



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Tuesday, May 8, 2018

- Romero (9 K's) leads Twins to 4th straight win. MLB.com (Harris) p.1
 - Rosario denies Fowler with over-the-wall grab. MLB.com (Harris) p. 2
 - Buxton tests fractured left toe with no issues. MLB.com (Harris) p. 3
 - Monday's top prospect performers. MLB.com (Rosenbaum) p. 3
 - Fernando Romero shines again as Twins stop Cardinals 6-0. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 4
 - Eager Byron Buxton says he's almost ready to return to Twins lineup. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 5
 - Postgame: Rosario thrilled to rob Fowler of a home run -- 'my first one'. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 6
 - Monday's Twins-St. Louis game recap. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 6
 - Buxton says he's close to return; Romero makes second MLB start. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 7
 - Logan Morrison in the outfield? He's working out there for the Twins. Star Tribune (Miller) p.8
 - Fernando Romero keeps Twins rolling in 6-0 win over St. Louis Cardinals. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 8
 - Anaheim looking more likely for Byron Buxton's return. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 10
 - Preview: Twins at Cardinals. Fox Sports North (AP) p. 11
 - Romero tosses six shutout innings in Twins' 6-0 win over Cardinals. Fox Sports North (AP) p.12
 - Bullpen's performance the key for Twins. Fox Sports North (Staff) p. 13
 - MLB stock watch: Is your team a buyer or a seller? ESPN (Doolittle) p. 13
 - Romero keeps scoreless streak going, Twins blank Cards 6-0. ESPN (AP) p. 14
 - 'I think I belong up there': Spin rate king Luke Bard aiming to work his way back to the big leagues. ESPN 1500 (Depue) p. 15
 - Prospect Hot Sheet (5/7/18). Baseball America (Staff) p. 16
 - Twins mailbag: Has Romero earned a spot? Is Sanó toast? More moves ahead? The Athletic (Hayes) p.16
 - Hochman: Ex-Cardinal Lynn jaded by free-agency experience. STL Post-Dispatch (Hochman) p.19
 - Cardinals run out of steam against Twins. STL Post-Dispatch (Hummel) p. 20
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Romero (9 K's) leads Twins to 4th straight win

Joe Harris | MLB.com | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- Fernando Romero is making quite a first impression for the Twins.

Romero followed up his solid Major League debut with six scoreless innings as Minnesota won a season-high fourth straight game -- 6-0 over the Cardinals on Monday night at Busch Stadium.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

"I feel so good competing, trying to keep up the hard work every day and attacking the zone early, that's the most important thing," Romero said.

Romero (2-0) stranded at least one runner in each of his first five innings, while four of his nine strikeouts were called third strikes. He hasn't given up an earned run in his first 11 1/3 innings in the big leagues.

"He stepped up," manager Paul Molitor said. "It's one of those nights where you walk the leadoff hitter of the game and you kind of wonder after you put some runs up. But he settled in. He kept his focus, used all his pitches, all the things you want to see."

Romero earned the Cardinals' respect.

"We knew he had good stuff, good arm," Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "But it wasn't just high velocity. It came with movement. He was in the zone more today than some of the other times we'd seen in the Minors. He looked good when he needed to."

Eddie Rosario had a pair of hits and scored a run, and he robbed Dexter Fowler of a two-run homer in the second with a leaping catch at the left-field wall. Rosario has hit safely in eight straight games and in 10 of 11. He has four home runs and 13 RBIs during his hitting streak.

"I thought it was a really good play," Molitor said. "You're not playing at depth with a left-handed hitter up there and he got back on it very well. Tracked it well and he timed it perfectly. That's a huge play especially after we score in the top of the first."

Max Kepler and Rosario each had RBI doubles to give the Twins a 2-0 lead in the first. Robbie Grossman went 3-for-4, scored a run and had a pair of RBIs, while Bobby Wilson doubled and drove in two runs.

"It was good to see Robbie have a good night," Molitor said. "He's been pressing, and he responded with three hits."

Trevor Hildenberger and Matt Magill combined for three scoreless innings of relief for the Twins.

Cardinals starter John Gant (1-1), who was recalled from Triple-A Memphis before the game, gave up four runs on 5 1/3 innings as St. Louis' five-game winning streak came to an end.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

After Paul DeJong's one-out double in the second inning, Kolten Wong followed by slicing one down the left-field line that landed foul by just inches. Had the ball been fair, DeJong would have scored easily. Romero was able to strike out Wong and escape the inning.

"I set my mind right, take a breath, and get ready for the next pitch," Romero said about his mindset with runners on.

SOUND SMART

The Twins have won 13 of their last 16 Interleague games dating to Aug. 2, 2017.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Fowler, whose walk-off home run on Sunday gave the Cardinals a 4-3 win over the Cubs, drove a Romero fastball the opposite way in the first inning. But Rosario jumped, extending his glove over the wall as he crashed into it.

"I don't rob this homer, the game's 2-2 in the first inning," Rosario said. "It changed everything."

UP NEXT

Twins right-hander Jake Odorizzi (2-2, 4.10 ERA) will start the series finale against the Cardinals at 12:15 p.m. CT on Tuesday at Busch Stadium. Odorizzi, who grew up 40 miles east of St. Louis in Breese, Ill., is 1-1 with a 3.24 ERA in three career starts against the Cards, who will counter with righty Carlos Martinez (3-1, 1.40).

Rosario denies Fowler with over-the-wall grab

Joe Harris | MLB.com | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- Twins left fielder Eddie Rosario robbed Dexter Fowler of a two-run homer in the first inning of Monday night's 6-0 win over the Cardinals with a leaping grab against the wall.

Fowler, whose walk-off home run on Sunday gave the Cardinals a 4-3 win over the Cubs, drove a Fernando Romero fastball the opposite way. But Rosario jumped, extending his glove over the wall, to make the catch as he crashed into the wall.

"I thought it was a really good play," Molitor said. "You're not playing at depth with a left-handed hitter up there and he got back on it very well. Tracked it well and he timed it perfectly. That's a huge play especially after we score in the top of the first."

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny thought it was a homer.

"That was surprising," Matheny said. "That was probably the best ball Dex has hit the other way all season. He went back on that ball. It's a 2-2 game at that point. It took a bit of wind out of us."

It was the second circus catch Rosario made at the wall in the past four games. On Thursday, he robbed White Sox outfielder Adam Engel of extra bases with a running catch at the wall.

His latest grab, however, saved a home run.

"I don't rob this homer, the game's 2-2 in the first inning," Rosario said. "It changed everything."

The catch provided a boost to rookie starter Fernando Romero, who pitched six scoreless innings for his second win.

"I appreciate the play," Romero said. "He's always pushing for the team."

Rosario's RBI double in the top of the first extended his hitting streak to eight games and gave the Twins a 2-0 lead. Rosario has now hit in 10 of his last 11 games.

Buxton tests fractured left toe with no issues

Joe Harris | MLB.com | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- Twins outfielder Byron Buxton reported no ill effects after running to test out his fractured left toe before Monday night's game against the Cardinals.

"I tolerate it as much as I can," Buxton said. "I know my limits, know when to back it off a little bit. It's just kind of what's the next plan for us and where do we go from there."

Buxton broke his toe after fouling a ball off his foot in a Minor League rehab game on April 27, while attempting to come back from a disabled-list stint caused by migraines. He hasn't played for the Twins since April 12.

"It was good today," manager Paul Molitor said. "Fairly extensive on the defensive side, I saw him running around out there. I think he was pleased. We're a little worried about the explosiveness and pushing off, and getting to balls in the gap. Tomorrow, if he responds well to what he did today, in addition to doing some hitting during BP, we'll try to have him run the bases. I think that's another hurdle we have to get over before he's ready to play."

Buxton said he only feels the injury when cutting or changing direction. Straight running and hitting are not a problem. He expects to accompany the team to Anaheim on the third leg of a 10-game, 11-day road trip this weekend, and he doesn't think he needs a Minor League rehab assignment.

"I feel like I'm ready to go," Buxton said. "Hit off the machine, step into bullpens, I know it's not the same, but you still get to see pitches, see velo, whatever it takes me to do."

Lynn draws rave reviews

Though he won't pitch in the two-game series against the Cardinals, the trip to Busch Stadium marks Lance Lynn's return to the place he called home for the first six years of his career.

Molitor said Lynn's former manager gave him high praise during a Spring Training discussion.

"Had a nice talk with Tony La Russa about him and he told me [Lynn] was one of his favorite guys in terms of just a teammate, workhorse, never will not take the baseball for you, things that you want to have," Molitor said. "His start here probably wasn't what he wanted, but the last start more indicative to what we think he can do for us."

Lynn earned his first win with the Twins on Saturday, giving up two runs over six innings in an 8-4 victory over the White Sox. His is 1-3 with a 7.28 ERA in six starts this season.

Quick hits

Trevor May (right UCL) made a start in extended spring, going three innings and throwing just under 50 pitches. His next stop will be Class A Advanced Fort Myers.

Molitor does not expect slugger Miguel Sano (left hamstring strain) to join the team for the club's upcoming series against the Angels.

Monday's top prospect performers

Mike Rosenbaum | MLB.com | May 8, 2018

- No. 20 overall prospect Royce Lewis (Twins' No. 1) recorded another multihit performance as he extended his hitting streak to five games for

Class A Cedar Rapids. The 2017 No. 1 overall pick tallied three singles in the contest, going 3-for-5 with one run scored and a stolen base, his 10th this season and fifth in his past four games. Altogether, the 18-year-old shortstop boasts an impressive .372/.417/.423 slash line 19 games into his full-season debut.

Fernando Romero shines again as Twins stop Cardinals 6-0

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS – Fernando Romero may not be much of a hitter. But he’s a pretty good streak stopper, and that’s a lot more important to the Twins.

Romero, who in his major-league debut last week halted the Twins’ three-game skid, on Monday stopped an even longer streak: The Cardinals’ five-game run of winning. The rookie pitched six innings against the red-hot home team, struck out nine and never allowed a run, delivering Minnesota’s fourth straight victory, 6-0 at Busch Stadium.

“He walked the leadoff hitter of the game [Matt Carpenter], and you kind of wonder, especially after you had put some runs up,” Molitor noted. “But he settled in. He kept his focus, used all his pitches, all the things you’d want to see. Seemed like he had really good velocity most of the night, and really good movement.”

Romero’s ERA remains at 0.00 as a major-leaguer, and this time, he didn’t even allow a runner to reach third base. He was far from perfect, allowing a Cardinal to reach base in all six innings, three via walk and one who was hit by a pitch. Three times, in fact, the leadoff hitters reached base. Yet Romero, whose fastball routinely registered 97 mph, never once allowed a runner to advance a base unless it came via sacrifice bunt. He constantly limited any danger he was in by whiffing critical hitters — five of them looking at strike three.

“I tell myself, just control yourself, control your energy, your emotions, and you’ll be a success,” Romero said.

By the time he was told he was done, Romero had extended his scoreless streak to 11 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings — the second-longest string of zeroes to open a career in Twins history. Only lefthander Andrew Albers, who racked up 17 $\frac{2}{3}$ scoreless innings in his first two starts in 2013, ever began a career with less turbulence.

“We like a lot of things he can offer — how he has presence on the mound. You could see when there was a walk or a base hit, [he would] take a deep breath,” Molitor said. After a walk in the fifth inning, “I sent Bobby [Wilson, the catcher] out there one time just to calm him down. and he got back to making pitches. You’ve got to be pleased to play as clean a game as we did.”

It wouldn’t have been that clean, and it wouldn’t have been the Twins’ first-ever shutout of the Cardinals in their 30 all-time meetings (including the 1987 World Series), if not for Eddie Rosario, though. After Carpenter’s leadoff walk, outfielder Dexter Fowler, who ended the Cardinals’ 14-inning walk-off victory over the Cubs late Sunday night with a home run that cleared the fence by inches, did it again, knocking a Romero pitch just over the wall in front of the Twins’ bullpen in left.

VideoVideo (02:17): Twins righthander Fernando Romero says he works faster with men on base, so he tried to take a deep breath while shutting out Cardinals in Minday.

But Rosario tracked the ball, put his glove over the fence, and came down with the ball, to the cheers of his teammates on the other side.

“It was a really good play. [He’s] not playing at normal depth with a left-handed hitter up, but he got back very well, tracked it well, and he timed it perfectly,” Molitor said. “That’s a huge play that changes the momentum.”

As new as he is to pitching in the big leagues, Romero is an even bigger novice at wielding a bat, having never come to the plate at any level of professional baseball. But the 23-year-old attacked the challenge with gusto, swinging at seven of the 11 pitches he saw from Cardinals starter John Gant and reliever Matt Bowman. He managed to foul four of them off, but never quite put a ball in play, walking away with three strikeouts.

“Swing at a couple balls, foul them,” Romero said with a smile. “First time hitting [in] big-boy league, we’ll take that.”

Romero’s spot in the batting order was just about the only one that wasn’t productive, making his task on the mound that much easier. The Twins, who have scored at least four runs in all seven games in May, handed the rookie a lead before he even took the mound. Joe Mauer walked to lead off the game, moved up on Gant’s wild pitch, and scored on a double by Max Kepler. Two batters later, Eddie Rosario, who is batting over .450 since the calendar turned to May, doubled off the right field wall, scoring Kepler.

The Twins strung together a couple of singles and a sacrifice fly by catcher Bobby Wilson in the fourth inning to produce another run, and then knocked Gant from the game in the sixth on a run-scoring double by Robbie Grossman. The outfielder had been hitless in 15 at-bats in May until collecting three hits on Monday, and he was in the middle of the Twins' two-run add-on in the eighth inning, too.

Rosario led off the eighth with his second double of the night — he's had an extra-base hit in all five games of this road trip, a total of seven overall — and scored on Grossman's single. When Wilson followed with a double down the left-field line, Grossman scored, too.

Eager Byron Buxton says he's almost ready to return to Twins lineup **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 8, 2018**

ST. LOUIS — Byron Buxton ran in the outfield for a second day in a row Monday, felt only occasional discomfort in his fractured left big toe and pronounced himself just about ready to return to action.

"I've gotten to the point to where I think I can tolerate it well enough to play. We're just taking it day by day," said Buxton, who last played April 12 before migraines landed him on the disabled list. Those have subsided, but he fractured the toe during a rehab game with Class A Fort Myers on April 22.

That's the Twins' plan, too. Manager Paul Molitor said if Buxton feels good again Tuesday, he will run the bases, "another step, another hurdle we'll have to get over before we start thinking about when he can play."

The center fielder is willing to go on another rehab assignment, but it's clear he would prefer to simply be activated. He stands in the batter's box while Twins pitchers throw in the bullpen, in hopes of heading off any delay to being activated.

"I try to get out there every day, just to see spin," he said.

No decision has been made yet about a rehab assignment, but Buxton emphatically said he was going to Anaheim for this weekend's four-game series with the Angels.

That's not the case for third baseman Miguel Sano (hamstring strain), eligible to return from the 10-day disabled list Tuesday.

"I don't think we'll see him in Anaheim," Molitor said.

Stopping bullying

A public service announcement that Buxton recorded during spring training will begin running this week as part of MLB and ESPN's "Shred Hate" campaign to eliminate bullying and support bullying victims.

It's a cause that Buxton, as the father of 4-year-old son Brixton, says has been important to him since childhood.

"I've taught [Brixton] the right way, and [I was] blessed with the parents I have," Buxton said. "I saw [bullying] in high school, middle school. It's hard for kids. I feel strongly it shouldn't be a part of the world. You should be treated the way you want to be treated, and that's with respect."

The commercial, which features Buxton interacting with fans at Target Field, will air on ESPN throughout the summer.

Unknown role

Phil Hughes has faced only four batters since his last start April 27, and Molitor said he is not certain how he's going to find more work for the former starter.

"When we talked about him going out [to the bullpen], we said we'd look for the right times. But looking for spots is tough," Molitor said. "Preferably we'd like to do it in shorter stints, where he can be real aggressive and try to let it go as much as he can. But unfortunately, there may be days where I have to let him go longer. It can be challenging."

Molitor said he doesn't anticipate Hughes starting anytime soon. But he is stuck in an odd limbo, without a defined bullpen role. For instance, could he be used on consecutive days?

“It’s unknown. I know he has some bullpen experience,” Molitor said of Hughes, a reliever with the Yankees in 2009. “But I’m not sure how far he’d be able to go, even with a six- or seven-day layoff” like he had before pitching an inning Saturday.

Etc.

- Trevor May pitched three innings, roughly 50 pitches, without incident in extended spring training. His next outing, likely this weekend, will be for Class A Fort Myers on a rehab assignment for the righthander who is recovering from elbow surgery.
- The Cardinals asked for a moment of silence in honor of Gretchen Piscotty, who died earlier in the day. St. Louis traded outfielder Stephen Piscotty to Oakland last winter to oblige his request that he play closer to his mother, who suffered from ALS.
- Twins players and coaches had warm greetings for Dave Pruemer, the team trainer for 13 years. He retired last fall to move his family to his hometown of Teutopolis, Ill.

Postgame: Rosario thrilled to rob Fowler of a home run -- 'my first one'

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Eddie Rosario is pretty sure the leaping catch he made of Adam Engel’s deep fly ball last Thursday in Chicago probably would have bounced off the wall if he hadn’t caught it. But this one on Monday, the Dexter Fowler blast that appeared headed to the Twins’ bullpen?

“It’s going to be a homer. I think I robbed a homer,” Rosario said proudly. “My first one.”

Rosario said he had no idea whether he was could reach it as he raced to the fence. “I threw the glove up there,” was how he described his technique. “I could feel it when I catch it.”

The catch kept Fernando Romero perfect, and he remained unscored-upon in two major league starts by putting up six shutout innings in Busch Stadium. Rosario said he was proud to have made the great play, because if he hadn’t, the game may have turned out completely different.

“Everything changes,” he said. “[If] I don’t rob this homer, the game is 2-2. The first inning changes the whole game.”

Instead, according to MLB’s Stat of the Day, Romero is only the seventh rookie in major-league history to throw at least five shutout innings and strike out five or more batters in his first two career starts. The previous six — Kyle Davies, Kazuhisa Ishii, Carlos Hernandez, Tom Phoebus, Karl Spooner and Al Worthington — aren’t particularly household names, but it’s still quite an accomplishment.

Speaking of accomplishments, Rosario is excelling at more than robbing home runs. He had two doubles and an RBI on Monday, giving him at least one extra-base hit in all five games so far on this 10-game trip. There’s no secret to it, he said, except for focusing on having a good approach.

“I want to try to have good at-bat every day,” he said. “When I try the same approach every time. Swing at strikes. Try to have good game every game.”

Monday's Twins-St. Louis game recap

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 8, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Eddie Rosario, Twins

A double to drive in a run and another that put him in position to score, to go along with a homer-robbing catch in the first inning.

BY THE NUMBERS

7 Extra-base hits, at least one in each game, by Rosario on the first five games of this road trip.

Minnesota Twins starting pitcher Fernando Romero works during the fifth inning of a baseball game against the St. Louis Cardinals Monday, May 7, 2018,

Minnesota Twins starting pitcher Fernando Romero works during the fifth inning of a baseball game against the St. Louis Cardinals Monday, May 7, 2018, in St. Louis. (AP Photo/Jeff Roberson)

More

7 Pitchers in big-league history to throw at least five shutout innings and strike out at least five batters in his first two career starts, with Fernando Romero joining that group.

ON DECK

Jake Odorizzi, from nearby Highland, Ill., faces Cardinals ace Carlos Martinez as the Twins try to sweep the two-game interleague series

Buxton says he's close to return; Romero makes second MLB start

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS — There were a lot of hugs and handshakes in the Twins' clubhouse and on the field today, as a couple of special guests arrived.

Torii Hunter stopped by to greet his old teammates. He'll see a lot of them this week, as he works as the color man on Fox Sports North's broadcasts of both games here, and all four in Anaheim next weekend. "A road trip with my boys," Hunter said, "just like the old days."

Then one player and coach after another came over on the field to greet Dave Pruemer, the team's trainer for 13 years who retired last fall to move his family back to his hometown of Teutopolis, Ill., about 70 miles from Busch Stadium.

With the greetings out of the way, the Twins, who have won three straight games, will take on a team that's even hotter: The Cardinals, who have won five in a row, including a rain-delayed, 14-inning marathon victory that ended at 12:50 a.m. last night. The Twins' hotel here is a block from the ballpark, so a few team employees walked over to take advantage of a rare opportunity to attend a game as fans, though none were still here when Dexter Fowler's walk-off homer ended it.

Fernando Romero makes his second major-league start, and Paul Molitor has one request for him: "I hope he's not thinking too much about his at-bats," the manager said. Romero has never swung a bat as a professional, but he seems a little excited about the challenge (if a little wary of getting hit by the ball when he's in the batting cage). He used an Eduardo Escobar model bat as he worked on his bunting before the game, and he took a couple of swings, too, one of which reached the outfield.

"If he gets three at-bats, it means he's pitching well," Molitor pointed out. "So hopefully he gets a chance."

Romero will be caught by Bobby Wilson, most because the 35-year-old catcher has plenty of experience that may come in handy for a 23-year-old pitcher. Since the series consists of just tonight's game and a noon start tomorrow, Molitor said it was always unlikely that fill-in starter Mitch Garver would catch both games, so he decided to pair Wilson with Romero, and save Garver for Jake Odorizzi's start on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Byron Buxton ran in the outfield again today, felt only occasional discomfort in his fractured big toe, and pronounced himself just about ready to return. "I've gotten to the point to where I think I can tolerate it well enough to play," said Buxton, whose last game was April 12. "We're just taking it day by day."

Molitor said if Buxton feels good again on Tuesday, he'll run the bases, "another step, another hurdle we'll have to get over before we start thinking about when he can play." No decision has been made yet about whether to send Buxton on a new rehab assignment, but when I asked if he was coming along to Anaheim for the four-game series that begins Thursday, he quickly said, "I'm going."

That's not the case for Miguel Sano, out with a hamstring strain but eligible to return from the 10-day disabled list tomorrow. "I don't think we'll see him in Anaheim," Molitor said.

Trevor May pitched three innings, roughly 50 pitches, without incident in extended spring training on Monday, Molitor said. His next outing, likely this weekend, will be for Class A Fort Myers, the start of a rehab assignment for the righthander who is recovering from elbow surgery.

Here are the lineups for tonight's game at Busch Stadium:

TWINS

Mauer 1B
Dozier 2B
Kepler CF
Escobar 3B
Rosario LF
Grossman RF
Wilson C
Adrianza SS
Romero RHP

CARDINALS

Carpenter 1B
Bader CF
Fowler RF
Ozuna LF
Gyorko 3B
DeJong SS
Wong 2B
Kelly C
Gant RHP

Logan Morrison in the outfield? He's working out there for the Twins

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 7, 2018

Logan Morrison did outfielder drills with coach Jeff Pickler during batting practice over the weekend. You could tell how long it had been since he had been out there just by looking at his bright-blue-with-gold-laces glove.

"Yeah, Rays colors, right?" Morrison said. "I've had it awhile. But it needs to be broken in."

That's because Morrison never actually played the outfield at Tampa Bay; he hasn't stood in the outfield since 2015 when he was with Seattle, and hasn't done so as his primary position since 2012 with Miami.

But he went to Twins manager Paul Molitor recently and volunteered to go back out there if Molitor needed to make a switch during a game.

"It's a long summer of baseball. People get hurt. Some days you get a little shorthanded," Molitor said. With the Twins headed to St. Louis, where the designated hitter won't be in use, Morrison wanted the manager to know he can still make himself useful.

"It makes the lineup more flexible. I don't think I'm going to be Willie Mays out there, but I can pick it up and throw it to the right base," Morrison said. "I just wanted to get some work out there so he doesn't hesitate if the need arises."

Sunday's game was Morrison's ninth start at first base, and he wouldn't mind being on the field more. This is the first season of Morrison's eight-year career in which he's primarily been the DH, with 17 starts so far.

"It's definitely an adjustment, one I'm still looking to make. To be honest, I'd rather feel like I'm part of the game, playing the outfield, instead of DH-ing all the time," Morrison said. "I'm not saying that I'm not [happy] at DH, but it's half the game, playing defense."

Fernando Romero keeps Twins rolling in 6-0 win over St. Louis Cardinals

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Fernando Romero walked Matt Carpenter on five pitches to start the bottom of the first. Was this a painful harbinger of a long

Monday night ahead for the Twins' rookie right-hander?

Hardly.

Romero, 23 going on Pedro Martinez, posted six more zeroes in a 6-0 win over the first-place St. Louis Cardinals in his follow-up voyage on a major league mound. Wholly unfazed by his surroundings at Busch Stadium, Romero struck out nine, walked three and scattered three hits (two to shortstop Paul DeJong) in a combined four-hit shutout.

"He stepped up," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "You don't want to judge it too much on two starts, but we like a lot of things about what he can offer. He has presence on the mound."

With 11 2/3 scoreless innings to open his big-league career, Romero is evoking memories of Canadian lefty Andrew Albers, who started with a Twins-record 17 1/3 scoreless innings in August 2013. Albers, whose best fastball couldn't keep pace with Romero's 89-mph slider, recorded just four total strikeouts and was sold to a Korean professional team after the season.

The Twins aren't likely to make Romero available anytime soon.

"I've got all my guys behind me so I'm not scared to throw the ball over the plate," Romero said. "Competing and attacking the zone early, that's the most important thing."

Romero became just the third pitcher in franchise history to record nine strikeouts within his first two starts, joining Dave Boswell in 1964 and Rene Montague of the 1938 Washington Senators. He also struck out in all three trips at the plate, where he hadn't batted in a game since age 15 in the Dominican Republic.

"I did OK," Romero said. "I swung at a couple of balls. It was my first-time hitting. Big-boy league, we'll take that."

Stretching their winning streak to a season-long four games, the Twins took the opener of their two-game interleague series from a Cardinals team that needed 14 innings and nearly six hours (including a 59-minute rain delay) to complete a three-game sweep of their division-rival Chicago Cubs on Sunday night.

The Twins pulled within a game and a half of first-place Cleveland in the American League Central and edged ahead of the Indians in the loss column. The Cardinals entered 12-5 at home with seven straight wins and a 10-1 mark in their past 11 home games.

Romero (2-0) gave the Twins their third quality start in a row, matching their season-opening series at Baltimore for longest such streak by the rotation. Twins starters haven't allowed a homer in that same stretch, one off their season high.

Dexter Fowler's first-inning drive to the opposite field could have tied the game, but left fielder Eddie Rosario crashed into the wall to make a leaping catch. That play gave Romero a boost, even as he allowed at least one baserunner in every inning.

"Right there he saved me," Romero said. "I appreciate the play. He's always pushing for the team."

It was Fowler who delivered the walk-off homer in Sunday's 14th inning.

"Rosey made a heck of a play," Molitor said. "He got back on it very well, tracked it well and he timed it perfectly. That's a huge play."

Journeyman catcher Bobby Wilson, called up from Triple-A on Saturday when Jason Castro's knee landed him on the disabled list guided Romero through another exemplary start. He did so despite catching Romero in just one of his four outings at Rochester this year; Willians Astudillo handled the others.

Romero likes to work fast, but after hitting the leadoff batter and allowing a two-out walk in the fifth he got a visit from Wilson reminding him to slow down a bit.

"I thought it was getting a little fast," Molitor said. "Pace is good when you're in control, but especially with baserunners you have to make sure you're focusing on every pitch."

Romero got all the offensive support he would need in the first. Joe Mauer drew his fourth walk in as many games since moving into the leadoff spot and scored on Max Kepler's one-out double.

Rosario drove in Kepler with a double of his own to give Romero a two-run cushion before touching the rosin bag.

Wilson knocked in two more with a sacrifice fly to the warning track in the fourth and an RBI double in the eighth, and Robbie Grossman added three hits and two RBI as the Twins handed the Cardinals their first home shutout defeat since last Sept. 13.

It was the Twins' fourth shutout victory and second on the road.

Anaheim looking more likely for Byron Buxton's return

Mike Berardino | MLB.com | May 7, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Byron Buxton spent close to an hour on the field during early work Monday afternoon, shagging flies and testing his fractured left big toe with straight-ahead sprints at 75- to 80-percent intensity as well as lateral slides, backpedals and cuts.

Working under the watchful gaze of head athletic trainer Tony Leo and assistant trainer Masa Abe, Buxton came away encouraged that he could rejoin the Twins without a minor-league rehab assignment. Twins manager Paul Molitor, who also watched the workout, said the plan is for Buxton to run the bases on Tuesday morning for the first time since fouling a ball off his foot in a Class A game on April 22, then fly west with the team to Anaheim, Calif.

Asked if he's ready to come off the disabled list, the center fielder nodded.

"For the most part, yeah," he said. "just want to get out there and play and help us out as much as I can. I'll tolerate as much as I can. I know my limits. I know when to back it off a little bit."

Buxton, who last faced major league pitching on April 12 before a bout of migraines sidelined him for four days, has been taking batting practice on the field the past few days as well as tracking pitches in the bullpen since last week.

"I try to get out there every day just to see sink or see spin," he said. "I know they're not the same but it's still good to see pitches and see (velocity). That's helpful enough. I feel like I'm ready to go."

NATIONAL PLATFORM

Buxton was one of a half dozen players participating in Major League Baseball's Shred Hate program that debuted during Monday's ESPN telecast of the Twins-Cardinals game.

Joining Buxton in the bullying prevention program are Tim Anderson (White Sox), Cole Hamels (Rangers), Trea Turner (Nationals), Justin Upton (Angels) and George Springer (Astros). X Games athletes Gus Kenworthy and Jordyn Barratt are part of the program that began last year with their sport and ESPN.

"It's something I feel strongly shouldn't be a part of the world," Buxton said. "You should be treated the way you want to be treated, and that's with respect. It was just about getting it out there and letting those people know we have their back and are there for them."

Buxton said he has tried to pass those lessons along to his 4-year-old son, Brix, and credited his parents with teaching him to respect others.

"You could pass that along to one person and one person leads to 100, and it goes from there," Buxton said.

The Twins will host students as part of the Shred Hate program on May 22 at Target Field before a game against the Detroit Tigers.

VOUCHING FOR LANCE

One of the people recommending former St. Louis Cardinals right-hander Lance Lynn to the Twins this offseason was Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa, for whom Lynn pitched as a rookie on a World Series winner in 2011.

"Had a nice talk with Tony La Russa about him," Molitor said. "He told me he was one of his favorite guys in terms of teammate, workhorse, (taking) the baseball for you. Things you want to have."

Molitor said he saw La Russa, now a senior adviser for the Boston Red Sox, in Fort Myers during spring training.

“He came in and said hi to me and we talked about Lance,” Molitor said.

BRIEFLY

Miguel Sano (strained hamstring) isn't expected to come off the disabled list for another week at least. “I don't think we'll see him in Anaheim,” Molitor said.

Right-hander Trevor May (elbow surgery) made his last start in extended spring training, tossing three innings on close to 50 pitches. His next start will be for Class A Fort Myers.

Left-hander Dietrich Enns cleared outright waivers and was assigned to Triple-A Rochester after being taken off the 40-man roster. Enns, acquired last summer from the New York Yankees for lefty Jaime Garcia, was 1-3 with a 4.50 ERA in four starts for Triple-A Rochester.

Triple-A lefty Stephen Gonsalves was named International League Pitcher of the Week after posting a 0.63 ERA and .087 batting average allowed in his first two 2018 starts for the Red Wings.

Former Twins minor-league catcher Dan Rohlfing attended Monday's game with his family. He's back home in St. Louis, finishing up his degree and working in real estate. The Twins discussed an amateur scouting position with him but he decided he wasn't ready for that after helping Double-A Chattanooga win a Southern League title in 2017.

Preview: Twins at Cardinals

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | May 8, 2018

For a moment on Monday night, it looked like St. Louis Cardinals right fielder Dexter Fowler had followed his early Monday morning walk-off homer against the Chicago Cubs with another bomb in his first at-bat against the Minnesota Twins.

But left fielder Eddie Rosario stuck his glove just above the wall in left-center field and brought it back. That was pretty much it for the St. Louis offense, which managed only four hits in a 6-0 loss that snapped its five-game winning streak.

The Cardinals will try to salvage a split of the series in the finale of their seven-game homestand Tuesday at Busch Stadium in St. Louis.

“That was probably the best ball Dex has hit the other way all season,” Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. “It was probably a 2-2 game if (Rosario) doesn't get to that ball. It took some wind out of our sails.”

Whether it was a letdown from an emotional sweep of Chicago or the fact that Minnesota rookie Fernando Romero simply overpowered St. Louis for the first six innings, the Cardinals looked flatter than a day-old fritter.

Regardless, St. Louis would appear to have a good chance to bounce back while sending ace Carlos Martinez (3-1, 1.40 ERA) to the mound. Martinez has ceded precisely three runs in his last six starts, looking like a Cy Young Award candidate since struggling on Opening Day at the New York Mets.

In Martinez's last outing on Wednesday, he sailed through 7 1/3 innings against the Chicago White Sox, allowing five hits and a run with two walks and five strikeouts in a 3-2 win.

Martinez even helped himself with the bat, clouting his first big league homer in the sixth inning to snap a scoreless tie.

“I never hit a home run in my life,” Martinez told mlb.com. “I was waiting for it.”

It was no cheapie. Martinez drilled a Lucas Giolito pitch 407 feet into the seats in left-center field, traditionally an area of Busch where the ball doesn't carry well. Martinez followed with a slow-motion home run trot that probably evoked tears of admiration from the likes of Yoenis Cespedes and David Ortiz.

In the job he's paid to do, Martinez has been almost peerless. He has been able to craft instead of throw, mixing speeds like a true pitcher and getting quicker outs by relying more on a two-seam fastball.

“We've seen seven starts at that next tier,” Matheny said to mlb.com after Martinez beat the White Sox. “That's consistently the type of stuff and

execution that puts you on a different level.”

Jake Odorizzi (2-2, 4.10) gets the call for the Twins in a homecoming of sorts. Odorizzi hails from Highland, Illinois, about 30 miles east of St. Louis, and figures to have a large following in the ballpark. He is 1-1 with a 3.24 ERA in three career starts against his hometown team.

Odorizzi was no-decided Thursday night at the White Sox, giving up six hits and five runs (three earned) in 5 1/3 innings. He was presented with an early 4-0 advantage and failed to make it stick.

“You’re supposed to keep the lead and I didn’t do my job,” Odorizzi said to mlb.com.

Romero tosses six shutout innings in Twins’ 6-0 win over Cardinals **Associated Press | Fox Sports North | May 7, 2018**

ST. LOUIS — Fernando Romero didn’t allow a run for the second straight start to begin his major league career, throwing six sharp innings to lead the Minnesota Twins over the St. Louis Cardinals 6-0 on Monday night.

The victory was a season-high fourth straight for the Twins, who have won 13 of their last 16 games against National League opponents dating to last year.

St. Louis had its season-best five-game winning streak snapped, one night after finishing a weekend sweep of the rival Chicago Cubs at nearly 1 a.m.

Romero (2-0) permitted just three hits and struck out nine while throwing 97 pitches. The 23-year-old right-hander tossed 5 2/3 scoreless innings in his debut last week, a win over Toronto.

Eddie Rosario helped keep Romero’s shutout streak intact in the first inning. The left fielder crashed into the wall and reached over it to catch what likely would have been a two-run homer for St. Louis’ Dexter Fowler.

Robbie Grossman went 3 for 4 with two RBIs, and Bobby Wilson knocked in two runs for Minnesota.

John Gant (1-1) gave up six hits and four runs in 5 1/3 innings for the Cardinals.

Paul DeJong had three of St. Louis’ four hits.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Twins: Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said Gold Glove CF Byron Buxton went through running drills in the outfield and plans to run the bases Tuesday. Buxton has been out since April 12 with a hairline fracture in his left big toe, but Molitor said the 24-year-old is expected to travel with the team to California this week and could return then.

Cardinals: Adam Wainwright made a rehab start at Double-A Springfield, allowing two hits in five scoreless innings. The right-hander is returning from elbow inflammation, and manager Mike Matheny said Wainwright will likely return to the Cardinals’ rotation for his next start. ... CF Tommy Pham was out of the starting lineup for the second consecutive game with a lingering hip injury. Pham pinch-hit in Sunday night’s 14-inning win over the Cubs. Matheny said the 30-year-old was “lobbying pretty hard” to start Monday and could return to the lineup on Tuesday.

UP NEXT

Twins: After striking out a season-high eight in his last outing, Jake Odorizzi takes the mound as Minnesota closes out its two-game interleague series in St. Louis on Tuesday afternoon. The right-hander is 2-2 with a 4.10 ERA and 35 strikeouts in 37 1/3 innings this season.

Cardinals: Carlos Martinez (3-1) has allowed one run or less in six straight starts and is second in the National League with a 1.40 ERA.

Bullpen's performance the key for Twins
Staff Writer | Fox Sports North | May 7, 2018

As their bullpen goes, so do the Minnesota Twins.

That's the theme early on in 2018, as the 13-17 Twins look to claw their way back to the top of the division after falling two games behind the 17-17 Cleveland Indians.

Minnesota's bullpen has a combined 1.38 ERA and 2.05 opponent batting average in wins, and an 8.38 ERA with a .325 opponent batting average in losses.

	Wins	Losses
ERA	1.38	8.38
Opp. BA	.205	.325
Opp. OPS	.590	.970
HR/9 IP	0.99	2.26
IRS%*	25.0	52.8

*Inherited runners scored percentage

They'll back starting pitcher Fernando Romero for a second time Monday, as the rookie takes the mound against the St. Louis Cardinals for his second career start. Romero impressed last week in his debut, allowing just four hits and three walks while striking out five in 5 2/3 innings, part of a 4-0 win over the Toronto Blue Jays.

He's just the fourth Twins pitcher ever to win his major-league debut with five-plus strikeouts, joining current starter Kyle Gibson, Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven and Darrell Jackson.

Player	Date	Opponent
Bert Blyleven	6/5/1970	at Senators
Darrell Jackson	6/16/1978	vs. Tigers
Kyle Gibson	6/29/2013	vs. Royals
Fernando Romero	5/2/2018	vs. Blue Jays

Other notes:

— The Twins and the Cardinals first met in the 1987 World Series.

— Road wins are rare in this series. The Twins are 10-2 against the Cardinals all-time in Minnesota, while the Cardinals are 13-4 in St. Louis.

— Twins designated hitter Logan Morrison is heating up after a slow start. He's hitting .304 this month with two home runs after .145 through the first month of the season.

— Cardinals pitcher Carlos Martinez has a 1.77 ERA in interleague play, the second-lowest all-time (minimum 10 starts) in such matchups.

— Twins outfielder Eddie Rosario has an extra-base hit in all six games this month, tied for the second-longest streak of extra-base hits to start a single month in team history.

— Cardinals infielder Matt Carpenter has a 1.027 OPS against American League teams, seventh all-time.

Statistics courtesy of STATS

MLB stock watch: Is your team a buyer or a seller?
Bradford Doolittle | ESPN | May 8, 2018

Between the weather, the strikeouts, the injuries, the underachieving teams, the teams not built to achieve this season in the first place, the pitchless intentional walks (still can't get used to that) and the sudden fixation on mound visits, April 2018 was ... interesting. Did I mention the weather? With the calendar turning to May and the weather in most regions finally reaching into the 70s, let's assume better days lie ahead.

While we have only a month and change in the books, we are only two full months of play away from baseball's annual non-waiver trade

deadline. Before the season, we speculated about what teams would end up selling, buying or holding, while recognizing few teams would actually settle into one bucket or another before any games had even been determined. Now, though, in this hyper-stratified environment, there already are a few teams that should pretty much know where they will be at the end of July, even if they aren't publicly willing to admit it.

With today's stock watch, for the first time this season we're using early results in conjunction with preseason expectations to group teams into those familiar buy, sell or hold buckets. Each team's current playoff odds from MLBPET -- my projection and tracking system -- are used to make these determinations. If you're currently at 60 percent or better, you're in the buy group. If your playoff chances have dipped under 10 percent, it's time to think about selling. The rest -- the hold group -- are teams still trying to figure out who they are. As are we all.

Within each group, the teams are ordered by their current chances to earn a spot in the postseason, based on season-to-date results and simulations of the remaining schedule. The simulations are based on MLBPET's internal power ranking system, which factors in each team's current roster strength, preseason forecast, schedule-adjusted run differential and recent trends.

Holders
 Minnesota Twins

Opening Day win forecast: 82.9

Current win forecast: 79.0

Change: -3.9

Current playoff probability: 26.5%

Current championship probability: 1.0%

The Twins are treading water right now as their playoff odds continue to move in the wrong direction. Minnesota won the last three games of a four games series in Chicago over the weekend to move back within four games of .500.

Still, the next two weeks are huge because the Twins won't have any AL Central patsies to fatten up on in a while. The Twins play the Cardinals (twice), Angels and Brewers before the Tigers visit Target Field on May 21. Minnesota has to stay afloat while awaiting the returns of Miguel Sano, Byron Buxton and Ervin Santana.

Romero keeps scoreless streak going, Twins blank Cards 6-0

Associated Press | ESPN | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- The way this major league thing is going for Fernando Romero, the Minnesota Twins rookie might just stick around for a while.

Romero (2-0) followed his impressive debut a week ago with another scoreless outing Monday night, throwing six sharp innings to lead Minnesota to a 6-0 win over the St. Louis Cardinals. The 23-year-old right-hander permitted just three hits and struck out nine while throwing 97 pitches.

He extended his shutout streak to 11 2/3 innings to begin his career, building on a win over Toronto last week. The victory was a season-high fourth straight for the Twins, who have won 13 of their last 16 games against National League opponents dating to last year.

"I got all my guys behind me, so I'm not scared to throw the ball over the plate," Romero said. "I've got nine guys playing with me, so they can get the ball whenever it comes."

Romero had plenty of help in the field on Monday, most spectacularly in the form of Eddie Rosario's home run-saving catch of Dexter Fowler's drive in the first inning. The left fielder was playing shallow with Fowler batting left-handed, but that didn't stop him from tracking the shot, crashing into the wall and reaching over it to take away what would have been a game-tying, two-run homer by Fowler.

"That was surprising," St. Louis manager Mike Matheny said. "It was amazing (Rosario) was able to get back on that ball. ... That certainly took a little of the wind out of us."

St. Louis had its season-best five-game winning streak snapped, one night after finishing a weekend sweep of the rival Chicago Cubs at nearly 1 a.m. John Gant (1-1) gave up six hits and four runs in 5 1/3 innings for the Cardinals, who managed only four hits.

Paul DeJong had three of those for St. Louis, which struck out 12 times. Seven came on called third strikes, including three for Marcell Ozuna.

Five of Romero's nine strikeouts caught Cardinals batters looking, thanks in large part to his upper-90s (mph) velocity and fine command.

Romero was signed by the Twins out of the Dominican Republic in 2011 and entered this season as one of their top prospects. After four appearances at Triple-A Rochester to start the season, he was called up last week -- and has put together two spotless performances since then.

"You don't want to judge it too much on two starts," Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. "We like a lot of things he can offer in terms of how he has presence on the mound. ... You've got to be pleased to come in here and play as clean a game as we did, and starting pitching is where it starts."

Robbie Grossman went 3 for 4 with two RBI, and Bobby Wilson knocked in two runs for Minnesota.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Molitor said Gold Glove CF Byron Buxton went through running drills in the outfield and plans to run the bases Tuesday. Buxton has been out since April 12 with a hairline fracture in his left big toe, but Molitor said the 24-year-old is expected to travel with the team to California this week and could return then.

Cardinals: Adam Wainwright made a rehab start at Double-A Springfield, allowing two hits in five scoreless innings. The right-hander is returning from elbow inflammation, and manager Mike Matheny said Wainwright will likely return to the Cardinals' rotation for his next start. ... CF Tommy Pham was out of the starting lineup for the second consecutive game with a lingering hip injury. Pham pinch-hit in Sunday night's 14-inning win over the Cubs. Matheny said the 30-year-old was "lobbying pretty hard" to start Monday and could return to the lineup on Tuesday.

UP NEXT

Twins: After striking out a season-high eight in his last outing, Jake Odorizzi takes the mound as Minnesota closes out its two-game interleague series in St. Louis on Tuesday afternoon. The right-hander is 2-2 with a 4.10 ERA and 35 strikeouts in 37 1/3 innings this season.

Cardinals: Carlos Martinez (3-1) has allowed one run or less in six straight starts and is second in the National League with a 1.40 ERA.

'I think I belong up there': Spin rate king Luke Bard aiming to work his way back to the big leagues

Jake Depue | ESPN 1500 | May 8, 2018

After a five-month odyssey in which he got selected by the Angels in the Rule 5 Draft, made their opening day roster, and got DFA'd after a month of mostly pitching well, Luke Bard is back in the Twins organization.

"It's been a whirlwind," said Bard. "It's the side of sports that isn't the easiest. The traveling, moving, dragging your family around. But it's part of it. I'm here now, back with my friends."

The Twins left Bard unprotected in last year's Rule 5 Draft despite a strong year in Double-A and Triple-A. In 65.1 innings, Bard had a 2.76 ERA, 8.4% walk rate and very good 34.7% strikeout rate. It was likely the strikeout rate, and elite fastball spin rate, that intrigued the Angels enough to take a chance on Bard, who'd pitched just 13 innings above Double-A.

It's difficult for Rule 5 picks to stick on an MLB roster an entire year—which by rule they have to do, or be offered back to their original club—and even more difficult when they're on a competitive team. Anaheim is off to one of the best starts in the American League at 21-13, and currently leads the AL West.

Bard's DFA on April 21 was somewhat surprising, though, because he pitched fairly well for an Angels team that doesn't have a particularly strong bullpen. His ERA (5.40) doesn't look good, but that can almost entirely be attributed to one disastrous outing against the Red Sox. Bard gave up four home runs and six earned runs in 1.2 innings against Boston on April 17, which boasts the second best offense in the game. In his other seven appearances, he allowed just one earned run over 10 innings, with a 24.5% strikeout rate and 9.4% walk rate. Bard said he was the victim of a numbers crunch, after a series of short starts taxed the Angels' bullpen.

"They didn't say it was because of your numbers or outing or anything," he said of the DFA. "I think we got a two-inning start, a three-inning start and a four-and-a-third inning start in three straight starts, so our pen was completely cashed. They just said unfortunately we've got to make some roster moves to get some pitching help up here. Just kind of the odd man out I guess."

Bard cleared waivers and returned to the Twins, where's he's made one appearance for Triple-A Rochester, striking out two over two scoreless innings.

Part of what makes Bard intriguing is his spin rate. At the time he was DFA'd, he had the highest average 4-seam fastball spin rate in the Majors at 2770 RPM, and was among the league leaders on slider spin rate as well. The high spin rate helps create a "rising" fastball and sharp slider that drops off the table. Bard said he's aware of his elite spin rates, and it's changed the way he's approaching hitters.

"I do [pay attention], and it's been brought a lot more to my attention since getting to the big leagues," he said. "I had the same spin rate my whole minor league career and nobody talked about it because I was in Double-A. You get to the big leagues and then Twitter and stuff takes off. I've definitely learned more about it."

Bard says he first started making adjustments when he was at Double-A last season, after becoming aware of his numbers and what they suggested about how he should attack hitters. He's realized that the high spin rate means throwing up in the zone is often a more effective pitch for him than keeping the ball down.

"I used to throw a lot of sinkers. I'm really only [throwing] 4-seamers now," he said. "I throw my slider a lot more, [throw] the ball up at times. Up and down is almost more important to me than in and out. Those might sound like small things, but they've bade a big impact on me."

For a Twins team that's already used 15 pitchers out of the bullpen alone, Bard is an intriguing option if he puts up strong numbers in Triple-A. He'd have to be added to the 40-man roster, but the Twins haven't hesitated to open up 40-man spots for fresh bullpen arms like David Hale and Matt Magill. Bard now has big league experience, and confidence that he can get hitters out at the highest level.

"I threw well," he said of his big league time. "I felt like one outing kind of skewed everything for me, but I felt comfortable. To get up there and get outs and do well in most of my outings, it definitely gives you confidence that I think I belong up there."

Prospect Hot Sheet (5/7/18)

Staff Writer | Baseball America | May 7, 2018

This installment of the Prospect Hot Sheet considers what minor league players did from April 30-May 6. Contributing this week were JJ Cooper, Josh Norris, Ben Badler, Matt Eddy and Kyle Glaser.

Remember, this simply recognizes what the hottest prospects in the minors did in the past week—it's not a re-ranking of the Baseball America Top 100 Prospects.

15. Stephen Gonsalves, LHP, Twins

Team: Triple-A Rochester (International)

Age: 23

Why He's Here: 2-0, 0.63, 14.1 IP, 4 H, 1 R, 1 ER, 14 SO, 2 BB, 1 HR

The Scoop: Twins' starters rank ninth in the American League with a 4.55 ERA, and it doesn't figure to be long before Gonsalves is brought up to help. Gonsalves made his Triple-A debut this week and won both his starts in dominating fashion, pitching 7.2 scoreless innings of one-hit ball on May 1 and following with nine strikeouts over 6.2 innings on Sunday. Gonsalves is more about pitchability than electric stuff, but opponents have hit just .198 against him in his minor league career. As long as he continues to make strides with his control, the 6-foot-5 southpaw figures be in the majors sooner rather than later. (KG)

Twins mailbag: Has Romero earned a spot? Is Sanó toast? More moves ahead?

Dan Hayes | MLB.com | May 8, 2018

If it feels like ages since the Twins had won a series, well, that's because it was.

By the time they finished out their third win in four tries against the Chicago White Sox on Sunday, it had been almost a full month between series victories for the Twins. Prior to this weekend, the Twins hadn't won a series since they took two of three games from the Houston Astros in Minneapolis last month.

Since then, Twins fans had been treated to some of the worst possible baseball from a team that believes itself to be a contender. More games have been given away by this bunch than one would care to count.

Finally, however, the Twins broke through in Chicago.

There were plenty of positive signs the last three days as the Twins beat up on the White Sox. They might still be without the services of Byron Buxton and Miguel Sanó, both of whom are on the disabled list, but they pitched well, scored a lot of runs and padded leads.

Still, we have to consider that those victories came at the expense of one of the worst teams in baseball. The White Sox are not only young on the pitching side, they're beat up offensively without All-Star Avisail Garcia or Yoan Moncada.

If the Twins want to be taken seriously, they're going to need to continue their strong play over the rest of the road trip. So far, so good — on Monday, Fernando Romero had his second straight strong start to start his major-league career in a 6-0 win over the Cardinals.

With all that in mind, here's a look at what's going on with the Twins and what you can expect in the upcoming week. Your questions, answered.

Sano is close to losing his career because he is overweight and lazy. Can the Twins wake him up or is he a lost cause?

— John L.

I'm skeptical that Sanó is on the way out. Here's where I think you and many people are wrong on this topic.

Sanó is currently down with a hamstring issue, which has nothing at all to do with weight. I present to you Chicago's Yoan Moncada, who is listed at 205 pounds. I've been around a lot of players and Moncada is one of the fittest in my career. I don't have the actual numbers, but I'd venture to guess that his BMI is somewhere between negative-four percent and negative-eleventy. Yet in spite of that, Moncada is on the DL with a hamstring strain, an issue he's dealt with for several weeks.

As for Sanó being lazy, he never would have seen the field this season if that was the case. Granted, it's unlikely he'll be able to sustain a long career at his current weight.

But, he's 24 and has time to figure that out.

However, this offseason, Sanó was heavily restricted from conditioning because of the ankle surgery he had. Even so, Sanó did enough conditioning when he was cleared for activity that the Twins moved up his return date by a month. When they opened camp in mid-February, the Twins suggested Sanó might not see game action until closer to Opening Day. Yet there he was at the start of March playing in exhibition games and the Twins were pleased with how he looked. Again, in the long run, Sanó will have a better, healthier career if he's in better shape. But this current situation has nothing to do with that.

Miguel Sano

You might be frustrated by Miguel Sanó, but he's far from a lost cause. (Credit: Mark J. Rebilas/USA TODAY Sports)

Are the Twins done with Sano at 3B at this point? Seems like Escobar is capable of being the everyday 3B (especially when Polanco returns) and we get Sano out of there defensively. I know this would create a logjam with LoMo though.

— Neal J.

Just don't see it because it would mean that either Joe Mauer or Logan Morrison isn't in the lineup on a daily basis. As we've seen all season, Mauer may not be a power hitter, but he brought a .434 on-base percentage into Monday's game. The Twins need all the runs they can get and having Sanó in the field allows means Eduardo slides to shortstop, where he provides a good bat for the position.

Would the Twins have interest in Matt Harvey?

— Ben S.

Harvey put himself in a difficult position by not accepting the Mets' request to send him to the minor leagues, which he's well within his right to. However, because he's not interested in Triple A, I think that all but eliminates the Twins as a possible landing spot. Even though the Twins' rotation has struggled early this season, they're all full up and will need to figure out what to do when Ervin Santana returns in early June. Given the Twins also already have Phil Hughes in the bullpen, that further reduces the chances of Harvey coming to Minneapolis.

Is the 5th spot in the rotation Romero's slot to lose? Do you think he will remain there until Ery gets back? If not what do you think will happen.

— Bruce L.

Romero was fantastic in his first start and backed it up Monday, going six shutout innings and allowing just three hits while striking out nine in another Twins win. He has earned himself an extended look. If you've read the reports or saw him pitch in either of his two outings, you've seen the outstanding ability that Romero possesses. But what I really like is his confidence and the belief his teammates have in him. The clubhouse was buzzing after Romero pitched so well in his first start. The fact that the Twins made the call to move Romero into the rotation and put Hughes into the bullpen gives you a good indication of what the front office thinks about this team. They were looking to improve the rotation and shake things up when the team was struggling. Romero might just be that little boost they need.

How much do the Twins miss Buxton?

— Mason T.

Any time Buxton is out of the lineup, the Twins miss him dearly. It's difficult to play for nearly a month without a player who produced 3.5 f-Wins Above Replacement last season. His skillset is elite both in the outfield and on the bases and is not easily replaceable. The Twins have a couple of other players who are capable of handling center field in Max Kepler and Ryan LaMarre. But the team would be much better off not to have to use them on a daily basis. Also, they're much better defensively when Kepler is in right and Buxton is in center. Even though Buxton was off to a slow start when he was placed on the DL, all he has to do is get on first base and he becomes a headache for the opposing pitcher. His speed makes him a threat to run at all times and pitchers have to keep tabs on him. Beyond that, the Twins feel like Buxton brings a certain energy to the field that you can't manufacture.

What's your opinion on switching Mauer and Dozier in the lineup? Will it stay this way? Should it?

— Nathaniel T.

The Twins have played very well since Paul Molitor rearranged the lineup and placed Mauer in the leadoff spot and batted Dozier second. While Mauer is anything but a prototypical leadoff hitter, it's not as if there are very many of those guys around anymore. But this move— at least temporarily — allows the Twins to take advantage of Mauer's outstanding ability to get on base. He makes opposing pitchers work hard and having that atop the lineup can be very beneficial to the rest of the group. Since Dozier is still not performing quite up to his full potential, I don't see any reason not to ride it for a little bit. Ultimately, however, the Twins are probably better off with Dozier up top doing his thing.

Do you think the Twins need to go out and make a splash to get the team going?

— Zack B.

Teams like to shake things up when they're struggling, and I believe the Twins probably already did this effectively enough by replacing Hughes in the rotation with Romero. The Twins did a very thorough job this offseason filling in the holes on the 25-man roster with experienced veterans. Unfortunately, most of that group has gotten out to a rough start. When you combine those performances with the injuries to Buxton, Sanó and Santana, the Twins couldn't have possibly started the season in a worse manner. One thing that has really held up through all of it though is the belief by players that they will turn things around, and that's why I think anything more than a shakeup is unnecessary.

Do you think the Twins still have a chance to win the division or the Wild Card?

— Lucas R.

The American League Central has proven to be a pretty terrible division through the first 5 1/2 weeks of the season. Cleveland's bullpen has suffered immensely with Andrew Miller on the DL. Despite their own early woes, the Twins are within striking distance and have shown some signs of life this weekend in Chicago and now in St. Louis. But, the rest of this road trip is a big test to see how they can handle themselves in the finale in St. Louis and against the Los Angeles Angels. If they can come out of these six games with a .500 mark or better, the Twins could be on the road to recovery and possibly competing this season, especially with Buxton on the mend.

Joe Rydholm

@rydley

Are there metrics that suggest Kyle Gibson's recent performances are sustainable?

Kyle Gibson has followed up a strong finish to 2017 by pitching very well early this season. Even though his walks per nine has increased to 4.19 in 2018 from 3.22 for his career, Gibson has pitched extremely well. His strikeouts per nine are currently at a career-best 10.24 and he's garnering

a lot of swings and misses. Beyond that, Gibson has allowed fewer homers than ever in his career. The Twins have worked with him on throwing more strikes early in the count, which opens up a very lethal repertoire. Gibson is feeling more confident in knowing how successful he can be when he gets ahead in the count and we're seeing that. And to answer the question, yes, metrics back up the performance. His Fielding Independent Pitching is 3.10 while his ERA is 3.49. Even his X-FIP sits at 3.71. Those suggest that Gibson's results are on par with his current performance.

Jeff Wood
@JeffWood28

Should we fans be concerned or confident that we are tied with the Indians in the loss column while playing sans Buxton, Sano, Polanco, and Santana for much of the year?

If this is the worst the Twins will play and they are where they are, I think that portends more toward confidence than concern. Whether it's underperformance or injury, we haven't seen the Twins anywhere close to full strength so far. The bullpen isn't perfect but there's enough there to win the majority of games and the offense is coming around. If Lance Lynn and Morrison follow suit, the Twins could be dangerous. But they have a lot to prove before we'd ever consider them a contender. Fortunately, the Twins have 131 games left after Monday and that is plenty of time to perform.

Hochman: Ex-Cardinal Lynn jaded by free-agency experience
Benjamin Hochman | STL Post-Dispatch | May 8, 2018

Thirty-one years ago this coming Saturday, Lance Lynn was born — which is to say, at the wrong time.

Perhaps if he'd been born years before, he'd have signed a contract for \$100 million, because that's what happened to early-30s pitchers with a bunch of WAR and war stories.

Instead, Lynn hit free agency the year free agency took a hit.

The former Cardinal signed with the Minnesota Twins for \$12 million. A one-year deal. And less than the qualifying offer he turned down as a formality, just to hit free agency in the first place.

Veteran starting pitching doesn't pay the way it used to, not in a data-driven world. And definitely not from the team that groomed him into a young pitching stud ... but now has the next Lance Lynns.

That's why, three hours before Monday's game at Busch Stadium, Lynn was a visitor in his old home, sitting in the third-base dugout.

Lynn is a Twin. For this year anyway. And then, free agency again.

"Maybe I'll just go on and be a hired gun the rest of my career, I don't really care," Lynn said in his monotone voice. "If somebody gives me a chance to pitch, I'm going to go do it, I'm not worried about anything else. It's kind of been who I've been my whole life. I'm going to take the ball and I'm going to try to help the team win.

"That's kind of the unfortunate business part of baseball now. I was here for seven years and there's no loyalty in the game. So as players, you've noticed players not having the loyalty anymore either. Until some of the things get cleaned up with the way the game's going, the direction, that's how it's going to be.

"And it's unfortunate because players enjoy the cities they're in. That's where they make home in the summer. So the fact that there's not that love feeling by the ownership and stuff like that, it's part of it. But when it's all said and done, we've got to play. It's our job. We go where we're told and where we get offered to play. We're going to do it and we get paid a lot of money to do it, so you can't be sad for us, because we're going to be all right."

The business of baseball is business, always has been. The difference is, the business model is ever-shifting — and Lynn got caught in the shift. You can't be mad the Cardinals didn't re-sign Lynn, but also giddy that Alex Reyes and Jack Flaherty will get some starts this summer.

Something had to give. And while Lynn sounded somewhat like a jilted lover, it wasn't just the Cardinals that jilted — it was much of baseball. The value of a veteran no longer is universal.

The game changed this winter. Now we're seeing the effects in the spring.

So here's Lance Lynn, again pitching for a contract.

Does he feel he has to prove himself all over again?

"I think that in this game, you prove yourself every year," the old workhorse said. "If you have a multiple-year contract, you get things guaranteed, but you're still proving yourself every year that you're worth it — or that you're good enough to be here.

"This game is not easy and there are only a certain few people who can play it. So every year you try to prove yourself, and it's you versus the guy in the box on the other team. You're up against somebody at all times, so there's no really taking a deep breath and doing all that, because there's always the young kid after your job — and always another team trying to beat your (butt)."

For years here, he beat the other team's (butt). Lynn was an underappreciated innings-eater. And his earned-run average was 3.38 for his Cardinals career. And there is no bad aberration season on his stats page. Just year after year, firing four-seamers. Then, after a Tommy John year up in flames, he returned to the mound with more flames.

On this day, one year ago, Lynn was 4-1 with a 2.04 ERA. Talk radio talked regularly about the \$100 million he'd make. Talk about a curveball.

His frozen winter led to a rushed spring. As we've seen with Greg Holland, April hasn't been kind to this fraternity of guys (haven't they suffered enough?). In his five April starts, his ERA was 8.37. Not 3.87. It was 8.37.

But in his first May start, he allowed just two runs, which was, manager Paul Molitor said optimistically, "indicative of what we feel he can do for us. ... I think most people are pretty familiar with his body of work. How he pitches, the aggressiveness, the fastball usage. I had a nice talk with (former Cardinals manager) Tony La Russa about him, and he told me he was one of his favorite guys in terms of just teammates, workhorse, never won't take the baseball for you. Things that you want to have."

Well, things you'd think teams want to have. But only for a certain price or duration.

Lynn and the Twins arrived Sunday night in St. Louis. Lynn spotted the lights on at Busch, and it was the first time it hit him — he's in St. Louis but not a St. Louis Cardinal.

He gathered some teammates and headed down to the Central West End for dinner at Gamlin Whiskey House.

"Saw some old faces, friends from over the years," Lynn said.

He didn't stay up to watch the end of the 14-inning Cardinals game — "I've got more important things to do," the Twin said — and on Monday it felt weird walking to Busch from a hotel ... then walking into Busch and past the home clubhouse.

"I've never been to this whole half of the side of the stadium," he said Monday.

Lynn won't start at Busch during this two-game series. Perhaps he'll catch the Cards next week in Minneapolis.

At that point, No. 31 will be 31, pitching against the team he said wasn't loyal to him, pitching against old teammates he called "brothers," pitching for a guaranteed contract with terms that aren't guaranteed.

Cardinals run out of steam against Twins

Rick Hummel | STL Post-Dispatch | May 8, 2018

The Cardinals' margin of error had been rather slim in their recent winning streak of five games. They had won those games by a total of six runs, with the last two victories in extra innings.

But the emotion and the fury of that stretch, notably that engendered in the weekend sweep of the Chicago Cubs, faded to black Monday night.

Minnesota rookie starter Fernando Romero, channeling his best Nick Kingham, the Pittsburgh rookie who was the last pitcher to beat the Cardinals, had much to do with this. While Kingham blanked the Cardinals on one hit for seven innings, striking out nine, on April 29, Romero, making his second big-league start, held the Cardinals scoreless over six innings, allowing three hits and also fanning nine.

The result was a 6-0 Minnesota victory at Busch Stadium, and it wasn't any closer than the score as the Cardinals were shut out for the second

time this season.

Some would offer that the Cardinals were due for a letdown after the high stakes play of the weekend. But Dexter Fowler, the hero of Sunday's 14-inning win, said, "You can't blame it on that. They got hits. They scored runs. They won."

Signed as a 16-year-old from the Dominican Republic in 2011, Romero didn't accomplish much until he had elbow surgery that cost him the 2015 season. Since then, he was 9-3 with a sub 2.00 ERA in 2016 at two stops and 11-9 last year at Class AA Chattanooga before making four starts and posting a 2.57 ERA at Class AAA Rochester this year.

In his first outing with the Twins, Romero blanked Toronto over 5 2/3 innings, fanning five, and was even better Monday night.

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny called Romero "very similar" to Kingham, who already has been sent back to the minors.

Romero was "a guy we haven't seen a lot," said Matheny. "Knew he had good stuff. Good arm. But it was not just the high velocity. He had good movement. He was in the zone more today than some of the other outings we'd seen."

John Gant (1-1), making his first start for the Cardinals this season, quickly fell behind 2-0 in the first inning and, while pitching creditably after that, would give up four runs over 5 1/3 innings. He was not available after the game to discuss his performance but Matheny said, "I thought he was good. First inning was atypical for him. High pitch count (32). Started off with a walk. A little trouble. Got into a tough spot, and they capitalized."

Gant hit for himself in the fifth inning with the Cardinals down three runs, and he sacrificed a runner to second. Matheny said he needed Gant to go as long as he could because the bullpen was short after long games in the preceding two days.

It isn't likely Gant will be here much longer this week and probably not lefthanded reliever Ryan Sherriff, who was raked for four hits and two runs in the eighth and was unable to pitch the ninth, as had been planned. Matheny said there was a "possibility (read: probability)" that a bullpen move would be made before Tuesday afternoon's game, with righthander John Brebbia, impressive in an earlier stint, perhaps to get another recall.

"We're still trying to figure out exactly what we're going to do," Matheny said.

Gant's night started with a walk to Minnesota's Joe Mauer in the first. Mauer went to second on a wild pitch and scored on the first of two doubles in the inning, this one by Max Kepler. A two-out double by Eddie Rosario chased home Kepler.

Rosario then hurt the Cardinals defensively in the home first. With Matt Carpenter on with a walk, Fowler sent what appeared to be a home run to left. But left fielder Rosario leaped against the wall and, with his glove at the top of the barrier, snatched away the extra-base hit, squeezing his glove as he descended, making sure the ball was secure.

This play, in essence, sucked the air out of the ballpark and out of the Cardinals.

"That was surprising," said Matheny. "That was probably the best ball Dex has hit the other way all season. Amazing (Rosario) was able to get back on that ball. That's a 2-2 game at that point. That took a little of the wind out of us. Just not a lot of offense. One of those days."

Fowler, who barely got his game-ending homer over the wall and out of the reach of Cubs right fielder Jason Heyward the night before, said, with little emotion. "I hit it well. He caught it. It's an out. That's all that mattered."

The Cardinals went hitless with men in scoring position at nothing for five. Paul DeJong had three of the four hits, the other a bloop single by Harrison Bader.

"We've got two guys in our lineup with hits," said Matheny. "Paulie had a real nice day. It's not the first time that's happened to us where we get a pitcher we're seeing for the first time and have trouble kind of getting to a place where we can put together good at-bats. It was another one of those times."

"You get all the information you can. You prepare. Felt like we had a pretty good idea what we were looking at. Comes down to once again execution. (Ninety-six, 97 (mph) with sink that's moving the width of the plate is going to give anybody a hard day if you're putting it where you want to."

The Cardinals struck out 12 times, seven of them called, three on Marcell Ozuna.

"A lot of that had to do with the movement," Matheny said. "At times guys were thinking they weren't that close. They would go check them out

(in the video room) and realize they were close enough to be called. But as they saw it out of the hand – that’s one of the challenges you have with a guy you haven’t seen before. You’re still trying to figure out what exactly the ball is going to do as it comes out of his hand. Sometimes they execute really well with good stuff. That makes for a long day.”

By the clock, it was 2 hours, 55 minutes of a long day’s night at Busch. That was nearly three hours less than the Cardinals had spent at the ballpark the night before. But they had had a lot more fun then.