

SPORTS

TWINS PREVIEW WEEK

WOLVES 99, GOLDEN STATE 96
Monday: at Sacramento, 9 p.m. (BSNX)

Towns to Wolves' rescue

His clutch three got the team over the line late.

By CHRIS HINE
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SAN FRANCISCO - When Karl-Anthony Towns hit two free throws to give the Timberwolves a victory Wednesday night in his first game back from a right calf injury, he said his return was "like a movie."

On Sunday night, Towns proved the sequel might have been better than the original.

Towns hit two key three-pointers, including the game-winner with 11 seconds remaining, to lift the Wolves to a 99-96 victory over Golden State on a night his shot was otherwise not falling.

Towns was just 3-for-14 before hitting the Wolves' last two field goals of the night, two of their biggest of the season.

"I've been away from the game a long time," Towns said. "I was looking for ways to help this team and was just trying to do that these last two games."

See **WOLVES** on C6 ▶

WILD VS. SEATTLE
7 p.m. Monday (Hulu, ESPN+)

Wild wins are credit to Guerin

JIM SOUHAN



When their best pure defenseman, Jonas Brodin, was sidelined, the Minnesota Wild surged.

With their best scorer and most valuable player, Kirill Kaprizov, sidelined, the Wild have excelled.

Their drive to the top of the Central Division standings, and toward the top of the entire NHL, has been a doctorate-level study in team-building.

The Wild have a gritty, deep, unified roster.

Dean Evason coaches with a tone that is always demanding but never strident or unreasonable.

Most of all, Bill Guerin has again proved that he is the Room Whisperer, the Sultan of Subtlety.

Remember when the Wild traded Cam Talbot for Filip Gustavsson last July?

That felt more like a move to remove Talbot from the awkwardness of being bumped from the starter's role by Marc Andre-Fleury than because Gustavsson was a quality player.

See **SOUHAN** on C4 ▶

Wind up, deliver at a new pace

By PHIL MILLER • phil.miller@startribune.com

FORT MYERS, FLA. - Ever mindful that even a minor mistake could wind up in the bleachers 400 feet away, big-league pitchers set out to master the most picayune details of their craft, particularly during spring training.

Which is how Sonny Gray found himself demonstrating his newfound proficiency last week in the fine art of turning his back.

"If there's a foul ball, I'm going to turn my back and walk back to the mound, back to the rubber, and take a couple of breaths," Gray explained. "If I turn my back, you can't

throw it to me, I'm not looking. I kind of gather myself and then I turn around and [receive a new] ball when I'm ready."

Major League Baseball has instituted new rules this season that parse, down to the second, the time that pitchers might take before winding up and delivering a pitch. Pitchers have responded, naturally, by hunting for ways to wring a few spare seconds more for themselves, and for better conserving those they are granted.

"It's fascinating to hear our guys sharing ideas, finding ways to adapt to new circumstances, or even gain some tiny advantage," said Derek Falvey, the Twins president of

See **TWINS** on C3 ▶

Inside: Gray not keen on short leashes for Twins starters **C3** • **Season opener:** 3:10 p.m. Thursday at Kansas City (BSN)

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