



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Thursday July 5, 2018

- Three pitches separate Berrios from win in finale. MLB.com (Cohn) p.1
- Twins lose 3-2 to Brewers to end 1-8 road trip fiasco. Star Tribune (Neal) p.2
- When teams like Twins lack a good catcher, it's a sure sign of trouble. Star Tribune (Reusse) p.3
- Twins postgame: Slegers gets the start against Orioles. Star Tribune (Neal) p.4
- Twins' Jorge Polanco getting back in groove after return from suspension. Star Tribune (Neal) p.5
- Twins-Baltimore game preview. Star Tribune (Neal) p.6
- Wednesday's Twins-Milwaukee game recap. Star Tribune (Neal) p.7
- For Twins, a long, strange, losing road trip is about to end. Star Tribune (Neal) p.7
- Twins end scoring drought but still fall 3-2 to Milwaukee Brewers. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p.8
- Twins RHP Aaron Slegers in line to start Thursday against Orioles. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p.9
- Home runs sink Twins in 3-2 loss to Brewers. Fox Sports North (AP) p.10
- Byron Buxton opens up about injuries, his swing and his mindset after 'frustrating' start to the season. ESPN 1500 (Depue) p.11
- Wetmore: With long odds for the postseason, Twins shouldn't wait to let the sell-off begin. ESPN 1500 (Wetmore) p.13
- José Berríos' continuing progress is one of the few bright spots of the Twins' season. The Athletic (Berrios) p.13
- Willians Astudillo Is Here to Stop the Strikeouts. The Ringer (Lindbergh) p.15

Three pitches separate Berrios from win in finale

Stephen Cohn | MLB.com | July 4, 2018

MILWAUKEE -- Jose Berrios' most recent start -- six earned runs over 4 1/3 innings versus the Cubs last Friday -- was one of the worst of his young career. Yet the trying outing didn't discourage manager Paul Molitor, who said the 24-year-old is still trending upward and has "been able to respond and come back the next outing and get back on track."

Berrios made Molitor's words a reality, and he delivered a stellar outing Wednesday, but Minnesota's offense was relatively silent for the second straight game, as the Brewers completed the sweep of the Twins with a 3-2 win at Miller Park. The Twins finished their nine-game road trip 1-8, and they fell to 15-28 away from Target Field this season with the defeat.

"I think we're all frustrated," Molitor said. "You win one game, and you're on the road for 10 days, playing good teams. Better game today, as far as we got a really nice effort from Jose. Just frustrating."

Except for a trio of fireworks, Berrios was nearly unhittable -- even though he only tallied three strikeouts over seven frames. He surrendered all three runs via solo homers: Travis Shaw in the second, and Brad Miller and Nate Orf -- his first career hit -- in the seventh.

"As a pitcher, you never want to lose, and we had the chance to win the game, and they hit the two homers." Berrios said, in regards to the seventh-inning blasts. "But after that, I tried to keep it together and keep pushing."

Aside from the homers, the Brewers tallied just two singles off Berrios.

"I didn't have all my best stuff," Berrios said. "You could see that with the strikeouts. But now, I know how to pitch and get the hitter out. Fastballs down, and believe in my curveball and changeup."

The Twins' offense couldn't make up for its pitcher's three mistakes, running into Brewers starter Chase Anderson, who allowed one run or fewer for the fourth time in his last five starts. Minnesota stalled for the second straight day, unable to capitalize on runners on second with no outs in both the fourth and fifth innings.

"[Anderson] settled in pretty well, did a nice job of riding that fastball just above where we could handle it," Molitor said. "He kind of rode that

pitch pretty heavily."

Jorge Polanco tied the game at 1 with his first RBI of the season in the seventh inning, driving in Brian Dozier on a single.

Minnesota tried to mount a comeback against closer Corey Knebel in the ninth. Dozier took the righty deep to center with one out, but Keon Broxton robbed him of a home run. Broxton's catch was a game-saver, especially after Eduardo Escobar followed Dozier by blasting his 13th homer of the season. The Twins got the tying run on base with a Polanco single, but Max Kepler finished the game by flying out to left.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Dozier gets robbed: When Broxton robbed Dozier of a home run with one out in the ninth inning, it was an electric play by the Brewers' athletic center fielder. After Escobar took Knebel deep two pitches later, Broxton's catch became a game-saving grab -- one that the Twins just had to tip their cap to.

"You've just got to give credit to [Broxton]," Escobar said. "I thought it was a home run. [Dozier] had two really good hits to center field today, and the last one [was a homer that was robbed], but it was just a great play. We'll continue to fight until the last out of the game."

SOUND SMART

Joe Mauer tied Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett atop the Twins' all-time doubles list with his third-inning two-bagger Wednesday, the 414th of his career. He passed Puckett on Minnesota's all-time games played list Friday night with his 1,784th career game.

HE SAID IT

"I thought [Polanco] looked like the same guy, as far as his at-bats. Pretty much a quality at-bat every time up there. Crowd was on their feet there with two outs [in the seventh]. He battled, and took some tough pitches, and still got a hit. And he looked good at shortstop, too. I thought he settled in very nicely for his first series back." -- Molitor, on Polanco's first series of the season after serving an 80-game suspension

Twins recall Slegers

The Twins recalled right-hander Aaron Slegers from Triple-A Rochester after the game. To make room for Slegers, Minnesota optioned Gabriel Moya, who was recalled on Tuesday after Zack Littell pitched in Monday's series opener.

Slegers will start for the Twins in their series opener with the Orioles on Thursday. In 14 starts with Rochester, Slegers has gone 5-6 with a 3.55 ERA, while striking out 55 in 83 2/3 innings. Moya appeared in Tuesday's loss to the Brewers, hurling two scoreless innings with four strikeouts.

"Moya did a nice job," Molitor said. "He's on a good track. He's pitching well. We just need to keep him going down there."

UP NEXT

The Twins start an 11-game homestand to close the first half of the season against the Orioles on Thursday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Slegers (0-0, 3.38) will take the mound for his first start of the season. He allowed two runs over 5 1/3 innings in relief on May 30 versus the Royals. Right-hander Andrew Cashner (2-8, 4.48) starts for the Orioles in the opener of the four-game series.

Twins lose 3-2 to Brewers to end 1-8 road trip fiasco

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 5, 2018

MILWAUKEE – Jose Berrios walked slowly off the mound after the seventh inning Wednesday and kicked at the dirt near the foul line as catcher Mitch Garver came over and put his arm around the righthander.

The Twins had tied the score 1-1 in the top of the inning, but Berrios gave up a pair of solo home runs in the bottom half. Predictably, they ended up being crushing blows.

"I needed him to know that, listen man, you're good. We got you. You keep throwing like you are throwing, we are going to be fine," Garver said. "Today is not the end of the world. A little encouragement, because he did throw well."

Berrios isn't the only one in despair, as the Twins' season has fallen apart, with moments like Wednesday's — when they play well enough to barely lose — happening too frequently.

This time, the Twins lost 3-2 to the Brewers, who scored all of their runs on solo homers off Berrios. The Twins finished 1-8 on their road trip, losing their last six games. They also have dropped eight of their past nine and 11 of their past 13.

Travis Shaw led off the second inning by driving a 1-0 pitch off the second deck in right for his 15th homer of the season. Berrios proceeded to

pitch four scoreless innings and was rewarded in the seventh when Brian Dozier led off with a double, advanced to third on a groundout and scored on Jorge Polanco's bloop single to left.

But Brad Miller hit a 2-0 fastball out to right. Two batters later, Nate Orf got his first major league hit, a home run to left on a fat 2-2 breaking ball. And the Brewers led 3-1, leading to Berrios' dejected walk.

"I felt bad," said Berrios, who tied a career high in giving up three home runs. "As a pitcher, you never want to lose and we had the chance to win the game and they hit the two homers. But after that I tried to keep it together and keep pushing."

Dozier blasted a Corey Knebel pitch to center with one out in the ninth that was headed over the fence before a leaping Keon Broxton robbed him of a homer. Eduardo Escobar followed with a home run to right to make it 3-2. Then Polanco singled, but Max Kepler flied out to end the game. The Twins are now 4-16 in one run games.

"We're creating some of our own problems," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "At the same time, we're not catching a lot of breaks."

Win or lose, the Twins were heading home following a defining moment in their season. They won one game in Chicago against the White Sox and Cubs. They scored 25 runs in three games against the Cubs but lost them all. Then they were 3-for-21 with runners in scoring position while losing three games to the Brewers.

And it was during this 1-8 road trip that it was learned that the front office intends to be sellers before the July 31 trade deadline and prepare for 2019. A frustrated team is headed back to the Twin Cities looking to regroup.

"It's leadership, it's professionalism, it's veterans," Molitor said. "There's a lot of things we're going to need to lean on here. It always seems a little more dire when you're in the moment. You've got to find a way to dig yourself out.

"This game's about people that can rebound when you get entrenched into a little bit of a hole. We're going to have to try to find a way to respond. That's just how the game goes."

When teams like Twins lack a good catcher, it's a sure sign of trouble

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | July 5, 2018

The Chicago White Sox went to the World Series in 1959 for the first time in 40 years and lost to the Los Angeles Dodgers in six games. Owner Bill Veeck decided there was a need for more punch in the Sox lineup and made two major trades:

He brought back outfielder Minnie Minoso to Chicago by sending Norm Cash, Bubba Phillips and John Romano to Cleveland on Dec. 6, 1959. He acquired Roy Sievers from Washington for Don Mincher, Earl Battey and \$150,000 cash on April 4, 1960.

Romano and Battey were both 25-year-old catchers at the start of the 1960 season. Sherm Lollar, the longtime catcher with Chicago, was 35 and now without two backups entering the prime of their careers.

Dwight Eisenhower had his last Presidential Opener on April 18, 1960, with the new catcher, Battey, homering and driving in four runs, and Camilo Pascual striking out 15 in a Senators 10-1 victory over Boston. Romano took over as the No. 1 catcher in Cleveland that summer.

Romano and Battey, representing the Twins, were both American League All-Stars in 1962. Romano made two of those teams and Battey four with the Twins.

This was true in 1960: If you have a pair of catchers who can receive, can hit and are major league-ready, do not trade both of them.

And this was true 50 years later: If you have a young catcher who can receive, hit and is major league-ready, do not trade him, no matter how strong is a front office's faith in its No. 1 catcher.

July 29, 2010 ... a day that can reside in infamy as a starting point for this miserable decade of how the Twins baseball.

On that day, the Twins surrendered Wilson Ramos, about to turn 23, for what at best was a modest upgrade of Matt Capps over Jon Rauch as the closer.

The Twins were a game out of first in the AL Central when the trade was made, wound up moving to as much as 12 games in front of the division, and eased into another playoff date with New York.

Result: Yankees, three wins to none.

Admittedly, the Ramos trade has been beaten to death in the media and by disgruntled Twins followers. And the defenders always will point out that Ramos had half of his six seasons in Washington waylaid by significant injuries.

True enough, but there's also this theory:

This decade's plummet that started in 2011 with injuries to Joe Mauer and others would not have been so severe with Ramos as Joe's replacement. The Twins would have been in the wild-card game with Ramos as the catcher in 2015. The Twins would not have become the worst team in franchise history with Ramos as the catcher in 2016.

And the Twins would not be as deeply into the current mess if Ramos were the catcher.

Ramos is a free agent-to-be and presumably available. Someone asked recently if the Twins should trade for him.

Answer: It's too late — as in, too late to do anything to rescue this putrid season, and too late for Ramos, 31 next month and wearing the tear of a veteran catcher, to be considered a several-season fix for the huge catching hole that exists in the Twins organization.

Through Twins history, the good runs — starting with Battey in the 1960s, ending with A.J. Pierzynski and Mauer from 2001-10 — have included catchers who could receive and could hit. And the bad runs generally have had a void of such catchers.

The void rarely has been more obvious than right now:

Jason Castro was batting .143 when injured. Bobby Wilson, 35 and signed to be a fill-in at best, is getting much of the duty — even though he's 1-for-37 since his second at-bat on June 7.

Why is Wilson catching so much? Why not Mitch Garver?

Garver is not an adequate receiver. Nobody is expressing it, but it's obvious the pitchers want to throw to Wilson and not Garver.

Take my word on this: There is no group that makes more excuses than starting pitchers, and now they have K Zones to blame umpires and pitch-framing analysis to blame catchers to support their complaints.

The Twins don't have a catcher in the minors who can both hit and receive to big-league standards. They have Brian Navarreto, an outstanding receiver who can't hit, at Class AA. They have Ben Rortvedt, a 20-year-old just reaching high-A at Fort Myers, who could arrive in three, four years.

The Twins need a team to trade them a 25-year-old Earl Battey this offseason. Or even better, they need a team to trade them a 22-year-old Wilson Ramos at the end of this month.

I wouldn't hold my breath for either.

Twins postgame: Slegers gets the start against Orioles **La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 5, 2018**

Aaron Slegers was in the running for a start a few times this season, but the Twins have gone with others, like Fernando Romero and Adalberto Mejia.

Now, he's getting his chance.

Slegers has been named their starter for Thursday's series opener against the Orioles.

Slegers, 5-6 with a 3.54 ERA for Class AAA Rochester, was called up on May 30 and pitched in relief against Royals at Kauffman Stadium. He gave up two earned runs over 51/3 innings after coming in for Fernando Romero, who was knocked out in the second inning.

Since returning to Rochester, Slegers is 0-4 with a 4.08 ERA in five outings.

The Twins needed a starter for Thursday after Mejia lasted just four innings on Saturday against the Cubs in Chicago. And Mejia was a sub for Romero, who was optioned to Rochester on June 24.

The 6-foot-10 Slegers debuted last season, going 0-1 with a 6.46 ERA in four games (three starts). He went 15-4, 3.40 at Rochester last season, earning the Jim Rantz Award as the Twins minor league pitcher of the year.

To make room on the roster for Slegers, the Twins optioned lefthander Gabriel Moya to Rochester.

Twins' Jorge Polanco getting back in groove after return from suspension **La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2018**

MILWAUKEE – Jorge Polanco has shown a little rust since joining the Twins following his 80-game suspension.

A little.

“I felt the first two games I swung at a few bad pitches,” he said, “but I feel good. My timing is good.”

He went 2-for-3 with an RBI on Sunday against the Brewers to finish 3-for-11 in the series.

“Now that I’m here I’m not trying to put pressure on myself,” he said. “Just going out and doing my thing.”

Molitor had looked forward to having Polanco back in the lineup because he takes quality at-bats.

“I thought he looked like the same guy as far as his at-bats,” Molitor said.

Slegers called up to start

The Twins will make righthander Aaron Slegers their starter for Thursday’s series opener against the Orioles.

Slegers, 5-6 with a 3.54 ERA for Class AAA Rochester, was called up May 30 and pitched in relief against the Royals at Kauffman Stadium. He gave up two earned runs over 5½ innings after coming in for Fernando Romero, who was knocked out in the second inning. Slegers returned to Rochester after that outing and has gone 0-4 with a 4.08 ERA in five outings since then.

The Twins need a starter for Thursday after lefthander Adalberto Mejia lasted just four innings on Saturday against the Cubs in Chicago. And Mejia was a replacement for Romero, who was optioned to Rochester on June 24.

Slegers debuted last season, going 0-1 with a 6.46 ERA in four games (three starts). He went 15-4, 3.40 at Rochester last season, earning the Jim Rantz Award as the Twins minor league pitcher of the year.

To make room on the roster for Slegers, the Twins optioned lefthander Gabriel Moya to Rochester. Moya did not pitch his way into the demotion. He threw two scoreless innings on Saturday, striking out four.

“Moya did a nice job [Saturday],” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “He’s on a good track. He’s pitching well. We just need to keep him going down there.”

Next for Santana

Ervin Santana’s next step on his extended road to recovery will take place on Monday when he makes his second start for Class A Fort Myers. The plan is for Santana to throw around 60 pitches as he continues his comeback from finger surgery in February.

In his last start, on Saturday, Santana gave up one run over three innings on two hits with two strikeouts. He only touched 90 mph with his fastball, which has concerned the Twins.

This is the second time Santana has started building arm strength for a return to the clubs. The first one was aborted in late May when he continued to deal with discomfort in the finger. After having a calcium deposit removed from his right middle finger in February, he took time off before resuming activities.

Astudillo versatile

Williams Astudillo is primarily a catcher but has served the Twins in a variety of roles just a few games into his major league career, playing four different positions in four games.

He played left field in his debut Saturday against the Cubs but moved to center late when Max Kepler left the game because of heat-related illness. He started games at third and second against the Brewers.

So far, he hasn't caught. Will that ever happen?

"It's possible," Molitor said. "It's nice to have that protection while he's on the roster to make moves, especially in these interleague games. The reality was he hasn't been catching a ton down in Triple A recently."

That's true. Astudillo caught just once for Rochester in June. He was needed at third base most of the month and also played three games in left field.

Twins-Baltimore game preview

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2018

PREVIEW Twins vs. Baltimore

Four-game series at Target Field

Thursday, 7:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Aaron Slegers (0-0, 3.38) vs. RHP Andrew Cashner (2-8, 4.48)

Friday, 7:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Lance Lynn (5-7, 5.49) vs RHP Dylan Bundy (6-7, 3.75)

Saturday, 1:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Kyle Gibson (2-6, 3.58) vs RHP Kevin Gausman (4-6, 4.05)

Sunday, 1:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Jake Odorizzi (3-6, 4.57) vs RHP Alex Cobb (2-10, 6.53)

TWINS UPDATE

This is the start of an 11-game homestand that will take the Twins into the All-Star break. ... The teams split a four-game series at Target Field last season. ... The Twins took two of three from the Orioles in the season-opening series in Baltimore, handing losses to Cashner and Gausman. ... Odorizzi is 5-4 with a 4.42 ERA in 19 career games (18 starts) against the Orioles. Odorizzi is matched up with former Tampa Bay teammate Alex Cobb on Sunday. It was Cobb who showed Odorizzi how to throw his changeup. Cobb calls the pitch "The Thing."

ORIOLES UPDATE

Baltimore manager Buck Showalter has a big mess on his hands, and he's been trying to come up with ways to get players going. He sat down slugger Chris Davis for eight games because he wasn't slugging. And he recently benched All-Star second baseman Jonathan Schoop for a few games. Schoop, who hit 32 homers last season, only has eight this season — all solo shots. ... Reliever Darren O'Day, an All-Star in 2015, is out for the season after surgery on his left hamstring. Former Twin Danny Valencia starts at third for Baltimore.

Wednesday's Twins-Milwaukee game recap
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Chase Anderson, Milwaukee

Righthanded starter held the Twins to one run over 6 1/3 innings on three hits and one walk while striking out five.

BY THE NUMBERS

5 Hits for the Twins over the final two games of the series.

13 Games under .500 for the Twins, their worst position of the season.

20 Scoreless innings for the Twins until Jorge Polanco's RBI single in the seventh.

98 Plate appearances between home runs by Eduardo Escobar.

414 Doubles for Joe Mauer, tying Kirby Puckett for first on the Twins' career list.

9 Consecutive games in which the Brewers' Brad Miller has a hit, a career high.

For Twins, a long, strange, losing road trip is about to end
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2018

It's almost over.

The Twins will play Milwaukee this afternoon in a Fourth of July matchup, shower, change, pack up and head for the Twin Cities.

Win or lose, they will be licking their wounds. They will be 1-8 or 2-7 on a road trip that I touted as fun a week and a half ago but will be known going forward as the trip that defined their season.

With each loss, you could sense the frustration mounting. Even though they said the right things about the leadership in the clubhouse and their willingness to turn things around, their play on the field said something else.

The baserunning errors.

The inability to sustain offense.

The inability to shut down the other team when the offense did produce - how do you score 25 runs in three games against the Cubs and not win any of them?

They have now played themselves into trade rumors. I don't expect Eduardo Escobar, Lance Lynn or Zach Duke to survive the month in a Twins uniform. And maybe Brian Dozier and Kyle Gibson. The Brewers need a second baseman like they need air to breathe, so Escobar or Dozier could be on their radar.

And just because the Twins have no reasonable chance at the postseason, they have to find another way to be motivated. A player told me a long time ago that you're always playing for your career, because someone is always watching. Perhaps that's the way the Twins should approach things from here on out.

Looks like righthander Aaron Slegers will be called up to start on Thursday against Baltimore. The Twins should announce the roster move after the game.

Twins

Joe Mauer, 1B
Eddie Rosario, LF
Brian Dozier, 2B
Eduardo Escobar, 3B
Jorge Polanco, SS
Max Kepler, RF
Mitch Garver, C
Jake Cave, CF
Jose Berrios, RHP

Brewers

Eric Thames, RF
Christian Yelich, LF
Jesus Aguilar, 1B
Travis Shaw, 3B
Brad Miller, 2B
Manny Pina, C
Nate Orf, SS
Keon Broxton, CF
Chase Anderson, RHP

Twins end scoring drought but still fall 3-2 to Milwaukee Brewers

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 4, 2018

MILWAUKEE — Jorge Polanco's game-tying single in the seventh ended the Twins' scoreless streak at 20 mind-numbing innings, but the Independence Day euphoria didn't last much past "God Bless America."

Young right-hander Jose Berrios gave up a pair of solo homers in the bottom half of the inning as the Twins fell 3-2 to Milwaukee on Wednesday afternoon at Miller Park, completing a sweep at the hands of the first-place Brewers.

With their sixth straight loss and 11th in 13 tries, the Twins (35-48) fell a season-high 13 games under .500. They packed for the short trip home after a disastrous 1-8 family road trip with the knowledge that personnel subtractions could begin soon with an eye toward 2019.

How do the Twins possibly keep moving forward amid such disappointment?

"It's leadership, it's professionalism, it's veterans," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "There are a lot of things we're going to need to lean on here. It always seems a little more dire when you're in the moment. You've got to find a way to dig yourself out."

Eduardo Escobar's 13th homer made things interesting in the ninth after Keon Broxton leaped at the wall in center to rob Brian Dozier of a homer, but Corey Knebel held on for his 10th save in 12 tries.

"I think we're all frustrated," Molitor said. "We're creating some of our own problems. At the same time, we're not catching a lot of breaks. We're going to have to find a way to respond. That's just how the game goes."

The Twins fell to an astounding 4-16 in one-run games. Three of those losses have come in their past four games.

Of the four wins, two have required extra innings (13 last week at the Chicago White Sox and 16 over the Cleveland Indians in Puerto Rico), another saw them rally with a three-run ninth on May 11 at the Los Angeles Angels and the first saw them blown an 8-1 lead after four innings on April 11 at home against the Houston Astros.

Berrios tied a career worst with three homers allowed. In addition to Brad Miller's leadoff blast to center and journeyman minor leaguer Nate Orf's first career hit in the seventh, Berrios gave up a shot to Travis Shaw to start the second.

Berrios still managed to turn in his fourth quality start in his past five outings, the exception being his heat-ravaged 10-6 loss at Wrigley Field over the weekend. Game-time temperature at Miller Park was 87 degrees, and the roof was closed for a portion of the middle innings.

“I feel great,” Berrios said after making a concerted effort to drink more water during his outing. “Not 100 percent, but I pitched in Chicago in the same weather. Today I had it in my mind that I had to be out there and compete with the weather and the other things.”

Joe Mauer doubled to the left-center gap in the fourth inning to tie Kirby Puckett for the most doubles in Twins history (414).

The Twins went 6 for 68 (.088) during their scoring drought before Dozier opened the seventh with a double to left. Escobar moved him over with a groundout to first that was just the Twins’ second productive out in their last 25 innings.

Polanco, reinstated Monday after serving an 80-game steroid suspension, then greeted hard-throwing reliever Jeremy Jeffress with a soft liner into short left field. That snapped the Twins’ longest scoring drought since September 2015, but the Brewers’ quick response boosted their record to 43-1 when leading after seven innings.

The Twins were 2 for 20 with runners in scoring position in the series before Polanco’s hit. Polanco also singled in the ninth, walked and stole second in the fifth and flied out to the warning track in right in the second.

“I thought he settled in very nice for his first series back,” Molitor said. “I thought he looked like the same guy as far as his at-bats. Pretty much a quality at-bat every time up there, and he looked good at shortstop too.”

Twins RHP Aaron Slegers in line to start Thursday against Orioles

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 4, 2018

MILWAUKEE — Rookie right-hander Aaron Slegers will be recalled to start Thursday night at home for the Twins against the Baltimore Orioles.

In order to create room on the 25-man roster, rookie reliever Gabriel Moya was optioned back to Triple-A Rochester after Wednesday’s game. Slegers will work on normal rest as his next turn was set for Thursday at Triple-A Rochester.

Slegers, 25, has a 5.66 earned-run average in five career outings (three starts) in the majors. His only appearance this year came in long relief on May 30 at Kansas City, where he gave up two earned runs in 5 1/3 innings in relief of fellow rookie Fernando Romero.

Romero struck out eight in 5 2/3 scoreless innings on Tuesday for the Red Wings. He would have been eligible to return from his option on Thursday but has now allowed one earned run in 11 2/3 innings since being shipped out on June 24.

Moya had a brief stay after being recalled on Tuesday, tossing two perfect innings with four strikeouts that same night against the Brewers.

MAGILL PERHAPS?

Long reliever Matt Magill, who posted a 1.14 ERA through his first 14 outings before a recent downturn, threw 45 pitches Saturday in his last outing. He said he could probably be stretched out to 70 pitches in a spot start, but Molitor downplayed Magill as an option for Thursday.

“Not really a candidate for me,” he said. “I like what he’s doing. I think we have enough starters in the fold here to be able to maneuver through some of the roster things we’ve had to do. We’re going to sit down (Thursday) and map out from here to the break the best we can, see where we’re at with Ervin (Santana) and everything moving forward.”

Magill, 28, made six big-league starts for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2013 and has made another 135 starts in the minors over the past decade.

SHIFTING SANDS

Upon taking Zach Duke out of Monday’s 6-5 loss in the seventh inning, Molitor shared a quick word with the veteran left-hander. A quick word of appreciation, perhaps?

“I said something to him about the (Jesus Aguilar) base hit through the shift,” Molitor said. “He’s had a couple lately. Some of it’s instinct, some of it’s information. That one was pretty much the last place with Duke on the mound that you’d expect it to go before two strikes.”

Duke, who has a 1.42 ERA over his past 13 outings since May 31, seemed to appreciate the comment.

“Just wanted to let him know,” Molitor said. “I think pitchers are fine with (the shift) for the most part. If you let them know sometimes you’re going to get beat on it, they can respect that.”

BRIEFLY

Ervin Santana is set to throw four innings or 60 pitches Thursday for Class A Fort Myers in his second rehab start since taking a month off to rebuild arm strength and calm down his surgically repaired middle finger on his right hand.

Super utility man Taylor Motter (concussion) hit on the field for the first time since slamming into the outfield wall in Chicago on June 28. He’s on track to be activated as soon as Friday, the first day he’s eligible to come off the 7-day disabled list.

Molitor, who has met a tremendous array of famous folks, has never met champion eater Joey Chestnut, who defended his Nathan’s hot dog-eating title Wednesday. Asked if he’d like to meet Chestnut, Molitor said, “Not really.”

Rock band Def Leppard, playing Summerfest here on Wednesday night, was staying in the same hotel as the Twins this week. That’s the infamous Pfister Hotel, which is reputedly haunted.

Infielder Ehire Adrianza (left hamstring) is doing strength and conditioning work but has yet to resume baseball activity since landing on the DL Monday.

Home runs sink Twins in 3-2 loss to Brewers **Associated Press | Fox Sports North | July 4, 2018**

MILWAUKEE — Keon Broxton has made challenging plays look routine for the Milwaukee Brewers.

The center fielder’s latest gem may have been his best one yet.

Broxton helped preserve a lead in the ninth, rookie Nate Orf hit a solo homer in Milwaukee’s two-run seventh and the Brewers beat the sliding Minnesota Twins 3-2 on Wednesday.

Broxton was on deck when Orf went deep two batters after Brad Miller hit a solo shot off Jose Berrios (8-7) to lead off the bottom of the seventh. It was Orf’s first career hit after coming up empty in his first seven at-bats.

Just a couple weeks ago, Broxton and Orf were also teammates at Triple-A Colorado Springs.

“Yeah I think I’m more excited about Orf’s home run,” Broxton said with a smile.

The Miller Park crowd was just as deliriously happy with Broxton’s catch. He ran full speed back to the wall and jumped with an outstretched glove to rob Brian Dozier of a homer for the second out in the ninth.

Broxton, filling in for the injured Lorenzo Cain, also made a tough catch at the angled part of the wall in center in a 6-5 win over Minnesota on Friday. He made a diving grab in the ninth last week to preserve a win at Cincinnati.

But manager Craig Counsell said Broxton’s latest catch was “special ... that one, he was on the run and had to time everything absolutely perfectly.”

The play prevented a rocky ninth for Corey Knebel from getting any worse. Eduardo Escobar hit his 13th homer and Jorge Polanco singled with two out, but Max Kepler flied to left to end the game. Knebel picked up his 10th save.

The Twins closed out a 1-8 road trip with their sixth consecutive loss.

“Frustrating. Dozier hits that ball and they made a heck of a play on that ball and then (Escobar) goes deep,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

BIG HIT

Jesus Aguilar and Manny Pina lifted Orf up by his legs at the dugout steps to help the rookie answer a plea for a curtain call from a vocal crowd following his homer in the seventh.

“They picked me up and that’s when I noticed they wanted a curtain call,” Orf said. “Next thing I know, I’m in front of all the fans on their shoulders. It was awesome.”

ON THE MOUND

Jeremy Jeffress (6-1) picked up the win despite allowing Dozier to score from third on Jorge Polanco’s bloop single to left for a 1-all tie in the top of the seventh. The hit snapped a stretch of 20 1/3 scoreless innings for Minnesota against the Brewers.

Berrios allowed five hits, struck out three and walked two in seven innings. He got little support from Minnesota’s punchless offense, which managed just three hits in the first 6 1/3 innings against Chase Anderson.

“I feel mad. As a pitcher, I never want to lose,” Berrios said. “We had a chance to win the game and then they hit me for two homers. So I don’t like that.”

MAUER MILESTONE

Twins first baseman Joe Mauer got his 414th career double in the fourth inning, matching Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett for the franchise record.

QUOTABLE

“Yeah, that whole play, I think it was the best play I’ve ever made.” — Broxton on his ninth-inning catch.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Twins: Two-time All-Star RHP Ervin Santana (right middle finger surgery) is scheduled to make his next rehab appearance on Thursday at Class A Fort Myers. ... Molitor said utility player Taylor Motter (concussion symptoms) is on a “pretty good track” to return from the 7-day disabled list on Friday.

Brewers: OF Christian Yelich went 1 for 4 after being held out of the starting lineup for five games with lower back tightness. ... Counsell said it’s a “pretty good sign” that Cain (left groin) is running the bases. “We are close, we’re just not there yet,” the skipper said.

UP NEXT

Twins: No starter is listed for the opener of a four-game series on Thursday in Baltimore, though Molitor said he was leaning toward Aaron Slegers. The right-hander, who would have to be called up from Triple-A Rochester, has a no-decision in one start this year in the big leagues.

Brewers: RHP Jhoulys Chacin (6-3) opens a four-game series against the visiting Atlanta Braves. Chacin is 1-4 with a 3.94 ERA in six career starts against Atlanta.

Byron Buxton opens up about injuries, his swing and his mindset after ‘frustrating’ start to the season **Jake Depue | ESPN 1500 | July 4, 2018**

PAWTUCKET, R.I. —Prior to Tuesday’s game in Pawtucket, Byron Buxton was candid about his difficult start to the season.

After a breakout 2017 in which he played at an MVP level in the second half and won a Gold Glove and the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year award, Buxton’s had a star-crossed first three months of 2018. After suffering migraine headaches in Puerto Rico that put him on the DL in April, he fouled a ball off his foot in his first rehab game, breaking his big toe.

Never one to shy away from playing hurt, he tried to come back before the toe was healed, but struggled at the plate and wasn’t able to use the elite speed that makes him such a dangerous player defensively and on the base paths.

“It was [tough], not being able to cut and steal bases,” he said. “You see a good pitch to hit but you can’t put the right amount of pressure on [the foot] to swing at the ball the right way. That was the more frustrating part. It limited me from doing what I wanted to do.”

Buxton’s season was derailed before it ever really got going. He suffered the migraine and toe fracture just a handful of games into a season that already featured multiple postponements, games played in the snow, and an exhausting trip to Puerto Rico.

“Beginning of the year you obviously want to get things going, get off on the right foot, and this year never, never got off on the right foot,” he said. “It went from migraines, try to rehab, get the broken toe. I can’t really say it’s anybody’s fault, just freak accidents. Anybody could get migraines, anybody could break their toe fouling a ball off. It’s the craziest combination you could think of. Probably the most frustrating part is it’s just one toe, but it was the most important toe, you need it. You never know how much you need your big toe until you break it.”

There was some criticism of the Twins for putting Buxton on the DL for migraines. The thought was a headache, even a migraine, should clear up in a day or two. Anyone who’s had migraines knows that’s often not the case, and Buxton detailed just how debilitating they can be.

“I remember I got a migraine last year when we went to L.A.,” he said. “I was perfectly fine, played a Sunday afternoon game. Monday morning, I was like, ‘Wow,’ I didn’t even open my eyes and my head was hurting so bad. I was like, ‘Okay, maybe I just have a bad, bad headache.’ Next day I couldn’t move. It was one of those things where even if you flinch your body your head hurts. You try to stay as still as possible, you don’t want nothing to do with the world. That’s how I felt for about three days.”

When he suffered the migraine this year, he had to fly from Puerto Rico to Tampa with the team, which he described as a ‘nightmare.’ The migraines affect his mood, to the point that the normally mild-mannered Buxton said he was acting aggressively towards teammates.

“It was one of those things for me where I couldn’t think; I was very ill. Aggressive. But I didn’t know it. [People would say], ‘Hey Buck,’ and I’d say [sharply], ‘I’m fine.’ Once I got over it I was like, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’ They understand, but still, that’s not the way you would want to handle things.”

Buxton’s swing

Buxton’s tweaked his swing several times through his professional career. In 2016, he used a leg kick that produced great success in September. That month, he hit .287/.357/.653 with nine home runs and 17 extra base hits.

He began 2017 with the leg kick, but had trouble making consistent contact. In April and May of that season, he hit just .201/.288/.281 with 54 strikeouts in 139 at-bats. Working with hitting coach James Rowson, he abandoned the leg kick mid-season in place of a much shorter stride. The goal was to put the ball in play more and cut down on strikeouts, even if it meant losing some of the home run power he displayed the previous season.

The new mechanics worked. From June 1 through the end of the season, he hit .276/.326/.471, and significantly lowered his strikeout rate. That offensive performance, along with his elite defense, made him one of the league’s best players in the second half, and he finished 18 in the AL MVP voting and first on the team in bWAR (5.2).

Buxton again struggled to make contact early this season, both before and after the toe injury, though the latter stretch should be taken with a grain of salt given his comments about the injury’s impact on his lower half. Since moving to Triple-A, he’s tweaked his swing. Initially, he reintroduced the leg kick into his mechanics.

“Tried it,” he said of the leg kick. “Trial and error. Something to try out to put me on my backside a little bit more. I went back to my old swing. That’s what’s comfortable to me, that’s what I have a memory of. I know what I do wrong with that swing rather than trying to find a leg kick that I haven’t worked on for a little bit. It was frustrating because I see a fastball down the middle, but because I have a leg kick I’m not used to, I’m late. So I’m like, ‘Screw this,’ go back to my other swing. Now I’m more direct, which tells me I’m getting back on a level plane.”

The leg kick gives him more power but not as much contact. He said as he gets older it’s something he could bring back, but for now he’s looking to get back to making more regular contact and having a simpler approach.

“I want to be a leadoff hitter,” he said. “I have to be more consistent. I have a simple swing [now] that works for me and doesn’t make me think as much. That’s what you want to have, something that doesn’t allow you to overthink it.”

One of the most important components of Buxton’s journey: his self-belief. The frustrating start hasn’t taken away Buxton’s confidence. Last year’s success showed the type of player he’s capable of being in the big leagues, and with the pressure now off in Triple-A, he says he’s relaxed and able to work on getting back to that level.

“For the most part, I’m clear-headed, not thinking, comfortable, confident,” he said. “Once I work out a few kinks I’ll be back on track. I’m not going to put any more pressure on myself; don’t have any pressure. Stay confident. Stay loose. Keep having fun.”

Wetmore: With long odds for the postseason, Twins shouldn't wait to let the sell-off begin

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | July 4, 2018

With half a baseball season in the books, the postseason odds are long for the Minnesota Twins. FanGraphs has their odds of winning the American League Central at less than 1%. Baseball Prospectus is even less optimistic.

With very little hope of playing October baseball and a very real hope of being a good team again next year, the choice for the Twins should be obvious.

Let the sell-off begin.

The Twins have a number of players that ought to be interesting to contending teams. More on those pieces in a moment.

More pressingly, the Twins are on a timeline to trade players and add value to future clubs at Target Field. Waiting around to the deadline in this case might cost them.

I look at the MLB Wild Card standings and I see about 10 teams that should be automatic sellers. Then there are a few teams in that grey-area middle ground of contender/hopeful, mostly in the National League. And then there are the teams that are already great but could add a piece or two to make an October runs against some other great baseball teams.

I'm just as curious as the next person to see if this will be a buyer's market or a seller's market, but I have a guess. If this trade deadline will be, as one observer put it recently, "Manny Machado and a bunch of pitchers," what will be the price paid in prospects? Will a great team have to give up a lot of future value to get 3 months of a postseason rotation starter? A closer-caliber reliever? How about a non-Machado position player?

The Twins would do well for themselves to find out. The time to make those phone calls — and send those iMessages — is yesterday. Figure out how much a team like the Mariners will value a starting pitcher. What price would Cleveland put on a reliever? Do the Phillies value veteran-ness, or do the Dodgers feel they're in need of more pitching?

All of these questions would be good to answer because the Twins have some pieces they could move — if they decide the time is right. One word of caution to the crowd that wants to wait and see, in light of last year's surprising surge post-deadline: If you sit around until the trade deadline and there are a dozen other teams willing to supply short-term rentals to those contenders, the rental market could get flooded early. GM Thad Levine made that observation a week ago in an interview with MLB.com. The Twins are 2-9 since that column was published, helping to clear up any confusion over Minnesota's trade deadline stance.

It wouldn't be too surprising to see trades around Major League Baseball happen as early as this week or weekend. Some trades already have happened. And if it happens this week we could all cave to the temptation to work "fireworks" into a headline.

The Twins will have players that should interest other teams, even if they don't dig too deep into their future controlled players. Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar, Zach Duke and Lance Lynn are pending free agents. The Twins hold an option — and a buyout — on the contracts of Fernando Rodney and Logan Morrison (if he doesn't reach 600 plate appearances). Ryan Pressly is a strikeout reliever with electric stuff; he has another year of team control, which could tempt the Twins to holding onto him for another shot at it next year. Same story for Kyle Gibson and Jake Odorizzi: useful pitchers with another season of Twins team control. Joe Mauer has a full no-trade clause and is in the final year of his 8-year megacontract in Minnesota.

How many players will the Twins trade? That part remains a mystery. But one silver lining on a down season for the club is that the murky question about whether to buy or sell has been cleared up.

José Berríos' continuing progress is one of the few bright spots of the Twins' season

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | July 5, 2018

MILWAUKEE — José Berríos didn't have it Wednesday afternoon.

He felt better than he did Friday in Chicago, when he made his worst start of the season. But the Twins pitcher still didn't feel whole and you only had to look at the lower velocity, lack of swings and misses and all the hard contact he yielded to understand.

Yet unlike his first two seasons, Berríos is learning how to manage himself better and give the Twins a chance to win on days when he's off.

Given how often pitchers aren't at 100 percent throughout a season, it's a key step Berríos will have to continue to work at if he wants to ascend to the next level.

Though Berríos wasn't nearly at his best Wednesday, he provided the Twins with seven innings against the first-place Milwaukee Brewers and a chance to close out a horrid road trip with a victory. As has been par for the course throughout most of the season, the Twins missed the window. A lifeless offense didn't wake up until it was too late and Milwaukee held on for a 3-2 victory. The loss continued a downward spiral for the Twins, who went 1-8 on their family trip and are 13 games under .500.

"We're all frustrated," manager Paul Molitor said. "You win one game and you're on the road for (nine) days, playing good teams. Better game today as far as we got a really nice effort from José. ... It's just kind of the way it goes."

Molitor said early Wednesday that Berríos has shown signs of developing into a frontline pitcher. He's not yet ready to anoint him an ace, nor should he. But Berríos has provided the Twins with plenty of evidence that he's ready to make the leap.

The way Berríos maneuvered around hard contact in the middle innings without any damage is yet another indicator.

Brad Miller

Brad Miller's blast was one of three solo homers for the Brewers in Wednesday's win. (Credit: Jeff Hanisch/USA TODAY Sports) Five days after he was so nauseous at Wrigley Field that the Twins had the bullpen warming up in the second and third innings, Berríos said he was once again affected by the heat. His fastball never topped 93.6 mph, a low figure for a pitcher who two starts ago hit 96 mph. The right-hander induced six swings and misses in 97 pitches, his fourth-lowest total of the season.

But the Brewers did only limited damage despite tagging Berríos for a season high eight exit velocities of 100 mph or greater. Berríos entered the game with 62 exit velos of 100 mph or more all season, never yielding more than seven in any one game (Boston on June 19 and at the Angels on May 10).

Yet he surrendered the three runs all via solo homers. Travis Shaw hit a home run in the second inning to make it 1-0 and Brad Miller and Nate Orf went deep in the seventh to put Milwaukee ahead 3-1.

It was far from perfect, but the effort was good enough to win.

"I felt bad," Berríos said. "As a pitcher, you never want to lose and we had the chance to win the game and they hit the two homers. But after that I tried to keep it together and keep pushing."

"I didn't have all my best stuff. You could see that with the strikeouts. But now I know how to pitch and get the hitters out. Fastballs down and believe in my curveball and changeup."

The confidence Berríos has developed in himself makes all the difference. He's no longer the pitcher trying to blow it by every hitter. Instead, he's learned how to grind his way through trouble spots. Twins advance scout Jeremy Hefner thinks Berríos has also learned how to quickly turn the page when things go bad.

"(That's the difference between) a one-inning start or a two-inning start or a six-inning start," Hefner said. "Being able to go deep into games, because that's something he wants to do, he prides himself on, is working hard, going deep into games and keeping us in it. Being able to do those things helps build confidence in himself and starts to compound in the correct way."

The continued development of Berríos is one of the few positive takeaways from what has become a disastrous season for the Twins. Whereas Miguel Sanó and Byron Buxton haven't yet taken the next step forward and are both in the minor leagues, Berríos is making the climb.

"You look at the best guys in both leagues — Klubers, Scherzers — he's not there yet as far as résumé and track record," Molitor said. "We all like how he's trending."

Silent offense

After scoring 25 runs in three days at Wrigley Field, the Twins' bats were mostly quiet at Miller Park. Shortstop Jorge Polanco snapped a 20-inning scoreless streak with a one-out, opposite-field RBI single in the seventh inning off Brewers reliever Jeremy Jeffress. It was the team's first run scored since Robbie Grossman hit a fifth-inning grand slam in Monday's loss.

The Twins had hoped to get to Milwaukee starting pitcher Chase Anderson early. Anderson had a 7.31 ERA in the first inning this season. But Anderson limited the Twins a run and three hits in 6 1/3 innings.

Trailing 3-1 in the ninth, the Twins scored once off Brewers closer Corey Knebel on an Eduardo Escobar solo home run. Batting ahead of

Escobar, Brian Dozier also appeared to have hit a homer off Knebel only to have center fielder Keon Broxton rob him.

“It’s a great play,” Escobar said. “For sure I thought (Dozier’s) was a home run. He had two really good hits to centerfield today, and the last one he homered, but it was just a great play.”

A day after they were shut out, the Twins had seven total base runners. Despite limiting Milwaukee to five runs the past two days, the Twins came up empty.

Asked what his team must do to get through their most recent rough patch, Molitor said: “It’s leadership, it’s professionalism, it’s veterans. There’s a lot of things we’re going to need to lean on here. It always seems a little more dire when you’re in the moment. You’ve got to find a way to dig yourself out. This game’s about people that can rebound when you get entrenched into a little bit of a hole. We’re going to have to try to find a way to respond. That’s just how the game goes.”

Good weekend for Polanco

Polanco capped off his first series of the season with a strong all-around day. The shortstop, who returned Monday after an 80-game suspension for testing positive for PEDs, reached base three times on Wednesday. Polanco singled in a run in the seventh inning with an opposite-field bloop. He also kept the Twins alive in the ninth inning with a two-out single and drew a walk. Polanco also almost homered in his trip to the plate, flying out to deep right. And, he helped turn a nifty double play on a hard shot off the bat of Brad Miller in the fourth inning.

“I thought it was really good,” Molitor said. “I thought he looked like the same guy as far as his at-bats. Pretty much a quality at-bat every time up there. Getting the runner in from there. Crowd was on their feet there with two outs. He battled and took some tough pitches and still got a hit. And he looked good at shortstop too. I thought he settled in very nicely for his first series back.”

Willians Astudillo Is Here to Stop the Strikeouts **Ben Lindbergh | MLB.com | July 3, 2018**

For the past decade, the Minnesota Twins’ pitch-to-contact staff has been baseball’s Gondor. Besieged but standing strong, the last alliance of soft-tossers and junkballers descended from Brad Radke has resisted the sport’s ever-rising strikeout rate. The last time Twins pitchers’ collective strikeout rate ranked in the top half of teams was 2007, when Johan Santana and Joe Nathan were still Cy Young contenders. Since then, Minnesota’s leaguelike ranks have looked like this: 24, 24, 23, 30, 30, 30, 30, 30, 28, 29. Not by complete coincidence, the Twins won zero playoff games over that 10-season span, but they made crucial contributions to the making-contact cause.

Now, even that durable bulwark is crumbling. Through 81 games, Twins pitchers have struck out 22.9 percent of the hitters they’ve faced—above the 22.3 percent MLB baseline. (Blame José Berríos.) That leaguelike level is on track for a 13th consecutive spike, and why wouldn’t it be? There’s no one still standing in the strikeout’s way. Even Twins pitchers have thrown in the towel and surrendered to the fascist strikeout scourge. If we can’t turn to Twins pitchers to stem the strikeout tide, what hope do we have of bringing back the ball in play?

But don’t despair yet: Just when it looks like the batted ball is doomed, a new contact hero has arisen. And wonder of wonders, he’s a Minnesota Twin.

Willians “A Stud” Astudillo (nickname patent pending) was promoted from Triple-A Rochester on Friday and made his major league debut Saturday, replacing Eddie Rosario in left field when Rosario succumbed to heat exhaustion. Facing current Cubs and former Twins reliever Brian Duensing, who for seven seasons served with distinction on Minnesota’s anti-strikeout staff, Astudillo didn’t wait long, poking the first pitch he saw past Javier Báez at second for a single. One pitch, one swing, one ball put in play: There couldn’t have been a better introduction to the Astudillo experience.

Astudillo, who’ll turn 27 in October, is baseball’s rarest beast: In an era when walks, strikeouts, and pitches per plate appearance are all on the upswing (so to speak), Astudillo doesn’t walk, doesn’t whiff, and doesn’t wait long to do his business in the batter’s box. He’s as anti-true outcomes as professional players come.

Astudillo first demanded America’s attention in March, when he picked off a runner without looking toward first.

Although the play was a first for some seasoned observers, Astudillo had done it before; being unusual is sort of a habit for him. Every player is unique in one way or another, but Astudillo is singular in more ways than most. The scatter plot below shows the combined 2018 Triple-A and MLB walk and strikeout rates through Sunday of every hitter who’s made at least 200 plate appearances at either level or across both levels

combined. Astudillo has made only 199 plate appearances, but we'll include him anyway. You won't have to hunt hard to find him.

In his 188 Triple-A plate appearances and 11 MLB plate appearances so far this season, Astudillo has walked five times (2.5 percent) and struck out nine times (4.5 percent). Aside from the fact that he finally made his major league debut, that type of performance is nothing new for him: He's been doing this since he broke into pro ball with the Phillies organization in 2009. Over nine seasons, Astudillo has made 2,797 plate appearances and slowly, reluctantly accumulated 97 walks (3.5 percent) and 87 strikeouts (3.1 percent).

In the process of assembling that improbable career line, Astudillo has produced some of the most strikeout-averse single seasons on record. The Baseball Prospectus database includes minor league records from MLB Advanced Media dating back to 2005 and incorporating almost 42,000 individual player-seasons of at least 100 plate appearances (counting 100-PA stints at multiple levels in the same season as discrete entities). Ranked by the lowest strikeout rates relative to the league, five of the top 11 entries and eight of the top 30 belong to Astudillo alone.

Counting non-MLBAM sources, BP possesses minor league stats from more than 94,000 100-PA stints, beginning in 1978. With the caveat that the stats aren't complete or official for all seasons and leagues, the database doesn't contain any record of a minor league hitter at any level striking out less often in a stay of at least 100 PA than Astudillo did when he went down on strikes just twice in the 2011 Venezuelan Summer League. The only hitter who beat that rate relative to his league was a Bronx-born catcher with the extremely Bronx-sounding name of Sal Agostinelli, who struck out once in 108 plate appearances in the 1983 Appalachian League and later topped out at Triple-A.

As one could infer from Astudillo's walk and K rates, the man has no time to take pitches. On every upper rung of the minor-league ladder, Astudillo has frequently finished with the lowest (or nearly the lowest) rate of pitches seen per plate appearance and the highest (or nearly the highest) swing rate. His swing rate through his first 11 MLB plate appearances—58.8 percent—probably won't budge far from there. The only qualified hitter this season with a higher swing rate than that is Javier Báez, who has one of the game's lowest contact rates. Astudillo, meanwhile, has swung at 20 big-league pitches and has whiffed only three times.

According to FanGraphs' rest-of-season projections, Astudillo is destined to be the big leagues' least-frequent walker and least-frequent strikeout victim. The FanGraphs forecast expects him to walk, strike out, or homer in only 12.5 percent of his plate appearances, easily the lowest three true outcomes rate of any hitter projected to play as many games.

Astudillo's game has made him a cult figure for years among seamheads who mine the minors for the strange-looking stat lines that lurk deep within. He's already internet-famous for a player who never appeared on a preseason prospect ranking, aside from his no. 28 placement on Baseball America's 2015 Phillies list, in a year when BA advised "You might want to avert your eyes" in reference to the Phillies' 22nd-ranked system. Averting one's eyes from Astudillo would be a big mistake: It would mean missing his memorable mug, which strongly resembles a blend of Bartolo Colon and Edward G. Robinson. Twins reporter Brandon Warne, who was on hand for Astudillo's debut, confirms that the rookie's listed dimensions of 5-foot-9 and 225 pounds appear to be accurate. "It's a really weird body shape for a pro athlete," Warne says. For obvious reasons, "absolute unit" was the most frequent response to this tweet.

@BenLindbergh

One pitch, one swing, one single. Welcome, my son.

Although I bestowed "son" status on Astudillo and took him in my January minor league free-agent draft—a normal, not at all deranged activity I engage in every year—I can't claim sole custody. It takes a village to appreciate him properly. According to Venezuelan baseball writer and analyst Octavio Hernández, Astudillo is better known on Baseball Twitter than he is in Venezuela, where he plays in the winter for a franchise with a small fan base and hasn't excelled until recently. But the pitchers who've faced him in his native country have learned to loathe the experience. "I know for a fact that people in the game know him as the biggest pain in the ass [at] the plate," Hernández says.

Until this season, Astudillo was closer to a curiosity than a prospect. Although he consistently generated above-average slash lines, he was prone to double plays and showed little power; in 2016, BA relayed a scout's jeering joke that Astudillo "could end up as a .280/.280/.280 big leaguer with a .280 BABIP." After his time with the Phillies, he was signed by both the Braves and the Diamondbacks to minor league contracts, but the call didn't come until Twins starter Félix Jorge pitched his way off the 40-man and utility man Taylor Motter—who hadn't made it to Minnesota until mid-June himself—suffered a concussion and hit the seven-day DL. With first-string catcher Jason Castro already out for the year, Astudillo's backstop experience and ability to play multiple positions earned him a major league look.

Although it took a confluence of injuries for an opportunity to present itself, Astudillo has also seemingly become a better player this year, adopting a more power-oriented approach and setting a single-season high of seven homers without compromising his contact skills. "At a certain point, we encouraged him to look to do more damage early in the count, and not just put the ball in play," says Twins assistant director of player

development (and former major leaguer) Alex Hassan. “His strikeout rate even after that nudge did not go up at all, which was somewhat surprising.”

Few aspects of Astudillo’s career are only somewhat surprising. Despite a physique that doesn’t scream “Put me at a premium position,” Astudillo has played every position at some point as a pro, and defensive stats paint him as a competent catcher. He even made one appearance as a pitcher in the Pacific Coast League last year, throwing two scoreless innings—naturally, without issuing a walk or recording a K. In his first weekend in the majors, Astudillo caught two flies in left and made a beauty of a barehanded play at third.

Perhaps most impressively, he also stood in center field for an inning, flanked by two players perhaps even worse suited for their respective positions.

Astudillo didn’t field a ball in center, but just by being there, he made history. I could quiz you on how many major leaguers listed at 5-foot-9 or shorter and heavier than 215 pounds have ever played center field, but I’ll save us all some time. It’s one: Willians Astudillo. Astudillo’s body belies some speed—he’s stolen six bases this season, another new stateside high in a single season—but it seems safe to say that no team prior to the 2018 Twins has ever fielded two players with a wider disparity in defensive ability and strikeout rate at the same position in the same season than Astudillo and first-string center fielder Byron Buxton, who’s currently rehabbing in Triple-A.

Astudillo has made an impression on offense as well, smacking three more singles and—also more than somewhat surprising—a triple, his third three-bagger in a domestic league. He’s now 5-for-11 in the big leagues, without a walk or K.

Commissioner Rob Manfred has yet to concoct a time-saving, strikeout-suppressing measure more effective than promoting Astudillo, who’s single-handedly halting the K rate one at-bat at a time. Promoting more Astudillos may be baseball’s best hope. Good news on that front: Astudillo’s brother, Wilfred, and cousin Wilfran both play pro ball, too, although Wilfred sometimes strikes out.

If Willians were just any pace-accelerating, action-enabling anachronism ported to 2018 through a wormhole back to the deadball days, dayenu. That he also plays every position with a scout-confusing frame seems too good to be true. Astudillo is far from a lock to remain in Minnesota, but he already has a stranglehold on our hearts.

“Coaches try to change my approach,” Astudillo said upon making the majors. “It’s just who I am. I’m a free swinger.” Those coaches can stuff it. As Hernández says, “He is an anarchist of the present system: an anti-true outcome, K-[defying], chubby batter that consistently generates above-average offensive production. What’s not to love?”