

sports

Sweet perfection

Ninth-inning heroics preserve baseball history



Mark Buehrle, above, is embraced by teammates including catcher Ramon Castro after throwing a perfect game Thursday against the Tampa Bay Rays. Centre fielder DeWayne Wise makes a leaping catch, right, during the ninth inning to preserve the perfect game. AP photos

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — The 105th pitch of Mark Buehrle's day broke in toward Gabe Kapler, who turned on it and connected. Buehrle looked up and knew - his perfect game was in jeopardy.

Just in as a defensive replacement, Chicago White Sox centre fielder DeWayne Wise sprinted toward the fence in left-centre, a dozen strides. What happened next would be either a moment of baseball magic or the ninth-inning end of Buehrle's bid for perfection against the Tampa Bay Rays.

Wise jumped and extended his right arm above the top of the wall. The ball landed in his glove's webbing but then popped out for a split second as he was caroming off the wall and stumbling on the warning track.

Wise grabbed it with his bare left hand, fell to the ground and rolled. He bounced up, proudly displaying the ball for the crowd.

Magic. A home run turned into an out. His biggest threat behind him, Buehrle closed out the 18th perfect game in major league history, a 5-0 victory Thursday.

"I was hoping it was staying in there, give him enough room to catch it. I know the guys were doing everything they could to save the no-hitter, the perfect game, whatever it might be," said Buehrle, who has now thrown two no-hitters in his career.

Wise knew the stakes.

"I was with the Braves in '04 and I was there when Randy Johnson of the Dia-



mondbacks pitched a perfect game. So I've been on both sides of it," he said. "It was probably the best catch I've ever made because of the circumstances.

"It was kind of crazy, man, because when I jumped, the ball hit my glove at the same time I was hitting the wall. So I didn't realize I had caught it until I fell down and the ball was coming out of my glove, so I reached out and grabbed it."

The pitcher received a congratulatory telephone call from President Barack Obama — a White Sox fan — following the 16th perfect game since the modern era began in 1900 and the first since Johnson's on May 18, 2004.

Final Jays start for Halladay could be today

The Canadian Press

TORONTO — Roy Halladay will make what could very well be his final start for the Toronto Blue Jays today and J.P. Ricciardi threw out this little nugget for fans to di-

gest: The team is only looking to trade the ace right-hander because he intends to test free agency.

"I think I made this clear real early that Doc wanted to test the free agent market. That's the whole reason we're going down this avenue," Ricciardi said after his team's 5-4 loss to the Cleveland Indians. "This has been a joint venture. This hasn't been like we're out there talking and Doc's not included in the process. He's obviously expressed an interest that

when free agency comes up next time, he's going to at least be attracted to trying to see what it is."

Halladay's loyalty and dedication to the organization have never been in doubt, two things that have made him beloved to the long-suffering faithful.

Ricciardi, who also said Halladay had provided him a list of teams he would approve a trade to, seemed to imply that the 2003 Cy Young Award winner had forced his hand.

Rain wreaks havoc at Canadian Open

The Canadian Press

OAKVILLE, Ont. — The first day at the RBC Canadian Open was so long that Kevin Na was willing to jeopardize a record-setting run just to get it over with.

Na raced through his final stretch of holes in fading light and still managed to birdie the final five coming in. He finished with a 9-under 63 and held a two-stroke lead over Scott Verplank, Retief Goosen and Joe Durant when play was halted by darkness on Thursday.

After sitting through a rain delay that lasted more than seven hours, the only thing Na wanted to do was complete his first round before dark to avoid having to return early Friday morning.

The fact he played so well at the end was simply a bonus.

"I would have taken par (on) the last hole if we weren't able to finish," said Na. "I was just trying to get to the tee real quick and hit. ...

"You never know when they're going to call it."

He signed for a 28 on his second nine - the front nine at Glen Abbey - to match Vijay Singh for the lowest nine-hole score in Canadian Open history. Singh managed that feat during the second round in 2004 and went on to win the tournament.

The turning point in Na's round came just after play resumed from the rain delay.

After pulling his tee shot into the trees on No. 11, he wanted to try hitting a risky approach to a green protected by water. That's when his caddie stepped in and the two briefly argued before Na elected to play safe.

"He rarely says you can't do something," said Na. "He made me pitch out, and I ended up making a 15-footer for par that kind of kept the round going. And

after that I started to back down and started catching fire."

Na will have to wait awhile to see if the lead holds up - 98 players were unable to complete the first round, and 39 of them didn't even start.

Mike Weir of Bright's Grove, Ont., posted the lowest score among Canadian finishers with a 1-under 71. He was 4-under in the middle of his round, but started hitting some sloppy shots down the stretch and made three bogeys coming in.

"I had a tough time finding my rhythm today for some reason," said Weir. "Maybe all the waiting around and getting warmed up and then getting pushed back another hour (caused trouble)."

The guys at the top of the leaderboard took different approaches to handling the delay.

Na watched TV shows on his laptop and napped for a little while in his car. Goosen found a comfortable chair in the clubhouse and relaxed. Verplank, the 2001 Canadian Open champion, went out to the putting green and corrected some issues with his stroke.

"I felt a little shaky with the putter on the first three holes where I had pretty decent looks at birdie," said Verplank. "And I got two or three hours of putting on the putting green (during the delay) and kind of got it worked out."

"When I came back, I started making them."

The rain delay had barely even been lifted before The Goose took flight.

Goosen eagled his first hole after getting back on the course and ended up posting a bogey-free 65. Playing one group ahead, Verplank made six birdies on his second nine to get in with the same score.

"We got lucky this afternoon," said Goosen. "You know, when the storm moved through the conditions were perfect - perfect playing conditions."

SPORTS programs on TV tonight 7/24/09

	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30
TSN	CFL Football	CFL Football Calgary Stampeders at BC Lions From BC Place Stadium in Vancouver (Subject to Backout) (L)						Sports-Centre (L)
TSN2	CFL on TSN Pregame	CFL Football Toronto Argonauts at Winnipeg Blue Bombers From Canad Inns Stadium in Winnipeg (Same-day Tape)						CFL Football
Sportsnet	Sportsnet Connected	MLB Baseball Cleveland Indians at Seattle Mariners (Jared in Progress) From Safeco Field in Seattle (Subject to Black-out) (L)						Sportsnet Connected (L)
The Score	Score Tonight	The FSN Final Score	The FSN Final Score	WWE SmackDown!				
SPEED	NASCAR Race	Trackside AL...	Inside the Headsets	Formula1 Debrief (N)	Inside Grand Prix (N)	The Grid (N)		
OUTDOOR	Cycling Tour de France - Stage 19	Cycling Tour de France - Stage 19 From Bourgoin-Jallieu to Aubenas						
NHL	2008 NHL Playoffs Rangers at Devils, Game 5	Top 10	Voices	2009 NHL Playoffs Devils at Hurricanes, Game 3				
GOLF	PGA Tour Golf PBC Canadian Open - Second Round	Golf U.S. Junior Boy's Amateur - Day 4 From Bedminster, N.J. (Same-day Tape)		Golf Central (L)				

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Lance fighting to keep spot on podium

The Associated Press

ANNECY, France — Lance Armstrong finds himself in unfamiliar territory at this Tour de France - fighting just to remain among the top three riders. Accustomed to dominating his way to victory, the seven-time Tour winner had to settle for a 16th-place finish in Thursday's time trial and a tenuous grip on third place.

The 37-year-old Texan battled fatigue in the 18th stage, a 40.5-kilometre race against the clock around bucolic Lake Annecy that Alberto Contador won in 48 minutes 31 seconds to close in on the overall victory. Armstrong was 1:30 behind, but he entered the day in fourth and easily overcame a 30-second deficit to Frank Schleck. The Saxo Bank rider finished 2:34 behind Contador to slip from third to sixth overall, but is only 34 seconds behind Armstrong. He will have to hold off Schleck, a top climber who is sure to challenge the American on Saturday during the uphill finish of the Tour's next to last stage.

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