



Superfan Declares Free Agency

by Guy Bartleby

Veteran fan Mike Finley declared free agency today, casting doubt that he would be available to cheer for the Minnesota Twins next opening day.

"I arrived at this decision after a lot of careful thought, and prayer," Finley said. "Nothing could please me more than rooting for the Twins through to the end of my career as a fan. The players have been great, and management has always made me feel at home here. The thought of packing up and leaving them tears me apart.

"But I have to keep in mind that baseball isn't just a game any more. Sure, I could settle for less and stay here, out of sentiment. Being a lifelong Twins fan was something me and my family always aimed for. But where's the reward? Without some kind of quid pro quo, could I continue to be as good a fan? My competitive nature tells me I should test the market, just to

find out my true worth."

Players and management will always remember "Finley's Fly Cast," during the first game of the 1986 League Championship Series. As Doyle Alexander went into his windup in the fourth inning, Finley, sitting behind the Twins' dugout, screamed, "Hey, Doyle, your zipper's open!" The befuddled pitcher threw one up Gary Gaetti's power alley, and the rest is history.

Kent Hrbek praised Finley's intensity in the stands. "Mike is a fan with intangibles that don't show up in the box scores -- character, spirit, a never-say-die attitude. He pulled the fat out of the fire for us more games than I care to mention."

"I never actually met him, being new to the team, and a rookie," said journeyman Twins infielder Donnie Hill. "But it was always a dream to play for him."

Andy MacPhail, general manager for the Minnesota Twins, tried to put a positive spin on the Finley announcement.

"Mike has been a great fan for many years. He helped the Twins to two world championships. "But we understand his attitude. We intend to sign him for 1993, but he has to understand that that is just one of our priorities. Now that he has taken this step, it may be difficult to return to the way things were."

Insiders speculate that Finley is trying to stick it to the Twins for having rewarded other fans more than him during season. "I saw where they gave Al Lonborg hats and pennants for his family, and one of those headphone radios to listen during games. I have no problem with Lonborg, but how many games did he actually go to this year -- three?"

"The thing about me was, when the bell rang, I was there. Even during that layoff when I had back spasms from getting blown out the revolving door into a mounted patrolman's horse.

"The way I see it, if they have the kind of money to put that kind of package together for a three-game man, they can afford reduced season ticket prices for me, plus a set of those tall plastic cups with the Twins logo on one side and the Marquette Bank logo on the other. We entertain a lot."

Finley is reportedly angling for a multiyear contract with a guaranteed box seat behind home plate, but not behind the screen, "off to the side, so everything isn't cut up into squares." His agent, Lance Tawdry, stipulated that Finley is anxious to be an everyday fan, and not be forced into a platoon system with a fan who performs better in fair weather.

"Finley's a mudder, everyone knows that," Tawdry said. "But that only makes him more curious what it would be like to cheer for another team, where rain has a greater chance of actually hitting the playing field. He feels this would lengthen his career, and it's hard to disagree with that."

Manager Tom Kelly was asked how he felt about Finley's possible departure, and responded by pelting this reporter with wrapped sandwiches. "Everyone thinks they understand this game better than me," he exclaimed. "Here, you want another sandwich?"

Team officials would not say it, but there is the feeling that Finley may have missed a step in the last season. During a game with Chicago September 29th, he seemed more intent on popping corn than on Bill Krueger's pitching duel with Kirk McGaskill. Another time, at a Dome game August 11th against the Rangers, Finley stood to sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," in the sixth inning. "He's not a malingerer," said one Twins official who asked not to be named. "But he'd rather not cheer in pain. The other fans pick up on that."

Apprised of these shortcomings, Finley brushed them away. "I'm not Superman," he said. "But I know that when I stay inside my own capabilities, and not to try to root the ninth

inning of the seventh game of the World Series, every at-bat, good things happen.

"I've got years of cheering left in me, and frankly, it hurt when management refused to discuss an extension during the season. I think I might have been distracted by that."

Through Tawdry, Finley has contacted six teams he would be interested in cheering for, all of them on the coasts. At this point, however, the only teams to have contacted him are the Cleveland Indians and Seattle Mariners.

"It would kill me to leave this area. I feel I have established excellent relationships with the players, and I would really miss them. Rachel and I had really hoped to make the Twin Cities our home, even bring our kids here to live with us.

"But what can I say? Baseball is a business."