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Berrios rebounds, K's 10 in win vs. Cardinals

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | May 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- After scuffling through four subpar starts, Jose Berrios turned it around against the Cardinals, finding his curveball again while striking out 10 over 7 1/3 strong innings, and was backed offensively by Byron Buxton's speed and a two-run homer from Bobby Wilson in a 4-1 win on Tuesday night at Target Field.

Berrios, who had an 8.84 ERA over his last four starts and didn't register any swinging strikes with his curveball against the Angels on Thursday, had much better command and recorded nine swinging strikes with his curve and 16 overall. Berrios worked on his curveball during his bullpen session this week, aiming to correct his arm speed while throwing the pitch.

View Full Game Coverage

"That was the Berrios everybody in this room is used to seeing," Wilson said. "That stuff was front of the line stuff right there. His breaking ball was sharp and it broke late. Had some good changeups, but I think overall, his fastball command was just much better."

The lone run Berrios surrendered came in the third after allowing a leadoff single on a curve to Harrison Bader, who was moved to second on a sacrifice bunt and scored on a single from Carson Kelly. Kelly's single came on a 3-1 fastball, as Berrios worked to establish it early in the game. Berrios threw nothing but fastballs until throwing his curve to Jedd Gyorko with one out in the second, throwing just eight curveballs through his first three innings.

"The reality is I wasn't happy with those last four starts and my mindset wasn't right," Berrios said through an interpreter. "I came back to the basics and I worked hard for this outing and the result was there."

The offense was quiet early against Cardinals right-hander Jack Flaherty, not scoring until the sixth after being shut out by the Mariners in Monday's 1-0 loss. Eduardo Escobar came through with a two-out RBI single off Flaherty to tie the game after singles from Brian Dozier and Eddie Rosario.

"Esco's was kind of an icebreaker for us," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It had been a lot of innings since we had scored back in Anaheim. So it just kind of opened the gates."

Minnesota took the lead in the seventh against lefty reliever Brett Cecil with Logan Morrison sparking the rally with a double off the base of the right-field wall. Buxton dropped down a bunt against right-hander Luke Gregerson, but utilized his speed to beat out the play and force Gregerson to rush his throw to first, which sailed into right to bring home the go-ahead run.

After Buxton advanced to third on a pitch in the dirt, Wilson came up huge with his first homer with the Twins this season. Wilson was looking for a pitch to drive to the outfield to score Buxton and connected on a hanging slider for a two-run shot after fouling off a bunt attempt.

"I haven't even been close to a slider for the past few days," Wilson said. "We made some adjustments. I actually hit one off the end of the bat my previous at-bat, which was a big stepping stone for me to get to that next at-bat."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Buxton's speed kills: Buxton is the fastest player in the Majors yet again this year with an average sprint speed of 30.5 feet per second despite nursing a hairline fracture in his left big toe. Buxton reached first in 3.73 seconds on his bunt, which was his fastest time to first this season. He also reached 31.7 per second, which is well above the mark of 30 feet per second that is considered elite by Statcast™.

"It doesn't always take that perfect bunt to get on base so I put that in the back of my head," Buxton said. "I was just trying to make sure I got that bunt down."

SOUND SMART

The Twins are 3-0 against the Cardinals this year and have outscored them by a 17-2 margin.

"I don't think there's a way to come up with logic in terms of the outcomes with the lopsided total score," Molitor said. "But it doesn't reflect the closeness of the games, or at least two of the three."

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Right fielder Max Kepler made a great leaping catch up against the right-field wall to rob Jose Martinez of extra bases to end the top of the ninth. Kepler was playing deep, but got to the rocket from Martinez that had an exit velocity of 101.6 mph at a launch angle of 23 degrees, giving it a hit percentage of 83 percent.

HE SAID IT

"I think it was a combination of both better depth and lateral [movement]. I didn't see many that were left middle, middle in to those righties that have been problematic for him for the last few starts. He was getting it out and away and extended and getting some swings and misses with two strikes." -- Molitor, on Berrios' curve

UP NEXT

The two-game series against the Cardinals comes to a close on Wednesday at 12:10 p.m. CT at Target Field. Right-hander Lance Lynn (1-3, 7.34) is set to face his former team for the first time since joining the Twins on a one-year, \$12 million deal in Spring Training. Lynn is off to the worst start of his career and gave up four runs in 4 2/3 innings against the Angels his last time out. Right-hander Miles Mikolas (5-0, 2.51 ERA) starts for St. Louis.

Twins leaning on veteran backstop Wilson

Jarrid Denney | MLB.com | May 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- It didn't take long for Bobby Wilson to create a tangible impact with the Minnesota Twins. The 35-year-old catcher was called up by the Twins on May 6 to fill in for injured starter Jason Castro, and five days later he lifted a go-ahead sacrifice fly to help the Twins top the Angels on May 11.

But it is what Wilson is doing behind the scenes that might prove even more important for Minnesota. Following Monday's announcement that Castro will be sidelined for 4-6 weeks with a knee injury, Wilson will now be counted on to take a larger role.

"[He] has a lot of baseball savvy and a lot of miles traveled, he's seen about every situation in the game," Twins pitcher Kyle Gibson said. "He was comfortable Day 1 coming in, and a guy who's been around that long knows how to get to know a pitching staff and knows how to catch a game. On top of that, he's seen most of these hitters as well."

Wilson was with Minnesota during Spring Training and had a chance to familiarize himself with the team's pitching staff. Now, he will rejoin that group and try to provide a steady presence for a team that entered Tuesday with a 4.49 ERA.

Mar. 12th, 2018

A Dunedin, Fla., native, Wilson was drafted by the Giants in 2002 out of St. Petersburg College and has played in nine Major League seasons for six organizations. The professional, detail-oriented mindset that has helped him carve out a 15-year professional career could benefit the Twins immediately.

"I never want to be ill-prepared with anything that I'm doing," Wilson said. "Especially with anything on the pitcher-catcher relationship and communication. That's something I take a lot of pride in. I want the pitchers to know that I'm out there in their best interest first and foremost, and then it's whatever I can do on the offensive side to help the team win."

Wilson made his Major League debut with the Angels in 2008 and spent five years working under the tutelage of Angels' skipper and former All-Star catcher Mike Scioscia. In Los Angeles, current D-backs catcher Jeff Mathis became a mentor to Wilson and helped him sharpen his skills as a game-caller.

"He's solid in his receiving and his thought process," Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. "Pitchers are comfortable with how he presents targets and all those type of things. He's just a hard worker who knows that's a big part of him staying in the big leagues, to be able to handle a pitching staff."

The loss of Castro has been softened by the hot start of Minnesota catcher Mitch Garver, who is hitting .254 with six extra-base hits in 59 at-bats this season. Molitor hasn't yet established exact situations in which Garver or Wilson will start, and said that the Twins will evaluate matchups each day in order to decide which backstop can help the team the most.

"Both Mitch and I know that we need to show up to the ballpark prepared to play every day," Wilson said. "So I've kind of been taking the mentality of be prepared to play every day and if I'm not in the lineup, I'm still going down and catching bullpens before the game. Just so the pitchers see me and I see them."

Jose Berrios, Byron Buxton rise up to help Twins beat Cardinals
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 16, 2018

Like cod liver oil or copper bracelets, baseball has a few home remedies for fixing what ails you. One old-wives-tale cure for an enfeebled bat: bunt.

Old-fashioned or not, the medicine temporarily cured Byron Buxton and Bobby Wilson on Tuesday, and their resulting big contributions helped the Twins shake off their offensive doldrums and beat the Cardinals for the fifth consecutive meeting, 4-1 at Target Field.

Jose Berrios broke out of a monthlong rut as well, restoring his curveball to its previous unhittable sharpness and pitching brilliantly for 7½ innings. Berrios, who had allowed four or more runs in four consecutive starts, gave up only two singles and a walk while striking out 10. Relievers Addison Reed and Fernando Rodney retired all five hitters they faced, and the Twins held the Cardinals to two hits for the second time in eight days.

"Wow," Wilson said of his first regular-season look at Berrios from behind the plate. "That's the Berrios everyone in this [clubhouse] is used to seeing. Obviously I wasn't here the first month to see it, but that stuff [Tuesday] is front-of-the-line stuff right there."

It wouldn't have mattered if the Twins had remained impotent at the plate, though, and Cardinals phenom Jack Flaherty seemed ready to extend their scoring slump. The 22-year-old righthander never allowed a runner beyond first base in the first five innings, extending the Twins' slump to 16 consecutive scoreless innings, and only three runs over 32 innings. But three consecutive two-out singles, capped by Eduardo Escobar's run-scoring loop to center, stopped the skid, tied the score at 1-1 and ended Flaherty's night.

The Twins put the Cardinals away an inning later, and squaring around was a big part of it. After Logan Morrison led off with a double off the right-field wall, Buxton — 1-for-13 since recovering from a fractured toe — came to the plate with instructions to bunt him to third. Buxton took two pitches, then tapped an 88-mph fastball from reliever Luke Gregerson toward the mound.

Gregerson hustled in to field it but, in seeing Buxton streak toward first base, hurried his throw and it sailed down the right-field line, scoring Morrison with the go-ahead run.

“There’s a lesson that we’ve tried to preach to him about those sacrifice bunts — he puts it right out in the middle, didn’t really get it close to the line, and he still beats it out,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “He doesn’t have to be perfect. It’s more about giving himself a chance. But he did his job, and it was rewarded.”

Two batters later, with Buxton on third, Wilson — 1-for-12 since being called up to the majors — decided to try a slump-breaking bunt, too. He sized up an inside slider from Gregerson, pushed his bat at the ball ... and fouled it off.

Lucky thing, too. Gregerson’s next pitch, also a slider, hung in the middle of the plate, and Wilson crushed it deep into the left-field stands, increasing the Twins’ mastery over the Cardinals in three games this season to 17 runs to 2. It was Wilson’s first home run since Sept. 21, 2016, when he was with Tampa Bay, or as Fox broadcaster Ken Rosenthal informed Wilson, 601 days ago.

Video (01:39): Twins righthander Jose Berrios says, through interpreter Elvis Martinez, that his emphasis on fixing his curveball between starts paid off during a two-hitter against St. Louis on Tuesday.

Wilson was just glad to make contact, he said. “I don’t think I’ve sniffed a slider in the past week,” the 34-year-old veteran said. He and hitting coach James Rowson had worked on sliders the past few days, and “I actually hit one off the end of my bat the previous at-bat, which was a big steppingstone for me.”

And maybe the bunt — excuse me, the missed bunt — helped a little bit, too. One old-school baseball savant seemed to think so.

“I told those guys,” Molitor said with a smile. “If you play the game right and try to bunt, you’re going to get a guaranteed hit.”

Despite their flaws, these Twins have a rare ace in the hole

Jim Souhan | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

In a few weeks, the Twins might have the option of employing a six-man pitching rotation, a phenomenon as rare in Minnesota as a Viking parade.

This is a franchise that, while winning the 1987 World Series, employed Les Straker — who finished his career with 10 big-league victories — as a third starter.

This is a franchise that signed Bartolo Colon last summer so he could belly-bump them toward the playoffs, a franchise that hasn’t drafted and developed a long-term, clear-cut No. 1 starter since changeup artist Brad Radke was leading pitching staffs all too familiar with the notion of launch angle in the ’90s.

Tuesday night at Target Field, Jose Berrios re-established his bona fides, ending a streak of four straight poor starts by striking out 10 and allowing just two hits in 7½ innings against the St. Louis Cardinals.

He followed a plan he should tattoo on the inside of his eyelids, pounding the strike zone with his fastball early, working quickly, and rehabilitating his curve.

“We talked from the beginning that we didn’t want to get too far out front in terms of him being the ace, because he’s not quite at the consistent point that I think he’s going to get to,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “I think he’s [getting] better.”

If Berrios is going to resume pitching like a young star, Fernando Romero is going to continue pitching like a young star, Jake Odorizzi and Kyle Gibson continue to perform reliably and Lance Lynn rights himself, the Twins will have an interesting decision to make if and when Ervin Santana returns from the disabled list in a few weeks.

They could employ a six-man rotation. More likely, Molitor will have to eject a quality arm from the rotation.

The sentence, “It’s a good problem to have,” still contains the word “problem.”

Lynn, who will start Wednesday against the Cardinals, his former team, is currently the most logical candidate for demotion to the bullpen. Lynn has never finished a major league season with an ERA higher than 3.97. His ERA this season is 7.34.

Would the Twins demote a pitcher they signed as a prominent free agent two months into the season?

What are their other options?

They could move Romero to the bullpen, where his 98-mph fastball would dominate, but Romero might be their current and future ace.

Odorizzi profiles as a starter. Santana was the team ace last year, and one of the primary reasons the Twins made the playoffs. Gibson is defying the columnist (me) who suggested last year he should be placed on a slow train to Rochester.

One tactic the Twins could employ is slow-playing Santana's return. Usually, these kinds of "problems" solve themselves. A pitcher slumps or gets hurt, and Santana steps into the available gap.

There is a different scenario, a dream scenario, for the team: The Twins employ a six-man rotation from the time of Santana's return through mid-July, and then become the first contending Twins team ever to deal away starting pitching at the trade deadline.

Lynn is signed to a one-year deal. Santana has a \$14 million option for 2019. If Romero and Berrios are good enough to lead the staff, either could be expendable in this everything-transpires-perfectly script.

Forgive me if this all sounds strange, or overly optimistic, but I have seen the Twins trade for Scott Klinglebeck and Phil Humber. I have seen Rich Robertson act as staff ace, and J.D. Durbin be treated as a prospect.

The 2018 Twins have been, occasionally, offensively inept, defensively sloppy, confused on the bases and lacking in late-game situations.

Entering Tuesday, they ranked just 17th in baseball in starting pitching ERA. They remain under .500 despite a strong road trip to Chicago, St. Louis and Anaheim, Calif.

Their six starting pitchers offer reason for hope and curiosity, especially after Berrios made the Twins 3-0 this season against the estimable St. Louis Cardinals.

Max Kepler's improvement at plate is one part power, one part patience

Chris Hine | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

Max Kepler wasn't about to give away any secrets. The Twins outfielder was talking recently about his improvement at the plate and said: "I'm aware of what my pitch is."

The natural follow-up: "Well, what is your pitch?"

Kepler gave a sly smile.

"I'd rather not give that away," he said. "Pitchers might be listening."

They need to be paying more attention to Kepler, who seems to be maturing in his third full season in the big leagues. If you look at Kepler's batting average, you'll notice not much has changed from a year ago — .241 in 2018 compared to .243 in 2017. But if you look a little deeper, you'd see the 25-year-old is steadily improving in a number of key areas, even if Kepler has been hitless in his past five games.

To put it simply: Kepler is hitting the ball harder more often. Perhaps the most striking statistic is the number of "barrels" he has accumulated. According to Statcast, a hitter gets a "barrel" when the launch angle and the exit velocity of a batted ball combine in a mathematical combination that typically results in an extra-base hit. Usually, the exit velocity has to be around or above 100 miles per hour and the launch angle has to be in the mid 20s to low 30s, the ideal launch angle for home runs.

Max Kepler's batting average is similar to last season, but analytics show he's hitting the ball with much more authority, Kepler only had 12 such moments of contact in 2016, 16 in 2017 but already has 10 in 2018. Kepler and hitting coach James Rowson have attributed this to Kepler getting more experience at the plate — to know when to swing at "his pitch."

"He's staying in a really strong position to hit longer, and he's calmed down at the plate," Rowson said. "The more you relax and see the ball a bit easier and you don't have that anxiety behind you, the better off you're going to be able to identify pitches."

Added Kepler: "It's all about comfortability. If you're comfortable in your environment, then you're going to perform better."

Because of that, Kepler is also striking out at a significantly lower rate — 13.4 percent of at-bats, vs. 20.1 percent in 2017.

That number has gone down because of Kepler's ability to identify breaking balls out of the pitcher's hand. After hitting only .149 last season when making contact against breaking pitches (sliders or curveballs), Kepler has increased that number to .300 this season. Teams have started to adjust, and pitchers have thrown Kepler a smaller percentage of breaking balls. Kepler faced breaking balls on 27.6 percent of pitches thrown to him in 2017. That number is down to 22.7 percent this season, per Statcast.

But Rowson wouldn't go so far as to say fastballs or breaking balls are what Kepler considers "his pitch." It's more about expectations and location.

"His best pitch is the pitch that shows up where he's looking for it," Rowson said. "Sometimes he's looking for a fastball over the plate or sometimes you say this guy is going to throw me something soft, so I'm going to look for it and hit it."

And when he hits it, he's more likely to hit it hard.

Twins coaches try to shift players' skepticism about shifts

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

When Kyle Seager came to the plate in the fourth inning of Monday's game against the Mariners, Twins shortstop Ehire Adrianza looked to the dugout for a sign, turned around and jogged 100 feet into left field. For the second time this season, the Twins shifted into a four-outfielder defensive alignment, with third baseman Eduardo Escobar left to patrol the entire left side of the infield.

"Baseball's changed a little bit, hasn't it?" Adrianza said. "Now it's four outfielders; first, it was the shift. It's always something with the computers. But if it helps us win, we have to make adjustments."

That attitude is critical to a shift's potential success, something that wasn't always there. Pitchers tend to notice when balls are hit to vacated areas, so buy-in wasn't automatic.

"When we moved to the infield shifts, there was a hesitancy of acceptance, just because we weren't embracing the fact that it wasn't going to work 100 percent of the time," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Pitchers have gotten better at understanding, OK, a ground ball is going to go through a large hole every once in a while, and it doesn't seem to turn anybody upside down. But when you start spreading your outfielders and you look and you have the whole side of the infield [vacant], I don't know if we're ready to accept that someone might get a hit, and the next guy might hit a two-run homer. The [pitcher] might say, 'What the heck are we doing?'"

It took Molitor some time to get there, too. Coach Jeff Pickler examines the data and maps out potential shifts, but Molitor said he doesn't implement every one.

"I'm not going to do it unless I have some confidence in it," Molitor said. "I've turned down opportunities a couple of times, just because of feel. I've gone with them a couple of times. We'll see if that picks up some momentum."

So far, Pickler said, the shifts have been a success, including when Seager grounded out to Escobar.

"We haven't been 100 percent, but we're on the plus side of the ledger at this point," Pickler said. "Over the past two weeks, our pitchers are top-five in baseball on balls in play, so that's a really good sign."

Draft budgeting

The Twins signed Royce Lewis, the overall No. 1 pick in the amateur draft, for \$6.725 million last June. They will have approximately the same amount to spend this year, too — on their first 10 picks.

Major League Baseball on Tuesday finalized the selection order for the 2018 draft, confirming that the Twins will own the 20th, 59th and 74th picks in the June 4-6 process, but will forfeit their third-round selection (96th overall) for signing free agent righthander Lance Lynn last March. They'll also own the 20th pick in each subsequent round.

The Twins will have a budget of \$6,705,500 to spend on their first 10 selections; only six teams will have less. Last season, the Twins were allotted a bankroll of \$13.8 million under MLB rules, which assigns bonus values to each draft slot and penalizes teams for overspending. Minnesota, for instance, was allowed to spend \$7.4 million on Lewis, but negotiated a contract of roughly \$675,000 less, money the Twins were allowed to spend on other players.

The Twins' first-round pick, 20th overall, has a slot value of \$3,120,000, while their second-round pick, the 59th overall, comes with a suggested

\$1,140,600 bonus. The Twins received a competitive-balance pick between rounds 2 and 3, the 74th selection, with a budget of \$812,000. MLB assigns a slot value to each pick in the first 10 rounds, and that constitutes the total bankroll that each team can spend. (For picks beginning in the 11th round, only bonus amounts over \$125,000 count toward the total.)

Kansas City, which will receive compensation picks for losing Lorenzo Cain and Eric Hosmer, has the largest bankroll: \$12.8 million. The Tigers own the overall No. 1 pick, which comes with an \$8,096,300 suggested bonus.

Etc.

- Escobar and Byron Buxton will hand out more than 3,000 baseball gloves to players in the age-8-and-under RBI baseball league Wednesday at 6:15 p.m. at Sibley Park in Minneapolis.

- Miguel Sano ran the bases and took batting practice, but there is no change in his condition, Molitor said. “We’re still, from my vantage point, not seeing max effort, which we’re going to need to see,” Molitor said. “He’s swinging the bat fine. It’s just making sure he can do everything he needs to on a baseball field.”

Postgame: Fernando Rodney extends scoreless streak to eight innings

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

A couple of extras from the Twins’ fifth consecutive victory (dating back to 2015) against the Cardinals:

The image of Fernando Rodney trudging off the field at Yankee Stadium, after giving up Gary Sanchez’s walk-off home run, may stick with some fans. But that’s not the Rodney that Paul Molitor has seen since that day.

Rodney retired all three hitters he faced in the ninth inning on Tuesday, the eighth consecutive scoreless inning he has pitched, and he converted his sixth consecutive save opportunity.

But he’s not really doing anything different, Molitor protested.

“I wasn’t making excuses [for him] early. I don’t think things were really going his way, even when he made pitches,” Molitor said. “The home run in New York was a 96, 97-mph fastball, up and in to a hitter, where he was trying to go. He had a bad hop in Tampa Bay. He’s throwing strikes, walks haven’t been a major issue, and the changeup seems to be gaining some momentum in terms of how he’s using it, and his confidence in throwing it.”

Rodney has walked five batters in his last eight outings, still too high, especially since he has only four strikeouts in those innings. But he’s surrendered only two hits, both singles, and has seemed stronger by the day. His ERA, 6.75 once Sanchez’s homer landed, is down to 3.07 today.

“His fastball, he threw the first one 89 [mph] tonight, and then he hit 95 later on,” Molitor marveled. “I just think he has a really good idea of how to approach each hitter he faces.”

XXX

Jose Berrios didn’t use a curveball in the first inning. He didn’t need to, not with a 96-mph fastball to rely upon.

“Those first four batters, I felt like my fastball was working well,” the 24-year-old righthander said. “I didn’t feel like I had to go to my curveball.”

When he did, though, he found one better and sharper than he’s had in a month. The reason? Simple: Practice.

“I was working between my last start and this one on my curveball,” Berrios said through an interpreter. “Today, the result was there.”

His catcher agreed. “A couple of days ago, we were working on it in the bullpen, really driving that breaking ball in the [strike] zone and getting it deep in the zone,” said Bobby Wilson, who caught a Berrios start for the first time Tuesday. “It got sharper as the night went on. But him pitching with his fastball set all that up. Him pitching and dotting the outside corner really set up his breaking ball, so he could get away with maybe a couple that weren’t as sharp. But overall, the majority of them looked pretty good.”

Tuesday's Twins-St. Louis game recap
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Jose Berrios, Twins

14 swings and misses, five 1-2-3 innings, and a mere two hits as Berrios turned in his first quality start since April 18

BY THE NUMBERS

2 Games (both by Berrios) in which a Twins starter has recorded an out in the eighth.

ON DECK

Lance Lynn faces his former teammates as the Twins try to complete a sweep of all four games against St. Louis.

With Wainwright hurt again. Cards call up prospect to face Twins
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

For the second time this month, the Cardinals have called up a pitcher from Triple-A to make a start against the Twins.

Last week, righthander John Gant was summoned from Memphis to start Monday's game, and he allowed four runs over 5 1/3 innings in the Twins' 6-1 victory at Busch Stadium. Tonight, 22-year-old Jack Flaherty, one of St. Louis' most prized prospects, rejoins the Cardinals for the third time this season to make the start in Target Field.

The disappointing part for St. Louis is that Flaherty is here because Adam Wainwright, the Cardinals' three-time All-Star, experienced inflammation in his pitching elbow again on Sunday. He missed a couple of weeks in April with the problem, returned to action in San Diego over the weekend, but lasted just 2 1/3 innings until the trouble returned. Wainwright went back on the disabled list today.

"The slider is his best pitch. He throws hard enough, but his fastball is low 90s with sink," Twins manager Paul Molitor said after examining video of Flaherty's outings against the Brewers and Pirates. "He can chase that slider away that looks pretty enticing to righties, as well as back-footing the lefties. ... It's going to be [about] keeping that slider in the zone. That will be a big test."

Miguel Sano had another test this afternoon, as he continues to try to recover from his strained left hamstring. Sano ran the bases and took batting practice, with Molitor watching, but there was no noticeable change in his condition.

"More of the same today. [We're] still, from my vantage point, not seeing max effort, which we're going to need to see" in his running, Molitor said. "He's swinging the bat fine. It's just going to be making sure he can do everything he needs to on a baseball field and play a position defensively."

I saw a half-dozen fans wearing Cardinals gear walking toward Target Field as I arrived today, and there are plenty more Missourians and Illinoisans expected to be in the house tonight and tomorrow. Here are the lineups for the first of a brief two-game series:

CARDINALS

Pham CF

Carpenter 1B

Martinez DH

Ozuna LF

Gyorko 3B

DeJong SS

Bader RF

Wong 2B

Kelly C

Flaherty RHP

TWINS

Mauer 1B

Dozier 2B

Rosario LF

Escobar 3B

Kepler RF

Morrison DH

Buxton CF

Adrianza SS

Wilson C

Berrios RHP

Frank Quilici was baseball overachiever, helped along with a dose of machismo

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | May 15, 2018

Billy Gardner was the second baseman when the Twins played their first-ever game on April 11, 1961 in Yankee Stadium. Pistol Pete Ramos pitched a 3-hit shutout, the Twins knocked around Whitey Ford for a 6-0 victory over the Yankees, and we big-league neophytes on the prairie figured this was a sign of excellence that would last through the summer.

It didn't work out that way.

The Yankees opened baseball's expansion era with a 109-53 record and a five-game victory over Cincinnati in the World Series. The Twins finished 70-90, 38 games back, and seventh in the new, 10-team American League.

Owner Calvin Griffith first gave manager Cookie Lavagetto a "leave of absence," then fired him and promoted third-base coach Sam Mele to manager (a position he would hold until the middle of the 1967 season).

A less-dramatic source of chaos was second base. Gardner lost his job when the Twins traded Billy Consolo to the Milwaukee Braves for Billy Martin on June 1. Two weeks later, Gardner was traded to the Yankees for pitcher Danny McDevitt, and wound up getting an at-bat for New York in the World Series.

Martin started 105 games, then was released near the end of spring training in 1962. The Twins hired him as a scout, and Billy also went to work in "public relations" for Grain Belt Brewery – the equivalent of putting a pyromaniac to work at an oil refinery.

Rookie Bernie Allen, only 18 months removed from quarterbacking Purdue to an upset victory over the No. 1-rated Gophers in November 1960,

was outstanding as the second baseman in 1962 – and then he couldn't hit in 1963.

It became such a problem that Vic Power, the exceptional first baseman, started 18 games at second base that summer. In 1964, the Twins were giving Allen another shot, and then Don Zimmer ruined Allen's left knee in a slide into second as Bernie tried to turn a double play.

Jerry Kindall became the second baseman, and it was his job again in the 1965 season. A great hitter for the Gophers as a collegian, Kindall carved out a big-league career as a terrific-fielding, weak-hitting infielder.

Kindall was dealing with a leg injury and was batting .190 when Frank Quilici, a 26-year-old batting .277 for the Twins' Class AAA farm club in Denver, was called up and inserted at second base on July 18.

He started 29 games over the final 2 ½ months of the schedule, and when the Twins went to the World Series, it was Quilici at second base for all seven games vs. the Dodgers.

And on Oct. 6, 1965 at Met Stadium, with Don Drysdale starting Game 1 as Sandy Koufax honored Yom Kippur, Quilici had a historic half-inning:

It was 1-1 when Quilici led off the bottom of the third with a double off Drysdale, and it was 7-1 after Quilici singled to drive in Don Mincher and finish Drysdale's afternoon after 2 2/3 innings.

Frank Quilici, the kid from the South Side of Chicago, had two hits in an inning in his first at-bats in the World Series. Eight days later, he had a double as one of three hits off Koufax, as the magnificent lefty shut out the Twins 2-0 in Game 7.

Frank had been the runner at second, with the walking Rich Rollins at first, and one out in the fifth. Zoilo Versalles ripped a ball that seemed destined to be a double, and then Junior Gilliam snared it and forced Quilici at third. The Twins' lone threat vs. Koufax soon died.

Quilici was back in Denver for the entire 1966 season, as the Twins went with Allen and Cesar Tovar at second base. In 1967, the carousel at second base ended with a rookie named Rod Carew.

Frank had three full seasons from 1968 to 1970, backing up Carew and also playing shortstop and third. In 1970, Carew's knee was blown out as he turned a double play, and Danny Thompson, Quilici and Tovar all played second as the Twins won a second straight AL West title.

Quilici was added to Bill Rigney's coaching staff for 1971. Seventy games into the 1972 season, attendance was continuing to tumble, and Griffith fired Rigney and replaced him with Quilici, who had turned 33 in May.

Griffith's logic was perfectly-Calvin: He figured that the Twins' followers still upset over the firing of Martin after the successful 1969 season could be mollified with the hiring of another loquacious Italian.

I can't recall the exact quote, but the Italian angle was in there. Dang, that Calvin was a beauty, as Quilici was going to discover more than ever.

The Twins were 81-81 in 1973, and attendance was 907,000. So, Calvin did more budget-cutting for 1974, reducing Quilici to a three-man coaching staff: Bob Rodgers, Vern Morgan and Ralph Rowe.

The latter two could not throw batting practice for physical reasons. The Twins didn't take a batting practice pitcher on the road. Thus, if Quilici and Rodgers had been paid by the BP pitches thrown that summer, they would have been millionaires before that was common in baseball.

That was my first year covering the Twins, for the St. Paul newspapers. In a time when many more regulars were used in spring training, the Twins were 5-21. We left Florida thinking poor Frank might have a 100-loss team in 1974.

Somehow, the Twins went 82-80. And his reward for 1975 was a situation so frugal that Griffith kept Steve Brye on the active roster for a time, when the outfielder had a cast on a broken wrist. The suggestion to Quilici was to use him as a pinch-runner.

The Twins went 76-83 and Quilici was fired. He was 280-287 in 3 ½ seasons as a manager, not bad for a guy who never really had much chance as Calvin struggled with falling revenues.

Frank wound up in the broadcast booth with Herb Carneal for several years, where that wonderful, outgoing, it's-great-to-be-here personality came through.

Heck, I give Frank's delighted delivery credit for much of my time on the radio at KSTP-AM, based on this:

Greg Harrington's call-ins with his impersonation of Quilici gave a rollicking start to the cult hit "Monday Night Sports Talk" in 1983. Lots of people started tuning in to hear Harrington's Q Man talk about the benefits of "machismo."

I spent time on Twitter last night paying tribute to the sausage sandwiches that Frank's "Pa," Guido Quilici, would bring to Comiskey Park for the start of every Twins' series.

Guido brought the sandwiches in what Frank called "Polish luggage" – paper bags. The sandwiches were prepared by Frank's "Ma," Laura, with Roma sausage and Fontana's bread from the South Side.

Note: Frank could get away with both Italian and Polish jokes, since his mother's maiden name was Domanowska.

Quilici died on Monday at age 79, after a long battle with kidney disease. He was given a kidney in 2012 by Elizabeth, the wife of a long-time friend named Bobby. It kept him alive as a third kidney, which Frank would refer to with a large and grateful laugh as "Little Liz."

He was a baseball overachiever – as a player, a manager and an announcer – and, more than that, a great dude.

The first generation of Twins fans loved Frankie for over a half-century; for sure, we loved him since the bottom of the third on Oct. 6, 1965, with his double to start the six-run burst off Drysdale, and an RBI single to finish him.

Two hits in one inning vs. Hall of Famer Don Drysdale. That right there took some machismo.

Byron Buxton, Jose Berrios give Twins much-needed jolt in win over Cardinals **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 15, 2018**

From his perch in center field, Byron Buxton found himself trying to communicate telepathically with the Twins battery of Jose Berrios and Bobby Wilson.

"I've got the best view in center," Buxton said after Tuesday's 4-1 win over the St. Louis Cardinals. "A few times I was like, 'Throw the curveball again. Throw the curveball.' And he'd throw the curveball again, and they'd swing and miss."

Of the 15 swing-and-miss strikes Berrios coaxed on this 10-strikeout night, seven came on a curveball he had stunningly lost over his previous four outings while posting an 8.84 earned-run average. Working into the eighth inning for the first time in over a month, Berrios allowed just two singles, both in the third inning, and gave up just a walk and a hit batter the rest of his 102-pitch night.

"That's Berrios," Buxton said. "All his pitches were working tonight. I've been blessed enough to see him coming up through the minor leagues. Tonight was a great example of who he is and how he plays baseball."

It was the Twins' third win in as many tries in this home-and-home interleague series, which concludes Wednesday afternoon at Target Field. It also kept them from a three-game losing streak for the first time since dropping eight in a row last month.

The Twins have outscored the Cardinals 17-2 over the past nine days, piling up 30 hits to their eight. Might that have something to do with the fact the Twins' top two video advance scouts (Jeremy Hefner and Corey Baker) are recently retired pitchers in the Cardinals' farm system?

Playing in front of a national television audience on FS1, the Twins broke a 16-inning scoring drought with three straight singles in the sixth inning. The last of those, by Eduardo Escobar, tied the score and chased 22-year-old right-hander Jack Flaherty after 98 pitches.

"That was an icebreaker for us," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It just kind of opened the gates, took some of the weight off our backs offensively."

Next came a pivotal three-run seventh, which started when Logan Morrison whacked a Brett Cecil slider off the base of the wall in right for a leadoff double. Buxton, looking to advance Morrison, then bunted a Luke Gregerson slider back toward the mound.

Not only did Buxton, playing through a hairline fracture in his left big toe, beat the throw for just his second hit since coming off the disabled list, but Gregerson threw the ball into right field. Morrison scored on the error as Buxton took second and then third as well on a ball in the dirt to Ehire Adrianza.

That brought up Wilson, the 35-year-old journeyman catcher who will stick around a while longer with Jason Castro recovering from arthroscopic

surgery on his right knee. Wilson fouled off a safety squeeze bunt attempt before putting the next pitch in the left-field seats.

It was Wilson's 17th career homer but his first in the majors since Sept. 21, 2016, when he took Masahiro Tanaka deep while playing for the Tampa Bay Rays. Wilson's blast snapped a string of 36 innings without a home run for the Twins.

"I don't think I've sniffed a slider in the last week," Wilson said.

The Twins had managed just one run over their previous 23 innings and three over their previous 32. Morrison's double was just their fifth extra-base hit — all doubles — since the start of play on Saturday.

That late outburst made sure the Twins didn't waste a much-needed gem from Berrios (4-4), who struck out at least one batter in each of the first seven innings. He credited a bullpen session Saturday in Anaheim, Calif., which Wilson caught, for reminding him to use his legs and improve the hand speed on his curve.

"When I'm aggressive and use the lower part of my body, I feel like it breaks better," Berrios said through a translator. "The reality is I wasn't happy with those last four starts. My mind-set wasn't right. Tonight I came back to basics. I worked hard for this outing, and the result was there."

Said Wilson after catching Berrios for the first time in a regular-season game: "Wow. That's the Berrios I think everybody in this room is used to seeing. That's front-line stuff right there."

After 'no loyalty' comment, Lance Lynn set to face former Cardinals teammates **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | May 15, 2018**

Luke Weaver could tell the difference in St. Louis Cardinals camp this spring. With Lance Lynn no longer around, there was a void that went beyond the starting rotation.

"He always had a big voice in the clubhouse," Weaver said of his fellow right-hander. "He knew what to say. Every day he had some jokes. Not having that guy across the locker room and not hearing him was different, but players come and go with different teams and this is part of it. I know the Twins got a good guy over there and a heck of a pitcher."

Seven starts into his Twins tenure, Lynn is still trying to live up to his bulldog reputation. He will carry a 1-3 record and 7.34 earned-run average into Wednesday's 12:10 p.m. start against his former team.

ADVERTISING

Just three pitchers with more than 30 innings have a higher ERA or nine-inning walk rate (6.55) than Lynn, who signed a one-year, \$12 million deal that includes separate \$1 million escalators for reaching both 170 and 180 innings.

Averaging just 4.9 innings per start, Lynn is on pace to work just 162 innings, even if he gets his usual 33 starts. He's also coming off a start in Anaheim, Calif., in which he got just two swing-and-miss strikes in his final 54 pitches after requiring a trainer's visit to the mound to check on what Lynn described as a "stinger" that "kind of shot up through the lower back and (left) hip."

Weaver, a former first-round pick who still refers to Lynn as "Ole Lance," said he learned plenty about pitching from a veteran who won 77 games for the Cardinals, including five in the postseason, from 2011-17.

"He taught me a lot," Weaver said. "Some conversations we had about pitching were really advanced. Sometimes I wouldn't even talk. I'd just listen. He just had a real light attitude. He joked around a lot. It was just cool to have him around. He's missed, but we know he's doing all right."

Lynn, who turned a \$17.4 million qualifying offer from the Cardinals before waiting until March 12 to sign, had some pointed comments for his former organization during the Twins' visit to St. Louis last week.

"I was here for seven years, and there's no loyalty in the game," Lynn told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "You've noticed players not having the loyalty anymore either. ... Maybe I'll just go on and be a hired gun the rest of my career; I don't really care."

Lynn will be matched up against right-hander Miles Mikolas, who signed a two-year, \$15.5 million deal last winter after three breakthrough seasons in Japan. Mikolas is 5-0 with a 2.51 ERA through seven starts as Lynn's de facto replacement.

“Lance was a vital piece for so many years, so he should definitely be proud of what he accomplished here,” Weaver said. “I think he walked away from this organization with his head held high after the numbers he put up and the impact he made, especially in those big games.”

TOSSED

When Robbie Grossman was ejected by plate umpire D.J. Reyburn in the fifth inning of Monday night’s 1-0 loss to the Seattle Mariners, he became the first Twins player to get tossed from a game since last July 30 at Oakland (Miguel Sano).

The Twins had just four total ejections last season: two for Sano and two for manager Paul Molitor.

“I couldn’t even believe it,” Grossman said. “(Reyburn) didn’t like what I had to say and thought I’d had enough of the game. He made the decision I couldn’t play anymore.”

Grossman, who had returned to the dugout after being called out on strikes, said it was his first ejection at any level since he was in the Class A Florida State League.

“I said I thought he missed two pitches in my at-bat, and he didn’t like what I had to say,” said Grossman, who had three strikes called against him in that trip. “We stick up for our teammates. We say what needs to be said. It’s part of the game.”

STILL NO SANO

Miguel Sano (hamstring) ran the bases again Tuesday afternoon but still wasn’t able to cut loose.

“I’m still, from my vantage point, not seeing max effort, which we’re going to need to see,” Molitor said. “He’s swinging the bat fine. It’s just going to be making sure he can do everything he needs to do on a baseball field and play a position defensively.”

Entering Tuesday, the Twins were 9-7 since Sano last played on April 27.

BRIEFLY

Major League Baseball released the order for the June 4-6 amateur draft. The Twins’ first-round pick is 20th overall, while their next two picks will come at Nos. 59 (second round) and 74 (competitive balance round). They lost their third-rounder (96th overall) because of the Lynn signing.

No slowing down: Buxton remains nightmare on basepaths despite pain in his toe **Judd Zulad | ESPN 1500 | May 15, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — Byron Buxton admits the pain in his left big toe has yet to fully disappear.

This should not come as a surprise considering he suffered a hairline fracture in the toe when he fouled a ball off it during a minor-league rehab stint last month with Single-A Fort Myers.

But that made it even more astounding that Buxton was able to display his typical blinding speed on Tuesday night at Target Field following a seventh-inning bunt that was supposed to move Logan Morrison to third base after he opened the inning with a double.

Instead, Buxton dropped down the bunt in front of home plate, Cardinals reliever Luke Gregerson picked the ball up and, seeing how quickly Buxton was moving, hurriedly launched his throw past second baseman Kolten Wong, who was covering first, and down the right field line.

That enabled Morrison to score to give the Twins a 2-1 lead — Minnesota had broken a 16-inning scoreless drought an inning earlier on Eduardo Escobar’s single to center field to tie the score at 1-1 — and two batters later catcher Bobby Wilson’s home run to left provided the final runs in a 4-1 victory over the Cardinals.

Tuesday’s game marked Buxton’s fifth since he returned following a 21-game absence that began when he suffered from migraine headaches and then was extended because of the toe injury. In his first four games back, Buxton had hit .077 (1-for-13) with one run batted in.

“It’s just frustrating. I wouldn’t say it’s tough,” Buxton said of having missed an extended period. “More frustrating than tough, just not being able to get out there and compete every day and battle with my brothers.”

The Twins certainly missed Buxton, losing 11 of the first 12 games after he went out. Buxton is only hitting .175/.228/.217 with three RBIs and four stolen bases on the season, but despite those less-than-stellar numbers, his presence makes a difference. Max Kepler did a nice job subbing in center field during Buxton's absence, but Buxton is a Gold Glove defender who can track down balls that others simply can't get near because of his blinding speed.

Buxton also causes huge problems on the base paths, as he showed on Tuesday. Twins manager Paul Molitor made the point that Buxton's bunt was an example that he doesn't need to be perfect to cause problems.

"There's a little lesson in that that we've tried to preach to him," Molitor said. "He sacrifice bunts and he puts it right out in the middle, didn't really get it close to a line and he still beats it out. (That shows) when he tries to bunt for hits he doesn't have to be perfect. It's more about just give himself a chance. But he did his job, it was rewarded with a misfire and gave us a chance to have a bigger inning."

Said Buxton: "(Molitor) has told me that before. It doesn't always take that perfect bunt to get on base. I put that in the back of my head and that certain situation, it was a sac bunt, so I was just trying to make sure I got the bunt down in a good spot."

And even if Buxton's toe was aching a bit, it didn't slow him down. "As long as (the pain is) tolerable I want to be in the lineup," he said.

Ten strikeouts and one great sign: J.O. Berrios jumps back on track for the Twins

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | May 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — J.O. Berrios had a couple starts in a row in which he didn't look quite like himself, and wasn't getting his typical results. Granted, it's easy to fall short of the high bar he set for himself earlier this season with a complete game shutout against the Orioles his first time on the mound.

A couple rocky outings are apparently in his rearview mirror, though, after Tuesday's impressive start against the St. Louis Cardinals. For one thing, he earned the win after the Twins had lost 3 of his past 4 outings, including a couple short starts.

In his previous 4 outings, Berrios had allowed 18 earned runs in 18 1/3 innings (8.84 ERA). He also walked 8 hitters and struck out just 11 of the 88 that he faced (12.5%). That's the other encouraging sign about Berrios' latest back-on-track outing: He struck out 10 St. Louis hitters and they had all sorts of trouble making contact with his curveball.

My amateur assessment of Berrios' rocky stretch was that he did not get the curves to where he wanted them to go consistently enough. He left pitches in hitting zones, it seemed, for right-handed hitters especially. And I've never stood 60 feet in front of him while he's uncorking that filthy pitch, but I had to wonder during that stretch if hitters were able to somehow pick it up just a split-second sooner than before. Manager Paul Molitor said before the game that the film study suggested that he needed to stay on top of his curve ball; Berrios himself said Tuesday that it's a matter of "staying behind" the pitch as he lets it go.

His course correction must have worked. The good breaking balls that Berrios threw Tuesday were not detected very often. Or maybe they were detected, and the 15 swings that missed everything were just a sign that he's got great stuff. He set it up with good command of his fastball, worked quickly, and he often finished off hitters when he had the chance.

The reaction of several Twins teammates in the clubhouse after Tuesday's start was universal. It's the sound you make if words don't immediately do justice to the performance.

'Psssh.'

"I think snapping off a couple good curveballs earlier helped him trust that pitch," manager Paul Molitor said, who noted that Berrios did focused work on his curve during his between-start bullpen session. "But his fastball played — he used it wisely when he needed to to get ahead. And he did a nice job."

Berrios had a strong outing in Puerto Rico in mid-April, with 7 innings against the Indians in a Twins win. Then 4 consecutive starts in which he allowed 4, 5, 5 and 4 earned runs, respectively. The Twins' pitching staff this year looks better than previous seasons, but if Berrios isn't at or near the top of his game, there seems to be a definite ceiling.

Tuesday, with catcher Bobby Wilson calling things behind the plate, Berrios was at or near the top of his game. He didn't even use too many changeups, and wasn't overly reliant on either of his good fastballs as put-away pitches.

"For me, it's throwing it deeper in the zone," Wilson said, "so it's coming out more [looking like a] fastball instead of popping up a little bit."

Molitor reminded an audience before the game that he'd cautioned about getting too carried away earlier this season with a label like "ace" for Berrios, "because he's not quite at the consistent point that I think he's going to get to."

To that end, the Twins got some good news Tuesday. Not only did Berrios move on from a string of so-so starts. He also dusted off that filthy curveball that can bury a big league hitter. If he strings together a few more outings like Tuesday, the Twins will be in a better spot because of it. And maybe we can revisit that age-old "ace" debate.

Wetmore: Robinson Cano's drug suspension had me thinking about the most fun players to watch
Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | May 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — A player choosing to accept a drug suspension in Major League Baseball is an unusual time to reflect on his legacy — especially if we're grasping for nice things to say. And yet here we are. Robinson Cano, the Mariners' all-star second baseman, reportedly has dropped an appeal and will serve an 80-game suspension for violating the league's drug policy.

Cano over the weekend was hit by a pitch, broke his finger, and is having surgery that likely would have knocked him out for a couple months. A cynic would point out that this is a convenient time to serve a drug suspension, since the days spent on the disabled list count just the same as those healthy days for the 35-year-old second baseman. The only fly in that ointment is that this tacit admission of guilt is damaging for his pocketbook — to the tune of almost \$12 million — and much more importantly for a player of Cano's stature, his reputation.

It calls into question what a generation of Hall of Fame voters will think of Cano. The sure-fire Hall of Famer is now looking more like a smudged test case that will be weighed against recent precedent: Roger Clemens, Barry Bonds, Andy Pettite, Alex Rodriguez... And now, perhaps, Cano.

This hurts the 2018 Mariners, but that's not what this column is about. It's possible he'll be back later from his suspension than he otherwise would have been after finger surgery. That's a tough guy to replace in a lineup, and the Wild Card battle just got tougher in Seattle. (And on the chance that they make the postseason, they'll again have to do without Cano's services for however long that run lasts.)

I'm also not here to defend Cano's alleged actions or decisions or his response to the news Tuesday. I'm not here to question his motives or talk about whether or not I believe the guy. I'm certainly not here to wax tirelessly about the Purity and the Sancity of the Great Game. I don't know. People are people, which is to say that they're imperfect. Baseball, like life, can be messy, and the truth is hard to come by.

The point of this column is just to share a thought I had Tuesday on my drive to the ballpark after I'd first read the Cano news.

Make a list in your head or on a scrap piece of paper. Name the baseball players from your lifetime that are the most aesthetically pleasing on the field. The ones that are a true joy to watch. Cano makes that short list for me.

This is admittedly a weird time to pile some praise on a guy who just accepted a suspension for taking a diuretic allegedly used as to mask steroid use. My baseball watching memory stretches back to about 1998, and in that 20 years, Cano has been one of the must-see players. There's something subjective about making a list like that. I could see leaving Cano off this list if you admire above all else players that sprint to first base on every ground ball. (He's guilty of dogging it from time to time.)

For me, it's guys like Cano, Ken Griffey Jr., and Ichiro. Throw in Vlad Guerrero. Andrelton Simmons.

That's what I kept thinking about on my drive to Target Field this afternoon. Cano suspended, huh? That's too bad. He's been such a joy to watch.

Preview: Cardinals at Twins
STATS | Fox Sports North | May 16, 2018

Matt Carpenter returned to the St. Louis Cardinals' lineup Tuesday night after getting a few days off to regroup. Now, it's Dexter Fowler's turn to get back on track.

Fowler is expected back among St. Louis' starting nine Wednesday when the Cardinals wrap up a two-game interleague series with the Minnesota Twins at Target Field in Minneapolis, Minn.

The center fielder was expected to be a sparkplug atop St. Louis' lineup this season, but both he and Carpenter got off to the worst offensive starts of their careers. Carpenter was batting .145 and Fowler .146 when the Cardinals arrived in Minneapolis. Carpenter went hitless on Tuesday and his average is down to .140.

Fowler went 0-for-6 in St. Louis' 2-1 victory Saturday night and spent nearly an hour in the batting cage after the game, trying to find a way out of his funk.

"No one likes to (stink)," Fowler told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny had considered starting Fowler Tuesday in the series opener but opted to give him another day off and said he has kept Fowler in the loop the entire time.

"Something is just off," Matheny said. "If you can pinpoint it, you'd fix it. 'Oh, I found something!' That's typically the conversation. But that's after days of repetition and after lots of sleepless nights trying to figure it out. You grind your way through it."

"It's all about confidence. That's the root of it. I don't know which comes first. When the confidence is lacking, with anything you do out there, your lack of success diminishes significantly."

If Fowler does return Wednesday, he'll be greeted by a familiar face as right-hander Lance Lynn takes the mound for Minnesota.

Lynn spent his last six seasons with the Cardinals, going 72-47 with a 3.38 ERA. Lynn turned down a \$17.4 million qualifying offer from St. Louis and didn't land with the Twins — who signed him to a one-year deal — until late in spring training.

Lynn didn't face the Cardinals when the Twins visited St. Louis last week, but didn't mince words about his departure.

"I was here for seven years, and there's no loyalty in the game," Lynn told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "You've noticed players not having the loyalty anymore either. ... Maybe I'll just go on and be a hired gun the rest of my career; I don't really care."

But he's gotten off to a slow start in his new home. Lynn is 1-3 with a 7.34 ERA through seven starts this season, and he allowed four runs on eight hits and two walks on Friday against the Angels in his last outing.

He was bothered by a "stinger" in his back and hip during the start, but still managed to go through 4 2/3 innings.

"I've had it before; it's not the first time," Lynn said. "I do get it every once in a while when you're really trying to get on a pitch or something like that. Just a big body coming down a mound — it happens sometimes."

Right-hander Miles Mikolas (5-0, 2.51 ERA) gets the start for St. Louis. He allowed just a run on five hits while working 6 2/3 innings against the Padres on Thursday to record the win.

Wednesday will be his first career appearance against the Twins.

Wilson homer backs Berrios in Twins 4-1 win over Cardinals **Associated Press | Fox Sports North | May 16, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) With an important insurance run standing at third base in the speedy Byron Buxton, Minnesota Twins catcher Bobby Wilson tried to pull off a surprise with a sacrifice bunt.

Wilson fouled off the attempt, never a good feeling for a journeyman that has played 329 major league games over the past 11 seasons to miss his chance. He didn't miss his next opportunity.

Wilson hit a slider from St. Louis reliever Luke Gregerson into the left field stands for a two-run homer to cap a three-run seventh inning and Minnesota beat the Cardinals 4-1 on Tuesday night.

Article continues below ...

Powered By Minute

"I don't think I've sniffed a slider in the last week," Wilson said. "I had to sit on it. (Hitting coach James Rowson) and I before the game, we did some sliders off the machine, just to keep working, because that was a pitch I felt like I kept swinging through."

It was Wilson's first major league home run since Sept. 21, 2016 for the Tampa Bay Rays. He has 17 career homers for six different teams in nine

major league seasons.

"He's been around, he's going to take a good at-bat," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We saw that when he got a big sac fly in another game. He knows how to get runs in from third. He just stayed back and let an offspeed pitch travel enough to hit it out."

Jose Berrios (4-4) surrendered one run on two hits and left after hitting Kolten Wong with a pitch with one out in the eighth. Berrios struck out 10 batters.

Addison Reed struck out both batters he faced and Fernando Rodney finished his eighth save in 11 chances with a perfect ninth.

St. Louis has lost five of their past seven games and scored more than three runs once during that span.

"It's just a short run here, and we haven't clicked this season," Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "We really haven't for an extended period of time. It's not July, it's still early in the season. It's going to come around. And until it does, it's just going to make us keep having to answer questions like these."

St. Louis reliever Brett Cecil (0-1) allowed a double to Logan Morrison to start the seventh. Morrison scored on Buxton's bunt attempt when Gregerson threw the ball wide of first and into foul territory.

Wilson was recalled last week when Jason Castro went on the disabled list with a meniscus tear in his right knee.

The 35-year-old Wilson spent the entire 2017 season in the minors with Oklahoma City in the Los Angeles Dodgers organization.

"At this point in my career, I really don't have a whole lot of worries," Wilson said. "I can just go play and enjoy it. The group of guys that we have in this clubhouse, they give me the energy to just enjoy the game and play and play free. If I make a mistake, so what? I know that those guys are going to pick me up."

BOUNCEBACK BERRIOS

Berrios had lost three of his past four starts, allowing 18 runs in 18 1/3 innings. The Twins believed they had found the issue with Berrios' curveball, working to keep his arm speed more in line with his fastball.

"The reality is I wasn't happy with those last four starts and my mindset wasn't right," Berrios said. "I came back to the basics and I worked hard for this outing and the result was there."

AN EXTENDED STAY

The St. Louis bullpen wasted another quality outing from rookie right-hander Jack Flaherty, who was recalled from Triple-A earlier in the day with Adam Wainwright going on the disabled list. Flaherty had the longest outing of his eight career major league starts with one run allowed in 5 2/3 innings.

Flaherty's emergence could be a key factor for the Cardinals with Wainwright and Carlos Martinez on the disabled list. Flaherty was cruising until the sixth when he surrendered three consecutive two-out hits to tie the game.

"It's not about proving, it's about going out and no matter what the situation is putting the team in position to win the game," Flaherty said. "I'm not trying to prove anything."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Cardinals: Martinez is still rehabbing a strain to his right lat and Matheny said it's unlikely Martinez would be able to return in time to start this weekend at home against Philadelphia.

Twins: 3B Miguel Sano (left hamstring strain) worked out again prior to the game but doesn't appear close to a return. Molitor said Sano is unable to run at maximum effort.

UP NEXT

Twins right-hander Lance Lynn (1-3, 7.34 ERA) will make his first start against his former team on Wednesday afternoon as the two teams wrap up a two-game series. Lynn allowed four runs in 4 2/3 innings in his last start. St. Louis counters with right-hander Miles Mikolas (5-0, 2.51), who has given up one run or less in four of his last five starts.

Lynn says start vs. Cardinals would have been 'meaningful' in St. Louis
Derrick Goold | St. Louis Dispatch | May 16, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS • Outside the clubhouse he now calls home, Minnesota starter Lance Lynn had a rather obvious reason for signing with the Twins during the winter. It was, he said twice for emphasis, the one official offer he had at that point. Other teams had talked about interest, other teams had feigned it, and only Minnesota had put it on the table.

The lone other contract presented all winter was from the Cardinals when they dutifully gave him a qualifying offer, worth more than the deal he has, and he dutifully turned it down.

He has, he said twice for emphasis, no regrets.

“The Cardinals had a chance to sign me to an extension and they did not even talk to me about it,” Lynn said Tuesday afternoon. “When you won’t talk to a guy about a multi-year deal — not even engaging me in conversation about any amount, one, two, three, whatever — that made me realize that they didn’t want me there. Why would you accept the qualifying offer? They made a business decision. They didn’t want me back, and they knew I wasn’t going to accept.”

For the first time in his career, Lynn will start against the Cardinals, the only other team he’s known in the majors, on Wednesday at Target Field. The curious twists of rainouts, rescheduled games and randomness have pitted him opposite Miles Mikolas, the free agent the Cardinals did pursue to replace Lynn and his innings in the rotation. If Lynn had accepted the Cardinals’ one-year, \$17.4 million offer, it’s unlikely they would have chased Mikolas.

Instead, Lynn rejected it. Mikolas signed. And as a result the Cardinals have a draft pick and a 5-0 righthander who has been one of the steadiest starters in the league.

They got the 75th overall pick as compensation for Lynn turning down their offer.

“Teams are doing that and they don’t want the guy back; they want the draft pick,” Lynn said. “Whatever, if there’s a rule if the guy signs less than the qualifying offer, they shouldn’t get the draft pick. ... That’s where the ‘hired gun’ comes in. If you have a chance to win and need me for one year, then so be it. Now I don’t have to be worried about being tied to some kid who might never make the big leagues.”

Lynn can no longer be given a qualifying offer, by rule.

At the start of his one-year, \$12 million deal with the Twins, Lynn has been like a lot of late signees, including Cardinals reliever Greg Holland. The search for command and their baseball legs has been tricky because they missed spring training. Lynn and Holland both said that missing pitcher’s fielding practice, shagging fly balls, and just the rhythm of the team’s workout has meant getting spring on the go during the season.

“You get in the flow of the game, how you bounce back,” Lynn said. “When you feel sore and that’s what happens in spring — you get through the soreness stages. You don’t that get time to pitch through soreness and you have to do it in the season. Hitters are ahead of you.”

In seven starts for the Twins, Lynn has a 7.34 ERA and he’s been bothered by walks, with 25 in 34 1/3 innings. He’s allowed 68 baserunners.

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny had just been describing Lynn’s competitiveness and how he’s always leery of a pitcher going up against his former team when Lynn walked by the Cardinals’ dugout. Matheny shouted that he was spending all his time talking to reporters about Lynn. Lynn smiled — then went off to share a hug with hitting coach John Mabry and others. Rarely ruffled and usually sarcastic during his time as a Cardinal — even when he was summoned into a World Series game by mistake — Lynn played down his start.

Not because of the opponent, not because of departure.

It’s the venue.

“I think it would have been more meaningful if it had been in St. Louis,” Lynn said. “If it was in St. Louis it would have been a way different feeling, it would have been a way different look. Now that we’re here it’s just another team. You’re where we play. You’re where I play now.”