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Odorizzi sets tone as Twins win 5th straight

Joe Harris | MLB.com | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- Jake Odorizzi is proving that he can go home again.

Odorizzi, who grew up 30 miles northeast of St. Louis in Highland, Ill., held the Cardinals to just two hits over five innings in a 7-1 Twins victory on Tuesday afternoon at Busch Stadium.

View Full Game Coverage

"I kind of treat it as a business trip for me," Odorizzi said. "I usually don't go out and do a bunch of stuff with family and friends. If you see one person you should see them all, that sort of thing, so I just try to keep it all baseball."

Odorizzi (3-2), who bought 16 tickets for family and friends, retired nine of the final 10 batters he faced as the Twins won their season-high fifth game in a row. His only mistake was missing with a fastball to Jose Martinez, who hit it over the center-field wall for a solo homer in the first.

"It was a situation with two out, nobody on, he was trying to elevate," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "I think he got it over the middle of the plate too much, and the guy didn't miss it. He settled back in."

Odorizzi even helped himself at the plate with a pair of sacrifices, the last of which led to a run. He improved to 2-0 in three career starts at Busch Stadium and lowered his ERA in St. Louis to 3.19.

"I think pitching here for him is probably pretty special," Molitor said. "I don't know if he liked that I made him bunt a couple times -- I think he may have liked to get some swings -- but he's walking away, did his job and executed a couple of those."

Robbie Grossman's two-run double in the fifth gave the Twins a 4-1 lead. Grossman, after collecting three hits on Monday, reached three times Tuesday, including a pair of walks. Eduardo Escobar's upper-deck, 403-foot, two-run homer to left in the seventh put the game out of reach, and Eddie Rosario also reached three times and scored three runs. He ran his hitting streak to nine games, and he has hit safely in 11 of his last 12.

"We just played good baseball all the way around," Grossman said. "We pitched it, we hit it and played good defense, and that's the recipe for

winning games."

Ryan Pressly, Taylor Rogers and Phil Hughes combined for four scoreless, hitless innings in relief. The Twins' bullpen, which struggled to begin the season, didn't surrender a run in seven innings in the two-game series, entering the set with a 5.56 ERA and leaving Busch Stadium with a 5.24 mark.

"We have a tendency to make a big deal about small sample sizes, especially early in the year," Molitor said. "We have guys who have resumes, they've done it before, and it's starting to show up more consistently."

Cardinals starter Carlos Martinez (3-2) lasted just five innings, his shortest outing since Opening Day, when he took his only other loss of the season against Noah Syndergaard and the Mets. Only two of the four runs he allowed Tuesday were earned.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Rosario appeared to hit an inning-ending lineout to Cardinals first baseman Jose Martinez in the fifth, but the ball went off of Martinez's glove and ricocheted into foul territory, allowing Brian Dozier to advance to third and Rosario to go to second. Grossman followed with his two-run double to break open what was a one-run game.

"You think about a game like today, facing a guy like Martinez, you know you're going to have to grind, nothing's going to come easy," Molitor said. "We took advantage. They did have a couple of miscues that led to some runs, which made it a lot easier for Jake to do his job."

SOUND SMART

The Twins have won 14 of their past 17 Interleague games dating back to Aug. 2, 2017.

HE SAID IT

"They're working now. It's tough to get off. If too many people call off, it looks a little suspicious." -- Odorizzi, on if any of his high school friends were at the game

UP NEXT

Jose Berrios (3-3, 3.98 ERA) will get the start as the Twins begin a four-game series in Anaheim on Thursday at 9:07 p.m. CT. Berrios will be making his second career start against the Angels, whom he beat on June 4, 2017, allowing two runs over six innings in a 3-2 Twins victory.

Buxton could return for set vs. Angels

Joe Harris | MLB.com | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS -- Twins outfielder Byron Buxton ran the bases, testing out his fractured toe. He reported that the pain is tolerable, and he was optimistic about an imminent return.

"I'm just trying to get in to help my teammates out," Buxton said. "I've been out long enough. I've got that itch to get back out there and just try to keep this going, keep that spark going and keep getting wins."

View Full Game Coverage

Buxton could be reinstated from the disabled list when the Twins begin a four-game series at Anaheim on Thursday. It doesn't appear that he will need a Minor League rehab assignment.

"There's some momentum about not doing that, to be honest with you," manager Paul Molitor said. "We'll have to collect everyone's thoughts back in Minneapolis and here with staff and trainers and see what we want to do. If he looks like he's ready to go, we'll have to make that decision within the next 48 hours."

Molitor talks extras

Long extra-inning games take their toll on a team's bullpen, and they often create the need for a pitcher to be sent down to the Minors simply to bring up a fresh arm to get through the next game.

While there are ideas such as starting extra innings with a runner on second to promote easier scoring and shorter games, Molitor would rather keep the current system.

"The carryover is just so significant for clubs, so the whole idea of trying to be creative and finding ways to increase chances of runs being scored, and all those types of things to minimize the chance of how long you might play, I'm not sure if that's going to pick up a lot of momentum," Molitor said. "Certainly the purist side of things is not going to be favorable to try to make adjustments to create ways to score.

"It's been a part of the game for a long time. I think as much as it hurts you at times, I would be opposed."

Dozier adjusts to new lineup spot

Molitor believes second baseman Brian Dozier's move to the two-hole in Minnesota's lineup will pay off.

Dozier, who has been the Twins' leadoff man since July 2016, was slotted one spot down in the order for fifth straight game on Tuesday against the Cardinals. The hope is that it will help spark Dozier, who carried a .226 average into Tuesday.

While Dozier was hitting just .222 (4-for-18) in the two-hole entering Tuesday's game, Molitor likes what he's starting to see.

"It's a good spot to hit, to be honest with you, especially if you've got opportunities in front of you," Molitor said. "He's had a couple of good games, and last night I thought he had some good swings and got under a few balls, but I think he's starting to come out of what we saw there for that stretch of seven or eight games."

The commitment to keeping Dozier in the second spot was shown in Tuesday's lineup, which featured Logan Morrison leading off and playing first with Joe Mauer getting a scheduled day off. Morrison, known as a power hitter, hasn't led off a game since 2015.

"It gives me a lot more flexibility with my left-right combinations throughout the lineup, and I'm kind of liking Dozier in the 2-hole for now," Molitor said. "I didn't want to flip that back up on top for a one-day basis with Joe being back available on Thursday."

Odorizzi, Twins shut down Cards to win fifth in a row

Phil Miller |Star Tribune | May 9, 2018

ST. LOUIS – Pitching in front of a noisy corps of family and friends from his nearby hometown Tuesday, Jake Odorizzi was a total flop.

Well, comparatively.

Odorizzi made one bad pitch, a first-inning fastball to Jose Martinez that hung a little high in the strike zone, and Martinez planted it on the grass beyond the center-field wall. But then the Twins righthander turned miserly, preventing another Cardinal from reaching third base in his five cruise-control innings, and led the Twins to their fifth consecutive victory and a two-game sweep of the Cardinals, 7-1 at Busch Stadium.

Odorizzi gave up a mere two hits, won his third game of the season and knocked a quarter-run off his ERA down to 3.83, yet was somehow the Twins' least effective pitcher in this series. Minnesota shut out the National League Central leaders in 17 of the 18 innings played, Monday's starter Fernando Romero kept his ERA at 0.00, and the Twins' bullpen — five pitchers over two days — retired 21 of the 22 hitters it faced.

"It's how you draw it up," Twins manager Paul Molitor said gratefully. "You try to stay close and add on when you get a lead, and everyone does their job coming out of the bullpen."

The offense wasn't bad, either, especially considering St. Louis had its ace, Carlos Martinez, on the mound. The Twins managed only four hits in five innings against the NL's ERA leader, but took advantage of three errors to score four runs off Martinez — more than he had allowed in his past six starts combined. Eduardo Escobar blasted a two-run homer and Eddie Rosario had two hits and scored three runs. Odorizzi himself contributed a couple of sacrifice bunts.

For all of their struggles before the current winning streak, the Twins will be in a tie for first place in the AL Central if Milwaukee beats Cleveland this afternoon. Minnesota opens a four-game series against Los Angeles on Thursday night.

"Now that the weather's gotten warm, we're feeling pretty good at the plate," said Robbie Grossman, who reached base six times in the series and crushed a two-run double to the center-field warning track against Martinez in the fifth inning. "Really, every part of this team has it going now."

He's got a point: Whether playing a cellar-dweller or a division leader, facing a minor league call-up or the ace of the staff, night or day, AL or NL foe — whatever the variable, this has been a get-well week for the Twins. A walk-off loss in Chicago last Thursday was a jolt, but since then, the Twins have outscored the White Sox and Cardinals 32-12, including 13-1 in front of all those Odorizzis in Busch Stadium.

The Twins immediately countered Martinez's first-inning homer with a Rosario single, a Grossman walk and a pitch that hit Mitch Garner, setting up Ehire Adrianza's game-tying sacrifice fly. They took the lead when Rosario and Garver singled in the fourth inning, with Rosario scoring when left fielder Marcell Ozuna couldn't cleanly pick up Garver's hit. In the seventh, Escobar socked a pitch from reliever Tyler Lyons more than

400 feet, his fourth home run in nine days.

Minnesota's seven runs was its most ever against the Cardinals — right, right, unless you include the 1987 World Series — and the Twins departed for Anaheim only one-half game out of first in the AL Central, after the Indians' 3-2 loss in Milwaukee.

"It's nice to get on a good streak on the positive side," said Odorizzi, who grew up in Highland, Ill., about 20 miles from the Gateway Arch that looms beyond center field. "We went through the negative earlier, and came out on the other side and are playing pretty good baseball. We have the ability to do something special if we continue to play this way."

Still, the Twins are only 15-17 on the season, so nobody is being fitted for rings. But like Grossman, Odorizzi noted the 80-degree Missouri weather as an important change.

"We got thrown off by the weather. It's hard to have an All-Star break in April," he said, referring to their blizzard-induced four days off from April 13-16. "We didn't play well on [our last] road trip — it really showed in our sloppiness and rustiness. Now that we've got that behind us, get to play baseball in normal weather, we get to see what this team can do."

Emerging rotation might cease to be Twins' Achilles' heel

Jim Souhan | Star Tribune | May 9, 2018

With Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano on the disabled list, the Twins have won six of their past seven games, finishing a two-game sweep of the proud Cardinals with a 7-1 victory Tuesday in St. Louis.

While a one-week referendum on a baseball team is never definitive unless it occurs in late October, the manner in which the Twins have righted themselves represents one of the more positive developments for the franchise since Torii Hunter & Friends saved the team in the early 2000s.

For once, the Twins might have more pitching than they need.

And for the first time since Buxton and Sano became dueling top prospects, they might have been replaced as the two players most integral to the Twins' future success.

This is an unusual development for a franchise that needed Les Straker as a third starter in the 1987 World Series, that needed a 36th-round draft pick named Scott Erickson to deliver his one dominant season for them to win in 1991, that has traditionally struggled to support quality position players with a professional rotation.

The rise of Jose Berrios and Fernando Romero, combined with the acquisitions of Jake Odorizzi and Lance Lynn and the latest resurgence of Kyle Gibson, gives the Twins the best starting pitching staff they've had since Johan Santana and Francisco Liriano led a top-heavy rotation in 2006.

In 2006, Liriano and Santana gave the Twins the best 1-2 punch in baseball. Liriano's slider and Santana's changeup were close to unhittable, and Liriano's fastball and Santana's fastball and slider were outstanding as well.

Before he was injured, Liriano was 12-2 with a 1.96 ERA. Santana finished 19-6 with a 2.77 ERA and won the Cy Young Award, in a hitter-friendly season in which 11 players hit 40 or more home runs.

Berrios and Romero might not prove to be as dominant, but they should receive more help. In 2006, the next-best ERA from a regular Twins starter was Boof Bonser's 4.22. (Boof Bonser!)

Here is one stab at the Twins' current pitching depth chart: Berrios, Romero, Odorizzi, Lynn, Gibson, Ervin Santana (returning in a few weeks?) and Stephen Gonsalves (5-0 with a 1.30 ERA at Class AA and AAA this season).

Starting pitching depth is crucial for at least four reasons:

1. Pitcher injuries remain one of the biggest variables in the game. The Twins could handle a pitcher injury or two, which is rare in modern baseball.
2. Depth should ensure that the Twins receive plenty of innings from their starters, meaning their bullpen should not be overworked.
3. Having starting pitching means not having to trade for starting pitching, which is expensive and risky.

4. Having starting pitching gives the Twins trading chips should they reach the trading deadline out of contention, or decide they need to upgrade another position.

And while the Twins' pitching is increasingly promising, their position-playing depth remains impressive. Two of their top prospects are shortstops — former No. 1 picks Nick Gordon and Royce Lewis. Jorge Polanco will return from a PED suspension at midseason. Eduardo Escobar might be the Twins' current MVP. And Brian Dozier is the Twins' most accomplished player.

If Lewis becomes an outfielder, the Twins' depth there will be impressive as well, considering that Eddie Rosario might be the team MVP since last July, Buxton is the best-fielding center fielder in the game and Max Kepler continues to hint at future stardom.

Depth does not guarantee immediate success. The American League is stacked with powerhouse teams this season. Even making the playoffs will be a challenge for the Twins.

But the arrival of Romero and the Twins' weeklong resurgence have displayed a new organizational strength. They are no longer hoping that someone such as Carl Pavano or Phil Hughes will lead their staff. They have dynamic young arms to go with their dynamic young position players. The Twins, for once, might be deep and strong at the game's most pivotal position.

MLB's shoe color crackdown is agony of de-feet for Twins

Phil Miller |Star Tribune | May 9, 2018

ST. LOUIS — The packages caught up to Logan Morrison on this road trip. His so-dark-blue-they-look-black shoes are going in a box somewhere, and his not-blue-at-all black shoes will be on his feet from now on.

“They can crack down all they want,” Morrison said of Major League Baseball's uniform monitors. “But get fined for this? No thank you.”

The Twins, like the other 29 MLB teams, received a warning memo from the commissioner's office in late April, reminding players of the rules about footwear, and warning them they might begin fining violators after May 1. The rules, as collectively bargained by the players and owners, state that “at least 51 percent of the exterior of each player's shoes must be the club's designated primary shoe color,” and that color must be “evenly distributed” on the shoe.

The problem for several Twins players is that the team's “designated primary shoe color” is black, not the navy blue that adorns the uniforms and caps. The color was selected decades ago, before baseball spikes were available in such a variety of colors, and has never been updated. Several players, Brian Dozier among them, wear shoes with navy blue and red trim on them to match the uniforms — but now risk being fined.

“These match. Black doesn't. You can't tell me that black would look better,” Dozier said. “I just think they're really trying to eliminate some of the crazier colors. I don't know why.”

Still, the Twins put in a rush order for a few dozen pairs of black shoes with the various manufacturers, just in case a crackdown comes.

“Times change and rules become outdated. But whatever, man. It's not worth having anyone taking my money over it,” Morrison said, displaying his new shoes. “I'll just express myself through arm sleeves and batting gloves, I guess.”

Buxton's test drive

Twins manager Paul Molitor sat with Byron Buxton at his locker for about five minutes Tuesday morning, getting a firsthand account of how Buxton's fractured left big toe feels. Buxton ran about four laps around the Busch Stadium bases a half-hour earlier, simulating rounding the bases on hits and extra-base hits, and pushing off to go base to base.

The final decision has yet to be made, but “there's some momentum” toward activating Buxton as soon as Thursday in Anaheim, Molitor said. “We'll have to collect everyone's thoughts, back in Minneapolis and here with staff and trainers, and see what we want to do over the next 48 hours.”

Buxton made it clear what his thoughts are.

“I'm pretty excited,” the center fielder said about returning to the Twins' lineup, which has been without him since April 12. “I've been out long enough.”

That would mean not going on a rehab assignment to the minor leagues, something Buxton said he's willing to do, but he would prefer not to go.

Molitor sounds as if he's willing, presuming Buxton meets a couple of criteria.

"Physically, we want him to be at a level where he's ready to play every day," the manager said. "Then we'll make a determination about how his offensive game is going to go without having played for about three weeks or so."

Battle of the phenoms

The Angels plan to keep Japanese two-way star Shohei Ohtani on his once-a-week pitching schedule, and informed the Twins he will start Sunday's game in Anaheim. That sets up an intriguing matchup of rookie phenoms: Ohtani will face Fernando Romero, who has yet to allow a run in winning the first two starts of his major league career. Ohtani also figures to serve as the Angels' designated hitter Thursday or Friday.

Tuesday's Twins-St. Louis game recap

Phil Miller |Star Tribune | May 9, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Jake Odorizzi, Twins

One run over five innings, and became first Twins pitcher since Glen Perkins in 2009 to collect two sacrifice bunts in a game.

BY THE NUMBERS

12 Runs scored by Eduardo Escobar since April 30, more than any player in MLB in that stretch

21 Cardinal batters retired by Twins' bullpen in this series, out of 22 who came to the plate

0 Extra-base hits by Eddie Rosario, breaking his streak of seven straight games with one, third-longest in Twins history

ON DECK

After an day off in southern California, the Twins open a four-game set in Anaheim with a matchup of Jose Berrios vs. Garrett Richards

"Momentum" toward Buxton return, Molitor says before St. Louis finale

Phil Miller |Star Tribune | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Paul Molitor sat with Byron Buxton at his locker for about five minutes on Tuesday morning, getting a first-hand account of how Buxton's fractured left big toe feels now. Buxton ran about four laps around the Busch Stadium bases a half-hour earlier, simulating rounding the bases on hits and extra-base hits, and pushing off to go base-to-base.

The final decision has yet to be made, but "there's some momentum" toward activating Buxton as soon as Thursday in Anaheim, Molitor said. "We'll have to collect everyone's thoughts, back in Minneapolis and here with staff and trainers, and see what we want to do, if he looks like he's ready to go, over the next 48 hours."

Buxton made it clear what his thoughts are. "I'm pretty excited," the center fielder said about returning to the Twins' lineup, which has been without him since April 12. "I've been out long enough. Got that itch to get back out there."

That would mean not going on a rehab assignment to the minor leagues, something Buxton said he's willing to do, but would prefer not to. He's been working hard in the batting cage on his swing, and standing in as pitchers throw in the bullpen to calibrate his batting eye, and he's ready to play again.

Molitor sounds like he's willing, presuming Buxton meet a couple of criteria. "Physically, we want him to be at a level where he's ready to play every day," the manager said. "Then we'll make a determination about how his offensive game is going to go without having played for about three weeks or so."

Coincidentally, Buxton was alternating sprints with the Cardinals' center fielder, Tommy Pham, who isn't on the disabled list, but has been out of the lineup for three days with a groin strain. Neither one are playing today, but both hope to be ready by the weekend.

Joe Mauer, who has been in the starting lineup for the last 13 days and has appeared in every game since the Twins' home opener, is getting a break today. Since Molitor wants to keep Brian Dozier in the No. 2 slot for now, Molitor simply gave Mauer's fill-in at first base, Logan Morrison, his normal leadoff spot. It's the first time since 2015 while with Seattle that Morrison has batted first, something he did 20 times for the Mariners.

The Twins will try to extend their winning streak to five games today, but they face a formidable task: Beating Cardinals ace Carlos Martinez, who leads the National League with a 1.40 ERA.

First pitch is at 12:15, and the Twins plan to be in southern California by dinner time. Here are the lineups for today's game:

TWINS

Morrison 1B
Dozier 2B
Kepler CF
Escobar 3B
Rosario LF
Grossman RF
Garver C
Adrianza SS
Odorizzi RHP

CARDINALS

Carpenter 2B
DeJong SS
J. Martinez 1B
Ozuna LF
Fowler RF
Bader CF
Garcia 3B
Pena C
C. Martinez RHP

Twins complete mini-sweep over mistake-prone St. Louis Cardinals **Dan Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 8, 2018**

ST. LOUIS — Apparently, the Twins finally grew bored with beating themselves. For now, at least, they are more than content to let their opponents self-immolate.

It happened again Tuesday afternoon at Busch Stadium, of all places, where the branding is strong and the audience gleefully applauds productive outs as if they are sitting in a game-show studio. A pair of fifth-inning errors by the St. Louis Cardinals' corner infielders allowed the Twins to break open a one-run game on Robbie Grossman's two-run double and race to a 7-1 victory and a sweep of the two-game interleague sampler.

"We know the Cardinals and their tradition and what they can do," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Maybe we caught them at the right time. Who knows? But we'll see them again next week."

Winning their fifth straight and sixth in seven games, the Twins completed their first-ever sweep here and also became the first opponent to hand the Cardinals back-to-back losses at home this season. The National League Central leaders dropped consecutive games here a month ago, but those defeats were split between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Milwaukee Brewers.

The Twins outscored the Cardinals by a combined 13-1 in these two wins with the rematch set for May 15-16 at Target Field.

"We just played good baseball all the way around," Grossman said. "We pitched it, we hit it and we played good defense, and that's the recipe for winning games."

Right-hander Jake Odorizzi, pitching with a pass list of 16 and 45 minutes from his hometown of Highland, Ill., gave up a two-out homer to Jose Martinez in the first inning but allowed just one more hit (Francisco Pena's leadoff single in the third). Odorizzi (3-2) used up 93 pitches on a warm afternoon in his five innings, but he got as much support from his bullpen as he did from the Twins' offense.

Three Twins relievers handled the final 12 outs as the final 18 Cardinals went in order with four strikeouts and four balls out of the infield.

Odorizzi also did his job at the plate, becoming the first Twins pitcher with two sacrifice bunts in a game since Glen Perkins at the same park in 2009.

"We went through the negative earlier and came out the other side," Odorizzi said. "We didn't play well during the last road trip, and it really showed our sloppiness and rustiness. I think we're all starting to see what the real Twins team can do."

Carlos Martinez, the NL earned-run average leader, loaded the bases in the second and gave up a sacrifice fly to Ehire Adrianza on an 0-2 slider. Streaking Eddie Rosario singled and scored in both the second and the fourth, the latter run coming on Mitch Garver's sharp single to left and a fielding error by Marcell Ozuna.

Brian Dozier's leadoff chopper in the fifth glanced off the glove of third baseman Greg Garcia, and two outs later he moved to third when Martinez failed to glove Rosario's liner. Grossman, reaching safely for the sixth time in as many trips, followed with a double into the right-center gap.

Opponents were 2 for 42 against Martinez with runners in scoring position before Grossman jumped on the first pitch after drawing a pair of four-pitch walks his first two at-bats.

Half of the Twins' runs off Martinez were unearned, pushing his ERA from 1.40 to 1.62. That's still lower than any qualifying ERA in the majors, save for Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole of the Houston Astros.

Logan Morrison, starting in the leadoff spot for the first time since July 9, 2015 with the Seattle Mariners, added an RBI single in the sixth. All 20 of Morrison's career leadoff starts came that season under manager Lloyd McClendon for a 76-win team.

Morrison entered with a .290 on-base percentage in 93 plate appearances out of the leadoff spot and fell to 6-for-28 (.214) with runners in scoring position earlier Tuesday as Joe Mauer got the day off.

Eduardo Escobar added a two-run homer in the seventh, tying him with Rosario for the team lead with seven home runs. It was just the second homer from the right side for the switch-hitting Escobar.

"It's a very well-rounded group and a very complete group," Odorizzi said. "We have the ability to do something really special if we continue to play this way."

Byron Buxton runs the bases, could return Thursday in Anaheim

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Byron Buxton seemed to pass his final test on Tuesday morning, running the bases at Busch Stadium in a variety of scenarios in order to see if his fractured left big toe could hold up under game conditions.

Afterward, Buxton huddled with team medical staff and Twins manager Paul Molitor, and was unable to hide a slight smile while meeting with the media.

"I'm pretty excited," the Twins center fielder said. "I've been out long enough. I've got the itch to get back out there and just try to keep the squad going and keep bringing in the wins."

Buxton said he's been told hairline fractures such as his can heal in six weeks or so. Tuesday marked 16 days since he fouled a ball off his foot on April 22 in Bradenton, Fla., in the second at-bat of his only rehab game for Class A Fort Myers.

"It's possible I could re-aggravate it," Buxton said. "It depends on certain ways I cut. I've kind of figured out what I can tolerate. I'll try to be as smart as possible and also be as aggressive as I can."

Molitor said more discussions would be held with team officials back in the Twin Cities as well as medical staff before deciding whether to activate Buxton in time for Thursday's opener of a four-game series against the Los Angeles Angels in Anaheim. Molitor said "there's some momentum" toward skipping a rehab assignment and throwing Buxton back into the fire four weeks after his last game at the major league level (April 12).

The migraines that sidelined him while the Twins visited Puerto Rico have not returned.

"Physically, we want him to be at a level where he's ready to play every day," Molitor said. "If he looks like he's ready to go, we'll have to make that decision over the next 48 hours."

Buxton joked about not being in baseball shape.

"I want to say I'm out of shape, but I know I'm not out of shape," he said. "I feel pretty good. It's tolerable. We'll see what happens from there."

The Twins, using Max Kepler and Ryan LaMarre to patrol center field during Buxton's absence, lost 12 of their first 14 games after he went down but have rallied to win six of their past seven games.

Buxton, who hasn't been caught stealing in nearly a full calendar year, said he wouldn't have any problem reclaiming his burst on the bases.

"The pain isn't going to hurt me," he said. "As long as I can get that extra 90 feet and get closer to scoring, that's the point. Once I get back out there, I'm not going to be cautious. I'm going to go out there and play my game and just let it play out. If something else happens, it happens."

CLOSE CALL

Kolten Wong wanted to be a Twin.

Drafted out of Hawaii's Kamehameha High School in the 16th round in 2008, Wong, now the Cardinals' second baseman, was a defensively challenged catcher. The Twins planned to move him to second base, but they refused to meet his \$100,000 bonus demand.

Their top offer was about \$75,000, which gave Wong enough room to negotiate a full ride to the University of Hawaii, a rarity for modern college baseball programs. Three years later, the St. Louis Cardinals took him 22nd overall and gave him a \$1.3 million signing bonus

He is under club control through 2021, playing on a five-year, \$25 million deal after producing 8.4 career wins above replacement.

"It's kind of funny to think right now," Wong said. "I don't want to throw (the Twins) under the bus, but it wasn't that much money back then. It went down to the last day. It just made sense to go to the University of Hawaii."

Also unsigned from that Twins draft, which yielded Aaron Hicks at No. 14 overall, were current Houston Astros center fielder George Springer (48th round) and left-handers Tyler Anderson (50th round) and Adam Conley (32nd).

Was Wong open to signing had the Twins been more aggressive from the start?

"Absolutely, I was," he said. "There were no ifs, ands or maybes. I knew. I didn't want a lot. It just took a little bit more to get me, and they didn't want to do it, so I felt like college was the way to go."

In 2009, the Twins took a shortstop named Brian Dozier in the eighth round out of Southern Mississippi. Dozier moved to second base in 2012, and the rest is history.

"Obviously now, when you look at somebody like a Brian Dozier, you're like, 'OK, things worked out for a reason,'" Wong said.

Escobar, Odorizzi lead Twins to 7-1 win over Cardinals

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | May 8, 2018

ST. LOUIS — Amid a bitterly cold April that led to four weather-related postponements, the Minnesota Twins never really had a chance to reap the rewards of a busy offseason.

Now that the weather's turned, the Twins are starting to live up to the lofty expectations that followed the franchise's first postseason appearance in seven seasons.

Led by a strong pitching performance from Jake Odorizzi and a two-run home by Eduardo Escobar, Minnesota beat the St. Louis Cardinals 7-1 on Tuesday for a season-high fifth straight victory.

The win capped a two-game series sweep for the Twins, who pulled within two games of .500 and have won 14 of their last 17 games against National League teams. For a team that had lost 11 of 12 a week ago, the turnaround has been a welcomed relief — along with playing regularly after last month's postponements.

"It's hard to have an All-Star break in April," Odorizzi said. "We didn't play good on that road trip and it showed. Now we got that behind us and playing good baseball, I think we see what the real Twins can do."

Odorizzi (3-2) allowed just two hits in five innings and one run, a homer by Jose Martinez in the first inning. The right-hander combined with three relievers to retire the final 18 batters of the game.

WATCH: Escobar launches 2-run homer into second deck

Escobar had two of Minnesota's 10 hits. Robbie Grossman had a two-run double in the fifth inning as the Twins won for the sixth time in seven games.

"We're playing better in all phases right now," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We're executing, especially over the last handful of days. We caught them at the right time I guess."

Carlos Martinez (3-2) saw his stretch of six straight starts allowing one or fewer runs end. The right-hander allowed four runs in five innings, with two of the runs unearned on a day when the Cardinals matched their season worst with three errors.

The Cardinals had just two hits in the loss and six hits combined in the two games against the Twins. St. Louis has now lost two in a row after a season-best five-game winning streak, including a weekend sweep of the Chicago Cubs that ended with a 14-inning victory at nearly 1 a.m. Monday.

"It looks like this weekend might have caught up with us a little bit, but we've got to play better and we know that," St. Louis manager Mike Matheny said. "... They've got a good offense, but we didn't show them our team."

ROSARIO'S STREAK

Minnesota's Eddie Rosario extended his hitting streak to nine games with his second-inning single. The outfielder finished 2 for 5 and has now hit safely in 11 of his last 12 games — batting .396 (21 for 53) during that stretch.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Molitor said Gold Glove center fielder Byron Buxton ran the bases before the game and could return as soon as Thursday. Buxton has been out since April 12th with a hairline fracture of his left big toe.

Cardinals: Center fielder Tommy Pham missed a second straight game with a lingering hip abductor injury. Matheny said giving Pham off on Tuesday made sense with Wednesday an off day. The 30-year-old is likely to return to the lineup against San Diego on Thursday.

UP NEXT

Twins: Minnesota has off on Wednesday before beginning a four-game series at the Los Angeles Angels on Thursday. Right-hander Jose Berrios (3-3, 3.98 ERA) is scheduled to start for the Twins. He allowed four or more runs in each of his last three starts.

Cardinals: Miles Mikolas (4-0, 2.70 ERA) starts for St. Louis when it opens a four-game series at San Diego on Thursday. The right-hander threw seven scoreless innings against the Chicago Cubs in his last start. He's struck out 31 and walked only two batters in 40 innings this season.

Sta Tuesday: Romero's place in history after first two MLB starts
Ryan Lund | Fox Sports North | May 8, 2018

It looks like Fernando Romero is here to stay.

It is, after all, kind of hard to send down a guy with a 0.00 ERA.

The hard-throwing right-hander was dealing again Monday night in his second big-league start, bringing his career numbers to 14 strikeouts, seven hits and six walks in 11 2/3 innings of shutout baseball.

After kicking off his career with 5 2/3 shutout innings and five strikeouts, he upped the ante across the board in the follow-up, going an even six innings with nine strikeouts.

He's just the seventh pitcher in MLB history to post a line of five-plus innings, five-plus strikeouts and no runs in each of his first two starts. It's a list that also includes some surprisingly pedestrian company: Kyle Davies, Kazuhisa Ishii, Carlos Hernandez, Tom Phoebus, Karl Spooner and Al Worthington.

More broadly, he's just the 20th pitcher ever to go the first two starts if his career without allowing a run.

Player	Tm	Year	W	GS	IP	H	R	ER	BB	K
Mike Wright	BAL	2015	1	2	14.1	7	0	0	3	10
Al Worthington	NYG	1953	2	2	18	6	0	0	5	13
Karl Spooner	BRO	1954	2	2	18	7	0	0	6	27
Ryan Sadowski	SFG	2009	2	2	13	7	0	0	4	6
Fernando Romero	MIN	2018	2	2	11.2	7	0	0	6	14
Tom Phoebus	BAL	1966	2	2	18	9	0	0	5	15
James Parr	ATL	2008	1	2	12	7	0	0	3	8
Larry McWilliams	ATL	1978	2	2	13	9	0	0	2	3
Vin Mazzaro	OAK	2009	2	2	13.2	8	0	0	4	5
Johnny Marcum	PHA	1933	2	2	18	10	0	0	9	7
Kenta Maeda	LAD	2016	1	2	12	10	0	0	1	8
Scott Lewis	CLE	2008	2	2	14	6	0	0	2	8
Kazuhisa Ishii	LAD	2002	2	2	11.2	4	0	0	6	15
Carlos Hernandez	HOU	2001	1	2	13	7	0	0	3	14
Chi Chi Gonzalez	TEX	2015	2	2	14.2	5	0	0	7	4
Dave Ferriss	BOS	1945	2	2	18	12	0	0	11	9
Vaughn Eshelman	BOS	1995	2	2	13	7	0	0	2	4
Kyle Davies	ATL	2005	2	2	10.1	9	0	0	4	12
Scott Chiamparino	TEX	1990	0	2	12	7	0	0	2	7
Andrew Albers	MIN	2013	2	2	17.1	6	0	0	1	4

A few more Romero-related fun facts:

Originally signed by the Twins as an international free agent in 2011, Romero entered 2018 as MLB Pipeline's 66th-ranked overall prospect, and Minnesota's No. 2 prospect, behind only 2017 No. 1 overall pick Royce Lewis.

Romero missed most of 2014 and all of 2015 after undergoing Tommy John Surgery, but had made his way from Single-A Cedar Rapids all the way to Triple-A Rochester by the beginning of 2018.

He's the third pitcher in the last 30 years to make his major-league debut with the Twins and win his first two starts, joining one-time All-Star Eric Milton (1998) and Andrew Albers (2013).

Romero's performance certainly calls to mind Albers' Twins debut. The Canadian started his career with 17 1/3 scoreless innings over two games, a Twins record, though certainly one that's well within Romero's reach now.

In Twins history at least, it's tough to find many comparable debuts.

There's Albers, who followed up his record by allowing eight hits and five earned runs in seven innings in his third start, and didn't win a game the rest of his rookie season.

Anthony Swarzak pitched seven shutout innings against the Milwaukee Brewers in 2009, and Milton pitched six scoreless against the Kansas City Royals in 1998.

Then there's utility man Cesar Tovar, who pitched the first inning of a game against the Oakland A's in 1968, in which he allowed no hits, played all nine positions and helped the Twins to a 2-1 win.

From there, 10 players — including our very own Bert Blyleven — had a one-run debut, while another 10 allowed two runs.

Player	Date	Opp	Rslt	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	Pit
Eric Milton	4/5/1998	KCR	W 10-1	6	6	0	0	2	1	88
Anthony Swarzak	5/23/2009	MIL	W 6-2	7	5	0	0	2	3	98
Andrew Albers	8/6/2013	KCR	W 7-0	8.1	4	0	0	1	2	109
Fernando Romero	5/2/2018	TOR	W 4-0	5.2	4	0	0	3	5	97

Statistics courtesy of baseball-reference

Lance Lynn laments lack of loyalty in baseball after unpleasant free-agent experience

Judd Zulgad | ESPN 1500 | May 8, 2018

Lance Lynn did not get a chance to start for the Twins during their two-game sweep in St. Louis, but the former Cardinals pitcher did get an opportunity to discuss his less-than-pleasant experience on the free-agent market this winter and it sounds as if the veteran righthander came away a bit disillusioned.

In an interview with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Lynn talked about the lack of loyalty in the game. This came after Lynn turned down the Cardinals' qualifying offer of \$17.4 million in November because he thought he would get more on the open market. Instead, he and several other free agents found there was little interest in their services.

Lynn, who had spent his first seven seasons with the Cardinals, finally signed a one-year, \$12 million deal with the Twins in March. That means he likely will end up elsewhere next season.

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

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

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

Lynn, who went 11-8 with a 3.43 ERA with the Cardinals last season, got off to a terrible start with the Twins. He posted an 8.37 ERA while going 0-3 in five April starts. Lynn did earn his first victory of the season on May 5, giving up two runs and eight hits with no walks and seven strikeouts in an 8-4 victory over the White Sox.

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

Zulgad: Fernando Romero's success signifies arrival of the good new days for Twins pitching

Judd Zulgad | ESPN 1500 | May 8, 2018

There is nothing about Fernando Romero that screams rookie.

Not the righthander's outstanding stuff, not his composure on the mound and not the way the native of the Dominican Republic handles himself in postgame interviews, electing to answer questions himself rather than using the assistance of an interpreter. At 23, Romero already looks at ease in the big leagues.

Major league hitters don't look nearly as comfortable facing him — Romero features a fastball that can reach the upper 90s, a nasty slider and also has added a change up — which is great news for a franchise that was pitching poor for far too long but looks as if it might end up with two top-of-the-line rotation guys in the recently recalled Romero and soon-to-be 24-year-old righthander Jose Berrios.

Berrios remains a work in progress. He can be brilliant when his stuff is working — his three-hit, 11-strikeout effort in seven innings of a 4-0 victory over the White Sox on April 12 is a prime example — but in his three losses this season he has given up five runs in 4.2 innings to Seattle, five runs in four innings to the Yankees and four runs in three innings to Cincinnati.

While it remains uncertain on a start-to-start basis which Berrios we are going to see, the same has not been true in Romero's first two outings with the Twins. Romero was summoned from Triple-A Rochester to make his first start big-league start on May 2 at Target Field and proceeded to throw 5.2 shutout innings, giving up four hits, three walks and striking out five in a 4-0 victory over Toronto that ended a three-game losing streak.

The Twins have won six of seven games since, including an impressive two-game sweep of the Cardinals on Monday and Tuesday in St. Louis. Romero's second start was the first game against the Redbirds and he continued his shutout streak by giving up three hits over six scoreless innings with three walks and nine strikeouts in a 6-0 victory.

The Twins were sitting at 9-16 entering Romero's first start and have now pulled within two games of .500 (15-17) and were within one game of first-place Cleveland in the American League Central entering Tuesday night's games.

One would think that Romero is going to have a clunker of a start at some point, but the good thing is I'm not sure that's going to bother him. When things aren't going well for Berrios you can see the gears start to turn in his head and the concern set in. Romero appears as if he might have a defiant streak in him, and that's meant in a good way.

Romero also has faced adversity before, having missed most of the 2014 season and all of 2015 after having Tommy John surgery.

Romero rebounded from a nearly two-year absence to post a 1.93 ERA in five starts with Low-A Cedar Rapids and a 1.88 ERA in 11 starts at High-A Fort Myers in 2016. He then went 11-9 with a 3.53 ERA at Double-A Chattanooga in 2017. Romero impressed in spring training with the Twins this year and did not surrender a hit, striking out eight and walking one in eight innings over four appearances.

That wasn't enough to win him a spot in the rotation, but when veteran Phil Hughes' struggles made it clear he couldn't continue in the rotation, the Twins went to Romero. That move has resulted in 11.2 scoreless from Romero, making it the second-longest streak by a Twins pitcher to begin a career, trailing only lefty Andrew Albers' stretch of 17.2 scoreless innings in his first two starts in 2013.

Jayson Stark

✓

@jaysonst

A stat from this fun segment:

Fernando Romero (15 2/3 IP is the only active pitcher to debut with 2 scoreless starts of this many innings & this many strikeouts - for any team!

Last to do it: Kaz Ishii for the 2002 Dodgers. <https://twitter.com/1500ESPN/status/993891408263163904> ...

Albers ended up making 10 starts for the Twins that season then was not heard from again in the bigs until 2015 when he surfaced with Toronto for one game. Albers made his way back to the Twins to make six appearances in 2016 and pitched in nine games for Seattle last season. He is currently keeping his dream of playing alive by pitching for the Orix Buffaloes of the Nippon Professional Baseball league.

Albers' early success in Minnesota was a nice story but he was a flash in the pan and joins a long list of Twins starters in recent years who all seem to run together.

Romero, meanwhile, appears to be something special. The type of pitcher who is worth the price of admission to watch. The Twins haven't had many of those in recent years, certainly not since moving into Target Field, but Romero and, ultimately, Berrios have a chance to change that.

Pending free agent Eduardo Escobar is crushing it for the Twins

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | May 8, 2018

For years Eduardo Escobar has produced in short spurts for the Twins and then watched as he was relegated back to bench duties as a backup infielder. To my knowledge, he never complained about the hand he'd been dealt. He simply kept smiling, for the most part, and talked about being ready for the next time he got his opportunity.

Well, his opportunity has come around in a big way this season and so has his bat. Right now, Eduardo Escobar is the best thing the Twins have going for them.

In Tuesday's win against the St. Louis Cardinals, Escobar had two more hits, including a 2-run home run into the upper deck in left field, his 7th long ball this season. When the Twins learned the surprising and unfortunate news that Jorge Polanco had tested positive for steroids and would miss the first 80 games of the season, they turned to Escobar. How many teams would be so fortunate to have a backup infielder capable of filling in as well as Escobar has in the first five weeks of this season?

And Escobar's been doubly valuable with the glove, because when Miguel Sano found his way onto the disabled list with a strained hamstring, Escobar slid over and played third base. The Twins didn't have a great replacement lined up to play third base, but Escobar's flexibility allowed them to find a backup at shortstop in Ehire Adrianza and Gregorio Petit. Clearly that's the route they preferred, and it was made possible because Escobar can play both positions admirably.

His bat has helped carry the Twins through a tough portion of their schedule, one in which the team lost 10 of 12 games at one point. For the season he's hitting .309/.366/.609, including his current torrid stretch of reaching base safely in 15 consecutive games. Over that span the small but strong infielder with some pop in his bat is hitting .364/.435/.745. He batted cleanup Tuesday, and didn't exactly look out of place.

It's no sure thing what the future holds for the Twins' roster, from Sano at third base to Polanco's eventual return in July. After 3 rounds of raises in the salary arbitration process, Escobar, the switch-hitting infielder with power, will be a free agent at the end of this season. What we can say at this point is that he's been a great fill-in when the Twins have needed him most.

He's also an irrepresible optimist and one of the favorite jokesters among his Twins teammates in the clubhouse. One of the running jokes — aside from a now-legendary encounter with Reddit's favorite actor Nicolas Cage — is that Escobar attributes his power to the restaurant chain Fogo de Chao. He's given so much free publicity to the Brazilian steakhouse chain that he should have stock options in the company.

The legend has it that Escobar, who credits his movie-watching habit for helping him learn English, thanked Cage for his roles in the movies. To which Cage allegedly responded: "Thank you, Escobar."

And if we're being honest about it, that's precisely what the Twins should be saying at this moment, too.

Thank you, Escobar.

Three questions: Twins' winning streak hits five as a big series in Anaheim looms

Dan Hayes | MLB.com | May 9, 2018

Wasn't too long ago, the Twins were in dire need of a day off.

It seemed as if a club that wanted to make the postseason had instead invested more resources into discovering new ways to lose. Whether it was an absence of timely hitting, a series of bad bounces and dropped fly balls, or poor all-around pitching, a Twins club that played well early in the season suddenly lost 12 of 14 games.

Yet five days later, here we are.

The Twins are headed into their first day off since mid-April having won five straight contests, including a 7-1 victory at the St. Louis Cardinals on Tuesday afternoon. After not winning any series since beating the Houston Astros twice in a three-game set from April 9-11, the Twins have won consecutive road series after a pair of victories in St. Louis followed three straight wins over the White Sox in Chicago.

Tuesday's victory was yet another sign the Twins' best baseball may yet still be ahead of them.

Behind a good start from Jake Odorizzi, who limited St. Louis to a run in five innings, and four scoreless innings from the bullpen, the Twins'

pitching staff continued one of its strongest stretches of the season. Over the last five games, Twins pitchers have a 2.40 ERA in 45 innings, which has dropped their overall ERA to 4.75, down from 5.10.

Much of that can be attributed to a starting rotation that has finally begun to consistently contribute. Odorizzi's 93-pitch outing was the shortest of the bunch from a rotation that nearly averaged six innings per start the past five games.

While they have played the fewest games in the majors, poor performances have been a big factor in Twins starters posting the second-fewest innings among all starting rotations in the majors this season. The trend has turned over the past five games as Twins starters have a 3.03 ERA in 29 2/3 innings during the winning streak.

Jake Odorizzi

Jake Odorizzi had one of his stronger outings of the young season as the Twins beat the Cardinals, 7-1. (Credit: Jeff Curry/USA TODAY Sports) Another positive development for the Twins has been an overall thaw with runners in scoring position.

For two weeks, the Twins couldn't buy a clutch hit, nor could they add on to a lead. It left them vulnerable to every possible bad bounce and it felt as if they ran into each and every one.

But with two outs in the fifth inning on Tuesday and the Twins up 2-1, Robbie Grossman made the Cardinals pay for a pair of errors with a two-run double to right-center field. Grossman's two-out knock was sandwiched in between RBI singles by Mitch Garver and Logan Morrison. By the time Eduardo Escobar homered in the seventh, the Twins' fifth straight victory was well in hand.

The Twins finished the game 4-for-10 with runners in scoring position and went 8-for-22 in St. Louis. During their winning streak, the Twins are 17-for-51 overall.

Not bad for a team that is still only hitting .226/.303/.352 with runners in scoring position.

Unlike Chicago, it's harder to be skeptical about a pair of wins against a good St. Louis club. There's no question the Twins may have caught the Cardinals at the right time, coming off Sunday's 14-inning win over the Cubs and with Yadier Molina on the sidelines. But the Twins continue to face similar issues with Miguel Sanó, Byron Buxton and Ervin Santana all out of the lineup.

With that in mind, let's look at some upcoming questions facing the Twins.

What can we make of this streak?

Given that we at The Athletic Minnesota spent much of the losing streak preaching patience and not getting caught up too much one way or the other in that stretch, we'll do the same here. This has been a great five days for the Twins. They've emerged from a deep funk in which a considerable amount of the fan base abandoned them (I have page-view numbers to back this) and rediscovered how to play clean baseball. They showed that the team that started the season 8-5 is still alive and well.

But beyond that, it's just another five-game stretch and it's hardly the time to make wild predictions that the Twins are headed for the playoffs. However, we will offer this — overcoming a horrendous run like that, especially when you're missing several key contributors, can be a catalyst for a team. The Twins — who have already guaranteed themselves a .500 road trip — still have four big games upcoming in Anaheim and would be in a great spot if they could at least split the series.

How much room does this team have for growth?

As was noted all along, the Twins reside in the American League Central, which isn't shaping up to be a good division. The overall product is feeble at best, even if the Cleveland Indians end up performing as they were projected to.

The Twins have already beaten the White Sox in four of five meetings this season and still have 38 to go against Detroit and Kansas City, both of whom are on the same level as Chicago. If they play extremely well against those teams and can step up against the rest of the league, there's no reason the Twins can't at least stick around in the wild-card chase and pose a challenge to Cleveland for the division. The wild-card race is going to be unquestionably difficult this season as the disparity between the haves and the have nots becomes greater. New York and Boston both look like potential 100-win teams and one is going to be in the wild-card mix. The Twins should have a pretty good idea about what the Angels are after this weekend — right now they appear to be locked into a similar race with Houston.

Considering that they're 32 games in and have received minimal contributions from Morrison and Lance Lynn and have been without Buxton and Sanó for a large portion of the season, the Twins can still feel OK about themselves. All of those factors along with the eventual return of Santana should at least lend to some level of confidence they can turn things around. Given where they were only five days ago, that's a much better outlook.

Byron Buxton

Byron Buxton's return is imminent. Miguel Sanó and Ervin Santana not so much. (Credit: Jeffrey Becker/USA TODAY Sports)
When will Buxton, Sanó and Santana be back?

While The Athletic wasn't in St. Louis the past two days, prior to that it was easy to see how great Buxton felt about the recent progress he has made. With every passing day, Buxton's big toe on his left foot allowed him to do a little bit more. On Tuesday, Buxton told Mike Berardino of the Pioneer Press "he's excited" after further testing out the toe.

Given the way manager Paul Molitor has spoken about it, it's not hard to imagine Buxton being activated off the disabled list when the team starts its series in Anaheim on Thursday. Though it may take his bat some time to catch up after he missed nearly a month, Buxton has the ability to make a huge impact with his glove alone and the Twins would love to add his energy back into the lineup.

Sanó isn't quite as far along as Buxton as he has been ruled out from rejoining the team on its current 10-game trip. However, the Twins noted there have been encouraging signs for Sanó, who went on the DL with a Grade 1 hamstring strain. He looks far more likely to return during the team's upcoming homestand, which starts next Tuesday against St. Louis.

Lastly is Santana, who has been making steady progress over the past few weeks. Still, as of Saturday, Santana had only reached the point where he's thrown 30 pitches off a mound, none of which were sliders. Santana is unquestionably on the mend but he still has a lot of progress to make. After he's had enough sessions off the mound, he'll throw a pair of live batting practice sessions. Then he graduates to extended spring training and then he'll pitch on a minor-league rehab assignment.

All of that is to say, let's not make too much of Fernando Romero's first two starts — both of which were fantastic and provided the Twins with a huge lift. Instead, let the kid continue to find his way in the majors and worry about his future more when Santana is ready to return.