, they can hit the ball. They always could. From the days of Harmon Killebrew and Oliva and Zoilo Versalles, the Twins always had enough offense.

Whether the Twins have enough pitching is the question mark in 1988. They think they do. Others are skeptical.

"How can anyone count this team out?" Houk asked. "This team has a lot of ingredients. Nobody had a career year last season. Everybody just played to about what they are capable of doing. They won 85 games and the fact that they've been there will help. I know they are capable of winning 10 more."

"It's just that people don't know these players yet. In Minnesota, there aren't as many newspapers or as much TV and radio coverage as there are in other places. But you talk to baseball people and they know these players. It's just people outside of baseball that count out this team."

And Kelly doesn't buy the theory that opposing teams gear up to play the pennant winner.

"That's bull," he said in his most pleasant tone. "We played the Boston Red Sox, the American League champs, last year and there was no difference between playing them or the New York Yankees or the California Angels. No team gets up for one team any more than another."

"We're just going to do the best we can."

The Twins will be taking it one game at a time. And they'll be careful answering the phone, too.



Kirby Puckett is happy just being "Stub."

Meet Stub, Cult Figure

TWIN CITIES—Kirby Puckett may have been the most popular player in Florida this spring. The mere mention of his name at Tinker Field in Orlando sent the fans into a convulsive state. Even the name itself has potential cult-figure status written all over it.

"I hear it," the Minnesota Twins' center fielder said of the cheers. "I wish I knew why, though. I really wish I knew why. Maybe it's because of my body."

A 5-8, 220-pound bundle of energy, Puckett cuts a less-than-dashing figure. With that barrel chest and 18½-inch neck, it's easy to see why some teammates call him Stub. He looks more like the guy who paid his five bucks to get into the park.

"Part of it could be the type of body he has," General Manager Andy MacPhail said. "It is so atypical. But he's not heavy. He is in the top half of the team in (lowest) percentage of body fat."

"I think basically that he is just the type of personality that makes you smile. He has an effervescent, ingratiating personality. Kirby is a very warm, very genuine person. If he had been playing in New York or Los Angeles, they would be building statues to him."

Also, it helps a guy's popularity to hit like the devil and make leaping catches in the outfield. Puckett also hit between .350 and .400 for most of spring training.

"I'm ready to go," he kept saying. "I came to camp in good shape. Better than I usually do."

Puckett says there are several reasons for that. For one thing, he signed a \$1.09 million contract for '88. He wants everyone to know there will be no complacency.

"It's so easy to let it get out of hand, especially living in Minnesota where there's not that much to do," Puckett said of staying in

shape—his kind of shape, anyway. "Then all you hear about is, 'Can you repeat? Can you repeat?' It makes you want to do better. You can't just sit back and not do anything, because then nothing will happen. I want to be ready."

The Twins would accept his 1987 numbers: a .332 average, 207 hits, 28 home runs and 99 RBIs. He is the only player in the majors to have 200-plus hits and 25-plus homers in each of the last two seasons.

Puckett had the highest road batting average in the majors at .362 and his .339 batting average against lefthanders was the highest of any player since 1975.

"I'll take those again," he said of the '87 numbers. "Why not? Of course, you can always get a little better. There's always room for improvement."

Puckett is living proof of that. During the '84 and '85 seasons, he hit a grand total of four home runs. Over the '86 and '87 seasons he hit 59.





Still, he virtually never refuses an autograph request and is as popular with teammates as he is with the fans. If he has an enemy in the world, it would be an opposing pitcher.

"I don't mean to put words in anyone else's mouth, but it's hard to imagine Kirby Puckett happier playing anywhere else," MacPhail said. "I think he likes it here. He likes his teammates and everything else is secondary."

Puckett takes issue with those critics who rule out the Twins for '88.

"I don't care about them, man," Puckett said. "Those are the same experts who picked us to do nothing last year. They don't know anything. Let's just see what happens."

TOM POWERS

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