

NINA MOINI: It's not just the weather. The Minnesota Twins are on a hot streak this weekend. They won their fifth series in a row. It's quite a turnaround from the start of the season, when *The Athletic's* annual Hope-O-Meter found Twins fans were the least optimistic about their team's chances. With half a season left to go, sports contributors Wally Langfellow and Eric Nelson are here to tell us more. Hey, guys.

ERIC NELSON: Hey. Happy heat wave, Nina.

NINA MOINI: Happy heat wave.

WALLY Happy heat wave. My goodness.

LANGFELLOW:

NINA MOINI: Wally, I feel like your Hope-O-Meter for the Twins has been all the way on the floor for a long time.

[LAUGHTER]

But it looks like they have a shot at the playoffs. What do you think it'll take to get there?

WALLY Well, if the season were to end today, they are tied currently for the last wild card spot. How's that for a positive
LANGFELLOW: spin on things? And they're only three games out of first place. And as you just mentioned, they have now won five straight series. So, in other words, they've taken two out of three games from each of their last five opponents, which is a good thing.

The bad news, they're still below sea level. They're still under .500 at 48 and 49. But the division isn't that good, so they have a shot. As I said, they're just three games out of first place. But nonetheless, they took two out of three from the dreadful Los Angeles Angels this past weekend, including a 4 to 2 win yesterday.

Taj Bradley pitched well. He went seven innings, gave up just 2 runs. They got a home run from Trevor Larnach. So they win the Saturday and Sunday games after losing on Friday night. So that's all good. The Twins are three behind Chicago and Cleveland. They're 48 and 49.

So you look at the all-star break, which is now. The all-star game is tomorrow night. You look at the all-star break, and you say, OK, we're at the halfway point of the season. Well, we're well past the halfway point. This is 97 games in out of a 162-game season. So we're past the halfway point.

Let's see if the Twins make a move here down the stretch, if they go out and get another reliever. They did pick one up last week. We'll see how that pans out. They got one from Toronto.

And they had the Major League Baseball draft this past weekend as well. They drafted a kid out of Georgia Tech-- or Georgia, yes. And he is-- his name is Vaughn Lackey, and he had a good season. And he is a catcher. So the Twins loading up on catchers. Their second pick in the draft was also a catcher, so they must feel there is a need for catchers long term.

NINA MOINI: Sure.

WALLY But when they get back to action, they'll be playing at Wrigley Field on Friday against the Chicago Cubs. And as I
LANGFELLOW: said, the all-star game is tomorrow.

NINA MOINI: Eric, tell us about the all-star game. What can folks expect from that?

ERIC NELSON: Yeah, Nina, this is going to be the 96th all-star game played. The first one was way back in 1933 at Comiskey Park in Chicago. Philadelphia is this year's site, in conjunction with the USA's 250th birthday. So you've got the cradle of liberty going on, the city's famous bell, and the Independence Hall and all that good stuff.

The numbers sound like this. The AL has won 48 games, the NL 45. There have been two ties. Now, the American League has won 10 of the last 12, but the National League came out on top in 2025 as the game came down to a home run swing-off because it was tied after nine innings. Kyle Schwarber of Philadelphia hit the game-winning tater a year ago in Atlanta, and the NL won 7 to 6.

Now, the Twins have two all-stars. Pitcher Joe Ryan is going to what they call the Midsummer Classic for the second time. Byron Buxton chosen as an all-star for the third time. He made the trip, but he's not going to play because of a hip injury. And Twins manager Derek Shelton is one of the AL bench coaches. So yesterday, after the Twins beat the Angels, Ryan, Buxton, and Shelton all took a private jet to Philadelphia with their families for the game.

If you're wondering about the Twin Cities and the all-star game, well, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Bloomington has hosted three of them. Let's go back to 1965 at the old Met in Bloomington. 20 future Hall of Fame players participated in that game. 1985 at the Metrodome in Minneapolis was the second all-star game here. And then 2014 at Target Field in Minneapolis. Mike Trout of the LA angels was the MVP of that game. And ironically, he took his own private jet to Philadelphia yesterday after the Angels played the Twins, so he left MSP for Philly.

I'll throw a little shade on the Twins, though. Jhoan Duran from Philadelphia and Louis Varland from Toronto, by way of St. Paul, both are in the all-star Game and both are two of the guys the Twins dealt away last July in that fire sale. One other note, Nina, forget about pretzels and cheesesteaks. It's going to be tater time tonight in Philadelphia. The Home Run Derby will be played. There's going to be eight participants. And it's on Netflix.

NINA MOINI: Wow. Yup, taters are home runs. That's something you guys taught me.

ERIC NELSON: That's right.

NINA MOINI: I'll carry it with me forever. So let's talk about the Timberwolves. Wally, any word on where LeBron James is going next? I forgot they were trying to get LeBron James.

WALLY LANGFELLOW: Yeah, that's been kind of hanging in the balance here for just about two weeks now when LeBron announced that he is not going to go back to the Lakers. And his agent has said that he listed a handful of teams that he is interested in going to, and that would include the Minnesota Timberwolves.

And we've talked about in this now for the last two weeks now. The Timberwolves in with Golden State, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Denver, and Miami as the most serious contenders. Probably going to be Cleveland, Philadelphia, or Golden State, maybe Miami. I think Denver is down the list, and the Timberwolves are probably in that same category as Denver.

But so what are the attractive parts about coming to Minnesota he probably may have heard? You have, of course, playing with Anthony Edwards. He and LeBron played together on the Olympic team, so that's a plus. And I think the fact that they have a need specifically at the position that LeBron plays, the power forward position. So I think that that's a good fit.

Timberwolves are young, so LeBron doesn't necessarily need to carry the load. He can rest when needed, so to speak. Load management. Take nights off if needed. Play only half a game or maybe 30 to 35 minutes instead of playing 40-plus minutes, like he had to particularly in the playoffs this year when two of the Lakers stars were down.

So we'll see. I don't think he's coming here, but I would never say never. You just don't know with LeBron James. My guess, he's going back to Cleveland where he started his career. And that's my hope, too, growing up in Cleveland. But I would say he's probably going to go to Cleveland. But don't count the Wolves out. Leave it at that.

NINA MOINI: Still pretty low on the Hope-O-Meter for him.

WALLY I'd say, yeah.

LANGFELLOW:

NINA MOINI: Let's talk about the Lynx. Beat the New York Liberty this weekend with Olivia Miles back from an injury. What's the latest with the Lynx, Eric?

ERIC NELSON: Yeah, so they play tonight, Nina, against the Phoenix Mercury. How fitting. The mercury is soaring high in the Twin Cities, and the Mercury are here in town. 8:00 PM tip-off, so it's a little bit later start than normal. The game is on the NBC Sports Network and Peacock.

The Mercury are 8 and 6. They've lost three straight games. The Lynx are 17 and 12. They've won two in a row. And Minnesota is the top team in the WNBA, just a half game in front of Golden State and Las Vegas.

You mentioned the win the other day against the New York Liberty. That was Saturday, national TV game on ABC. Kayla McBride scored 25 points. Olivia Miles, the rookie from LSU, chipped in with 23. She came back after missing two games with a calf injury.

And now, we're starting to hear rumblings about the all-star, the face of the franchise, Napheesa Collier. She could be returning to the Minnesota Lynx soon. The head coach, Cheryl Reeve, did not pinpoint exactly when Collier is coming back but said Phee is close to returning. Remember, she had dual ankle surgeries in the offseason. By the way, another WNBA note. They had a record crowd of 20,996 in Montreal Friday night to watch Dallas play Toronto.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

ERIC NELSON: That broke the old mark of 20,000-plus set a few years ago. And guess who was the star of the show up there, north of the border-- Paige Bueckers from Hopkins. She had 34 points as the Wings beat the Tempo 108 to 95. So we know Canadians love pucks, but apparently they love hoops, too.

NINA MOINI: And just, Eric, before we have to let you go, talk to us about the Target USA Cup, the big youth soccer tournament there in Blaine. How's it going? It's pretty hot out.

ERIC NELSON: Yeah, definitely. It starts this week, Nina. It's a global event. It draws over 1,100 teams from 20 nations, 25 states. The opening ceremonies are fantastic. It's very World Cup-like. They've got a total of 4,000 games being played--

NINA MOINI: Wow.

ERIC NELSON: --at the National Sports Center in Blaine through Saturday. But the scorching heat is real, so some of these games are being moved up an hour. Afternoon games are being moved from field turf, which heats up almost like concrete. They're going to move those to grass surfaces. And look for shortened games and more hydration breaks. So hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.

NINA MOINI: All right, Wally and Eric, thanks so much. Have a great week.