



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Friday, August 3, 2018

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AL Central: Moving forward post-Trade Deadline

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | August 2, 2018

With the Indians out to a healthy lead in the American League Central, they were the only buyers in the division, as the other four clubs decided to sell, including the second-place Twins, who were the second-most active sellers in the Majors, trading away five players before Tuesday's non-waiver Trade Deadline.

The Indians helped shore up two of their issues with moves to address the bullpen and center field, while the Royals, Tigers, Twins and White Sox added pieces for the future. Here's a look at what all five clubs accomplished at the Deadline and what it means going forward:

INDIANS

What they did at the Deadline

Prior to Tuesday's Deadline, the Tribe landed center fielder Leonys Martin and Minor League pitcher Kyle Dowdy from the Tigers in exchange for shortstop prospect Willi Castro. Back on July 19, Cleveland shipped its former No. 1 prospect, catcher Francisco Mejia, to the Padres for All-Star closer Brad Hand and searmer Adam Cimber. Also on Tuesday, the Indians acquired outfield prospect Oscar Mercado from the Cardinals for Minor Leaguers Conner Capel and Jhon Torres.

What it tells us

The Indians' main priorities during the trade season were to strengthen the bullpen and help the injury-riddled outfield. With Hand and Cimber in the fold, and relief ace Andrew Miller due back from the DL soon, the bullpen is in a much better spot. In Martin, the Indians upgraded the outfield defense and added a bat to lengthen out the bottom third of the top-heavy lineup.

What's the goal

For many players in Cleveland's clubhouse, free agency is looming and there is a heightened sense of urgency to win the World Series now. Given that all the players acquired have at least one additional year of control, the front office showed that it is focused on keeping the window open well beyond this year.

Big questions

Can the Indians really proceed with two outfield platoons? Right now, Martin and Rajai Davis are splitting time in center, while Melky Cabrera and Brandon Guyer divvy up the innings in right. That is not an ideal setup, but the Tribe is trying to maximize the offensive and defensive production in the absence of a surefire everyday player at either spot.

ROYALS

What they did at the Deadline

Traded outfielder Jon Jay, closer Kelvin Herrera and third baseman Mike Moustakas, all with expiring contracts. Acquired Brian Goodwin as a

potential starting center fielder.

What it tells us

The Royals' No. 1 priority since last fall was finding ways to restock the farm system and accelerate the rebuild. They made a nice haul with their trades, picking up outfielder Brett Phillips, who could be a long-term starter, and another Major League-ready outfielder in Goodwin. They also added prospects to their Top 30 list per MLB Pipeline: right-hander Elvis Luciano (No. 23); third baseman Kelvin Gutierrez (No. 17) and outfielder Blake Perkins (No. 15). Right-hander Jorge Lopez, also acquired for Moustakas, could be a bullpen piece by next season.

What's the goal

Get a long look at Phillips and Goodwin (presently on the disabled list), and other internal prospects such as first baseman Ryan O'Hearn, among others in the system (Richard Lovelady, Josh Staumont, etc.).

Big question

Wins and losses are mostly irrelevant as the Royals barrel toward a 100-plus-loss season. So, the battle for roster spots in 2019 essentially can begin now. Kansas City will need to clear space off the 40-man roster so they can activate Eric Skoglund and Jesse Hahn off the 60-day disabled list, and call up other prospects from the Minors. But will it start the service-time clock on Lovelady, Staumont and/or Nicky Lopez?

TIGERS

What they did at the Deadline

Traded Martin and Dowdy to Cleveland for Castro.

What it tells us

While the Tigers continue to stockpile prospects for their rebuilding project, the more telling statement was the lack of deals with other veterans Detroit had on the block. While general manager Al Avila admittedly tempered his expectations on returns, he opted to hold onto Mike Fiers and Francisco Liriano rather than give them away for throwaway prospects.

What's the goal

The Tigers head into the stretch run looking to keep developing their young players, a group that now includes outfielder Mike Gerber in Martin's old roster spot. They'll likely add more youngsters once rosters expand in September.

Big question

If the Tigers do not trade Nicholas Castellanos by the end of August, will they revisit the idea of a contract extension, something they threw out last offseason but quickly dismissed for lack of common ground?

TWINS

What they did at the Deadline

Traded infielder Eduardo Escobar to the D-backs for two prospects; traded right-hander Ryan Pressly to Astros for two prospects; traded lefty Zach Duke to the Mariners for two prospects; traded right-hander Lance Lynn to the Yankees for two prospects and traded second baseman Brian Dozier to the Dodgers for infielder Logan Forsythe and two prospects.

What it tells us

After making it to the AL Wild Card Game last year, the Twins planned to compete this season and signed several players to one-year deals in the offseason, but after struggling to find any consistency, the front office decided to sell. Escobar, Duke, Lynn and Dozier were impending free agents, while Pressly is under control through next season, so the Twins were trying to get value from players who were otherwise going to leave in free agency. It was a tough week for Twins fans, as Dozier and Escobar were the heart and soul of the club, but the organization feels it's now better set up to compete in the near and long-term future.

What's the goal

Despite receiving some lower-level prospects among the 11 Minor Leaguers they acquired, the Twins are still preparing to be competitive next season. They opted to hold onto right-hander Kyle Gibson, who is under team control next year, and closer Fernando Rodney, who has a \$4.5 million club option for 2019. They still see the last two months of the season as important to the development of young core players such as Jose Berrios, Eddie Rosario, Miguel Sano, Jorge Polanco and Max Kepler. Right-hander Ervin Santana, who has made just two starts this year after undergoing finger surgery in February, could also be traded in August, as he's an impending free agent.

Big question

Byron Buxton and Sano were expected to break out this season and help Minnesota build on its unexpected success last year, but it hasn't been the case. Buxton has struggled offensively and has had trouble staying healthy, as he's currently nursing a left wrist sprain at Triple-A Rochester. Sano is back with the Twins, but spent roughly six weeks in the Minor Leagues, including a stint at Class A Advanced Fort Myers to work on his conditioning and get back on track offensively. They're both still a huge part of the future, and finishing strong would be big going into next season.

WHITE SOX

What they did at the Deadline

Traded closer Joakim Soria to the Brewers for left-hander Kodi Medeiros and right-hander Wilber Perez; traded international signing bonus pool money to the Yankees for left-hander Caleb Frare and to the Rays for left-hander Hunter Schryver.

What it tells us

General manager Rick Hahn has talked about this season being more about development than talent acquisition, unlike this time last year, and the lack of frequent action at the Trade Deadline backed up that idea. The White Sox brought in needed left-handed pitching depth to their rebuild.

What's the goal

The main target for the White Sox remains setting themselves up for multiple championships. That involves developing players at the Minor League level, not rushing them to the big leagues even if there's a need, and putting together a critical mass of talent.

Big question

When will outfielder Eloy Jimenez and right-handed pitcher Michael Kopech, the organization's top two prospects, arrive with the White Sox? Will they arrive with the White Sox in 2018?

Hahn recently mentioned a checklist the pair needs to fulfill, even with both of them performing at a high level for Triple-A Charlotte. Again, the organization's focus is future excellence and not speeding things up now for present gratification.

Trades provide Twins farm system plenty of players packed with potential

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | August 1, 2018

Have a seat. Catch your breath. The trade deadline has come and now is gone.

The Twins, during a dizzying week of transactions, turned five major leaguers into a whopping 11 minor leaguers. It's reflective of the team's still-new regime, led by Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey and General Manager Thad Levine: There will be no fence-sitting at the trade deadline.

The Twins' chances of reaching the postseason were slim, so they spun current value into future assets by dealing Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar, Ryan Pressly, Zach Duke and Lance Lynn — all but Pressly eligible for free agency after the season — for second baseman Logan Forsythe and 11 prospects.

“At the deadline, you have two choices to make,” Falvey said. “You're either in and pushing and grabbing players to push toward the finish or you're aren't. I don't think we wanted to get caught in the middle.”

So let's focus on the 11 players the Twins currently are trying place all over their farm system. The group lacks a true blue-chip prospect but, as a whole, has been rated favorably by various evaluators.

CBSSports.com's Mike Axisa gave the Twins a B grade for their work, mentioning in particular sending Escobar to Arizona for righthander Jhoan Duran and outfielders Gabriel Maciel and Ernie De La Trinidad, and trading Pressly to Houston for righthander Jorge Alcala and outfielder Gilberto Celestino. ESPN's Buster Olney gave the Twins a B-plus.

twins vs. kansas city 7:10 p.m. Friday (FSN)

According to Baseball America, of the 69 prospects dealt over the six weeks before the deadline, Alcala was the eighth-best. The 23-year-old's fastball has touched 100 miles per hour, and he throws a good slider. Some believe Alcala could wind up as a reliever, but the Twins will develop him as a starter.

Celestino, 19, was the 13th-best prospect dealt. The Twins view him as a good overall player who has a chance to be a good hitter. Houston signed him out of the Dominican Republic for \$2.5 million in 2015, so he has been highly regarded.

Duran was next, at 15th. The 20-year-old is effective right now with a mid-90s fastball that has heavy sink but is developing a good curveball. He announced his arrival with authority Monday with seven no-hit innings for Class A Cedar Rapids. While some feel that Alcala is a much better prospect than Duran, the Twins believe the gap is closer than that.

“We got some real power arms back that we feel can creep to the top of the rotation,” Falvey said. “Not to say that would be the only approach

this deadline. But when we found opportunities with different clubs whether it's Jorge Alcala or Jhoan Duran, others, those are guys with real stuff, ceiling and a chance to impact our future in the not too distant future."

The Twins also are high on righthander Luis Rijo, who came over with Tyler Austin from the Yankees in the Lynn deal. Rijo, 19, has a long way to go, but he throws the full mix of pitches and has flashed good control, and the Twins love his makeup.

Maciel, 19, is fast and controls the strike zone well, making him a leadoff prospect if he can get stronger — he is listed at 170 pounds — and hone his hitting skills.

Two players who could appear for the Twins before the season is over are righthander Chase De Jong, who came over with first baseman Ryan Costello from Seattle for Duke, and outfielder-first baseman Tyler Austin, who came over with Rijo from the Yankees for Lynn.

De Jong, 24, pitched in seven games for Seattle in 2017, going 0-3 with a 6.35 ERA. He has a fastball that can reach 94 mph, but his key is mixing his secondary pitches effectively.

Austin, who turns 27 on Sept. 6, has power. He has hit two home runs — one 454 feet, the other 421 — since joining Class AAA Rochester. Contact has been his issue in the majors. He has batted .230 with 15 home runs and 106 strikeouts in 85 games with the Yankees since debuting in 2016.

Contact also will determine the future of outfielder-first baseman Luke Raley, who came with Forsythe and lefthander Devin Smeltzer in the Dozier trade. The lefthanded-hitting Raley batted .275 with 17 home runs for Class AA Tulsa, with 24 walks and 105 strikeouts in 93 games.

Smeltzer, 22, recently was sent to the Tulsa bullpen but has a 2.70 ERA in his past seven outings. He throws in the low 90s and doesn't strike out a lot of batters.

The last two prospects the Twins received, De La Trinidad and first baseman Ryan Costello, are viewed as organizational role players.

One challenge of adding so many minor leaguers to an organization is finding room for them.

"We were able to make it work," said Jeremy Zoll, Twins director of minor league operations. "We had a little bit of roster flexibility."

And it will be worth the logistical headache if a few of the acquisitions reach the majors.

Derek Falvey maintains his long-term vision to improve Twins

Sid Hartman | Star Tribune | August 3, 2018

Twins Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey said that while fans and players might be upset about their trade deadline deals, he knows he was brought in to change the organization for the better, and that's what he and General Manager Thad Levine are going to do.

"I certainly can appreciate the perspective of the fans. Any time you trade away major league players who are impacting you right now, it's tough," Falvey said Tuesday. "But I think our job as leadership of this organization, and my job in particular around baseball, is to find opportunities to make this organization better moving forward, not just for now but in the future. We feel we did that over this deadline."

There is no question that Falvey's tenure in his two seasons has been aggressive.

Since arriving after the 2016 season, Falvey has made 15 trades, including eight this season and five at the trade deadline. Compare that to the eight trades the Twins made from the start of 2015 until Falvey's arrival, when Terry Ryan was the GM before being fired in July 2016 and replaced on an interim basis by Rob Antony.

While there weren't any big-name prospects acquired in the five July trades — to be expected since four of the players dealt will be free agents after the season — Falvey sees a lot of potential.

"I think the jewel of what we got back was the high-upside pitching," he said. "I think that we've acquired at least two guys in these trades that we think have the chance to be upper-end starters in Jhoan Duran, who carried a no-hitter in Cedar Rapids into the seventh [Monday] who has real power stuff, and then Jorge Alcala, who is now one of our top prospects in terms of pitching at the Double-A level. Some impact, power arms. That's what we're going to need to compete with the best in the league."

When it comes to infielder Eduardo Escobar, who was the first of the five players traded when he was dealt to Arizona last Friday for Duran and

outfielders Ernie De La Trinidad and Gabriel Maciel, Falvey said the team will certainly try to bring him back in free agency. “I have every expectation we’ll have a conversation with him come the fall,” he said.

Looking to the future

Now that the Twins front office is looking toward next year, there is no question it’s going to be an exciting and wide-open offseason.

Neither Ervin Santana nor Logan Morrison figures to have his 2019 vesting options guaranteed, and the Twins figure to enter the offseason with less than \$29 million in guaranteed payroll for four players — and that’s if they pick up the \$4.25 million option on closer Fernando Rodney. The only other players signed for next year are catcher Jason Castro and righthanders Addison Reed and Michael Pineda.

Falvey was asked if that means the team will have a lot of free-agent movement.

“With the blessing of the Pohlad family, we have had real opportunities in the free-agent market over the last year-plus,” Falvey said. “I anticipate with some of the expiring contracts that we have and the flexibility that we have around payroll, we’re going to be creative in this free-agent market and see what opportunities present.”

And there is no doubt one move Falvey wants to make is bringing back Joe Mauer.

Undrafted star?

The Vikings have had a number of undrafted players who have turned out to be something special. On the current roster, this group includes Adam Thielen, Marcus Sherels, Rashod Hill, Nick Easton and C.J. Ham.

This year’s group of rookie free agents includes Holton Hill, a 6-2 defensive back out of the University of Texas. Hill has to be one of the biggest surprises of the offseason workouts and training camp so far.

The Vikings were high on Hill all the way through the predraft process. They brought him in as one of their top 30 prospects.

Hill was considered by draft experts to be a third- or fourth-round talent. However, his junior season ended Nov. 7 when he was suspended for a violation of team rules, and he didn’t play in the Longhorns’ final three games last season.

“A number of reasons,” Hill said of why he wasn’t drafted. “Basically my character issues off of the field, which I don’t blame them for not drafting me, now that I look back on it.”

Hill acknowledged he was upset he wasn’t drafted, adding, “But it added fuel to the fire and gave me much more of a reason to go out there and compete each and every day so I can prove myself.”

While he didn’t work out for the Vikings on a 1-on-1 basis, he said his top-30 visit gave him a chance for in-depth meetings with coaches.

“I decided to pick the Vikings because they had a good foundation as far as defensewise and they had good vets such as Harrison Smith, Xavier Rhodes, [Everson] Griffen, a lot of others,” Hill said. “I decided they would be a good fit for me to mentor me and develop my game to the next level.”

Did the Vikings tell him he would have a real shot to make the team? “They did tell me that I have a really good chance to play for them,” he said. “But I just take that as motivation to make me go much more harder.”

One big connection on the Vikings for Hill is Jerry Gray, the defensive backs coach since 2014 and a former Longhorns player.

“Jerry Gray is a big motivation for me, because I’ve seen all of the achievements and awards that he did from Texas on to the NFL, and having him as a coach to help me develop my game, and [I’ll] hopefully follow that same path that he did,” he said.

Academic standout

Hill was a high school All-America in Lamar, Texas, and was one of six finalists for the 2015 Watkins Award, which honors the top black male high school scholar-athlete in the nation.

“I’m most definitely proud of that,” said Hill, who led the state of Texas with 11 interceptions as a prep senior. “Just because ... even though I was good on the football field, I always relied on my grades to define my character.”

He said a big reason he chose Texas was a chance to help turn that program around, and also because of his relationship with then-coach Charlie Strong. “That was my dream growing up, ever since like the third grade when I saw Vince Young, a Houston native, win the [2005 national championship] for Texas,” he said.

At Texas, Hill started 26 games and made 121 tackles to go along with three interceptions, all returned for touchdowns. Last year against Maryland, he returned an interception for a score and also scored on a blocked field goal return.

“I try to take the humble route as far as preparing myself each and every week going into the game,” he said. “Basically, the harder you work, the more benefits and rewards you get out of the game.”

The Twins' latest acquisitions: a closer look
Staff | Star Tribune | August 3, 2018

A TAKER’S DOZEN

The Twins traded five major leaguers over the past week and picked up 12 players in return: a major leaguer, a part-time major leaguer, and 10 prospects:

- Logan Forsythe, 31, second baseman for Los Angeles Dodgers, joined the Twins.
- Tyler Austin, 26, infielder at Class AAA Scranton/Wilkes Barre (Yankees) who started the season with the Yankees, assigned to Class AAA Rochester.
- Chase De Jong, 24, pitcher at Class AA Arkansas (Seattle), assigned to Rochester.
- Jorge Alcala, 23, pitcher at Class AA Corpus Christi (Houston), assigned to Class AA Chattanooga.
- Luke Raley, 23, outfielder-first baseman at Class AA Tulsa (Dodgers), assigned to Chattanooga.
- Devin Smeltzer, 22, pitcher at Tulsa, assigned to Chattanooga.
- Ryan Costello, 22, infielder at Class A Clinton (Seattle), assigned to Class A Fort Myers.
- Ernie De La Trinidad, 22, outfielder at Class A Kane County (Arizona), assigned to Fort Myers.
- Jhoan Duran, 20, pitcher at Kane County, assigned to Class A Cedar Rapids.
- Gabriel Maciel, 19, outfielder at Kane County, assigned to Cedar Rapids.
- Gilberto Celestino, 19, outfielder at Class A Tri City (Houston), assigned to rookie league Elizabethton.
- Luis Rijo, 19, pitcher at Class A Tampa (Yankees), assigned to Elizabethton.

Twins-Kansas City series preview
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | August 2, 2018

Three-game series at Target Field

Friday, 7:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Jake Odorizzi (4-7, 4.58 ERA) vs. RHP Heath Fillmyer (0-1, 3.29)

Saturday, 6:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Jose Berrios (10-8, 3.56) vs. RHP Burch Smith (1-2, 6.00)

Sunday, 1:10 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

RHP Ervin Santana (0-0, 6.10) vs. LHP Danny Duffy (7-9, 4.50)

Twins update

Their playoff hopes were hanging by a thread at the All-Star break, but it was a three-game sweep by the Royals at Kansas City coming out of the break that was the final straw and pushed the Twins front office into sell mode. The Twins are 3-6 vs. last-place Kansas City this season, although they are 2-1 at Target Field. ... 1B Joe Mauer has 588 extra-base hits, nine shy of Tony Oliva for fourth place on the Twins' all-time list. ... After going hitless in his first two games back from the minor leagues at Boston, 3B Miguel Sano went 4-for-9 in three games against Cleveland, with two doubles.

Royals update

There are some new faces since the teams met two weeks ago. 1B Ryan O'Hearn, called up from Class AAA Omaha, and OF Brett Phillips, acquired from Milwaukee as part of the Mike Moustakas trade, each hit a two-run homer Tuesday to beat the White Sox. ... Phillips has a tremendous arm. Playing in center Thursday, he threw out Chicago's Leury Garcia trying to score; the throw was measured at 100.1 miles per hour by Statcast. ... LF Alex Gordon homered and doubled Wednesday, but the 34-year-old said he is considering retiring when his contract expires after the 2019 season.

Brian Dozier's busy Dodgers debut includes home run in extra-inning victory **News Services | Star Tribune | August 2, 2018**

LOS ANGELES — Brian Dozier's first game with his new team certainly was an eventful one.

The second baseman, traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers on Tuesday after spending his entire career with the Twins, earned a curtain call with a tying home run in the fifth inning Wednesday night, one of his three hits in a 6-4, 10-inning victory over the Milwaukee Brewers at Dodger Stadium.

Dozier was in the on-deck circle when Los Angeles catcher Yasmani Grandal ended the game with his second home run of the night, a two-run, walkoff blast off Matt Albers.

"It was a fun game," he said, "especially after the home run and curtain call. That was pretty cool."

Dozier also was partially responsible for Milwaukee's first run. Lorenzo Cain led off the game with a triple, and in trying to throw Cain out at third, Dozier's relay throw bounced to third baseman Manny Machado and into the stands, enabling Cain to walk home.

Milwaukee righthander Chase Anderson threw four perfect innings, but the Dodgers tied the score 2-2 in the fifth on back-to-back homers by Grandal and Dozier, who drove a fastball over the center-field fence at Dodger Stadium. Dozier earned a curtain call after the blast.

In the seventh, Dozier led off with a single, advanced to second on a one-out walk to Chris Taylor and came around to score on an RBI single by Yasiel Puig, giving Los Angeles a 3-2 lead.

An inning later, after Milwaukee had tied the score 4-4, Dozier nearly was the hero again. But with two out and Grandal on first, Dozier's drive to left bounced into the stands, keeping Grandal at first. Two batters later, with the bases loaded, newly acquired Brewers third baseman Mike Moustakas made a diving stop and threw out Chris Taylor, keeping the score tied.

Dozier joins a Dodgers team in the thick of a tight NL playoff race. Los Angeles is battling Arizona and Colorado for the NL West title and a number of other clubs, including the Brewers, for one of two wild cards.

"Love the way he plays the game," Roberts said of Dozier. "He's a hard-nosed player. I think there's more of that to come."

Half the infielders in this game were acquired in late July from AL teams: Dozier and Machado on the Dodgers, Moustakas and Jonathan Schoop on the Brewers. Schoop, the second baseman making his Milwaukee debut after joining Machado as a veteran traded away by Baltimore, went hitless in five at-bats, including three strikeouts.

Dozier was traded at Tuesday's nonwaiver trade deadline, the fifth veteran player traded by the Twins over a span of four days. All but one are

free agents after the season. Dozier, a 2015 All-Star who hit 42 home runs in 2016, was hitting .224 with 16 homers and 52 RBI in 104 games with the Twins.

Second-rounder Ryan Jeffers laying quick claim to Twins' 'catcher of the future'
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | August 2, 2018

Ryan Jeffers was waiting to catch a bullpen at rookie-level Elizabethton this summer when he fell into an easy conversation with a fellow physics buff.

Josh Kalk, the Twins' senior analyst for baseball research and development, introduced himself to the club's second-round pick out of UNC Wilmington and started "a good conversation about the more scientific part of baseball," said Jeffers, who is two semesters shy of completing work toward his physics degree.

"He's a lot more knowledgeable than I am," Jeffers said. "I went through some college classes and I'm pretty good, but he's definitely got some on me."

Kalk, a former physics professor at Bluefield (W.Va.) State College who joined the Twins front office last offseason, spent the past nine seasons working for the cutting-edge Tampa Bay Rays.

"He was saying some stuff that was really interesting," Jeffers told the Pioneer Press in a phone interview. "I loved listening to him."

Jeffers, whose mother is a mechanical engineer, chuckled when asked if Kalk made any book recommendations.

"We didn't get that far," he said. "We were sticking more to just baseball, like spin-rate stuff, all sorts of things."

As usual with the 21-year-old Jeffers, he made a point of soaking up as much information as he could. He may be listed at 6-foot-4 and 228 pounds, but he's as liable to beat you with his brain as his brawn.

That partly explains his remarkably smooth transition into pro ball, where it took him just 28 games and 102 at-bats to earn a promotion from the Appalachian League to low-A Cedar Rapids. Part of a three-man catching rotation at E-town, Jeffers hit .422 with a ridiculous 1.121 combined on-base/slugging percentage.

Drafted 59th overall and signed for a below-slot figure of \$800,000, Jeffers wasted little time making the Twins look smart for plucking him from a deep group of draft-eligible catchers in that general vicinity.

"I never really thought of it as an adjustment per se," he said. "I just tried to carry my same mentality from college ball into playing baseball, really. Yeah, I was swinging a different bat, but baseball is baseball. I didn't change too much."

The Twins "just kind of let me go" in terms of hitting mechanics, said Jeffers, who hits from the right side with a short, powerful stroke.

"They liked my swing a lot," he said, "and the results showed I didn't really need to change too much."

UNC Wilmington's Ryan Jeffers smiles after Wilmington defeated Ohio State during an NCAA college baseball tournament regional game Saturday, June 2, 2018, in Greenville, N.C. (Juliette Cooke/The Daily Reflector via AP)

Minor-league hitting coordinator Rick Eckstein and Elizabethton hitting coach Jeff Reed, a former big-league catcher, would talk with Jeffers about "zoning up" in certain counts. Jeffers took quickly to that, as well.

"In college ball, a lot of guys you'll face are just throwing the ball in the zone," he said. "Now, there will be more guys that are really trying to get you out and locating much better, and you've got to zone in on your area. It's a broad philosophy that can apply to everything."

Raised in Raleigh, N.C., where his father is national sales manager for the PPG Industries paint company, Jeffers has been catching since he was 14 and gravitated quickly to San Francisco Giants star Buster Posey as his role model. With three World Series championships from 2010-14, Posey's influence took root from afar.

“I always loved watching Posey,” Jeffers said. “He’s one of the bigger-name guys, but also a humble guy that’s not going to be ‘out there.’ I kind of thought of myself as having similar characteristics to him, so I love to watch his game and take it in. A lot of what I learned behind the plate is just from watching catchers, watching big-league games, picking up everything I can.”

Jeffers, who had a .986 OPS through eight games for the Kernels, wasted no time getting up to speed on a new pitching staff in conversations with fellow catcher David Banuelos, a 2017 Johnny Bench Award finalist from Long Beach State. Banuelos, who landed on the 7-day concussion disabled list this week, is known more known for defensive work than his bat.

Jeffers could turn out to be the rare two-way threat at the highly valued position. Positional flexibility isn’t high on his list of professional goals.

“The Twins haven’t even asked me to play anything else,” he said. “For me, that’s a good sign. They trust me behind the plate and want me to stick there. I want to stick back behind the plate. I don’t really want to play any other position.”

His above-average arm rates a 60 on the 20/80 scouting scale, and Twins scouting director Sean Johnson said there were a lot of internal comparisons to current Twins catcher Mitch Garver.

“A big, physical catcher,” Johnson said. “(Jeffers) reminds us of Garver at the same stage. We liked a lot of the catching metrics that we had on him and his ability to catch and throw. Great makeup. There’s a lot to like.”

While Garver, a former University of New Mexico standout, had to rise from the ninth round in 2013 to his current spot, Jeffers is flattered by the comparison.

“I’ve heard that and I take it as a compliment,” Jeffers said. “I’m going to work every day to get to that level. That’s the end goal. Getting to Cedar Rapids is awesome, but that’s just one step in a long journey. I’m trying to get to where Mitch has gotten.”

Preview: Twins vs. Royals

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | August 3, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Were it not for the Kansas City Royals, the Minnesota Twins might not have been one of the more active sellers ahead of this week’s trade deadline.

The Twins had won nine of their last 11 games heading into the All-Star break and though they were still six games below .500 and were within 7 1/2 games of the American League Central-leading Cleveland Indians when they opened the second half at Kansas City on July 20.

Any hope of catching the Indians disappeared quickly, though, as the last-place Royals swept the Twins in convincing fashion. Though the Twins won five of their next eight, the damage was done and Minnesota started planning for the future.

“I don’t think anybody in here is going to give up,” right-hander Kyle Gibson said. “We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to the guys who got traded away. That was the one thing (Brian) Dozier told me was, ‘Hey, don’t let these guys quit.’”

The Twins will get a chance for revenge Friday when they open a three-game weekend series against the Royals at Target Field.

Right-hander Jake Odorizzi gets the start after having survived the Twins’ purge. He’s looking to bounce back after posting a 4.44 ERA in five July starts and is 2-4 with a 4.29 ERA in seven career starts against the Royals.

Kansas City turns to rookie right-hander Heath Fillmyer for the series opener. He allowed three runs in five innings against the New York Yankees his last time out and is 0-1 with a 3.94 in three big league starts.

Fillmyer will benefit from having newly-acquired Brett Phillips in center field. Acquired from the Milwaukee Brewers a week ago in the deal that sent Mike Moustakas to Milwaukee, Phillips has gotten off to a good start with his new squad and has opened eyes with his defensive ability.

“I like what I see from that kid,” Royals manager Ned Yost said.

He came up big for the Royals on Thursday at Chicago, making a diving grab to rob Yolmer Sanchez of a bloop single and then made a spot-on throw to the plate later in the game that caught Leury Garcia trying to score.

“That’s what gets me the most pumped is when I throw a guy out,” Phillips said. “It’s not a home run. It’s that. Because seeing the look on a pitcher’s face, you saved him a run. That’s what it’s all about, just helping those guys out on a daily basis.”

The throw clocked it at 100.1 mph — the hardest-thrown ball by a Royals outfielder since MLB started tracking such numbers in 2015.

“(The numbers) show up on my phone,” Phillips admitted. “But it’s not something I base my practices on. I just focus on good accurate throws. If it’s got velocity on it, it’s fine. But if you throw 105 and if it flies into the stands, it doesn’t matter.”

The Royals are 8-6 since the All-Star break, including the three-game sweep of the Twins, and are 9-3 against Minnesota but just 1-2 at Target Field.

Olney: What trade deadline? These 12 players could move in August **Buster Olney | ESPN | August 2, 2018**

As the final hours before the trade deadline ticked down this week, an executive for one contender spoke confidently about opportunities to come. "There will be a lot of deals [in August]," he said, "because guys will get through waivers and teams will want to save money."

The Mets' trade of Jay Bruce to the Indians a year ago was a classic example of this. Bruce was in the midst of an excellent season in which he would hit 36 homers, with a .275 batting average, and he passed through waivers without anyone placing a claim. The Mets could have kept him through the end of the season, but in an effort to save about \$4 million, they basically gave him away to Cleveland, taking a player in return to dress up the deal -- minor league pitcher Ryder Ryan, a 30th-round draft pick currently in Double-A.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Olney's grades: Plenty of A's, B's and C's -- and one big, fat F

No team added more talent than the Yankees, while the crosstown rival Mets utterly failed to unload any. It's t to hand out the report cards.

Bunting is hard. Matt Harvey makes it look nearly impossible

The Reds rightly has tried to bunt 27 times since 2015 -- and has made 32 outs. Sorry to pick on the pitcher, but ... oy vey.

Can the Yankees actually catch the Red Sox?

The Bombers went for it at the deadline, but if they don't beat up on Boston the next four days, the AL East race could soon be over.

You could make an argument that the Mets, who have a thin farm system, should have used the moment to add a better prospect by assuming more of Bruce's contract. But there is nothing wrong with this: In the midst of a lost season, it's good business for a non-contender to save some money.

We loosely refer to July 31 as the trade deadline, but rest assured, the real deadline is Aug. 31, by which contenders must add players to make them eligible to play in the postseason.

Here are some players who could move this month, either by getting claimed on waivers or by passing through and then being traded.

1. Matt Harvey, Cincinnati Reds

His four-homer start against the Pirates on July 22 torpedoed his trade value, rival executives thought. But Harvey has allowed two earned runs or fewer in six of his past seven starts, and as injuries inevitably manifest, some contender might grab him for depth. He's making \$5.63 million this season, so he's still owed about \$1.8 million.

2. Jose Bautista, New York Mets

He might not clear waivers, because he's making minimum salary and would cost a claiming team only about \$180,000 for the rest of the season. Since joining the Mets, Bautista has a .376 on-base percentage, and he seems like a great candidate to move to another team close to September, when the rosters open up, because of his pinch-hitting potential. He gets on base, and he's a power threat.

3. Mike Fiers, Detroit Tigers

He's making \$6 million this season, and overall, he's pitched effectively, with a 3.48 ERA in 21 starts. For a contender with some payroll

flexibility -- the Red Sox or the Phillies? -- he could make sense as a rotation safety net.

4. Andrew McCutchen, San Francisco Giants

The Giants didn't execute a sell-off before the deadline, but they didn't add either, so they could be right on the edge of moving some players if they continue to lose ground in early August. McCutchen has a .353 on-base percentage and can play an outfield spot at least serviceably. He is owed about \$4.5 million for the rest of this season, so it seems likely he would clear waivers. If that happens, his situation could be just like Bruce's last year: The Giants could move him while eating some money, and get a better prospect, or they could try to just dump as much of the contract as possible.

5. Logan Forsythe, Minnesota Twins

He'll make about \$3 million for the next two months, and in a year in which he's batting .206, he'd presumably clear waivers. When -- not if -- a contender loses an infielder to an injury, Forsythe will be available.

6. Daniel Murphy, Washington Nationals

One of the reasons the Nationals have struggled this year is because some of their veterans, including Murphy, are still working their way back from injuries. Murphy has been steadily improving; in his past 27 games, he's batting .353 with a .412 on-base percentage, nine extra-base hits, 10 walks and only seven strikeouts.

If the Nationals fade and decide to execute a measured sell-off this month, Murphy could be a great target for a contender in either league. He could be a DH for an AL team. He could play first or second for an NL team. And we've seen how he can thrive in the postseason. Because his contract is back-loaded, Murphy is making \$17.5 million this year and is owed about \$5.8 million for the final two months. On paper, he would seem to be a great waiver target for the Phillies, given their payroll flexibility.

7. Jose Iglesias, Tigers

He's a nice possibility for a contender that finds itself in need of a shortstop, given his defensive capability and his experience. Iglesias is making \$6.28 million this year.

8. Curtis Granderson, Toronto Blue Jays

The veteran outfielder is owed about \$1.6 million for the rest of this season, and he could be attractive for a lot of reasons: his experience playing all over the outfield, in the postseason and off the bench, his leadership, and his power. Granderson is notoriously streaky in his production, and July was a rough month, in which he batted .192 with a .268 on-base percentage and one homer in 83 plate appearances.

9. Carlos Gomez, Tampa Bay Rays

He's owed about \$1.3 million for the last two months and, overall, Gomez has had a rough season. But small sample size means more at this time of year than any other; in his past 11 games, Gomez has a .488 on-base percentage. A contender could add him for depth.

10. Victor Martinez, Tigers

Martinez's situation might be a little bit like that of Jim Thome near the end of his career, when Thome welcomed a deal to the Dodgers to serve as a pinch hitter in 2009. The 39-year-old Martinez is making \$18 million this year and will clear waivers, and he's having another down year, hitting .241. But he is widely respected for his leadership and his understanding of hitting, and you do wonder if, on Aug. 30 or 31 -- just before the September roster expansion -- some contender might take on a few thousand dollars in salary for his presence in September and October. The Phillies, perhaps, or the Braves.

11. Derek Holland, Giants

He could be a nice cheap option for some team, given he's owed about \$600,000 for the rest of the year; it seems unlikely that he would clear waivers. Holland has been a starting pitcher for the Giants this year, but he might be an intriguing bullpen piece because of his excellence against lefties this season -- zero homers in 99 plate appearances and a .193 average.

12. Francisco Liriano, Tigers

The Red Sox discussed the lefty and could revisit that conversation this month. Liriano's overall numbers are not great, a 4.41 ERA, but he has

been effective against lefties this season and could be used as a specialist, as he was in the postseason last year. Lefties are batting .113 against him this year, with seven hits in 62 at-bats.

'A good young wave': Breaking down the Twins' trade-deadline prospect haul **Dan Hayes | The Athletic | August 3, 2018**

Whether via rival teams or prospect analysts, the early reviews would suggest the Twins fared very well recouping value in trades the past week.

While trading five players, some among their most popular major leaguers, reduced their minimal chances of reaching the postseason in 2018, the consensus is the Twins were one of the trade deadline winners. Double-A Chattanooga pitcher Jorge Alcala is the prize of the bunch, a group of 11 prospects that contain both high-risk, high-reward players with impact potential as well as prospects who offer more certainty of becoming major leaguers but have lower ceilings. Given they accomplished what they did in a market that provided only one top-50 prospect in exchange for Manny Machado, arguably the best rental player available, the Twins should feel good about what they brought back in the trades for Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar, Lance Lynn, Zach Duke and Ryan Pressly.

“As far as overall hauls go, the Twins are one of the few teams who managed to get some potentially impact prospects back,” Baseball America editor J.J. Cooper said. “There weren’t a whole lot of those guys traded at the deadline.”

Catcher Francisco Mejia, who is rated No. 24 overall, and outfielder Yusniel Diaz (No. 46) were the only players rated among Baseball America’s top-50 prospects traded last month. Mejia went from Cleveland to San Diego for a strong pair of relievers (Brad Hand and Adam Cimber) who are both flush with team control. Diaz and three other minor leaguers went to Baltimore in the Machado deal.

But nobody else among BA’s top 50 was traded.

Aside from Ryan Pressly, who won’t become a free agent until after the 2019 season, the Twins merely had rental players to deal, albeit extremely popular ones whose departures brought on criticism from fans. Yet by taking a collection of volatile players and ones with less risk, the Twins managed to do extremely well even though four of the five players they dealt offered their teams only two months of service time.

“They deserve a little love,” said one American League executive. “They added a good young wave of talent even though it was a difficult market to navigate.”

The Twins were all about fanning out the portfolio in their trades. They wanted to acquire a cross section of lower-risk players they figured could reach the majors — pitcher Chase De Jong (Duke trade) and outfielder Luke Raley (Dozier) — and more volatile ones who could make an impact. Outfielder Gilberto Celestino (Pressly) and pitcher Jhoan Duran (Escobar), who threw seven no-hit innings and struck out eight in his Single-A Cedar Rapids debut, are among the higher-risk prospects.

“You’re always trying to find that right sweet spot depending on which team you’re dealing with and what their system looks like,” Twins farm director Jeremy Zoll said. “We’re trying to acquire as much value as possible. With (chief baseball officer Derek Falvey) and (general manager Thad Levine) working as hard as they can to not go 100 percent to the upside side of things, nor 100 percent to no ceiling and only floor, they’ve done a really nice job of striking that balance.”

In all, the Twins added five players who MLB Pipeline.com has ranked among the Twins’ top 30. Alcala, 23, has four above-average pitches, including a fastball graded 70 on the 20-80 scouting scale. The prize of the Pressly deal, the hard-throwing right-hander is already at Double-A and should be a reliever at worst, Cooper said.

Cooper said that Celestino, also acquired in the Pressly trade, has a lot of potential even though he has a long way to go. Though he’s not a speedster, Celestino’s routes and reads should keep him in center field, Cooper said.

Baseball America’s Kyle Glaser also was impressed with the Twins’ take. He thinks Raley, acquired in the Dozier trade, has a chance to surprise.

“I thought they had one of the best deadlines of the selling teams,” Glaser said.

Given how the Twins had performed all season long through the end of last week, the front office was ready to move on. Most sites listed the Twins as having fewer than a five percent chance of coming back to win the American League Central.

Falvey and Levine didn’t want to wake up on Wednesday to find a number of future free agents on the roster who would provide the Twins with no value after the season ends. Rather than be concerned with winning and losing trades, the Twins were focused on improving in the long run. That meant acquiring a vast array of players who could help in a variety of ways.

“When we look at deadline returns and we’re investing in prospect acquisition, we’re taking a portfolio approach, a blended approach,” Falvey said. “We felt like in different trades we acquired maybe lower-ceiling, higher-floor types that fit the upper levels and have a chance to help us along the way. That’s not to say those guys couldn’t exceed our expectations. But I think in some cases we probably did invest in a little higher-risk, higher-reward guys with real elite premium stuff. Sometimes those things don’t go exactly the way you expect. But to get a good 25-man and to build the kind of depth you need, as some of the other clubs that have been really successful right now have done, you had to invest in a blended approach.”

The players added to the system should easily land the Twins among the top 10 farm systems in baseball. MLB Pipeline’s Jim Callis suggested on Thursday that the system is in the top six. Cooper didn’t identify where the system ranks but said with the new haul as well as the development of Royce Lewis, Alex Kirilloff and Brusdar Graterol that Twins have a strong grouping to go with their young major-league core.

“A lot of teams you get to Aug. 1 and wonder why that guy is still on the team,” Cooper said. “The Twins did (well) and I don’t think they really gutted the current team to do it.

“They got some guys that are productive who maybe the scouting reports don’t match the productivity. Some of those guys end up being useful big-leaguers. They got guys who have all kinds of tools and are a long way away.

“They did get a great portfolio.”