



Photo by Joe Brown

Southwest Minnesota State University's **Krista Steen**, front, heads home and **Kiley Petersen**, back, gets to second after a single by Katie Turner during Game 2 against St. Cloud State Wednesday at Mustang Field. Steen scored a run on the play.

Rain, Red Sox fall on Twins at Target Field

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The rain came down, the crowd cheered, and the Red Sox and Twins kept playing.

"Out-door base-ball," some fans chanted Wednesday in the second game at Target Field.

John Lackey didn't seem to mind getting wet, either.

Lackey turned in a second strong start and Jeremy Hermida gave Boston room with a three-run double in the eighth inning, leading the Red Sox past Minnesota 6-3.

For the first time in 29 years, rain fell on the Twins at home.

"It held up pretty good. We didn't slip or anything," Twins center fielder Denard Span.

The crowd of 38,164, more than 1,000 below capacity, rediscovered baseball's unique relationship with the weather. Temperature at first pitch was 73 degrees, but raindrops fell intermittently from the third through the eighth innings.

Some fans scurried for the concourses and others hastily put up their umbrellas, but the first shower led to another celebration of Minnesota's move out of the Metrodome to an open-air facility.

Lackey (1-0) lasted 6 2-3 innings for his first Red Sox victory, lifted early by Marco Scutaro's two singles and Dustin Pedroia's RBI double and solo home run. Scutaro batted leadoff again for the injured Jacoby Ellsbury, and Hermida filled in as the left fielder.

"Honestly, there was probably one inning there where it was kind of pretty slick," Lackey said. "Once they fixed it, it was great the last two innings that I was out there."

Twins starter Kevin Slowey (1-1) inched through five, giving up three runs and taking the loss after several discussions on the mound with Joe Mauer about pitch selection.

"He wanted to do something, and I wanted to do something else," Mauer said. "We're both in it to try to get outs. So go out there and talk about it and come up with a plan."

After a sharp start last week in a win over the Los Angeles Angels, Slowey never found his footing — even literally in the fifth following Pedroia's two-out shot.

Slowey gave up a single and a walk

Twins PAGE 6B

SCHEDULE

Area Baseball

Marshall at Redwood Valley
Dawson-Boyd at RCW

Minneota at Lincoln HI

Canby at TMB

BOLD at YME

RCVWWG at MCC

Wabasso at New Ulm Cathedral

RTR at MACCRAY

Area Softball

Lakeview at Minneota/Canby (DH)

KMS at TMB

YME at BOLD

MCC at RRC/WWG

New Ulm Cathedral at Wabasso

Area Track

Marshall at Willmar

Lakeview at MACCRAY

Area Golf

Marshall at Montevideo (Girls)

TMB at WWG

YME at BOLD (Boys)

SCORES

Wednesday's Scores

College Softball

SMSU 4, St. Cloud State 1

St. Cloud State 8, SMSU 6

College Baseball

SMSU 14, Bemidji State 8

SMSU 12, Bemidji State 4

IN THE NEWS

First hole-in-one of season recorded at Marshall Golf Club

Todd Madden recorded the first hole-in-one of the season Wednesday at Marshall Golf Course.

Madden used a 4-iron on the 170-yard, par-3 ninth hole. He was playing with Brad Cool and Steve Schuler.

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Will FROM PAGE 1B

While Will's body has allowed him so many opportunities, his mother's has been failing her for the past 13 years.

Mary Jo Kurka has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The degenerative neuromuscular condition has rendered her almost completely immobile and has taken away her ability to speak.

But the mother of five hasn't allowed the things that she can't do define who she is. If her children need a word of advice, she can give it. When they need her support, she's there for them.

As Will's sports team's have made their long runs through the regular season and postseason, Mary Jo has been on the sidelines watching him in her wheelchair. She can't clap when Will makes a basket. She can't cheer when he catches a touchdown pass. But she's there.

"It's great just seeing her. It's not easy for her to get to the games," Will said. "I play football and stuff, but I know I'll never be quite as tough as mom is."

Growing up

Will was around five years old when Mary Jo was diagnosed with ALS.

For a child so young, it can be hard to fathom a parent having a disease so serious. According to the ALS Association, only 20 percent of people with ALS live longer than five years after their initial diagnosis.

"At that age, you don't really put together what's going to happen in the future," Will said. "You don't really understand what's all going to take place."

Mary Jo, a registered nurse, began to notice the signs that something was wrong. At first, she began having trouble with her fine motor skills — controlling the small muscles of her hands. About three years into the disease's progression, she was unable to walk and eventually lost the use of her arms.

Gary Kurka, who has

been married to Mary Jo for 34 years, was a teacher and a coach at Marshall Area Christian School when his wife was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. He had to leave the job soon after to assist Mary Jo, who was already struggling to perform simple, everyday tasks.

"Even by that next fall, it wasn't going to be possible for me to go back there because at that point we didn't have any nurses, so I needed to be around," said Gary, who is now a pastor at a small church near Bruce, S.D. "It was at that time that I was doing the cooking and feeding because it was becoming difficult for her to even pick up a spoon or a fork."

Eventually, nurses came into the home to tend to Mary Jo, but Will, his sister Sara, who is now 27, and brothers James (20), Grant (14) and Ethan (13) have all played their part in helping their mother.

For older children, coping with a parent's physical deterioration can be difficult. For Will, Grant and Ethan, the situation is almost all they've ever known.

"Just being young, it wasn't like a huge adjustment for me," Will said. "I was young enough and it went slowly enough at first where it was just everyday life. It's not like everything changed in an instant. It was a pretty slow progression. You just take it all in stride."

Six years ago, Mary Jo had a tracheotomy procedure to allow her to breathe better, but lost her ability to talk. Today, she does most of her communicating with a specialized program on her computer that allows her to spell out words and create messages by clicking a button with her foot — a movement she can perform when her legs are positioned correctly.

Mary Jo also communicates with the help of an alphabet chart, that has letters arranged in rows and columns. A person holds the chart in front of Mary Jo and moves his or her finger across the chart and she

blinks when the finger comes to the letter she wants to use. The other person then goes onto the next letter or tries to guess the word or phrase Mary Jo is thinking.

Although this way of life is normal for Will, he admits that his family's unique situation has helped him grow up faster and allows him to put things into perspective.

While Gary and Mary Jo would obviously have preferred to raise their children under normal circumstance, they say there have been some positive things that have come from their situation.

"I think it's probably made some changes in their lives, and I don't think they're necessarily bad changes," Gary said. "For example, maybe now they see people who are handicapped or in chairs. I don't think they're phased by it at all."

Mary Jo also thinks Will has matured more quickly than other children his age as a result of her affliction and she's proud of the person he's become.

"Yes, he was very easy to raise," she said of Will, with the aid of nurse Candi Reynolds using the alphabet chart.

A sports family

Through everything, sports have always united the Kurka family.

Will said his parents and siblings are all very competitive and have enjoyed spending time playing different sports with each other or rooting on one another at games.

"Everyone's involved in sports big time," Will said. "It's kind of a fixture in the family. It definitely started with mom and dad. Dad was into sports in high school and played basketball in high school. Mom was really supportive of all of us in sports and played some softball."

When Gary left his job in Marshall to care for his wife, he began coaching girls basketball at Minneota High School and coached his daughter, Sara, for three years until she graduated in 2000. Balancing coaching and helping Mary Jo put Gary in an awkward position at times. He said there was once a situation where a nurse was unable to show up one morning when he had a 6 a.m. practice scheduled and he had to pack up his whole family and take them all to practice.

At Sara's games, Will would frequently wheel his mother around and help feed her — a far from average outing for a child under 10 years old.

"I remember bringing her to games," Will said. "She was in a wheelchair at the time. I remember bringing her to the old gym at SMSU and playoff games and stuff. She always got really, really nervous."

Gary stopped coaching a year after Sara graduated, but sports have remained a big part of the Kurka's life. Since that time, probably no sports season has been as thrilling for the family as Will's senior year.

Will said Mary Jo went to all of his home football and basketball games, some important road games, and all of the playoff games.

Getting to the games is

It's great just seeing her. It's not easy for her to get to the games. I play football and stuff, but I know I'll never be quite as tough as mom is."

— Will Kurka

Independent file photo

Minneota's Will

Kurka runs

downfield after

making a catch

in the Class A

semifinals

against

Blooming

Prairie

November 21,

2009, in the

Metrodome in

Minneapolis.



like that before, so that really hasn't changed too much."

Will's parents have both noticed the team concept take center stage in how their son approaches life and sports.

"One of the things both Mary Jo and I have felt with Will, is that he has always kind of had that team mentality," Gary said. "In fact, I remember one time in football when some (scouts) came to see him play and I think that particular game, (quarterback Sam Deryck) threw to him one time. They were talking to Will after the game and said they were disappointed he wasn't thrown to more and Will said, 'I don't care. We won.'

"I think his mindset has been about whatever he can do to help the team."

School All-Star football game at Husky Stadium at St. Cloud State University. Not long after that, it's off to college, just a short drive away at SMSU.

The Mustangs were one of several teams in the region who made Will a scholarship offer. Gary said that even before the recruitment letters started coming in, Will expressed a desire to play at SMSU.

"I really think he wanted to stay close to home," he said. "In fact, what he's told me is, 'Dad, I want to play where I know the people and they know me.'"

Will said he will redshirt his freshman season and likely play tight end for the team, and Mary Jo is already looking forward to seeing her son take the field.

SMSU seems like the perfect choice for Will in more ways than one. Not only is SMSU close to home, the campus was built to be handicap accessible and the Regional Event Center offers special seating for Mary Jo to take in games.

For Will, it doesn't matter that his mom won't be able to cheer or clap for him. Just as long as she's there.

Close to home

Whether or not the Minneota baseball team has a run like the football or basketball teams, the Kurka's have enjoyed their time watching Will compete during his thrilling senior year. But the ride doesn't stop after the Vikings' final out.

On June 26, Will will play in the Minnesota High

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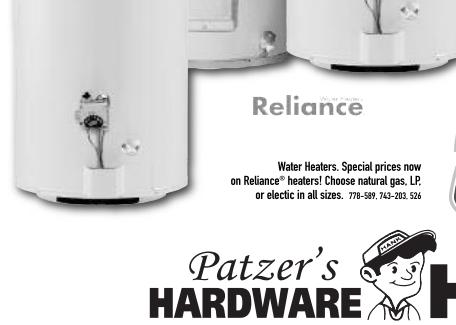
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