



**Minnesota Twins Daily Clips  
Tuesday, September 11, 2018**

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**Gibson's strong start can't derail Yankees**

**Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | September 11, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Kyle Gibson delivered his best start in nearly a month, and the Twins right-hander might have escaped with a scoreless outing had it not been for one mighty swing from Gary Sanchez.

Gibson tossed 5 2/3 strong innings and kept the Twins in contention early against a Yankees offense that entered Monday with an MLB-leading 232 homers. But his strong start had little impact on the final result, as New York's bats came to life in the seventh and pushed the Yankees to a 7-2 win in the opener of a three-game set at Target Field.

After enduring a rough month of August in which he recorded a 5.28 ERA over five starts, Gibson bounced back on Monday night and struck out five New York batters while inducing weak contact. He was one out away from exiting with his first scoreless appearance since May 29, but Sanchez sent a 2-2 fastball soaring 460 feet into the left-field upper deck to give the Yankees a 1-0 lead.

"When you get a pitch, and throw that pitch where you really wanted to ... when a guy puts a barrel on it, that just shows you it was the wrong pitch at the wrong time," Gibson said. "I really didn't throw enough changeups to righties tonight, and that probably was a great time for a changeup. We'd thrown quite a few pitches in to the righties, and sinkers in there, unfortunately just went to the well one too many times."

Sanchez's long ball was his 16th of the year and the longest homer hit at Target Field this season. The ball left Sanchez's bat at 110.8 mph, according to Statcast™.

As solid as Gibson was, Yankees starter J.A. Happ was even better, blanking the Twins for six innings. Happ did not surrender a walk and struck out three as he worked around six hits.

Minnesota had a chance to get to Happ early when Mitch Garver drilled a leadoff single in the second and Jake Cave added a one-out single. But Happ worked out of the jam by forcing Johnny Field and Gregorio Petit to fly out and end the inning.

"I think that's how he's been throwing," Twins manager Paul Molitor said of Happ. "He does a nice job pounding that ball down in the zone early, but he sure can elevate effectively. We had a lot of guys get under pitches at the top of the zone and hit some lazy fly balls. His changeup wasn't great tonight, but he pitched around that. The slider kind of came in the mix more the second time around. Once they got the lead, they got him

out. We had a couple opportunities to get a knock with runners in scoring position, and we just couldn't find a way to get on the board to give Gibby any kind of a lead to work with."

Happ settled in from there, and the Yankees' offense broke through with plenty of run support in the seventh. Alan Busenitz issued walks to Andrew McCutchen and Aaron Hicks to begin the inning, and Miguel Andujar, Giancarlo Stanton and Didi Gregorius delivered consecutive run-scoring doubles. All told, the Yankees racked up six runs in the seventh off three pitchers to build a 7-0 lead.

"They've got some pretty good hitters down at the bottom of the lineup," Molitor said. "The guys at the top, McCutchen has been a good addition, obviously. And Aaron's having a really nice year. You look up and see he's got 80 walks, not to mention the 24 homers. He's a nice table setter. He finds ways to get on base, and then you've got the meat coming up. You walk the first two guys and you're playing with fire, and that's what happened to [Busenitz] tonight."

#### YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

In the fourth inning, Petit went full extension as he made a tremendous diving snag and followed with a throw to retire Sanchez at first for the second out of the inning.

#### HE SAID IT

"[Jake Odorizzi] even mentioned that was probably the most three-ball counts I'd been in all year. But [catcher Garver] did a good job of reining me in at times, and getting pitches to be executed at the right time, and I think that's what got the big outs when we needed them." -- Gibson, on battling control issues throughout his outing

#### UP NEXT

Tyler Duffey will be Minnesota's "opener" on Tuesday (7:10 p.m. CT) against the Yankees, and he is expected to throw one or two innings before the Twins turn to their bullpen. Minnesota has deployed an opener twice this season but didn't find success on either occasion. Duffey, a 27-year-old righty, is 1-2 on the season with a 9.00 ERA in 14 appearances. For the Yankees, Sonny Gray (10-8, 4.96 ERA) will make a spot start.

#### **Sano's recovery taking longer than expected** **Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | September 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins still have hope that Miguel Sano will return to the field this season, but manager Paul Molitor admitted that the slugger's recovery has been slower than expected after he was injured last week.

Sano was carted off the field Tuesday in Houston with a lower leg injury after sliding into second base as he attempted to advance on a wild pitch. X-rays that day were negative, and Sano was listed as day to day with a left leg bruise.

Sano, 25, had a titanium rod inserted into his left shin last offseason and was hindered by lower body injuries earlier this season.

"Progress is slow," Molitor said. "Lot of time in the training room trying to figure out how we can alleviate symptoms that are being preventative of him being able to get into some baseball activities. It hasn't gone probably like anybody expected after we got the news that everything looked good, in terms of any specific injury other than some soreness and swelling. But it's been slow."

Sano was placed on the 10-day disabled list on May 1 with a left hamstring strain and was eventually sent to the Twins' complex in Fort Myers, Fla., to work on strengthening his lower body and rediscovering his swing after posting a .203 batting average through June 13. He rejoined the Twins on July 28 and found spurts of success, hitting six home runs in August and showing off improved athleticism in the field.

Molitor said Sano's left knee has been sore and he has been receiving various treatments for his entire lower left leg.

"No one's told me that we're close to shutting anything down," Molitor said. "It's just a matter of when we can return to baseball activities. I don't know if it will be the next day, the next five days. But with three weeks to go, we're gonna keep pushing, trying to see when we can get him back. We haven't given up hope that he's still not gonna play some baseball here."

#### Austin working his way back

Tyler Austin went through hitting drills and took batting practice before Monday's game as he continues to work through lower back tightness that caused him to leave Wednesday's game and has kept him out of the lineup since.

"He did some work and flip drills," Molitor said. "He looked pretty normal, I haven't had a chance to see how he got through that portion. But what I can tell so far, everything's been positive."

Austin was not in the lineup for Monday's series opener vs. his former club, the Yankees.

**30 players better than their 2018 numbers**  
**Will Leitch | MLB.com | September 11, 2018**

Down years in baseball happen. Three years after he hit .370, Tony Gwynn hit .309, which, fine, is a great year for everyone who isn't Tony Gwynn, but you get the point. Even the best players take a step back before taking a step forward sometimes.

Thus, this week at The Thirty, we take a look at players you might have expected to have a better season than they have, for whatever reason, whether it's a slump, injury or just bad luck. These players are likely to bounce back next year: They're too talented not to. So don't give up on these guys yet

Twins: Logan Morrison

2017 AB/HR: 13.5 | 2018 AB/HR: 21.2

It all went pear-shaped for Morrison in the one year of his Minnesota contract, but this was sneakily one of the best hitters in baseball in 2017. Someone will take another one-year flier on him this offseason, and it might pay off this time.

**Kyle Gibson strong but Yankees pile on Twins bullpen for 7-2 win**  
**La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

Two strong outings for Kyle Gibson against the Yankees — and two ugly losses.

The Twins righthander went toe-to-toe with New York lefthander J.A. Happ on Monday, darting, ducking, diving and dodging through a dangerous Yankees lineup, until Gary Sanchez hit an ankle-high heater into the third deck at Target Field in the sixth inning for a solo homer.

Once Gibson left, and the seal was broken on the bullpen, the Yankees pounced with a six-run seventh inning and pulled away to a 7-2 victory at Target Field.

“Kyle fought; there’s no question about it,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “He had a few situations he had to pitch around, including some free passes, but he did well. I was proud of him for how he hung in there.”

But the Yankees’ domination of the Twins continues. Including last year’s AL wild-card game, New York has won the past nine meetings between the teams. It’s the first eight-game regular-season winning streak the Yankees have had against an opponent since ... the Twins, that one from 2015 to ’16. The Yankees are 20-4 vs. the Twins since July 25, 2015, and they look primed to win some more this week as they roll into the postseason.

On April 26 at Yankee Stadium, Gibson set a career high with 10 strikeouts while tossing six shutout innings. That game ended disastrously for the Twins, as Sanchez hit a walk-off three-run homer off Fernando Rodney for a 4-3 victory.

So, in two starts against the Yankees and all their burly hitters, Gibson has given up one earned run over 11⅓ innings while striking out 15. And the Twins have lost both games.

Gibson never had a clean inning Monday, as he stranded a runner on base in each of the first four innings. He stranded two in the fifth, as New York went 0-for-6 against him with runners in scoring position.

Then Gibson was one strike away from completing six innings when Sanchez connected on a pitch low enough to be on a golf tee.

“When you get a pitch, and throw that pitch where you really wanted to — which that pitch, really, was,” Gibson said, “when a guy puts a barrel on it, that just shows you it was the wrong pitch at the wrong time.

“I really didn’t throw enough changeups to righties tonight, and that probably was a great time for a changeup. We’d thrown quite a few pitches in to the righties, and sinkers in there, unfortunately just went to the well one too many times.”

Gibson really wasn’t impressed with his outing. He gave up four hits and walked four, so his line justified his concern.

“I still felt pretty good,” he said. “I’m glad Molitor let me go out for the sixth and gave me that chance to get [Greg] Bird after that [home run], too, but it was definitely a battle tonight. Command went in and out. Bad combination of a team that was pretty patient from the get-go, and command going in and out; that will normally probably result in more than four walks.”

New York poured it on after Gibson left, drawing two walks before Miguel Andujar hit a two-run double off Alan Busenitz in the seventh. That was the start of a six-run inning, with Giancarlo Stanton and Didi Gregorius also hitting RBI doubles.

“You walk the first two guys and you’re playing with fire,” Molitor said, “and that’s what happened to [Busenitz].”

### **'Failure' Aaron Hicks tells Twins to be patient with Byron Buxton**

**Chip Scoggins | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

The young Twins centerfielder was struggling to hit big-league pitching when the organization demoted him to the minors and then declined to bring him back to the majors as a September call-up.

“I was sitting in Triple AAA, not knowing what I’m doing,” Aaron Hicks recalled on Monday. “I was kind of lost.”

Hmmm, sounds familiar. Yep, Hicks knows how Byron Buxton feels.

Hicks was supposed to be the Twins’ next great centerfielder before that same label was attached to Buxton. Now Buxton’s career is floundering, just as Hicks’ career floundered before being traded to the New York Yankees in 2015 at age 26.

Fast forward three years. Hicks is back at Target Field this week, site of his Major League debut. He struck out his first three at-bats that day, foreshadowing an unfulfilling tenure in a Twins uniform. The team ultimately traded him to the Yankees for catcher John Ryan Murphy, who has a cool name but couldn’t hit, to clear way for Buxton’s arrival.

That trade made sense at the time. In hindsight, the Twins lost that one in a rout.

Hicks has found his footing as a major league hitter, his power production improving dramatically the past two seasons. He already has set career highs in home runs (24), extra-base hits (42) and RBIs (68) this season. He batted second in the lineup Monday and went 1-for-4 with a single and two walks.

Hicks represents example 1,202,982 that baseball development works at its own pace and on its own timeline. The tricky part for teams comes when deciding whether they should continue to show patience or cut bait.

Hicks offers unique perspective on Buxton’s sluggish development because he’s been there, done that.

“I still think he’s going to be a great player,” Hicks said. “It’s going to come. He’s too good of an athlete, too good of a player to not succeed in the big leagues. It’s just being patient with him. It’s all about finding that confidence in himself and his abilities.

“It’s happened before. It’s not like he can’t be the player that we all expect him to be. It just takes time. Some people take longer than others. I believe that’s him.”

In Hicks’ case, the Twins rushed him too fast to the majors. He wasn’t ready for everything thrown at him.

“In spring training I felt like I was ready for the big leagues,” he said. “But spring training isn’t the same as regular season. The adjustments that I needed to make, I wasn’t ready for them.”

Hicks also didn’t help himself along the way. He stunned the team when he showed up one day in 2014 and announced that he would no longer be a switch-hitter because he was abysmal from the left side. There were other signs of immaturity.

A stern phone call from Rod Carew changed Hicks’ mind about switch-hitting.

“Once I got that call I realized that I was making a horrible decision,” Hicks said. “I was trying to do what I can to help my team win. Once I made decision to go back, it opened my eyes to how hard it is for righty on righties to hit and that I’m better off being a switch-hitter.”

Hicks overhauled his entire approach in New York. He stopped worrying about hitting for average and focused on hitting for power and getting the ball in the air. He became better at laying off pitches down in the zone that he flailed at early in his career. Those changes, along with more experience, helped him become a credible hitter, especially from the left side. He’s hitting .262 with 15 home runs against righties this season.

Hicks turns 29 in October. He’s developed into a productive two-way player and top-of-the-order hitter on one of the best teams in baseball.

Playing in the New York pressure-cooker can be suffocating for a young player still trying to prove himself. For Hicks, the big stage is where he established that he belongs.

**Twins face uncertainty over Miguel Sano's return from left leg injury**  
**La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

Monday marked the fifth game Miguel Sano has missed because of injuries suffered when he slid hard into second base last week in Houston and damaged his lower left leg.

After initially expressing hope he could return in a couple of days, the Twins have taken a more cautious approach, and it might be a few more days before Sano even attempts baseball activities again.

And, as the days go by with No. 22 sidelined, the Twins might have to consider at what point they should shut him down for the final weeks of the season.

“No one’s told me that we’re close to shutting anything down,” manager Paul Molitor said. “It’s just a matter of when we can return to baseball activities. I don’t know if it will be the next day, the next five days. But with three weeks to go, we’re gonna keep pushing, trying to see when we can get him back.”

The left leg is the same one Sano had a titanium rod inserted last offseason to help treat a stress reaction. He felt pain throughout his lower left leg when it hit the bag last Tuesday — he even initially worried that he had broken his leg — but he complained about having a sore knee the next day. And he has been sidelined ever since.

The Twins started treating three areas on his lower leg — the ankle, calf and knee. Further tests on the leg did not reveal any more damage.

“Progress is slow,” Molitor said. “Lot of time in the training room trying to figure out how we can alleviate symptoms that are being preventative of him being able to get into some baseball activities. It hasn’t gone probably like anybody expected after we got the news that everything looked good in terms of any specific injury other than some soreness and swelling. But it’s been slow.”

One way to go

The Twins have approached some of their prospects about adding a one-seam fastball to their repertoires, a pitch that could help them.

Righthander Kohl Stewart, who could pitch on Tuesday vs. the Yankees, is one of them.

“We talked about different grips, who throws one,” said Stewart, who was approached about it in spring training and immediately started working on it. “Talked about Zach Britton and Blake Treinen. We had a bullpen that day and started messing with grips and which one felt comfortable, which one was repeatable.”

The one-seam sinking fastball usually has more of a downward action, while the more popular two-seam sinker will move laterally as well as downward.

“It’s a little more sink,” Stewart said. “A lot more guys are hitting the top of the ball. More swings and misses, too, than I’ve had in previous years.”

Aaron Slegers, on the disabled list because of shoulder problems, also has added one. And Fernando Romero, who finished the season at Class AAA Rochester, has tinkered with one, too.

“I get more sink,” Slegers said. “It’s harder to keep in the strike zone.”

Etc.

- Ryan Costello hit a three-run homer as Class A Fort Myers defeated Daytona 8-5 on Monday to win the Florida State League championship for the second time, the first since 2014. The Miracle roster includes three of the top-ranked prospects in the Twins farm system: Shortstop Royce Lewis, outfielder Alex Kirilloff and righthander Brusdar Graterol.

- Twins first baseman Tyler Austin (sore back), the former Yankees player who missed his fourth game in a row Monday, took some swings on the field before regular pregame batting practice. He will slowly ramp up activities and could return to action in a few days.

**Monday's Twins-Yankees game recap**  
**La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

IMPACT PLAYER

A.J. Happ, New York

The lefthander shut out the Twins over six innings on six hits while striking out three.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

9 Consecutive losses by the Twins to the Yankees, including last year's AL wild-card game.

12-4 The Yankees' record over their past 16 road games.

460 Estimated distance in feet of Gary Sanchez's home run off Kyle Gibson, breaking a scoreless tie.

#### ON DECK

Sonny Gray, will be pitching on eight days' rest when he faces the Twins on Tuesday. Tyler Duffey gets his turn as an opener for the Twins, with Kohl Stewart expected to follow.

#### **Twins postgame: Eddie Rosario still bothered by sore quadriceps**

**La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 10, 2018**

Tyler Duffey will "open" tomorrow's game. Now back to postgame programming.....

Apologies to the readership. Something told me to check on Eddie Rosario prior to the game but I got busy peppering Paul Molitor with questions about Miguel Sano and forgot.

Rosario is still having some trouble with the left quad he strained during the last road trip while running the bases in Cleveland. He returned to the lineup during the Royals series, but part of the reason he didn't play on Monday is that he's continues to be nagged by the injury.

"He's not 100 percent," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We found that out over the weekend. Combined with the (J.A.) Happ matchup, we thought it was a good day to just kind of have him available late if we needed him, which we didn't need to do."

Rosario played all three games of the Royals series, starting in left on Friday then DH-ing the next two games. He's having the best season of any of the remaining hitters, so his bat is needed. But let's face it: why force it? I would put Rosario in the same category as Miguel Sano. Until they are as close to 100 percent as possible, there is not reason to play them. Having them try to get a few hits over the final weeks of the regular season is less important than their health.

Sano has not proven to be a quick healer in his young career. And Rosario's wheels are too important.

And, as Molitor pointed out, Rosario's style a play could extend or aggravate an injury.

"We'll re-evaluate tomorrow and see if we can get him back in there in some capacity," Molitor said of Rosario, "but I get a little leery about a guy when he's going to be out there playing and a guy who loves to compete. I don't know if he'll be able to play at a level where it would be safe but we'll get a good evaluation from our trainers tomorrow."

#### **Yankees break through late, roll Twins 7-2**

**John Shipley | Pioneer Press | September 10, 2018**

Kyle Gibson fought through command issues all night Monday, but the pitch that ended his night was one he put right where he wanted it.

Gary Sanchez took an inside fastball at his feet and sent it an estimated 460 feet to left field to break a scoreless tie in the sixth inning and ultimately open the floodgates as the New York Yankees beat the Twins 7-2 at Target Field.

"When you ... throw that pitch where you really wanted to (and) a guy puts a barrel on it, that just shows you it was the wrong pitch at the wrong time," Gibson said.

Sanchez went 3 for 5 with an RBI and run scored, and J.A. Happ scattered six hits over six scoreless innings as the Yankees inched closer to nailing down an American League playoff spot. They entered the day tied with Oakland atop the American League wild card race, each 7.5 games ahead of third-place Seattle, where New York took two of three over the weekend.

Twins right fielder Robbie Grossman ended the shutout with a double to left that scored Jorge Polanco in the eighth, but the Twins lost for the seventh time in nine games and failed to win consecutive games for the first time since Aug. 14-17.

Yankees third baseman Miguel Andujar hit a two-run double in a six-run seventh inning as the Yankees won their 90th game, and for the third time in their past four.

Happ (16-6) shut out the Twins for six innings on six hits. He didn't walk a batter and fanned three. After the Yankees sent 12 batters to the plate in the seventh inning, he was relieved by Luis Cessa.

Sanchez tie-breaking homer came on the 112th pitch for Gibson, who had labored effectively until Sanchez deposited the pitch into the third deck in left field. It was Sanchez's 16th homer of the season.

"Kyle fought; there's no question about it," manager Paul Molitor said. "He had a few situations he had to pitch around, including some free passes, but he did well. I was proud of him for how he hung in there. We drove his pitch count up there."

Gibson (7-13) has lost his past four starts. He was charged with one earned run on four hits and four walks. He struck out five.

"The last few starts ... I've probably had some of my worst command of the year," Gibson said. "That probably led to their patient approach, and that paid off there to run up the pitch count and get the four walks."

The Yankees's first eight batters of the seventh inning reached safely. With Alan Busenitz on the mound, Andrew McCutchen and Aaron Hicks walked, and Andujar and Giancarlo Stanton followed with back-to-back doubles. Andrew Vasquez relieved Busenitz and threw two pitches, the second resulting in run-scoring double by Didi Gregorius.

Molitor then called on Matt Magill, who allowed three runs to score — one earned — on two hits, two walks and a sacrifice fly as New York took a 7-0 lead.

"They've got some pretty good hitters down at the bottom of the lineup," Molitor said. "The guys at the top, McCutchen has been a good addition, obviously. And Aaron's having a really nice year. You look up and see he's got 80 walks, not to mention the 23-24 homers. He's a nice table setter. He finds ways to get on base and then you've got the meat coming up."

"You walk the first two guys and you're playing with fire and that's what happened to (Busenitz) tonight."

### **Leg still bothering Miguel Sano, but Twins not thinking shutdown yet** **John Shipley | Pioneer Press | September 10, 2018**

The Twins were relieved last week when an awkward slide by Miguel Sano looked worse than it was, but the third baseman hasn't been available since being injured on Sept. 4 and wasn't on the field for pregame activities Monday as Minnesota prepared to start a three-game series against the New York Yankees at Target Field.

"Progress is slow," manager Paul Molitor said.

Sano injured his left leg while stealing second base on a pitch in the dirt in a 5-2 loss at Houston last Tuesday, the same leg into which a titanium rod was inserted to help a stress reaction heal last fall. X-rays and an MRI on the knee were negative, but Sano has yet to attempt baseball activities.

"It hasn't gone, probably, like anyone expected after we got the news that everything looked good in terms of any specific injury other than soreness and some swelling," Molitor said. "It's been slow."

Sano, 25, has been plagued by leg issues since making his major league debut midway through the 2015 season, making trips to the disabled list for hamstring injuries and last year's stress reaction in his left tibia. He missed nearly a month this season with a left hamstring injury, and spent about six weeks on an extended rehab assignment in Fort Myers, Fla., to improve his core and lower-body strength.

Sano is hitting .202 with 13 home runs and 41 RBIs — and 111 strikeouts — in 70 games after making the American League all-star team in 2017.

The Twins have 19 games remaining and already have shut down center fielder Byron Buxton, whose injury-riddled season ended when Triple-A Rochester finished its season. Would the Twins do the same with Sano?

"No one's told me that we're close to shutting anything down," Molitor said. "It's just a matter of when we can return to baseball activities. I

don't know if it will be the next day, the next five days. But with three weeks to go, we're going to keep pushing, trying to see when we can get him back.

"We haven't given up hope that he's still not going to play some baseball here."

#### BRIEFLY

— Outfielder Eddie Rosario was left out of the lineup because of a quad injury. "We'll re-evaluate tomorrow and see if we can get him back in there in some capacity, but I get a little leery about a guy when he's going to be out there playing and a guy who loves to compete. I don't know if he'll be able to play at a level where it would be safe, but we'll get a good evaluation from our trainers tomorrow."

— Molitor said right-hander Tyler Duffey will work as the "opener" against the Yankees on Tuesday, rookie Kohl Stewart's normal turn in the rotation. Veteran right-hander Jake Odorizzi is set to start Wednesday's series finale.

— Tyler Austin, out since wrenching his back when he slipped chasing a foul ball in a 9-1 loss at Houston last Wednesday, took early batting practice Monday but was not in the lineup.

#### **Wetmore's 5 thoughts: Who would have guessed the ballot in race for Twins MVP?** **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | September 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS —When Eddie Rosario was passed over for a spot on the American League all-star roster, it left him with something to prove. He was wrapping up an all-star caliber first half of the season, and looked under normal circumstances like he'd make a good candidate.

And if he becomes the Twins' 2018 MVP, it'll be because he was a good candidate for that, too. But it's hard to glance over the make-believe ballot for Twins MVP and ignore the names of players that are not on the ballot. That sentence helps explain the Twins' season in a nutshell.

When Rosario returned this weekend from a strained quad muscle, it set up a compelling September race. Right now, the title of Twins 2018 MVP belongs to him. And it would take a lot to knock him off that pedestal. Manager Paul Molitor said around the time of the mid-summer break that Rosario was not going to be hung up on the perceived "snub" of the all-star game; Rosario was out to prove that no matter the recognition, he was going to show he can be that player every single day he puts on a uniform.

Rosario has some competition when we're sorting through this sort of individual award. And the first guy that should be mentioned is the other Twins hitter that carried the team through adversity across the first 3 months of the season...

#### Eduardo Escobar

Before the deflating concession ahead of the trade deadline, Eduardo Escobar was the spirit of the Twins. Rosario added talent and offensive output, but no players seemed as universally well-liked by Twins fans (and teammates?) as Eduardo Escobar.

We're suckers for the underdog story, and Escobar's tale fits the script. He was seen as a small utility infielder when Terry Ryan traded Francisco Liriano to the White Sox and got Escobar as one of two players back from Chicago. In the time since then, he's won and lost starting infielder jobs a handful of times with the Twins, and every time he'd smile and say he was ready to be patient and work for his next opportunity.

He grabbed it and ran this time around.

Escobar could have been a bench player if things went to plan this year for the Twins. But of course, it's the 2018 season and very little has gone according to plan in Minnesota. Jorge Polanco was suspended, and Escobar could have taken over as the shortstop. But then Miguel Sano got hurt and wasn't playing much third base so Escobar filled in there instead. In both spots, he crushed it.

Escobar made power a part of his game, cleaned up the defensive side of things, and hit .274/.338/.514 with the Twins before they traded him to Arizona for at least two very intriguing prospects. If not for his shorter stay in Minnesota, the 29-year-old, smile-a-minute infielder might have been in the running for this team MVP award. As it stands, it looks like a breakout year for a soon-to-be free agent, and he'll have to settle for a playoff chase with the Diamondbacks.

#### J.O. Berrios

Berrios earned his first trip to the all-star game this year, and if the season's first half is any indication it won't be his last trip. Berrios was great and certainly a worth nod at the time of the game, as he admirably filled the Staff Ace void left by Ervin Santana's eventual season-ending finger surgery.

Berrios has already hit a career-high with 173 2/3 innings, and he's got a good 3.83 ERA going. He's leading Twins starters with a 24.5% strikeout rate and he's cut the walks this year, too. The Twins should feel pretty good about the pitcher Berrios has become and can continue to be. And they'd likely feel even better about that prospect if Berrios' recent run of starts had gone more smoothly. He got back on track with a



good start over the weekend in which he had the fastball for strikes and missed barrels with his breaking ball. But before that outing he'd pitched to a 5.24 ERA in his previous 9 starts, dating back to the outing before the all-star break. That led me to wondering if the noted workout enthusiast was wearing down during a long season, so Saturday's good outing opposite a perfect game bid was a good sign for Berrios and the Twins.

He could get 4 more starts in September. Let's see what he'll do with them.

#### Kyle Gibson

Gibson is having the best year of his career. A raise is in his immediate future, even before he can expect to get that big contract the following season in free agency, Gibson is due an arbitration raise in 2019. And he's certainly earned it. For all the accolades that Berrios has earned, Gibson has the better ERA this season.

As of this writing, Gibson has made 28 starts, with a few more to go before his season concludes. His 171 innings are the third-most in his MLB career, and he will have a shot to surpass his personal best and even touch 200 if he stays healthy in September. He's got a career-best (and Twins-best) 3.74 ERA, and he's still getting groundball outs about 50% of the time. That's always been Gibson's game, dating back to his days as the ace of the Mizzou Tigers.

Only now, Gibson has unlocked a new level. He's throwing more strikes, using his 4-seam fastball to work up in the zone, which has opened up his breaking ball as a swing-and-miss pitch.

As a result, opponents are whiffing 11.5% of the time, a new career-high for Gibson. And he's running a 22% strikeout rate, which is slightly better than league-average, and represents a big step forward for Gibson, who has long been a contact-oriented starting pitcher.

He'll get a handful of starts the rest of the way. Maybe he can make this team MVP race a little more interesting.

#### Fernando Rodney / Taylor Rogers

Fernando Rodney was probably the most well-known reliever to many ballpark goers earlier this season. He had the strikeouts, the drama — the walks — and importantly he had the pantomime archery arrows. Rodney was pretty good in a Twins uniform, although he wasn't the best Twins reliever this year. That distinction belongs to Taylor Rogers, who has been the most consistent and best reliever over the long haul.

Either way, it'd be impossible to hand out this team MVP award to a one-inning reliever on the 2018 club.

Rodney had a rough April and then recovered nicely. He always seemed to make things interesting in the 9th inning — walks or base hits always seemed to introduce a traffic jam for Rodney to wiggle his way out of. All told, he finished his brief Twins career with a 3.09 ERA and a 50:19 strikeout-to-walk ratio with a big fastball, shaky control and a terrific changeup. Now he's shooting fake arrows in Oakland, where he's already predicted he'll win a World Series with the A's.

Taylor Rogers actually has made a case as the best reliever on the Twins this season. The lefty has stealthily put together another strong year. He's added a slider to go with his fastball-curveball mix, and the strikeouts and scoreless innings are piling up. We'll have more on Rogers later this week. The fact remains that a setup lefty more or less can't be the team MVP, even if he's the team's best reliever in 2018.

#### Eddie Rosario

Rosario missed a little time recently with a minor hamstring strain. He returned over the weekend, serving as a DH and taking it easy when he runs so as not to reinjure the muscle. He's hit .289/.326/.482 with 23 home runs, which is basically a continuation of the strong offensive season he had last year.

He was the Twins' best player at the time the front office gave up on the season and traded away a handful of veterans with an eye toward the future. Like Berrios, Rosario's production has tailed off quite a bit since the end of July (.250/.259/.402), but when you look at the totality of the work, Rosario has been the team's best player this season.

Who would have thought it a year ago? If somebody asked you at spring training which player would be the team's MVP in 2018, how many would you have named before Rosario? Byron Buxton, you might have said. Or Brian Dozier. Miguel Sano, maybe. J.O. Berrios would get some votes. Or how about Joe Mauer or Ervin Santana?

None of those players have had the season that Rosario has had. And the fact that he's under team control for years to come means that he wasn't in danger of getting shipped out at the trade deadline. Rosario has become a piece around which the Twins can build. Three young outfielders showed promise last season, and looked like the start of a great future in the pastures of downtown Minneapolis. Only one of them has backed up that promise with a really good 2018 season.

And for that, Rosario now looks like one of the bright spots when forecasting the 2019 season.

**Twins continue to struggle against Yankees, lose 7-2**  
**Associated Press | Fox Sports North | September 11, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Gary Sanchez was struggling since coming off the disabled list, and the New York Yankees were off to a so-so September start.

Facing the Minnesota Twins seems to be a cure-all.

Sanchez had three hits, including a mammoth home run, J.A. Happ tossed six shutout innings and the Yankees continued their mastery of the Twins with a 7-2 win on Monday night.

Could his first three-hit game since April 16 be a turning point for the catcher hitting .189?

“I’ve hit the ball very hard all season and I haven’t got the results I wanted. If this is what it takes for me to find a good streak here or a good positive streak, yeah, why not,” Sanchez said through an interpreter.

New York has beaten Minnesota nine straight times, including last year’s wild card game, outscoring the Twins 66-23. The Yankees are 20-4 in the teams’ meetings since July 25, 2015.

The Yankees, 5-4 in the season’s final month, increased their lead over idle Oakland to three games for the first AL wild-card spot.

Happ (16-6) allowed six hits and struck out three. Acquired from Toronto on July 26, the left-hander has allowed two or fewer runs in six of eight starts for New York, going 6-0 with a 2.70 ERA.

“I ran into a couple outings before I came over where I really wasn’t getting strike one as much as I needed to,” he said. “Tonight, I felt like I was ahead in the count a lot and kind of forced them to be aggressive and swing.”

Kyle Gibson (7-13) allowed four hits and one earned run in 5 2/3 innings. He was one batter away from tossing six shutout innings before Sanchez crushed low 2-2 fastball 460 feet into the third deck in left field.

“We’ve talked before about a guy’s sweet spot, and some guys like the ball down and that’s probably on the fringe of where he likes the ball the most,” Gibson said.

Before the bomb, Sanchez was 3 for 29 since coming off the disabled list on Sept. 1.

“You always feel like he’s a guy that can get it rolling, and when he does, he’s, from a talent standpoint, one of those guys that can carry a club offensively,” manager Aaron Boone said.

New York’s first eight batters reached base in a six-run seventh. Miguel Andujar had a two-run double and later scored on a double by Giancarlo Stanton, who had been in a 3-for-35 slump. Didi Gregorius doubled home Stanton.

New York was 5 for 17 with runners in scoring position after going 4 for 35 in its previous six games.

“Finally, a lot of really good at-bats to kind of break that game open. It was something I feel like we needed and glad that a lot of guys had a hand in it,” Boone said.

#### JUDGE GETS HIS CUTS

Yankees slugger Aaron Judge took on-field batting practice for the first time since fracturing his right wrist on July 26.

The session included home runs to multiple fields by the 2017 AL Rookie of the Year.

“It went really well; another big step for him to get out on the field,” manager Aaron Boone said.

#### TRADING GEMS

Twins left fielder Johnny Field made a sliding grab in the fifth to rob Andujar of a hit and save two runs. Third baseman Andujar returned the favor in the bottom of the inning, snaring a sharp liner by Field.

#### TRAINER’S ROOM

Yankees: 1B Luke Voit has been dealing with back stiffness for a couple of days and wants to play through it, but Greg Bird got the start.

Twins: 3B Miguel Sano missed his fifth straight game with lower left leg issues — including a sore knee that he sustained sliding into second base last Tuesday. ... 1B Tyler Austin went through hitting drills and took batting practice but missed his fourth straight game with a stiff back.

UP NEXT

To provide extra rest for Luis Severino and Masahiro Tanaka, New York's Sonny Gray (10-8) is scheduled for a spot start on Tuesday. Removed from the rotation in early August, Gray tossed 6 1/3 scoreless innings in his last spot start, on Aug. 25 in Baltimore. Minnesota planned to announce its starter after Monday's game.

**Gray gets spot start for Yankees vs. Twins**  
**The Sports Xchange | Fox Sports North | September 11, 2018**

Sonny Gray gets a spot start Tuesday night against the Twins as the New York Yankees try to give their regular starting pitchers a breather for the stretch run.

Gray lost his spot in the rotation in August after he gave up seven runs on eight hits in just 2 2/3 innings against the Baltimore Orioles on Aug. 1. That left him 8-8 with a 5.56 ERA through 21 starts.

He's shown signs of improvement since his demotion and has a 1.83 ERA over his last six outings, including a spot start in the second game of a doubleheader in Baltimore when he allowed three hits over 6 1/3 scoreless innings.

"(He's been) a little more on the attack, maybe a little more trusting of his stuff and maybe not overanalyzing or overthinking every sequence," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "As we've talked about all year, when he's attacking with his stuff, he's so capable of being a really good pitcher. And he's shown that really since moving to the pen."

Gray learned about the assignment over the weekend and threw a bullpen session Sunday to prepare for what may be his last start of the season.

"I feel good," Gray said. "My outings may have had gaps in between them but I can do whatever is needed. I feel like I am throwing the ball well and continue to take steps in the right direction."

Gray will try to help the Yankees improve to 6-0 against the Twins this season. The Yankees opened the series with a 7-2 win on Monday when Gary Sanchez homered and had three hits.

The right-hander is 2-3 with a 5.23 ERA in six career starts against the Twins.

Gray will be facing a Twins team still missing third baseman Miguel Sano.

Sano has been sidelined since injuring his left knee sliding into second base last week at Houston. The team had hoped to get him back by the weekend but when he didn't make the anticipated progress, Sano went in for further testing.

An MRI revealed no structural damage, but his knee still isn't responding enough to resume a full workload.

"Progress is slow," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Lot of time in the training room trying to figure out how we can alleviate symptoms that are being preventative of him being able to get into some baseball activities. It hasn't gone probably like anybody expected after we got the news that everything looked good, in terms of any specific injury other than some soreness and swelling. But it's been slow."

Tyler Austin isn't back yet either, as he recovers from a back issue, but took batting practice Monday and is getting closer to a return.

"He did some work and flip drills," Molitor said. "He looked pretty normal, I haven't had a chance to see how he got through that portion. But what I can tell so far, everything's been positive."

Molitor will use an "opener" for Game 2 of the series. Right-hander Tyler Duffey (1-2, 9.00 ERA) will get 1-2 innings of work with the Twins' bullpen covering the rest of the game.

Duffey is 1-0 with a 5.54 ERA in six career appearances against the Yankees.

Tuesday was supposed to be Kohl Stewart's day to start, but he'll be passed over this time through the rotation with Jake Odorizzi taking the

mound Wednesday in the series finale.

## **The time a Twitch star, ‘Hamilton’ actor and Twins pitcher played Fortnite at Target Field**

**Dan Hayes | The Athletic | September 11, 2018**

He may have more than 4,000,000 subscribers to his YouTube account, but gamer Marcel Cunningham, aka @BasicallyIDoWrk, was admittedly nervous on Sunday morning as fans began to take their seats in Target Field’s lower bowl.

He has logged thousands of hours playing Fortnite in front of his fans, often younger gamers who watch his Twitch account in search of tips for improving their own gaming skills while also being entertained. But Cunningham had never played in front of an audience before.

Roughly 10 minutes before he, Twins pitcher Trevor May — who pitched a scoreless 1/3 of an inning in a 7-2 loss to the New York Yankees on Monday — and entertainer Jordan Fisher were set to play Fortnite in front of a crowd of approximately 341 fans at Target Field on Sunday morning, reality began to set in. While other teams have featured their players’ Twitch streams on the big screen at their home parks and some have held meet and greets with professional gamers, the Twins are believed to be the first major professional team to hold a live event in front of an audience.

“I’ve never played in front of a crowd before,” Cunningham said. “The last time I was in front of people was high school, choir. This is scary because when you’re at home, everybody is a little camera box. This is completely different for me. I’m going to be nervous.”

If you pay close enough attention to baseball social media, you can’t help but to have seen Fortnite or other professional gaming leagues this season. It has inundated the sport.

The Houston Astros’ outfield has celebrated wins with Fortnite victory dances in the outfield. The Chicago Cubs occasionally have performed Fortnite dances after a player hits a home run. Both the Cleveland Indians and Milwaukee Brewers have featured their players’ Twitch accounts on the big screen before games. Last month, the Los Angeles Dodgers held an event where fans could meet Overwatch League All-Stars before a game. The Texas Rangers have even included a Fortnite Dance cam into their in-game entertainment.

Twins senior communications director Dustin Morse knew about May’s passion for esports and wondered if there was a way to incorporate it. The two had previously joked about holding an event at Target Field while May rehabbed from Tommy John surgery earlier this season. A few weeks back, Morse asked May if he thought they could pull off an event before the end of the season. May — who represents Luminosity Gaming as a brand ambassador and is the founder and CEO of eSports Lab — didn’t hesitate to say yes.

“It’s my job to identify the interests and passions of our players and bring it to people within the organization that we can actually make something happen,” Morse said. “This is a pretty cool event where we were very proactive in a short amount of time. We identified a unique opportunity for a unique event and put it into motion. If we planned more for it in the future, it could be a bigger event. But Trevor is interested in it and we followed his lead. He’s been the guy that has educated us on the monitors, equipment, the actual stream, how to open a Twitch account.”

Morse got approval for the event from Twins president Dave St. Peter. The Twins then partnered with the WorldGaming Network, which promoted and sponsored the hour-long event.

At that point, it was up to May to find some gamers. The first to commit was Cunningham, who met May through mutual friend, @TimTheTatman.

“Immediately,” Cunningham said when asked how quickly he committed. “Do you want to play on a baseball field? Yes.”

Fisher — who took over playing the part of Philip Hamilton in the Broadway production of “Hamilton,” appeared on the “Moana” soundtrack and recently won the 25th season of “Dancing With The Stars” — was another quick commit.

“How often?” Fisher said when May asked if he wanted to play at Target Field.

Fisher, May and Cunningham often play together online. With the event planned on short notice, May struggled to find a fourth player who could make the trip to Minneapolis. Tyler Blevins, more popularly known as @Ninja, was in discussions with May early on, but couldn’t come.

May also spoke with Twins catcher Mitch Garver, who emceed the event, and rookie pitcher Stephen Gonsalves. But both declined to play, as did a number of other Twins players.

Ultimately, May was able to recruit Ninja to join the trio online, which was a coup because his Twitch often attracts an average of at least 75,000-80,000 viewers, May said. Sunday’s three-hour stream had more than 126,000 views as of Monday night.

As for May, Fisher and Cunningham, they were seated with their laptops next to one another under a tent on the warning track in front of the home dugout. Wearing headphones and microphones, the trio warmed up for 30 minutes prior to their live viewing party as they adjusted to the conditions. May said the event mostly went off without a hitch, though the mid-morning glare did provide some disruption.

Once the event began with a number of fans in the seats, Garver provided commentary.

“We have a hype man?” Cunningham yelled out.

Garver was selected for his Fortnite expertise. The Twins catcher played Fortnite online in April with MLB.com’s Cespedes BBQ duo. He also often plays online with friends and family back at home in New Mexico.

“It’s funny,” Garver said. “Fifteen years ago nothing like this would happen. Now you kind of see the way the world is going and the kids that play these games, the way they communicate with each other is they kind of play video games together. It’s how I stay in touch with my brother and how I stay in touch with people from home. We don’t really talk on the phone or text too much. When we talk, it’s through video games. It’s kind of a cool way to socialize.

“People think you need to get outside and go do stuff, which I totally encourage. I think kids should play outside to get out of the house. But as far as social skills coming along, I think it has some part to do with it.”

May initially got involved in esports because he sees a strong similarity to the way kids consume gaming compared with the way others consume household sports like baseball, football, basketball, etc. An avid gamer himself — he got his start playing World of Warcraft online — May sees why kids follow professional streamers closely and understands why they buy products associated with those stars.

“Just the number of people that are doing it,” May said. “I have a unique experience being a baseball player and understanding why people watch this stuff and why they buy the stuff that they have and what makes people fans. It’s people doing things that you can’t do at a level you can’t do it at. People like baseball, but they know they’re not big-leaguers. But that whole thing with streaming is what I saw. They want to be like you. They want to be a stream and play a game as good as professionals. The fandom is the same stuff, there’s just way more of them. And it’s all digital so the opportunities to monetize it are ridiculous. That’s why there’s so much money pouring into it.”

It led him to found his company, which he hopes to build into a viable scouting service to find future professionals through analytics. May also was a keynote speaker at the Overwatch League players summit last December, an event he described as media training for pro gamers. During the event, he discussed professionalism and being a good teammate to players who would be competing on stage in front of crowds.

“It’s kind of a crash course on what it’s going to be like to be a professional athlete,” May said. May, of course, offered no crash course for Cunningham or Fisher on how to compete in front of a crowd.

“He literally didn’t say anything,” Cunningham said.

“Throwing us to the wolves,” Fisher said. “As always.”

Said Cunningham: “He texted us. ‘You’re coming.’ That’s it.”

May and the Twins are pleased with how the event went. Given it was planned in less than two weeks, the crowd of 300-plus was a good turnout. Though it wasn’t easy to adjust from playing on PCs with larger screens to laptops, May said the event mostly went off without a hitch aside from some audio issues.

May also said he found it a little bit more difficult to play in front of a live audience because it added another element in the communication process.

Normally, May would be talking to his teammates over the headphones while answering questions some of his followers might ask on Twitch. With a crowd on hand and Garver asking the occasional questions, however, May had a third audience to pay attention to.

But overall, May is satisfied with the event. The Twins have even discussed the possibility of trying to line up a home-and-home series against the Milwaukee Brewers next year in which May and a Brewers player would recruit their dream teams for an event.

“(Playing in front of baseball crowds) prepared me,” May said. “I don’t really even think about the crowd at all. The only reaction I wanted was for them to laugh at us when we did stupid stuff and they did and it was funny. But mostly when I looked up it was kids explaining to their parents.”

Included in that crowd was Twins manager Paul Molitor, who received a Fortnite tutorial from his 12-year-old son, Ben. Ben Molitor is an avid

Fortnite who plays a little more often than his dad might want him to. But the team's veteran manager sat with his son for nearly 20 minutes and got an explanation for everything taking place on the big screen.

"I learned a little," Molitor said. "A game of survival, it looks like to me, but I don't know. It was a lot going on the screen at one given time, trying to keep track of who the players are in the game and we're reading the numbers. But yeah, he enjoyed it."

Rosario, Sanó still banged up

Tyler Austin (sore back) took batting practice on Monday, a positive sign from one of the Twins sluggers. But outfielder Eddie Rosario was held out of the lineup, a combination of a strained right quadriceps and a matchup against Yankees left-hander J.A. Happ, Molitor said. Rosario has only played three times since he suffered the injury on Aug. 30 in Cleveland.

"He's not 100 percent," Molitor said. "We found that out over the weekend. ... We thought it was a good day to just kind of have him available late if we needed him, which we didn't need to do. We'll re-evaluate tomorrow and see if we can get him back in there in some capacity, but I get a little leery about a guy when he's going to be out there playing and a guy who loves to compete. I don't know if he'll be able to play at a level where it would be safe, but we'll get a good evaluation from our trainers (Tuesday)."

Third baseman Miguel Sanó also hasn't played since he injured his knee last Tuesday in Houston. Sanó was cleared for structural damage and the Twins thought he might return to the lineup in time for last weekend's series against the Kansas City Royals. But Sanó hasn't come along as much as the Twins had hoped, Molitor said.

"Progress is slow," Molitor said. "Lot of time in the training room trying to figure out how we can alleviate symptoms that are being preventative of him being able to get into some baseball activities. It hasn't gone probably like anybody expected after we got the news that everything looked good in terms of any specific injury other than some soreness and swelling. But it's been slow.

"We checked the knee out just to make sure he was fine. We got all clear.

"It's pretty much that whole lower leg that's probably getting some type of — whatever they're doing, work in the pool, work on the table. They've got stim machines and all that stuff. They're trying to find a way to get him better."

### **Tyler Austin Has Thrived With the Twins (Don't Rub It In)**

**Pat Borzi | New York Times | September 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Twins were in Chicago in mid-August when Tyler Austin called Greg Bird, his former Yankees teammate, to discuss an uncomfortable topic: the two insulting tweets Austin's father, Chris, had directed at Bird, whom the Yankees chose over Austin as their everyday first baseman.

When Austin, who was traded to Minnesota in a July 30 deal for pitcher Lance Lynn, homered on Aug. 11 in his Twins debut, his father tweeted, "18 homerun for Tyler on the year but bird is the word." And a week later, after Austin had a three-hit game, his father posted, "Tyler has more hits in a week with the twins than bird has in a month with the Yankees." Austin called the statements embarrassing and made his father delete them.

"I told him that stuff can't happen," Austin said Friday night after the Twins beat the Royals, 10-6. "He really regretted them, and here we are now."

Speaking to Bird, he said, was a relief. "He knew I had nothing to do with it," Austin said. "He was a man about it, and I'm really thankful for that. He's a very classy guy, and we've developed a good relationship over the years. I'm thankful for the way he handled that."

Bird confirmed that Austin reached out to him, but had little to add. "It's done," he said. "That's it. He apologized, and I don't have much else to say."

Austin has been productive since joining the Twins, benefiting from regular play, which he rarely had with the Yankees. Before sitting out Friday's game with a stiff back, Austin had seven homers and 11 runs batted in over 20 games as a designated hitter and first baseman since the Twins called him up from Class AAA Rochester, where he reported after the trade.

His back, he said, bothered him for about a week, but he kept playing until it worsened on Wednesday after he slid for a foul pop-up in Houston. Austin said he was not sure whether he could return by Monday, when the Yankees arrive for a three-game series.

"I'm enjoying every opportunity I've been getting here," he said. "It is a comforting feeling, knowing I'm coming to the ballpark every day knowing I'm going to be in the lineup, helping the team win any way that I can."

The Twins called up Austin when Logan Morrison, a first baseman and designated hitter, was lost for the season with an injured left hip. It reunited Austin with the Twins' hitting coach, James Rowson, a former Yankees minor league instructor.

Austin, who turned 27 on Thursday, quickly impressed the Twins with his power, homering six times in his first 12 games. The most prodigious: an Aug. 26 blast into Catch, the restaurant and bar above the batter's eye at Target Field, estimated at 433 feet by Major League Baseball's Statcast technology. Two innings later, Austin homered again, to the opposite field, his third multiple-homer game of the season and first as a Twin.

"This is the first time at this level where he's really gotten a chance to get extended at-bats and play consistently," Rowson said. "That goes a long way. He's had some good at-bats versus righties, versus lefties, trying to prove he can be a good hitter at this level regardless of who's on the mound. He's incredibly confident, and this guy is relentless with the way he goes about it."

Austin and Aaron Judge made their memorable major league debuts the same day, Aug. 13, 2016, hitting back-to-back home runs. But injuries and circumstances curtailed Austin's playing time with the Yankees.

Last season, he missed 91 games with a broken bone in his left ankle and a right hamstring strain. This season, Austin hit .290 in April with five home runs and 16 R.B.I. But a poor May (.130) and Bird's return from ankle surgery led to Austin's demotion to Class AAA Scranton/Wilkes-Barre in June.

Whether Austin can hit his way into a job with the Twins next season remains to be seen. First baseman Joe Mauer's eight-year, \$184 million contract is up, and he is expected to re-sign with the club or retire. The club also holds an \$8 million option on Morrison for 2019.

"He's a guy that will try to play hurt, try to make a play regardless of consequence to his body," Twins Manager Paul Molitor said of Austin. "The raw power, it's impossible not to see what he can do to a baseball when he connects. He wants to become a better hitter and keeps trying to find ways to do that. It's been fun to watch him play, and I think over all, he's got to be pretty pleased with what he's done here."