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**Mejia out to improve conditioning during spring**

**Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- After his third start of the spring against the Orioles in a 9-8 win on Tuesday, Twins left-hander Adalberto Mejia was asked what he felt he could improve upon from last season.

Mejia wasted no time in answering that he needs to be in better physical shape than last year, and he's well on his way. Mejia lost 13 pounds during the offseason and has dropped three more since reporting to camp to get down to 262 pounds. He credits his wife, Alejandrina, for helping him eat healthier, cutting out fried foods and a dedicated workout plan for the weight loss.

"I need to work on my physical attributes and my weight," Mejia said through a translator. "After that, I just need to work on commanding my pitches."

Mejia, who is competing with veterans Phil Hughes and Anibal Sanchez for the final spot in the Twins' starting rotation, gave up three runs on four hits and a walk over three innings to see his ERA rise to 5.63 this spring, although he wasn't helped by his defense with Byron Buxton misplaying a fly ball that was ruled a double as part of a two-run Orioles third.

"Conditioning, I think he looks good and his endurance has been fine," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "His outings down here, for me, have been somewhat similar to last year, where he tries to find ways to put guys away but throws some good changeups but then some not-so-good ones. I think he's really trying to put his fastball in better spots so that his other pitches play better."

Mejia, 24, showed flashes as a rookie last season, posting a 4.50 ERA in 21 starts, but he averaged just 4 2/3 innings per outing. He surprisingly made the Opening Day roster over Jose Berrios last season and is considered a bit of a dark horse again this year because he can be optioned to Triple-A Rochester. The Twins also want to see what they have in Hughes and Sanchez.

"To be honest, last year was last year," Mejia said. "I'm happy I made the team, but it's a new year. I'm just concentrating on his year and going forward. I want to make the team."

As for his weight going forward, Mejia said there's no target in mind, but he likes the way he feels now better than last season.

"I don't have any limits," Mejia said. "The more I lose the better. It makes me feel better. I just want to be healthy, make the team and get ready for the start of the season."

#### Camp battles

- Lefty Gabriel Moya, who is competing for a spot in the bullpen, threw a perfect fifth inning with a strikeout to lower his ERA to 1.80 in four Grapefruit League outings. With fellow lefties Taylor Rogers and Zach Duke locks to make the bullpen, Moya is a bit of a longshot to break camp with the Twins, but he's helped his cause with a strong start to the spring.

"He's always been a reverse-split guy with that changeup being tremendous against right-handers," Molitor said. "He's working on a third pitch [a slurve] that he's trying to use to get out left-handers. But he acts like he belongs and I think he thinks he belongs. But to have too many people who are deserving would be a good thing."

- Utility man Ehire Adrianza made his first start in left field and went 2-for-3 with an RBI to improve his average to .348 this spring. Adrianza is considered highly likely to make the club as a backup infielder/outfielder.

#### Injury updates

- Right-hander Ervin Santana returned from New York after getting his cast and sutures removed from his surgically repaired right middle finger on Monday. Santana is still expected to miss the first 2-to-4 weeks of the regular season.

- Catcher Jason Castro, who hadn't played since Feb. 27 after experiencing migraines, returned to the lineup against the Orioles, going 0-for-1 with a walk and sacrifice fly.

#### Up next

Right-hander Jake Odorizzi is slated to make his second Grapefruit League start on Wednesday against the Red Sox at 12:05 p.m. CT at JetBlue Park. Other pitchers scheduled to see action include Duke, Addison Reed, Ryan Pressly, Alan Busenitz, John Curtiss and Felix Jorge. The game can be heard live on Gameday Audio.

### **Dozier 'disappointed' in lack of extension talks**

**Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Twins second baseman Brian Dozier is in the last year of his contract, and from what he's heard from the front office, he won't be offered an extension this spring. That means barring a dramatic reversal, Dozier will be a free agent after the season.

Dozier, who is earning \$9 million this season in the final year of a four-year extension signed in 2015, said at TwinsFest in late January he wanted to sign a long-term deal to remain in Minnesota. But it's gained no traction since then, and the Twins haven't even engaged Dozier or his agent for a possible extension.

"I've said I wanted to stay here since forever, but I've really vocalized it the last couple years," Dozier said. "But I just don't think it's in their future, from what I've been told. We'll see if anything else shakes out, but I'll leave at it."

Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey wouldn't get into the specifics of their dealings with Dozier but said just because a deal doesn't get done in Spring Training doesn't mean they can't explore future discussions.

"We keep those conversations and specifics private, but I would say when a guy of Brian's caliber is approaching free agency, there's an intriguing aspect to that, as Dozier said," Falvey said. "We recognize that. We want to be thoughtful. We have conversations with agents and players and talk big picture and parameters. We don't rule anything out, but we have nothing at this stage to announce."

Dozier, 30, said the best word to describe how he feels is "disappointed," but he understands the business aspect of it. The Twins have Jorge Polanco at shortstop and several highly regarded middle infielders in their Minor League system such as Nick Gordon, Wander Javier and Royce Lewis.

Dozier, though, is one of the faces of the franchise along with Joe Mauer, who is also in the last year of his contract. Dozier was an All-Star in 2015, hit a career-high 42 homers in '16 and followed that with 34 homers last season while winning his first Gold Glove Award at second base.

"When you put your heart and soul, me and my wife, into an organization and you say you want to be here and see this thing out for a long time and nothing comes to fruition or is even explored, it is what it is," Dozier said. "I get it. And that's why you have forget about that and play to win this year. Whatever happens after this year, happens."

Dozier, though, said he's already shifted his focus to trying to help the Twins reach the postseason for a second consecutive year. With another strong season, he could be in line for a sizable contract in free agency as a power-hitting second baseman who can lead off and play above-average defense.

"It's pretty much black and white from what I've been hearing, which is upsetting, but you turn the page and play to win," Dozier said. "For now, it's disappointing news but you set your sights on playing for a championship."

### **Report: Lynn turns down Twins' offer** **Manny Randhawa | MLB.com | March 6, 2018**

Free-agent right-hander Lance Lynn turned down a two-year, \$20 million contract offer from the Twins, according to the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

Lynn, 30, posted a 3.43 ERA in 33 starts for the Cardinals last season. He missed the entire 2016 campaign recovering from Tommy John surgery, though he proved durable in his return. In six seasons with St. Louis, he posted a 3.38 ERA with 8.5 K/9 innings.

Lynn is one of several notable pitchers remaining on the free-agent market, including right-handers Jake Arrieta and Alex Cobb.

The Twins had pursued Yu Darvish and other frontline free-agent starters during the offseason, but saw Darvish sign with the Cubs. Ace Ervin Santana is recovering from surgery on his right middle finger and will likely miss the first couple of months of the regular season, making potential additions to the rotation of more urgency for Minnesota.

The Twins acquired right-hander Jake Odorizzi in a trade with the Rays last month to bolster the rotation between Jose Berrios and Kyle Gibson. Beyond that trio, the Opening Day rotation is unsettled so far, with candidates such as Anibal Sanchez, Phil Hughes and Adalberto Mejia competing for the other slots.

Other clubs that have shown recent interest in Lynn include the Orioles, Brewers and Phillies.

### **Twins pitcher Aaron Slegers, at 6-10, is showing growth potential** **La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | March 7, 2018**

FORT MYERS, FLA. – Aaron Slegers grew up in Scottsdale, Ariz., but played collegiately at the University of Indiana. He received no interest from local Pacific-12 Conference powerhouse programs Arizona and Arizona State.

And he shouldn't have.

"I threw two varsity innings in high school," Slegers said. "I wasn't even a baseball letter winner in high school."

Slegers' path to the majors was far from smooth. His senior season at Notre Dame Prep in Scottsdale was wrapped up in one game. He threw less than 10 innings over his first two seasons with the Hoosiers. But he parlayed one good year on a team that reached the College World Series into a fifth-round selection in 2013 by the Twins.

After debuting in the majors last season, the righthander is in camp with a chance to win the fifth spot in the Twins' starting rotation.

To understand how far Slegers has come, look at how tall he's grown. Slegers is 6-10, and a dramatic growth spurt hindered his progress in baseball.

Slegers loved baseball as a kid and frequently played catch with his father, Robert, who is a 7-footer. When he started playing Little League at age 8, throwing strikes wasn't a problem.

He took his talents to Notre Dame Prep and also played on a traveling team called the Arizona Diamondbacks Scout Team. Slegers was 6-2 in his junior year of high school, then grew seven inches over the next year. He was growing into a body that would entice scouts, but that body was in pain as his bones grew and his muscles stretched.

"Everything hurt," Slegers said. "My shoulder hurt. My elbow hurt. I couldn't throw."

Growing pains literally wrecked Slegers' senior season. He was forced to shut down after throwing only two innings.

"When I was going through it, my body hurt so bad, I wasn't highly participating in sports," he said. "I was doing it because I loved to do it. I'd go to Life Time Fitness and play basketball and be on baseball teams, but I wasn't in games on a regular basis because my body just hurt so bad."

There was little for colleges to go on when evaluating Slegers. A coach on his scout team knew someone on Indiana's coaching staff. Then-coach Tracy Smith watched a DVD of Slegers throwing, and the Hoosiers took a chance. Now 6-10, Slegers was headed to Indiana — and not to play basketball.

"Indiana was in a unique position where they could sign a tall, big-bodied guy with potential who hadn't proved himself yet," Slegers said.

But after throwing one scoreless inning as a freshman, Slegers was hit by a line draft during an intrasquad game and broke his wrist. He was redshirted the rest of the year.

The next year, Slegers had thrown 7½ innings when he was late for the team bus and ordered to run as punishment. He suffered a stress fracture in his right tibia during the lengthy session and was done for another season. In a span of three years — from his senior year in high school through his redshirt freshman season — Slegers threw a total of 10½ innings.

He worked on getting in the best shape possible for his third season with the Hoosiers, and he went 9-2 with a 2.04 ERA and became the Big Ten Pitcher of the Year. It was the Twins' turn to take a chance in the 2013 draft.

"Certainly there was some risk projecting him without much history prior to 2013," said Jeff Pohl, the area scout who signed Slegers. "His injuries at Indiana not being throwing-related helped. What made it easier for me was his delivery and arm action. He wasn't a 6-10 guy with a good delivery "for his size." He was a 6-10 guy with a great delivery no matter what his size."

Slegers has slowly risen through the Twins' farm system, mixing a fastball in the low-90-mph range with a slider and a changeup. He went 15-4 with a 3.40 ERA at Class AAA Rochester last season and was named Twins minor league pitcher of the year. He was 0-1 with a 6.46 ERA in four games (three starts) with the Twins. So far this spring, Slegers is 0-1 with a 3.86 ERA in three outings.

The Twins feel they have a late bloomer in Slegers because of the inactive phase of his career.

"Not a lot of wear and tear," said Mike Radcliff, the Twins vice president in charge of player personnel. "Still a work in progress, still a piece of clay. Still has room to grow and do things."

While the growth spurt was part of a rough time for Slegers, he learned from it. As soon as he got healthy, he didn't take much for granted. He kept in shape, worked on his mechanics, asked questions and studied. Now he finds himself in the mix to win a spot in the starting rotation, or at least to move to the front of the line when they need another starter.

He pointed out that he didn't have his first good season until he was 20.

"When I was having a good year [in the minors], I still kept my foot on the gas pedal," Slegers said. "My main message to kids is that it is never too late. You keep wanting to play basketball, play baseball, play football. It's never too late as long as you want to work hard and get better."

### **Here's a thought: Twins hitters find success focusing on one thing at the plate**

**Jim Souhan | Star Tribune | March 7, 2018**

FORT MYERS, FLA. — Byron Buxton doesn't remember the opponent or the date. He will always remember the thought.

The Twins center fielder often looked helpless at the plate early in the 2017 season. He was batting .082 on April 20. He received advice from any acquaintance who had ever owned a baseball card.

His mind swimming, Buxton sought the counsel of a few Twins veterans, and found a common theme among quality hitters. The physics of making solid contact on a round ball moving 90 mph using a round bat can't be contemplated in the split-second required for the ball to reach home plate, so Brian Dozier and Joe Mauer told him to take only one thought into the batter's box. Unburdened, Buxton performed like a star.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Buxton said. "It was a pitch low and away. Me thinking 'right-center,' I stayed on the pitch and drove it for a triple. I said, 'That's what I'm going to stick to.'"

Embracing the power of one thought, Buxton hit .314 with a .912 OPS (on-base-plus-slugging percentage) from July 4 through the end of the regular season, joining a litany of great Twins hitters who adopted a similar approach.

Wednesday, the Twins beat Baltimore 9-8 at Hammond Stadium. Mauer hit two opposite-field doubles and Buxton hit one.

Once the Twins' Byron Buxton locked onto one thought at the plate, he hit .314 from July 4 through the end of last season.

"I try to drive everything right toward the pitcher," Dozier said. "Another way to think about it is, I try to knock down the center field wall. If I do that, then I can cover the plate, and still turn on inside pitches and pull the ball. But I'm not trying to pull the ball or go the other way. It just happens."

Mauer is a dedicated opposite-field hitter. Twins manager Paul Molitor used to think, "Let the ball travel" as a way to remind himself to be patient and willing to hit outside pitches to the opposite field. He, like Buxton and Dozier, had hands fast enough to pull inside pitches without planning to do so.

In the world of Zen and the Art of Swing Maintenance, trying to pull the ball can be disastrous, even if pulling the ball in and of itself can be a good thing.

"If I had one thought, it was to make sure I had the middle and outer plate covered and to trust myself inside," Molitor said. "If I got a little antsy or paranoid about a guy making a pitch inside, there usually weren't good results for me. Let the ball travel."

Kirby Puckett wore out the baggie in right field of the Metrodome. Kent Hrbek hit majestic shots to left-center. Molitor and Chuck Knoblauch both hit .341 in 1996 by spraying hits to center and right.

Justin Morneau broke out of slumps by lining outside pitches to right-center, which would lead to fastballs inside he would pull.

Twins Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey was watching the Detroit Tigers take batting practice once when he discovered Miguel Cabrera, Victor Martinez, J.D. Martinez and a few other hitters were playing a game, awarding points for home runs hit to center or the opposite field. If they pulled a home run, they earned negative points.

Falvey said he has read research on "internal vs. external cueing." Scientists confirm the approach of top hitters: A mental picture is worth a thousand words.

"If you focus on what your body is doing, you're in trouble," Falvey said. "There is a view that your body will organize itself with the intent of what you're trying to do."

Falvey trusts hitting coach James Rowson to distill video and statistical information.

"James will say, 'OK, I'm not saying any of that to the player, but I can get him to do what he needs to do,'" Falvey said.

Puckett used to say, "Swing hard in case you hit it." Knoblauch thought about knocking the cap off the pitcher's head. During spring training, Hrbek would try to hit the cows that once wandered in the pasture beyond the left field fence. It seems that in baseball, one simple thought can make the difference.

### **Joe Mauer's bases-loaded double sparks Twins to 9-8 victory over Baltimore** **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, FLA. – Joe Mauer was 1-for-7 this spring, and the Twins were batting .218 entering Tuesday's game against the Orioles. Both trends changed in a hurry.

Mauer doubled twice, including once with the bases loaded, and the Twins scored in four of their eight turns at bat, breaking a three-game Grapefruit League losing streak with a come-from-behind 9-8 victory at Hammond Stadium.

Jorge Polanco smacked a 350-foot home run onto the right field party deck, Byron Buxton doubled home a run, and outfield invitee Ryan LaMarre collected his eighth hit in 16 spring at-bats. And with the score tied in the seventh inning, minor league outfielder Nick Buss lined a single to right field, driving home LaMarre with the go-ahead run.

Mauer has played only three games this spring, under manager Paul Molitor's ease-him-in approach for the veteran. The plan seems to be working, Molitor said.

“He had a couple of really good at-bats [Tuesday],” Molitor said. After taking several pitches in the fourth inning, “he finally got an off-speed pitch up that he hammered.” An inning later, with the bases loaded and two outs, “he took two strikes off [Orioles lefthander Joely Rodriguez]. Didn’t seem to faze him too much.” Apparently not — Mauer launched an opposite-field drive into the left-field corner, scoring three runs.

“Some guys don’t need too many” spring at-bats to get ready, Molitor said. “Joe’s never been about a big number, it’s just about feel.”

Adalberto Mejia, who said he has now lost 16 pounds from the 275 he finished at last season, allowed three runs in three innings, including a long home run to left-center by former Twins infielder Danny Valencia. He gave up two more runs in the third on a soft liner to left by Manny Machado; that Baltimore rally was triggered when, for the second day in a row, a Twins center fielder — Buxton, in this case — lost a routine fly ball in the sun and allowed it to drop for a double.

Trevor Hildenberger allowed two runs, including a solo home run by Orioles outfielder Anthony Santander, and Taylor Rogers gave up two more on three singles and a Caleb Joseph double.

### **Twins day at camp: Bullpen cars could be making comeback to help pace of play**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 7, 2018**

FORT MYERS, FLA. – Could the return of the bullpen car be one answer to baseball’s pace of play problem?

The Twins are considering bringing the kitschy vehicles — staples of the game in the 1960s and ’70s — out of the garage. The Arizona Diamondbacks on Tuesday became the first team to announce they will use a bullpen car this season.

Twins President Dave St. Peter confirmed the club already is studying bringing similar cars to Target Field.

“It is something we have discussed and will continue to review,” he said. “The ballpark will require some modifications in order to allow easier cart ingress/egress.”

While playing at Metropolitan Stadium, the Twins used an actual automobile to transport pitchers from the bullpen, delivering the pitcher in front of the dugout. Other teams used golf carts, some modified to look like baseballs wearing giant caps. It’s not known what type of vehicle the Twins are considering.

The carts eventually were phased out by teams after most pitchers eschewed the service in favor of jogging to the mound.

Bringing bullpen cars out of retirement actually came up during discussions between the players association and Major League Baseball about shortening the time of games, but didn’t gain enough momentum.

Union chief Tony Clark, speaking to reporters last month following his annual meeting with Twins players, pointed out that bullpens, once located in most stadiums down the foul lines, have migrated in modern stadiums to beyond the outfield fences. They are farther away than ever before, so pitchers are taking longer to reach the mound.

“When you look at the amount of time that it takes on average for a pitching change and you combine that with how the game is being governed, where there are more pitching changes than ever before,” Clark said, “the combination platter leads you to wonder how you speed up a pitching change.”

Etc.

- Ervin Santana was back in camp, minus the cast on his right hand that has protected the middle finger since he had surgery earlier this month. What now? “He wants to throw a bullpen [Wednesday],” said Derek Falvey, the Twins’ chief baseball officer. “We’re trying to slow him down a little.” Santana will work on strengthening his hand and eliminating any lingering soreness before throwing, something that could happen by the weekend.

- Phil Hughes will pitch live batting practice, probably on Friday, rather than make his next start, manager Paul Molitor said, so he can better develop his slider and changeup without worrying about results. “In game situations, guys get competitive sometimes and they end up trying to get outs more than [working on] their pitches,” Molitor said.

- The Twins opened minor league camp, with morning workouts going on across the complex from Hammond Stadium.

Up next

Rain is in the forecast for the first time this spring, but if the skies clear in time, Jake Odorizzi will make his second start of the spring. Veteran relievers Zach Duke and Addison Reed are also scheduled to pitch in the noon game against the Red Sox at JetBlue Stadium.

### **Twins' catching crew restored for Grapefruit League game with Orioles**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Jason Castro's spring gets a reset today. The Twins' starting catcher, sidelined by migraines last week, will be behind the plate today and again tomorrow, according to manager Paul Molitor's plan, his first action since the headaches struck a week ago.

Castro's backup today will be Mitch Garver, who also is being handled carefully since suffering a knee injury last week that had the Twins concerned enough to schedule a magnetic resonance imaging test. Those two probably form the Twins' catching crew this season, but with three weeks still to go in spring training, nobody is concerned yet about their availability.

Meanwhile, Ervin Santana is back in camp — and the cast on his right hand is not. Santana's surgeon judged the middle finger sufficiently healed to remove the cast, and Santana will now be placed on a rehabilitation plan to strengthen his hand and slowly ramp up his throwing program.

The Orioles are at Hammond Stadium on a sunny day in south Florida, with a former Twin — Danny Valencia, who signed with Baltimore just last week — batting cleanup. The Orioles will face a Twins' starting lineup consisting entirely of players likely to head north.

Here are the lineups for today's game:

#### ORIOLES

Gentry CF  
Mancini 1B  
Machado SS  
Valencia 3B  
Trumbo DH  
Santander RF  
Rickard LF  
Tejada 2B  
Joseph C

Harvey RHP

#### TWINS

Dozier 2B  
Mauer 1B  
Sano DH  
Escobar 3B  
Kepler RF  
Buxton CF  
Polanco SS  
Castro C  
Adrianza LF

Mejia LHP, followed by Taylor Rogers, Trevor Hildenberger

### **Twins are still looking for (affordable) starting pitching, sources say**

**Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Even with a club-record \$118 million payroll projected for Opening Day, the Twins continue to prowl for pitching upgrades.

They recently offered a two-year, \$20 million contract to free agent right-hander Lance Lynn, according to a person with direct knowledge. That idea proved a non-starter as Lynn, the 30-year-old former all-star and three-time 15-game winner, opted to keep waiting for a suitable deal.

Lynn has been working out in Jupiter, Fla., with noted trainer Eric Cressey, who also had recent Twins signee Logan Morrison and Rule 5 pick Tyler Kinley in his camp last month. Fellow right-handers Jake Arrieta and Alex Cobb also remain unsigned with Opening Day a little over three weeks away.

Cobb is a former Tampa Bay Rays teammate of new Twins Logan Morrison and Jake Odorizzi, but the Twins don't appear to be aggressively pursuing his services.

"They're still looking for another starter," a rival scout said of the Twins.

Ideally, that would come on a short-term commitment as the Twins, aside from a nine-figure offer to free agent right-hander Yu Darvish before he signed with the Cubs, have managed to keep all their additions to one- or two-year terms.

They also made a run at veteran lefty C.C. Sabathia in December before the 37-year-old re-signed with the New York Yankees for one year at \$10 million. Lower-cost free-agent starters still unsigned include Jeremy Hellickson, Ubaldo Jimenez, John Lackey, Clay Buchholz, Scott Feldman, Trevor Cahill, Jeff Locke and ex-Twins Ricky Nolasco, Matt Garza and R.A. Dickey.

"You always want to balance cost and length and risk and everything associated with that," Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey said last week. "While everyone's focused on the 2018 roster, I've got my sheet with '19, '20, '21, '22 built out. I think as we think about future flexibility, we feel really good about where our team is headed moving forward."

The Twins have just \$37.7 million committed to four players in 2019 — Phil Hughes, Addison Reed, Michael Pineda and Jason Castro — and no guaranteed money on the books for 2020.

"We've always been thoughtful about where the spots are and what the right investments are and making sure that we're flexible and nimble, whether it's at the (trade) deadline or otherwise," Falvey said.

## CUTDOWN COMING

Tuesday was the official report date for all Twins minor leaguers, although the vast majority of them have been in camp for weeks.

Intrasquad games on the back fields aren't due to start until Sunday, which made Thursday's first scheduled off day on the major league side trickier than usual. Rotation candidates Phil Hughes and Tyler Duffey were due to take their turns that day after both worked into a third inning on Saturday at Dunedin, but that will become a full day off for those in big-league camp.

Instead of facing minor-leaguers in a game-type setting, Hughes will skip his scheduled turn and throw live batting practice on Friday or Saturday. That will enable him to work on his slider and changeup without the "pressure of a game situation," Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

The first round of cuts could take place by this weekend, although minor-league games against outside competition won't begin until March 14. The Twins opened Sunday with 59 players still in camp, a smaller number than normal.

"We talked about syncing it up with the games over there in the minor leagues," Molitor said. "I don't know if there's ever been this small of a window between when their games start and when our season starts. It kind of limits some of the options you might normally have a little bit longer."

## BRIEFLY

Catcher Jason Castro, out recently with a migraine, played his first game in six days. Naturally, the first defensive play went to him on a foul pop. Castro, who walked and had a sacrifice fly in three at-bats, is expected to catch Wednesday as well for his first back-to-back games of the spring.

Adalberto Mejia gave up a long home run to Danny Valencia and a two-run single to Manny Machado, but otherwise was pleased with his third outing of the spring. Mejia said his weight is down to 262 pounds after losing 16 pounds with the help of his wife and personal chef, Alejandrina, who has cut greasy and fried foods from his diet.

Joe Mauer snapped out of a 1-for-9 start with a pair of doubles and three runs batted in. ... Rookie lefty Gabriel Moya worked a spotless fifth on 11 pitches (nine strikes) to retire three dangerous right-handed batters: Machado, Valencia and Mark Trumbo.

Miguel Sano ripped a first-inning curve to left off Hunter Harvey for his first hit of the spring after an 0-for-8 start. ... Jorge Polanco had two hits, including a long homer, to break a 2-for-15 slide.



## **No extension talks yet for young Twins stars Miguel Sano or Max Kepler**

**Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. — While initial conversations regarding a multiyear deal for Byron Buxton have yet to gain traction, according to a person with direct knowledge, Miguel Sano and Max Kepler say they haven't been approached.

“No, not yet,” Sano told the Pioneer Press on Tuesday morning. “I want to take my time, want to play my game. If something happens, it happens, but I'm not thinking about that. I'm thinking about playing my game.”

Sano, 24, is coming off his first all-star season but also underwent Nov. 13 surgery to insert a titanium rod in his left shin. In addition, the power-hitting third baseman is awaiting the outcome of a Major League Baseball investigation into a Dec. 28 Twitter allegation against Sano by freelance photographer Betsy Bissen, who accused Sano of grabbing her wrist and making unwanted advances in an October 2015 incident at a Minnetonka mall.

Representatives from Major League Baseball's security department were at Hammond Stadium on Tuesday morning for their annual presentation to Twins players and staff.

Sano, who made \$573,000 last season and figures to see that number climb above \$600,000 in 2018, is among 11 Twins who could be eligible for salary arbitration next offseason.

Kepler, meanwhile, made \$547,000 last season as an everyday right fielder and said he wasn't aware of any multiyear talks for him either. How receptive would the 25-year-old signed out of Germany be to such an offer?

“It depends what they offer, obviously, but I'm not going to jump the gun,” he told the Pioneer Press. “I'd just sit down, talk it over with my agent, see what's realistic. But yeah, this is where I want to be, with this squad, most definitely. I like this team and I want to stick with it as long as I can.”

Right-hander Jose Berrios, who is still two seasons away from being eligible for salary arbitration, said he hasn't been approached about a multiyear deal either. Berrios, coming off a 14-win season, has agreed to a contract paying him \$570,000 this year.

In Buxton's case, Boston Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts' recent \$10.5 million award via arbitration — the highest ever for a player in his first year of eligibility — could make it more difficult to convince a talented player like Buxton to exchange his year-to-year earning potential for guaranteed security on a multiyear deal.

According to MLB Trade Rumors, recent extensions for center fielders Ender Inciarte (Atlanta Braves) and Odubel Herrera (Philadelphia Phillies) could impact the Buxton talks, considering both players had similar service time upon signing to Buxton's current two-plus years.

Inciarte was 26 when he signed a five-year, \$30.525 million deal that bought out three free agent years. Herrera was 25 when he signed for \$30.5 million over five years, giving up two years of potential free agency.

Over the weekend, the St. Louis Cardinals extended shortstop Paul DeJong for \$26 million over six years, plus a pair of club options that could boost the total value to \$51 million over eight years. DeJong is coming off a rookie season in which he hit 25 home runs and slugged .532.

His deal could provide context for what it would take to lock up young Twins shortstop Jorge Polanco (one-plus years of service time) for an extended period.

Tony Clark, executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association, said recently Twins players aren't necessarily receiving added attention in light of their potential for market-shaping multiyear deals.

“Ninety-nine percent of our focus is on the free-agent market,” Clark said. “Teams that have young talented players, you engage them, you engage their agents and simply make sure they have as much information as they can, and then if they are approached by a club in regards to a possibility moving forward, they can make the decisions that are best for them.”

A historically tepid free-agent market seemed to have slowed the normal flow of multiyear extensions for young stars, but Clark said he wasn't sure if the year-over-year data would support that or not.

“I'm not suggesting we aren't aware of some of the conversations that are being had, and it does remain to be seen whether any of those deals are going to be consummated,” he said in late February. “What we do and will continue to do is engage the individual representatives and the players

themselves. Our goal is simply that the players make educated decisions against whatever considerations they are working through.”

The last Twins player to sign away his arbitration years was second baseman Brian Dozier, who agreed to a four-year, \$20 million extension heading into the 2015 season. That deal, however, failed to buy out any of Dozier’s potential free-agent years, much less tack on a club-friendly option year or two.

Dozier, who was 27 when he signed his extension, has provided an estimated \$113.1 million of value over the past three seasons, according to Fangraphs. He is due to hit the open market for the first time next winter.

### **Pickler’s proteges: Twins outfield is on the rise**

**Staff Writers | Associated Press | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) With Byron Buxton in the middle, flanked by Eddie Rosario and Max Kepler, the Minnesota Twins boast one of the most dynamic young outfields in baseball.

Their average age is 25. They combined to hit 62 home runs last season. Their defense is superb, judged by both basic measurements and advanced metrics.

These are Jeff Pickler’s proteges.

”We don’t feel too pressured, or feel scared to make that mistake. We’ve got room to improve, and he understands that,” Buxton said, reflecting on his first year under Pickler’s supervision. ”It allows us to go out there and play free, play aggressively.”

Soon after Derek Falvey took over as the organization’s chief baseball officer, the Twins hired Pickler as the eighth coach under manager Paul Molitor, without a defined role like the rest of the staff. Though his background was at second base, in an eight-year minor league career that topped out at Triple-A and ended in 2005, Pickler was quickly identified as the right person to work with the outfield and try to further tap into the immense potential of this homegrown trio.

”The concept in the infield is the margin for error is really small and they’re expected to catch every ball and they’re expected to put every throw within three inches, and in the outfield our focus is so much more big picture that maybe we lose sight of the details that the infielders focus on,” Pickler said. ”So we tried to bring some of those details to the outfield and say, `Hey, if infielders can focus on some of these things and help them make plays more consistently and throw the ball more accurately, can we bring those concepts to the outfield?’”

The son of a longtime college baseball coach, Pickler came to Minnesota with experience in three major league organizations, either as a scout or in player development. He also brought a mind for analytics, baseball’s data-driven revolution, with an ability to mesh them with human preference and process.

”He loves the defensive side of the game. But he also roots himself in finding ways to try to help the players by using whatever information is useful to them, not just whatever information that’s out there,” Falvey said. ”There’s a lot out there. It can be overwhelming.”

After the Twins played their first exhibition this spring on Feb. 22, Molitor raved about Pickler’s meticulous drills, singling out an exercise he put the outfielders through during full-squad workouts to practice tracking line drives that slice toward the corners. That night in the game against the University of Minnesota, the Twins faced ”about six of them,” Molitor remarked.

”It’s progressive. It’s understanding what guys do well and what guys don’t and how to create drills that address those things that we need to get better on,” Molitor said, ”and those guys buy in across the board. I think they all felt like they got better under his tutelage last year.”

Buxton, the 24-year-old Gold Glove award winner and the second overall pick in the 2012 draft, is the prize of the bunch with the best range among all major league outfielders as defined by multiple metrics. That doesn’t mean he’s immune to coaching, of course. He fondly recalled a drill Pickler ordered last year for the outfielders to practice knocking a football down while up against the fence. Then they switched to baseballs, and Buxton’s skepticism about the usefulness of the activity quickly subsided when he realized the improved feel in his hand and wrist.

”It was like him building trust, I would say, and we kind of latched onto it,” Buxton said.

Buxton pointed at Pickler for devising the group motto ”Nothing falls but raindrops,” an attempt to instill in the players an aggressive mindset with which to pursue airborne balls that enter their territory. The slogan was even co-opted by the marketing department, accompanying a bobblehead giveaway this summer for each of the three regulars. Pickler brushed aside credit for the creativity and shook his head slightly with a smile when asked about the promotion.

He's more concerned about the process of helping Buxton, Rosario, Kepler and current backups Robbie Grossman and Zack Granite improve, even if he's fully on board with the audaciousness of the mantra.

"We can do anything that we put our mind to. He just tells us every day, 'Don't put limits on what y'all can do,'" Buxton said.

### **Mauer's big day helps Twins top O's 9-8**

Staff Writer | Associated Press | March 6, 2018

TWINS 9, ORIOLES 8

Joe Mauer drove in three runs with two hits in four at-bats. Hunter Harvey, a 2013 first-round draft pick and son of former major league pitcher Bryan Harvey, worked two innings in his second start for Baltimore.

Twins shortstop Jorge Polanco blasted a solo homer in the first inning. Myles Jaye recorded a scoreless ninth inning to pick up his first save of the spring.

### **2018 Fantasy Baseball Draft Prep: Projecting upside for Breakouts 2.0**

Heath Cummings | CBS Sports | March 5, 2018

Earlier this year I gave you my favorite breakouts under the age of 25, and not a lot has changed since then. In fact, you're going to see some of those same names below. Names like Andrew Benintendi, Byron Buxton, Alex Bregman and Rafael Devers. These are the future stars of baseball, and it feels disingenuous to put together a breakout list without them.

So how do we make this different? If we're already talking about the future, let's talk about guys who could break out to become first-round picks in 2019.

Byron Buxton

MIN • CF • 25

Upside: .270/.335/.465 with 22 home runs, 100 runs and 35 stolen bases.

We've seen even more upside than this from Byron Buxton over small samples, which shouldn't be all that surprising. He's an elite talent who still strikes out way too often. That's going to lead to wild fluctuations. Buxton is the one guy on this list who almost made the list above.

### **Tim Beckham, Jake Faria Among the 2018 American League Fantasy Sleepers**

Michael Beller | Sports Illustrated | March 6, 2018

The idea of a true sleeper is a relic of the past. In an effort to return one of the mainstays of the fantasy sports lexicon to its original meaning, we dug deep for our sleeper columns this year. Everyone in this column has an average draft position of 185 or lower. Pick No. 185 comes in the 16th round of a 12-team draft, 14th round of a 14-teamer, and 13th round of a 15-teamer. Most of the players herein are coming off the board much later than that. It may be harder than ever to find a true sleeper in fantasy leagues, but we won't let that stop us from trying.

We've divided all of our sleepers, busts and breakouts columns, what we call our Staples Series, by league. In this installment of the Staples Series, we take a look at AL Sleepers.

Max Kepler, OF, Twins (ADP: 280.73)

Kepler was a dangerous hitter against righties last year, slashing .272/.343/.484 with 17 homers and 29 doubles. He was a black hole against lefties, hitting .152/.213/.240. Kepler posted 117 wRC+ with the platoon advantage, equal to what Carlos Santana and Eugenio Suarez did for the full season. Against lefties, however, he had 16 wRC+, meaning that Kepler against lefties was literally one of the worst players in the league. He'll always be on the long side of any platoon, and that has him on the radar in most fantasy leagues. If he can figure out lefties, though, a breakout could be written in the stars.

Logan Morrison, 1B, Twins (ADP: 295.91)

Morrison didn't just blindly run into more pitches than usual last year. He made significant changes at the plate, and they led to his career season in which he hit 38 homers and slugged .516. Morrison is part of the launch angle revolution, increasing his average in the category to 17.4 degrees last season. His previous career high was 12.1 degrees. A change that dramatic doesn't occur by happenstance. Morrison cultivated the change,

and it launched a true power breakout. What's more, for those of you in OBP leagues, he's a plus in your rate category. Morrison had a 13.5% walk rate last season, helping him to a .353 OBP. His career walk rate is 10.5%, and there's reason to believe he'll outpace that again this season as one of the most dangerous hitters in Minnesota's lineup.

### **Report: Lance Lynn turned down two-year, \$20 million offer from Twins**

**Bill Baer | NBC Sports | March 6, 2018**

Mike Berardino of the St. Paul Pioneer Press reports that the Twins recently offered free agent starter Lance Lynn a two-year, \$20 million contract but the right-hander turned it in down. In Berardino's word, the offer was a "non-starter."

Lynn, 30, finished up a three-year, \$22 million contract with the Cardinals that ranged from 2015-17. While he was plenty productive, compiling a 3.24 ERA across 361 2/3 innings, he also missed the entire 2016 campaign recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Lynn is joined by Jake Arrieta and Alex Cobb among free agent starters still available. It seems likely that Lynn will have to eventually settle for less money and/or fewer years than he was anticipating. He could potentially take a one-year contract and test his luck in the free agent market again next season as well.

### **How Kyle Gibson evolved into a more dangerous version of himself**

**Dan Hayes | The Athletic | March 6, 2018**

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The objective of their spring training sit-down was to capture Kyle Gibson's attention enough for him to consider making a change.

Derek Falvey and Thad Levine hoped Gibson would be open to overhauling his approach. They wanted him to become a more dominant pitcher, the one they suspected he could be.

The team's new decision-makers surmised that the most effective way to break through would be to read Gibson the scouting report each of their former teams had for him.

The two descriptions were nearly identical: If Gibson throws strikes early in the count, it's going to be a long night. But if he doesn't, he's beatable.

Gibson heard what the scouting departments of the Cleveland Indians and Texas Rangers had to say and took note.

The discussion, though, was only the first step, one of many taken since last February to get the five-year starter to become the pitcher the Twins think he can. The 13 months since have included missteps and victories, including two demotions to Triple-A, the second of which was followed by the best stretch of Gibson's career. As he prepares for the upcoming season, Gibson — who went 6-0 with a 2.92 ERA in his final eight starts of 2017 — said the experience and making the transition has him more confident about the pitcher he has become.

"It was eye-opening," Gibson said. "Part of that (success) at the end of the year is that I started figuring out this is the pitcher I could be. I had lost sight of that. After the first 8-10 starts of 2017 and feeling this small because of what's going on, you can easily lose sight of the pitcher you can be."

Not only did the Twins want Gibson to regain confidence in the pitcher he could be, they hoped to help him discover a pitcher he perhaps didn't know existed.

Until the middle of last August, Gibson, the 22nd overall pick of the 2009 draft, had primarily been a sinkerballer for his entire career. In fastball counts, Gibson preferred the two-seamer to the four-seamer 72 percent of the time, according to BrooksBaseball.net.

But courtesy of the research and development department, the Twins believed they found characteristics in Gibson's four-seam fastball that suggested it could be used more effectively, particularly up in the zone, and more frequently. They thought that increased usage of the four-seam fastball would lead to more strikes and fewer walks, which would certainly benefit a pitcher who issued 45 free passes in his first 94 2/3 innings last season.

"He's traditionally been a sinker-only guy and occasional four-seam," advance scout Jeremy Hefner said. "There were some things that came up with Kyle that he wasn't necessarily using his pitches correctly, or maybe most efficiently.

"We identified those."

Identification is hardly the same as implementation, especially when major-league wins and losses are involved.

That's where Hefner came in. As a former pitcher for the New York Mets, Hefner knows first-hand that making a change during the season is difficult to execute. Hefner's experience and the two pitchers' familiarity with one another helped establish trust that Gibson wouldn't be led astray.

Though they proposed a massive change in his approach — incorporating more fastballs at the top of the zone after Gibson had pitched down for his entire career — the Twins didn't want to overload him.

"Let's simplify the approach, find out what works for you against these hitters and go with that," Falvey said.

But it wasn't until his second demotion of the season to Triple-A on July 25 that Gibson became a more captive audience. Gibson figured he didn't have anywhere to go but up. Falvey and Levine told the pitcher the move to Rochester was them trying "to reinvest" in his career, Gibson said. They stressed to Gibson how important it was that he throw more strikes and trust in his four-seamer.

August and everything after

During a late-summer stint in the minors, Kyle Gibson revamped his approach. His stats in the short time since have the Twins encouraged that he's turned a page.

Stat	Career through Aug. 5	2017 after Aug. 5
IP	672.1	58
ERA	4.81	3.41
BB/9	3.3	2.0
K/9	6.0	8.5
WHIP	1.45	1.22
HR/9	1.0	1.1
AVG	.275	.264

"One thing (they) made sure I realized when I was in Triple-A is that when my fastball is in the zone, the results are normally there regardless of how well the pitch is executed," Gibson said. "For me, it was trying to figure out how to get my fastball in the zone more."

Expanding to the top half of the zone opened more avenues for use of the four-seamer. As Gibson discovered, using the four-seam fastball earlier in the count helped him get ahead of hitters, which made his other pitches more dangerous.

Whereas before he tried to get ahead with a sinker that naturally runs out of the zone and missed too frequently, Gibson found consistency with his four-seam fastball. Instead of getting behind of hitters and trying to rebound with his changeup, slider or curveball, Gibson realized his four-seam fastball was the key.

"Relying on chases all the time is not necessarily a recipe for long-term success," Gibson said. "If they know you're not going to throw the ball in the zone, and if they can get it through their head that it looks like a strike, but I can't swing because it's not a strike, well then they will eventually take."

Gibson returned to the majors on Aug. 5 and threw 18 four-seamers in a start against Texas. But he increased that number significantly the rest of the way, throwing 26 in his next start and jumping to 52 after that.

It helped that Gibson saw an improved performance as a result of a nine-percent spike in four-seam fastball strikes. Through Aug. 10, 2017, Gibson threw his four-seamer 16.9 percent of the time in his career and only got strikes on 54 percent of his deliveries.

Over his final 10 starts, Gibson threw the four-seamer 29 percent of the time with 63 percent going for strikes.

The shift in strategy and executing it led to a significant reduction in walks and the number of times the pitcher beat himself up. Gibson lowered his walks per nine to 2.02 over his final 58 innings of the season. Prior to that, Gibson averaged 3.27 walks per nine in the first 672 1/3 innings of his career.

"I don't want to punch myself in the face near as much," Gibson said.

Fewer base runners meant better production at a time when the Twins needed it most. Starting with his no decision on Aug. 11 at Detroit, the Twins got comfortable behind Gibson, who was now fully invested in the switch. He threw more strikes and the Twins responded by winning nine of Gibson's last 10 starts.

“It’s kind a testament to his mental fortitude,” catcher Jason Castro said. “A lot of guys can face a situation like that and throw their hands up and say, ‘It is what it is.’ He was aggressive about making an adjustment and it paid dividends for him at the end last year.”

The front office would love if Gibson’s story leads to more players being open to analytics-based changes. Levine said the front office understands midseason changes like Gibson are the exception to the rule. But, they’d love for other players to experiment while they’re in spring training.

“What a great example he represents because he was able to accomplish that and do it at the major-league level,” Levine said. “No more important games were played than in the last six weeks and he was implementing change and thriving at the big-league level.

“If he’s the standard-bearer for other guys — ‘Why shouldn’t I try it at Fort Myers?’”

Gibson has no plans to adapt his spring training routine. He’s in camp to earn a rotation spot like every other season. He figures being gifted a spot in spite of a bad spring wouldn’t do him any good. But now that he has caught an extended glimpse of that guy, the one Falvey and Levine referenced last spring, the one the opposition would prefer to miss, he’s much more confident about his prospects.

“I was about as consistent as I’ve felt in a long time,” Gibson said. “I never had that type of success to see how it worked for me. Now that I’ve had a few starts where I threw my fastball well, it’s easier for me to see how that stuff plays. Part of the adjustment process to the big leagues for young guys is how is their stuff going to play.

“I just had to kind of realize what that looks like again, but realize it the right way. The first couple of years, I don’t think I was going about it the right way, using my off-speed to get all the outs I did. But now that I was able to keep my fastball in the zone and use that more so to get ahead, I think it’s going to make a big difference.”