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Littell roughed up in debut as Twins split DH

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | June 5, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Zack Littell's first Major League start didn't go as he envisioned it, but the 22-year-old stayed positive about his outing, focusing on things he can learn from the next time he gets a chance to start in the Majors.

The right-hander, called up from Triple-A Rochester to be the club's designated 26th man in the twin bill, gave up four runs in the first inning and lasted three-plus innings in the Twins' 6-3 loss, splitting their doubleheader against the White Sox on Tuesday night at Target Field. Littell was optioned back to Rochester after the game, but came away excited about making his debut.

"Obviously, the results weren't there but it was one of the more fun nights of my life," Littell said. "I got to live out my dream. And that was awesome. I didn't pitch the way I wanted to, but the experience was incredible."

Littell, ranked as the club's No. 15 prospect by MLB Pipeline, struck out the first batter he faced, Yoan Moncada, looking on a 95 mph fastball, but it was downhill from there. He served up a double to Yolmer Sanchez before allowing a two-run blast to Jose Abreu on a first-pitch fastball. Kevan Smith and Adam Engel each added RBI hits with two outs.

"What got my attention was velocity right away," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It was up from what he had been throwing, whether it's adrenaline or trying to do too much too soon. Some of the things we had heard about what he's doing didn't really surface tonight. Part of it's just part of the experience of being up here. He'll learn, he'll be better."

Littell settled down a bit over the next two innings before walking the first two batters he faced in the fourth. Right-hander Matt Magill came in but promptly served up a two-run double to Sanchez with both runs being charged to Littell, who gave up six runs on six hits and four walks.

Magill, though, didn't allow another hit and threw three innings to help the bullpen stay fresh despite the doubleheader.

Offensively, much like the first game against starter Reynaldo Lopez, the Twins couldn't get much going against right-hander Lucas Giolito, who entered with a 7.53 ERA. He lasted six innings, giving up two runs in the third after a pair of walks to Gregorio Petit and Robbie Grossman.

Eddie Rosario hit a long single off the base of the right-field wall to load the bases but Miguel Sano grounded into a run-scoring 6-4-3 double play. Eduardo Escobar, who had the game-winning homer in Game 1 and went 3-for-4 in Game 2, laced an RBI double but was stranded when Max Kepler grounded out to first.

"I feel good," Escobar said. "For me, it's been about coming in and working hard every day. My swing right now is good, but it's about coming to field ready and trying to help the team win."

Escobar kept up his impressive day with an RBI double to score Grossman in the eighth, putting two runners in scoring position with one out. But lefty Luis Avilan struck out Kepler and righty Joakim Soria struck out Mitch Garver to quell the potential rally.

The Twins made it interesting in the ninth against Soria, putting two runners on for Rosario with two outs, but Rosario grounded out to second to end the game.

"We had some opportunities," Molitor said. "Didn't capitalize when they came around. I'm a little disappointed we couldn't finish off the sweep."

MORRISON OUT WITH BACK INJURY

Twins first baseman/designated hitter Logan Morrison didn't see action in either game, as he's been dealing with back stiffness since Sunday. The Twins are hopeful it's a minor injury.

"We're just going to monitor it and see what it turns into," Molitor said. "I'm hoping it's a short-term deal, but he wasn't available today."

SOUND SMART

With a double in Game 1 and two more in Game 2, Escobar has 23 doubles this season, which is the most in the Majors. Abreu is second with 22. Escobar has already surpassed his total of 16 doubles last year, while his career high is 35 in '14.

"I think he knows where people try to work him," Molitor said. "Things he's more vulnerable to. He tries to make those adjustments. We talked about after the first game how he learns to shorten up when he needs to when the guy is trying to elevate velocity just so he can get to it. I just think he's gotten a better idea in how to use what skill set he brings up to the plate."

HE SAID IT

"There's no way to prepare for this, no matter what you do or who you talk to. There's just no way until you pitch in a Major League game. So I just need to continue to work on what I've been working on and stay with my consistency to get back up here again. I think the only way to get better is keep doing it and learn from it." -- Littell, who had 21 family members and friends at the game for his first start

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Twins were hurt by an overturned call in the seventh, when Ehire Adrianza hit a ground-rule double and was caught taking too big of a lead at second base. Adrianza was initially ruled safe on the pick-off attempt, but after a review, the call was overturned for the second out. Petit flied out to right to end the inning.

UP NEXT

Right-hander Jake Odorizzi (3-2, 4.14 ERA) is set to start for the Twins in the third game of the four-game set on Wednesday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Odorizzi is coming off his worst start of the year, allowing seven runs in 3 2/3 innings against the Indians. Former Twins left-hander Hector Santiago (1-2, 5.10) starts for Chicago.

Escobar's 3-run HR caps Twins' rally in G1 **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | June 5, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Eddie Rosario and Eduardo Escobar have both surprisingly powered Minnesota's offense this season, and after Rosario was the star on Sunday with his three-homer performance, it was Escobar's turn to play hero in the first game of Tuesday's doubleheader.

After the offense was held to just one hit through the first seven innings, Escobar helped the Twins break out for a four-run rally in the eighth with a go-ahead three-run homer off reliever Nate Jones to lift the Twins to a 4-2 victory over the White Sox at Target Field for their fourth straight win.

"He threw a strike and I tried to hit it up the middle, but I made good contact," Escobar said. "I was surprised it went out to center field. But with

two strikes and the tying run at third base, I was trying to make good contact up the middle."

The Twins rallied with two outs in the eighth against Jones, with Brian Dozier reaching on an infield single and Rosario drawing a walk to set up an RBI single to left from Miguel Sano. But it was Escobar who provided the big hit this time, crushing a 97.3-mph fastball to dead center for his 11th homer of the year. Escobar came out to a curtain call after the go-ahead homer.

"It looked like he choked up there a little bit to put the ball in play," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "I'm going to ask him about maybe using that philosophy all the time. Not really expecting a home run."

It came after Minnesota couldn't get anything going offensively against right-hander Reynaldo Lopez, who threw seven scoreless innings, allowing just one hit and four walks. Their lone hit off Lopez was a two-out double in the fourth from Escobar, but he was stranded on a groundout from Max Kepler.

"As far as pitching against this team, I think he followed a pretty good plan," Molitor said of Lopez. "He kind of knew when to elevate with the fastball, which hit 98 [mph] at times, and he knew our guys that were chasing the slider."

Twins right-hander Fernando Romero bounced back from the worst start of his young career to turn in a strong outing, surrendering two runs on seven hits with four strikeouts over six innings. It was the first time this season he didn't issue a walk, but he was stuck with a no-decision and hasn't picked up a win since his second career start on May 7.

"I had to control myself a little bit," Romero said. "Calm down and attack the zone. That helps me more."

Romero had trouble with Yoan Moncada, who led off the game with a solo homer to center on the second pitch of the game. Moncada also singled in the fifth, stole second and scored on a two-out RBI double into the gap from Jose Abreu.

Romero's effort helped save the bullpen from being overtaxed with fellow rookie right-hander Zack Littell making his Major League debut in Game 2. Tyler Duffey threw two scoreless innings in relief and picked up the win. Fernando Rodney tossed a scoreless ninth to get his 13th save.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Dozier reaches on infield single: The four-run rally started innocently enough, with Dozier getting a single on a grounder that took a tough hop at third baseman Yolmer Sanchez, who recovered but Abreu couldn't handle the throw in the dirt. It set the stage for the unlikely comeback.

SOUND SMART

Escobar's homer came on a 97.3-mph fastball -- the fastest pitch for a homer by the Twins this year and the fastest offering Escobar has hit for a homer in his career. He'd never homered off a pitch faster than 95 mph before. The homer had an exit velocity of 102.1 mph at a launch angle of 27 degrees, traveling a projected 413 feet, per Statcast™.

HE SAID IT

"I was so happy. I love the moment for me, but the most important thing is winning the game."
-- Escobar, on the curtain call

UP NEXT

Littell is set to make his Major League debut in the second game of Monday's doubleheader at Target Field. Littell, who was acquired in the trade that sent Jaime Garcia to the Yankees before last year's Trade Deadline, had a 2.57 ERA at Triple-A Rochester and went a combined 19-1 in the Minors last season. The White Sox counter with right-hander Lucas Giolito (3-6, 7.53).

Twins take 3 RHPs in 7 picks on Draft Day 2

Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | June 5, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Minnesota Twins got started a bit later than most clubs on Tuesday, as they did not have a third-round pick in the 2018 MLB Draft. That went to the Cardinals as compensation after Lance Lynn rejected St. Louis' \$17.4 million qualifying offer and instead signed with Minnesota.

Still, Minnesota stuck to chief baseball officer Derek Falvey's plan and took whom they perceived as the best player available with each pick, instead of drafting for need. Minnesota selected seven players during Day 2 of the Draft, four from the college ranks and three out of high school. The Twins have yet to reach official agreements with any of their selections, and will wait until the end of the collegiate season to negotiate with those still in postseason play.

"At the end of the day yesterday, there was a scenario that unfolded where we [lost out on a pick] a couple of times -- right in front of us -- so some guys that we thought were going to make it fell short," Twins scouting director Sean Johnson said. "So today we had a few mental wins, I

would say. We felt like we got some guys. With less than \$6 million we still made a lot of our pool. We felt good walking out of there today, like we did last year, not the same volume, but we were able to get some guys that we really liked with some upside."

Round 4: OF DaShawn Keirsej Jr., University of Utah

DaShawn Keirsej Jr. was a rising prospect during the 2017 season before sustaining a hip injury after running into the outfield wall in late May, derailing his season. He bounced back nicely in 2018, batting .386 with four home runs and 22 RBIs while playing standout defense in center field. Keirsej was a bit of a late bloomer as a high school baseball prospect and didn't play much summer ball because he was often involved in 7-on-7 football. He is a three-time First-Team All-Pac 12 selection and was ranked by MLB Pipeline as the 144th best prospect in the Draft. Keirsej is from the same high school as Twins prospect Jake Reed, who is at Triple-A Rochester.

Round 5: RHP Cole Sands, Florida State University

The first pitcher the Twins selected in this year's Draft was Florida State starter Cole Sands. He is the brother of Cubs farmhand Carson Sands, whom Chicago selected with the 109th pick of the 2014 Draft. Cole Sands, 20, battled some bicep tendinitis in late May, but bounced back to finish the season. He went 7-4 this season with a 4.54 ERA while striking out 88 over 75 1/3 innings. He was drafted by the Astros in the 22nd round of the 2015 Draft out of high school, but did not sign.

"I kind of compare him to a gentlemen I had the pleasure of coaching when I was at the University of Oklahoma by the name of [Angels right-handed pitcher] Garrett Richards," Florida State associate head coach Mike Bell said. "Garrett was, I don't wanna say a late bloomer, but he was a guy who always had potential, always had the stuff. And really it wasn't until his junior year that he put the whole package together. I think you're gonna see Cole's career take off at the next level."

Round 6: SS Charles Mack, Williamsville East HS (NY).

Committed to Clemson, Mack was a standout prep shortstop in New York who might end up at third base. Ranked at No. 133 on MLB Pipeline's Top 200, Mack was named a 2018 Rawlings Perfect Game Third-Team All-American and Northeast All-Region First-Team pick. Mack was advanced enough at an early age that he played six years of varsity baseball at Williamsville East.

"There's a New York state law if you're in middle school where, if you can pass a test, you can play up with the varsity while you're still in middle school," Williamsville East HS head baseball coach Jerry Gasz, who is in his 49th year coaching at the school, said. "So he played for me for six years and so did his brother. I had assigned one of my senior captains to keep an eye on him. But he didn't need that -- he was mature upon his years."

Round 7: RHP Josh Winder, Virginia Military Institute

The Twins added another college arm in Winder, a 6-foot-5, 210-pound righty who is the 31st player ever to be drafted out of VMI. He is the third-highest player to be selected out of the school. The 21-year-old Winder finished his junior season with a 5-6 record and a 5.40 ERA and 91 strikeouts over 85 innings. He was ranked by Baseball America as the No. 2 prospect in the Southern Conference and was the conference's preseason pitcher of the year. He finished his career with 273 strikeouts in 42 starts.

"It's an honor to be selected by the Minnesota Twins," Winder said in a statement released by VMI. "Playing professional baseball has been my dream since I was a little kid, and for that to come true is unbelievable. Thank you to my family, friends, teammates and coaches for helping me to get where I am today."

Round 8: C Chris Williams, Clemson

A finalist for the Johnny Bench Award in 2018, Williams hit .281 with 17 homers and 72 RBIs. The 6-foot-1, 220-pound Williams split time at catcher and in the infield. He was drafted by the Rays in the 31st round of the 2017 Draft, but chose to return for his senior season. He played strictly at catcher in 2016 and 2017 before transitioning to first base in 2018.

Round 9: CF Willie Joe Garry Jr., Pascagoula HS (MS)

Minnesota selected a player with a connection to a former Twins standout. Garry Jr. was coached at the youth level by Matt Lawton, who was selected as an All-Star for the Twins in 2000 when he hit .305. The left-handed hitting Garry Jr. was ranked as the 415th prospect by Perfect Game. His father was the cousin of Southern Miss running back legend Ben "Go Go" Gerry, who was the school's all-time leader in rushing yards when he left the school in 1977.

Round 10: RHP Regi Grace, Madison Central HS (MS)

The Twins went with a pair of Mississippi prep standouts to finish the day, rounding out the afternoon by taking the 18-year-old Grace. Listed at 6-foot-1, 215 pounds, Grace was named a 2018 Rawlings Perfect Game All-American. In 32 games for Madison Central High School, Grace went 7-2 and struck out 98 batters over 64 innings and ended the season with a 1.31 ERA.

Escobar's home run helps Twins split doubleheader with White Sox
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | June 6, 2018

The White Sox led for 16 innings Tuesday, and the Twins for two. So let's call it a draw.

Eduardo Escobar has never hit a walkoff home run, but his eighth-inning, three-run blast was close enough to earn the Twins a 4-2 victory in the makeup of a snowed-out game from April. In the second game, the White Sox welcomed Zack Littell to the major leagues with a four-run first inning, and Chicago claimed a lopsided split of the doubleheader with a 6-3 victory at Target Field.

First-inning home runs in both games meant the Twins were pedaling uphill all day, but Escobar, who collected five hits in the doubleheader (four for extra bases) and drove in five runs, salvaged the opener with a dramatic and unlikely home run. With two strikes and two runners on base, Escobar choked up on the bat and smacked a two-strike, 97-miles-per-hour fastball from White Sox reliever Nate Jones onto the grass beyond the center-field wall, completing an out-of-nowhere, two-out, four-run comeback.

"He threw a strike and I tried to hit it up the middle, but I made good contact," Escobar said after hitting his fourth home run in five games. "I was surprised it went out to center field."

So was his manager.

"I'm going to ask him about maybe using that philosophy all the time. Not really expecting a home run," Paul Molitor said, especially with the infielder obviously just trying to put the ball in play. "I kind of feel like we stole one a little bit, given the fact that we didn't have much going the entire game."

It was the same in the second game, too, because Zack Littell's major league debut for the Twins included six hits, four walks, and only nine outs. The rookie righthander, obtained from the Yankees for Jaime Garcia at last year's trade deadline, struck out the first batter he faced, and he did it on a 95-mph fastball — an indication of how amped up he was for his debut, given that he normally tops out at 93.

"What got my attention was velocity ... whether it's adrenaline or trying to do too much too soon," Molitor said. "Some of the things we had heard about he's doing didn't really surface [Tuesday]. It's just part of the experience of being up here. He'll learn, he'll be better."

Things went poorly for him after that strikeout. Three doubles, a single and a long home run by Jose Abreu added up to four first-inning runs. He lasted two more innings, but when he walked the first two hitters in the fourth inning — they came around to score when Matt Magill gave up a double to Yolmer Sanchez — he was finished.

Still, Littell said, "It was awesome. The results weren't great. I didn't pitch the way I wanted to. But the experience of it all was incredible. I had a blast."

The Twins' other rookie starter, Fernando Romero, looked like he would be tagged with a loss, too, because Chicago starter Reynaldo Lopez shut out the Twins on one hit over seven innings in the opener.

But the Twins' offense suddenly came alive against Jones with two outs in the eighth. Brian Dozier hit a hot smash that third baseman Sanchez bobbled, allowing him to reach on an infield single. Eddie Rosario then drew a walk, taking a 100-mph fastball in the dirt for ball four, and Miguel Sano lined a single into the left-field corner, scoring Dozier.

"It just felt like the way we were going, the way we were swinging, it was going to be tough to muster a rally," Molitor said. "But that little in-hop that got Dozier on base, that turns out to open the door," Molitor said.

Escobar fell behind 1-2, but when Jones left a fastball belt-high in the middle of the plate, the Twins' cleanup hitter pounced. The ball cleared the wall, the crowd roared, and Escobar punched the air in triumph as he rounded first base, two runs scoring in front of him. There was no Gatorade bath at home plate — Fernando Rodney still had three outs to record, after all, which he did with ease — but Escobar was rewarded when the crowd demanded a curtain call from the dugout.

"I was so happy," Escobar said. "I love the moment for me, but the most important thing is winning the game."

Twins' Eduardo Escobar doubles down on advice from former Twin Torii Hunter
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | June 6, 2018

He'll be better remembered Tuesday for his game-winning home run, but Eduardo Escobar doesn't consider himself a home-run hitter. No, if he has a specialty, Escobar said, it's the one recommended to him by former Twin Torii Hunter.

“Torii told me: doubles, doubles, doubles,” Escobar said. “He told me, put the ball in the gap, run hard, watch for your chance, and get doubles, doubles, doubles.”

By following that advice, Escobar has created a small sideshow to this week’s series with the White Sox: Escobar entered Tuesday’s doubleheader with 20 doubles this season, one short of Chicago first baseman Jose Abreu’s major-league-leading total.

Escobar tied Abreu in the fourth inning of Game 1, slugging a ball to the warning track in left-center, which bounced into the bullpen for a ground-rule double. But Abreu struck back in the top of the fifth, ripping a fastball to those bullpens on one bounce to drive in a run and give him 22 doubles.

But in the third inning of Game 2, Escobar hit No. 22 of his own, and did it in his favorite way: He saw a slight opportunity and took advantage with his own hustle. Escobar’s looping line drive came down between left fielder Charlie Tilson and center fielder Adam Engel, and it was a long run for both. When Tilson slowed up and caught the ball on the bounce, Escobar sped up and beat the throw to second, clapping his hands in delight.

And his 23rd of the season in the eighth inning, making him the MLB doubles leader, was nearly identical: a long line drive between left and center.

Whistleblower

Joe Mauer has been out of action for nearly three weeks, but in the meantime, another Mauer has been getting plenty of attention. Ken Mauer, second cousin to the Twins first baseman, is refereeing in the NBA Finals for the 13th consecutive season. And the refs haven’t exactly been invisible in the Warriors-Cavs series.

“He called the offensive foul [on Kevin Durant] that got overturned” in Game 1, Mauer noted. “It’s fun to see him out there when I turn on big games, but it looks like a tough job.”

He’s been doing it for a long time. Ken Mauer, cousin to Joe’s father, Jake, is in his 32nd season as an NBA referee, and has called more than 200 playoff games. Game 1 last Thursday was the 63-year-old University of Minnesota grad’s 19th NBA Finals game.

“With all the running those guys do, it’s impressive for him to be doing that at his age,” Mauer said. “Not sure I could run that much.”

Actually, Joe Mauer did some running Tuesday as he prepared for a return, perhaps later this week — “I’m not sure when we’re going to collectively decide that it’s time,” manager Paul Molitor said — from a cervical strain and a bout with recurring concussion-like symptoms. Mauer took about 10 minutes of batting practice, fielded several ground balls and pop flies in the infield, and jogged in the outfield. “Feeling good, but more to do,” he said.

So when he watches an NBA game, does he ever want to boo his cousin? “Nah, he gets it enough, being a referee,” Mauer said with a laugh.

Etc.

- Ervin Santana’s finger surgeon, Dr. Charles Melone, “was really pleased with where he was, compared to where he saw him a little over a month ago,” Molitor said of a report he received via text. The All-Star righthander, sidelined this season because of surgery on the middle finger of his pitching hand, expects to throw again Thursday, the first step toward beginning a new minor league rehab assignment.

- Logan Morrison wasn’t available for the doubleheader, Molitor said, because of “a little issue with his back. ... We’re going to have to monitor and see what it turns into.” Molitor said Morrison felt stiff after Sunday’s game, and didn’t improve over the off day.

- The Twins are confident they will be able to sign first-round pick Trevor Larnach, an outfielder from Oregon State, shortly after his season ends with the Beavers. They made headway on the general parameters of a deal, but some details have yet to be ironed out.

Staff writer La Velle E. Neal III contributed to this report.

Doubleheader done right: two for price of one
Chip Scoggins | Star Tribune | June 6, 2018

Grady Kruse considers himself a baseball purist, but he admits the length of a typical Major League Baseball game these days is maddening. He sees too much wasted time between pitches.

“They’ve got to do something about it,” he said.

Here's one way to make a game feel quick: Attend two games in one day. Kruse jumped at that opportunity on Tuesday.

"You think I'm crazy, don't you?" he asked.

Not necessarily. Who doesn't enjoy the rare 2-for-1 special?

The Twins and Chicago White Sox played a rare traditional doubleheader at Target Field. One ticket, two games, a 45-minute break in between and 5 hours, 44 minutes of baseball viewing combined.

Kruse, a self-employed electrician, attends about 10 Twins games every season. He put doubleheader on his bucket list after seeing the Twins play a twin bill last season.

"I said if they do that again, I want to do that," he said.

This was only the second "true" doubleheader in Target Field history. Fans of a certain age can remember when doubleheaders were fairly common. They were built into the schedule and not solely a product of postponements.

"I always liked them [as a player]," Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

Really?

"Yeah," he said. "You get twice as many chances to get a hit."

If your parents were like mine, they viewed doubleheaders as a savvy financial investment. Two games for the price of one is easier on the family budget.

Split doubleheaders have become far more common because teams can charge gate for two games. Business usually comes first.

Hall of Famer Ernie Banks coined the beautiful phrase "Let's play two!" and the weather gods couldn't have provided more perfect conditions for a long day at the park. Bluebird skies, 76 degrees, light breeze.

Goodness.

Kruse never leaves a game early, even in blowouts, so naturally, he watched the doubleheader start to finish, all 18 innings. He and a few buddies scored club seats for \$36 apiece.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "For two games?!"

Game 1 was a throwback in pace: 2 hours, 37 minutes. Eduardo Escobar earned a standing ovation and curtain call after drilling a three-run home run in the eighth inning for a 4-2 win.

Zach Littell probably wishes he had a do-over to his major league debut in Game 2. The White Sox pounded him for four runs in the first inning and the Twins couldn't catch up, losing 6-3.

The heartiest of souls stuck around until the final out. That included Ian Baggett and his two young sons, ages 9 and 8. Baggett normally cheers for the Twins, but he grew up south of Chicago in a family of diehard White Sox fans so he found the perfect opportunity for his "family-friendly" bachelor party.

He's getting married in October. His two brothers planned to visit him with the White Sox in town. When they found out about the doubleheader, party on.

Baggett even broke out his White Sox jersey for the occasion.

"[Doubleheaders] never happen," he said. "We almost hate the Cubs. But Ernie Banks saying 'Let's play two!' ... it's an old tradition."

Baggett is 43 and grew up watching doubleheaders as a kid, but this was his first one as a fan. He figured two games meant twice the fun.

"I like the game, I like the atmosphere, it's a nice day, I like eating junk food and drinking beer," he said. "To double that? That sounds awesome."

A doubleheader with his two brothers and two sons was doubly awesome. His brothers flew in from Indianapolis a few hours before first pitch. His sons got out of school a little early. The group planned to stick around to the end, which seemed ambitious with two kids under age 10.

“Feed them snacks and root beer and they’ll be fine,” Baggett said.

Smart. And for the record, they made it to the final out.

Eight-year-old Gavin shared words of wisdom with his dad at one point.

“If you bring someone to a doubleheader,” he said, “you better like baseball.”

Or root beer.

Some of Twins' second-day draft choices need a second medical opinion **Staff Writer | Star Tribune | June 6, 2018**

The Twins selected seven players Tuesday during the second day of the first-year player draft, including three with medical issues that had to be investigated before the picks were made.

University of Utah center fielder DaShawn Keirse, a fourth-round pick, batted .386 this season — a year after dislocating and fracturing his left hip while running into a wall. The belief is his speed has not yet fully returned.

“He’s a really good defender,” said Sean Johnson, the Twins’ director of scouting. “He has a really pro swing. He’s got some raw power.”

Eighth-round pick Chris Williams, a power-hitting catcher from Clemson, underwent shoulder surgery last season after being injured while diving into first base during a pickoff play. He was not 100 percent at the beginning of this season, so he played a lot at first base, batting .281 with 18 home runs and 72 RBI.

“We think there’s an outside chance he can catch,” Johnson said. “It’s part of the rehab and our player development, they’ll do their thing and we’ll see if we can get lucky there on a catch. He’s got a ton of power.”

Even their fifth-round pick, righthander Cole Sands of Florida State, left his last start because of shoulder tightness. But the Twins made sure Sands was fine before drafting him.

The Twins medical staff examines hundreds of medical reports of potential draft picks every year - so they are comfortable making these selections.

“We had (head trainer) Dave Pruemer in our room and he’s been going through the medicals, obviously doing a great job,” Johnson said. “We’re checking in on the medical piece on each player we take and making sure we’re not missing anything. Because you get nervous when guys are on Day 2 and there’s guys you think should be gone and they’re still there.”

Here's a list of players chosen in the first 10 rounds

1. Trevor Larnach, OF, Oregon State: Lefthanded slugger has 17 HR, 65 RBI for nation’s No. 2 ranked team.
2. Ryan Jeffers, C, UNC-Wilmington: Power potential, but could switch positions in the minors.
4. DaShawn Keirse, OF, Utah: Serious hip injury last year, but rebounded to hit .386 for Utes.
5. Cole Sands, RHP, Florida State: 95 mph fastball, was No. 1 starter for Seminoles before being injured.
6. Charles Mack, SS, Williamsville (N.Y) East HS: Lefthanded power hitter who will move to third base.
7. Josh Winder, RHP, VMI: Fastball clocked at 95 mph; 91 strikeouts in 85 innings.
8. Chris Williams, C, Clemson: Played first base while recovering from injured throwing shoulder.
9. Willie Joe Garry, Jr., CF, Pascagoula (MS.) HS: Once coached by former Twin Matt Lawton

10. Regi Grace, RHP, Madison Central (MS) HS: Low 90's fastball plus a curveball that has potential.

Twins-Chicago Game 2 recap

Staff Writer | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018

GAME 2 RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Yolmer Sanchez, Chicago

Two doubles and a walk, and drove in two runs to help Sox earn a split.

BY THE NUMBERS

23 Doubles by Eduardo Escobar this season, more than any other MLB player.

10 Baserunners allowed by Zack Littell in his MLB debut, in which he recorded nine outs.

55 Consecutive games played this season by Brian Dozier, a streak that ended in Game 2.

Twins-Chicago Game 1 recap

Staff Writer | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018

GAME 1 RECAP IMPACT PLAYER

Eduardo Escobar, Twins

His three-run homer turned a quiet Twins loss into a victory worthy of a curtain call

BY THE NUMBERS

0 Walks allowed by Fernando Romero, the first time in his seven career starts he hasn't issued one. He gave up seven hits and struck out four.

1 Hits by the Twins over seven innings against Chicago starter Reynaldo Lopez

Postgames: Littell "got to live out a dream," even in losing his debut

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018

A couple of extras from a long day at the ballpark:

Zach Littell emerged from the Twins' clubhouse shortly after the Twins' 6-3 loss on Tuesday night, and started hugging people. The 22-year-old righthander had 21 friends and family members in the stands at Target Field on Tuesday, most of them thrilled to travel from western North Carolina to be here for his debut.

"He should have a lot of adrenaline," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "He had what seemed like a fairly large contingent up there who were pretty boisterous."

Littell himself was still calming himself down afterwards, though giving up six runs over three innings deflated the mood.

But only a little bit.

"I got to live out a dream," Littell said. "It was awesome."

He figured he would be excited, but then he thought he would simply get down to business, just like he has hundreds of times before. Only, this time was undoubtedly different.

"You expect the adrenaline, you expect the rush of it,. But it just hung around a little longer than I thought it would," Littell said. "I thought it would go by after the first out or the first inning, but it just hung around. It's something I'll have to learn to deal with."

That's why getting to pitch two more innings was helpful. "That's probably the most pitches I've ever thrown in that timespan. I just wanted to try to go deep into the game, but tonight was kind of tough," he said. "There's no way to prepare for this, no matter what you do or who you talk to. There's just no way until you pitch in a major league game. I'll just continue to work on what I've been working on, get back up here and do it again."

Only, he wouldn't throw an 86-mph slider in the middle of the plate to Jose Abreu again.

"[There are] a lot of pitches I wish I could take back, [but] probably the Abreu home run, it started everything off," he said. "Even the double [by Yolmer Sanchez] before him wasn't a bad pitch. He fisted it off to left field for a double. But the Abreu pitch, I left it down the middle and he did his job."

Molitor has made an interesting discovery over the past month, and again on Tuesday: It's fun to call Fernando Rodney into a game.

"You look forward to when he gets an opportunity to come in and close out the game," the manager said of his closer, who has converted 11 straight save opportunities. "He's an interesting guy. He comes out throwing the first pitch 88 [mph], and five pitches later it's 97. But he's got a good feel, and he loves the opportunity. It doesn't seem like he's slowed down in terms of stuff."

Twins complete Day 2 of the draft by selecting prep righthander
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018

The Twins completed the second day of the draft by selecting righthander Regi Grace from Madison (MS.) Central High.

Grace missed his junior year with a back injury but returned this season and got scouts' attention while going 7-2 with a 1.31 ERA.. He added a few mph to his fastball late in the season, as it ticked up to the mid-90's. And he can spin a breaking ball. He has signed with Mississippi State, so he could be a tough sign. But he has talent the Twins could work with.

That's all for today's draft. Teams return tomorrow at 11 a.m. for rounds 11-40. The Twins ended up selecting three pitchers today, with more expected tomorrow. A couple picks are shaking off old injuries, so that is worth monitoring.

Ninth round: CF Willie Joe Garry Jr.

The Twins selected CF Willie Joe Garry Jr from Pascagoula (MS.) High in the ninth round of the draft.

Garry wasn't listed among the top 25 players coming out of Mississippi this year. But he's a lefthanded hitter with some line drive ability who can run. He was once coached as a youth by former Twin Matt Lawton.

Sounds like a project. Sounds like someone they can save bonus money with so they can sign players like Charles Mack.

With one round to go, the Twins have selected two pitchers, two righthanders, two centerfielders, a catcher and an infielder with their six picks. And there is one to go.

Eighth round: Clemson C Chris Williams

Clemson catcher Chris Williams was selected by the Twins in the eighth round. He's the second catcher taken by the club, after second round pick Ryan Jeffers.

Williams could turn out to be a steal - if his shoulder holds up.

He injured his shoulder late in the 2017 season while diving back into first base during a pickoff attempt, requiring surgery. He wasn't 100 percent at the start of the 2018 season, so Clemson used him mostly at first base this year while he continued to build up strength in the shoulder.

The Twins have their medical staff look over reports on most draft-eligible players. So they must be convinced that Williams' shoulder won't be an issue.

He's a good hitting prospect, batting .281 with home runs and 72 RBI this season. He walked 43 times and struck out 52 in 63 games. Potentially, a good on base percentage guy.

But the key will be how he distances himself from his shoulder injury while honing his defensive skills behind the plate.

Baseball America has him ranked 213th. Here's part of their scouting report:

"When healthy, Williams showed solid-average arm strength behind the plate, throwing out 50 percent of basestealers; his defensive game needs polish, but he profiles as an offensively geared catcher. His draft stock this year will depend on how teams view the medical reports on his right shoulder and whether they believe he'll be able to stick at catcher long-term. At the plate, Williams has been one of the best power hitters in the Atlantic Coast Conference since transferring from Golden West (Calif.) JC prior to his sophomore year."

Here's a solid feature about the young man.

Seventh round: Josh Winder

The Twins selected VMI righthander Josh Winder in the seventh round, the second pitcher they have taken today. Winder opened eyes last season when he set a school record for strikeouts and touched 95 miles an hour with his fastball. His stuff has regressed some this season, with a fastball in the low 90's.

Winder went 5-6 with a 5.40 ERA (85.0 IP, 51 ER), 19 walks and 91 strikeouts this season. Over his last four starts, he went 4-0 with a 2.56 ERA while walking four and striking out 31. That might have the Twins thinking that his 2017 stuff is coming back.

He was the 223rd ranked prospect by Baseball America, who mentioned the following in its scouting report:

"While he still managed a respectable walk rate with 19 free passes in 85 innings (2.01 BB/9), his strike-throwing has backed up this spring. He's fanned 91 batters through 85 innings and posted a 5.40 ERA in 14 starts. Winder could still get taken in the fifth or sixth round by a team that's confident he'll get back to his 2017 version, but his stock has slipped a bit this spring."

Sixth round: Charles Mack

The Twins selected shortstop Charles Mack in the sixth round.

The 5-foot-11, 210-pounder hit .551 with four homers, 20 RBIs and a .959 slugging percentage during the regular season as a senior for Williamsville East HS in New York

Mack played shortstop for his high school team, but the Twins have asked that Mack be listed as a third baseman. He could also end up at second, but reports are that his arm is strong enough for third base.

His bat is his ticket to the majors, as he has shown projectible lefthanded power in high school. Yes, the Twins have good shortstops in the organization. But you can never have enough. And Mack is being moved to third base.

Mack is committed to Clemson, so it will be interesting if the Twins will have to offer more than \$253,700 to buy him out of his commitment. If the Twins start drafting kids ranked in the 400's, that means they are looking for cheap signs to save money to make a run at someone like Mack.

UPDATE: Scouting director Sean Johnson said they are confident that they will sign Mack.

Baseball America ranks him as the 118th best prospect. Here's the write-up:

"Mack has above-average bat speed and routinely puts on a good show in batting practice with above-average raw power from his 5-foot-11, 185-pound frame. He's cleaned up his hands and load over the last couple of years and scouts think he has a chance to be an above-average hitter. Mack is an infielder who plays mostly shortstop in high school, but there are questions about his defensive home in the future. If he stays on the infield, Mack's range and defensive actions would seem to fit best at second base, although there are scouts that think he could be an above-average defensive catcher down the line."

Fifth round: RHP Cole Sands

The Twins have selected Florida State righthander Cole Sands in the fifth round, their first pitcher selected in the MLB draft.

Sands, listed at 6 feet, 3 inches and 220 pounds, went 7-4 with a 4.54 ERA for the Seminoles after taking over as the No. 1 starter when a teammate was down with an injury. He throws a fastball with good sinking action, topping out at 95 miles per hour, to go with a slider and a changeup. He's known for his competitive demeanor.

Baseball America has him ranked 74th while MLB.com ranks him 116th.

Sands was drafted in the 22nd round out of high school by the Astros, but elected to stay close to home and pitch for the Seminoles. Here's BA's write up about him:

"Sands has compiled a solid college track record, including a strong performance in the Cape Cod League. Sands throws his fastball in the low 90s, reaching 95 mph with sinking action. He throws his sharp slider for strikes and he has improved his changeup into a viable third offering. Sands comes right after hitters and locates his fastball well. Listed at 6-foot-3, 220 pounds, Sands has good size and has been a reliable starter throughout his career."

Sands missed two games earlier in the season due to biceps tendinitis. And look what happened on Friday. I'm sure the Twins have received assurances that Sands is not seriously injured.

Fourth round pick: OF DaShawn Keirse

DaShawn Keirse, an outfielder from the University of Utah, was selected by the Twins in the fourth round of the first year player draft on Tuesday.

Keirse was highly thought of as a prospect a year ago but had a setback when he crashed into a wall in May of 2017, suffering a serious hip injury. So he's in the process of distancing himself from that injury. But he projects to be a good athlete who can play center field and could develop some power. Right now, he's a line drive hitter who makes plenty of contact.

He's a three-time all Pac-12 player who hit .386 last season with four home runs and 22 RBI.

Keirse, a lefthanded hitter and thrower, is ranked as the 144th best prospect by MLB.com. But Baseball America has his ranked 82nd. Here's their write-up on him:

"Keirse's career-best campaign this spring is impressive enough in its own right, as the junior center fielder hit .392/.440/.636 through his first 36 games—a slugging percentage nearly .200 points better than his previous high. His performance looks even more impressive when remembering the gruesome injury he suffered last May, when Keirse dislocated and fractured his left hip after colliding into the center field wall while tracking a deep home run.

While the injury prevented Keirse from playing in the Cape Cod League last summer, it's seemingly done nothing to slow him down this spring. Scouts have been impressed with his athleticism, plus raw power, a strong throwing arm and running ability.

The power is the obvious improvement in Keirse's game, although most of that is driven by all of the doubles he's collected (18) rather than the home runs (3) he has hit through May 10.

While scouts grade Keirse as an above-average or plus runner, teams will worry that his hip injury will cause that grade to depreciate quicker than usual, and a related, recurring injury is also a concern.

Outside of durability questions, Keirse has a solid package of tools and a bat that can project as average—both of which could override worries about the medical."

Here's s story about his comeback from the injury. Makes my hip ache just reading it.

The second round of the draft is underway, with rounds three through 10 taking place. Keirse is the Twins first pick this afternoon because they lost their third round pick when they signed Lance Lynn as a free agent.

Check back here for updates as the draft continues.

Twins stay college heavy on Day 2 of the draft
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | June 5, 2018

After making two selections on Monday, there was a 65-pick overnight wait for Twins scouting director Sean Johnson before he could again put his expansive team's reconnaissance to good use.

"It felt like 1,000 picks," Johnson said Tuesday after completing Day 2 of the draft. "It felt like we were in the penalty box for awhile, so when we got back out it was nice."

Utah center fielder DaShawn Keirse, a speedster still working back from a horrific collision with the outfield wall 13 months ago, went to the Twins in the fourth round. He was on their radar in the second round, so they were pleased to get him with the 124th overall pick, which carried a

slot value of \$443,000.

The Twins' total draft pool for the first 10 rounds was \$5.93 million this year, fifth-lowest among the 30 organizations.

Keirsey had hip surgery as a sophomore but has shown no fear in his pursuit of fly balls while playing his home games at the hive of the Triple-A Salt Lake Bees.

"This guy will go into the wall still," Johnson said. "He's a really good defender. He has a pro swing. We think there is some more power in there."

Round 5 brought the Twins their first pitcher of the 2018 draft: Florida State right-hander Cole Sands. He overcame a bout of biceps tendinitis this season and comes with a 92-95 mph fastball, low-80s slider and a starter's profile.

Despite concerns about overwork for some members of the Seminoles staff, the Twins are confident Sands comes to them in relative health after being pulled just 55 pitches into his regional start against Samford last Friday.

"The information we have is that he's fine, and we obviously double-checked on that before we took him," Johnson said. "From what we know, it was just a precautionary thing and he'll be fine."

Sixth-round shortstop Charles Mack (Williamsville, N.Y.) was the Twins' first high school draftee this year, and they went back into the prep pool in the ninth round for toolsy center fielder Willie Joe Gary Jr. from Pascagoula, Miss. Mack is a Clemson signee but the Twins expect to sign him.

Eighth-rounder Chris Williams, a Clemson senior, is a power-hitting catcher coming off a shoulder injury that could force him to move to another spot. He joins second-rounder Ryan Jeffers, a catcher from North Carolina-Wilmington, as the Twins try to replenish a hard-to-find position.

Physically, Jeffers reminds Twins scouts of Mitch Garver at the same stage, but with pitch-framing and throwing ability that pushed him up the draft board to No. 59 overall (\$1.14 million draft slot).

"A lot to like there," Johnson said.

MORRISON SITS

First baseman Logan Morrison was unavailable for Tuesday's doubleheader due to back stiffness. Miguel Sano started both games at third base in his place.

"He he just had a little issue with his back," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We're just going to have to monitor and see what it turns into. I'm hoping it's a short-term deal."

Asked if he knew how Morrison hurt his back, Molitor said "not specifically." Morrison briefly hoisted left fielder Eddie Rosario after his walk-off homer on Sunday.

"I know he said today after the game on Sunday he felt a little bit stiff," Molitor said. "Wasn't too worried about it but just didn't have any improvement over the last couple days."

MAUER WORKS OUT

First baseman Joe Mauer, out since May 18 with neck and concussion issues, went through another on-field workout after taking Monday off.

"I'm not sure when we're going to collectively decide it's the right time," Molitor said.

DRAFT BITS

With the 74th overall pick (\$812,200 slot value) they received from the Twins along with Phil Hughes' contract, the Padres took Texas Tech outfielder Grant Little, a sophomore-draft eligible.

With the 20th pick of the third round, the Cubs took speedy Duke center fielder Jimmy Herron. That was the pick the Twins forfeited (along with the slot value of \$570,600) with the signing of Lance Lynn in March.

Gophers shortstop Terrin Vavra, youngest son of former Twins coach Joe Vavra, was taken in the third round by the Colorado Rockies. His older

brothers, Tanner and Trey, were drafted by the Twins in the 30th and 33rd rounds, respectively, in 2013 and 2014.

BRIEFLY

Ervin Santana's checkup with finger surgeon Dr. Charles Melone went well on Monday in New York City. The plan is for Santana to resume throwing on Thursday as he works toward restarting his rehab clock in the minors.

Class A Cedar Rapids right fielder Alex Kirilloff was named Midwest League player of the month for May. The 15th overall pick in 2016 hit .360 in 31 games with a combined on-base/slugging percentage of 1.063.

Twins settle for doubleheader split with White Sox **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | June 5, 2018**

Zack Littell's big-league debut didn't go as hoped, a four-run first giving the right-hander plenty to contemplate on his way back to Triple-A Rochester, and a pair of late rallies fell short in the final two innings with the potential tying run at the plate.

As a result, the Twins fell 6-3 to the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday night and had to settle for a doubleheader split at Target Field. Their last doubleheader sweep in their favor came on April 17, 2014 at home over the Toronto Blue Jays, 17 doubleheaders ago.

Still, the one-day cameo as the 26th man was something Littell will never forget.

"I got to live out a dream, and that was awesome," said the 22-year-old North Carolinian, who was pitching in front of 21 friends and family members. "Obviously the results weren't great. I didn't get to pitch the way I wanted to, but the experience of it all was incredible."

Falling for the first time in five games, the Twins watched Littell issue four walks in three-plus innings and leave with an 18.00 earned run average. He struck out the dangerous Yoan Moncada at 96 mph to start the nightcap, but needed 35 pitches to escape a five-hit first.

To his credit, the spin-rate darling was able to record nine outs on 86 pitches, pitching out of a pair of jams in the second and third before being lifted after consecutive walks to start the fourth.

"You expect the adrenaline but dealing with it is a whole different story," he said. "I was definitely amped up. I felt good, but I didn't feel like I was nervous or wasn't able to execute. I just had an off night and can only learn from it."

Earlier Tuesday, young White Sox right-hander Reynaldo Lopez held the Twins to one hit through seven innings before they rallied in the eighth against veteran reliever Nate Jones. Eduardo Escobar's three-run homer carried the Twins to a 4-2 victory in the opener.

It was Escobar's 11th homer, this one coming on a 97-mph fastball, and his eighth career homer in 78 games against the White Sox, tied for his most against any opponent. Does he derive added pleasure from connecting against the club that traded him in July 2012.

"It's the same thing," Escobar said. "I play hard — 100 percent every day — no matter what team I'm facing. It wasn't an easy decision for Chicago. They gave me the opportunity and signed me to play professionally. They traded me here, but I'm so happy here. It's my new house."

Brian Dozier's infield smash off Yolmer Sanchez's glove at third started the winning rally with two outs. Eddie Rosario followed with a full-count walk, and Miguel Sano rifled a run-scoring single to left.

Fernando Rodney finished up for his 13th save in 16 chances.

Rookie right-hander Fernando Romero rebounded from a disastrous outing in Kansas City, where he allowed nine hits and eight earned runs while recording just five outs. Moncada opened the game with a 430-foot homer to dead center, but Romero bobbed and weaved to complete six innings for just the third time in seven big-league starts.

Romero held the White Sox to just one hit in eight at-bats with runners in scoring position: Jose Abreu's two-out double in the fifth. It was the first time in 11 starts this season, including four at Triple-A Rochester, that Romero had gone walk-free.

Ex-Twin Daniel Palka ripped a two-out double in the first at 118.4 mph. That was the second-highest exit velocity recorded this season, trailing only Aaron Judge's 119.9 mph laser for the New York Yankees, but that didn't keep the Twins from roaring back to win the opener.

"You know Twins boys always got something in the backpack," Romero said. "We never give it up."

Mike Trout hit a game-ending liner against Rodney at 118.0 mph in Anaheim on May 11, meaning two of the four hardest-hit balls this season

have come against Twins pitching.

After having three mid-April games postponed by the Blizzard of '18, the Twins still have two more home doubleheaders with the White Sox on the docket (Aug. 20 and Sept. 28). In six doubleheaders last season, the Twins dropped the opener each time, got swept once and split five times.

The cost of moving pitchers: Twins gave up 2 top-100 draft picks this year, limiting draft pool money

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | June 6, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — In two separate transactions in the past several months, the Twins forfeited draft choices for the right to move a pitcher. In one case, they paid that price to add a pitcher; in the other, they had to give up a top-100 pick to help get rid of one.

Now that the first 100 picks of this year's draft, we've got a clearer view of the whole picture. Let's take a quick look.

In March the Twins were looking at the price tag for free agent starter Lance Lynn and thinking that it looked appealing on a one-year offer. They might have preferred a cheaper two-year offer, but in either case, Lynn signed a one-year, \$12 million deal after spring training was well underway. Since the Cardinals had extended Lynn a qualifying offer, signing him came at the expense of a high draft pick. In the Twins' case, that was pick No. 95 at the time, and that's for just one year of Lynn. (Unfortunately for Lynn, it appears that he would have received a much better deal if he simply accepted the qualifying offer in St. Louis.)

For Minnesota, it means that they now get to employ Lynn in the starting rotation and they lost the 95th pick in the draft. The Cardinals used that third-round pick to draft Mateo Gil, a high school shortstop from Texas. The pick comes with an approximate slot value of \$588,000, which the Twins also gave up when they surrendered the pick. (Gophers shortstop Terrin Vavra was drafted one pick later, so he would have been available to the Twins at 95, if Minnesota liked the Local Angle.)

Trading Hughes was slightly more complicated. The Twins got a catching prospect back who does not seem to have very much prospect cachet. They sent the 74th pick and the recently DFA'd Phil Hughes to San Diego and agreed to take care of a portion of his salary. Reports say that the Padres will take care of about \$7.25 million of next year's \$13.2 million salary for Hughes, which to me says that the Twins basically just sold the 74th pick in the draft after giving up on Hughes.

Pick No. 74, which came with a little more than \$800,000 in slot pool money, was used to draft Grant Little, an outfielder from Texas Tech.

"Ultimately, any time you make a trade, it's all about valuations of players, contracts, asset value," Twins CBO Derek Falvey said. "A draft pick's an asset. But we felt like in the [Phil Hughes] deal that we made – to get the player that we got back, to get the financial flexibility and be able to move some asset value around to help us in the near term – we felt it was the right deal to make.

"It's always tough to give up draft picks; we aspire to get more if we can," he said.

So the Twins value draft picks and they're also willing to move them around as assets if they get a deal that they like. This time around, for the right to sign Lynn for a year and get out from under part of Hughes' contract, the Twins lost two top-100 draft picks and about \$1.4 million in draft slot signing bonus money.

Zulgad: Fernando Rodney again closes the door on early-season struggles

Judd Zulgad | ESPN 1500 | June 5, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Eduardo Escobar's three-run homer in the bottom of the eighth inning on Tuesday had given the Twins a 4-2 lead over the Chicago White Sox in the first game of a doubleheader at Target Field.

This left it up to Fernando Rodney to close out the White Sox. The 41-year-old righthander got the first two hitters he faced to ground out to second and shortstop. Yoan Moncada, who had led off the game with a home run, then struck out swinging on a 95-mile-per-hour fastball as Rodney recorded his 13th save.

What was interesting was that as Rodney jogged in from the bullpen there was no concern that the Twins' lead was in danger or that Rodney would make things interesting. That was in stark contrast to Rodney's first month in Minnesota when it appeared the Twins' one-year, \$4.5 million investment in the closer (the deal included a team option for 2019) might not have been a wise one.

Rodney posted a 6.75 earned-run average in his first eight games with the Twins, going 1-2 with two saves converted and three blown. Opponents hit two home runs against Rodney and had a .375 average against him as each of his appearances turned into an adventure that Twins manager Paul Molitor certainly did not enjoy.

But there was a good reason to believe Rodney would turn things around. Rodney also had been awful in the first month a year ago with Arizona, giving up 14 earned runs in 10 innings (a 12.60 ERA) with two blown saves. Opponents hit .364 against him, leaving Diamondbacks fans and

officials wondering if Rodney had lost it.

He hadn't.

Once May arrived, so did Rodney's stuff. Over his next 14 games, he did not give up an earned run in 13.2 innings. He surrendered two hits in that time and recorded 11 saves with only one blown save during a season in which he finished with 39 saves, or his most since he had 48 with Seattle in 2014.

This season Rodney found his stuff in late April. Rodney's third save as a Twin came on April 28 in a 3-1 win against the Cincinnati Reds at Target Field. Since that time, he has made 14 appearances, giving up one earned run and six hits with 12 strikeouts in 14.1 innings. He now has 313 career saves and needs one to tie Robb Nen for 21st on the all-time list.

"There were a lot of things in the first (month)," said Rodney, who now has a 2.57 ERA in 21 innings. "Every moment you go to the mound you want to feel comfortable. When you started in April (with) very bad weather, but you try the best (you can). I knew someday it's going to be how I want; the way I want to continue doing my job and throwing the ball. I feel that way right now. ... Maybe before I tried to do a little bit too much. A lot of pitches out of the strike zone, hang a lot of pitches. But I feel good right now."

The Twins' ability to rely on Rodney for more than month now has been one reason the team had pulled within four games of .500 (26-30) after winning the opening game of the doubleheader against the White Sox. The Twins fell back to 26-31 with a 6-3 loss to the White Sox in the nightcap.

"I'm not trying to defend the guy," Twins manager Paul Molitor said when asked about Rodney's turnaround. "I think that some of the things that happened earlier ... the baseball gods weren't looking too favorably on him. Some of the things that happened and some of the saves that got away.

"But if you want to combine that on the flip side with he's had a little bit of trouble getting on track in some of his other seasons until he gets in the groove. But it's been really pretty clean here for several weeks now. You look forward to when he gets an opportunity to come in and close out the game."

Eddie Rosario was the hero on Sunday when his third home run of the day gave the Twins a 7-5 victory over AL Central-leading Cleveland in the bottom of the ninth inning, but it was Rodney who had come in to pitch the top of the ninth and held the Indians scoreless to earn his second victory of the season.

"I have a lot of confidence," Rodney said. "As you said, I've spent a long time in this game. Every moment I'm trying to do my best and if it doesn't happen tonight (for me) that's why we play every day."

Rodney is in his 16th big-league season and with his ninth team. He pitched for the Detroit Tigers from 2002 through 2009 and then began a tour of the major leagues that has included stops with the Los Angeles Angels (2010-11), Tampa Bay (2012-13), Seattle (2014-15), the Cubs (2015), San Diego (2016), Miami (2016) and Arizona.

As he did in 2015 and 2016, Rodney could find himself on the move during this season if the Twins fall out of the race as the trade deadline nears. But if the Twins can remain within striking distance of the first-place Indians, Rodney has an opportunity to spend at least one season closing things out at Target Field.

"He's an interesting guy," Molitor said. "He comes out and throws the first pitch 88 (miles per hour) and then five pitches later it's 97. But he's got a good feel and he loves the opportunity. It doesn't seem like he's slowed down in terms of stuff."

Logan Morrison held out of Twins' doubleheader with 'back issue' **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | June 5, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — The Twins earned the split Tuesday in a doubleheader with the Chicago White Sox, thanks to a dramatic win in game 1.

Unfortunately for Minnesota, the team couldn't get through the day without another injury update to add to the pile.

Starting DH/first baseman Logan Morrison was on the shelf Tuesday with what manager Paul Molitor described as a back "issue." Morrison was in the dugout and met with the training staff after the conclusion of the second game, but he was unavailable for a possible late-game pinch-hitting opportunity, Molitor said.

"He's just having a little issue with his back," Molitor said. "So we're going to just have to monitor him and see what it turns into. I'm hoping it's a short-term deal. He wasn't available [Tuesday]."

Molitor said that he didn't know specifically how Morrison hurt his back. Although the Twins' manager mentioned that Morrison told him he'd felt a little stiff Sunday and just "didn't have any improvement over the last couple days."

Molitor said that he hopes this is a short-term injury. Still, when an injury lingers through an off day, it could be cause for concern. And while it's certainly too early to sound the alarm, it does seem the Twins have gotten some awful bad luck with injuries and available this year.

They're already without their starting catcher (knee surgery), first baseman (concussion), shortstop (drug suspension), centerfielder (broken toe) and now they could be without their DH/first baseman. Oh, and their starting third baseman missed 24 games with a hamstring strain.

Other than that, though, the Twins have been relatively healthy on the position player side of things this year.

Here's every player that the Minnesota Twins selected on Day 2 of the MLB Draft **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | June 5, 2018**

The Twins have tried to stock up on young talent in the 2018 MLB first-year player draft — even after giving away two early round picks.

They gave up one pick to add a pitcher, Lance Lynn, when they surrendered the 95th to sign the free agent. (Lynn had rejected the qualifying offer.) Then they gave up another draft pick to subtract a pitcher, Phil Hughes, when they sent the 74th overall pick to San Diego as part of the Hughes salary dump.

Here's a look at every Twins draft pick through Day 2:

Day 1

- 1 (20) – Trevor Larnach, outfielder. Oregon State
- 2 (59) – Ryan Jeffers, catcher. UNC-Wilmington

Day 2

- 4 (124) – DaShawn Keirse Jr., centerfielder. University of Utah
- 5 (154) – Cole Sands, RHP. Florida State University
- 6 (184) – Charlie Mack, 3B. Williamsville East High School in New York
- 7 (214) – Josh Winder, RHP. Virginia Military Institute
- 8 (244) – Chris Williams, catcher. Clemson
- 9 (274) – Willie Joe Garry Jr., centerfielder. Pascagoula high school in Mississippi
- 10 (304) – Regi Grace, RHP. Madison Central high school in Mississippi

Escobar's late homer powers Twins to 4-2 victory **Associated Press | Fox Sports North | June 5, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Twins flailed their way through seven scoreless innings against Chicago's Reynaldo Lopez, and they made two quick outs in the eighth.

Then came the rally, capped by another clutch hit by Eduardo Escobar.

Escobar hit a three-run home run to power the Twins to a 4-2 victory on Tuesday in the first game of a doubleheader, spoiling a stellar start by the White Sox right-hander Lopez.

"Kind of feel like we stole one a little bit, given the fact that we didn't have much going the entire game," Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

Miguel Sano's RBI single set up Escobar for his latest damage to his original team. Traded to the Twins in 2012 for starting pitcher Francisco Liriano, Escobar is batting .321 with seven doubles, four homers and 14 RBIs in his past 22 games against the White Sox.

Once again, the dogged and affable Venezuelan seemingly destined for a utility role has dug himself in the middle of the lineup as a valuable everyday player.

He's on pace for a 30-homer, 60-double season.

"I play hard, 100 percent every day no matter what team I'm facing," Escobar said. "The most important thing is playing hard."

Tyler Duffey (1-1) pitched two scoreless innings for the victory, and Fernando Rodney pitched a perfect ninth for his 13th save in 16 attempts and

11th in a row.

Twins starter Fernando Romero went six innings, allowing a two-out RBI double to Jose Abreu in the fifth but striking out four without a walk. He gave up seven hits.

With a lift from Yoan Moncada's leadoff home run, Lopez sailed through seven scoreless innings with only one hit allowed. He turned a 2-0 lead over to Nate Jones (2-2), who got two easy outs before Brian Dozier reached on an infield single that was bobbled by third baseman Yolmer Sanchez and preceded by a low throw that Abreu couldn't scoop at first base.

Eddie Rosario walked. Then Sano's single finally put the Twins on the scoreboard, before Escobar's 414-foot drive to straightaway center on a 1-2 pitch.

He pumped his arm and shouted in celebration as he rounded first base to put the Twins ahead and on track for their fourth straight win, before emerging from the dugout with a wide smile for a tip-of-the-helmet curtain call.

"Twins ball has always got something in the backpack," Romero said. "We never give it up."

Lopez (2-4) walked four batters and struck out four, allowing only a fourth-inning double by Escobar. He left after 106 pitches, a strong bounce back from his previous turn when he allowed seven hits and eight runs at Cleveland in just 2 2/3 innings.

"It was a really nice outing. Win or lose, that's something that I can't control," Lopez said through an interpreter. "I can just control the execution of my pitches and have command and control of my pitches. As a team, you always want to win. Losses are never easy to digest, but this is a game and you have to be ready for whatever the outcome is."

GETTING CAUGHT UP

The game was a makeup from April 15, when a weekend snowstorm finished smothering the Twin Cities and forced a third straight postponement. The others were rescheduled for Aug. 20, a single game on what was originally a day off for the teams, and Sept. 28 as a day-night, dual-admission doubleheader. This one was a traditional twinbill, with only one ticket required and just a half-hour between games.

TRAINER'S ROOM

White Sox: Matt Davidson returned from the DL for back spasms and served as the DH in the second game. He missed 12 games.

Twins: RHP Ervin Santana, who had a setback with his middle finger rehabilitation last week in the minor leagues, visited with his surgeon on Monday that yielded no red flags. He's scheduled to throw again on Thursday.

UP NEXT

White Sox: RHP Lucas Giolito takes the mound in the second game. He lost to the Twins on April 12, the only game that was played as scheduled during that series, after allowing five hits, five walks and four runs in 6 1/3 innings.

Twins: RHP Zack Littell, added as the 26th player for the doubleheader, makes his major league debut in the second game. Acquired last July 30 from the New York Yankees in a trade for starting pitcher Jaime Garcia, the 22-year-old Littell has a 2.57 ERA in 28 innings for Triple-A Rochester. He was promoted from Double-A soon after Romero was called up by the Twins.

Twins tumble in nightcap of doubleheader

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | June 6, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Every year he's been with the Minnesota Twins, Eduardo Escobar has been slotted for a utility reserve role in spring training until some kind of setback during the season necessitates more action for the affable infielder.

Once again, he has further entrenched himself as a vital everyday player. Facing the Chicago White Sox, well, that especially brings out his best.

Escobar went 5 for 8 with five RBIs in the doubleheader, hitting a three-run homer with two outs in the eighth inning in a 4-2 victory by the Twins in the opener before the White Sox bounced back with a 6-3 win in the second game for a split.

"He's got a better idea how to use that skill set he brings up to the plate," Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

After Escobar put the exclamation point on the rally in the matinee to ruin a stellar start by White Sox right-hander Reynaldo Lopez, Jose Abreu

hit a two-run homer in the first inning of the nightcap to send Zack Littell's major league debut on a short track.

Escobar did his best to bring the Twins back again, with RBI doubles in the third and the eighth innings. The White Sox bullpen held this time, though. Luis Avilan struck out Max Kepler with men on second and third in the eighth, and Joakim Soria fanned Mitch Garver. Soria had runners at the corners in the ninth, but he finished his fifth save in seven opportunities.

Traded to the Twins in 2012 for starting pitcher Francisco Liriano, Escobar is batting .325 with nine doubles, four homers and 17 RBIs in his past 23 games against the White Sox. He has 11 home runs in 2018 and an MLB-leading 23 doubles, putting him on pace for a 30-homer, 60-double season.

"I'm so happy," Escobar said, "but the most important thing is to help the team win."

Abreu, who hit an RBI double in the opener, hit a first-pitch fastball from Littell (0-1) left over the middle of the plate onto the grass berm beyond center field. With an RBI single by Kevan Smith and an RBI double by Adam Engel, the White Sox staked starter Lucas Giolito (4-6) to a 4-0 lead. Giolito took advantage of the early cushion and completed six innings, and a two-run double by Yolmer Sanchez in the fourth provided further support.

"Everything kind of came together," Giolito said, "as far as the defense behind me and the offense supporting me."

The under-25 tandem of Lopez and Giolito gave the extra-green White Sox an encouraging performance.

"I feel really good about the fact that these are two of our youngest guys," manager Rick Renteria said. "They continue to evolve in different ways."

WELCOME TO THE SHOW

Littell, added as the 26th player for the doubleheader, was acquired last July 30 from the New York Yankees in a trade for starting pitcher Jaime Garcia. The 22-year-old got only nine outs, allowing six runs on six hits and four walks. He took a lot more than that back to Triple-A.

"Obviously the results weren't great, but it was one of the most fun nights of my life," Littell said, later adding: "You expect the adrenaline, but dealing with it is a whole different story."

FOR STARTERS

Twins starter Fernando Romero went six innings without a walk in the opener. Tyler Duffey (1-1) pitched two scoreless innings for the victory, and Fernando Rodney pitched a perfect ninth for his 13th save in 16 attempts and 11th in a row.

With a lift from Yoan Moncada's leadoff home run, Lopez sailed through seven scoreless innings with only one hit allowed. He turned a 2-0 lead over to Nate Jones (2-2), who got two easy outs before Brian Dozier reached on an infield single and Eddie Rosario walked. Miguel Sano's single finally put the Twins on the scoreboard before Escobar's 414-foot drive to straightaway center on a 1-2 pitch.

"Twins ball has always got something in the backpack," Romero said. "We never give it up."

LOPEZ SPARKLES

Lopez allowed four walks but only one hit, a fourth-inning double by Escobar. He left after 106 pitches, after surrendering seven hits and eight runs in his last turn at Cleveland in just 2 2/3 innings.

"It was a really nice outing. Win or lose, that's something that I can't control," Lopez said through a translator.

GETTING CAUGHT UP

The first game was a makeup from April 15, when a weekend snowstorm finished smothering the Twin Cities and forced a third straight postponement. The others were rescheduled for Aug. 20 — a single game on what was originally a day off for the teams — and Sept. 28 as a day-night, dual-admission doubleheader. This one was a traditional twin bill, with only one ticket required and just a half-hour between games.

TRAINER'S ROOM

White Sox: LHP Carlos Rodon, who is still working his way back from offseason shoulder surgery, is expected to be reinstated from the DL this week to make his first start of the season. Because Lopez and Gioloto both pitched in the doubleheader, there'll be an opening in the rotation this

weekend at Boston.

Twins: 1B Logan Morrison was unavailable for both games because of back stiffness. “We’re just going to monitor it and see what it turns into,” Molitor said.

UP NEXT

White Sox: LHP Hector Santiago (1-2, 5.10 ERA) pitches on Wednesday night against his former team. He made 25 starts for the Twins over the 2016 and 2017 seasons and posted a cumulative 5.61 ERA. He allowed eight runs on six hits and six walks in 3 1/3 innings against them in a turn on May 5.

Twins: RHP Jake Odorizzi (3-2, 4.14 ERA) takes the mound for the third game of the series. He’s coming off his worst start with his new team, with eight runs allowed on seven hits and two walks in 3 2/3 innings last week against Cleveland.

Preview: Twins vs. White Sox
STATS | Fox Sports North | June 6, 2018

Wednesday marks a return to normalcy for the Minnesota Twins and Chicago White Sox.

After splitting a doubleheader Tuesday, the two teams will return to action Wednesday night when they resume their four-game series at Target Field.

The Twins are hoping to get Logan Morrison back in the lineup Wednesday. Minnesota’s first baseman sat out both games of the doubleheader because of back stiffness.

“He just had a little issue with his back,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said of Morrison, who has five hits in his last 34 at-bats. “We’re just going to have to monitor and see what it turns into. I’m hoping it’s a short-term deal.

Miguel Sano started both games at first in place of Morrison and went 1-for-7.

“I know he said today after the game on Sunday he felt a little bit stiff,” Molitor said. “Wasn’t too worried about it but just didn’t have any improvement over the last couple days.”

Right-hander Jake Odorizzi gets the start for Minnesota, which had a three-game winning streak snapped with a 6-3 loss in the nightcap.

Odorizzi is coming off his worst start of the season when he allowed eight runs — seven earned — over just 3 2/3 innings in a 9-8 loss to Cleveland on Thursday.

Odorizzi allowed a three-run homer to Francisco Lindor and a solo homer to Jose Ramirez in the fourth inning Thursday. In his last three starts, Odorizzi has allowed five homers.

“They hit some mistakes,” Odorizzi said. “I got to two strikes on a lot of people and I feel like and they were kind of looking for some of the stuff I threw, I guess. They were on it.”

It marked just the 12th time in 138 career starts that Odorizzi failed to get through four innings.

“It’s going to happen from time to time in your career,” Odorizzi said. “Just move on from it. Remember it.’ It’s funny to pass that knowledge along to him, and now I have to look myself in the mirror. I’ve been through it before. We all have as pitchers.”

Odorizzi is 1-1 with a 3.86 ERA in four career starts against Chicago.

The White Sox have won three of five after dropping six of seven.

After Eduardo Escobar hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning off Nate Jones to give Minnesota a 4-2 win in the opener Tuesday, Jose Abreu hit a two-run homer in a four-run first inning for Chicago in the nightcap.

The White Sox will send out a familiar face to Minnesota fans as Hector Santiago takes the mound. Santiago, who made 26 appearances with Minnesota in the previous two seasons, is 1-2 with a 5.10 ERA in 16 outings (six starts) this season.

He last started on May 26 when he allowed three runs (two earned) and seven hits in five innings of an 8-4 win at Detroit. Santiago is 1-2 with a

6.59 ERA in six starts this season.

One of those starts occurred May 5 against the Twins in Chicago when he allowed eight runs and six hits in 3 1/3 innings. Santiago allowed a homer to Eddie Rosario and issued six walks in that start.

"I pulled a lot of fastballs, which is weird for me because usually if I miss then I'm missing up and away or up and in to a lefty," Santiago said after his last outing against Minnesota. "So little different kind of scenario there, I was trying to figure out which way to go, trying to make that adjustment, and I just never figured that out."

Santiago is 3-3 with a 5.73 ERA in 11 appearances (seven starts) against Minnesota.

The double-header began a difficult stretch for the White Sox, who will play 21 games in a span of 20 days and will not have a day off until June 25.

"We're going to play a lot of games," Chicago manager Rick Renteria said. "Every game's a test. It's the test they've been studying for their whole lives. They'll have some good results, some bad results."

10 hyped players who are running out of time to become stars

David Schoenfeld | ESPN | June 6, 2018

The MLB draft concludes Wednesday, an exciting and important time for every organization. It's also the annual reminder of how difficult it is to project high school and college players into the future. You know what else is difficult? Projecting players even closer to the majors into the future. Baseball is hard, with so many unknown variables.

This is a list of 10 players, all premium prospects coming up through the minors. I've chosen them more or less at random because their stat lines in 2018 jump out for various reasons. Five of them have negative WAR, one is at 0.0 and another is barely above replacement-level at 0.1 WAR. It's still too early to call them busts -- you never know in baseball -- and some of them have had significant major league success at some point.

But they're all at some type of crossroads in their careers. Let's take a look.

Byron Buxton, CF, Minnesota Twins

Stats: .156/.183/.200, 3 BB, 28 SO, 0 HR, minus-0.2 WAR

Age: 24.170

Peak prospect status: Consensus No. 1 (pre-2014)

Buxton has shown flashes of brilliance -- September 2016 when he hit nine home runs and the second half of 2017 when he hit .300/.347/.546 -- but between those flashes have been long droughts of empty results at the plate. I talked to Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey in spring training and one notable thing he said is that Buxton wants so badly to be a great player and can put too much pressure on himself.

Buxton is on the disabled list with a broken big toe, but before the injury he was back into some bad habits at the plate, with a 39 percent chase rate. He was at 32.4 percent in the second half last year -- still high, but at least a figure he could still do some damage on. Buxton now has over 1,000 big league plate appearances and owns a .285 career OBP. He doesn't have to be great at the plate -- he was worth 5.2 WAR last year even with a .314 OBP thanks to his brilliant defense -- but he does need to be more consistent.

Miguel Sano, 3B, Twins

Stats: .212/.282/.449, 12 BB, 52 SO, 7 HR, minus-0.1 WAR

Age: 25.026

Peak prospect status: No. 4 (pre-2014) by MLB.com

It's easy to see why the Twins have disappointed when two of their expected cornerstone players haven't done the job. Sano's strikeout rate has gone from extreme to scary. He was at 35-36 percent his first three seasons, but he is now at 40 percent -- and that's come with a deteriorating chase rate and thus a career-low walk rate (he was at 15.8 percent as a rookie but is at 9.2 percent this year). Sano has once again missed some time, but 52 strikeouts in 29 games translates to a mind-numbing 269 over 150 games. Somewhere, Joe Sewell is crying.

Sano was a 2.5-WAR player a season ago in just 114 games, so he isn't a lost cause, but the regression in plate discipline is a big concern. His conditioning is another issue, and while he played an OK third base last season (minus-6 defensive runs saved), if he moves to first that puts even more pressure on the bat. Sano looked like a 45-homer slugger when he was so impressive as a rookie. Will he ever get there?

Geography trivia, caffeine and Atomic Balm: A long day in the Twins bullpen

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | June 6, 2018

Addison Reed's only action throughout all of Tuesday's Twins-Chicago White Sox doubleheader was to spend time catching up with old friends.

Even though Twins pitchers recorded 54 outs on Tuesday, Reed received a much-needed day off. It just so happened that with his old team in town, Reed also had a chance to catch up on gossip with former teammates Hector Santiago and Nate Jones, among others. Asked about his late-game conversation with Santiago, Reed burst into laughter. He's seen enough long, rainy ugly doubleheaders over the course of his seven-year career to know that Tuesday's was too easy.

Sure, the Twins wanted to sweep the double dip and instead had to settle for a split.

The Twins won Game 1, 4-2, after Eduardo Escobar blasted a three-run homer in the eighth inning. They lost the nightcap, 6-3.

But all things considered, the Twins escaped from the twin bill relatively unscathed even though the bullpen was needed for nine innings. The long-relief efforts of Matt Magill, who pitched three scoreless innings in Game 2, and Tyler Duffey, who earned a Game 1 victory with two zeroes, provided the Twins with exactly what they needed on a day that could have been disastrous. Instead, the Twins stayed away from Reed, who's on pace to appear in 80 games, and Ryan Pressly, who's projected to make 88 appearances.

"(Duffey and Magill) both threw the ball well and it wasn't like they were thrown out there and eating up innings because they had to — they were pitching well and keeping us in the game," Reed said. "Going into it, I definitely thought I was going to get in there. It just worked out where the first game situation didn't come up and the second game went the way it did, which was kind of unfortunate. ... But arm feels good. I'll be ready to go and fresh for (Wednesday)."

Fresh is a word rarely used in association with 18 innings of baseball, particularly when a team has a pair of rookie starting pitchers going as the Twins did on Tuesday. While the Twins had Monday off, it didn't change the fact that Reed, Pressly, Trevor Hildenberger and Zach Duke are all among the American League-leaders in appearances. Pressly is third in the AL, Reed is tied for 15th and Duke and Hildenberger are tied for 20th with 27 appearances.

Nobody went into Tuesday's doubleheader with any restrictions. The Twins intended to use everyone if the situation called for it and several pitchers may have been used twice, Fernando Rodney and Hildenberger among the top candidates.

Yet Twins manager Paul Molitor and pitching coach Garvin Alston both said they intended to give starting pitchers Fernando Romero and Zack Littell a little more rope than normal given they had 18 innings worth of outs to fill — with the caveat that they were playing to win.

"You're aware that you have to get through two games," Molitor said. "If you have a chance to win the first game, you're going to play it pretty straight up in your decision making."

Said Alston: "It's going to be touch and go. We really have to pay attention and use our starters' pitches. Regardless of the situation, sometimes we've got to put a little extra trust in them (Tuesday)."

Staying fresh

Somehow the Twins and White Sox completed a pair of nine-inning games in a total of 6 hours, 32 minutes even with a 48-minute break in between games. The teams' incredible pace of play is the exception to the rule, however.

Doubleheaders can be especially cruel. Reed pitched in Game 1 of a July 13, 2013 doubleheader between the White Sox and Philadelphia Phillies that lasted 507 minutes (minus the break between contests but including a 41-minute rain delay at the end of the opener).

"It's hectic sometimes," White Sox bullpen catcher Mark Salas said. "It makes for a long day."

Both teams planned accordingly. Whereas on a normal day the Twins bullpen would have hit the field 3.5 hours before first pitch to play catch and warm up, on Tuesday they waited until 1:20 p.m., roughly 110 minutes before first pitch of the straight doubleheader. Players and Twins bullpen catcher Nate Dammann, who's in his 12th season in the role, were allowed to arrive later in case Tuesday's contests took them into the wee hours of the morning.

"You prepare for the first one, got to get everything loose like normal, and then try not to allow your body to stiffen up before the second one," Duke said. "You've got to try to stay in motion longer."

As is their custom, most of the Twins relievers headed to the bullpen about 10 minutes before first pitch. Rodney, Reed and Pressly waited until later to arrive, but the rest were in the outfield by the time Romero's second pitch resulted in a leadoff solo homer for Yoán Moncada.

After he struggled in his previous start at Kansas City, Romero looked as if he potentially could be in for another long day. His early innings were

full of opponents' exit velocities of 100 mph or more. Daniel Palka's second-inning double registered a 118.4 mph exit velocity, the second-hardest hit ball of the season by any player in the majors, according to BaseballSavant.com.

Yet Molitor stuck to his plan and Romero began to work in and out of several potential trouble spots. Nobody stirred in the Twins' bullpen until the top of the fifth inning of Game 1 when Taylor Rogers and Duffey began to get loose. Pressly also started to jog if he were potentially needed.

Two of the three never were. Romero completed six innings and left with his team trailing 2-0. At that point, the Twins opted for Duffey to start the seventh over Magill, who had begun to run and stretch in the sixth.

Duffey responded with two scoreless frames, throwing strikes on 22 of 35 pitches. The effort allowed the Twins enough time to rally and take the lead on Escobar's three-run shot off Jones.

Hildenberger potentially would have pitched in Game 1, but the situation never arose. He merely played catch in the bullpen. But if he had pitched, Hildenberger — who said he hasn't pitched both games in a doubleheader since college — would have altered his postgame routine in order to be available for the nightcap.

"If I pitched in the first game I wouldn't do my normal postgame stuff where it's kind of shut down into recovery mode already," Hildenberger said. "I would just stay hot. ... It's not strange to go big gaps between getting hot. But you will have to do extra special recovery if you pitch in both games."

Rogers was the only Twins pitcher to warm up in the bullpen in both games on Tuesday. With the White Sox ahead 1-0 in the fifth inning, Rogers began to get loose at 4:13 p.m. The White Sox made it a two-run game on Jose Abreu's RBI double but Molitor stayed with Romero.

After Escobar's homer put the Twins ahead, Molitor pressed the button to ignite the Fernando Rodney Experience. At 5:38 p.m. Rodney entered to Lil John's 'Live the Night' and responded with a perfect ninth inning. Rodney needed only 16 pitches to convert his 11th straight save, which ended with a strikeout of Moncada.

Molitor was pleased with the shape of his bullpen after the opener and thought he could turn to Rodney, whom Alston said was capable because he's in great physical shape, in Game 2 if needed.

"(It's) good," Molitor said. "We'll see if Fernando wants the ball again, I have a feeling he might. But other than that, we're fine."

Break time

Dammann suggested he might eat a sandwich in between games. Duke said there's just enough time to grab a plate and alter the uniform if necessary. The veteran left-hander, who threw 11 pitches in a scoreless ninth inning in Game 2, also had a plan if he had to pitch in both games.

"Eat some food," Duke said. "Maybe re-stretch out a little bit and get back at it. Maybe change your undershirt or if your feet sweated a lot, maybe change some socks. Maybe just strap on some more Atomic Balm or Red Hot to keep everything warmed up instead of doing things to kind of shut it down for the day."

Another critical element is caffeine. A former major-league catcher, Salas said he has a cup of coffee in the second inning. Hildenberger also adheres to that theory and spoke with Pressly about their loading up on caffeine. At 7:18 p.m., Hildenberger and Rogers were seated atop the bullpen bench with a can of Red Bull in their hands.

"Kind of gets the adrenaline going," Hildenberger said. "Little caffeine. Little boost. I take a Red Bull every game and on doubleheaders you've got to double-Bull. Keep your routine the same. First game and the second game are equally important. I know it's a lot of caffeine, but it's part of it."

The mental game

Bullpen coach Eddie Guardado has pitched in his share of doubleheaders. He knows how unpleasant and trying they can be. One of the biggest hurdles for Guardado is keeping his pitchers locked in. Hildenberger says he tries to do so by looking for several right-handed batters in a row and guessing where he might slot into the game.

"Nobody really wants to play a doubleheader," Guardado said. "I stress (the mental part) every day no matter if you're going good, going bad. The mental part, that's what takes a toll on your body. You've got to stay focused as best you can and my job is to do that for these guys, doubleheader or not."

The Twins pitchers all mentioned that Guardado is an expert at keeping them focused. But they've also created their own way, and Duke said it usually involves geography.

“We do a lot of trivia,” Hildenberger said. “Duke’s question was what’s the largest body of fresh water in the world?”

Rogers said he’d heard the question before and thought the answer was Lake Victoria. But since he’d heard Duke previously discuss it, Rogers opted to answer the Nile River. Hildenberger answered Victoria, which has a surface area of 26,600 square miles and is divided among Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. (For those playing at home, it’s actually Lake Superior that’s considered the largest body of freshwater by surface area, at over 31,000 square miles. Russia’s Lake Baikal is the largest by volume.)

Magill — who first warmed up at 6:48 p.m. when Littell struggled early and eventually took the mound at 7:52 p.m. — wasn’t as certain about his answer.

“I didn’t guess,” Magill said. “I had no idea. I was going to guess one of the Great Lakes, but I knew it was going to be wrong. That’s why I kept my mouth shut.”

You should’ve guessed, Magill!

Another trivia topic in the bullpen? The last 10 World Series winners and those series’ most valuable players.

“Hildy was the best though because he knew the opponents and probably 50 percent of the MVPs,” Rogers said. “That was very impressive.

“It’s impossible to stay locked in the whole game. As a human being, you can’t do it. You’ve just got to do something to keep it light. Especially when some of the ‘pens around the league are kind of tight. You have to do something. Just mess around, test people’s knowledge and goof off.”

Magill, Duffey provide a big lift

Molitor couldn’t stick with Littell any longer after he walked the first two batters of the fourth inning in Game 2. His rookie pitcher was struggling and the Twins didn’t want to make him wear it in his major-league debut. Molitor also had a bullpen in fairly good shape given Duffey picked up two big innings in the opener.

He turned to Magill, who including Tuesday’s contest, has pitched 20 2/3 innings this season and has a 1.31 ERA. While Magill didn’t prevent Littell’s runners from scoring, yielding a two-run double to Yolmer Sanchez, that was the only downside of a 40-pitch outing. Magill threw strikes on 29 pitches and provided the Twins with nine critical outs. He not only threw in the bullpen 64 minutes before he would enter the contest, Magill also stretched in between on a jungle gym-esque machine in the bullpen that has a platform for arm and leg stretches. Afterward, Magill did arm band work to stay fresh.

“I think being a starter in the past kind of helped with the mindset of seeing a guy the second time through the lineup,” Magill said. “And being comfortable getting up, sitting, getting hot, sitting and then throwing again. My thought process was to eat as many innings with as little pitches just so I can throw longer.”

Hildenberger said he plans to start a petition to earn Magill a trip to the All-Star Game. The right-hander’s three-inning effort allowed Molitor and Co. to smoothly navigate the rest of the game. A little more than seven hours after he first played catch, Hildenberger entered and needed only eight pitches to retire the side in the seventh inning. Rogers followed with an 11-pitch effort in the eighth and Duke did the same in the ninth.

Though Alston would have loved to be in a position to use Reed or Pressly, he didn’t have to strain his eyes to see the silver lining of two days off for his most-utilized arms.

“It’s a win in that regard, without a doubt,” Alston said. “Guys were able to go out and pitch well and pitch efficiently and keep us in a situation where we were down 6-2 and keep us there. Shoot, we had the tying run at the plate at the end of the game. That’s a phenomenal job by the bullpen.”

All told, the Twins bullpen provided nine scoreless innings on Tuesday. Twins relievers allowed four hits, walked one and struck out nine.

But not Reed, who has already thrown 461 pitches this season. He instead had a chance to catch up in both games with Jones and in the second contest with Santiago, who starts on Wednesday and couldn’t stand being stuck in the clubhouse and dugout any longer. Santiago has mostly worked out of the bullpen this season and likes spending time with his bullpen mates. Reed said the talk revolved around family and was long overdue as he couldn’t partake in April because he was sidelined with strep throat and the flu in the team’s only meeting before the rest of the series was snowed out.

“Hector comes snaking down there,” Reed said. “He’s starting tomorrow, but he can’t stay in one place for longer than two minutes. He said he was going crazy in the locker room and the dugout so he wanted to come down and say hello.

“It was good catching up with him and Nate.”