



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
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Berrios shuts out O's, but not without drama

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE -- Right-hander Jose Berrios turned in the best outing of his young career with a three-hit shutout, and the offense provided the rest with four homers, including two from Brian Dozier, in a 7-0 win over the Orioles to clinch the series on Sunday afternoon at Camden Yards.

A day after Kyle Gibson held Baltimore hitless for six innings, Berrios was nearly unstoppable. The only hit he gave up before the ninth inning came on a misplay from left fielder Eddie Rosario that was ruled a double for Chance Sisco, despite the ball hitting Rosario's glove. Berrios gave up a bunt single with one out in the ninth to Sisco -- which the Twins weren't thrilled with -- and loaded the bases but escaped the jam to come away with the first shutout in the Majors this season.

"Berrios is so good that he can do that all the time," said catcher Mitch Garver. "When he throws the ball wherever he wants it with whatever pitch he wants, that's how effective he can be."

Berrios was efficient, needing 107 pitches to record the shutout, striking out six and walking one. He recorded 11 swinging strikes with six on fastballs, three on curveballs -- including the game-ending strikeout of Adam Jones -- and two on changeups.

"I felt comfortable with my three pitches all game long," Berrios said through a translator. "I just kept attacking, attacking, attacking and it worked."

Berrios was staked to an early lead with the Twins scoring four times in the first against right-hander Kevin Gausman. Dozier set the tone with a homer on the first pitch of the game and Eduardo Escobar dropped in a bloop RBI double before a run-scoring wild pitch and an RBI single from Byron Buxton.

Minnesota added two more runs in the third, with Miguel Sano and Escobar both connecting on homers. It was the second in as many days for Sano and the first for Escobar. Dozier capped the scoring with a solo shot off reliever Pedro Araujo in the sixth, giving him his eighth career multi-homer game.

"We were able to get the ball in the air a lot and in this park, it doesn't make it easy, but it makes it easier to hit the ball over the fence," Dozier said. "But we're in the process of creating runs. Not just home runs."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Dozier sets the tone: Gausman's first pitch of the season was a 91.3-mph fastball on the inside part of the plate, but Dozier turned on it and hit it a projected 357 feet, per Statcast™, for his 28th career leadoff homer. Dozier is also tied with Jacque Jones for the Twins' all-time lead in first-pitch homers in his career with four.

"I felt good, but for whatever reason, it kind of wasn't there today," said Gausman. "I felt like I got better as the game went on, really with everything, but I will say early on I just didn't really feel as locked in as I have been in spring." More >

Sisco breaks it up: Berrios had no-hit stuff and wasn't helped by his defense when Rosario couldn't make the catch on a deep drive to left field. It was a makeable play -- it had a catch percentage of 90 percent, per Statcast™ -- and he had 5.6 seconds to cover 83 feet.

"It's kind of baseball's way, a guy takes a no-hitter there if that play were to be made, we all know that," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Rosie did a nice job getting back there, it just deflected off his glove. It kind of took some of the drama out of what might have unfolded, but that's fine. I don't think Jose is going to be too disappointed with a shutout."

QUOTABLE

"Obviously, we're not a fan of it. He's a young kid. I could've said something at second base, but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there with Chris Davis, Adam Jones and those guys. I'm sure they'll address it and move forward. It's all about learning up here." -- Dozier, who was one of several Twins to take issue with Sisco's bunt single in the ninth

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Twins starters combined to throw 21 scoreless innings against the Orioles. The last time the club had three starting pitchers throw at least six scoreless innings in consecutive starts was from June 10-13, 2014 (Kevin Correia, Phil Hughes, Gibson). Baltimore hitters went a combined 5-for-68 (.074 average) against Twins starters.

ROSARIO, BUXTON MAKE GREAT GRABS

Rosario recorded a four-star catch in the first inning, racing 123 feet in 6.1 seconds, giving it a catch probability of 49 percent, per Statcast™. He reached 29.9 feet per second, which is considered elite.

Buxton outdid Rosario with a five-star catch in the eighth on a fly ball from Trey Mancini. Buxton needed to cover 92 feet in 4.8 seconds, giving it a catch percentage of 21 percent. Buxton, who was the fastest player in baseball last year, reached 30.9 feet per second.

WHAT'S NEXT

Right-hander Lance Lynn is set to make his Twins debut on Monday against the Pirates at 12:05 p.m. CT at PNC Park, live on MLB.TV. Lynn was signed to a one-year deal during Spring Training and stayed in Florida to make a start on the Minor League side as prep for his first outing. It's the first game of a two-game set in Pittsburgh with an off-day on Tuesday.

Dozier dingers! 2B hits 2 HRs vs. O's

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE -- Brian Dozier wasted no time hitting his first homer of the season in Sunday's 7-0 win over the Orioles, as he launched the first pitch of the game from right-hander Kevin Gausman into the left-field seats at Camden Yards. The Twins kept adding to their total with Miguel Sano and Eduardo Escobar both going deep in the third and Dozier launching his second homer of 2018 in the sixth. That brings Minnesota's total to seven homers over the past two games.

Gausman's first pitch of the season was a 91.3-mph fastball on the inside part of the plate, but Dozier turned on it and hit it a projected 357 feet, per Statcast™, for this 28th career leadoff homer, which is a club record. Dozier is also tied with Jacque Jones for the Twins' all-time lead in first-pitch homers in his career with four.

"A lot of things go into that," Dozier said. "It's not just going up there and looking to swing or anything like that. I'm not going to tell you what those things are. But there's a process behind it."

The homer left the bat at 95.4 mph at a launch angle of 34 degrees, per Statcast™, and similar batted balls go for hits only 17 percent of the time. But Dozier hit it to the right part of the park and was rewarded with his 152nd career homer. His 153rd, also a solo shot, marked his eighth career multi-homer game and came on a 2-1 fastball after Gausman missed with two sliders.

"We took advantage," Dozier said. "He's a heck of a pitcher, but I think he had trouble with his off-speed [pitches]."

Sano crushed his second homer of the season and his second in as many days leading off the third, hitting an opposite-field blast on a 1-0 fastball in the outer part of the zone. It had an exit velocity of 110.3 mph at a launch angle of 23 degrees, traveling a projected 404 feet, per Statcast™. It was the 13th homer of Sano's career that had an exit velocity of at least 110 mph, and his first since Aug. 18, 2017.

Escobar, who had an RBI bloop double as part of a four-run first, joined the party with a solo shot to center in the third on a 1-1 splitter. His homer went a projected 427 feet, leaving the bat at 107 mph with a launch angle of 19 degrees, per Statcast™.

The last time the Twins hit at least three homers in back-to-back games came against the White Sox on Aug. 21-22, 2017. Max Kepler, Jason Castro and Sano homered on Saturday.

"It puts us on a pretty good pace," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Doz hitting the leadoff homer, which we've gotten somewhat accustomed to. I thought they were all just really good approaches. For Esco to stay on a changeup and hit it to center, and then Miggy going the other way, you know when he's hitting the ball over there with authority, he's in a pretty good place. You take the power."

Molitor relying on Twins' 'pen for 2-frame stints **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | April 1, 2018**

BALTIMORE -- With the Twins deciding to go with a four-man rotation and eight relievers, none of whom are stretched out enough to be long relievers, Twins manager Paul Molitor said he told several members of his bullpen to be ready to pitch two-inning stints.

Molitor has already deployed that strategy, using Addison Reed for two scoreless innings on Thursday and then going to Ryan Pressly for two innings in relief of Kyle Gibson on Saturday with a no-hitter going. Pressly pitched well but lost the no-hitter on a two-out single from Jonathan Schoop in the eighth.

Molitor met with his relievers before the start of the season to go over his plan and let pitchers such as Trevor Hildenberger, Taylor Rogers, Gabriel Moya and Pressly know they could be counted on for multiple innings.

"Coming out of spring without a long man, Pressly, Rogers, Hildenberger and Moya know that two-inning stints won't be uncommon for them, at least early in the year," Molitor said. "Once we get more settled, we'll see how we want to go once we get to a five-man [rotation]."

Rule 5 reliever Tyler Kinley will be used in low-leverage spots early in the season, but Molitor clarified he's not going to be used as the club's long reliever.

"He's not a guy who has pitched long," Molitor said. "I told him it'll be tricky to find the right spots to get him started. Hopefully, it'll give him some momentum. He understands that."

The Twins are expected to stick with a four-man rotation and eight relievers until they need a fifth starter on April 11, barring any weather-related scheduling changes. Right-hander Phil Hughes, who is on the 10-day disabled list with a left oblique strain, remains the top candidate to be the club's fifth starter, as he came out of his Minor League outing on Saturday without any issues and will start again on Thursday with Class A Advanced Fort Myers.

Hughes also remains a candidate to be the long reliever once right-hander Ervin Santana returns to the rotation, although Santana isn't expected back until May. But for now, Molitor believes his relievers have a clear view of their roles early this year, with Zach Duke and Reed as the top setup relievers to closer Fernando Rodney.

"I tried to generally present the highest expected situations to be looking to pitch in," Molitor said. "Obviously, you have to leave some room for yourself because we don't have a long man, per se. I think the guys have a good feel for how they'll be used."

Twins tidbits

- The Twins are 20th in the Draft order this season, giving them a bonus pool of \$6,745,200. Each pick in the first 10 rounds of the Draft has an assigned value, and the total for each of a club's selections equals what it can spend in those rounds without incurring a penalty. The No. 20

overall selection has a pick value of \$3,120,000. The club lost the No. 75 overall pick to the Cardinals when it signed Lance Lynn.

- The Twins have the highest signing bonus pool for signing international free agents, as they have \$6,025,400 in pool money, which also matches the Reds, Marlins, Brewers, A's and Rays. The signing period begins on July 2.

Jose Berrios, Twins shut out Orioles

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 2, 2018

BALTIMORE – Though nobody knew it at the time, the Twins' season-opening series finale Sunday was over after one pitch.

Brian Dozier smashed that 91-mile-per-hour fastball from Kevin Gausman into the left-field seats, and just like that, Jose Berrios had all the run support he would need to make it a happy Easter. Jake Odorizzi pitched six shutout innings on Thursday, Kyle Gibson threw six hitless innings Saturday, and yet somehow the 23-year-old managed to outpitch both, recording his first career shutout, first career complete game and first victory of the season, a 7-0 three-hitter against the flummoxed Orioles.

The Twins, who hit four homers on the day and seven in the series, leave Maryland with warm memories of cozy Camden Yards, the ballpark that set them off to an 0-9 start just two seasons ago. They have, um, upgraded the pitching since then.

“He followed suit after Jake and Gibby. You know, the starters haven't given up a run yet,” marveled manager Paul Molitor. “That's pretty good after three games here in Baltimore.”

It's pretty good anywhere, anytime. Twins starters contributed 21 consecutive scoreless innings during this series — recorded 41 consecutive outs without allowing so much as a hit, matter of fact — marking the first time the franchise has received nothing but zeros from its rotation for three consecutive games since 2014. Baltimore had only 11 hits over the entire series.

And Berrios left the Orioles flailing, mixing a 94-mph fastball with a funhouse curveball that breaks as much side-to-side as it does vertically. Berrios retired 25 of the first 26 hitters he faced, 17 in a row at one point, and the lone hit in that time could have been caught. Chance Sisco hit a third-inning fly ball that came down just short of the left-field wall, glancing off Eddie Rosario's glove for a double.

“It's kind of baseball's way — a guy takes a no-hitter there if that play were to be made,” Molitor said. “Rosie did a nice job getting back there, [but] it just deflected off his glove. It kind of took some of the drama out of what might have unfolded, but that's fine. I don't think Jose is going to be too disappointed with a shutout.”

Disappointed, no. Satisfied might be another matter. Was it his best performance in the major leagues? “Yes,” said Berrios, “but I want more.”

The Orioles wanted no more of him. Berrios needed 57 pitches, only 16 of them balls, to mow through the first six innings. Baltimore hitters struck out six times Sunday, hit seven popups, 10 routine ground balls (into several extreme defensive shifts), and zero balls that were remotely threatening.

The only blemish that prevented Berrios from recording the Twins' first one-hitter since an Ervin Santana masterpiece last April: a bunt-induced hiccup in the ninth. Sisco pushed one toward third base, vacated by another of the Twins' frequent shifts, and the Twins grumbled a bit afterward about the play. Berrios then walked Chris Davis and gave up a soft line drive into center by Manny Machado, loading the bases. But Berrios ended the 106-pitch beauty by whiffing Adam Jones with a sideways-breaking curve.

“We were going to ride him and see where it went. Obviously a chance to get his first big-league shutout, we were pulling for that,” Molitor said. “It got a little bit interesting there in the ninth ... [but] there were just a lot of positives to get off to a start like that for him.”

Gausman, the Orioles' second-best pitcher a year ago, was not so lucky. After Dozier lined his first pitch into the seats — his 28th career leadoff home run, and fourth on the first pitch — things just got worse. He walked Joe Mauer, Rosario bunted against a shift for a hit, and Eduardo Escobar doubled and Byron Buxton singled, producing a four-run inning.

Then the Twins' power took over, with Miguel Sano and Escobar each crushing home runs off Gausman. Dozier put the cap on the day himself, collecting his eighth career two-homer game by launching another against Pedro Araujo.

“It puts us on a pretty good pace,” Molitor joked of his power-hitting team. “I thought they were all just really good approaches. For Esco to stay on a changeup and hit it to center, and then Miggy going the other way — you know when he's hitting the ball over there with authority, he's in a pretty good place.”

And when the Twins pitch like this, they all are.

Minnesota Twins starting pitchers are off to a great start

Michael Rand | Star Tribune | April 2, 2018

Four thoughts about a few of the converging sports seasons:

- The Twins' best starting pitcher in 2017 and their \$12 million free-agent starting pitcher haven't even taken the ball yet, making what Minnesota's three starters combined to do in the opening series against Baltimore that much more impressive.

Jake Odorizzi, Kyle Gibson and Jose Berrios threw 21 shutout innings over three games against the Orioles, allowing just five hits combined while striking out 19.

It's hard to say which outing was most impressive, though Berrios' three-hit shutout Sunday might get the nod even over Gibson's six hitless innings Saturday or Odorizzi's dazzling debut Thursday.

It's not enough to make you say, "Who needs Ervin Santana and Lance Lynn?" but it's evidence of what we knew coming into the year: The Twins' starting pitching should be better this year than it has been in a long time.

- It's tempting to blame baseball's schedule-makers for what figures to be a rough first homestand weather-wise for the Twins. Really, it's just an extraordinarily cold week ahead.

Per usclimatedata.com, the average high temperature in Minneapolis on April 5 is 52.3 degrees — plenty warm for baseball. The projected high for the Twins home opener Thursday, though, is 35 — and that looks like it might be the nicest day of the week.

Seriously.

If it feels like the MLB season started early — March 29 for the Twins, to be exact — you are correct. That said, the first Twins home game was actually two days earlier last year because they opened the season at home April 3 against the Royals.

This will all be a distant memory soon enough, but it's hard to really blame MLB for squeezing in a few more games early in the year — when they can be played during the day, by the way — instead of risking the most meaningful games of the year extending into chilly November nights.

- Wild defenseman Ryan Suter had been so durable before his injury Saturday against Dallas that it was easy to take his presence in the lineup for granted.

Suter missed just five games in his first five seasons with the Wild — all of them coming in 2014-15 — and has suited up in all 78 for Minnesota this season. In all his seasons here, he has ranked among the top three players in the NHL in average ice time per game. This year, he sits at No. 2.

That will all change with Suter out indefinitely, of course. It's hard to overstate his impact or what Suter's absence will mean for the Wild's postseason aspirations. Suffice to say, this is their biggest challenge in an already trying season.

- The NBA's Western Conference is brutal, and there will still be plenty of reshuffling of the standings even after Sunday's game between the Timberwolves and Utah.

That said, here is my minimum expectation for the Timberwolves this season in order to say they made a significant step forward: Make the playoffs, get a seed that allows them to play a competitive first-round series and win at least two playoff games.

Winning a playoff series would of course mean even more significant progress. Barely getting into the playoffs and bowing out quickly or missing the postseason altogether? This roster has too much talent for that to be an acceptable outcome, even if this is already the franchise's best season in more than a decade.

Twins miffed by rookie catcher Chance Sisco's ninth-inning bunt

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE – Brian Dozier thought about approaching Chance Sisco at second base during a ninth-inning timeout Sunday but decided against it.

"I could've said something, but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there, with Chris Davis, Adam Jones and those guys," the Twins' de facto spokesman said. "I'm sure they'll address it and move forward."

What needs addressing? In the Twins' opinion, it's Sisco's decision to bunt to the vacant left side of the infield with one out in the ninth, trailing 7-0. Jose Berrios was trying to complete his first career one-hitter and shutout, and there were some players in the visitors' dugout who felt it inappropriate for the Baltimore catcher to lay down a bunt to end Berrios' streak of 17 straight outs, rather than swing away.

"Obviously, we're not a fan of it," Dozier said.

Berrios, who followed up by walking Davis on a fastball that umpire Marty Foster ruled was low, and loading the bases on a broken-bat fly by Manny Machado that fell in, said he wasn't bothered by the bunt. Sort of.

"I don't care if he's bunting," Berrios said. "I just know it's not good for baseball in that situation. That's it."

Minnesota Twins manager Paul Molitor is seen past home plate umpire Marty Foster, front left, and Twins catcher Mitch Garver as he watches the seventh

Sisco, a rookie catcher, defended the bunt to the Baltimore Sun, noting what followed: "[Berrios] was kind of going through the lineup. Just trying to do what I can to get on base," he said. "They were playing the shift right there, so they kind of gave it to me. If they're going to shift, I have to take it right there in that spot. We got bases loaded right after that. We're a couple home runs away from tying the game."

Twins manager Paul Molitor said he understood his players' discontent, but he didn't pass judgment on the play.

"Some of those unwritten rules of the game are not black and white," he said tactfully. "He did what he thought was right."

Tools of ignorance

Mitch Garver absorbed Machado's long backswing with the side of his head, but that's not what was making him see the ball move in all kinds of crazy directions Sunday. Berrios' curveball and changeup really were moving that much, breaking bats along the way.

"I know there were two of [Jonathan] Schoop's in one at-bat. That's just telling of how good his stuff is," said Garver, making his first start of the season. "He's got balls moving every which way. ... He can change the shape of his breaking ball, as well as his fastball. Super effective. It's hard to hit off of."

Machado found that out in the fourth inning, flailing at a curveball that broke under his bat. He made solid contact with Garver's helmet, however, and the catcher was on his knees for about a minute while trainer Tony Leo checked on him.

"It was a loud sound. He caught the barrel," Molitor said. "Thankfully, he caught mostly helmet, but it dazed him a little bit. He was clear, answered the questions, and gave us the thumbs up. We checked with him the next couple of innings as he came off the field, and he was good."

Shouldn't be a problem, Garver said: "I feel pretty good. My brain does not hurt. My skull does, however."

Etc.

- When the Baltimore chaplain who normally holds chapel services for players each weekend couldn't make it to Camden Yards on Sunday, Kyle Gibson took action. "I didn't want to not have one on Easter. So I was somewhat the organizer," Gibson said. "I read a little bit [Saturday] night, and as I was thinking about the whole [Easter] story, had a few things pop in to share. Some other guys shared, too, and we were able to have a good service."

- Twins starting pitchers put together a string of 12 consecutive hitless innings over the series' three games, and they never gave up a run. The last time the Twins got three consecutive starts of six innings or more and didn't allow a run was June 10-13, 2014, when Kevin Correia, Phil Hughes and Gibson managed the feat.

Series preview: Twins at Pittsburgh

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 1, 2018

Two-game series at PNC Park

Monday, noon • FSN, 830-AM

Twins RHP Lance Lynn (11-8, 3.43 in 2017) vs. RHP Jameson Taillon (8-7, 4.44 in 2017)

Wednesday, 5 p.m. • FSN, 830-AM

Twins RHP Jake Odorizzi (0-0, 0.00) vs. RHP Ivan Nova (0-0, 3.60)

Twins update

They are 16-12 all-time against the Pirates, 8-6 in Pittsburgh. ... Twins LHP Zach Duke spent the first six years of his MLB career with the Pirates, going 45-70 with a 4.54 ERA as a starter and getting chosen for the All-Star Game in 2009. OF Robbie Grossman was drafted by the Pirates in 2008 but was traded to the Astros in 2012 before making it to the majors. ... The Twins have already hit seven home runs this season, with Miguel Sano and Brian Dozier hitting two apiece. ... Byron Buxton has two stolen bases, giving him a streak of 26 in a row without being caught. ... Lynn will make his Twins debut on Monday. The former St. Louis righthander is 7-7 with a 5.10 ERA in 21 career starts against the Pirates. Wednesday's starter, Odorizzi, has never faced Pittsburgh.

Pirates update

Thanks to a controversial replay reversal, Pittsburgh opened the season with a 13-10, 13-inning victory at Detroit on Friday, then swept a doubleheader with the Tigers on Sunday following a rainout Saturday. ... Monday is Opening Day in Pittsburgh, where the Pirates have won four straight openers. ... Nova is 2-0 with a 1.93 ERA vs. the Twins, both wins coming while with the Yankees. ... The Pirates traded former NL MVP Andrew McCutchen to the Giants and their top pitcher, Gerrit Cole, to the Astros over the winter. ... Former Twins LHP Nik Turley is in the Pirates organization but is serving an 80-game suspension for failing a PED test. ... 1B Josh Bell hit 26 home runs in 2017 and led Pittsburgh with 90 RBI.

Sunday's Twins-Baltimore game recap
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 1, 2018

Impact player

Jose Berrios, Twins

Retired 25 of the first 26 hitters he faced, and recorded his first career shutout.

By the numbers

57 Pitches thrown by Berrios in the first six innings, a mere 16 of them called balls.

41 Consecutive outs recorded by Twins starters between Orioles hits, from second inning Thursday to third inning Sunday.

11 Runs allowed by Baltimore starting pitchers in the series, compared to zero allowed by Twins starters.

On deck

The season's first interleague game takes the Twins to Pittsburgh, where former NL pitcher Lance Lynn makes his debut.

Postgame: Shifting Miguel Sano helps defense -- and keeps him warm
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — A couple of extra notes from Camden Yards, before moving on to Pittsburgh:

There's an unexpected benefit, Miguel Sano says, to all the extreme defensive shifts the Twins used against Orioles left-handed hitters.

"It's good because I can try to warm up," said the Twins' third baseman, a Dominican who doesn't particularly like the springtime cold weather.

Sano moved to the right side of the infield more than a dozen times on Sunday, and recorded a couple of outs over there, even ranging into left field at one point to catch a Craig Gentry popup.

"I like it. It's fun, talking to [second baseman Brian] Dozier and Esky [Eduardo Escobar] too," Sano said. "I try to play decent defense over there. If I think I can catch the ball, I'll get there."

The 55-degree weather on Saturday night and Sunday just makes it better, he said. “I’ve got Red Hot [liniment] over my whole body, and when I’m running, it keeps me hot,” he said. “In between innings, I run inside. It’s not easy in cold weather — and more in Minnesota.”

Playing the right side is easier than keeping warm in April, apparently.

“He took the last ground ball in an inning, and he said, ‘Wow. Playing over here is easy,’ “ said Dozier, a Gold Glove winner at the position. “I said, ‘Yeah, that’s why they moved me from short to second. It’s a lot easier.’”

XXX

Jose Berrios needed just 57 pitches to get through the first six innings on Sunday, and with a 7-0 lead, it appeared a simple matter to finish the game himself.

But it wasn’t quite so easy.

It took the 23-year-old 21 pitches to work through his only difficulty of the day, a bases-loaded ninth inning. He finished with 107 pitches, one fewer than his career high in the majors, and enough for Twins manager Paul Molitor to ask Fernando Rodney to get warmed up, just in case.

“I know that we were checking in after the sixth [inning], seventh, eighth. He said he felt strong,” Molitor said. “We were monitoring him fairly closely there in the ninth, protected if something went haywire. But I wanted to give him a chance. I don’t think Jose is the kind of guy who’s going to say something that’s not accurate. So I trusted him, and he got that last strikeout.”

He whiffed Adam Jones, who Molitor confirmed was going to be Berrios’ final batter either way, on a beauty of a curve.

“It was a battle. I battled really hard and the results were there,” Berrios said of that final at-bat with Jones. “After the eighth inning, [Molitor] came up to me and asked if I wanted the ninth. I said, ‘for sure. I want to keep competing.’ It was my first compete game, and I really wanted to go out there.”

Jose Berrios goes the distance in 7-0 win over Baltimore Orioles
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — When young Jose Berrios took the mound for the ninth and final time Sunday afternoon, he didn’t jog out of the third-base dugout.

Instead, he positively sprinted out to pick up the baseball. That’s how eager the 23-year-old from Puerto Rico was to finish off his first complete-game shutout in the major leagues.

“After the eighth inning, they came to me and said, ‘Hey, do you want the ninth inning?’ ” Berrios said after a 7-0 win over the Baltimore Orioles at Camden Yards. “I said, ‘For sure.’ I wanted to go out there and keep competing.”

Berrios got Pedro Alvarez to pop out to shortstop just four pitches into the ninth, but when Orioles catcher Chance Sisco laid down a bunt single against the shift there was a new challenge for the slender right-hander making his 40th career start in the majors.

That ended a string of 17 straight batters Berrios had retired, going back to Sisco’s fly-ball double that deflected off left fielder Eddie Rosario’s glove in the third. That had been the only base runner all day against Berrios, who was seeking just the fourth complete-game, one-hit shutout in Twins history since 1980.

“I don’t care if he bunts on me, but I know that’s not good for baseball in that situation,” Berrios said. “That’s it.”

Berrios missed the strike zone with his first three pitches to Chris Davis — Berrios’ first such skid all day — before walking him on a borderline full-count pitch. Catcher Mitch Garver, making just his fifth big-league start behind the plate, made his first mound visit of the day.

“I understand it’s a play that will irk you,” Garver said of the bunt, “so I went out there just to make sure he knew that we were one pitch away from finishing that game out: ‘You make your pitches, we can get it done.’ “

Manny Machado followed with a line single up the middle to load the bases, but with two relievers warming in the Twins bullpen Berrios locked in again. He got Jonathan Schoop to foul out to Garver and then shook off four foul balls by Adam Jones to end the game with a swinging strikeout on a sweeping curveball.

It was just the sixth strikeout for Berrios, who used his two-seam fastball and changeup more than ever to induce weak contact. As Garver caught his 107th and final pitch — one shy of Berrios' career high in the majors — the budding young ace slapped his glove with his bare hand and let out a mighty roar.

“I knew that was going to be my last hitter anyway,” Berrios said through a translator. “I just battled. I just battled hard, and the result was there.”

In this season-opening series victory, Twins starters produced 21 scoreless innings, a remarkable streak of dominance this early in the season. Jake Odorizzi allowed two hits over six innings on Opening Day, and Kyle Gibson followed with six no-hit innings to earn the victory on Saturday night.

Entering the day, the Twins already were the only big-league rotation without an earned run allowed. Three games in, the Oakland A's had already seen their starters give up 11, while the Miami Marlins and Colorado Rockies had given up 10 apiece.

Berrios, coming off a 14-win breakthrough season, was determined to record his first complete game. He had lasted eight innings twice before, most recently last June 21 against the Chicago White Sox.

In 98 starts across six seasons in the minor leagues, Berrios managed a pair of nine-inning complete games. For Triple-A Rochester in July 2016, he went the distance on just 87 pitches at Syracuse but allowed two runs (one earned); and in May 2015 for Double-A Chattanooga, he threw a two-hit shutout on a whopping 113 pitches for hard-driving manager Doug Mientkiewicz.

“Those,” Berrios said, “are not the same.”

Four more home runs gave the Twins a total of seven in the final two games of the season. Brian Dozier keyed a four-run first with his 28th career leadoff homer and went deep again in the sixth for his eight career multi-homer game.

Miguel Sano added an opposite-field homer in the third, his second homer in as many days, and Eduardo Escobar tacked on a 427-foot shot off the batter's eye in center field.

Asked if this was his best game yet, Berrios smiled.

“Yeah,” he said, “but I want to have more.”

Lance Lynn heads back to Pittsburgh for Twins debut after rocky last visit

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — In addition to his Twins debut, Monday will mark Lance Lynn's 11th career start at Pittsburgh's PNC Park. He'd rather forget his last visit.

Last Sept. 23, in his penultimate start for the St. Louis Cardinals, the veteran right-hander failed to get out of the first inning. Lynn faced 10 batters and retired two of them, getting saddled with eight earned runs in a 42-pitch nightmare.

“Why do you have to bring up the past?” Lynn said in mock protest. “That was last year.”

Anything unusual about that day for him?

“Yeah, I didn't get out of the first,” he said with a smile. “That was pretty much it. And it was last year, so I'm not really worried about it.”

Lynn, who broke in with the Cardinals in 2011, is 3-4 with a 5.57 earned-run average in 12 career outings (10 starts) at PNC Park. He has allowed 70 hits in 53 1/3 innings, including five home runs, and the ERA is his highest in any park where he has worked more than three times.

He also has four quality starts at the Pirates, including a pair of scoreless outings in his two previous trips to the mound there.

“I've had my good ones and I've had my bad ones and I've had my ugliest one of my career there, I think, but it's a pretty park,” Lynn said. “They do a good job, so it's a fun place to play and a good atmosphere. We'll be there for the home opener, so it should be good.”

The Pirates were one of the Cardinals' top division rivals through most of Lynn's tenure, including a matchup in the 2013 National League Division Series. Even after the offseason trades that sent former MVP Andrew McCutchen to San Francisco and ace right-hander Gerrit Cole to Houston, Lynn is expecting a battle in the two-game interleague series.

“They still have some talent, even though they traded away some guys,” Lynn said. “Most of the whole entire offense is young and they’re trying to make their impact on the game. They just have to learn at the big-league level.”

GARVER OK

Rookie catcher Mitch Garver had a scary moment in Sunday’s fourth inning when Manny Machado’s bat struck him on the left side of the helmet while making this follow through.

Twins manager Paul Molitor and head athletic trainer Tony Leo went out to check on Garver, who took off his skull cap to make sure he wasn’t bleeding. Aside from a noticeable welt on his scalp, Garver was apparently unscathed and concussion-free.

“I took a moment to gather myself and figured I’d be able to finish out the game,” Garver said. “It wasn’t something that would stop me from catching the rest of that game.”

Garver, who was able to pass the quick on-field exam, said he’s been hit in the helmet while catching but never that hard.

“I feel pretty good,” he said. “My brain does not hurt. My skull does, however. I guess you would call it a bone bruise.”

TAKING A CHANCE

Orioles rookie catcher Chance Sisco caused a stir on the winning side with his ninth-inning bunt for a base hit against the shift with the Twins leading 7-0.

“Obviously we’re not a fan of it,” Dozier said. “He’s a young kid. I could very easily have said something about it at second base, but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there. I’m sure they’ll address that, and you move forward. It’s all about learning. You learn up here.”

Added Twins left fielder Eddie Rosario: “Nobody liked that. No, no, no. That’s not a good play.”

Sisco’s bunt was just the second hit of the game off Jose Berrios, which added to the perceived violation.

“Some of those unwritten rules of the game are not black and white,” Molitor said. “He did what he thought was right. I think there were a few people who took exception to that. I won’t mention names.”

IMMORTALIZED

In addition to former Twins first basemen Justin Morneau and Jim Thome, current Twins Logan Morrison and Robbie Grossman have commemorative markers out on Eutaw Street at Camden Yards.

Morrison, then with the Tampa Bay Rays, connected on a 410-foot blast last July 1 against Orioles right-hander Dylan Bundy. It was the second of two homers off Bundy that day for Morrison.

Grossman, meanwhile, hit his 385-footer off Miguel Gonzalez back on July 31, 2013, while with the Houston Astros. It was Grossman’s first career homer, hooking around the right-field foul pole.

“I remember that,” Grossman said. “I hit it pretty good. I can always come back and see that. It will always be something to remember for me here.”

BRIEFLY

Phil Hughes (oblique) came through his Saturday rehab start with no initial concerns and was on track to start Thursday’s opener for Class A Fort Myers.

Class A Cedar Rapids will include eight of Baseball America’s top 30 Twins prospects on its Opening Day roster. That includes the Twins’ last two first-round picks: shortstop Royce Lewis (2017) and outfielder Alex Kirilloff (2016). It’s the first time since 2010 that the Kernels, then an Angels affiliate, have had two first-rounders on their roster (Mike Trout, Randal Grichuk).

Zulgad: Twins look silly for taking offense after bunt by Orioles catcher
Judd Zulgad | ESPN 1500 | April 1, 2018

There was one out in the bottom of the ninth inning of the Twins' 7-0 victory over Baltimore on Sunday afternoon when catcher Chance Sisco stepped in to hit against Twins starter Jose Berrios.

Sisco saw that the Twins were shifting him to the right — Miguel Sano was the only player on the left side of second base — and dropped a bunt that rolled toward the vacated third base position. It was the Orioles' second hit of the game against Berrios.

The outrage was nearly immediate. The Twins radio broadcast said that Twins manager Paul Molitor, a rather mellow fellow, was staring into the Baltimore dugout.

Twins second baseman Brian Dozier later told reporters: "Obviously we're not a fan of it. He's a young kid. I could very easily have said something about it (to Sisco) at second base but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there. I'm sure they'll address that. It's all about learning. You learn up here."

Then there was this from Berrios.

@RhettBollinger

Jose Berrios on Chance Sisco's bunt in the ninth: "I don't care if he's bunting. I just know it's not good for baseball in that situation. That's it."

What am I missing here?

Hockey used to have the dumbest list of unwritten rules – or The Code as it was called – but that torch has been passed to baseball. The sport that now embraces analytics and many new ways of thinking still has a made up list of rules that call for revenge if they are broken.

The bunt by the 23-year-old Sisco is the perfect example of this. The Twins actually felt they had the right to be offended because, up by seven runs and having gone into a shift, Sisco had the audacity to bunt on them rather than swing away and conveniently hit into their shift as Berrios pursued a complete-game, one-hitter.

And now, because he did this, Sisco is going to get a talking to from veterans on the Orioles and maybe a fastball thrown toward him when the O's visit Target Field in early July.

This isn't just silly, it's stupid.

Did anyone bring up the fact that Twins center fielder Byron Buxton stole second base in the top of the fifth inning with his team up by six runs? What on earth was Buxton thinking by running with his team comfortably ahead?

Oh, that's right. He was thinking it might be a good idea to add some more runs, even if Berrios was in the process of pitching a complete game, three-hitter.

But when Sisco decided that maybe he could get his second hit of the game by bunting, well, that was somehow going too far. A line had been crossed! That, of course, is nonsense.

Maybe it's the veterans on the Twins, and not Sisco, who need to be pulled aside for a chat.

Spinning a gem: 5 numbers that illustrate dominant first outing for J.O. Berrios
Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | April 1, 2018

Look out, Major Leagues. Twins starter J.O. Berrios has arrived.

Minnesota's No. 3 starter continued the team's trend of strong pitching performances through the first series of the season. And Berrios' was the best of the bunch. The young righty pitched all 9 innings Sunday and shut out the Orioles with very few blemishes on the ledger. This column presents 5 thoughts on the dominant outing from Berrios, in by-the-numbers fashion.

a) 6 strikeouts

Berrios finished his dominant outing by wiping out Adam Jones on a strikeout with a breaking ball. The reason Twins fans have for years been excited about Berrios is that he combines that nasty curve with a number of other weapons. It starts with mid-90's heat on his 4-seam fastball, and includes a 2-seamer that has crazy movement at times and a changeup that looks like it could be a great pitch for him, even though he doesn't use

it all that often.

Here's how he got O's hitters to punch out Sunday:

The first trip through the batting order Berrios got Colby Rasmus and Pedro Alvarez with high fastballs.

Then he cut down Manny Machado and Adam Jones on a curve the second time through the order .

Berrios got Rasmus again with a 2-seamer that looked like it dived away from the lefty, and Berrios got the called strike on the outside corner.

And then he got Jones to swing through a curveball to end the game and cap the shutout.

b) 66% strikes

Berrios only needed 107 pitches to get through the 9-inning shutout Sunday. And 71 of those pitches were strikes. (I believe he got a generous call or two Sunday and also got squeezed at times late, and I think it's fair to call it a wash.)

c) 7 runs

Berrios had run support from the very first pitch of the afternoon. Kevin Gausman tried to get ahead of Brian Dozier, who took the challenge and belted pitch No. 1 out of the field of play to put the Twins up 1-0 early.

It turns out that it was the only run that Berrios needed. But just for good measure, the Twins offense poured it on with 3 more runs in the first inning, 2 more in the third and 1 in the 6th inning. Dozier was the offensive star of the day with a pair of solo homers; Eduardo Escobar and Miguel Sano also chipped in with a home run apiece.

The Twins led the American League in runs scored after the all-star break last season. And now they've added a healthy Miguel Sano and Logan Morrison — who hit 38 home runs last season — in the DH spot. Through the first series of the season, it's looking like that lineup is going to score an awful lot of runs this season.

d) 21 innings

Berrios turned in the best start of the young season for the Twins, but Jake Odorizzi and Kyle Gibson did well to hand him the baton.

Odorizzi pitched 6 scoreless innings in the opener, and then Gibson had a no-hitter (with 5 walks) through 6 innings before he was hooked Saturday. Berrios was dominant in the rubber match, and his run-free outing Sunday pushed the scoreless streak to 21 innings for Twins' starting rotation. A quick consultation with the 1500ESPN stats and info department revealed that Minnesota's starting rotation is currently on pace to finish the season with a 0.00 ERA.

Lance Lynn, you're up next.

e) Chance Sisco's 2 hits

There was a no-hitter in play at one point, and two plays that led to a little bit of controversy.

With 2 outs in the 3rd inning, Chance Sisco doubled to the left-field wall. Eddie Rosario raced under the fly, and couldn't reel in what looked to be a catchable ball. Some felt that Sisco's knock should have been ruled an error, which would have kept the no-no intact. Personally, I wasn't offended that it was ruled a double because of the ground that Rosario had to cover and, more importantly, where he was at in relation to the outfield wall when he tried to make the catch.

With the drama gone and Berrios pursuing a one-hit shutout, Sisco was involved in a play that stirred up more controversy. Here's the scene: It's the 9th inning and the Orioles trail 7-0 with Berrios still on the mound and showing no signs of stopping. The Twins employ a huge infield shift against Sisco, who promptly takes the invitation to lay down a beautiful bunt along the third-base line for a single.

The Twins apparently are mad at the audacity.

Brian Dozier was quoted after the game as saying that Sisco will need to learn, and that his veteran teammates will need to talk to him, presumably about the fact that he bunted to reach base while trailing by 7 runs.

That's an absurd stance to take, if you ask me.

The Twins relinquish their right to whine about the bunt the moment they shift their infielders. You're going to give Sisco a hit down the line because you think it increases your chances to win? OK, that's fine. But then you don't get to get mad when he tries to increase his club's chance to win by taking the free base.

I'm glad this didn't come with a no-hitter on the line, because then we really would have seen a head-on collision of playing the odds versus playing within The Code, the unwritten rules of the game. It appears like the controversy was minimized because there wasn't a no-no on the line, and because Berrios and the Twins were able to complete the shutout.

Preview: Twins at Pirates

Staff Writers | Associated Press | April 1, 2018

Minnesota Twins right-hander Lance Lynn already has an advantage over Pittsburgh Pirates right-hander Jameson Taillon going into the teams' game Monday afternoon at PNC Park.

Lynn, 30, spent the past six seasons with St. Louis, so he's familiar with the Pirates, who were division rivals. Taillon, 26, who is in his second full major league season, has never faced the Twins.

Taillon is just glad to be pegged for the home opener for the Pirates (3-0).

"This is only my second Opening Day to even be a part of a team, so to be able to get the home opener in my second full year is really exciting," Taillon said.

His rookie season (8-7, 4.44 ERA in 25 starts) was memorable for good and bad. He showed poise and control as he positioned himself as a potential staff ace — he's probably 1B to Ivan Nova's 1A for now — but he also went through some trials, particularly time away to recover from surgery for testicular cancer.

In his final spring start, Tuesday against Philadelphia, he threw three scoreless innings, with two hits and four strikeouts.

"Everything felt good," Taillon said. "I'm healthy and ready to go."

A win Monday afternoon in the interleague game would give the Pirates five straight home opener wins for the first time since a 10-year streak at Forbes Field that lasted through 1954.

The start to Pittsburgh's season has been a bit tumultuous despite a sweep at Detroit to come home undefeated.

Their game Thursday was postponed by bad weather. They won Friday, a wild, 13-inning, 13-10 game. Saturday's game was another postponement, leading to 1-0 and 8-6 wins in a day/night doubleheader plus late travel Sunday.

Minnesota (2-1) is opening the season on a five-game, seven-day road trip. The Twins began at Baltimore and are coming off back-to-back wins, 6-2 and 7-0, after dropping their opener, 3-2.

Lynn sat through the stodgy free agent market all winter before signing with the Twins on March 12.

"It's a new opportunity to show what I can do in a new league," Lynn said. "So I'm definitely looking forward to it, and just excited for a chance to play for a team that's got a chance to win."

In 23 career games (21 starts) against Pittsburgh, he is 7-7 with a 5.10 ERA, 105 strikeouts and 45 walks. That includes four quality starts, but also a nightmare his last time at PNC Park — he gave up eight earned runs and did not make it out of the first inning on Sept. 23.

Lynn, who was 11-8 with a 3.43 ERA in his final season with the Cardinals, is two years removed from Tommy John surgery.

"Last year I got through that as the season went on, so I don't have those worries anymore," he said. "I can just go do what I have to do and I know what I need to do in between starts to get ready for the next one."

Which, for him Monday, will be his first one with the Twins.

LEADING OFF: Astros celebrate, snow for Yanks, Bartolo time

Staff Writers | Associated Press | April 1, 2018

A look at what's happening all around the majors today:

KEEP IT GOING

Lance Lynn makes his Minnesota debut at Pittsburgh after signing a \$12 million, one-year contract in the offseason to join a Twins rotation that's off to a terrific start. Minnesota starting pitchers Jake Odorizzi, Kyle Gibson and Jose Berrios did not allow a run during the season-opening series at Baltimore, combining for 21 innings of five-hit ball. Lynn was 11-8 with a 3.43 ERA in 33 starts last season for St. Louis.

Berrios completes shutout, Twins earn series win over Baltimore

Staff Writers | Associated Press | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — One after another, the Minnesota Twins' starting pitchers kept getting better and better against the Baltimore Orioles.

Jose Berrios threw a three-hitter in Minnesota's 7-0 victory Sunday, capping a season-opening series in which Twins starters combined for 21 innings of five-hit ball.

After Jake Odorizzi blanked Baltimore for six innings in the opener, Kyle Gibson tossed six no-hit innings before Berrios rang up his first career complete game.

"Just a lot of positives, getting off to a start like that," manager Paul Molitor said. "Our starters haven't given up a run yet."

Baltimore emerged from the three-game series with a 1-2 record and a .117 team batting average.

"When you see that many guys having trouble, you know it's the pitching," Orioles manager Buck Showalter said.

Baltimore's potentially potent lineup has thus far produced only 11 hits in 29 innings. Orioles slugger Chris Davis, batting leadoff, is 0 for 12 — the worst start of his career — and All-Star second baseman Jonathan Schoop is 1 for 13.

Only one batter reached against Berrios over the first eight innings — rookie catcher Chance Sisco, whose third-inning double whisked by the raised glove of left fielder Eddie Rosario at the wall.

Berrios then retired 17 straight before Sisco bunted down the third-base line against the shift for a one-out single in the ninth. A walk and a single loaded the bases before Berrios retired Schoop and Adam Jones.

Berrios (1-0) struck out six and walked one in his 40th career start. He threw 107 pitches.

"I felt comfortable all day long," the 23-year-old said. "I wanted to go out there and keep competing, and that was the end result."

Brian Dozier homered on the game's first pitch to launch a four-run first inning and added a solo shot in the sixth for his eighth career multihomer game.

Miguel Sano and Eduardo Escobar also connected for the Twins, who hit seven homers over the last two games.

"That puts us on a pretty good pace," Molitor said with a laugh.

Orioles starter Kevin Gausman (0-1) allowed three home runs and lasted only four innings. The right-hander has gotten off to a slow start in each of the past two seasons, and this performance did nothing to dispel the notion that this year will be no different.

Dozier got things started with a drive into the left-field seats. Escobar added an RBI double, another run scored on a wild pitch and Byron Buxton capped the uprising with a run-scoring single.

WATCH: Dozier mashes two homers in Twins' win

In the third inning, Sano hit his second homer in two games and Escobar connected with two outs for a 6-0 lead.

Gausman gave up seven hits, walked two and threw two wild pitches. After starting 1-7 in 2016 and 3-7 last year, he worked this spring to avoid another early-season struggle.

That may still happen, but at this point his first priority is reducing his 13.50 ERA.

"I feel good. Everything feels great," Gausman insisted. "Who knows, maybe it was just a little cold today, (or I) didn't throw enough out in the pen. I'm not too worried about it."

STAT PACK

Gausman is 1-4 with a 7.01 ERA in his season debuts. ... Signed as a free agent in February, Logan Morrison is 0 for 11 with three strikeouts for Minnesota. He had 38 homers and 85 RBIs with Tampa Bay last year. ... Max Kepler had hit in all nine career games against Baltimore before going 0 for 3 with a walk.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Orioles: LHP Zach Britton (Achilles) will travel with the team to Houston as he strives to get off the 60-day disabled list by June. Britton recently started running, and the final obstacle will be sprinting to cover first base.

UP NEXT

Twins: RHP Lance Lynn makes his Minnesota debut in Pittsburgh on Monday afternoon. He went 2-2 against the Pirates with the Cardinals last year.

Orioles: RHP Chris Tillman starts Monday night against the World Series champion Houston Astros in their home opener.

Brian Dozier and the Twins are upset the Orioles' Chance Sisco tried to help his team win

Mike Axisa | CBS Sports | April 1, 2018

Sunday afternoon, Minnesota Twins right-hander Jose Berrios carried his team to victory over the Baltimore Orioles (MIN 7, BAL 0). Berrios struck out six in the three-hit shutout. It was the first complete game of his career.

In the ninth inning, O's catcher Chance Sisco bunted against the shift with one out in an effort to help his team mount a comeback, even though the odds were stacked against them. Berrios then walked Chris Davis and served up a single to Manny Machado, loading the bases. He escaped the jam and completed the shutout with a pop-up and a strikeout.

After the game, both Berrios and Twins second baseman Brian Dozier said they weren't happy with Sisco bunting against the shift, giving the Orioles their second hit of the game. They didn't like the one-hitter being broken up that way.

@RhettBollinger

Twins were not thrilled with Chance Sisco bunting for a hit in 9th with Berrios working on a one-hitter with a 6-run lead.

Dozier: "Obviously, we're not a fan of it. He's a young kid. I could've said something at 2nd base but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there."

@RhettBollinger

Jose Berrios on Chance Sisco's bunt in the ninth: "I don't care if he's bunting. I just know it's not good for baseball in that situation. That's it."

Translation: "We're very upset Sisco and the Orioles didn't just roll over and lose in the ninth inning. How dare they try."

That is, of course, completely ridiculous. Surely the Twins would have had no problem with one of their players doing what Sisco did. Dozier would credit him for doing what it takes to win and taking what he's given, blah blah blah. And questioning the O's veteran leadership? What in the world is that? Seems to me a team refusing to go down quietly has pretty good leadership.

I have no idea if this is a feeling unique to the Twins or one of baseball's many stupid unwritten rules. Whatever it is, it's dumb. Play until there are 27 outs. If you don't like giving up bunt singles against the shift, don't shift. I could understand being upset if it were a no-hitter. But a one-hitter? Come on.

I looking forward to watching the Twins refuse to put up a fight when they're down big in the ninth. After all, "it's not good for baseball in that situation."

Twins completely overreact to Orioles bunting to beat shift in ninth inning

Chris Kwik | Yahoo! Sports | April 1, 2018

Baseball is a game full of unwritten rules. Don't talk about a perfect game. Don't steal bases with your team up or down by a lot. Don't bunt to

break up a no-hitter. Run afoul of one of the many unwritten rules, and you'll draw the ire of the opposition.

After Sunday, we have a new unwritten rule to add to that list: Don't bunt to beat the shift in the ninth inning during a one-hitter when you're trailing by seven runs. That sounds wordy and specific, but it was enough to set off the Minnesota Twins.

Pitcher Jose Berrios was in the midst of a dominant start against the Baltimore Orioles on Sunday. He had completely shut down the powerful Orioles lineup, and carried a one-hitter in the ninth inning. The only hit of the day had come via catcher Chance Sisco, who doubled in the third.

With the Orioles trailing by seven in the bottom of the ninth, Sisco came up to the plate again. When he saw the Twins were playing the shift against him, he decided to drop a bunt up the third base line for a hit. Berrios would give up a walk and another hit during the frame, but kept his shutout intact, leading the Twins to a 7-0 win.

Berrios may have recovered on the field, but he and his teammates were pretty angry with Sisco after the game.

@RhettBollinger

Twins were not thrilled with Chance Sisco bunting for a hit in 9th with Berrios working on a one-hitter with a 6-run lead.

Dozier: "Obviously, we're not a fan of it. He's a young kid. I could've said something at 2nd base but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there."

@RhettBollinger

Jose Berrios on Chance Sisco's bunt in the ninth: "I don't care if he's bunting. I just know it's not good for baseball in that situation. That's it."

@MikeBerardino

Eddie Rosario on the Sisco bunt hit against the shift in the 9th: "Nobody liked that. No, no, no. That's not a good play." #mntwins

We're not entirely sure what the Twins are upset about. Berrios wasn't in the middle of the no-hitter or perfect game. He had already allowed a hit to Sisco. So, the bunting shouldn't matter.

There's a chance the team is angry Sisco decided to bunt with his team down by seven, but even that seems silly. Sisco was doing anything he could to keep his team alive. It was a long shot that the Orioles would come back, but he was trying to give them a chance.

If you want to argue that the game was out of hand and it was disrespectful, why did the Twins still have a shift on? Here's how the defense was lined up on the play.

The Twins might have been up 7-0, but they were still trying as if they were playing in a one-run game. If the Twins are giving that much effort, shouldn't Sisco be allowed to do the same? The Twins don't think so. They would rather he just give up and accept his fate.

The Twins will have plenty of time to reflect on how angry Sisco's bunt made them. The two clubs don't play again until July. Hopefully, that's long enough for the Twins to get over a ninth-inning bunt and focus on plays that actually have an impact on the outcome of the game.

Twins unhappy Orioles' Chance Sisco bunted for a hit

Bill Baer | NBC Sports | April 1, 2018

Twins starter Jose Berrios was working on a one-hit shutout in the ninth inning against the Orioles on Sunday afternoon. After getting Pedro Alvarez to pop out, Chance Sisco came to the plate and dropped down a bunt to the left side for a single. Berrios would then walk Chris Davis and Manny Machado to load the bases, but finished his shutout by getting Jonathan Schoop to pop out and Adam Jones to strike out.

The Twins won 7-0. Berrios got his shutout. They should be happy, right? The Twins were actually pretty upset with Sisco's choice to lay down a bunt. Second baseman Brian Dozier said, via Mike Berardino of the St. Paul Pioneer Press, "Obviously, we're not a fan of it. He's a young kid. I could've said something at second base but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there. I'm sure they'll address that. It's all about learning. You learn up here."

Berrios said, "I don't care if he's bunting. I just know it's not good for baseball in that situation. That's it."

Outfielder Eddie Rosario said, "Nobody liked that. No, no, no. That's not a good play."

In baseball's rather large book of unwritten rules, there has traditionally been a section that says hitters shouldn't attempt to bunt for a hit to break up a pitcher's no-hitter. I've never heard an unwritten rule prescribing that same behavior when a pitcher is working on a one-hitter.

As Matthew Pouliot points out, the Twins were shifting Sisco pretty hard to the right side when he came to the plate in the ninth inning.

The game wasn't over yet. Sure, overcoming a seven-run deficit with one out in the ninth is a tall order, but players aren't taught to just roll over once the deficit reaches a certain threshold. They play until the last out is officially recorded. Furthermore, if the Twins expected Sisco to play standard, why weren't they playing standard defense? If it's okay to defensively shift up by seven, then it's okay to bunt down by seven — even if there's a one-hitter in progress.

This is just tremendously petty on the Twins' part. The two clubs don't meet up again until July 5 in Minnesota, so we'll see if the Twins carry a grudge for three months.

In his 2018 debut, Jose Berrios looked like an untouchable ace for the Twins
Dan Hayes | The Athletic | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — If you listened closely enough on Sunday afternoon, you rarely heard a Baltimore Orioles hitter barrel up against Jose Berrios. In fact, it's much likelier you heard the noise produced when a bat is shattered into 1,000 tiny pieces.

Working with dominant stuff and an early lead, Berrios produced the first complete-game shutout of his career. The effort is one the Twins, 7-0 winners over the Orioles in front of 17,212, hope to see plenty more of from Berrios as he continues to develop into a frontline-starting pitcher. Berrios limited Baltimore to three hits and a walk while striking out six in a 107-pitch effort. He carried a one-hitter into the ninth inning and retired 17 batters in a row from the final out of the third inning to the first of the ninth.

“Berrios is so good that he can do that all the time,” catcher Mitch Garver said. “When he throws the ball wherever he wants it, with whatever pitch he wants, that's how effective he can be.”

It's no accident that Berrios was a top-100 prospect from 2014-16. His stuff is as legit as they come and has No. 1 starter material written all over it.

But reaching that point hasn't been easy.

It hardly ever is.

As White Sox general manager Rick Hahn often notes, development rarely is linear. Sometimes a player takes a step forward and then several backward and then another forward and one to the side. After struggling to an 8.02 ERA in 14 starts in 2016, Berrios produced a very strong first half last season, going 8-2 with a 3.53 ERA. His production slipped a little in the second half — he had a 4.24 ERA in 74 1/3 innings — but overall Berrios finished the season 14-8 with a 3.89 ERA.

But Sunday's performance potentially looks like a significant leap forward for Berrios.

He broke at least four bats, though one National League scout said it was closer to seven or eight and “felt like 200.” The Orioles' No. 3 hitter, Jonathan Schoop, broke two bats in a seventh-inning at-bat alone as he weakly grounded out to third.

“I didn't keep track, but they went back a few times,” manager Paul Molitor said.

Berrios only garnered 11 swings and misses among the 71 strikes he threw. But the Orioles didn't have much luck when they were able to put the ball in play, either. According to Baseball Savant, Baltimore's average exit velocity was 73.8 mph on Sunday, an obscenely good number for a pitcher. Last season, the average exit velocity against Berrios was 85.2 mph, which ranked 10th-best in the majors.

“That's just telling of how good his stuff is,” Garver said. “He's got balls moving every which way. His command is improving every time, every start. If we can just keep that rolling, he's going to be very effective.”

Sure, Berrios' job was made much easier by the early four-run lead his teammates staked him. Brian Dozier homered in the first inning and Eduardo Escobar and Byron Buxton each drove in runs to give Berrios a 4-0 lead before he took the mound.

It's what Berrios did with that lead that impressed Dozier as he had the team back in the dugout only 11 pitches later. The quick inning was representative of the first half of Berrios' day as he threw 57 pitches through six innings.

The Twins took advantage and continued to pour it on. Miguel Sano and Escobar both hit solo homers in the third inning and Dozier added another one in the sixth to make it a 7-0 game.

“When the guy fills up the strike zone and commands his four pitches all over the plate, it makes for a long day for the opposing team,” Dozier said. “They can’t get comfortable. The big thing when you face a guy like Berrios with electric stuff, from an offensive standpoint, you go up there swinging. You can’t take pitches down the middle of the plate. ... They were aggressive like they should be, but he was able to get the shutout.”

Completing the shutout was tricky for Berrios, who threw two in the minors — “It’s not the same,” he said through an interpreter.

Heading into the ninth inning at 86 pitches, Berrios looked to be a lock for the first complete game of his career. Then ninth-hitter Chance Sisco, who had Baltimore’s only other hit, a double in the third inning, bunted for a base hit against the shift. Though it was effective in starting a rally, which you can’t really fault the Orioles for doing, Sisco’s decision didn’t appear to sit well with the Twins.

“We’re not a fan of it,” Dozier said. “He’s a young kid. I could’ve said something at second base, but they have tremendous veteran leadership over there with Chris Davis, Adam Jones and those guys. I’m sure they’ll address it and move forward. It’s all about learning up here.”

Berrios followed by issuing a walk to Davis and Manny Machado singled to load the bases. But Berrios got Schoop to foul out behind the plate before he struck out Adam Jones to end the contest.

Berrios said the outing was his best but he wants to replicate it. Molitor is going to have a hard time passing up similar efforts, too.

“He had a great day,” Molitor said. “A lot of strikes, the changeup I thought was a really good pitch for him. He was aggressive. I’m sure it’s a good feel when you’ve got some runs on the board. And we just kind of were going to ride him and see where it went. Obviously, a chance to get his first big-league shutout, we were pulling for that. Your first objective is to win, and like it did yesterday, it got a little bit interesting there in the ninth. To bounce back and win the last couple of games after a tough loss on Opening Day, you’ll take the series win for sure.”

Eddie Rosario's fantastic catch was a product of Twins' spring outfield drills

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | April 1, 2018

BALTIMORE — If it looked like Eddie Rosario knew what he was doing to make Saturday night’s stunning catch, it’s because he does.

While the young outfielder may never have seen that particular line drive before, the Twins ran a series of drills this spring to prepare him and the rest of his cohorts for whenever they will potentially face one.

Outfield coach Jeff Pickler worked with each member of the entire group individually at least twice a week during the spring to get them ready for the variety of angles they could experience in a game situation. The effort paid off in the sixth inning on Saturday night when Rosario slid and got enough of his glove under the rocket off Trey Mancini’s bat to tip it in the air before snatching it with his bare hand. The catch ended the inning and temporarily preserved Kyle Gibson’s no-hit bid.

“Each (drill) was designed to get them used to seeing the ball in that plane and then making sure they knew what glove angle was appropriate for that play,” Pickler said. “We don’t do them moving, for the most part. We’re training the eyes.”

“Basically, any plane where you’re not used to seeing the ball, we just tried to make sure he has some history seeing the ball in that plane.”

Though Gibson’s high pitch count all but assured he would not have a chance to complete his quest for a no-hitter, Rosario at least kept alive the opportunity for a combined effort. Mancini ripped a 2-2 changeup from Gibson on a low line toward left field. The ball exited Mancini’s bat at 106.7 mph and at a launch angle of 10 degrees and hung in the air for less than two seconds, which gave it an 84 percent chance of becoming a hit, according to Baseball Savant.

Rosario raced in, taking no more than seven paces before he thrust his glove at the ball. The left fielder appeared to close the heel of the glove on the ball too early, which somehow popped it into the air long enough for him to make the sliding grab with his throwing hand. Just like Neo at the end of ‘The Matrix,’ Rosario said he watched the entire play in slow-motion.

“I thought I caught the ball, but when the glove hit the floor, the ball went up,” Rosario said. “But I saw everything. I just saw the ball right here.”

Manager Paul Molitor’s plane of vision on the play was blocked enough that he thought the ball dropped in for a hit. From his perch in the dugout, Molitor didn’t see the catch completed until he watched a replay shortly thereafter.

“It was a nice recovery,” Molitor said.

But from the mound, Gibson got to take in the entire play. Gibson knew his shelf life on the mound was close to expiring but appreciated the end

result of the hard work put in by the team's outfielders in Fort Myers, Fla.

"It's a lot of fun watching those guys play out there," Gibson said. "It's something that they work on quite a bit, coming in on a ball and tipping it up and making sure they don't panic. We've got a really good outfield. Hopefully we don't have to see a lot of those plays. But we're going to see a lot of plays that we're going to say 'Wow' quite a bit."

Pickler would love if his already-talented outfielders continue to provide the Twins with plenty of jaw-dropping moments. He noted that Rosario's drills differ from those of Byron Buxton and Max Kepler, who are likelier to dive for similarly hit balls. To prepare Rosario for that particular play, Pickler had the outfielder lie in a "four-figure slide" while he fires baseballs in Rosario's direction. Pickler said drills include back-handed glove plays, forehand plays and over the shoulder attempts. But Pickler can only prepare the outfielders so much. The rest, including the dramatic bare-hand grab, is up to them.

"It's mostly making them feel like they're prepared so that when the ball is hit they have a plan on every play," Pickler said. "I'll just prepare them and they can add the style and the flair."

Twins-Lookouts partnership has been successful so far

David Paschall | Times Free Press | April 2, 2018

The Chattanooga Lookouts won just one Southern League championship from 1976 to 2014, when the storied Class AA baseball franchise had affiliation stints with the Oakland Athletics, Cleveland Indians, Seattle Mariners, Cincinnati Reds and Los Angeles Dodgers.

Then the Minnesota Twins came along.

At a developmental level of a sport where rosters are continually tweaked, the Lookouts have been consistent and stout in their three seasons with Minnesota as their parent club. Chattanooga won its first Southern League title since 1988 during its inaugural year with the Twins in 2015, and last season's Lookouts posted a scorching 91-49 record and shared the league championship with Pensacola due to the best-of-five title series getting canceled by the threat of Hurricane Irma.

Last year's Lookouts set a franchise record for victories during their time in the Southern League, and as many as 18 returning players could be on Chattanooga's roster when the 2018 Southern League season starts Thursday against Birmingham at AT&T Field. The Lookouts will host Chattanooga State for the 13th time in an exhibition game Tuesday night at 6:15.

"First and foremost, it speaks to the depth of our system," said Jeremy Zoll, who is in his first year as Minnesota's director of minor league operations. "We're not only excited to kick off 2018 in Chattanooga but at all our other levels as well, because we feel like we're pretty deep up and down throughout. I think that allows you to move guys up to Rochester (N.Y.) and to the big-league club knowing we've got good guys right behind them.

"At times, development and winning gets put at two different ends of the spectrum, but it should really be a balance of both to try and accomplish the best of both worlds."

Chattanooga's dominance last summer was reflected in the fact the Lookouts led the Southern League with 659 runs scored and with a team ERA of 3.09.

Felix Jorge and Zack Littell are scheduled to return to Chattanooga's rotation after banner 2017 seasons. Jorge went 10-3 with a 3.54 ERA in 22 starts with the Lookouts last year, when he made two big-league starts with the Twins, including one that resulted in a victory. Littell went 5-0 with a 2.81 ERA in seven starts with Chattanooga and was a staggering 19-1 in combined Single-A and Double-A results.

"I think the pitching is going to be really deep for sure," Zoll said. "We had some tough decisions to make and still have some tough decisions to make as far as how we're going to balance out Triple-A and who gets pushed down to Double-A as a result.

"That will be good news for the Lookouts, because that means there are a lot of guys who are really qualified to be on a Double-A pitching staff."

Other players scheduled to return to Chattanooga are LaMonte Wade, Nick Gordon and T.J. White, who drove in 67, 66 and 65 runs, respectively, in 2017. Wade hit .292 in 117 games with the Lookouts, while Gordon hit .270 in 122, and Zoll said those two have the opportunity to advance to Rochester sooner than later. White hit .276 with 14 home runs in 96 games last season in Chattanooga.

The newcomer to watch could be left fielder Brent Rooker, who was playing for Mississippi State this time last year and hit .387 for the Bulldogs. He was the second-round selection of the Twins last June and wound up playing 40 games for the Fort Myers Miracle of the high Single-A Florida State League.

Rooker hit .280 for the Miracle with 11 homers and 35 RBIs.

"I'm looking forward to Brent taking down a spot in the middle of the order for the Lookouts," said Zoll, who was a recent guest of "Press Row" on Chattanooga's ESPN 105.1 FM. "He's someone who can make a lot of noise in Chattanooga and someone fans will be excited to have.

"On offense, it will be a pretty nice mix of profiles, and there should be a good amount of power to go around. There are a lot of names that we're excited about."

Gordon is the No. 4 organizational prospect, according to MLB.com, while Rooker is No. 8.