

Moment #1



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By Dan Vaughan

So we reach our final moment. Spoiler alert: it is the final game of the season!

We learned during the 2018 season that T-Bones outfielder Todd Cunningham was working on a screen play that he had been working on for several spring trainings, and it was in the can and done. But the “writers” (and players) of the T-Bones story had also been busy, writing some twists in the franchise's screen play as well. The final game of the 2017 season against the St. Paul Saints was like the original Rocky movie where the Italian Stallion goes the distance and guts it out but comes up just short. The T-Bones had won in a walk-off, only to find out that it was not enough as the help they needed did not come just minutes prior to the final win. The club would lose the tie breaker and fail to make the post season. They fell just a tad short.

But our story continued in 2018. The 2018 season would end up more like Rocky II, where Rocky becomes champ, overcoming long odds. In the movie, the challenger beats the champ at the very end after seemingly chasing him the entire fight. The same was true for our club. The T-Bones never caught Sioux City, and they had a 1-6 record against St. Paul. Yet KC had notched the most wins any T-Bones club had ever recorded in franchise history. They pulled it off despite eight players being signed by Major League organizations and a pair more to Mexico. There was the opening weekend where we lost two starting pitchers and our left fielder, and there were also all the normal ebbs and flows of a season. But here they were with one game to play--poised and ready for a great ending. It was like the final round of Rocky II.

In almost a carbon copy of the game four script, the T-Bones had to come from behind and use the long ball to do it. Toss in a pretty good pitching performance and the yeoman work of the pen, and the Hollywood ending was easy to write.

From the game story:

“In the series opener, it was two home runs by Noah Perio Jr. that allowed Kansas City to get the early series lead in a 11-4 win. Then, with the series even at one a piece, it was a pair of hits

by Todd Cunningham, the second grand slam, that helped the T-Bones come back in the sixth to take a 2-1 series lead in the third game of the best-of-five Friday night. In game four with a chance to wrap up the series, Alay Lago launched a big blast down the left field line over the "mini monster" to break a three-three tie in the sixth."

It looked early like St. Paul wanted to force a series-deciding game five with their own gutsy performance. Game one starter Chris Nunn, pitching on three days' rest, rebounded from a rough outing and early exit to keep the Saints in the game as he matched T-Bones starter Jared Mortensen, both putting up three scoreless innings to start the game. The left-hander held the T-Bones hitless through four innings despite falling behind 1-0 as the T-Bones manufactured a run. KC used a walk, a fielder's choice, and a sac fly to grab a 1-0 lead.

St. Paul's Joey Wong tied the ball game at one with an RBI single off Mortensen in the fifth. The Saints would get runners at first and second with one out to chase Mortensen. Marcus Crescentini came in with one out and runners at first and second. Kyle Barrett singled to drive in Wong to make it a 2-1 lead for the Saints. Barrett was gunned down by T-Bones catcher Adrian Nieto while trying to steal second for out number two. Brady Shoemaker would single to right to make it 3-1 before Crescentini could get the third out of the inning, and Kansas City would have to write the comeback story once again.

From the game story:

"In the bottom of the fifth, Keith Curcio led off the inning with a double off Nunn for the first KC hit and moved to third on a sac bunt from Anthony Phillips. With one out Danny Hayes hit a sharp single to center to cut the lead to 3-2.

In the sixth inning Adrian Nieto would single with one out off Nunn, and St. Paul summoned right hander Mike Devine from the bullpen to face Alay Lago. After a foul back made the count one ball and two strikes, Lago hit a high blast down the left field line that cleared the park entirely, landing in the parking lot. The park went crazy as the T-Bones had the 4-3 lead. Noah Perio added an RBI double an inning later, and the rest was up to the KC bullpen."

As I said at the time "Alay, Alay, Ole Lago" as he crossed the plate. I will never forget that moment or that call.

Lefty Nick Lee worked a scoreless seventh and retired the first two batters of the eighth before the Saints made one last run, forcing a game five. Burt Reynolds singled, and the T-Bones skipper Joe Calfapietra brought in closer Cody Winiarski to face former T-Bone Zach Walters. Walters singled to put runners at first and second, but Winiarski was able to get Dante Bichette Jr. to fly to left, ending the inning.

After a scoreless bottom of the eighth for the T-Bones at the plate, Winiarski worked a 1-2-3 top of the ninth to pick up his fourth post-season save and close out the Saints in four games. The three games to one series win was the first title for Kansas City since the club won the 2008 Northern League, and it was the franchise's third overall title, having also won the Northern League in 1997 when the club was located in Duluth, Minnesota. It was the team's first American Association pennant.

Crescentini (1-0) picked up the win while Devine (0-1) was charged with the loss. The media for both clubs selected Noah Perio Jr. as the American Association Championship Series MVP. Todd Cunningham and his fellow writers could not have fashioned a better script for this most memorable story.

Have a great opening day everyone! This is going to be anothe great season and I cannot wait for the sequal!

Dan Vaughan is the play by play voice of the Kansas City T-Bones. You can follow him on Twitter [@DanVaughanjr](https://twitter.com/DanVaughanjr) and on the T-Bones broadcast on [Mixlr](#).