

POPULAR

Rule of engagement: Twins Twitter led by Andover's Heather Rule

Patrick Slack
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Andover's Heather Rule has been the Minnesota Twins' in-game coordinator for Twitter posts since 2015, providing a clever twist on updates on the field. Photos submitted

A Friends throwback reference? A Britney Spears lyric? Perhaps a bit of wordplay or a historic oddity to point out?

A fly ball heads toward the Target Field bleachers, a decision is made and the keyboard is put to work.

Moments later, the batter touches home, and a near-instant update — in 280 characters or less, of course — has been composed. A photo or video, maybe a timely GIF, is thrown on. The “tweet” button is hit, and the Minnesota Twins' Twitter followers have a fresh post on their timeline.

Behind it all? Andover's Heather Rule.

Since the position's creation in 2015, Rule has operated the Minnesota Twins social media in-game Twitter account. Pairing on-field updates with photos, videos and creative references to everything from Mambo No. 5 to Crazy Eights, it's a blend of information and creativity that enables the team's over 657,000 followers to travel along through the highs and lows of a given game and season, interacting with one another as the action unfolds.

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It's a new age of fan engagement, and Twins Twitter posts must follow only one rule: the Twins' Rule.

Starting out

Rule's path has long since pointed to journalism.

One of the first to attend Andover High School as it opened, Rule was also among the first group of editors at and helped name the school newspaper, Husky Tracks.

Throughout school, reading and writing were early passions. As were sports.


"In middle school probably I got really interested in following the Twins, and the Wild as well when they got started," Rule said. "Those two, and also I'm a big Indy car fan as well. I always loved to watch and writing was something I always enjoyed doing as well, reading and writing. English class was always my favorite. I knew I wanted to do something in writing and kind of took the journalism track in college."

After graduating high school, Rule went to the University of St. Thomas, working at the student newspaper and taking on various stories, sports included.

"Once I got there I got a job at a student paper on campus and started taking some of the sports stories and started realizing it was a good way to kind of combine the two things I was really interested in," Rule said. "Not only just the writing in journalism, but realizing there was this whole avenue I could take combining sports and writing."

Right out of college, Rule had an internship at a magazine group in the Twin Cities and a part-time job at the Star Tribune as a sports clerk taking down high school scores.

"I knew that's what I wanted to get into," Rule said. "It was kind of the downturn of the economy at that time, so it took a little while, but my first full-time job in journalism was as a news reporter in Austin, Minnesota at the Post Bulletin."



Rule covered the city council and education beats in Austin, going on to work part-time as a sports reporter in Albert Lea and full-time as a news reporter in Fergus Falls, breaking community news and even taking on the crime beat.

Not yet at her ultimate goal, but gaining a wide range of experience.

"A lot of council meetings, school board meetings, other community news stories as well to just kind of get my feet wet," Rule said. "There's a lot of learning involved on the crime beat, good experience you can learn at a small-town paper like that and some of the stories you get to cover. You get to learn a lot along the way about news writing and really telling people's stories. In sportswriting, it's ultimately telling people's stories. I knew that I eventually wanted to get into sports, it just kind of didn't work out until a little bit later."

Later was about to arrive.

Joining the Twins

After a few years working across the state as a reporter, Rule returned to the Twin Cities to determine her next career move. She joined networking groups and reached out to different people involved with communications around the area. One of them was a member of the Twins organization.

"Just kind of a cold reach out," Rule said. "He agreed to meet with me and we just stayed in touch. Eventually, there was this social media position that came up."

The job was one of the first of its kind, an in-game coordinator for a team, working through Major League Baseball.

"At the time it was a new position for in-game coordinators," Rule said. "There were only six of us at the start. The program has been built up and this is the first season I'm working for the Twins directly, but it's basically the same job."



Rule had done some social media posting through news reporting and her own accounts, yet nothing extensive. The position started with more nuts and bolts updates, but has developed drastically over time.

"A lot of the skills are similar," Rule said. "They were looking for someone with good writing skills. As social media has evolved, the things we post have changed. GIFs took off on Twitter, and even the way we post videos is different. It was fun to get into a little different part of writing that wasn't standard journalism."

It didn't take long for Rule's creative – and quick – wit to shine.

There's plenty of preparation involved, with notes turned back to and referenced here and there. But more than that, there is a knack for connecting an on-field play with a catchy reference for fans following along, providing more than just a line on the scorecard.

"Early on I'd update after three innings, after six innings, a score update with maybe a photo," Rule said. "That has changed too, because there are so many more ways people can find out what the score is or what happened. They follow beat writers from the team or there's the MLB app and obviously watching the game on TV to see what's going on, so it's a little more of, not necessarily telling people the score, it's kind of getting more creative with the post."

"A lot of it at the beginning was trying to play off players' names a little bit. Trevor Plouffe, who played here a few years ago, I did the hashtag 'Plouffe there it is' when he hit a home run. Just some things like that, little different things. I have a master list of notes. As you get into the rhythm of it there's things that come to mind. I have a Word document always open with notes and the game note sheet that the PR team puts together to keep track of any notable stats. A lot of stats to keep track of and records they're breaking, or individual things too. So keeping track of that and different milestones that players might hit, things like that to keep in mind beyond some of the creative stuff."

The Twins provided plenty of moments to turn back to the stat sheet in 2019, when they set the Major League Baseball record for team home runs in a season.

Whether it was quickly queuing up a 1991 World Series GIF for a walk-off homer versus Atlanta or firing off a one-liner after a go-ahead grand slam that essentially sealed the division title against Cleveland, Rule was ready for them all.

“I keep my own stats a little bit too, quirky stats, I started keeping track of how many home runs they would hit a game, things like that,” Rule said. “They had a couple games where they hit eight in a game. It got to be an everyday thing. It’s a lot more enjoyable to do the job too when the team is performing well on the field, not only in the content I get to post, but from the fan perspective of engagement.”

Given the number of outlets also tweeting information and the instant nature of the platform, it can be a pressure-filled role. One of the important things to remember is to not try to force cleverness, rather let it come up organically. And realize not every scoring play is going to be gold.

“Not everything that gets posted is going to be this amazing thing that goes viral,” Rule said. “Sometimes you kind of get lucky with them or sometimes they just come to you. A lot of times the scoring in a game isn’t done in the most exciting way either – I always joke, ‘Oh, RBI groundout to second,’ or ‘double play with the bases loaded’ or something. For those it’s kind of, what can you really say about some of that stuff? So not everything is going to be the most exciting. With Twitter it is kind of that real-time, putting content out there as quick as possible. That does go into it a little bit too, sometimes you just need to get the content out there, especially if it’s a big inning. That happens too, things happen quickly.

“You just get used to being in that little bit of a rhythm. Then on the other side too, if the game’s not going well, there are some nights you’re not posting much of anything. I kind of say there are the three-tweet games – you post the lineup, you post a tweet at the start of the game and you post the final score.”

Whether it’s the possibility of the dreaded three-tweet night, a slugfest or a walk-off, there is joy in coming to the ballpark – or tweeting road games from home – not knowing just what might happen.

“It’s been fun to be able to combine a couple of things I really enjoy,” Rule said. “Social media isn’t the standard of what you think of journalism. In a lot of ways I learned it’s this different position – you’re a little more PR-focused because you’re working for the team or Major League Baseball like I was. It’s different than what I would tweet out on my own account or what beat writers would tweet out. Letting people know what’s going on, but also being positive about the team too. I enjoy being at the games, being able to watch the games and have that be my job, and all of the people I’ve gotten to meet at the press box at Target Field has been a lot of fun. I’ve made a lot of friends there, met some really good colleagues. I’ve met people there that have led to other freelance opportunities.

“I think it’s really fun to get to watch baseball and to really follow a team too. If you’re following as a fan, how many people have time to watch every single game or almost every game and really follow. To have something I really enjoy and have that also be my job is really fun.”

Twins by summer, freelance by winter

While working with the Twins 162 games a year takes up almost every night from April to October, it does leave roughly half the year open. That has enabled Rule to continue operating in the reporter world as well, freelancing for a variety of newspapers and magazines.

“The freelance stuff I really enjoy because of the variety of things I get to do with that,” Rule said. “It kind of evolved — I didn’t necessarily set out to be a freelance sports journalist, it just sort of evolved and worked out that way. That was where I was finding opportunities to be honest in sports. I got started with the Star Tribune, doing a lot of the section and state tournaments, helping out in the fall and winter season. Not so much in spring because baseball takes over, but being able to do that and some Minnesota Wild coverage for Minnesota Hockey Magazine; I’ve done stories with USA Hockey.

“Being able to have all of these opportunities and cover different things, cover the Minnesota Whitecaps women’s hockey team as well. I like the variety. I like that I can focus on writing too. There are perks to being able to set your own schedule in a way and choose what you want to be working on. It takes a little getting used to going from baseball where there’s games every single night to a little bit of a gap, but in some ways it’s been nice to keep growing that over the years, going from one high school football game to different opportunities with different outlets. It’s been nice to be able to write in the offseason when baseball is not going on.”

One for the books

In addition to working with the Twins and for various publications as a freelance writer, Rule has had several non-fiction children’s books published. One more hat to wear in the sportswriting world.

“That kind of stemmed from the freelance sportswriting I was doing once I got back to the Cities,” Rule said. “The freelancing for me kind of snowballed. It started with covering a high school football game, and the more I networked with people and got to know other people in the business, and especially once I got the job at Target Field and meeting more people in the press box, that led to more opportunities freelancing. One of those was with an editor for a local publishing company that produces these children’s books.”

They were looking for someone who could take non-fiction sports topics, do research and write for a children's audience. The first two books needing an author were part of a women in sports series – “Women in Sports Media” and “Women in the Olympics.”

Rule was a perfect fit.

“They're children's books, so they're not extensive,” Rule said. “Those have been fun. They're pretty similar, but you really have to condense things. There's so much research that goes into the topics, and then you break it down into chapters or topics, however the book is laid out. You have to be very concise with your sentence structure and everything else.

“It's similar, but can be kind of challenging to hit the highlights of important things, because a lot of times there's so much more you could say about a certain topic or athlete that you don't have room for, so it's a challenge to get your point across in a very concise manner.”

After the first pair, Rule has had several more titles published, including “Sports' Greatest Turnarounds,” “Wayne Gretzky and the Edmonton Oilers,” “Ultimate NASCAR Road Trip,” “College Basketball Underdog Stories,” “Olympic Games Upsets” and “All About Women's College Gymnastics.”

While the 2021 Twins season is winding down, Rule's writing isn't.

A few more Twins tweets remain before year's end, then back to freelancing. More books are on the way next year as well.

Down the road, the idea of covering a single beat holds intrigue, combining her passions of sports and writing. And of course cleverness.

“I think it would be interesting at some point to maybe take on a beat full-time in sports,” Rule said. “I think that's kind of the other side of having your head in all these different avenues. To really have that be the focus and really explore the beat that way.”

For now, she's taking things day by day. Tweet by tweet.

The Twitter Rule.

Could it **be** more exciting?

Patrick Slack
Staff Writer