



**Minnesota Twins Daily Clips  
Wednesday, September 12, 2018**

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**Mauer's fifth slam propels Twins past Yankees**

**Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | September 12, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Throughout this season, Joe Mauer has shown flashes of his former All-Star self while grinding out at-bats atop the Twins' lineup. On Tuesday, he showed there's still a little pop left in his bat, too.

Mauer crushed a towering grand slam in the fifth inning vs. Yankees righty Jonathan Loaisiga to bust the game open and give the Twins a nine-run lead en route a 10-5 win at Target Field.

Mauer's fifth career grand slam had a projected distance of 419 feet and left the bat at 104.1 mph, according to Statcast™. The dinger also tied Mauer with Tony Oliva for fourth on the Twins' all-time extra-base hit list at 597.

With the 20,343 fans in attendance still buzzing after Mauer reached the dugout, Twins bench coach Derek Shelton knew the crowd wouldn't let Mauer off the hook without a curtain call and told him he better head back out to the field.

"Well, it hasn't really happened a whole lot to be honest over a career," Mauer said of the ovation. "But I've had a couple as of late, and it's a pretty cool moment with the fans and the players. I've seen a few of 'em, and yeah it's pretty special. ... It was kind of fun. Like I said, I felt kind of excited, and you could tell the crowd was going crazy, but you don't really hear it. You're in that moment, I guess."

The long ball capped off a six-run inning in which the Twins batted around. Minnesota hitters drew three walks during the frame and Williams Astudillo poked an RBI single.

Jake Cave, who was drafted by the Yankees in 2011 before being shipped to Minnesota this spring, cracked a two-run single in the third to give the Twins a 3-1 lead. An inning later, Jorge Polanco tacked on another run with an RBI double.

Didi Gregorius kept the Yankees in contention with a grand slam of his own in the sixth inning off reliever Trevor May, who had inherited a bases-loaded jam from Kohl Stewart. May ensured that the rally stopped there, though, and struck out Gary Sanchez and Luke Voit to end the inning.

Taylor Rogers threw two perfect innings in the seventh and eighth, and Trevor Hildenberger struck out two of the three batters he faced in the ninth to close out the game.

Since the start of the month, the Twins have occasionally experimented with deploying an "opener" on the mound to toss the first inning or two of games. On Tuesday, Minnesota ran with the strategy for the third time this season and found some positive results. Tyler Duffey held New York

to one run over two innings before handing the game off to Stewart.

"Obviously, the first pitch of the game is different than coming in in the eighth," Duffey said. "When we were walking out, [pitching coach Garvin Alston] was saying, 'Treat it like the eighth or ninth. Don't come into it as a starter. Treat it as we planned, attack them as you would normally.' And after throwing that first pitch slider, at the time it felt weird, but I threw that and it put me in the mode of, 'OK, attack guys.' We did a pretty good job of mixing it up, and I got a good double-play ball when I needed to."

Stewart took over in the third and issued five walks over 3 1/3 innings as he battled spotty command. But he benefited from double plays in both the fourth and fifth innings to keep his scoresheet clean until Gregorius' sixth-inning slam. Stewart wasn't pleased with the lack of feel for his pitches, but he still picked up his first career win.

"I'm just glad we got the win, you know, as a team," Stewart said. "It's kinda crazy that today I felt worse than I have all year up here and ended up getting the win. Glad the team won. Offense did a really good job tonight, and then the bullpen kept us there. It was good."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

In the fourth inning, the Yankees quickly loaded the bases against Stewart on a single and two walks. Sanchez, who crushed a massive 460-foot home run a night earlier, stepped to the plate with one out and a chance to erase Minnesota's 3-1 lead. But Stewart got ahead of Sanchez in the count and got the All-Star catcher to roll into an inning-ending 6-4-3 double play.

#### HE SAID IT

"I understand it, yes. It feels different. There's no way around it. A starter coming out of the bullpen, a reliever starting the game, it goes against what we're used to doing, basically. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, I'm just saying it's different. It worked today. If it works the next time around or doesn't, who knows? It's something that can work. It has the possibility of being good. We'll see what happens."-- Duffey, on whether he believes using an "opener" and "primary pitcher" gives a team an advantage

#### UP NEXT

The Twins will close out their three-game set with the Yankees at 7:10 p.m. CT Wednesday at Target Field. Jake Odorizzi will get the nod for Minnesota in search of a bounce-back start. Odorizzi struggled last time out against Houston, surrendering five runs over 4 2/3 innings. All-Star righty Luis Severino (17-7, 3.52 ERA) will start for the Yankees.

### **Joe Mauer's grand slam helps Twins score rare victory over Yankees**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 12, 2018**

The strangest thing, Joe Mauer said, wasn't that he was in a 1-for-23 slump, or that he hadn't had an extra-base hit since Sept. 1. Or that he got behind in the count and was just trying to avoid striking out, as he had in his last at-bat.

No, the weirdest part, after crushing a full-count fastball onto the center-field berm Tuesday night, his fifth career grand slam and the critical hit in the Twins' 10-5 victory over the Yankees, was that he didn't really hear the Target Field crowd roar with excitement.

"You're rounding the bases, and you know it's loud, but you don't hear anything," Mauer said after blasting his sixth home run of the season. "It's a pretty cool feeling. And to see the guys excited when you round third, and the fans jumping up and down — it's pretty cool."

Mauer capped off the moment with a curtain call to acknowledge those cheers, the second time in a month he's tipped his cap after a dramatic home run. Bench coach Derek Shelton told him "You better get out there," Mauer said, "so it was kind of fun. You could tell the crowd was going crazy, but you don't really hear it. You're in that moment, I guess."

The Twins don't get many of those moments against the Yankees. In fact, Tuesday's victory stopped a nine-game losing streak to New York, counting their playoff meeting last October, and even with the 10-1 lead that Mauer's fifth-inning slam gave them, the Yankees made it difficult. In the very next inning, Kohl Stewart gave up a single and two walks to load the bases, and when Trevor May relieved him, Didi Gregorius matched Mauer's slam with one of his own.

But May, Taylor Rogers and Trevor Hildenberger didn't give up another hit after that, retiring the last 11 Yankees batters in a row to seal the Twins' victory — and allow Mauer and his fans to savor another memorable moment in a career full of them.

"He's just got that ability to not let emotions or moments overtake his ability to perform," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "When you can trust

yourself, trust that you're still going to recognize, have a plan, not be afraid to go deep in counts — all those things, he's been marvelous at for a long, long time."

The Twins already had scored six runs by then. They entered the fifth inning up 4-1, getting one run on a passed ball, two on a Jake Cave single vs. his former teammates and a fourth on a Jorge Polanco double.

They made it 6-1 as Yankees reliever Jonathan Loaisiga walked three batters and gave up two singles in the fifth. With the bases loaded, Tommy Kahnle was summoned to face Mauer, and quickly got ahead 1-2.

"I was just trying to get something up in the strike zone, where I could handle it and maybe get something to the outfield," Mauer said.

He worked the count to 3-2, and then pounced on a fastball over the heart of the plate.

"I just tried to take deep breaths, try to slow the heart rate down a little bit," Mauer said. "That's about all I've got right there."

### **Twins' 'opener' plan is a work in progress**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 12, 2018**

The Twins' third attempt at using a relief pitcher to handle the first two innings went far better than the first two. But they left room for improvement, too.

"In a perfect scenario, you get the first six hitters out, and your primary [pitcher] gets [hitters] 7-8-9 in his first inning of work," manager Paul Molitor said. "That's not very likely, but that's probably the ideal scenario."

Tyler Duffey, selected to make his first "start" since Sept. 30, 2016, though limited to two innings, came relatively close to the ideal. Duffey faced only seven hitters in two innings of the Twins' eventual 10-5 victory over the Yankees, but he gave up a run. After getting a double play in a three-batter first inning, Duffey surrendered a one-out triple to Didi Gregorius in the second, followed by a Gary Sanchez sacrifice fly.

But he turned the game over to Kohl Stewart to face the bottom of the New York lineup, and Stewart shut out the Yankees for three innings before loading the bases in the sixth, ahead of Didi Gregorius' grand slam off Trevor May. Stewart earned his first major league victory, despite pitching only 3½ innings.

"It's kind of crazy that I felt worse than I have all year up here, and ended up getting the win," Stewart said. "I honestly just didn't have much feel tonight. You can't walk five guys like that and expect a victory."

He will likely get more chances, though. Molitor made it clear that the Twins intend to continue to try the first-inning reliever concept over the next few weeks. The idea, he said, is to use a pitcher particularly suited to a certain opponent in the early innings, in hopes that the "primary pitcher" can pitch multiple innings without facing the best hitters three times. "It's not something that we're flippantly trying to experiment with," Molitor said. "We think it has merit. We're trying to see how it plays out."

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The family of Thomas Burnett was recognized during a 9/11 tribute before the start of Tuesday's game between the Twins and Yankees.

More

That includes judging the fit for their various pitchers. Duffey was the third Twins pitcher asked to pitch only the first two innings — Gabriel Moya and Trevor May have also opened a game — and he's the first one to get through two innings as planned.

In fact, the Twins have given up seven first-inning runs in their three opener/primary pitcher games, which is not exactly what they are looking for.

"Obviously, the first pitch of the game is different than coming in in the eighth," Duffey said. "It felt weird, but I threw that first pitch and it put me in the mode of, OK, attack guys. ... The weirdest part was coming [into the clubhouse] afterward. ... Now what?"

The Twins are also examining the effect the late "start" has on the designated multi-inning pitcher. So far, they have used only rookies, Stephen Gonsalves once and Stewart twice, mostly because they experienced the concept at Class AAA Rochester.

"Part of the challenge with those guys is trying not to have their confidence shaken as a starter. That, 'Hey, we need to open for you because

we're just a little worried about how you're going to do the third time facing the lineup,' ” Molitor said.

Tampa Bay is the model for the concept; opponents hit only .221 in the first inning off the Rays this year, the second-best mark in the AL. They have given up only 58 first-inning runs, the fewest in the league.

“I couldn't help but pay attention to Tampa's success. [We] have talked about it at length throughout the year, and have watched fairly closely how it's unfolded in our system. The more you look at the data, it's easy to support,” Molitor said.

Notes

- Miguel Sano took about 10 minutes of swings on the field Tuesday, and fielded ground balls for about 10 minutes, the first activity he's attempted in a week. Sano has not played since injuring himself Sept. 4.
- The Twins honored Tom Burnett, a Bloomington native who helped rush the cockpit of Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001, during a pregame ceremony. Burnett's sister, Martha Pettee, threw out the ceremonial first pitch, with Molitor catching.

### **Postgame: What slump? Mauer took a deep breath, and hit the ball hard** **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 12, 2018**

Yes, Joe Mauer was aware that it had been a long week at the plate. Maybe he didn't know that he was 1-for-23, but hitters know when they're not getting on base enough.

“Absolutely,” Mauer said after breaking out of that slump with a memorable grand slam, the final blow in the Twins' 10-5 victory on Tuesday. “This time of year, you're grinding. Your body doesn't feel too great. You might make adjustments, not even knowing it.”

And it didn't help that he had grounded out, walked and struck out in his three previous plate appearances in the game. “You try to wipe away what happened the first two or three at-bats and get another opportunity,” Mauer said. “And I'm glad I was able to do what I was able to do.”

Making the grand slam even sweeter? Well, truthfully, Mauer gets a little tired of losing to the Yankees. The Twins have never — never — won the season series against New York during Mauer's 15-year career, and of course, they're 1-13 in the postseason against New York with Mauer on the roster.

This doesn't make a dent in that. But “It's always nice to beat those guys, I'll tell you that,” Mauer said. “Just coming up in situations like that, the guys are fighting up and down the lineup, giving you the opportunity to do that. Being able to come through, that's a really good feeling.”

So get out of here with any of that slump talk. That's Paul Molitor's opinion, anyway.

“Twenty-three at-bats, in terms of how many he's at in his career [6,867 after tonight] — I don't think he gets too bogged down by any particular stretch at this juncture,” the Twins' manager said.

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Mauer's grand slam, to straightaway center field, was even more impressive given the windy conditions, Molitor said.

“The ball wasn't carrying particularly well, with that wind tonight,” Molitor said. “To hit it out where he hit it out, you know he got all of it.”

Yankees righthander Tommy Kahnle got ahead of Mauer right away, but couldn't get the three-time batting champion to bite on a couple of low changeups. So on 3-2, he was forced to throw a fastball over the plate.

“Kahnle throws relatively hard. He's pretty much a fastball-changeup combination, and it looked like Joe had a pretty good feel for recognizing that changeup coming out of his hand, in terms of not expanding the [strike] zone,” Molitor said. “He finally made him get to a fastball count, and he deposited it.”

**Tuesday's Twins-Yankees game recap**  
**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

MPACT PLAYER: Joe Mauer, Twins

Even in a 1-for-23 slump, he's a dangerous hitter, as he proved with a grand slam.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

10 Runs scored by the Twins, their most against New York since July 24, 2015.

16 Consecutive games without a stolen base by the Twins, a streak ended Tuesday by Jake Cave's third-inning steal.

**UP NEXT**

The last time the Twins won back-to-back games in one season against the Yankees? 2013.

**Sano has light workout, but still out; Austin faces Yankees for first time**  
**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

Miguel Sano took about 10 minutes of swings on the field Tuesday, and fielded ground balls for about 10 minutes, the first activity he's attempted in a week. It wasn't exactly a strenuous workout, "but it's better than nothing," Paul Molitor said. But "he [moved] a little gingerly," the manager added.

Sano is out of the lineup again, as is Eddie Rosario, both dealing with leg injuries. Tyler Austin's bad back, however, seems to have healed, and he will play tonight for the first time since Wednesday.

"He had a good day yesterday swinging, and he felt good today, with no carryover effect," Molitor said. "And he's excited to play against the Yankees. I was looking for a DH, and when [head trainer Tony Leo] told me he was available, I stuck him in there."

It's Austin's first meeting with his former team, which has won eight consecutive games against the Twins. Austin, acquired in the July 30 trade that sent Lance Lynn to New York, was in the midst of a 3-for-28 slump when he injured his back, but with the minor-league season over, there is no option to send him on a rehab assignment.

Tyler Duffey will "start" for the Twins tonight, assigned to face the Yankees for the first two innings before Kohl Stewart, the "primary pitcher" takes over. It's the third time the Twins have used an "opener," in hopes of sparing the starter from having to face the top of the order three times.

"We're hoping the third time's the charm," Molitor said of the two-pitcher strategy. "The first two haven't gone particularly well."

Both teams are wearing special "We Will Never Forget" patches on their hats tonight, to honor those lost on Sept. 11, 2001.

Here are the lineups for Tuesday's game:

**YANKEES**

McCutchen RF

Hicks CF

Andujar 3B

Stanton LF

Gregorius SS

Sanchez DH

Voit 1B

Romine C

Torres 2B

Gray RHP

TWINS

Mauer 1B

Polanco SS

Forsythe 2B

Grossman LF

Cave CF

Austin DH

Kepler RF

Adrianza 3B

Astudillo C

Duffey RHP, followed by Stewart RHP

### **State Fair attendance will top Twins attendance for first time since 2000**

**Michael Rand | Star Tribune | September 11, 2018**

If back-to-schoolers are still writing essays about how they spent their summers, the theme this year is this: By going to the Minnesota State Fair — and not necessarily Target Field.

The Great Minnesota Get Together topped 2 million in attendance for the first time in its history, and in posting that number the State Fair almost certainly will achieve another milestone: It will beat the Twins in total attendance for the first time since 2000.

The Twins are on pace for an overall attendance about 100,000 lower than that of the Fair, a fact I was first alerted to by colleague Paul Klauda. He wondered if this had ever happened before, which sent me on a dive into some numbers. What at first might seem like an apples to oranges comparison is actually somewhat revealing when put into context.

Going back to 1961 — the year the Twins arrived in Minnesota and also the year MLB went to a 162-game schedule — we have 58 years, counting this year, with which to work.

The Twins outdrew the Fair each of their first 10 years of existence from 1961-1970, but as the Twins' fortunes waned and the Fair gained momentum, the Fair took the attendance crown every year from 1971-1983.

The arrival of a young wave of stars in the Metrodome — led by Kirby Puckett — gave the Twins the edge in all but one year between 1984 and 1993. As the dome aged as poorly as the Twins, the Fair regained the lead every year from 1994-2000.

Buoyed by another young group while staving off contraction talk, the Twins retook the lead in 2001 and held it every year through 2017 thanks to strong teams and a new ballpark. This year's Twins disappointment and another steady climb by the Fair reversed the trend.

Tally, so far: Twins 36 years ahead, State Fair 22, as you can see conveniently on the year-by-year chart (2018 Twins attendance is projected).

What does it tell us?

\*Well, for starters the State Fair has grown at a more or less steady pace. Though you see some dips that were likely influenced by weather and/or economic factors in particular years, overall gains have been consistent and drops have been temporary.

This speaks to the power of the Fair. Sure there are new foods and other attractions added, but it more or less offers the same experience every year. There is not a "winning" or "losing" Fair. It is a known commodity, and that is a selling point.

\*Twins attendance is far more volatile. Weather and economic factors might play small roles, but those tend to get smoothed out over the course of 81 home games.

You can see from the chart that their attendance is much more closely tied to major events like performance (topping 3 million fans in 1988, the year after winning their first World Series) and the opening of Target Field, which boosted attendance again in the early part of this decade.

\*About seven times more people per day went to the Fair (170,000) than the average Twins game this year (about 24,000), but the 12-day Fair is always going to win that battle. The State Fair lasts pretty much all day, while Twins games only seem like they do.

\*It's hard to imagine the Twins regaining the lead in 2019 since season ticket sales are heavily influenced by the previous year's performance, though a successful season could push the Twins back over 2 million fans and into contention.

It will be interesting to see whether the Fair continues on its steady growth line or reaches a leveling off point in the future, and it will similarly be interesting to see to what extent the Twins' attendance recovers when their fortunes consistently turn positive (or continues to plummet if the do not).

### **While Twins audition prospects, veteran Robbie Grossman proves his value**

**John Shipley | Pioneer Press | September 11, 2018**

Robbie Grossman was drafted by Pittsburgh and started his major league career with Houston, but the switch-hitting outfielder has steadily become a mainstay for the Twins.

"It's funny how this game works," Grossman said.

Grossman, 28, played his 111th game of the season on Tuesday against the Yankees at Target Field and is on pace to surpass the career-high 119 games he played last season, his second in Minnesota. Under team control through 2020, he has made his presence not only felt in Minnesota, but vital.

Grossman opted out of a deal with Cleveland after playing 34 games at Triple-A in 2016; since joining the Twins, his only minor-league time has been six rehab games with Rochester.

## ADVERTISING

“All you can ask for is an opportunity, and hopefully you make the best of it,” he said.

Grossman is proving his worth as the Twins audition prospects over the last month of the season. Playing left and right field, and occasionally serving as the designated hitter, he is hitting .333 with an .880 OPS since Aug. 5.

On Saturday, Grossman broke up a no-hitter by Kansas City right-hander Jorge Lopez with a ninth-inning single; on Monday, his eighth-inning double to score the Twins’ first run in a 7-2 loss. This after home plate umpire Marvin Hudson had mistakenly wrung him up on a called third strike.

“It’s not the first time I’ve seen it, but it’s the first time it’s happened to me,” Grossman said.

Grossman was taking a practice swing when Hudson yelled, “Strike three!” — although the crew chief quickly corrected himself.

“He was like, ‘Wait, that was only two strikes,’ ” Grossman said.

On the next pitch from Luis Cessa, Grossman lined a double to right field that scored Jorge Polanco in a two-run eighth.

Miguel Sano, out since Sept. 4 because of pain in his lower left leg, took some batting practice and fielded a few grounders at third before Tuesday’s game, his first baseball activity since being injured while stealing second in a 5-2 loss at Houston.

“First day we’ve seen him, which is encouraging,” Molitor said. “He took some swings, a few grounders — a little gingerly, it looked like as far as his movements out there, but it’s better than not doing anything.”

Because rosters were expanded on Sept. 1, Sano is not on the disabled list.

An X-ray and MRI exam revealed no significant damage in the leg, the same leg into which a titanium rod was inserted to help a stress reaction heal last fall.

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. An American League all-star last season, he is hitting .202 with 13 home runs and 41 RBIs — and 111 strikeouts — in 70 games.

Molitor said Monday he was confident his third baseman will play again before the season ends Sept. 30.

## BRIEFLY

— The family of Tom Burnett, the Burnsville resident who perished in United Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001, was honored prior to Tuesday’s game. Burnett’s older sister, Martha, threw out the ceremonial first pitch.

— Left fielder Eddie Rosario was out of the lineup for the second straight game because of a quad injury.

— Tyler Austin was in the lineup as designated hitter, his first action since wrenching his back while chasing a foul ball in a 9-1 loss at Houston last Wednesday.

## **Joe Mauer’s grand slam is big difference in 10-5 victory over Yankees**

**John Shipley | Pioneer Press | September 11, 2018**

Joe Mauer could feel the excitement after his grand slam Tuesday night at Target Field, but he couldn’t hear it.

“You’re kind of rounding the bases, you know it’s loud, but you don’t hear anything,” he said. “So it’s a pretty cool feeling, and to see the guys excited when you round third and the fans jumping up and down.”

Cool.



Mauer's fifth career grand slam capped a six-run fifth inning, and rookie pitcher Kohl Stewart pitched a start shortened by strategy to earn his first major league win as the Twins beat the New York Yankees, 10-5, Tuesday at Target Field.

## ADVERTISING

It was Minnesota's first victory this season over its arch nemesis, which has knocked the Twins out of the playoffs in four of their past five postseason trips with a 12-2 record — including last season's one-game wild card playoff.

"Just another win over the Yankees," Twins manager Paul Molitor quipped.

Didi Gregorius was 2 for 3 with a walk, triple and grand slam for the Yankees, who entered the game percentage points ahead of Oakland for the American League's top wild-card spot, 7.5 games ahead of third-place Seattle.

Five Twins players drove in runs, but Mauer's sixth homer of the season was the big blow.

With one out in the fifth and two runs already in, Yankees manager Aaron Boone tapped right-hander Tommy Kahnle to face Mauer. The Twins' first baseman worked the count full before hitting a towering shot to straightaway center field to give the Twins a 10-1 lead.

"Bases loaded, one out, just trying to get one in, and I got a pitch and was able to get all four — so that was good," Mauer said.

The homer was estimated to have traveled 419 feet after landing on the grass in front of the batter's eye in center field.

"That was about all I've got right there," Mauer said.

Mauer went 2 for 4 with a walk, four runs batted in and two runs scored as the Twins improved to 3-2 on a six-game homestand that ends Wednesday night against the Yankees. He is tied with Tony Oliva for fourth on the franchise list with 597 career extra-base hits.

The game also was notable as the first time the Twins successfully used an "opening" pitcher to start the game. Right-handed reliever Tyler Duffey pitched the first two innings, giving up an earned run on two hits, although he was hurt by a misplay in center field that put Gregorius on third with a triple.

Stewart (1-1) pitched three scoreless innings before loading the bases with one out in the sixth. Trevor May relieved and immediately gave up Gregorius' grand slam — his second this season, both against the Twins — but Stewart already had done enough to reap the benefits of the Twins' ninth game this season with 10 or more runs.

He was charged with three earned runs on two hits and five walks.

"I'm just glad we got the win, you know, as a team," Stewart said. "It's kind of crazy that today I felt worse than I have all year up here and ended up getting the win. Glad the team won. Offense did a really good job tonight, and then the bullpen kept us there. It was good."

After Gregorius' grand slam, May, Tyler Rogers and Trevor Hildenberger held the Yankees without a base-runner.

Jake Cave's single off starter Sonny Gray (10-9) against a drawn-in infield gave the Twins a 3-1 lead in the third. Jorge Polanco, Willians Astudillo and Max Kepler — with a bases-loaded walk — also had RBIs.

"It's always nice to beat those guys, I'll tell you that," Mauer said. "But just coming up in situations like that, the guys are fighting up and down the lineup, giving you the opportunity to do that. And being able to come through, that's a really good feeling."

### **Mauer's grand slam powers Twins past Yankees**

**Associated Press | Fox Sports North | September 12, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — Though the New York Yankees remain on pace to reach the 100-win mark, the threat of being forced to take a cross-country trip for a one-and-done postseason game sure has not disappeared.

This rare lopsided loss to the Minnesota Twins sure didn't help.

Joe Mauer hit a grand slam to highlight a six-run fifth inning, and the Twins beat the Yankees for the first time in 10 meetings, a 10-5 victory on Tuesday night after another flop by Sonny Gray as a starter.

"We've got to do better. We go out and lay an egg like that," manager Aaron Boone said, trailing off. "This is the time where we've got to start playing up to our capabilities and putting our best foot forward every single day."

Didi Gregorius answered Mauer's big bop with his own slam in the sixth. That was the only bright spot for the Yankees, who dropped nine games behind Boston in the AL East race and had their lead over Oakland for the first wild card spot cut to two games. The Athletics won their fifth straight game.

"Can't control what's going on over there," Gregorius said. "Can only control what's going over here."

The major league leaders in home runs with 234, the Yankees fell to 80-36 in games when they go deep. They grounded into three double plays and had only five hits, none after Gregorius hit his second grand slam against the Twins this year.

"We've got to dig down right now and find it," Boone said, "and try and lock in and get this thing rolling the right way."

Gray was dropped from the rotation in early August with an 8-8 record and 5.56 ERA. He pitched more aggressively in four relief appearances, then returned to the rotation for a spot start and took a shutout into the seventh inning at Baltimore on Aug. 25. He made one more relief appearance and was given the start against the Twins to allow the rotation an extra day of rest.

Gray (10-9) lasted three innings and allowed three runs — two earned — with four hits and three walks.

"You walk guys," Gray said, "and it will kill you."

The right-hander refused to acknowledge any added frustration from stumbling in his now-rare opportunity to start. Neither did he allow for any increased pressure the team might be feeling from the A's, his former team.

"We lost one game. We're fine," Gray said. "I feel like everyone's in good spirits."

## MAUER POWER

Gregorius tripled and scored on Gary Sanchez's sacrifice fly for a second-inning lead, and Gray gave it back in a three-run third fueled by a two-run single by former Yankees farmhand Jake Cave. Jonathan Loaisiga fared even worse, forcing in a run with a bases-loaded walk to Max Kepler in the fifth.

Boone appeared to argue with plate umpire James Hoyer that the third ball to Kepler actually grazed his bat for a foul ball. Three batters later, Mauer crushed a full-count fastball to center field where it landed in the berm beyond the wall. He came out for a curtain call after his fifth career grand slam, tying Tony Oliva for fourth place in Twins history with 597 extra-base hits.

"He's just got that ability to not let emotion or moments overtake his ability to perform," manager Paul Molitor said.

The Yankees are 96-34 against the Twins, including the playoffs, and have won every season series since the start of 2002. They outscored the Twins 66-23 over the nine-game winning streak that ended.

"It's always nice to beat those guys," Mauer said, "I'll tell you that."

## THE OPENER

Kohl Stewart (1-1) earned his first major league victory despite walking five batters in 3 1/3 innings. He followed reliever Tyler Duffey, who pitched two innings as a bullpen opener in the latest experiment by the Twins with a new trend that Tampa Bay started. This was their first win in three tries with the arrangement.

"I'm not saying it's right or wrong, I'm just saying it's different," Duffey said. "It worked today. If it works the next time around or doesn't, who

knows?”

## DON'T JUDGE

Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge missed his 44th game after being hit by a pitch that broke his right wrist, but for the second straight afternoon he put on a powerful batting practice display in addition to some defensive drills. Boone declined to divulge a specific timeline for Judge's return to the lineup, but the manager is clearly eager for that to occur. More clarity will come after Judge's workouts this weekend at Yankee Stadium, Boone said.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: With Boone preferring Austin Romine as the backstop for Gray, Sanchez moved from behind the plate to take a turn as the DH.

Twins: Tyler Austin was the DH for the Twins, after a four-game absence because of back tightness. Traded by the Yankees to the Twins on July 30 for right-hander Lance Lynn, Austin made his first appearance against his original team. He singled and walked in five plate appearances.

## UP NEXT

Yankees: RHP Luis Severino (17-7, 3.52 ERA) will pitch the last game of the series, coming off his shortest turn of the season with six hits and six runs allowed in 2 2/3 innings in a loss at Oakland last week. After an off day on Thursday, Masahiro Tanaka, C.C. Sabathia and Lynn will be the weekend starters against Toronto.

Twins: RHP Jake Odorizzi (5-10, 4.57 ERA) will take the mound on Wednesday night, reaching the 30-start mark for the third time in five years.

## **Cautionary tale of Aaron Hicks echoes in the Twins' Byron Buxton situation** **Dan Hayes | The Athletic | September 12, 2018**

The cautionary tale batted second in the New York Yankees lineup on Tuesday night.

Aaron Hicks has hit in the top third of the order for one of baseball's best teams 57 times this season.

The ex-Twins prospect is in the midst of a fantastic campaign, manning center field and tapping into the offensive upside his former team always suspected he possessed.

Hicks entered Tuesday's game hitting .248/.369/.464 with 24 home runs, 68 RBIs and 82 walks in 520 plate appearances. His play has produced 4.5 f-Wins Above Replacement and is his second consecutive strong season for the Yankees, who have won 90 games and spent the better part of the summer preparing for October.

That it took Hicks nearly 4,000 professional plate appearances between major and minor leagues to live up to his potential shouldn't be lost on anyone ready to write off Byron Buxton, who has shown flashes of brilliance, but struggled to find consistency in parts of four major-league seasons.

When the Twins traded Hicks in November 2015 for catcher John Ryan Murphy, Hicks had a .655 OPS in 928 career major-league plate appearances.

“It took him awhile, like it does a lot of people we've seen around here, to just make that transition in terms of confidence and slowing the game down,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “He shows the patience now that we thought that he would have as a young player, because we saw it in the minor leagues. Just a combination of physical development and the fact that he's learned how to elevate the ball a little bit more consistently from both sides of the plate. As a young hitter, I thought he was way better as a right-handed hitter, just in terms of the crispness and the shortness of the swing and the trust factor. But he has balanced that out tremendously over time, to where he's dangerous on both sides.”

Hicks struggled so much early in his career from the left side there was some consideration to ditch it entirely. He was promoted to the majors in 2013 despite only having 82 plate appearances above Double-A.

His inexperience showed up in his splits. While he has always hit well against lefties (his career OPS is .761), the 14th overall pick of the 2008 draft proceeded to hit .207/.284/.316 against righties in his first three seasons with the Twins.

Even though he proved to be a plus defender in center in two of his first three seasons, the Twins felt confident enough that they had an emerging everyday center fielder in Buxton to trade Hicks to the Yankees.

Hicks didn't immediately click in New York. He provided a .617 OPS in 361 plate appearances in his first season with the Yankees.

Ever since, he's been absurdly good. In 210 games dating back to the start of the 2017 season, Hicks is hitting .255/.370/.468 with 39 homers and 133 walks in 881 plate appearances.

Hicks said it simply has come down to effort and experience and tapping into his power.

"To kind of keep working hard at it," Hicks said. "My whole thing is I want to hit the ball in the air and it kind of has been working for me.

"I felt like the more I was able to play, the more I was able to learn and get better at my craft. It's kind of what got me going."

Byron Buxton

It's been a lost season for Byron Buxton, with injuries hampering his play after a promising second half of 2017. (Photo: Joe Nicholson/USA TODAY Sports)

Though Hicks and Buxton are different players on their own development paths, both have the ability to play a premium position at a high level. And elite center fielders are difficult to identify.

Having already had one potential star slip through their hands, the Twins are likely to give Buxton as many chances as necessary for his career to take off for good. There was plenty of optimism surrounding Buxton headed into the 2018 season. He had overcome a slow start to 2017 and was a dominant force on both sides of the ball from July 1 on, which resulted in a value of 3.5 f-WAR. His inspired play helped the Twins make a surprise push and earn a wild-card berth.

But 2018 has been one setback after another, concluding earlier this month with the team's controversial decision to not promote Buxton after the Triple-A season ended on Sept. 3.

Sidelined early by migraine headaches, Buxton broke the big toe on his left foot with a foul ball in a minor-league rehab game in April. He returned to the Twins nearly a month later on May 10 without a rehab assignment or time to test out his toe in the minors. Saying they wanted his energy, glove and playmaking ability in the lineup, the Twins brought Buxton back and said they'd allow time for his bat to get back up to speed. Buxton never was quite right though, admitting he was still hampered by the toe after his return.

He struggled at the plate, hitting .122/.140/.163 in 51 plate appearances, giving the Twins an avenue to place Buxton back on the disabled list with the toe injury. When Buxton continued to struggle on his rehab assignment, the Twins pulled him off and demoted him to Triple-A Rochester.

He has twice injured his wrist since, which kept him sidelined until mid-August. Even though the issue lingered, the Twins allowed Buxton to return to action and he heated up. But a hot stretch at the end wasn't enough to bring Buxton back, which amounts to 2018 ending in a lost season for the center fielder. It also leaves Buxton 13 days of service time short of three years, which will push back his free agency another year, a move that has drawn the Twins some criticism.

Without question, the poor performance will provide Buxton's many doubters on social media a renewed voice that the 24-year-old is overhyped and not capable of being an everyday major-leaguer, the same type of complaints many made about Hicks.

But as many other major-leaguers have shown, development doesn't often occur in a straight line. Sometimes players take a step forward and then two steps back before finally breaking through. They might need more time.

Hicks is a perfect example. A guy who nearly gave up being a switch-hitter has impressed Molitor with the improvements he's seen the past few seasons.

"Aaron's having a really nice year," Molitor said. "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. ...

"I was around Aaron a lot. It was always pleasurable — high pick, high expectation. (He) always asked me a question every year — 'How do I get to the big leagues?' He was hungry to get here.

"He's earned a valuable spot in his place on that team, amongst a lot of really good players, to his credit."

Mauer's grand slam highlights Twins' victory over Yankees

Joe Mauer ended his 1-for-23 slump rather dramatically on Tuesday night when he blasted a fifth-inning grand slam off Tommy Kahnle to break the game open. Mauer went 2-for-4 with a walk as the Twins topped the Yankees for the first time all season, 10-5.

“That was about all I’ve got right there,” Mauer said. “So that felt great.”

“I just try to take deep breaths, to be honest. I try to slow the heart rate down a little bit and, like I said, try to stick with my plan. He threw me two pretty good strikes and two pitches that were up and away, and I just tried to stick with it and have a good at-bat, and I was able to get that one 3-2, which I’m glad I did.”

Kahnle took over to face Mauer and got ahead in the count 1-2. But Mauer took two changeups low to work a full count before ripping a 97-mph fastball out to dead center for his sixth homer of the season. The ball exited Mauer’s bat at 104.1 mph and traveled 419 feet.

Mauer went 1-for-2 with runners in scoring position on the evening. Overall, Mauer is hitting .392/.484/.608 with four home runs and 40 RBIs in 91 plate appearances with runners in scoring position this season.

“Heartbeat,” Molitor said when asked why Mauer excels in those spots. “You know, I think he’s just got that ability to not let emotion or moments overtake his ability to perform. When you can trust yourself, that you’re still going to recognize, have a plan, not be afraid to go deep in counts — all those things he’s been marvelous at for a long, long time — usually you’re hoping to get that big single, but tonight he delivered the power.

“The ball wasn’t carrying particularly well with that wind tonight, but to hit it out where he hit it out, you know he got all of it.

“It looked like Joe had a pretty good feel for recognizing that changeup coming out of the hand, in terms of not expanding the zone, and he finally made him get to a fastball count there and he deposited it. So, yeah, you’re feeling pretty positive about good contact somewhere on the field, and obviously the grand slam is a bonus.”

Duffey not accustomed to a successful two-inning start

Tyler Duffey remembers that feeling as a starting pitcher when he only lasted two innings and how bad it was to be stuck in the clubhouse the rest of the night. On Tuesday, however, as the team’s opener, Duffey was strategically removed after two innings to give way to rookie Kohl Stewart, the team’s primary pitcher for the evening. Several hours after he exited the game, Duffey was still trying to wrap his head around a short start resulting in attaboys from his teammates. It was quite a different feeling, he said, than when he used to “shit the bed.”

“That’s the way it feels,” Duffey said. “It was weird. But winning a ballgame was fun, so that makes it easy.

“In 2016, I had some tough ones that year. That’s what it was like, coming out in the second inning. ‘Now what do I do all day?’ Guys were like, ‘Hey, good job.’ I guess. It doesn’t feel right.”

Duffey wasn’t the only part of the OPP tandem in a strange mood. Stewart earned his first major-league victory with 3 1/3 innings pitched. Though the right-hander made pitches when he needed to, Stewart was more concerned with the five walks he issued. Stewart threw strikes on 29 of 63 pitches and allowed three earned runs.

“It’s kinda crazy that today I felt worse than I have all year up here, and ended up getting the win,” Stewart said. “Glad the team won. Offense did a really good job tonight, and then the bullpen kept us there. It was good.

“I honestly just didn’t have much feel tonight, I don’t know what the hell was going on. ... I’m not gonna get that lucky every night. But the defense made some plays behind me. I kept the ball on the ground, I think that’s what saved my ass. But I know that you can’t walk five guys like that and expect a victory.

“But the defense picked me up, so gotta give them credit.”