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Wednesday, July 11, 2018**

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Rosario needs fans' help in Final Vote push

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 10, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins continued their push for left fielder Eddie Rosario to win the MLB Final Vote, including bringing Rebecca Kufirin from ABC's "The Bachelorette," to Target Field on Tuesday, but Rosario still needs some help, according to the latest ballot update.

Rosario is one of five players up for the final American League roster spot as part of the Camping World MLB Final Vote for the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard at Nationals Park, as announced Sunday on ESPN. On Tuesday, the 26-year-old outfielder ranked fourth in the AL field behind the Mariners' Jean Segura, the Red Sox's Andrew Benintendi and the Yankees' Giancarlo Stanton. Voting ends on Wednesday at 3 p.m. CT.

Twins manager Paul Molitor appreciates the club's efforts to try to get Rosario elected, as they've created the "Accept This Rosie" campaign with his teammates wearing tuxedo-styled T-shirts during batting practice to show their support. Kufirin, a Minnesota native, threw out the ceremonial first pitch to Rosario, who has been handing out roses to fans as part of the promotion.

"I hope it works" Molitor said. "It's a natural connection with the roses and I guess a pretty big TV show. I think it's fun. We're going to do what we can. We know we're up against some tough odds, with bigger markets, and maybe bigger names as far as recognition. But we'll do our part."

Fans can cast votes for the final player on each league's roster -- on computers, tablets and smartphones -- exclusively online as part of the 2018 Camping World MLB Final Vote, as well as via the MLB At Bat and MLB Ballpark mobile apps, until Wednesday at 3 p.m. CT.

Then on Tuesday, July 17, while watching the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard live on FOX, fans can submit their choices for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet with the 2018 All-Star Game MLB.com MVP Vote.

#AcceptThisRosie

The 89th Midsummer Classic, at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C., will be televised nationally by FOX Sports; in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS; and worldwide by partners in more than 180 countries. FOX Deportes will provide Spanish-language coverage in the United States,

while ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide exclusive national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network, MLB.com and SiriusXM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage.

For more information about MLB All-Star Week and to purchase tickets, visit AllStarGame.com and follow @MLB and @AllStarGame on social media.

Worth noting

- Twins reliever Trevor Hildenberger joined team athletic trainers Tony Leo, Masamachi Abe, Matt Biancuzzo, Taylor Hooten Foundation president Donald Hooton Jr. and Harry Schein Inc.'s John Miller for an event at Target Field on Tuesday morning as part of the National Play Campaign. It helped raise awareness about living a more healthy and active lifestyle.
- Right-hander Ervin Santana started for Double-A Chattanooga on Tuesday night and he is scheduled to start for Triple-A Rochester on Sunday. The Twins will then evaluate whether Santana will be ready to return or if he'll need to remain on a rehab assignment to build arm strength. Santana has been out since early February after undergoing surgery on his right middle finger.

Slegers labors in short outing against Royals

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 10, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins have had trouble finding a consistent fifth starter in the absence of veteran Ervin Santana this season, as rookie Aaron Slegers couldn't build on his previous strong start in a rough outing against the Royals on Tuesday night at Target Field.

Slegers allowed five runs while recording just four outs in a 9-4 loss that snapped Minnesota's five-game win streak and put an end to Kansas City's 10-game losing skid. It was also the first time the Royals scored more than five runs in a game since June 4, a span of 30 games. Slegers wasn't immediately optioned after the game, but Sunday's starter before the All-Star break is to be determined, according to manager Paul Molitor.

"They're an aggressive team," Slegers said. "I knew that going in. Some of my pitches caught a little too much of the plate, and even others that didn't, they found a way to get the bat on the ball and found holes."

Slegers, making his second start and third appearance of the year with former fifth starters Fernando Romero and Adalberto Mejia at Triple-A Rochester, ran into trouble early, giving up a double to open the game before allowing a hard-hit RBI single off the left-field wall to Salvador Perez. It fell apart in the second, when he served up a three-run homer to Adalberto Mondesi and an RBI single to Rosell Herrera.

"It was up," Slegers said of the homer. "Hats off to him, he got there. But we were trying to go fastball up there. I threw him back-to-back sliders then was tempted to elevate there. I don't think it was a strike."

It put the Twins in an early 5-1 hole, as Brian Dozier got the Twins on the board in the first with a solo shot off Ian Kennedy. Eduardo Escobar added an RBI single in the third on the 10th pitch he saw from Kennedy, but that was all they could muster against the right-hander, who departed after three innings with left-side tightness.

Kansas City's bullpen combined to hold the Twins scoreless until the ninth inning with Brian Flynn throwing four scoreless innings, while the Royals tacked on a run in the sixth on an RBI single from Mondesi off Matt Magill and three more in the eighth with Hunter Dozier connecting on an RBI triple and Alex Gordon smacking a two-run homer off Addison Reed.

"Flynn shut us down for four innings," Molitor said. "That hurt. You're hoping to go through multiple guys and inch away. Just didn't happen. We just couldn't get a hit to get us over the hump even though we had some traffic out there, and then they kind of ran away at the end."

The Twins went 2-for-7 with runners in scoring position, wasting a prime scoring opportunity with two on and none out in the fifth with Dozier grounding into a double play and Escobar grounding out to end the inning. Minnesota didn't score again until an RBI triple from Max Kepler in the ninth.

"Doz had a good swing, but right at [third baseman Mike Moustakas]," Molitor said. "That kind of stymied us there. You think once you get into the bullpen and you're within three, you think you're going to find a way to put up some kind of a number along the way to make it a game. But we were never in it."

SOUND SMART

The Twins have yet to win six games in a row this year, as their five-game win streak matched a season high. They also saw their season-high six-game win streak at Target Field come to an end.

HE SAID IT

"We're talking about a lot of different things, especially around the break and rotation. A lot of questions. To be determined. There are some things up in the air that we haven't finalized yet. Hopefully tomorrow morning, we can clear it up." -- Molitor, on if Slegers will get another start

UP NEXT

Twins right-hander Lance Lynn (6-7, 5.21 ERA) is set to start the series finale against the Royals at 12:10 p.m. CT on Wednesday at Target Field. Lynn is coming off a strong start against the Orioles, allowing one run on six hits over six innings. He has a 4.02 ERA over his past 12 starts. Righty Burch Smith (0-0, 5.40 ERA) will make his first start for the Royals.

Bachelorette Rebecca Kufrin threw out the first pitch for the Twins and helped promote Eddie 'Rosie' Rosario **Jessica Kleinschmidt | MLB.com | July 10, 2018**

The final push to send Twins left fielder Eddie Rosario to win the MLB Final Vote presented by Camping World included a celebrity appearance by Rebecca Kufrin of ABC's "The Bachelorette." Kufrin asked fans to help send Rosario to the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard, while Rosie was sporting a nice tux, and of course, he presented her with a rose -- get it?

"You look so handsome," Kufrin said as she approached Rosario prior to the Royals-Twins game on Tuesday:

#AcceptThisRosie

✓

@Twins

.@thebkoof accepted this Rosie!

And she will be throwing out the ceremonial first pitch tonight!<http://www.twinsbaseball.com/vote> #AcceptThisRosie 🌹 #TheBachelorette

The Minnesota native also hung out with the team during batting practice and when she met Joe Mauer "no introduction was needed."

Did we mention the Twins had a lot of fun with this promotion?

Rosario was grateful for the support. "I think it's good," he said to MLB.com's Rhett Bollinger. "I like that all the guys are trying to help me be an All-Star. It's the little stuff. I know other guys are more in the public but I appreciate that everyone is trying to help go to the All-Star Game."

When Kufrin had to throw the ceremonial first pitch, it couldn't have gone any better:

Look at that form. Not only did she throw it from the mound, but we didn't see a bounce, did you?

"She threw a strike," Rosario said with a smile.

Just a few more episodes left and we will find out who Becca chose to spend the rest of her life with. And also, keep checking the Final Vote tallies to see if fans did indeed, "Accept This Rosie."

Twins players enjoy 'Mall Ball' with local fans **Jarrid deney | MLB.com | July 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- When Tim Scovell looked out his second-story window at the Charles Schwab office on the corner of 7th and Nicollet Avenue on Tuesday afternoon, he knew he couldn't pass up the opportunity.

Scattered on the street outside the Nicollet Mall, an impromptu Home Run Derby had popped up while he was working. Instead of the typical foot traffic that fills the lunch hour in the downtown area, Scovell saw Twins stars Eddie Rosario, a Camping World MLB Final Vote candidate, and Eduardo Escobar attempting to launch home run balls off the City Center Skyway.

Scovell and several other onlookers got to jump in and join a pickup game with a plastic bat and ball that the club titled "Mall Ball."

"I got to go out there and embarrass myself in front of a couple thousand people," Scovell said, laughing. "It's wonderful."

The Twins planned the event in order to give fans a chance to interact with players and take a few swings outside the newly renovated mall. With both ends of Nicollet Avenue barricaded off from traffic, and ballpark-themed food vendors stationed all along the street, Minnesota's players split up into two squads and began to swing away.

"It felt really good to go out there in the middle of the mall and play with the kids," Escobar said. "It was awesome to have the families out there. I used to play that out on the streets, too, and it was fun."

With a DJ blasting music, and Twins corporate sales member Chad Jackson serving as the emcee of the event, Minnesota players eventually handed the bats over to the fans and even a few local media members. WCCO Radio host Mike Max smashed a homer, and the players even cajoled Twins media relations members Dustin Morse and Elvis Martinez into taking a few cuts.

Twins closer Fernando Rodney stole the show early when he launched a massive home run on the second pitch that Jose Berrios threw to him as Kyle Gibson taunted from the makeshift outfield.

"It's so great, man," Scovell said. "Meeting these professional athletes that make us all proud -- it's terrific. We're so glad to have them in the community."

View image on TwitterView image on TwitterView image on TwitterView image on Twitter

Dustin Morse

✓

@morsecode

We had so much fun at #TwinsMallBall today! #MNTwins

For the players, the event was a throwback to the type of pickup games they would play as kids.

"Just in my driveway," Robbie Grossman said while describing his childhood field. "The house I grew up in, above the garage it kind of had a little extra room. We would play where you would try to hit the ball off the top of the roof. Playing with my brother and some kids around the block, it was great."

Twins starter Aaron Slegers' short-lived success doesn't last long against Royals **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 11, 2018**

So it is with rookies. Five days after the best start of Aaron Slegers' short career, he delivered the worst.

The Twins' 6-10 righthander faced 11 Kansas City batters Tuesday, watched seven of them smack hits and five of them score, putting the Twins in an early hole that spelled the end of their five-game winning streak. Adalberto Mondesi hit a three-run homer and the Twins never recovered, plodding their way to a 9-4 loss at Target Field.

"Some pitches caught a lot of the plate. Some balls found the hole," Slegers said, seemingly wondering himself how things could reverse themselves so quickly. "[It's] nothing I can point to right away. I wasn't pitching as sharply, and they capitalized."

It was the Twins' first defeat since last Wednesday in Milwaukee, and their first loss at home since June 24. But more notable: It was a rare Royals' victory, their first in July. Kansas City had lost 10 consecutive games, its longest skid in six seasons, and had dropped 22 of its past 25 to fall an astonishing 40 games below .500.

All of which made Slegers' rough start even more discouraging — for the Twins, and for FS1, the national network that willingly chose to televise this 3½-hour snoozer. He might even have fumbled away his chance to remain in Minneapolis; Twins manager Paul Molitor said no decision has been made yet about whether Slegers will start Sunday against Tampa Bay.

The 25-year-old former 2013 fifth-round pick had seized the chance to impress the Twins last week against Baltimore, kicking off the Twins' winning streak by holding the Orioles to only three hits over six innings, and needing a mere 72 pitches to do it. Slegers lasted only 41 pitches this time, and a big percentage of them were belted around the diamond.

"That fastball, it seemed like a lot of them got back over the middle rather than getting where he wanted them," Molitor said. "It probably wasn't coming out quite as good as it seemed the other day — the velo[city] was down just a little bit. But mostly, it's where you're putting it. You don't

have to pitch at a high velocity to be effective as long as you get it where you need to, and I don't think that was happening."

Video (01:18): Twins righthander Aaron Slegers says bad nights, like his loss to the Royals on Tuesday, are part of baseball, but they're more painful at the major-league level.

Against Baltimore, Slegers didn't allow his second hit until the fifth inning. Against Kansas City, he allowed his second hit to the fourth batter. That was Salvador Perez, who took three consecutive balls, then lined a 3-2 sinker to left field, bringing home Whit Merrifield.

The second inning was a quagmire right from the start, and Slegers wound up facing six hitters, with five of them getting hits. Mondesi, a light-hitting infielder, had the biggest one, swinging at a high fastball on a 2-2 count that was out of the strike zone — but not far enough out.

"Hats off to him, he got [his bat] there," Slegers said. "I threw him back-to-back sliders, then was tempted to elevate there. I don't think it was a strike."

Nope, it was a 400-foot homer, landing on the right-field plaza, staking the Royals to a 4-1 lead that the Twins could never dent.

"You're hoping to go through multiple [Royals relievers] and inch away. Didn't happen," Molitor said. "You think once you get into the bullpen and you're within three, you're going to find a way to put up some kind of a number along the way to make it a game. But we were never in it."

Twins' Ervin Santana has most effective rehab start so far

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 11, 2018

Ervin Santana struck out five of the first six Jumbo Shrimp batters he faced in Jacksonville, Fla., on Tuesday, retired the first 10 hitters in a row, and gave up only a bunt single and a two-run homer in his five-inning stint for the Class AA Chattanooga Lookouts. His 63-pitch outing, which included no walks, was easily the longest and most effective of his rehab starts, and might finally signal concrete progress in his recovery from February finger surgery.

The 35-year-old Santana's next start will be Sunday in Scranton, Pa., for Class AAA Rochester, Twins manager Paul Molitor said, and another positive outing might give the Twins reason to add him to the roster after the All-Star break, or at least set a target date for the end to his rehab assignment.

"It's kind of like his spring training, building up. We're going to have to think about when the right time will be," Molitor said.

A spot in the rotation could be easily arranged for the 2017 All-Star, considering the Twins have used three different pitchers in the fifth-starter role, and the latest aspirant, rookie Aaron Slegers, retired only four batters in his abbreviated start Tuesday.

Still, Molitor said, the Twins' rotation has been relatively stable even without their ace, an encouraging development considering the Twins' recent history. They entered Tuesday with a 4.23 ERA among the starters, eighth-best in the American League, and a half-run improvement on last season's 4.73.

"We haven't really seen that a lot the last few years," Molitor said. "We all know how many starters we've gone through. The fact that they've all been healthy and taken the ball, especially the top four guys, that's been a good sign for us."

Santana

Santana
Campaign contribution

With Eddie Rosario a long shot to win the Final Vote contest onto the AL All-Star team — he's up against players from the Red Sox and Yankees, after all — the Twins called upon a local celebrity to endorse his candidacy.

Becca Kufrin, a Prior Lake native who is now the star of ABC's "The Bachelorette," came to Target Field to take part in the Twins' "Would you accept this Rosie?" campaign on Rosario's behalf. Kufrin posed for publicity photos with Rosario — who dressed in a tuxedo for the occasion — and met several of the Twins' players. She also threw out the first pitch, with Rosario serving as catcher and then presenting her with a rose instead of the baseball.

"I hope it works. We're going to do what we can," Molitor said of the campaign, which Rosario's teammates have adopted with gusto. "We know we're up against some tough odds, with bigger markets and maybe bigger names [such as Boston's Andrew Benintendi and the New York

Yankees' Giancarlo Stanton]. But we'll do our part.”

Durable and dependable

Molitor marveled at the selection of Royals catcher Salvador Perez to his sixth All-Star Game next Tuesday.

“Gosh, he catches a lot. It feels like he’s been around forever, and how old is he? Twenty-eight?” Molitor said of Perez, who has caught at least 115 games in each of the past five full seasons, which leads the American League. “He’s built to last — that frame, that size. He influences how I manage games, because I know how he can handle the baseball and throw people out. ... Catching’s not the most deep position in our game anymore. It’s tough to find those guys.”

Etc.

- Eight Twins players staged a Wiffle ball home run derby for fans on Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis during the Tuesday lunch hour.

Accept this Rosie? 'Bachelorette' star stumps for Twins' Rosario

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 11, 2018

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“I hope it works. We’re going to do what we can,” Molitor said of the campaign, which Rosario’s teammates have adopted with gusto. “We know we’re up against some tough odds, with bigger markets and maybe bigger names [such as Boston’s Andrew Benintendi and the New York Yankees’ Giancarlo Stanton]. But we’ll do our part.”

Said Rosario after the game: “I think it’s good. I like it. I appreciate the guys trying to help me go to the All-Star Game. Even the little stuff. The other guys have more votes, but I want to try get everyone to help me get to the All-Star Game.”

Tuesday's Twins-Kansas City game recap

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 11, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Adalberto Mondesi, KC

The light-hitting shortstop came in with six RBI on the season, but added four more with a three-run homer and a single.

BY THE NUMBERS

0 Batters struck out by Twins starter Aaron Slegers, only the second time this season a Twins starter has failed to record a strikeout

UP NEXT

Lance Lynn, who pitched six strong innings in Kansas City in May, tries to win the series when he faces Burch Smith.

Postgame: Rogers succeeds in new territory -- the 2nd and 3rd innings
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 11, 2018

A trio of extras after the end to the Twins' winning streak:

As Taylor Rogers walked into the dugout Tuesday after killing a Royals rally, Paul Molitor had a question for him.

"I asked him when's the last time he was in a game in the second inning," the Twins manager said. "He couldn't remember, except when he started."

That's because it's never happened. Rogers had pitched 163 major-league games, all in relief, and another dozen relief appearances in the minor leagues (he was primarily a starter until 2016), and he had never been summoned into a game in the second inning.

Turns out, it's quite a good inning for him. Called in to relieve starter Aaron Slegers, Rogers needed only three pitches to get out of the jam by inducing Mike Moustakas to hit into an inning-ending double play. Then Rogers cruised through a 1-2-3 third inning — his first big-league third inning, too — with two ground balls and a strikeout. And he got two quick outs in the fourth before walking Adalberto Mondesi, causing Molitor to pull him because his pitch count had reached 37, one fewer than his major-league high.

Molitor hadn't set out to try Rogers in a new role, but Slegers' rough night made him consider it. And since Rogers had only thrown 13 pitches since July 1, he seemed particularly suited to emergency early work.

"Looking at the innings that I had, where we were, I knew that he was fresh and could probably give me close to two innings, if not a tad more," Molitor said of Rogers, whose seven outs were also one fewer than his career high, set back in 2016. "I thought that was the best way to shut it down, try to keep it there until I turned it over to [Matt] Magill."

XXX

Zack Duke loaded the bases in the eighth inning, but escaped without allowing a run by striking out Moustakas. An inning later, Addison Reed had a rocky relief appearance, with a couple of rarities.

First, the righthander allowed a triple to Hunter Dozier, the first triple he's given up since April 2017 and only the second triple hit off him in three years. If that wasn't enough, he then surrendered a long home run to Alex Gordon, Reed's eighth home run allowed this year.

Why is that unusual? Because Reed had owned the Royals' outfielder before Tuesday night. Gordon was 0-for-10 in his career against the Twins' righthander.

XXX

The Twins used a four-outfielder alignment against Lucas Duda on Tuesday, having third baseman Eduardo Escobar back up into left field when the left-handed slugger comes up, with the three regular outfielders all shifting to the right.

The shift paid off a couple of times, first on a first-inning popup into medium-depth left field, a play that Escobar made easily. Duda might have been retired by a conventional defense on that one, but not a later one. Leading off the sixth inning, Duda hit a hard liner into the right-field corner, a double in nearly every case. But because Max Kepler was shifted closer to the foul line, he was able to sprint into the corner and make a running catch, saving the extra-base hit.

Twins hoping to extend streaks: Kennedy's losing, their own winning
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | July 10, 2018

Ian Kennedy hasn't won a game since April 7, and hasn't recorded a win against the Twins since 2016. He's also missed the last 10 days with a strained left oblique. So maybe Kansas City's veteran righthander is exactly who the Twins want to face as they try to match their longest winning streak of the past three seasons.

They've won five in a row, and will give Aaron Slegers his second start of the season tonight. The 6-foot-10 righthander has one other major-league appearance this season, and it's relevant: he pitched 5 1/3 innings against the Royals in May, in relief of Fernando Romero, and allowed only two runs.

The Twins won six straight games last August, and had another streak of six in a row in 2015. But that's been it for the past seven seasons; their

last streak that long was in 2011, a stretch that reached eight games. So they're accomplishing what they need to during this homestand against the American League's two worst teams.

"We've played better. Just looking for signs of life," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "The heartbeat was a little hard to hear, but we've responded. You don't want to get overly excited, but it's what we needed to do. We'll keep pushing."

Cleveland has lost three straight games, so the Twins' deficit in the AL Central is down to 8 1/2 games, the smallest it's been this month.

With Kennedy on the mound, left-handers Logan Morrison and Jake Cave are back in the Twins' batting order tonight. Here are the lineups:

ROYALS

Merrifield 2B

Herrera RF

Moustakas 3B

Perez C

Duda DH

H. Dozier 1B

Gordon LF

A. Escobar CF

Mondesi SS

Kennedy RHP

TWINS

Mauer 1B

Rosario LF

B. Dozier 2B

E. Escobar 3B

Morrison DH

Polanco SS

Kepler RF

Garver C

Cave CF

Slegers RHP

Twins' five-game winning streak ends with a thud
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 10, 2018

Kansas City jumped on rookie Aaron Slegers for five runs in less than two innings, and long reliever Brian Flynn kept the Twins in check after Ian Kennedy was pulled because of injury as the Royals snapped Minnesota's five-game winning streak with a 9-4 victory Tuesday night at Target Field.

Making his second start of the season, and fifth in seven major league appearances, Slegers surrendered five earned runs on seven hits in 1.3 innings. On July 5, he scattered three hits and a walk over six innings in a victory over Baltimore.

"Early some pitches caught a lot of the plate and some things just went a little differently," Slegers said. "Some balls found the holes."

Not the big blow, a three-run home run by No. 9 hitter Adalberto Mondesi in the second. Slegers (1-1) was trying to get Mondesi to chase a fastball high out of the zone, but he lined it to the plaza behind the right field deck — an estimated 410 feet from home plate.

"It was up," he said. "Hats off to him. I mean, he got there."

Slegers gave up a double to Whit Merrifield, who scored on a single by Rosell Herrera, before being pulled in favor of left-hander Taylor Rogers with two out in the second. Rogers coaxed a 4-6-3 double-play grounder from Mike Moustakas to end the inning, but the Royals were already up 4-1.

Mondesi, who entered the game hitting .211 with one home run, was 2-3 with a walk and four RBIs for Kansas City, which snapped a 10-game losing streak and won for just the sixth time since June 1.

The Twins appeared to have Kansas City starter Ian Kennedy on the ropes early.

Brian Dozier hit a two-out solo home run in the first, and the Twins put six on base in three innings against the right-hander. But Logan Morrison's leadoff double in the second was negated when he was thrown out trying to stretch it to a triple, and he lined out to left to strand runners at first and third to end the third inning.

Kennedy was pulled after that because of tightness in left side and replaced by left-hander Flynn (1-1), who gave up a hit and two walks over the next four innings to steady the ship and lower his earned-run average to 3.71. He struck out three.

"Flynn shut us down for four innings, that hurt," manager Paul Molitor said. "You're hoping there for multiple relievers so you can just chip away."

Eduardo Escobar drove in rookie Jake Cave with a two-out single in the third, and the Twins added two runs off Jason Hammel in the ninth inning.

The Royals had 15 hits and left nine on base. Addison Reed, the sixth Twins pitcher, worked the ninth and gave up three earned runs on a single, triple and two-run homer by left fielder Alex Gordon.

The Twins are now 5-1 on their 11-game homestand.

"It happens. It's baseball," said left fielder Eddie Rosario, 1 for 3 with a walk. "Everyone tried to keep the winning streak going. We're staying positive. It was a bad game; let's do it tomorrow."

Slegers will likely be optioned back to Triple-A Rochester for a reliever but there was no move after Tuesday game, and it's unclear whether the Twins can get a pitcher here for Wednesday's 12:10 p.m. noon start.

"We're talking about a lot of things, especially around the (July 16-19 all-star) break, the rotation — a lot of questions," Molitor said.

Trade bait Brian Dozier feels history ready to repeat for Minnesota Twins
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 10, 2018

The 2017 Minnesota Twins careened into the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline on a 5-12 skid, walked off in the last three. After falling from three games over .500 and 2.5 games out in the American League Central to three under and seven out, the brass traded closer Brandon Kintzler to Washington for a prospect and international bonus pool money.

Feeling the rug pulled from under them after a surprisingly good first half, the Twins responded by winning 8 of 11 and jumping back into the wild-card race, ultimately winning the AL's second spot for their first postseason berth since 2010.

Brian Dozier swears he feels history repeating.

The red-hot subject of trade rumors heading into the July 31 non-waiver deadline, the Twins second baseman says it's too early to give up on what has been a disappointing 2018.

"Everyone keeps talking about trade deadlines and trades and selling and all this; this game can turn in a minute," he said. "And I have a feeling it's turning now."

The Twins came into Tuesday's game against the Kansas City Royals at Target Field on a five-game winning streak and 8.5 games behind Cleveland in the AL Central. After a 1-8 road trip through Chicago and Milwaukee, the Twins were 13 games under .500 and 12.5 out of first — going nowhere with a roster that includes eight veterans on pace to become free agents at season's end.

Dozier, an all-star Gold Glove winner with a 42-homer season on his résumé, is among a small handful of those who could likely help a contender down the stretch and in the postseason.

"I'm not just giving you clichés here but I don't even pay attention to it, because there are so many things out there that are false — people trying to create stories and all that stuff," he said Tuesday. "I recognize the business side of it. I recognize what's at stake. I do recognize all that stuff."

"But with the momentum we have now, and the potential of getting this thing back rolling, I'm still in the mind-set that I don't see us doing anything except maybe trying to find ways to get better."

The Twins swept a four-game series against Baltimore, the worst team in baseball, over the weekend and won the opener of a three-game series against division rival Kansas City on Monday.

The problem, of course, is that the Twins had a wild-card berth to play for last season; this year's wild-card teams likely will come from the AL East and AL West, where the Red Sox, Yankees, Astros and Mariners are winning big. Seattle, currently holding the second wild-card spot, is 23 games over .500.

The Twins would have to overtake Cleveland in the Central to make the playoffs this year.

"We've played better," manager Paul Molitor said. "Just looking for signs of life; the heartbeat was a little hard to hear, but I think we've responded. You don't want to get overly excited, but I think it's what we needed to do this home stand. We'll keep pushing."

The Twins have six games left on the 11-game home stand against the Royals, last in the Central, and Tampa Bay Rays, two games over .500.

"It's a huge home stand," Dozier acknowledged. "This is kind of the make-or-break home stand, just because that's the nature of the game now, and I think we've responded well. Don't let us get hot."

SANTANA COMING?

Ervin Santana, the returning No. 1 starter who hasn't pitched in the majors this season because of Feb. 6 finger surgery, started at Class AA Chattanooga on Tuesday, allowing two earned runs on a fourth-inning home run by Peter O'Brien in five innings.

He struck out six and didn't walk a batter.

Molitor said Santana is scheduled to pitch with Class AAA Rochester on Sunday. Does that mean his next stop would be Minnesota after the July 16-19 all-star break?

RELATED ARTICLES

“It’s two more starts, and it’s kind of like his spring training, building up,” Molitor said. “We’re going to have to think about when the right time will be eventually. From what we learn from these next two starts, we’ll obviously have a conversation after that.”

BRIEFLY

With left fielder Eddie Rosario among the five AL players eligible to earn the final roster spot for the July 17 all-star game in Washington, D.C., the Twins have put on a full-press charm offensive. Rosario was one of eight Twins to participate in a Wiffle ball home run derby on Nicollet Mall on Tuesday afternoon, and CBS’ “The Bachelorette” star Becca Kufrin of Prior Lake threw the ceremonial first pitch before Tuesday’s game as part of a promotion the team is calling “Accept This Rosie.” Rosario was the catcher.

Twins treat fans to Wiffle ball home run derby on Nicollet Mall

John Shipley | Pioneer Press | July 10, 2018

The first pitch from Kyle Gibson was deposited over the fence Tuesday afternoon, a long homer from teammate Fernando Rodney that hit ... a skyway above Nicollet Mall.

The Twins’ closer hit the longest, and first, homer of the day as the team put on a Wiffle ball home-run derby between Seventh and Eighth Streets in downtown Minneapolis.

Eight Twins players split into two teams for a contest that started at noon and included free lunch for fans, and free hacks for a few lucky spectators.

Gibson and Rodney were joined by teammates all-star pitcher Jose Berrios, left fielder Eddie Rosario, third baseman Eduardo Escobar, shortstop Jorge Polanco, infielder Ehire Adrianza and outfielder Robbie Grossman.

The Twins take a five-game winning streak into Tuesday night’s 7:10 p.m. first pitch against Kansas City at Target Field.

Twins’ 5-game winning streak ends with loss to Royals

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | July 10, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Adalberto Mondesi had a three-run homer and a career-high four RBIs, and the Kansas City Royals snapped a 10-game skid with a 9-4 win over the Minnesota Twins on Tuesday night.

The Royals scored more than five runs for the first time since June 4 and improved to 26-65 overall, percentage points ahead of Baltimore to avoid owning baseball’s worst record.

Mondesi went deep in the second inning and added an RBI single in the sixth. The middle infielder entered with just six RBIs in 17 games this year.

Royals right-hander Ian Kennedy made his first start since landing on the disabled list with a strained left oblique. He pitched just three innings after experiencing a recurrence of left side tightness.

Kennedy was looking for his first win since April 7 but failed to qualify. The right-hander gave up two runs and five hits while striking out three. He has gone 16 starts since his last victory.

Brian Flynn (1-1) allowed one hit in four innings of relief to pick up the win.

Twins starter Aaron Slegers (1-1) allowed five runs and got just four outs in his second start of the year.

Brian Dozier drove in the game’s first run for Minnesota with a solo homer in the first. Eduardo Escobar plated the Twins’ second run with a single in the third.

BACHELORETTE HELPS OUT TWINS

Becca Kufrin, star of ABC’s “The Bachelorette,” threw out the first pitch before Tuesday’s game. Kufrin, a Minnesota native, was at Target Field

to help the Twins promote Eddie Rosario's campaign for the MLB All-Star Game's Final Vote.

Rosario is one of five AL finalists for the Final Vote spot, and the Twins have taken a page from the popular TV show by using the slogan "Accept This Rosie." He caught the first pitch from Kufrin and offered her a rose.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: RHP Ervin Santana (60-day DL, finger surgery) started Tuesday for Double-A Chattanooga as part of his rehab assignment. He allowed two runs on two hits and struck out six in five innings. Santana is expected to be moved up to Triple-A Rochester for his next rehab start Sunday.

UP NEXT

Royals: RHP Burch Smith (0-0, 5.40 ERA) will be making his first start of the season after appearing in 24 games as a reliever. It will be the first major league start for Smith since 2013 with San Diego.

Twins: RHP Lance Lynn (6-7, 5.21) is coming off a start in which he allowed just one run in six innings against Baltimore. Lynn earned the victory in his first meeting against the Royals this year, holding Kansas City to two runs in eight innings back on May 28.

Trade chatter: A Machado alternative, an intriguing starter and more **Jerry Crasnick | ESPN | July 11, 2018**

One of the more intriguing elements to the Manny Machado trade discussions -- beyond the question of Machado's destination -- is the Baltimore Orioles' approach to fielding offers for the four-time All-Star. ESPN's Buster Olney has spoken to competing executives who see a more focused, purposeful and engaged Orioles front office this summer. But that's not a universal take.

"I wouldn't call them methodical or organized, and the aggressiveness comes and goes," said one team official who has dealt with the Orioles recently. "There is a lot of stop-and-go to the process."

Will a deal come to fruition before or after the All-Star break? Barring the mother of all trade-deadline shockers, Machado will be gone soon enough and the other position-player dominoes will start falling. One intriguing Plan B name making the rounds: Minnesota Twins second baseman Brian Dozier.

Dozier entered this season with hopes of playing in the postseason and enhancing his free-agent payday with a productive "walk year," but events haven't played out that way. The Twins are 40-49 and 8 ½ games behind Cleveland in the AL Central, and one bad week is probably all it takes for Derek Falvey and Thad Levine to punt on the idea of contention and aggressively shop Dozier, Lance Lynn, Fernando Rodney and the team's other short-term veteran pieces.

EDITOR'S PICKS

The one player all 30 teams should trade before the deadline

Whether looking for that final piece or building for the future, every team has a reason to make a deal. Here's whom they should be shopping around.

As Orioles mull trade options, who is in charge in Baltimore?

While the team holding this July's biggest trade chip decides who stays and who goes at the deadline, the intrigue is compounded by the unsettled status of its front office.

MLB hitters explain why they can't just beat the shift

"Why don't guys just hit ground balls to short?" Three veteran batters tell us what makes adjusting to the shift so difficult.

Dozier's .223/.308/.409 slash line has put a bit of a crimp in his appeal. But he's two years removed from hitting 28 homers and slugging .646 after the All-Star break. Dozier ranks 148th among 163 qualifying MLB hitters with a .248 batting average on balls in play this season, so it's not unreasonable to think he has a second-half run in him. He is also a popular, team-oriented veteran who is only going to add to a contender's clubhouse mix.

So which teams could be in the mix on Dozier? Sources said the Dodgers, Diamondbacks and Brewers, three teams in the heart of the Machado

pursuit, are all potential landing spots.

The Dodgers, who rank 25th in the majors in second base OPS and have expressed interest in Dozier in the past, might be the best fit. The Brewers are playing Jonathan Villar at second base and the Diamondbacks are going primarily with Ketel Marte, and Dozier would be an offensive upgrade over either player. He also would take a considerably smaller bite than Machado out of a team's farm system.

"The guy is a proven home run hitter and a leader, and on the right club, hitting in the right part of the lineup, he can get hot with anybody," said a scout. But first, everybody needs to see how the Manny saga plays out.

Twins would need thumbs up from Joe Mauer and family to move on a trade

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | July 10, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS – If there's a competitive club out there with its eyes on the postseason and hopeful of acquiring a veteran first baseman, don't expect the Minnesota Twins to be proactive in shopping Joe Mauer. And if one of those teams called Minnesota, well, the front office would sit down with No. 7 and get input from Mauer and his family.

"For the tenure that Joe's had here, all that he has meant to this franchise [and] the fact that he clearly has 10-and-5 rights," Twins GM Thad Levine said, "we would feel honor-bound — if any club were to call us — to sit down with him and express that to him and then effectively put the ball in his and his wife Maddie's court to determine how they would want us to proceed."

That conversation hasn't happened yet, Mauer said. And unsurprisingly the 15-year big league veteran says he hasn't spent a whole lot of time thinking about the subject. Mauer said that his tune hasn't changed since spring training, when he said that he wanted to keep playing baseball so long as he felt he was contributing.

The fact that this could be his final season in Minnesota – or that there's a trade deadline looming at the end of this month? Those thoughts don't dominate Mauer's consciousness, he said, since he's just paying attention to winning that night's ballgame. And that's a pretty typical Joe Mauer answer.

Still, it's one of the big questions on the mind of Twins fans. With the team currently far out of postseason contention and nothing promised for next year, would the Twins trade away the guy from St. Paul who won three batting titles at home?

This is the final season of an 8-year mega contract that Mauer signed after he won the American League MVP in 2009. He's done well for himself financially, and he's a first-ballot Twins hall of famer. If he reaches base 84 more times in a Twins uniform, he'll pass Harmon Killebrew for No. 1 on the team's all-time list.

It's an open question, though, how long he'll keep pulling on that uniform. Mauer had concussion symptoms earlier this summer and missed about three weeks of action. He's 35, and this is the final year under contract with the only team he's ever known. Right now he's hitting .267/.360/.355 and playing his usual brand of good defense at first base.

Is there a contender out there that could use a guy like Mauer in the lineup? The Twins won't selectively screen the calls if they come, but Levine also made it clear that Mauer would be part of the discussions. That's part of his contractual right, but it's also a respect he's earned, Levine said.

"I think in the event that we want to move forward in a conversation of that nature, we would let another team kind of inspire it," Levine said.

"Ideally we would be presenting him an opportunity to pursue the playoffs here," Levine added. "But just conscious of his commitment to his community – but also a desire to win – I think we would allow for him to make all those decisions, rather than pre-emptively making any decisions on behalf of Joe and his family."

The American League Controls the Top and Bottom Tiers of Our Power Rankings

Emma Baccellieri | Sports Illustrated | July 10, 2018

How is it that the American League features three of the best teams in recent memory and three of the worst? Welcome to baseball's era of the haves and the have-nots. Let's dig into this week's Power Rankings!

TIER FIVE: COULD BE WORSE, I GUESS...

25. Texas Rangers (40–52) You probably know that defenses shift a lot against Joey Gallo. You might guess that defenses shift against Joey Gallo

far more often than they not. But would you have guessed that defenses shift against Joey Gallo 88% of the time? And considering that his OPS has dropped by more than 100 points from last season, it's working.

24. San Diego Padres (39–54) Since returning from the disabled list on June 21, Wil Myers has a 1.075 OPS. More than half of his hits have been for extra bases. Sadly, San Diego is further back of first place than they've been all year.

23. Detroit Tigers (40–53) Time to check in on baseball's extremely cruel aging process: It's only been four years since Victor Martinez was MVP runner-up. Four years since he led baseball with a .974 OPS! Fast-forward to present day, where he's one of just eight players with a sub-.620 OPS.

22. Cincinnati Reds (39–51) The trio of Joey Votto, Eugenio Suarez and Scooter Gennett solidly deserve their All-Star roster spots, and Cincinnati is still this bad. Is there any bigger indictment of the team's pitching staff?

21. Minnesota Twins (40–48) An update on large adult son and rookie Willians Astudillo, who built a reputation in the minor leagues for being remarkably allergic to both strikeouts and walks: Five games into his major-league career, he has yet to notch one of either.