

Moment #4



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By Dan Vaughan

A five-run sixth inning from the Airhogs doomed the T-Bones in a 6-5 loss on July 7, 2018 in Texas. That loss offered the strangest moment from the season and one of the quietest ejections I have ever seen. Looking back, it was an early tremor in what was to develop into a major earthquake in the league a few days later.

The official box score from that night makes no mention of Zach Walters's being ejected from the T-Bones game against Texas on that Saturday night. In fact, the Box score shows that Walters went 1-for-3 with an RBI in his last game in a T-Bone jersey. That night, Todd Cunningham has a night off, but he was pressed into action when Walters was ejected, following the T-Bones scoring a run on a Walters RBI that gave the T-Bones a fifth inning 2-1 lead.

The announced crowd of 2,623 did not make any noise when Walters was run from the game just as we went to an on-air break after the visitor's half of the fifth. Plate umpire Steve Linton owns the quietest ejection I have ever seen. It was so quiet, I am not sure anyone really saw it—even the official scorer missed it. Thus, there was no mention in the box score. I remember trying to sort out what had happened during the break. I even speculated that maybe Walters had some type of emergency. He had had a previous conversation with Linton, but it seemed very matter of fact—the type that happens during every game at every level. I thought it was just small talk at first, but clearly something had happened as Walters, bat in tow, walked down the left side of the field to the clubhouse as we waited for him to clear the field to resume play. The #11 man was gone. If we had only known then...

The T-Bones had an off day on Sunday upon the return to the metro. I stayed over in Texas for a rare Sunday off day in the Texas heat with the family. KC was headed to Lincoln on Monday morning for the first trip of the year to face the Saltdogs. I had an early flight from Dallas to Omaha, and I scheduled to take a shuttle to Lincoln about an hour away from the Omaha airport.

If you have ever traveled by air, you know the drill: turn off your phone, or put it in airplane mode. You land, turn it on, and see all the calls, texts and emails that you missed while in flight. For some reason I still had my phone volume down when I turned it on, so I did not hear all the pings and dings that had come with the flurry of emails and texts. As I walked through the terminal, I started to get curious about why my phone was so quiet. As I was coming down the escalator to meet the shuttle driver, I noticed a text from Manager Joe Calfapietra and one from Vice President and General Manager Chris Browne. That, in and of itself, is not uncommon as it is almost a daily occurrence in my job. (I talk and text with the two all the time.) But this time, the message was different, and I actually had to sit down to soak it all in.

I was informed that we had traded Zach Walters for Noah Perio Jr.—the same Walters who had just two weeks prior been named the player-of-the-week for the league, and the same guy who, on July 4th a week earlier, had jogged to the ballpark from his apartment with a large United States flag; the same guy who most fans had thought was the team's best player and four hole hitter.

Trades are not unusual, and as we have come to learn, player moves happen for all types of reasons. I took a breath or two and texted my wife to give her the news as I was still in shock. Chris Browne was driving to Lincoln that day with the family for a T-Bones road trip, and we would catch up after lunch. There in the Omaha terminal, I was able to get in touch with Nick Marak, our media staff person on call to get a press release started and to make adjustments to the game notes. Then I pulled out the laptop to adjust the rooming list for the trip.

What makes working with the T-Bones unique is that often we wear several different hats. One of the reasons I am the first to know things like this is that I handle some of the travel, particularly the hotel, as well as other media-related items. Many hotels want the rooming list with accurate names and details because we all try to avoid problems with the players getting in their rooms.

The team by now had left Kansas City. They were still two hours out and were scheduled to arrive at noon. I still had about an hour before I would arrive in Lincoln. I was set to arrive there before they did, which was the plan, but a move like this is huge. St. Paul and I had to trade player photos and details of both players, and it was time to get familiar with Noah Perio Jr. for the broadcast.

I knew him, but I had no way of knowing he would be so important to Kansas City in the end. He was a great player, but at that point, if I would have told you to pick a guy on the T-Bones roster days earlier who would be the MVP of the Championship Series, I am sure the overwhelming favorite would have been Zach Walters. If I asked you that day of the trade, I am not sure many would have guessed Noah Perio Jr.

What would happen next was that the two players would become major parts of playoff teams. St. Paul Manager George Tsamis and T-Bones skipper Joe Calfapietra completed one of those rare trades where both sides benefit. That is the ultimate goal, but it usually does not work out that way. Walters would have a good season, and I heard several who follow the league warn

that St. Paul was in better shape. The evidence suggest that the trade was beneficial for both clubs, but the finished product shows what a difference-maker Perio Jr. was for KC this season.

The Windfall of the deal:

| | G | AB | R | H | 2B | 3B | HR | RBI | BB | SO | SB | AVG |
|---------|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|------|
| Perio | 52 | 209 | 31 | 62 | 12 | 1 | 8 | 57 | 21 | 32 | 3 | .297 |
| Walters | 51 | 207 | 33 | 62 | 15 | 0 | 9 | 38 | 13 | 40 | 1 | .300 |

Noah Perio Jr. finished the season on a two-week roll that would help the T-Bones move into the post-season. He had a huge week for Kansas City, going 13 for 29 with 18 RBIs. He added two home runs, four doubles, walked four times and scored six runs. Perio Jr began the first of the final two weeks with a go-ahead RBI in the series opener at Lincoln on Tuesday, the 21st. On Wednesday, in game two of the day/night double header, he drove in two key insurance runs in the seventh to help KC take down the Saltdogs 5-1.

When KC returned to KCK, the California native would go 2-for-3 in the series opener with two RBIs against Winnipeg at T-Bones Stadium. On August 24th he became the only T-Bones player to have two multi-home run games last season when he went deep twice for KC in a 13-11 loss to the Goldeyes. That night he tied a single-game franchise mark with seven RBIs against Winnipeg, going 3-for 5. He followed that up with six more “ribbies” on Saturday, the 25th in the T-Bones series-clinching win over Winnipeg, 18-6. He would again have a three-hit game and would finish the series 8-for-13 with 15 RBIs. In an ironic twist, Perio Jr. joined former T-Bone Zach Walters as the second T-Bone to be selected player-of-the-week last season.

Yet he was not done just yet. He then closed out the last week with a 10 RBI week, making it 28 to close out the season during the tail end of August/September. He was 6-for-18 in the Championship Series with two home runs and five RBIs, including a huge insurance run against his old club in the clinching game

Who would have thought a quiet ejection in July would result in one of your team’s best players being traded away in a block buster trade? That tremor in Grand Prairie was the earthquake that provided the final piece to the season’s final chapter. In retrospect, the day of the trade should have been known as the day that the T-Bones legend Noah Perio Jr was born.

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](https://www.mixlr.com/mixlr).