

The Never Ending Shuttle from Rochester

Written by Brandon Warne

Wednesday, 29 June 2011 13:44



The following is a guest article from Brandon Warne, a contributor for FanGraphs. Please welcome Brandon to the Biz of Baseball. -- Maury

According to webflyer.com, it's 780 miles one-way from Rochester, NY to Minneapolis, MN. For a team that is 33-45, and has already rostered 39 players to-date on the season, that's an awful lot of miles to rack up. Let's break that down a little bit, and try to figure out how many miles the club has racked up over the course of the season, and what toll it has taken on Triple-A manager Tom Nieto and his squad.

Luke Hughes – IF – Call-ups: 2 - Send Downs: 1 - Miles Traveled: 2340.

The Aussie infielder was among the Twins' first calls this season, as he was called up just prior to the club's seventh game of the season. Hughes made his major league debut in 2010, stroking a home run in his first major league at-bat against Max Scherzer of the Detroit Tigers. Luke has filled in at first, second, and third base for the Twins this season, providing some much needed versatility for a team that's suffered injuries at all three of those positions.

In regards to the situation in Rochester, Hughes said: "I heard that they had nine position players the other day. So, I know it's going to be tough for those boys down there. I've been down in Triple-A when we've been playing short, and when everyone's out there busting hard, but it's fun you know. Everyone's coming up and contributing up here and everyone's done a good job. It's been great to see these guys, and myself included, stepping up and helping the Twins out."

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Brian Dinkelman – UTIL – Call-ups: 1 - Send Downs: 1 - Miles Traveled: 1560.

Dinkelman made his major league debut June 4 by collecting a hit in five trips against the Kansas City Royals. Of the players on this list, only Brian, Steve Holm, Chuck James, and Rene Rivera weren't members of the 40-man roster at the beginning of the season. In a sense, that sort of speaks to the unlikelihood that Brian was going to get a shot this season. Still, Dinkelman didn't embarrass himself while posting a .286/.412/.286 line over a very short 17 plate appearances before being outrighted back off the 40-man, and was appreciative of the shot to play in the major leagues. "It was exciting because you work for all those years to try get that chance and to finally get that phone call, it was exciting. I couldn't wait to get here," Dinkelman noted.

As for the situation in Rochester, Dinkelman agreed that it has been tough sledding in the Flower City. "It's tough with guys moving around so much. I know we've probably lost 10 or 11 guys from Rochester to come up here, and back and forth. It makes it tough for Rochester, you know, because I think the other day they only had nine players for the whole game, position player wise. It makes it tough on the guys, because guys are kinda out of position and not sure what's going to go on. It definitely makes it tough. I know the guys are battling to do the best they can."

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Ben Revere – OF – Call-ups: 2 - Send Downs: 1 - Miles Traveled: 2340.

Nothing about Ben Revere is very conventional. From the chicken-wing flap he does at the plate, to his first-round selection by the Twins, to that huge smile that he flashes just about every second on the baseball diamond, Revere is no doubt cut from a different mold. The Twins wouldn't have it any other way, as Revere has dazzled defensively while holding his own for the most part with the stick. His level-headed approach has been a godsend to a team that's, if nothing else, needed someone to simply catch the ball in the outfield.

Revere's been able to do that, and has managed to keep a pretty even-keel when giving his

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thoughts on the shuttle in and out of the Monroe County Airport. “You know, it’s been really crazy out there. The manager down there is losing his mind a little bit. No, he’s real happy to see his guys go up to the majors and hates to see them come back down, but it’s part of the game. We have a bunch of guys we signed here the past couple days, or who got released, or who have gotten hurt. We’ve also brought a lot of guys up from Double-A and High-A, so it’s been really crazy busy down there. I’ve been hearing they’ve been doing decent; the pitching staff’s been doing good and the hitting has still been pretty good because we have a good coaching staff down there. Right now, it doesn’t seem too bad but after a while you see all the news and stuff, and it’s been crazy.”

Trevor Plouffe – IF – Call-ups: 1- Send Downs: 1 - Miles Traveled: 1560.

One of the more contentious tenures in Minnesota this year was that of Mr. Plouffe. Trevor, who terrorized Triple-A pitching at an OPS exceeding 900, developed a slight case of the yips and was only hitting .200/.310/.383 at the time of his demotion. So why all the hubbub? Well, for one, there’s still plenty of outcry over the jettisoning of J.J. Hardy, as his replacements have combined to “hit” .234/.300/.345 while he checks in at a cool .304/.369/.538. Plouffe’s shown a fair amount of pop, and only got 71 plate appearances to essentially sink or swim at the major league level, while Alexi Casilla was allowed to flounder through 1200 or so.

With Plouffe now playing a few more positions like right field and second base to improve his versatility, and to help out a Rochester team in dire need of guys to simply stand in spots, it seems obvious that Trevor is a company guy that is willing to do what it takes to help the club out. Here’s to hoping his shot up in the show again isn’t far away.

Rene Rivera – C – Call-ups: 1 - Send Downs: 0 - Miles Traveled: 780.

Rivera is a man of few words. After waiting for a half-decade to receive another promotion to the big leagues, Rene has developed a great rapport with a rejuvenated Francisco Liriano, which has perhaps extended Rivera’s big league shelf-life just a bit longer. Obviously their shared Spanish heritage helps, but Rivera is developing a reputation as a catcher whose care for his pitchers goes beyond just between the lines.

When asked about the Rochester situation, Rivera remained true to form while noting: “...I

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mean it's awesome. You gotta feel great when your teammates get called up. This year, a lot of guys are getting called up here and it's good for them and it's good for the team. It means a lot." A team-first guy who shies from the limelight, Rivera had to be prodded a bit to talk about himself in a positive light, as he said," It was awesome. I'd been waiting for five years when I got the call up, and I finally did it. I try to do my best, and play 100 percent, and see what happens."

Rene Tosoni – OF – Call-ups: 3 - Send Downs: 2 - Miles Traveled: 3900.

Tosoni marks the most miles traveled by any Twin this season, with perhaps the exception of the injured Joe Mauer. While that hardly seems possible at first glance, multiple injuries to Delmon Young as well as to others which have necessitated the maximization of Michael Cuddyer's versatility make the proposition seem a bit less absurd. Considering the amount of shuffling done, Tosoni's cobbled together a decent year with the Red Wings, hitting .265/.297/.440 while only really missing his trademark plate discipline (career minor league isolated OBP of .089). It's also important to consider that this is Tosoni's first tour of duty in Triple-A, and mixing that tour with a first tour in the big leagues isn't always conducive to success, at least not right away.

When asked about the situation in Rochester, Tosoni, who happens to lead the Twins in awesome back tattoos, said: "You know, it's really interesting seeing guys come up and go down. It's kinda tough as a team; you can't continue going without a solid lineup. Sometimes we have nine guys on the bench, sometimes we have 13. We've got injuries on both teams, and it's very interesting to see and to be a part of it is fun. You always love to come up here, right? But, you always get to go back down and see how it's working as a team. It's kinda tough."

Like Dinkelman, Tosoni also got his first call to the big leagues this season, though it was perhaps a bit less surprising as Tosoni was on the 40-man roster at the time. "It was awesome. I called my wife at home to tell her. When Tom Nieto called me and told me I was going up, I didn't really believe him because we have a good relationship, so I thought maybe he was joking around or something. When he told me, it was probably the best memory of my life so far, so it was awesome coming up here and being with the team and being able to play."

Phil Dumatrait – RP – Call-ups: 1 - Send Downs: 0 - Miles Traveled 780.

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When the Twins signed Dumatrait to a minor-league contract in the offseason, it received almost no fanfare. To be perfectly honest, it was probably for good reason. Dumatrait, a former top pick of the Red Sox back in 2000, had put together career marks of a 7.06 ERA, 1.82 WHIP, and a paltry 1.1 K/BB rate. It was what it was: a procedural move that would fill out the Red Wings roster and provide organizational depth. Given the instability of the Twins bullpen, it turned into a bit more. To Phil's credit, he managed to compile a 1.15 ERA in Rochester over the span of 15.2 innings pitched, though his 12-11 K/BB ratio and 1.34 WHIP might suggest that the ERA was superficially high. Still, Dumatrait made the most of his opportunity in Triple-A, and joined the seemingly endless conga line to Minneapolis on May 15.

Phil noted the following on the situation in Rochester: "You know, things happened up here to where people got chances. I don't think it really changed anything down there; it was just that certain guys were in certain situations and they were needed. It's great for them, and like Chuck (James) said, you just shake a lot of hands and continue to throw the ball well, and the time came." Additionally, when asked about how the call from the Twins differed from any other call to the majors he had received, Dumatrait added: "You know, it was just as exciting. I was out of the country last year. I came back to the states, and obviously wanted to pitch in the big leagues. When you get that call, you just try to make the most of the opportunity."

Chuck James – RP – Call-ups: 1 - Send Downs: 1 - Miles Traveled: 1560.

Perhaps the Rochester Red Wing that captivated the most Twins fans was James, who was obviously the focal point of the #FreeChuckJames movement on Twitter. It wasn't hard to see why, as James was tossing to an ERA in the 1.00s while fanning more than a batter per inning. James finally got his shot when the club added him to the 40-man roster on May 28, but his time with the club was short lived as he was used sporadically over the roughly two weeks he was with the club before being returned to Triple-A, much to the dismay of the social media crowd.

Still, James said all the right things when asked about being in Rochester the longest of all the call-ups and amidst all the insanity: "It's good, especially if you're down in Triple-A. You kind of look at it like, so many guys are coming up and getting that opportunity. So, it's just a matter of time before you maybe get yours. It was actually pretty cool to see that many guys that were moving, and so many guys that they make spots on the 40-man for. For me, I wasn't on the 40-man, and to know that this team wasn't scared to take a guy that wasn't on the 40-man was awesome." When asked about the #FreeChuckJames movement, he said that he was not aware of it but did note: "Well if it worked, I appreciate it. But, like I said, I just took it a day at a time, threw the ball, and shook a lot of hands of a lot of other guys that got a chance to come up, and just waited for my turn."

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The Others:

Steve Holm/Eric Hacker/Jim Hoey/Dusty Hughes/Anthony Slama/Jeff Manship/Alex Burnett

Total Call-ups: 8 - Total Send Downs: 9 - Total Miles Traveled: 13,260.

While these guys range in their level of noteworthiness, each of them has contributed at least one trip to or from Rochester in the 2011 campaign. Hughes, Burnett, and Hoey have each shuttled back and forth as the bullpen, which currently checks in at a 5.08 ERA (last in the AL), has been made over more times than Joan Rivers. Holm, the lone position player of the bunch, got a brief bit of playing time in Mauer's stead, but only managed a 343 OPS and is likely in Rochester to stay.

This brings the total mileage to 28,080, or roughly 3,000 miles longer than the entire Earth measured around the equator. Around the world in 80 games, indeed.

Brandon Warne is a contributor to The Biz of Baseball. He also writes weekly for FanGraphs. Follow him on Twitter [@brandonwarne52](https://twitter.com/brandonwarne52)