



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Friday, May 11, 2018

- Twins rally, but Berrios falters in loss to Angels. MLB.com (Bollinger) p.1
 - Dozier (4 hits) goes back-to-back with Kepler. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 2
 - Buxton returns from DL for opener in Anaheim. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 3
 - 5 early unsung heroes in the AL Central. MLB.com (Beck) p. 4
 - Jose Berrios struggles again as Twins' five-game winning streak ends with loss to Angels. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 4
 - Postgame: Where is the world is Jose Berrios' curveball? Star Tribune (Neal) p.5
 - Miguel Sano arrives in California, but unlikely to play. Star Tribune (Neal) p.6
 - Byron Buxton activated from disabled list by Twins. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 6
 - Eduardo Escobar, Max Kepler fuel Twins offense. Star Tribune (Hartman) p.7
 - Top Twins prospect Wander Javier out for the season. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 8
 - Thursday's Twins-L.A. Angels game recap. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 9
 - Twins can't sustain rally, fall 7-4 to Shohei Ohtani and Los Angeles Angels. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p.9
 - Surprise! Twins' Miguel Sano (rehabbing) joins Byron Buxton (activated) in Anaheim. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p.11
 - The mystery of the Twins' post-Puerto Rico malaise has been solved. Their Bumpboxx was busted. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p.12
 - It sure looks like ex-Twins pitcher Kyle Lohse has announced his retirement from baseball. ESPN 1500 (Wetmore) p.13
 - Byron Buxton is back from the DL in time for series with the Angels. ESN 1500 (Wetmore) p.13
 - Shohei Ohtani homers, doubles in Angels' win over Twins. Fox Sports North (AP) p.13
 - Twins activate Buxton, option LaMarre to Triple-A. Fox Sports North (Staff) p.14
 - Twins activate speedy outfielder Byron Buxton off DL. ESPN (Staff) p.15
 - Twins activate Byron Buxton from the disabled list. NBC Sports (Baer) p.15
 - Royce Lewis, Twins' ace prospect, has yet to meet a challenge he can't conquer. The Athletic (Hayes) p.15
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Twins rally, but Berrios falters in loss to Angels

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | May 10, 2018

ANAHEIM -- The Twins received back-to-back homers from Brian Dozier and Max Kepler to come back to tie the game in the sixth inning, but they couldn't weather another rough start from Jose Berrios in a 7-4 loss to the Angels on Thursday night at Angel Stadium. It snapped a five-game win streak for Minnesota.

Berrios has scuffled since the Puerto Rico series in mid-April and had trouble against a tough Angels lineup, allowing five runs on seven hits and a walk over 5 1/3 innings. Since posting a 1.63 ERA through his first four starts of the year, Berrios has struggled over his last four starts with an 8.84 ERA, 11 strikeouts, eight walks and six homers allowed in 18 1/3 innings.

"It was nice to come back -- we kept talking about trying to put together one big inning," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We didn't have much going on, until Dozier on the hanging breaking ball and the home run from Kepler. But Jose, I thought, was having a tough night. His breaking ball, he seemed afraid to use it after hanging it a couple times."

Berrios attributed his four-start slump to a lack of feel for his curveball, as he threw it 17 times on Thursday, but he didn't get a single swinging strike with it. He served up two homers, and both came on curves that hung over the plate, instead of having his signature sharp lateral break.

"It's not been the curveball I've been accustomed to throwing," Berrios said through an interpreter. "It just hasn't been working out recently. It's something I have to keep learning. When it's on, it's on, but over my last four starts, I haven't been able to throw it over the plate like I'm used to. I'm just going to keep working on it."

It was evident from the start that Berrios didn't have his best command, as he hit the first batter he faced and walked the second, but he got out of

the first unscathed. He wasn't as fortunate in the second, giving up a two-run shot to Ian Kinsler on a hanging curveball. He threw another hanging breaking ball to Justin Upton in the third resulting in a solo homer, before Albert Pujols and Shohei Ohtani connected on back-to-back doubles to give the Angels a 4-0 lead.

The Twins had only two hits through five innings, but broke out for a four-run sixth to tie the game. Dozier connected on a three-run homer off right-hander Garrett Richards, after an infield single from Ehire Adrianza and a hit-and-run single from Joe Mauer. The Angels went to left-hander Jose Alvarez to face Kepler, who shook off getting hit by a 92.4-mph fastball from Alvarez on his left hand on what was ruled a strike to homer on the next pitch to tie the game. It was the second time this season -- and the second time in the past week -- the Twins hit back-to-back homers.

But Berrios came back out for the sixth and gave up a one-out single from Andrelton Simmons that chased him. Reliever Ryan Pressly gave up a single to Kinsler and threw a wild pitch, setting up a go-ahead sacrifice fly from Kole Calhoun before Martin Maldonado ripped an RBI double to give the Angels a two-run lead. Ohtani stretched it to 7-4 with a solo shot off Trevor Hildenberger in the seventh.

"Berrios did a nice job of trying to hold it down after holding it to four, but we had him on a short leash at that point," Molitor said. "So we turned it over. Kinsler got the hit on the curveball, a wild pitch, Calhoun and then Maldonado turned on a slider over the middle. That's all it took."

SOUND SMART

The four-hit game was the third of Dozier's career, as he also had four hits against the White Sox twice, on May 3, 2015, and Aug. 30, 2017. He came into the game hitting .127 (8-for-63) over his previous 15 games.

HE SAID IT

"I'm confident. I know who I am as Jose Berrios. I work hard every day to try to help the team win. That's the game. You're going to have rough outings, rough two or three innings, but you have to keep moving forward and do your job." -- Berrios, who switched to speaking in English when asked about his confidence level

UP NEXT

Right-hander Lance Lynn (1-3, 7.28 ERA) will be looking to build off his best start of the season when he takes the mound against the Angels in the second game of the four-game set on Friday at 9:07 p.m. CT at Angel Stadium. Lynn picked up his first win with the Twins in his last outing, allowing two runs over six innings against the White Sox last Saturday. Lefty Tyler Skaggs (3-2, 3.08 ERA) starts for the Angels.

Dozier (4 hits) goes back-to-back with Kepler **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | May 10, 2018**

ANAHEIM -- After the offense was held in check through five innings, the Twins broke out with back-to-back homers from Brian Dozier and Max Kepler in the sixth in Thursday night's 7-4 loss to the Angels at Angel Stadium.

The Twins were limited to two hits through five scoreless frames against right-hander Garrett Richards, before Ehire Adrianza reached on an infield single to open the sixth and Joe Mauer smacked a hit-and-run single to left to put two runners on for Dozier.

Dozier didn't miss a 1-1 slider from Richards that caught too much of the plate, crushing it to left for a three-run blast. It left the bat at 103.5 mph and went a projected 407 feet, per Statcast™. It was the sixth homer of the year for Dozier, but his first that wasn't a solo shot. It was his first three-run homer since Sept. 29, 2017.

Dozier had a pair of singles, and he also doubled in the eighth for a four-hit game, matching his career high for the third time. He also had four hits against the White Sox twice, on May 3, 2015, and Aug. 30, 2017. He came into the game hitting .127 (8-for-63) over his previous 15 games.

"It was one of those nights," manager Paul Molitor said. "He's been working hard to get a feel, and he was rewarded. It's good to see him swinging the bat. He's a big part of our lineup when it's going well."

Dozier's homer, which cut the Twins' deficit to 4-3, chased Richards, and the Angels turned to lefty Jose Alvarez to face the left-handed-hitting Kepler. Kepler was hit on his left hand by a 92.4-mph fastball from Alvarez, but it was ruled a strike, while Kepler had his hand checked by head athletic trainer Tony Leo before staying in the game.

Kepler showed he was fine, lining a solo shot to right field to tie the game at 4. His fifth homer of the year came on a 2-2 fastball and left the bat at 107 mph, traveling a projected 392 feet.

It marked the second time the Twins hit back-to-back homers this season. Eduardo Escobar and Logan Morrison connected on consecutive homers against the White Sox last Friday.

Buxton returns from DL for opener in Anaheim
Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | May 10, 2018

ANAHEIM -- The Twins received a big boost Thursday, as center fielder Byron Buxton was activated from the 10-day disabled list before the opener of their four-game series against the Angels. Outfielder Ryan LaMarre, who hit .324 in 20 games, was optioned to Triple-A Rochester to make room for Buxton on the roster.

Buxton started in center field and batted ninth, going 0-for-2 with two strikeouts and a walk in a 7-4 loss.

The Twins reinstated Buxton, despite the fact he hasn't played since April 12 and he played in only one Minor League game while on rehab assignment on April 23, sustaining a hairline fracture to his big left toe on a foul ball off his foot. He was originally on the DL with migraines sustained during the Puerto Rico series.

"His impact on the game, over and above what he does with the bat, is significant, so we felt it was the right the thing to do," manager Paul Molitor said. "It's hard to say [how he'll do offensively]. You just hope he doesn't try to do too much."

Buxton, who won both the Rawlings Platinum Gold Glove Award and the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year Award last season, tracked pitches during bullpen sessions from Twins pitchers, and he has been hitting in the cages for more than a week. The biggest concern remains his long layoff, as Buxton said he felt fine while performing cuts while running in St. Louis early this week.

"I haven't had any at-bats, but I'm ready to go," Buxton said. "I feel confident, comfortable. Just me getting out there into the swing of things. My bat might be a little slow, but just defensively, I can play a huge part, and I'll look up to make up anything offensively."

Buxton, who hit .195/.233/.244 in 11 games before going on the DL, said he also spent time trying to look for tells from pitchers about what type of pitch they're going to throw while tracking pitches.

"It's nothing like being in the game, but just being able to see the pitchers and see spin should help me out tremendously," Buxton said. "It was more of me trying to pick [pitchers] apart. I used my DL time to try to find the different things guys do before they throw pitches. Like a guy might move his glove a certain way."

Javier out for season

Twins shortstop prospect Wander Javier will undergo season-ending surgery later this week to repair a torn labrum in his left non-throwing shoulder. Javier, the club's No. 5 prospect and the No. 97 overall prospect per MLB Pipeline, dealt with the shoulder injury last year, but it worsened this season.

Javier, 19, hit .299/.383/.471 in 41 games with Elizabethton in the Rookie League last year.

Sano joins Twins in Anaheim

Third baseman Miguel Sano, who has been on the DL with a left hamstring strain since May 1, will continue his rehab at Angel Stadium over the next four days, but he isn't expected to be activated from the DL this weekend. Sano ran, took grounders at third and hit on the field before Thursday's game, but he is still a few days away from being healthy enough to play without the fear of a setback. There remains a chance he could also go on a rehab assignment next week.

"We felt it would be good to keep track of his progress, instead of just monitoring the reports from afar," Molitor said. "And to have Sano around the team is a healthy thing, too. But we didn't bring him here because he's imminently close. But I thought he had a really good day today. He did more than I thought he could do."

Sano was encouraged by his recent progress, and he admitted it's been frustrating to be on the DL with a hamstring strain for a third straight year.

"I put in a lot of effort and worked hard to be able to join the team," Sano said through an interpreter. "Anything I worked on, I worked an extra hour and a half, or an extra hour, to get better. And now I'm here."

Twins Honorary Bat Girl announced

Major League Baseball announced the Honorary Bat Girls for each of the 30 clubs as part of the annual "Going To Bat Against Breast Cancer" initiative, and Jennifer McLaughlin of Wayzata, Minn., was selected as the Twins' representative.

McLaughlin works at the Hope Chest for Breast Cancer and was diagnosed with the disease on Dec. 26, 2017, changing her perspective from someone who works with breast-cancer survivors to becoming someone with breast cancer. Her cancer was detected with a 3D mammogram, and she encourages others to do the same, as it wouldn't have been detected that early with a regular mammogram. Each honoree's story of fighting breast cancer can be found at HonoraryBatGirl.com.

5 early unsung heroes in the AL Central **Jason Beck | MLB.com | May 10, 2018**

Considering the standings, it's safe to call the American League Central an unsung division. But whether it's the title-contending Indians, the up-and-coming Twins, or the rebuilding Tigers, Royals and White Sox, every team has an unsung hero -- someone who doesn't get enough credit for the impact he makes.

These are the players who can help teams overachieve in a season, either to take an extra step forward toward contention or to keep a team in the thick of the race. The Indians certainly know that, having watched Jose Ramirez emerge from a versatile infielder coming up to an AL MVP Award candidate last year. The Royals watched Ryan Madson blossom from a comeback story to a big bullpen piece during their World Series run of 2015. The Tigers built their run of division dominance with help from super-utility player Don Kelly, who became a cult figure in Detroit with his playoff heroics and ability to play everywhere.

This season, for a contender like Cleveland, it's a swing pitcher who finds his way into the rotation and deals like an ace. For Minnesota, it's an infielder who stepped into a void and capably filled it. For Kansas City, it's a Rule 5 Draft pick who has found his place in a restructured bullpen. For Chicago, it's an infielder who doesn't rank among the top prospects in the team's rebuild, but is outperforming everyone and enlivening the clubhouse. For Detroit, it's a versatile athlete who can play everywhere, but has filled a pressing need in the outfield.

Here's a closer look at the unsung heroes of the AL Central:

Twins INF Eduardo Escobar

Why you should know about him: Escobar quietly enjoyed a breakout season in 2017, hitting a career-high 21 homers while filling in capably for an injured Miguel Sano at third base down the stretch. But Escobar has taken it to a different level this year, as he's been the club's best hitter, batting .313/.367/.626 with seven homers and a league-leading 15 doubles in 29 games. He's also been versatile, playing both shortstop and third base this season.

Why you don't: Escobar was projected to be a backup this season behind Sano at third base and Jorge Polanco at shortstop. But Polanco received an 80-game suspension for the use of a performance-enhancing drug, and Sano has missed time with a hamstring injury. It's allowed Escobar to play in an everyday role, and he's taking advantage of the opportunity.

What they're saying: "He's kind of a streaky hitter. We know he knows how to hit. He's got tremendous barrel awareness, and I think he's one of those guys that when the confidence is riding high, good things happen. Hopefully it continues for a while. He's been a big part of what our offense seems to be getting on track." -- manager Paul Molitor

Jose Berrios struggles again as Twins' five-game winning streak ends with loss to Angels **La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018**

ANAHEIM, CALIF. – Jose Berrios wasn't sizzling, he was surviving.

He was stung a couple times Thursday night by throwing faulty curveballs over the plate while giving up four runs in his first three innings.

In the middle of his third trip through the Angels batting order, Twins manager Paul Molitor appeared from the dugout to remove Berrios with one on and one out in the sixth inning of a tie game. Berrios had thrown 78 pitches and certainly had more in the tank. But without his good curve and the Twins just having tied the score with a four-run sixth, Molitor went to the bullpen.

The move immediately backfired as Los Angeles promptly scored two runs to take a lead they would never relinquish. Shohei Ohtani added a solo homer in the seventh and the Angels pulled away to a 7-4 victory, halting the Twins' winning streak at five games.

"His breaking ball, I think he was afraid to use it after hanging it a couple of times," Molitor said, "and he was trying to get by with his fastball, primarily."

Ryan Pressly replaced Berrios and gave up a single to Ian Kinsler, threw a wild pitch, then gave up a sacrifice fly to Kole Calhoun. Martin Maldonado, the No. 9 hitter, followed with an RBI double to put the Angels ahead 6-4.

Twins starter Jose Berrios gave up four runs in the first three innings against the Angels, but managed to pitch into the sixth.

Trevor Hildenberger got the first two outs of the seventh before Ohtani blasted the first pitch out to center, bringing an announced crowd of 30,127 to its feet. The hitting/pitching phenom was 2-for-4 with a homer and two RBI.

"We've got to pitch him carefully, make him aware of the inside of the plate, but if you make mistakes, he's going to hit them," Molitor said of Ohtani.

It ruined everything the Twins did in the sixth to get back in the game.

Angels righthander Garrett Richards held the Twins to two hits over the first five innings and had retired 13 of 14 heading into the sixth. But the Twins got singles from Ehire Adrianza and Joe Mauer before Brian Dozier crushed a 1-1 pitch an estimated 407 feet to left for a three-run home run that cut the lead to 4-3.

Lefthander Jose Alvarez entered to face Max Kepler, who was batting .333 against lefties. Kepler took a 2-2 pitch off the bottom of his left hand while fouling a ball off, leading to a brief delay while he was looked at by the training staff.

Kepler remained in the game — and hit the next pitch into the seats in right to tie the score at 4-4.

Berrios was off the hook after putting the Twins in a 4-0 over hole the first five innings.

When Berrios' curve ball is at its overpowering best, it appears to break as much horizontally as it does vertically.

In April, his whiff percentage with the pitch was 20.6 percent, according to Brooks Baseball. On Thursday, he didn't get a single swing and miss with the pitch. That lead to problems.

Kinsler, hitting .191 before the game, hit a two-run homer on a hanging curve in the second to open the scoring.

It wasn't a fluke, as Berrios hung another curve to Justin Upton in the third that landed in the seats for his ninth home run and a 3-0 Angels lead. Albert Pujols followed with a double, then Berrios threw a changeup that didn't change much — until Ohtani smacked it to right-center for an RBI double, putting Los Angeles ahead 4-0.

"It's something I have to keep learning," Berrios said of his breaking ball. "When I have it on, it is on. My last four starts, I haven't been able to throw it over the plate like I'm used to. I'm going to keep working on it."

Postgame: Where is the world is Jose Berrios' curveball?

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018

In case you were wondering, Jose Berrios is not worried.

The righthander lasted only 5 1/3 innings on Thursday and has given up at least four earned runs in each of his past four outings. There's a search party embarking to find his curveball, and his ERA over his last four starts is 8.83.

It's not the Berrios the Twins saw at the start of the season, when he looked like one of the best young pitchers in the game.

"I know who I am," he said. "I'm Jose Berrios. I work every day to help the team win a lot of games."

It sure didn't happen on Thursday in the Twins' 7-4 loss to the Angels. Berrios put the Twins in a 4-0 hole before the offense woke up and tied the game in the sixth. But the Angels scored twice off of Ryan Pressly in the sixth and Shohei Ohtani homered off of Trevor Hildenberger in the seventh to put the game away.

Some on Twitter were grumbling about Twins manager Paul Molitor removing Berrios with out in the sixth — especially when Pressly came in and gave up the go-ahead runs. But Molitor saw what we all saw — Berrios did not have his nasty breaking ball and it was affecting how he worked the Angels hitters. So he was removed after 78 pitches thrown.

"Jose was having, I thought, a tough night," Molitor said. "We had him on a short leash, at that point. His breaking ball, I think he was afraid to use it after hanging it a couple of times, and he was trying to get by with his fastball, primarily."

He hung a curveball in Chicago during his previous outing too, giving up a 434-foot home run to White Sox slugger Jose Abreu. Berrios said he had a good curveball in the bullpen Thursday but admitted things can change once someone steps in the batter's box. It wasn't the curveball he usually throws and he has to figure out what he needs to do to get it back.

When he's on, the ball is moving right as well as up and down, and it gives hitters fits. Without it, he tried to throw more fastballs on Thursday and probably got a little predictable.

Berrios didn't get a single swing-and-miss with his his curveball on Thursday. In April — when he was rolling — his whiff percentage was 20.6 percent, according to Brooks Baseball.

"It's something I have to keep learning," he said. "When I have it on, it is on. My last four starts, I haven't been able to throw it over the plate like I'm used to. I'm going to keep working on it."

Twins catcher Mitch Garver said Berrios' curveball wasn't sharp, but felt the righthander was influenced by some ball-strike calls by home plate umpire Larry Vanover. Berrios was not getting the low strike (I remember a pitch down the middle at the knees to Mike Trout in the first inning that was called a ball). Berrios' issues might be mental as much as physical.

"The zone affected how he threw his pitches tonight," Garver said. "Because he didn't get those pitches in the first inning, he started aiming it. When he aims his curveball, it is not as affective as when he throws it like he can."

The offense didn't get going until the middle of the game, and the bullpen couldn't hold the score at 4-4. But the biggest issue from Thursday's game is where in the world is Jose's curveball.

Miguel Sano arrives in California, but unlikely to play

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018

ANAHEIM, CALIF. – Miguel Sano laid out his plan Thursday.

"I'm here to see Rudy and Geno and James and Perry," he said.

That is, in order, assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez, infield coach Gene Glynn, hitting coach James Rowson and strength and conditioning coordinator Perry Castellano. Sano rejoined the Twins on Thursday as he continues to recover from a strained left hamstring going back to April 27.

Sano spent the early afternoon getting in plenty of work in on the diamond, in the cage and in the outfield. He took his first grounders in over a week. He did conditioning drills in the outfield.

"[Thursday] was my second day running," Sano said. "No problems."

The Twins, however, appeared no closer to activating him from the disabled list. Sano said he has not been told if he will be sent on a minor league rehabilitation assignment or activated right off the DL.

"I told you guys at the beginning of the week that we would not see him here," manager Paul Molitor said. "After that comment, and hearing his progress, there was a couple trains of thought coming from Minneapolis. It would be good for us as a staff to keep an eye on his progress, we could monitor it instead of someone reporting to us.

"We can see it for ourselves. Plus Miguel being around the team is probably a helpful thing."

So there are no plans to activate him during the series against the Angels, and a decision will be made early next week on whether he will need a minor league rehabilitation stint.

Byron Buxton activated from disabled list by Twins

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018

ANAHEIM, CALIF. – Byron Buxton is batting only .186, but his return to the Twins lineup on Thursday night was met with open arms.

The speedy center fielder was activated from the 10-day disabled list after he recovered, enough, from a hairline fracture of his left big toe. The fracture might or might not be fully healed, but it is well enough for Buxton to tolerate some discomfort while he plays.

Buxton, who missed 21 games, said he began to feel better earlier in the week while working out in St. Louis. He went 0-for-2 with two strikeouts and a walk in the Twins' 7-4 loss to the Angels.

"Cutting wasn't too bad," Buxton said. "Nothing I could not tolerate. So that was my key that I was able to get back at it and try to help us as much as I can."

The Twins optioned outfielder Ryan LaMarre to Class AAA Rochester. LaMarre hit .324 in 20 games.

Max Kepler, who made the majority of the starts in center field while Buxton recovered, was back in right field against the Angels for the first time since April 12.

And, like that, the Twins' first-choice outfield is restored, a group that coined the phrase, "Nothing falls between us except raindrops."

Twins players gravitate toward Buxton, and they missed his presence in the lineup. Even when he's scuffling at the plate, his ability to routinely make stunning catches in the outfield and make an impact on the game with his speed has energized the club ever since he made his major league debut in 2015. It's an element many clubs don't have, and the Twins say they feel there's a different vibe when Buxton is not in the lineup.

"We decided to get him back up here was going to work," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It is not true for every injury or every player. But his impact on the game, over and above of what he might do with the bat, is pretty significant that we felt it was the right thing to do."

The Twins lost 11 of 12 games and fell seven games under .500 after Buxton went out but have since stabilized, having won five consecutive games heading into a four-game series against the Angels this week.

Buxton's DL stint began on April 17 when he came down with a migraine before a game against Cleveland in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and was scratched from the lineup. He missed the two games in Puerto Rico and the entire three-game series in St. Petersburg, Fla., that followed. But he began to feel better that weekend, and the Twins decided to send him to nearby Clearwater — where Class A Fort Myers happened to be playing — to get some at-bats.

It seemed like a reasonable decision at the time. The Twins could ensure that Buxton's symptoms were gone, and he could face live pitching. But the move backfired when Buxton fouled a ball off his foot, suffering the fracture.

Molitor said the decision to activate Buxton from the DL without a rehab stint this time had nothing to do with what happened in Clearwater.

"He was in a position after the migraines where he had a few days before he was eligible to come off the DL to take advantage and go ahead and get some at-bats," Molitor said.

The Twins, and Buxton, hoped he would be able to run on the toe in a few days, but he felt too much pain.

"It was frustrating," Buxton said, "but that's baseball."

Now nearly a month after playing in his last major league game, Buxton is back. And he might celebrate in an odd way when he gets to the outfield and sees the center-field wall.

"Just run into the wall," Buxton joked. "Break myself back in."

Eduardo Escobar, Max Kepler fuel Twins offense **Sid Hartman | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018**

When the Twins traded pitcher Francisco Liriano to the White Sox in 2012, it landed them one of the best utility players in franchise history in Eduardo Escobar.

Escobar went 0-for-4 at the plate in the Twins' 7-4 loss to the Angels in Anaheim, Calif., on Thursday night, but there is no doubting he has been vital to keeping the Twins hovering near .500 early in an up-and-down season.

He has been the Twins' best player early this season, not only because he leads the team in batting average (.303) and is tied with Eddie Rosario for the team lead in runs scored (23) and home runs (seven), but also because he first stepped in for suspended Jorge Polanco at shortstop and then moved over and replaced injured Miguel Sano at third base.

Escobar said he was excited to play every day at shortstop but also was ready to change positions as needed.

"Third base and second base are important, but shortstop is my favorite position," he said. "I played a lot last year at third base, but I've been ready every time I've gotten an opportunity to play short, third or second base. I'm ready because I'm working every day, hard."

After appearing in only 66 games during his first full season with the Twins, Escobar has often been in the lineup. From 2014 to 2017 he has averaged 124 games per season while hitting .257 and averaging 11 homers, 24 doubles, 51 RBI and 48 runs scored per year.

Last season was easily his best, with career highs in on-base plus slugging percentage (.758), homers (21), RBI (73) and runs (62). He credits his improvement to playing regularly.

“I’m working hard, you know, but the thing is when it comes to hitting really good, playing every day is the most important,” Escobar said. “You know, I waited for my opportunity every time. I’m getting the chance to play every day and play 100 percent.”

He added that playing in an infield with players such as Sano, second baseman Brian Dozier and first baseman Joe Mauer has helped his game.

“Dozier, Mauer, they are the guys I talk to the most,” Escobar said. “[Mauer] is the most patient hitter. But a lot of guys around here have helped me. It’s everybody helping together, that’s the most important quality. Mauer, Dozier, they help me a lot.

“Sano at third base, me or [Ehire] Adrianza at short right now, Dozier, Mauer. ... It’s really good in the infield when you have Mauer and Dozier, All-Star players, Sano, too. It’s good.”

Escobar won’t turn 30 until January, when he will become an unrestricted free agent after earning \$4.85 million this season.

“I want to stay all of my life here. I want to retire here,” he said.

One thing working in the Twins’ favor in keeping Escobar is the bond he has built working with manager Paul Molitor, who clearly values Escobar’s versatility.

“I love him. I love playing for Molitor,” Escobar said. “He gave me an opportunity. I told him every time I’d be ready.”

Kepler breakthrough

During the offseason, Twins outfielder Max Kepler said his main goal was to improve his hitting against lefthanders, which plummeted drastically in 2017, when he hit only .152 in 125 at-bats against lefties.

Kepler has done that and then some at the start of this season. Not only is he hitting .333 against lefties in 27 at-bats, but he’s actually hitting them better than righthanders (.256 in 90 at-bats). On Thursday night he hit his second homer of the season off a lefty, a solo shot off Jose Alvarez that briefly tied the score at 4-4 in the sixth inning.

Odds are that the lefthanded-hitting Kepler will eventually see those numbers level off or reverse, but his ability to handle lefties so well this year bodes well for him.

“I have hit them before,” Kepler said before the team left for its road trip. “It was just last year I had some mental issues, a mental block that got blown out of proportion. I have hit them all of my minor league career, so [I’m focusing on] just seeing the ball and getting my pitch.”

When asked how he got over the mental block, Kepler said working on his eyesight helped.

“There’s things I work on mechanically in the offseason,” he said. “I wouldn’t say necessarily just for lefthanded hitting, but I work on a lot of stuff. My vision, strengthening my mental game — which allows me to see the ball better and choose my pitches. That’s what works best for me — just seeing the ball the best I can, lefty or righty.”

On defense, Kepler had been spending more time in center field because of the toe injury to Byron Buxton. And while he said he enjoyed the challenge of moving to center, he was looking forward to the return of Buxton, which happened Thursday.

“Yeah, he’s my guy on this team,” Kepler said. “He’s the guy I like to play next to and watch him play.”

Top Twins prospect Wander Javier out for the season
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018

ANAHEIM, CALIF. – Another year, another top Twins prospect will miss valuable development time because of an injury.

Wander Javier, one the organization’s group of strong shortstop prospects, is scheduled to have season-ending surgery next week to repair a torn labrum in his non-throwing shoulder.

Noted surgeon Dr. James Andrews will perform the surgery on Thursday at his clinic in Florida, and Javier is expected to miss six to nine months.

Javier suffered the injury late last season and it flared up during spring training. The Twins took the conservative approach and tried rehabilitation. Javier was close to playing again when he suffered another setback, leading to the decision to have surgery.

The Twins signed Javier, 19, to a \$4 million signing bonus in 2015. He batted .308 in 2016 for the Twins Dominican Summer League team, then .299 for rookie league Elizabethton in 2017.

With last year's No. 1 overall pick, Royce Lewis, and Nick Gordon, the fifth overall pick in 2014, in the fold, the Twins felt good about their depth at short. It made it easier for them to trade another shortstop prospect, Jermaine Palacios, to Tampa Bay in exchange for Jake Odorizzi. Javier, in his young career, showed the ability to stick at short as well as offensive potential.

It also is the latest lengthy injury involving the top Twins prospect.

Outfielder Alex Kirilloff, their 2016 first round pick, missed all of 2017 because of Tommy John surgery. He's back this year and, on Wednesday, hit his fifth homer of the season for class A Cedar Rapids.

Lefthander Tyler Jay, their first round pick in 2015, pitched only 11⅓ innings last season because of shoulder problems. He's at Class AA Chattanooga, trying to reach the majors as a reliever.

Byron Buxton, the second overall pick in 2012, was limited to 31 games in 2014 because of a left wrist he sprained twice and a concussion he suffered when crashing into teammate Mike Kvasnicka while chasing a fly ball.

Miguel Sano, signed in 2009, missed the entire 2014 season because of Tommy John surgery.

Etc.

- Outfielder Zack Granite (right shoulder) has been activated from the DL and has rejoined Class AAA Rochester.
- Lefthander Adalberto Mejia (blister) on Saturday will make the first of two starts at extended spring training. If all goes well, he will return to Rochester.

Thursday's Twins-L.A. Angels game recap
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | May 11, 2018

IMPACT PLAYER: Shohei Ohtani, Angels

We'll see Sunday how he pitches. In the meantime, the hitting thing is going well for the Japanese standout. Ohtani doubled and homered, driving in two runs.

BY THE NUMBERS

3 Hits for Ian Kinsler, including a two-run homer off Jose Berrios. The Angels second baseman came in hitting .191.

4 Hits for Brian Dozier in four tries, and one was the home run that brought the Twins back to life in the sixth inning.

6 Ground ball double plays turned in the game, three for each team.

ON DECK

Lance Lynn, coming off his first victory in six starts with the Twins, gets a chance to improve on that 7.28 ERA against Angels lefthander Tyler Skaggs

Twins can't sustain rally, fall 7-4 to Shohei Ohtani and Los Angeles Angels
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 11, 2018

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Four-run rallies that forge ties on the road simply must be followed up with shutdown innings.

The Twins couldn't make that happen Thursday night at Angel Stadium, and the result was a 7-4 loss to the Los Angeles Angels and the end of their five-game winning streak.

Reliever Ryan Pressly entered with a glittering earned run average of 0.92, but he has now allowed four of seven inherited runners to score. The latest was Andrelton Simmons after a one-out single in the sixth chased Jose Berrios at just 78 pitches.

Ian Kinsler greeted Pressly with a single, both runners moved up on Pressly's team-high third wild pitch and Kole Calhoun brought home the go-ahead run with a sacrifice fly. Martin Maldonado added a run-scoring double to completely wrest away any momentum the Twins had forged on homers by Brian Dozier (career-high four hits) and Max Kepler in the top half of the inning.

"Jose was having a tough night; we had him on a short leash at that point," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Kinsler gets the hit on a curveball, we throw a wild pitch and Calhoun does his job and Maldonado hits a slider that looked like it stayed in the middle. That was about all it took."

Shohei Ohtani, the Japanese rookie sensation, added a majestic solo homer into the rock pile off Trevor Hildenberger in the seventh. That shot left Ohtani's bat at 108.7 mph, giving him the two hardest-hit balls of the night to that point.

Ohtani, who starts on the mound on Mother's Day, also ripped an RBI double in the third off Berrios at 111.4 mph.

"He obviously put a couple of nice swings on the baseball," Molitor said. "He got a changeup on the double that kind of stayed up there and he turned on it. Never saw Hildenberger before but he got a sinker that didn't sink and he was all over it."

Ohtani, now hitting .354 with a .400 on-base percentage and a .677 slugging percentage in 65 at-bats, also accounted for three of the five swing-and-miss strikes Berrios was able to muster. Just one of those came after the first two innings (42 pitches).

"We know he's dangerous," Molitor said. "You've got to pitch him carefully, you've got to make him aware of the inside part of the plate but obviously he's skilled offensively. If he gets pitches, he's going to hit them."

The Twins managed just two Dozier singles off Angels starter Garrett Richards across the first five innings, but Ehire Adrianza's infield hit to shortstop kick-started a game-tying rally in the sixth.

Joe Mauer's run-and-hit single to left set the table for Dozier, who connected for just the second time in his past 120 at-bats. It was the first three-run homer of the year for the Twins.

Max Kepler followed with a game-tying blast to right off left-hander Jose Alvarez; that came one pitch after taking a fastball off the knuckles of his left hand. Head athletic trainer Tony Leo went out to check on Kepler, who eventually stepped back into the box and improved to 10 for 28 (.357) with two homers off lefties.

Berrios (4-3) hung a pair of curveballs and saw his struggles expand to runs allowed in 12 of 16 innings since leaving Puerto Rico. Kinsler jumped on the first one for a two-run homer in the second, his 21st career homer against the Twins.

Justin Upton added a solo homer on another hanger in the third, and Albert Pujols and Ohtani added back-to-back doubles for a 4-0 lead. Berrios left with a 4.50 ERA.

"His breaking ball, I think he was afraid to use it after hanging it a couple times," Molitor said of Berrios. "He was trying to get by with his fastball primarily, so we turned it over. I'm sure when you've done it a couple times, it makes you a little tentative the next time you see those fingers go down."

Berrios has allowed just four homers to right-handed batters since the middle of last August. All four, however, have come over his past four starts, when Berrios has gone 1-3 with an 8.84 ERA.

In 18 1/3 innings, he has allowed 24 hits, six homers and eight walks against just 11 strikeouts. Gary Sanchez (Yankees) and Jose Abreu (White Sox) also took him deep from the right side.

In his prior two starts, including an emotional homecoming in Puerto Rico, Berrios had fanned 16 in 14 shutout innings, walking none and giving up just six hits (all singles).

It was the sixth time in 48 career outings that Berrios had allowed a homer and hit a batter in the same game. It was the first time, however, that he'd recorded two of each in the same outing.

Eduardo Escobar flied to left as the potential tying run against newly activated Keynan Middleton to end the eighth, and Jim Johnson closed it out without much drama for his first save of the year.

Surprise! Twins' Miguel Sano (rehabbing) joins Byron Buxton (activated) in Anaheim
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 10, 2018

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Byron Buxton is back.

As expected, the Twins reinstated their center fielder from the disabled list in time for Thursday's opener of a four-game series against the Los Angeles Angels. Buxton, who last played in a major league game on April 12, missed 21 games while recovering from migraines and a hairline fracture of his left big toe.

To make room on the 25-man roster for Buxton, outfielder Ryan LaMarre was optioned back to Triple-A Rochester.

Buxton was hitting .195 with a paltry .476 combined on-base/slugging percentage in 43 plate appearances when he landed on the DL, but the Twins opted to bring him back without an additional rehab assignment. Buxton fouled a ball off his foot on April 22 in Bradenton, Fla., while playing for Class A Fort Myers.

In his first weekend back, Buxton was set to face hard-throwing right-handers Garrett Richards (Thursday) and Shohei Ohtani (Sunday) as well as talented lefty Tyler Skaggs.

"Facing Richards is probably a little tough right out of the chute," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It's a little bit unpredictable. Hope he doesn't try to do too much, and we'll see how his at-bats look. He's been swinging plenty. It's just not major league pitching."

Head athletic trainer Tony Leo called Buxton on Wednesday morning to see how he was doing after running the bases for the first time on Tuesday. Buxton reported no issues.

"We decided that to get him back up here was going to work," Molitor said. "Obviously it's not true for every injury or every player. His impact on a game, over and above what he might do with the bat, is pretty significant. We felt that was the right thing to do."

The Twins were 7-4 when Buxton went down, then lost 12 of their first 14 games without him before rallying over the past week.

LaMarre, 29, hit .324 with a .395 OBP in 38 trips (eight starts). Signed to a minor-league deal this offseason, he produced a game-winning single in the 16th inning of a 2-1 win over the Cleveland Indians on April 18 in Puerto Rico.

SANO SIGHTING

Also on hand Thursday, somewhat surprisingly, was Twins third baseman Miguel Sano. Eligible to come off the 10-day disabled list on Tuesday, Sano had been rehabbing his strained left hamstring back in the Twin Cities during the early stages of this three-city road trip.

Sano took grounders for the first time and batting practice on the field at Angel Stadium during early work and seemed to be moving acceptably at his usual third-base spot. At the end of the session, he exchanged fist bumps with third-base coach Gene Glynn, who seemed pleased with Sano's showing, but Molitor said he didn't expect Sano to be activated this weekend.

"We didn't bring him out here because he was imminently close," Molitor said. "We'll see how the next couple of days go. Hamstrings make me a little nervous. We'll have to decide on what we feel he needs to do to prove that he's ready."

A rehab assignment is possible for Sano, who probably won't be brought back as a designated hitter with Logan Morrison emerging from an early-season funk.

"We have a DH right now," Molitor said. "I'd like to see him prepare to come back and be ready to play."

JAVIER OUT FOR YEAR

Shortstop Wander Javier, ranked the Twins' No. 2 prospect by Baseball America, will undergo season-ending surgery to repair a torn labrum in his left (non-throwing) shoulder. It's the same shoulder that kept him out for the bulk of spring training.

According to Twins farm director Jeremy Zoll, the 19-year-old Javier faces a recovery period of six to nine months, which should enable him to return for his age-20 season in 2019. Some players facing the same injury have needed 10 to 12 months to return, but the Twins are optimistic Javier will be at the front end of that timetable.

Signed at age 16 in July 2015 to a \$4 million bonus out of the Dominican Republic, Javier has been limited to 50 professional games due to hamstring (2016) and shoulder injuries.

A potential five-tool player, Javier slugged .471 with a .383 OBP last season in the rookie-level Appalachian League. Rated No. 97th overall by MLB Pipeline, he was slated to join a loaded low-A Cedar Rapids club that includes fellow shortstop Royce Lewis and 2016 first-round pick Alex Kirilloff had he stayed healthy.

BRIEFLY

Outfielder Zack Granite (non-throwing shoulder) and reliever Jake Reed (shoulder impingement syndrome) were activated from the DL at Triple-A Rochester.

The mystery of the Twins' post-Puerto Rico malaise has been solved. Their Bumpboxx was busted. **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 10, 2018**

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The mystery of the Twins' post-Puerto Rico malaise has been solved.

Their Bumpboxx was busted.

“Had to send one back and get a new one,” Twins designated hitter Logan Morrison said. “It took a week or so, but it works good now.”

As the Twins alighted in southern California this week for the first time since early last August, they did so with a Stockton, Calif.-based product that promotes itself as “the Biggest, Baddest and Loudest Bluetooth BoomBox GhettoBlaster on the Planet!”

Morrison bought the Freestyle V3, a 29-pound, 440-watt red-and-black behemoth, online for \$549 after seeing former Seattle Mariners teammate Taijuan Walker rave about his on an Instagram post. If it's working that well for the first-place Arizona Diamondbacks — the right-hander's new team entered Thursday with a 24-12 record, best in the National League — maybe it could do the same for the Twins.

“I was like, ‘Oh, that looks pretty good. We might be able to use that,’ ” Morrison said. “We use it for early (batting practice) and times when you don't have music. You go to certain places, and they don't play music in batting practice for you. I'm not exactly sure how (Walker) got hooked up with it, but it works.”

Even with its handy black shoulder strap, the Twins' Bumpboxx can be a beast to carry around.

“It's huge,” Morrison said. “They do have a bigger one. It's 800 watts. I didn't want to wish that on anybody to carry around. I had to carry it to the field (Tuesday), and it was pretty tough, even though I had a golf cart. You cross the body (with the strap) and kind of just mosey on in with it.”

The UpRock V1 model retails at \$895 and weighs in at 48 pounds with the same 300-foot Bluetooth range, so Morrison likely chose wisely. Even though he keeps the Bumpboxx at his locker on the road, where the Twins have reeled off five straight wins since its return, the veteran slugger isn't overly protective of it or the tunes which blast forth from its two 10-inch woofers.

“It's kind of open,” Morrison said. “Just whoever wants to (play DJ). It has a mike and everything with it, if you want that.”

Morrison's go-to karaoke number?

“Vanilla Ice, maybe?” he said almost apologetically.

Twins center fielder Byron Buxton, who coincidentally landed on the disabled list with migraines after having a reaction to loud music in San Juan, admired the Bumpboxx from a few lockers away and gave his endorsement.

“It's definitely loud,” he said. “You can hear it. It's one of those things you just take part in and you enjoy it. That's our little sound box now.”

Twins senior communications director Dustin Morse posted a Twitter photo of Morrison leaving the team charter after Tuesday's flight from St. Louis. The first-year Twins slugger had to shuffle sideways down the aisle because of the width of his Bumpboxx.

“We take it everywhere: take it on the bus, take it on the plane,” Buxton said. “Whoever wants music, you can do it. But if you get booted off, you can't do it anymore.”

How does that version of Twins Got Talent work?

“If we don’t like the song, it’s ‘Booooo!’ and you’re gone,” Buxton said.

It seems the only danger is getting too close to the Bumpboxx and suffering hearing loss. Could it blow out unsuspecting eardrums?

“Oh, it will,” Buxton said. “Trust me. That’s why we got the second-to-the-biggest, just so we could take it with us.”

According to its website, the 2016 startup promises you will “feel like a kid again with our nostalgic bass-pumping unit.” There’s a “redesigned ergonomic handlebar” and a rechargeable battery with up to 12 hours of play time.

Like Bumpboxx, Twins bullpen coach and hall of fame closer Eddie Guardado was born and raised in Stockton, so maybe the connection was inevitable. Best of all, Morrison said, the Bumpboxx is able to drown out the formidable model 41-year-old closer Fernando Rodney totes around.

“Rodney’s is pretty loud, so I had to get one louder,” Morrison said with a grin. “We kind of had to make a statement.”

It sure looks like ex-Twins pitcher Kyle Lohse has announced his retirement from baseball

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | May 10, 2018

Ex-Twins pitcher Kyle Lohse has had a heck of a run. And if his latest Instagram post is a legitimate indication, he’s be on to the next chapter of his life.

Lohse was trying to make a comeback this year, when he signed a minor league deal with the Kansas City Royals and was pitching for the Triple-A Omaha Storm Chasers. He reportedly was released recently, and then he posted this to his Instagram page:

Lohse, 39, spent 6 of his 16 MLB seasons with the Twins. If this is indeed the end of the road, he finishes his big league career with 147 wins and a 4.40 ERA in 418 starts. He also spent time with the Cardinals, Brewers, Reds, Rangers and Phillies.

Until this year, he was the answer to a Twins trivia question. He had been the most recent example of a pre-free agency player to go to arbitration with the Twins (2006), until Kyle Gibson and the Twins couldn’t agree on a salary this winter.

Byron Buxton is back from the DL in time for series with the Angels

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | May 10, 2018

Twins centerfielder Byron Buxton is back on the 25-man roster without a second rehab stint.

Buxton originally went on the 10-day DL for migraine symptoms, and then fouled a ball off his big toe while on a rehab assignment in Florida. That impact fractured his toe, which is what has kept him out of the lineup recently.

Buxton has tested his ability to run and do other baseball activities with a hairline fracture on his toe. And whether or not its fully healed, he’s now ready to return to the Twins’ lineup for the first time since April 10.

That’s good news for Minnesota ahead of a low-key important series against the Angels in Anaheim.

To make room for Buxton on the 25-man roster the Twins have optioned Ryan LaMarre to Triple-A Rochester.

It’s interesting that the Twins decided this time around to activate Buxton without a rehab assignment. On one hand, they could really use his glove and speed and arm in centerfield, assuming he’s playing at or close to full capacity. On the other hand, it’s been a month since he’s faced Major League pitching and even before the migraines and broken-toe detour he was hitting .195/.233/.244.

Shohei Ohtani homers, doubles in Angels’ win over Twins

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | May 11, 2018

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Shohei Ohtani hit his fifth homer and added an RBI double, and Ian Kinsler had a two-run homer among his three hits in the Los Angeles Angels’ seventh win in nine games, 7-4 over the Minnesota Twins on Thursday night.

Justin Upton also homered in his third straight game and Kole Calhoun drove in the tiebreaking run in the sixth inning as the Angels snapped Minnesota’s five-game winning streak.

Brian Dozier hit a three-run homer in the sixth inning before Max Kepler followed with a tying solo shot for the Twins, but the Angels reclaimed the lead moments later and eventually ended Minnesota’s longest streak of the season.

Ohtani's first homer of May went 413 feet to the fake rock pile beyond left-center field at the Big A in the seventh inning. The two-way rookie sensation also drove in Albert Pujols in the third for his first multi-RBI game since April 12.

Andrelton Simmons had three hits for the Angels, and Garrett Richards pitched five-hit ball into the sixth inning.

After Kinsler hit his first homer since April 12 in the second inning, Upton added a solo shot in the third, giving him four homers in five games. Pujols and Ohtani followed with back-to-back doubles for a 4-0 lead.

Richards yielded just two singles in the first five innings but abruptly gave back most of the Angels' lead with two singles followed by Dozier's homer in the sixth. Dozier's sixth homer of the season chased Richards, and Kepler promptly tied it with a solo homer off reliever Jose Alvarez (2-0).

Los Angeles answered with a rally that began with Simmons' single off Jose Berrios (3-4), who yielded seven hits and five runs.

Calhoun drove in the go-ahead run with a line-drive sacrifice fly to the wall that should help the veteran outfielder, who came to the plate mired in a 5-for-61 slump.

Martin Maldonado made it 6-4 with a long RBI double moments later.

Jim Johnson pitched the ninth for his first save.

SHOTIME RETURNS

Ohtani made his first start as a designated hitter since last Friday. He was limited to two at-bats in the Angels' previous four games because of his latest pitching start and two interleague games in Colorado. He'll pitch against touted Twins rookie Fernando Romero on Sunday.

BIG AL

Pujols was honored briefly in the first inning for getting his 3,000th hit last Friday in Seattle. His 3,005th career hit in the third inning gave him a seven-game hitting streak. He also flawlessly turned a key 3-6-3 double play at first base to end the seventh.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: CF Byron Buxton was reinstated from the 10-day disabled list, and he went 0 for 2 with a walk while batting ninth. Buxton was out with migraines and a subsequent broken toe after fouling a ball off his foot during a rehab assignment.

Angels: Reliever Keynan Middleton returned from the disabled list after missing 10 days with right elbow inflammation. He yielded two walks and a double while pitching a scoreless eighth. ... RHP Matt Shoemaker isn't making progress in his return from a forearm strain, manager Mike Scioscia said. His throwing program has been shut down. He made only one start this season before his latest injury problem.

UP NEXT

Twins: Lance Lynn (1-3, 7.28 ERA) is coming off his first victory in a rough season. He hasn't faced Los Angeles since July 2013, and he has never beaten an AL West team.

Angels: Tyler Skaggs (3-2, 3.08 ERA) makes his first career appearance against Minnesota. He has allowed more than two runs just once in seven starts this season.

Twins activate Buxton, option LaMarre to Triple-A **Staff Writer | Fox Sports North | May 10, 2018**

Byron Buxton is back.

The Minnesota Twins activated the speedy outfielder Thursday following a rehab assignment, reinstating Buxton from the 10-day disabled list.

Buxton is set to start Thursday night against the Los Angeles Angels.

The 24-year-old outfielder has been on the shelf since April 12, when he was placed on the 10-day disabled list while suffering from migraines. Buxton then fouled a ball off of his left foot during a rehab assignment on April 22.

The Twins optioned outfielder Ryan LaMarre to Triple-A, freeing up a space for Buxton on the 25-man roster. LaMarre is hitting .324/.395/.324 in 20 appearances for the Twins this season.

Twins activate speedy outfielder Byron Buxton off DL
Staff Writer | ESPN | May 10, 2018

Minnesota Twins center fielder Byron Buxton, who has been out since April 12 with a hairline fracture in his left big toe, was activated from the disabled list and will start Thursday night against the Los Angeles Angels.

Buxton is batting just .195, but his speed in the field and on the bases brought an element of excitement to the lineup.

"I think everyone feels a little void when he's not around," manager Paul Molitor said.

To open a spot on the roster for Buxton, the Twins optioned outfielder Ryan LaMarre to Triple-A Rochester. LaMarre hit .324 in 20 games.

Twins activate Byron Buxton from the disabled list
Bill Baer | NBC Sports | May 10, 2018

The Twins announced on Thursday that outfielder Byron Buxton has been activated from the 10-day disabled list. Outfielder Ryan LaMarre was optioned to Triple-A Rochester.

Buxton, 24, went on the disabled list in mid-April due to migraines. During a rehab assignment, he fouled a ball off his foot and suffered a hairline fracture on one of his left toes. Prior to the injuries, Buxton hit a disappointing .195/.233/.244 in 43 plate appearances.

Max Kepler moved over to center field while Buxton was absent while Robbie Grossman handled right field. Grossman will head to the bench and Kepler will move back to right field with Buxton back in the mix.

Royce Lewis, Twins' ace prospect, has vet to meet a challenge he can't conquer
Dan Hayes | The Athletic | May 11, 2018

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Calif. — Though the Twins have had Royce Lewis on an aggressive development path since he was drafted, his performance would suggest it's nothing he can't handle.

Ask anyone who has spent a considerable amount of time around the first overall pick of the 2017 draft and they'll tell you that Lewis would continue to excel no matter how big of a challenge the Twins throw his way.

Lewis doesn't turn 19 until June 5 and is one of the youngest players in the Midwest League. He performed upon arriving at Cedar Rapids in 2017 and has followed his strong debut with a spectacular secondary act by hitting a robust .356/.398/.414 with a home run and 12 RBIs in 93 plate appearances this season. The way Lewis has performed has made it clear the second promotion of his young pro career is right around the corner.

"He could be in Double A right now," said Lewis' high school coach, Brett Kay. "Nothing phases him. When he's playing against better competition, I feel like the best comes out in him. Wherever they're put him, I think he's going to keep proving to people he's capable of so much more."

Kay isn't merely shooting from the hip. Not only has he coached a number of Division I players and one major-leaguer (Austin Hedges) in 12 seasons as the head coach at Junipero Serra High School, Kay also played professionally himself. He's a former eighth-round pick of the New York Mets and spent three seasons in pro ball.

Having coached against Lewis in travel baseball before he arrived at JSerra — about 25 miles from Angel Stadium of Anaheim, where the Twins were playing a four-game series this weekend — Kay was impressed and ultimately made a controversial decision to start him as a freshman. Playing on a team full of Division I athletes and potential pros, Lewis hit .388.

"His sophomore year, it was game over," Kay said.

Lewis would win three Trinity League most valuable player awards during his prep career. He was also named the Los Angeles Times' player of the year in 2016.

But his stellar play wasn't only limited to the local scene. The first-ever player from Orange County to be drafted No. 1 overall out of high school, Lewis excelled on the national stage.

Following his junior season, Lewis homered in the 2016 Under Armour All-American Game at Wrigley Field and was named the most valuable player. He also went 4-for-4 in the 2016 Perfect Game USA at Petco Park in San Diego and was named MVP of that showcase. Lewis excelled in the Area Code Games, too.

University of California-Irvine assistant coach Ben Orloff kept a close eye on Lewis that summer. Lewis was committed to attend Irvine and was close to Orloff, who spent five seasons in the Houston Astros farm system. As much as he wanted Lewis to attend Irvine, Orloff knows his former recruit made the right choice.

“Nothing he does surprises me with how talented he is and with how much it matters to him to be really good,” Orloff said. “He wants to be really good. He really loves playing and he’s talented.

“He was the best on the field every time with all those other guys. I told him when he was 15 years old that he reminded me a lot of George Springer. He reminded me a lot of that type of talent level.”

The Twins saw the talent and the tremendous maturity that accompanies it and knew Lewis could handle an aggressive path.

They love each and every story uncovered about Lewis, the way he bought a Toyota Corolla after he received a \$6.725-million signing bonus, or how he asked Kay if he could be the godfather to his second son — “He wanted to be in our lives. Who says that?” Kay said.

Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey also appreciated a story relayed to him last season by minor-league infield instructor Sam Perlozzo. Perlozzo was working with Lewis and offering encouragement and positive reinforcement until Lewis interrupted.

“Sammy. I appreciate the good stuff. But tell me what I’m not doing right because I’ve got to get it better,” Falvey said.

Falvey said the combination of Lewis’ maturity and his understanding of the strike zone let the Twins know they could be aggressive with his development. Though he’s often the youngest player on the field, Falvey said Lewis often is the one displaying leadership traits.

“He never acted young,” Falvey said. “You get a sense from him that he’s all about wanting to grow and develop and get better. You usually only find guys who are at Double A and Triple A who are focused on that.”

“That’s what he’s been ever since we brought him in.”

And that has the Twins confident Lewis can handle each and every challenge in spite of his age.