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Sunday July 8, 2018**

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Twins win 3rd straight on Wilson's go-ahead hit

Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | July 7, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins have relied on Bobby Wilson for much of this season to provide a steady presence behind the dish and work with their young pitchers. On Saturday, the 35-year-old Wilson provided some much-needed support with his bat, too.

Wilson smashed a go-ahead two-run double in the sixth inning to push the Twins to a 5-4 win over the Orioles at Target Field. He finished the day 2-for-3 with three RBIs while registering his first multihit game since Sept. 21, 2016, for the Rays.

"Of course it feels good," Wilson said. "It feels good to contribute offensively. It's nice to do something offensively. I feel like I've been doing everything I can defensively. It's time to start turning that corner and start contributing offensively as well."

The win was Minnesota's third straight. Prior to Saturday, the Twins had not strung together three consecutive wins since they topped the White Sox on June 5.

Twins starter Kyle Gibson's afternoon didn't begin in ideal fashion, but the Twins righty bounced back to deliver seven strong innings. Gibson struck out nine batters and generated 23 swinging strikes, including 11 with his slider and seven with his curveball.

"I feel like the curveball just changed a lot of things for me," Gibson said. "We tried to make a point of using it today because these guys are really good on fastball-slider combinations. When I'm able to throw that curveball for strikes and start it in similar locations as a slider, then they complement each other pretty well."

But before Gibson settled in, Baltimore jumped on him for three runs in the first inning. He nearly escaped the frame trailing just 1-0, but surrendered a two-out homer to Chris Davis that put the Twins in an early hole.

"Unfortunately, I made one tough pitch there in the first inning to Davis and threw him the 1-1 changeup he was looking for," Gibson said. "Came out a little bit hot and just not quite the location I wanted it in. But man, the offense did a great job."

Minnesota's bats came to life in the fifth when Max Kepler blasted a solo homer -- his second long ball in as many days -- to put the Twins on the board. Robbie Grossman followed with a double, and then Jake Cave and Wilson, Minnesota's No. 8 and 9 hitters, each singled.

With the bases loaded, Baltimore starter Kevin Gausman bounced a splitter that skipped to the backstop and allowed Cave to score from third, cutting Baltimore's lead to 3-2.

The Twins loaded the bases with no outs in the sixth, but nearly squandered the scoring chance when Grossman and Cave each grounded into a fielder's choice early in the count. Then, Wilson stepped to the plate and delivered his big hit to left field to clear the bases. Cave came sprinting home from first on the play with hopes of tacking on Minnesota's third run of the inning, but he was nabbed at home on a quick relay throw by Manny Machado.

Wilson is now hitting .134 in 82 at-bats on the season. When he steps to the plate with a runner on second or third, though, he has been a noticeably better hitter. He is batting .227 on the year with runners in scoring position.

"We don't expect a ton, and we know that," Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. "I think what you want to do with a guy like Bobby is situationally, hopefully he can execute, whether it's when I ask him to hit and run ... He's done a pretty good job of getting guys in from third, something our team has kind of struggled with."

The duo of Trevor Hildenberger and Fernando Rodney came on to throw an inning apiece in relief of Gibson to close out the game. Rodney surrendered an RBI double to Jace Peterson that cut the Baltimore deficit to one run, but then got Tim Beckham to ground out to short and end the game. Rodney picked up his 19th save of the season.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

In the top of the third, Adam Jones ripped a 1-2 slider from Gibson to deep center field and appeared to be headed for extra bases. But Cave tracked back and made a full-extension diving catch to take the hit away from Jones and record the second out of the inning.

In the second inning, Orioles left fielder Peterson dragged a bunt down the third-base line and tried to leg it out for a base hit. But Gibson bounced off the mound and made an athletic effort to scoop up the ball and throw out Peterson to end the inning.

UP NEXT

The Twins close out their four-game series with the Orioles with a 1:10 p.m. CT finale on Sunday at Target Field. Jake Odorizzi (3-6, 4.57 ERA) gets the nod and will try to bounce back from the loss he took last time out in Milwaukee. Odorizzi faces off against former teammate Alex Cobb, who is 2-10 this season with a 6.53 ERA.

Bobby Wilson, Max Kepler lead Twins to third win in a row

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

Last weekend, Bobby Wilson was struggling to make it around the bases in 96-degree heat in Chicago. The veteran Twins catcher left a June 30 game against the Cubs because of heat-related illness and needed an IV to help him recover.

Wilson also rolled into Saturday in a 1-for-34 slide that pulled his batting average down to .114.

"I can't deny it," he said. "I can't say everything has been unicorns and rainbows, but it's been a struggle."

For one game, it wasn't. Wilson came through with two hits — his first multihit game since 2016 — and drove in three runs as the Twins came back from three runs down to beat Baltimore 5-4 at Target Field, their third consecutive victory over the worst team in the major leagues.

It just might have been his day. Logan Morrison alerted him to a fan in the stands holding a picture of Wilson the volleyball from the Tom Hanks movie "Cast Away."

"LoMo pointed it out to me right before my third at-bat," Wilson said. "I was kind of trying to peek up there to see it, but somebody showed it to me, and it was kind of cool."

When that happens, it figured Wilson — the 35-year-old recalled from Class AAA Rochester in May when Jason Castro was lost for the season because of a knee injury — had to come through. Wilson's first hit Saturday helped tie the score, and his second gave the Twins the lead.

Max Kepler led off the bottom of the fifth inning with a homer to center, and singles by Robbie Grossman and Jake Cave put runners on the corners for Wilson. Orioles righthander Kevin Gausman threw a full-count fastball, and Wilson was able to poke it through the right side of the

infield for an RBI single that made it 3-2. Cave scored on a wild pitch to tie the score.

"I think I've hit my last 10 balls off the label at second base," said Wilson, whose single ended a run of 20 consecutive hitless at-bats. "To get one through there finally felt nice. To get the barrel on the ball was big for me, in that kind of situation."

The Twins kept pushing, loading the bases with no outs in the sixth inning against Baltimore reliever Miguel Castro. Both Grossman and Cave grounded into force plays at home, and Wilson was their last chance.

Wilson got ahead in the count 3-1, then got a fastball over the middle of the plate. Wilson slapped a double down the left field line. Two runs scored — Cave was thrown out at the plate to end the inning — to give the Twins a 5-3 lead.

"You just know he's going to battle 'til the end there," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It's not always pretty, but he pulled through today. I'm not sure what his numbers are; they're not particularly good coming into today, but he got a couple of hits today and had a nice day."

Wilson's work with the pitching staff has never been questioned, and he helped guide Gibson through seven innings in all after the righthander gave up three runs in the first, two on a two-out home run by Chris Davis on a changeup that was up some and away from the plate.

Wilson and Gibson decided to stick with the original game plan and try to execute better. The result was Gibson (3-6) pitching at least seven innings for the fourth time in the past month.

"One thing Bobby does really well is, no matter what he's hitting or how he's doing at the plate, he does a great job behind the dish," Gibson said. "He did a great job calling a lot of good pitches and the right offspeed at the right time. He always puts together pretty good at-bats for the most part, and that was a couple of really big hits today."

"That double there at the end, almost scoring three, it's exactly what our team needed. A timely hit to give us the lead and give the bullpen a chance to be able to lock it down."

Twins' Max Kepler showing a return to form following long slump

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

Max Kepler is using this homestand to turn things around. The Twins right fielder returned to Target Field batting .165 with only three extra-base hits over his previous 24 games.

"He needs a pat on the back probably, just reassurance," manager Paul Molitor said. "Sometimes he gets into — when it is not going well — he gets a little more cautious. Tries to play it a little safer, whether it is on the bases or defensively."

"We talked collectively and with Max at times, just trust in your ability, and if you make a good decision and it doesn't work out, no one is going to be critical of that. I'd rather see the guy make the aggressive play rather than the tentative play."

Hitting coach James Rowson added that Kepler has been overthinking things of late and should just relax and look for a good pitch to drive.

"I think that it is important in those moments, to go back and think about what makes you good," Rowson said. "Try to free up your mind rather than add things that can clog things up."

Consider Kepler unclogged. He had two hits Thursday against Baltimore and a two-run homer Friday. On Saturday, he hammered a 2-0 fastball clocked at 96 miles per hour from Kevin Gausman for his 10th homer of the season, beginning the Twins' comeback in their 5-4 victory.

It was the fifth time Kepler has homered in back-to-back games. Molitor said it was a good sign that the 25-year-old drove the ball to just left of center field.

"After a little bit of a tough trip, he's had some pretty good games here where he's contributed," Molitor said. "It's just that confidence thing. He's still a relatively young kid; we'll try to keep steering him forward. There's going to be some downturns, and hopefully some upturns as well. It's been a nice start to the series for him."

Gibson gets No. 3

Kyle Gibson says he is not hung up on his victory total. But he began the day with a 3.58 ERA and only two victories in 17 starts.

And things didn't look good early when the righthander put his team in a 3-0 hole in the first inning, with two runs coming on a home run from .155-hitting Chris Davis. But he proceeded to complete seven innings and the Twins rallied, giving Gibson his first home victory of the season.

"I just tried to keep executing pitches," he said. "You can't let one swing or a couple batters get you out of your game plan. I feel like we had a good game plan. Sometimes when you give up a few runs early, it kind of pushes you out of your game plan, but you've got to have conviction in it."

Molitor has shown increased confidence in Gibson, who has thrown at least seven innings five times — all coming May 29 and later. He is 2-2 with a no-decision in those games. He has thrown at least 100 pitches in five of his past six outings, including a career-high 118 on June 9 in a 2-1 loss to the Angels.

Etc.

- The Twins, looking for help at Class AAA Rochester, acquired veteran minor league outfielder Jon Kemmer from Houston for cash considerations.

Kemmer, 27, was batting .254 with 13 home runs and 44 RBI at Class AAA Fresno. He was drafted by the Astros in the 21st round in 2013 and has yet to play in the majors.

To make room for Kemmer, first baseman/designated hitter Chris Carter was released. Carter, who hit an NL-best 41 home runs for Milwaukee only two years ago, was acquired from the Angels on May 22 but hit .187 with seven homers and 15 RBI in 36 games for the Red Wings.

- Class AA Chattanooga infielder Sean Miller was suspended 50 games for a second positive test for a drug of abuse. In 46 games with the Lookouts, Miller, 23, is batting .220 with a homer and eight RBI. He was selected by the Twins in the 10th round of the 2015 draft out of South Carolina-Aiken.

Twins-Orioles Saturday recap

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

GAME RECAP

Impact player

Bobby Wilson, Twins

From the No. 9 spot in the order, the catcher went 2-for-3 with three RBI, including a go-ahead, two-run double in the sixth.

BY THE NUMBERS

35 Doubles for Eduardo Escobar, two shy of the club record for most doubles before the All-Star break.

5-1 The Twins' record against the Orioles this season.

319 Career saves for Fernando Rodney, who passed Rick Aguilera and tied Todd Jones for 19th on the all-time list.

ON DECK

The Twins can sweep the four-game series when righthander Jake Odorizzi faces the Orioles and his former Rays teammate Alex Cobb.

Kyle Gibson alone at the top of Target Field victories

Staff Writer | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

Alone at the top

It took more than half the season, but Kyle Gibson's first home victory of 2018 broke a tie with Brian Duensing for the most victories by a Twins

pitcher at Target Field. Jose Berrios, of course, is closing fast. The top 10:

Pitcher (years) Record

K. Gibson (2013-) 21-30

B. Duensing (2010-15) 20-19

P. Hughes (2014-18) 17-15

J. Berrios (2016-) 15-8

F. Liriano (2010-12) 13-13

C. Pavano (2010-12) 13-12

G. Perkins (2010-17) 13-7

S. Baker (2010-11) 13-4

E. Santana (2015-) 12-14

N. Blackburn (2010-12) 11-12

Source: Baseball Reference

Just maybe the Twins are better off not spending any money

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

This decade provides rugged competition for a most disappointing Twins season, and the current one is remindful of 2011. That melodrama came out of nowhere after a decade (2001-10) when the Twins won six division titles, had nine winning seasons and averaged 89 victories.

The Twins of 2011 were ravaged by injuries, terrible personnel decisions and an astounding 19-50 collapse to conclude the schedule.

That was the first of four years of utter ineptitude, and then came 83-79 in 2015 and a mild threat to win the AL's second wild card. This was followed by 59-103 in 2016 (the worst season in team history) and then a rebound to 85-77 that secured the second wild card in 2017.

It was only two more wins — 85 rather than 83 — but the Twins of 2017 did not seem to be the pieced-together long shot of two years earlier. There appeared to be a competitive foundation for 2018, and then the front office added pitchers Lance Lynn, Jake Odorizzi, Fernando Rodney, Addison Reed and Zach Duke and designated hitter Logan Morrison.

Back in 2011, the Twins were coming off 94 wins and pushed the payroll to a team record \$113.2 million. A more accurate number would have been \$118.5 million, since the Twins also paid a \$5.3 million posting fee to bring in regrettable infielder Tsuyoshi Nishioka from Japan.

Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau were injured. Delmon Young — coming off 21 home runs and 112 RBI — was injured, inept and then traded. The final record was 63-99 and Bill Smith was fired as general manager.

Our new-age baseball boss, Derek Falvey, blew past that previous high payroll to \$128 million to open this season. Phil Hughes (\$13.5 million) was cast away, Erv Santana (\$13.2 million) is still rehabbing and Jason Castro (\$8 million) is out for the season — to name a few bigger-buck items.

Miguel Sano is in Class A trying to again look like a ballplayer, Byron Buxton is in Class AAA trying to find a workable swing, and the Twins are ready for a “we’ll listen to any offer,” trade-deadline sale.

And we now have a Twins pattern in this failed decade: Record payrolls lead to lousy records.

PLUS THREE

Baseball variety pack:

- The fact the AL playoff field is already set — New York, Boston, Houston, Seattle and Cleveland — is going to seriously limit deadline trading partners for “sellers.”
- Boston could use Brian Dozier to fill second base for the stretch of 2018, but as a rental, he will bring a return that disappoints Twins followers.
- David Banuelos, 21, is a catcher the Twins acquired from Seattle for \$1 million in international signing money. He entered Saturday batting .195 at Class A Cedar Rapids.

Gibson after elusive win No. 3 as Twins face Orioles

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 7, 2018

Righthander Kyle Gibson is on the mound today, still looking for his third win of the season. You look at his 3.58 ERA and scratch your head. He's pitched well enough to have a few more decisions in his favor.

“We all know what kind of year Kyle’s had,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “It’s been tough to get wins. But for the most part he’s done his job of pitching deeper into games and minimizing damage. So, yeah, it’s just one of those things.”

Gibson has pitched into the seventh inning five times. His record in those games: One win, three losses and two no decisions.

Gibson's lowest ERA was 3.84 in 2015. He was 11-11 that year. There's less of an emphasis on pitcher wins, but Gibson has pitched better than his record shows.

The Twins are going for their third straight win.

Minor notes:

First baseman Chris Carter has been released from Class AAA Rochester. Outfielder Jon Kemmer was signed and took Carter's place on the roster.

Also, infielder Taylor Motter, who was activated from the concussion DL and sent to Rochester earlier this week, has now been assigned to Class AA Chattanooga. With the International League All-Star break coming up, the Twins sent Motter to Chattanooga so he can play.

Orioles

Tim Beckham, 3B
Adam Jones, CF
Mark Trumbo, DH
Chris Davis, 1B
Danny Valencia, RF
Jonathan Schoop, 2B
Chance Sisco, C
Jace Peterson, Lf

Kevin Gausman, RHP

Twins

Joe Mauer, 1B
Eddie Rosario, DH
Brian Dozier, 2B
Eduardo Escobar, 3B
Jorge Polanco, SS
Max Kepler, RF
Robbie Grossman, Lf

Jake Cave, CF
Bobby Wilson, C

Kyle Gibson, RHP

Bobby Wilson's double rallies Twins past last-place Orioles, 5-4
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 7, 2018

The Saturday battery finally gave the Twins a charge on Saturday.

Catcher Bobby Wilson drove in three runs, and starter Kyle Gibson survived a shaky start as the Twins beat the fading Baltimore Orioles 5-4 at Target Field.

Minnesota will try to sweep the four-game series against the worst team in baseball in a 1:10 p.m. start on Sunday. The Orioles (24-64) fell 40 games under .500.

Gibson (3-6) gave up three first-inning runs on an RBI groundout and a two-run home run by Chris Davis but recovered to pitch seven innings for his first win since June 16 at Cleveland. He gave up four hits, walked three and struck out nine while lowering his earned-run average to 3.59.

"You try not to let one swing or a couple of batters get you out of your game plan," Gibson said. "I felt like ... we had a good game plan. Sometimes when you give up a few runs early, it kind of pushes you out of your game plan. But you've got to have conviction in it."

Wilson, the No. 9 hitter who started the day hitting .114 in 28 games, broke a 3-3 tie with a bases-loaded double that scored Max Kepler and Robbie Grossman in the sixth inning. He drove in Grossman with a single in a three-run fifth that started with a Kepler home run, his 10th of the season.

Wilson, who hit a combined .240 with six doubles, seven homers and 31 runs batted in in 70 games with Texas and Tampa Bay the previous two seasons, said he has been "really getting after it the last week" with batting coach James Rowson.

"Obviously with the struggles offensively, it's kind of a grind, and I have been trying to work my way out of it," Wilson said. "We have been doing some things the last few days, and I've felt better. Obviously, the staff and everybody here, everyone wants to help. Everybody is trying."

Fernando Rodney gave up a ninth-inning run on a double by No. 9 hitter Jace Peterson but got leadoff hitter Tim Beckham to ground out to short to end the game and earn his 19th save, his second in a row after blowing his previous two chances against the White Sox and Brewers.

It was Minnesota's third straight win to start an 11-game homestand after finishing a three-series road trip through Chicago and Milwaukee 1-8.

"We have one goal, winning, so a big part is the support from everybody," Wilson said. "Postgame, we talked about staying together, loving each other, supporting each other. And that is what is going to help us turn this corner."

Twins open for business as July 31 non-waiver trade deadline nears
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 7, 2018

Even after beating the Baltimore Orioles for the third straight day on Saturday, the Twins were 11 games out in the American League Central, 16.5 out in the wild-card race and 10 games under .500.

So, with the all-star break approaching, and many of their key players in places other than Minnesota, the Twins are ready to hear from any team interested in a trade before the July 31 non-waiver deadline.

"We're a team that has to always be open-minded to phone calls that we get," chief baseball officer Derek Falvey said Saturday during the Twins' 5-4 victory over last-place Baltimore at Target Field.

"Sometimes those are about short-term decisions, sometimes they're about long-term decisions," Falvey said. "There are going to be times where it's going to be clearer for us what we're trying to do at that moment."

It seems pretty clear the Twins are not going to make the playoffs after breaking into the postseason for the first time since 2010 with a wild card berth last fall. The Twins slumped into this weekend's four-game series against the worst team in baseball on the heels of a 1-8 road trip through Chicago and Milwaukee.

Optimism would be higher if the Twins had their Opening Day roster intact, but injuries to starter Ervin Santana, catcher Jason Castro, first baseman Joe Mauer, third baseman Miguel Sano and center fielder Byron Buxton have made this season a patch-and-fill operation.

Mauer is back, but Santana made his second rehab start in Fort Myers on Thursday and looks, according to Falvey, "much like a guy would at the beginning of spring training." Jorge Polanco is back from an 80-game steroid suspension, but Sano and Buxton are on re-set missions at Fort Myers and Class AAA Rochester, respectively.

The Twins won't declare surrender on 2018, especially manager Paul Molitor and the players, but they're likely to seriously entertain offers for veterans such as second baseman Brian Dozier, closer Fernando Rodney and, if they can get any interest, DH/first baseman Logan Morrison.

"We've said all along that this is about building the right stable to give yourself a chance year after year to compete for division titles and beyond that," Falvey said.

"We're always going to be open-minded. If there are calls that make us better, sometimes for the longer term, then we're going to have to consider that."

BALTIMORE ELIXIR

The Orioles, who fell 40 games below .500 with Saturday's loss, have been just what the Twins ordered. Not only has Minnesota beaten them three straight times after a 1-8 road trip, their pitching has awakened a couple of bats.

On the nine-game road trip through Chicago and Milwaukee, right fielder Max Kepler hit .188 with one run batted in and eight strikeouts. In three games against the O's (24-64), he's 4 for 11 with two homers and four RBIs.

Catcher Bobby Wilson, who started Saturday with a batting average of .114, had two hits and three RBIs in Saturday's 5-4 victory.

"It's nice to do something offensively," Wilson said. "I feel like I've been doing everything I can defensively. It's time to start turning that corner and start contributing offensively, as well."

Fernando Rodney, who blew his last two save opportunities on the road trip, has nailed down both his chances against the Orioles, although he made it interesting on Saturday, allowing a two-out, run scoring double to No. 9 hitter Jace Peterson in the ninth before getting Tim Beckham on a sharp grounder to short.

MINOR LEAGUER SUSPENDED

Twins Double-A third baseman Sean Miller was suspended for 50 games under baseball's minor league drug program following a second positive test for drugs of abuse.

Drugs of abuse under the minor league program include marijuana, cocaine, opiates, LSD and PCP.

Miller 23, is hitting .220 with one homer and eight RBIs in 150 at-bats at Chattanooga.

BRIEFLY

— Joe Mauer went 1 for 3 with a walk but remains tied with Kirby Puckett for the Twins' career doubles record at 414. He has played in only six more games than the late hall of fame outfielder. ... Right-hander Trevor Hildenberger earned his 13th hold with a scoreless eighth inning.

Twins willing to wait for Miguel Sano, Byron Buxton to fix their issues

John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 7, 2018

Twins fans awaiting the return of young building blocks Miguel Sano and Byron Buxton might do well to take a deep breath. It might be awhile.

Although happy with progress Sano and Buxton are making in the minors, the Twins aren't going to rush it, said chief baseball officer Derek Falvey. There are no timetables, only the goal of getting them back ready to hit major league pitching.

"We know for this team to be the team we want it to be, and intend it to be, those two guys have to be key members of it," Falvey said Saturday. "We all know that, and no one's running from that."

Two of the top prospects in all of baseball before becoming regular, if inconsistent, big-leaguers the past few years, Sano and Buxton are working through issues that, while different, are equally crucial to whatever major league success they have ahead of them.

While the Twins struggle to gain a toehold in the American League Central, Sano is in Fort Myers, Fla., working on strength and conditioning at the Twins' minor league headquarters, home to the organization's advanced Class A team. Buxton is at Triple-A Rochester, N.Y., trying to fix a swing that has played well at every level but the majors.

While the Twins are eager to piece back together a team plagued by injuries since before Opening Day, they are willing to wait for Sano, an all-star in 2017, and Buxton, the 2017 Platinum Glove-winner in center field, to get right.

For instance, when Sano was sent to Florida on June 14, the Twins had a two-month plan for him to improve his lower-body and core strength.

"That way we could cut that short 10 days in, or 20 days in, or 30 days in, but let's make sure we have a good long-term plan there," Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey said Saturday. "I would say that as it's progressed, he's at a place where he's made real gains over the last 10 to 12 days."

Sano is playing games with the Miracle, hitting .326 with a homer and seven runs batted in in 13 games, but the focus is on strength and nutrition. Felled by shin and hamstring injuries in August and May, Sano's 6-foot-4 frame was getting thick, and he was unable to work out the way the team believes he must. Otherwise, Falvey said, his body isn't strong or flexible enough to swing the way the team feels he must.

Manager Paul Molitor is in regular contact with Sano, 25, and spoke to him Saturday morning.

"I think he understands that this is probably a little bit of a fork in the road for him," Molitor said. "So, without too much panic about it, he understands, and I think he's heard us on the message and at times I think he's responded. It's not really a consequence for everything as much as this just seemed like the right next step.

"He understands that, and he wants to get back here."

Sano hit .264 with 28 homers and 77 RBIs in 114 games last season, making his first all-star team before suffering a shin injury that knocked him out the last month of the season, and out of the Twins' wild-card playoff game, an 8-4 loss to the Yankees in New York.

He was hitting .203 with an astonishing 66 strikeouts in 37 games this season when the Twins optioned him to Class A. The team is getting reports on his status.

"We do assessments based on how he's moving, and those are improving, and there has been weight loss; it hasn't been our focus, but that's part of it," Falvey said. "So I think we're seeing good progress, but we don't want to say there's one end point, because this is going to be a continued process, even if he is back here in the big leagues. He's going to have to continue a lot of this work up here to keep himself in a good position."

Buxton was hitting .203 with with three doubles, a homer and six RBIs in 15 games since being activated from the disabled list and optioned to Rochester. Limited to 28 major league games because of migraines and a broken toe, he was hitting .156 with a .183 on-base percentage with the Twins.

"We're seeing good progression when we're evaluating it on video," Falvey said. "We want him to focus just on the process of getting better, because if he does that, we believe the process will lead to good outcomes."

Preview: Twins vs. Orioles

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | July 8, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — After wearing the same uniform for the past four seasons with the Tampa Bay Rays, Alex Cobb and Jake Odorizzi face off Sunday as Cobb's Baltimore Orioles try to avoid a sweep when they take on Odorizzi and the Minnesota Twins at Target Field.

With the Rays in a full-blown rebuild, both pitchers found new homes this past spring. Odorizzi was traded to Minnesota early in spring training while Cobb was one of the many free agents who waited out an unnerving winter before eventually signing a four-year, \$57 million deal with Baltimore late in camp.

Now, only a week away from the All-Star break, neither pitcher — nor his team — is having the kind of season they anticipated Opening Day.

It's been especially painful for Cobb (2-10, 6.53 ERA), whose deal was the largest offered to an Orioles pitcher. The right-hander was expected to be a stabilizing force in a rotation that had designs on a postseason berth but instead, he slumped out of the gate and went 2-9 with a 7.14 ERA through his first 12 starts in an Orioles' uniform.

Through that, there have been flashes of the pitcher Baltimore had in mind when it made the deal. He's held opponents to three earned runs or fewer in eight of his 15 starts overall, including his last time out when he held the Phillies to three while striking out five in 6 2/3 innings.

"Alex is going to be a good pitcher," Orioles manager Buck Showalter said. "He is a good pitcher at times this year. It's hard. It's hard. He's hardened from pitching in the American League. He knows the fine line between success and failure."

With his team holding baseball's worst record and buried in the basement of a division dominated by the Yankees and Red Sox, Cobb knows the playoffs aren't even a pipe dream at this point. But he still has a goal of finishing the season strong and setting the stage for a bounce-back campaign in 2019.

"I don't want to say take it almost spring training-like, but we have to do whatever it takes for each and every one of us to get better going forward," Cobb said. "When you get hung up on results, I think that you let that cloud the process that's going on to make yourself get better. I don't want it to be framed to any fans or front office, coaching staff, that we're not going out there trying to win ballgames. We absolutely are, every single night.

"But we also need to not be so result-oriented and take the small progressions that we're making and get better. If we want to compete later on this year, next year, we need to get better each and every one of us — individually."

Cobb is 2-0 with a 2.20 ERA in three starts versus Minnesota.

Things haven't been much better in the Twin Cities, where Odorizzi (3-6, 4.57 ERA) was expected to be a key addition to a Twins team that was thought to be a contender with Cleveland for the AL Central title after making an unexpected trip to the American League wild-card game a year ago.

He opened the year on a high note, going 3-2 with a 3.17 ERA through his first 10 outings but has struggled with consistency since, posting a 6.81 ERA over his last eight starts.

"It's upsetting and frustrating ... it's not something I take lightly," Odorizzi said of his struggles late last month. "I take a lot of pride in getting guys out. Trust me, I'm more frustrated about this than anybody in this clubhouse. This has been one of the tougher stretches in my short big-league career."

Odorizzi has shown signs of bouncing back in his last two outings. He held the White Sox scoreless for six innings, allowing three hits while striking out eight, but took a no-decision June 28 in Chicago and followed that with a strong showing in Milwaukee where the Brewers managed only two runs while striking out nine times over five innings.

Odorizzi, who hasn't won since May 8, is 5-4 with a 4.42 ERA in 19 games (18 starts) versus Baltimore.

Gibson strikes out nine as Twins beat Orioles 5-4 **Associated Press | ESPN | July 8, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Bobby Wilson helped Kyle Gibson turn around his pitching after a rough first inning. Then, for at least one afternoon, the veteran catcher fixed his own struggles at the plate.

Wilson went 2-for-3 with three RBI, Gibson recovered from a shaky first to throw seven innings, and the Twins beat the Baltimore Orioles 5-4 on Saturday.

Max Kepler homered in his second straight game to help send the Twins to their third win in a row.

"You take them any way you can get them," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We haven't had the luxury of any kind of run here as of late, so to start out the home stand with three, it feels pretty good."

The Twins didn't bring in Wilson for his offense -- his two-hit day raised his batting average to .134 -- so they're not expecting him to deliver game-turning hits on a regular basis. But that's exactly what he did with an RBI single in the fifth that made it 3-2, and a two-RBI double the next inning that proved the game-winner.

It was Wilson's first multi-hit game since Sept. 21, 2016.

"I feel like I've been doing everything I can defensively but it's time to start turning that corner and start contributing offensively as well," Wilson said.

Earlier in the day, the team needed Wilson's smarts behind the plate to recover from an early hole.

Gibson (3-6) allowed three runs in the first inning -- including a two-run homer by Chris Davis -- but only gave up two hits after that while striking out nine. It was Gibson's highest strikeout total since fanning 10 batters on April 26 against the New York Yankees.

"After the first inning we sat down and I said 'Gibby talk to me, what do we got to do? What's going to turn this around?' So we talked about a few things and we kind of stuck with that game plan for the rest of the game," Wilson said.

Kepler's solo shot off Kevin Gausman sparked a three-run fifth that tied it. Wilson's two-run double off Miguel Castro (2-5) in the sixth gave Minnesota the lead for good.

Trevor Hildenberger worked a scoreless eighth for the Twins. Jace Peterson's RBI double off Fernando Rodney pulled the Orioles to 5-4, but Rodney got Tim Beckham on a grounder to short to convert his 19th save in 24 chances.

PUNCHLESS ORIOLES

The team with baseball's worst record, meanwhile, lost its fifth in the row and fell 40 games below .500.

"It's kind of hard to believe that's where we're at right now," Davis said. "I feel like anytime we start to build some momentum, we either give it right back to the other team or we do something to kind of take ourselves out of the game."

That certainly seemed the case Saturday.

Coming off his best start of the season against the L.A. Angels, Gausman had a 3-0 lead before ever taking the mound and looked sharp early. Gausman faced the minimum number of batters through the first three innings, and allowed a single hit through the first four.

But things turned quickly in the fifth. With one out, Kepler homered to left-center, Robbie Grossman doubled, and Jake Cave and Wilson followed with singles. After Joe Mauer walked, Cave scored on a wild pitch to tie the game.

"I don't think I really got away from anything. They just did a good job of battling and put some long at-bats together, and fought some pitches off and really got my pitch count off."

Gausman, who held the Angels to one run and two hits without a walk in eight innings last Sunday, didn't return for the sixth.

TURNING POINT

The Orioles loaded the bases in the third with two outs, but Gibson struck out Danny Valencia swinging to end the threat. After that, Gibson allowed a leadoff double to Jonathan Schoop before retiring 10 in a row.

"We scored three in the first and then just didn't do anything," manager Buck Showalter said. We had a chance to open it up there, but that's the hit that's been eluding us to really get to that five or six-run lead."

TRAINERS ROOM

Orioles: OF Trey Mancini got a rare day off, but manager Buck Showalter said he was fine. The manager said it was more about getting Peterson a chance to play. Peterson went 1-for-3 on Saturday.

RIPKEN'S RECORD

Davis' strikeout against Hildenberger in the eighth was the 1,306th of his career, moving him past Cal Ripken, Jr. for Baltimore's franchise record.

"You play long enough, you're going to swing and miss enough to apparently set some records. There's not really much to say about that," Davis said.

UP NEXT

Orioles: Alex Cobb (2-10) takes the mound for Baltimore in the finale. He hasn't won since June 5 against the New York Mets.

Twins: Jake Odorizzi (3-6) makes his 19th start of the year as the Twins go for the sweep. His last outing against Baltimore was March 29, when he shut out the Orioles over six innings on two hits and two walks.

Report: Red Sox interested in Fernando Rodney

Ashley Varela | NBC Sports | July 7, 2018

Twins closer Fernando Rodney has landed on the Red Sox' radar this summer, according to a report from ESPN's Jerry Crasnick. The club is reportedly looking to deepen their bullpen reserves in advance of a push for the postseason, and Crasnick points out that GM Dave Dombrowski has more than a passing familiarity with the reliever from their time together on the Tigers.

The 41-year-old Rodney hasn't looked himself lately — and that's a good thing. He recorded 18 saves in his first 23 save opportunities this year, paired with a respectable 2.97 ERA, 3.3 BB/9 and 10.1 SO/9 across 30 1/3 innings. While Rodney's durability and effectiveness might be due for a more significant regression over the next few years, he figures to be one of the more affordable arms on the market this year and could give the Red Sox an easy way to spruce up an already-dominant crew.

It also helps that Rodney wouldn't be thrust into the kinds of high-leverage situations he's facing with the Twins, given that fellow right-hander Craig Kimbrel has been pretty well established as the team's closer over the last three years. The Red Sox' relief corps currently ranks third among AL teams and fifth in the league overall with a collective 3.24 ERA and 3.6 fWAR — totals that could still use a little boost from Rodney's stellar 2018 campaign. Naturally, Rodney isn't the only potential setup man under consideration; the Red Sox have also reportedly been asking around about Orioles left-hander Zack Britton and Reds right-hander Raisel Iglesias, among others.

With some creative inspiration from the crowd, Bobby Wilson delivers for Twins

Nick Kelly | The Athletic | July 8, 2018

On a day the character of Wilson the volleyball from the movie *Cast Away* made an appearance at Target Field, catcher Bobby Wilson came up big for the Twins.

A fan at Saturday's game displayed on a white sign the face that actor Tom Hanks painted on the Wilson-brand volleyball in the film. Logan Morrison pointed it out to Wilson, the player, before Wilson's at-bat in the sixth inning against the Orioles.

Wilson then walked up to the plate and smacked the ball to the track in left field. It scored two runners and gave Minnesota its first lead of the game, which it rode to a 5-4 victory. The Twins improved to 38-48 and moved within 10.5 games of Cleveland in the AL Central.

The hit was Wilson's second of the day, making it his first multi-hit outing in 29 games this season.

"Appreciate you bringing that up," Wilson said. "Of course it feels good. It feels good to contribute offensively. It's nice to do something offensively."

Even one hit had been difficult for Wilson to come by before Saturday's game — he had mustered only two over the previous 37 at-bats. His batting average of .134 sits last of any Minnesota player who has at least 15 at-bats.

"It's been a little bit of a struggle," Wilson said. "I can't deny it. I can't say everything has been unicorns and rainbows, but it's been a struggle. The support of the staff, the support of the players has really helped me to continue to work, continue to battle and keep grinding."

That meant putting in extra time with Minnesota hitting coach James Rowson this past week. Wilson said that helped him feel better.

And feeling better turned into timely hitting against the Orioles. In addition to his RBI double, Wilson hit an RBI single to shallow right field that brought Minnesota within 3-2 in the fifth inning.

“We don’t expect a ton (offensively), and we know that,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “I think what you want to do with a guy like Bobby is situational. Hopefully, he can execute, whether it’s when I ask him to hit and run.”

Despite Wilson’s frequent struggles at the plate, Molitor praised Wilson’s consistency working behind it. Starting pitcher Kyle Gibson, who picked up his first home win of the season while tossing seven innings, agreed. He lauded Wilson’s ability to call good pitches postgame.

“I feel like I’ve been doing everything I can defensively,” Wilson said. “It’s time to start turning that corner and start contributing offensively as well.”

Polanco has ‘enough skills to be in batting-title races’

Jorge Polanco didn’t contribute much at the plate Saturday, but his success there in the first two games of this series has given the Twins a spark after a deflating road trip.

Polanco has registered at least one hit in four of his six games since returning from an 80-game suspension on July 2 in Milwaukee. In that stretch, Polanco has six hits and two RBIs.

“It feels like we just had a trade acquisition, to be honest with you,” Brian Dozier said pregame of the midseason addition of Polanco to the lineup.

Polanco missed the first half of the season after he tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs. His early production, Molitor said Saturday, serves as an indication of the value Polanco brings when he’s in the lineup.

“I think offensively, he’s got a chance to be a guy for me that has enough skills to be in batting-title races,” Molitor said. “There’s more in store for him.”

Sanó update

After speaking with Miguel Sanó on Saturday morning, Molitor said the third baseman continues to commit to a long-term vision to improving his play instead of just jumping through some hoops after being sent down to Single-A Fort Myers in June.

“I think he understands that this is probably a little bit of a fork in the road for him,” Molitor said of Sanó’s stint in Fort Myers. “So, without too much panic about it, he understands and I think he’s heard us on the message and at times I think he’s responded.”

Molitor added that he thinks it’s difficult for Sanó because he spent time with Polanco in Fort Myers, and Polanco has returned to the big leagues. Sanó does not ask Molitor about when they plan to bring him up, though, Molitor said.

“He’s trusting that we’re doing the best thing for him,” Molitor said.

Polanco’s certainly glad to return to Minnesota after his suspension, but he said that he enjoyed spending time with Sanó in Fort Myers.

“He’s very positive,” Polanco said. “I talked to him. He wants to get better and work ... I think he’s positive.”

During Sanó’s 13 games with Fort Myers, he has registered 15 hits, one home run and seven RBIs while striking out 14 times.

Rodney moves up all-time saves list

Twins closer Fernando Rodney picked up his 19th save of the season Saturday, which moved him up to 19th on the MLB all-time saves list.

Rodney has 319 saves, passing three-time Twins All-Star Rick Aguilera and tying Todd Jones.

From History Teacher to Minnesota Twins Curator
Staff Writer | Sports Feel Good Stories | July 7, 2018

How do you get to be the guy with the coolest job in baseball? Well, it all started with just good manners.

Major League Baseball’s First Team Curator

Clyde Doepner looked at a high stack of mail on his desk his first day back from summer break in 1966. As a high school history teacher and baseball coach at Pine Island High School in Minnesota – about an hour south of Minneapolis – Clyde set to the task of reviewing each piece of mail.

A Free Pass to see the Twins

He went through each envelope, catalog and flyer one-by-one. He was happy he did. In one envelope, he found a letter from Calvin Griffith, the owner of the Minnesota Twins. Along with the letter, Griffith included a free Twins season pass. It was a Griffith's initiative to encourage high school baseball coaches to attend games. The pass was for four people to attend Minnesota Twins' games.

Doepner rounded up a few buddies, and headed to a Twins' game in August. A life-long baseball fan, Doepner had attended Winona State on a baseball scholarship, and had a passion for the game.

Thanking the Twins' Owner

After he and his friends had a pleasurable time at the game, Doepner thought it appropriate to thank Mr. Griffith for the pass. After being directed to Griffith's office, Doepner thanked the owner for the experience.

Perhaps taken off guard, Griffith asked Doepner to sit down explain himself.

"My mother always taught me that when a gift was given, I should thank the person," said Doepner.

Griffith explained that in the months of implementing the program that Doepner was the only person to ever thank him. And because of that, when he attended Twins game at the Met, he should plan on sitting in Griffith's family section behind home plate instead of the cheap seats that the pass allowed.

So for the rest of the 1966 season and subsequent seasons at the Met, Doepner sat in the Griffith family seats until the Twins moved to the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in downtown Minneapolis. His relationship with Calvin and his family members strengthened.

As one of the last Major League Baseball team owners to rely on revenues from baseball for his income, Griffith had earned a reputation for his frugality. He watched his money closely. When he heard the folks running the Dome would be charging the Twins for storage space, Griffith decided to do some housecleaning and get rid of a lot of items in storage.

Clyde Doepner Explains How He Became Twins Curator Video

An Instant Collection

Now, when you've owned and managed a baseball team for many years, you apparently accumulate a lot of interesting memorabilia, communications, and such. Griffith owned and managed the team since 1955 when the team was the Washington Senators. Prior to that, his adoptive father, Clark Griffith, owned the team.

Hearing about the plans to toss old storage boxes, Doepner got the blessing from Calvin's son that he could review and take whatever he liked, as long as he threw away the discards. For the next 31 days, Doepner showed up at the old Met with friends, and together, they went through boxes and old file cabinets that were set aside. Some nights it might be 6 boxes, and other nights it might be 30.

He found a treasure chest of baseball and Twins memorabilia and ended up keeping some 3,000 items. Perhaps his most prized keepsakes are letters from U.S. presidents to the Senators' organization when they agreed to throw out the first pitches on opening days of the seasons. Beginning with President Taft, Clyde's collection includes correspondence from the likes of Eisenhower, Nixon and Truman.

When VP Nixon stepped in for Ike one opening day, President Truman send a telegram to team owner Clark Griffith that read,

BEST OF LUCK TO YOU ON OPENING DAY AND EVERY DAY. WATCH OUT FOR THAT NIXON. DON'T LET HIM THROW YOU A CURVE.
YOUR FRIEND, HARRY TRUMAN.

From Clyde the Collector to Clyde the Curator

Fast forward a few years, Doepner displayed his collection of Twins' memorabilia at the annual Twins' fest. Team owner Carl Pohlad (Pohlad acquired the Twins from Griffith in 1984) and Twins' President David St. Peter recognized the value of what these historic items could bring to the fan experience. They brought Doepner on as the Twins' Curator. Clyde: the keeper of the collection. He was the first curator hired in MLB. Clyde is responsible for all of the displays exhibited at Target Field — some 50 displays in all.

Clyde, who arrives at 5:50 a.m. every work day morning to Target Field, gave 86 talks to sports fans outside of the stadium last year and made 128 presentation on site.

Over the course of his work with the Twins, he's had the opportunity to form close relationships with many players. Harmon Killebrew (his favorite), Kirby Puckett and Jim Thome are a few that stand out. When those milestone home runs are hit, and the balls, bases and bats need to be collected for the Hall of Fame, a Twin's exhibit, and the player, it is Clyde who sees to it. He's always on the search for new items for the Twins' collection.

With Target Field also serving as a concert venue, Clyde collects music memorabilia and sees to their display at the stadium for the various acts who perform. This week, the Eagles and Jimmy Buffet are scheduled for Saturday night, and Clyde will be ready.

To say Clyde loves his job is a major understatement. For a former history teacher, the history associated with the collectibles and the opportunity to teach others about them is a perfect fit. And, to think that it all started with a thank you.