

## No sun and fun for this Twins fan; he's got a book out

By Scott Hotard

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FORT MYERS — Sandy beaches down the street. A heated swimming pool right outside his door. A free pass to spring training games.

Ah, yes. John Nemo is living the American dream.

So it seems.

Wednesday happened to be Nemo's lightest day here. An interview with a newspaper reporter in the morning and one with a radio host in the afternoon.

Maybe this would be the day he got to relax. If so, it would be the first.

"Look at me," Nemo said with a laugh, as he sat by the pool of this Fort Myers rent house. "I'm a wreck. Haven't shaved. Jumped out of bed and ..."

OK, so perhaps this isn't the American dream. But it is Nemo's.

Why has he come to the Sunshine State in the heart of tourism season? Why is he talking of recent trips to catch the Twins and the Red Sox in their respective Florida ballparks? Why is he smiling so big, even though he's hardly slept?

Well, it's because Nemo, a Woodbury, Minn., resident, is about a week removed from the national release of his first novel. He is on this eight-day getaway to promote it, a trip that rescued him from the snowy Twin Cities and put him square in the middle of baseball's purest season.

But he knew from the start it would be no vacation. If "The King's Game" is to become what he envisions, then Nemo must drive the right number of miles, sit down for the right number of book signings, set aside time for the right number of interviews, and spread the word to the right number of baseball fans.

In other words, shaving can wait.

"I love to get out there and share it with people," said Nemo, who has pushed his poor Saturn rental up and down Florida's left coast. "I've met fascinating people just on this tour."

He has met them at City of Palms Park. He has met them at Hammond Stadium. He has met them at bookstores in Tampa and Bradenton. He had planned to meet them in Orlando, as well, but that signing was cancelled.

Nemo arrived in Florida on Thursday with wife Sara and their two children. Since then, he's covered more ground than Torii Hunter.

His mission?

He's got to make folks a fan of Cody King, the protagonist of the novel. He's got to tell them about the battles King has with himself. He's got to tell them about Game 7, the crowd, the stakes — everything except the ending.

"It's been a thrill," said Nemo, a lifelong Twins fan. "It's a dream come true for a baseball nut."

But Nemo does leave town today with one regret. As hard as it is for him to admit, the 31-year-old hasn't seen a game on his trip.

Not one at-bat.

"It's killing me," he said. "What I'll do is set up before the game on a concourse, and then I have to run off to a signing."

His travels have been documented, of course. He has recorded a daily blog on [MLBlogs.com](http://MLBlogs.com), the same site that helped transform this grassroots project into a home-run hitter.

A year ago, Nemo decided to self-publish the work he'd been sitting on since 2002. He used Print On Demand.

Then he discovered [MLBlogs.com](http://MLBlogs.com). Nemo posted the book there chapter by chapter — inning by inning, actually — last summer. The buzz it created allowed him to strike a deal with River City Press, a publishing company in Minneapolis.

"I want to reach baseball fans," said Nemo, who has covered Major League Baseball for [MLB.com](http://MLB.com) and the Associated Press. "There's not a lot of great baseball fiction."

Nemo didn't set out to write about America's pastime. But when he started to write, that's what flowed out of him.

Figures.

Nemo's dad started dragging him to the Metrodome when he was young. They even made the voyage to Orlando one time, back before the Twins trained in Fort Myers.

All these years later, the author still loves coming to Florida. Especially now that he has his dream to sell.

"I'm excited to see how the sales go now that it's been out there a few days," Nemo said. "You don't know exactly, but the next couple of months will tell."

Best-case scenario?

"That I'll sell like 10 million copies," Nemo said, laughing, "and buy this house. My Florida getaway."

### **Fort Myers product belts a home run**

When Tommy Watkins walked to the plate for his second at-bat of Wednesday's game, he had a secret in his back pocket.

When he was done with the at-bat, he had a home run. And a smile the size of Hammond Stadium.

The smile was directed at Torii Hunter, who gave his buddy some advice before Watkins went to the plate a second time. In his first at-bat of Minnesota's 5-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Fort Myers native grounded out. The tip?

"I was told," Watkins said, "to never say."

### **The book**

"The King's Game" is a novel by John Nemo, a resident of the Twin Cities. It tells the story of a big-league pitcher who finds himself in the biggest game of his life — Game 7 of the World Series, against the best lineup in baseball.

The story has a religious theme. As Cody King pitches in front of 45,000 fans, he inches closer to a relationship with God he'd always resisted. He doesn't realize, however, that these nine innings will mark the final chapter of his life.

The novel was released nationwide on March 1. Nemo has spent the last seven days racing between Tampa and Fort Myers to promote the book. As part of the tour, he has appeared twice at City of Palms Park and twice at Hammond Stadium.

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