



**Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Monday, March 12, 2018**

- Twins release Sanchez to make room for Lynn. MLB.com (Bollinger) p.1
 - Twins to stick to staff plan despite Lynn signing. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 2
 - Jimenez stays hot to lead prospect performers. MLB.com (Rosenbaum) p. 3
 - Twins release Anibal Sanchez in order to clear space for Lance Lynn. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 4
 - Twins day at camp: Anibal Sanchez let go after three weeks. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 5
 - Twins' acquisition of Lance Lynn rewarded patient strategy. Star Tribune (Rand) p. 5
 - Top prospect Fernando Romero continues to impress in Twins' 6-5 victory over Rays. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 6
 - With Twins' spring-training acquisitions, we ask again, what's not to like? Star Tribune (Reusse) p. 7
 - Somehow, Twins became the winter destination of choice for MLB free agents. Star Tribune (Miller) p. 8
 - Lance Lynn signing has Twins players thinking big about 2018. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 9
 - Young Fernando Romero continues to impress Twins. Pioneer Press (Berardino) p. 10
 - Anibal Sanchez released by Twins after three weeks with team. ESPN (Staff) p. 12
 - Baseball America's J.J. Cooper on Twins' system, prospects. ESPN 1500 (Depue) p. 12
 - Wetmore: What does Twins rotation look like after signing Lance Lynn? ESPN 1500 (Wetmore) p. 14
 - Twins release Anibal Sanchez to make room for Lance Lynn. ESPN 1500 (Wetmore) p. 16
 - Twins release Anibal Sanchez. NBC Sports (Varela) p. 16
 - Twins, Indians Headline Quiet Offseason in the Rebuilding AL Central. Sports Illustrated (Tayler) p. 16
 - Aybar collects two RBI, Twins beat Rays 6-5. Fox Sports North (AP) p. 18
 - The surprise big winners from MLB's ugly offseason. Yahoo Sports (Brown) p. 18
 - Lance Lynn answers another question for the Twins, but plenty still remain. The Athletic (Hayes) p. 19
-

Twins release Sanchez to make room for Lynn

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | March 11, 2018

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. -- After agreeing to terms with Lance Lynn on a one-year deal worth \$12 million on Saturday, the Twins made room on their roster for him by giving veteran right-hander Anibal Sanchez his unconditional release on Sunday.

Sanchez, who signed a \$2.5 million non-guaranteed deal on Feb. 20, will receive \$417,000 and would've been due \$625,000 if the Twins waited until Tuesday to make the move. Sanchez was due to start against the Rays in Port Charlotte on Sunday, but right-hander Aaron Slegers made the start instead.

Sanchez, who was competing for a spot in the rotation, made two relief appearances this spring, allowing six runs over four innings. All six of those runs came in his last outing against the Pirates on March 4.

Twins manager Paul Molitor and general manager Thad Levine met with Sanchez before Sunday's game to give him the news.

"You can't measure any type of surprise or anything, but I just know he was very professional and grateful for the opportunity," Molitor said. "That was a tough one. I can't say he got a very large opportunity in the short term he was with us."

The Twins decided to release Sanchez now so he could have a chance to catch on with another team this spring. Sanchez has a career 4.09 ERA in 12 seasons in the Majors but has a combined 5.67 ERA over the last three seasons.

Sanchez, though, did strike out 104 and walk only 29 in 105 1/3 innings with the Tigers last year, but served up 26 homers. He received a \$5 million buyout from Detroit this offseason after the club declined his \$16 million option.

Sanchez, 34, was signed before the Twins traded for Jake Odorizzi and signed Lynn this spring to bolster their rotation. Odorizzi and Lynn are expected to join Jose Berrios and Kyle Gibson in a four-man rotation early in the season, as Ervin Santana isn't expected back until late April or early May after undergoing surgery on his right middle finger.

"The potential of things working out and the innings we thought he could be an option for kind of closed a little bit," Molitor said. "So we get him out there with some time to go in camp with maybe the best opportunity to find a home. But he was good, he was really good.":

Twins to stick to staff plan despite Lynn signing

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | March 11, 2018

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. -- The addition of right-hander Lance Lynn, who underwent a physical on Sunday after agreeing to terms on a one-year, \$12 million deal on Saturday, doesn't change Twins manager Paul Molitor's plan to open the season with a four-man rotation, Molitor said before Sunday's 6-5 win over the Rays.

Molitor chose to speak hypothetically because the signing isn't official yet, but said he has no issues with an all-right-handed rotation and doesn't plan to use a fifth starter early in the season because of off-days. He also added that he's hopeful a potential addition like Lynn will be ready for the start of the season after signing with less than three weeks left before Opening Day.

"Obviously, you have to think about those kinds of things, short window and all that," Molitor said. "If things work out."

With Molitor looking to open the 2018 season with a four-man rotation, it means Jake Odorizzi, Jose Berrios, Kyle Gibson and Lynn, if ready, will be the four starters. However, the Twins aren't ready to name who will get the call for Opening Day against the Orioles on March 29, with Ervin Santana sidelined until late April or early May. Berrios is a top candidate, but Molitor would like to see him pitch in the Twins' game in Berrios' home country of Puerto Rico in mid-April and it will be difficult to get the righty lined up for both starts.

Right-hander Phil Hughes is likely headed for long relief after the addition of Lynn. Hughes will start on Monday against the Yankees in Tampa, and Molitor said he plans to meet with Hughes about how the signing could affect his role. Hughes has two years and \$26.4 million remaining on his contract.

"You always try to stay ahead of those kinds of things as best you can when people are affected by other moves that are made," Molitor said.

Right-hander Anibal Sanchez was released before his projected start on Sunday to make room for Lynn. Another domino effect is lefty Adalberto Mejia is likely ticketed for Triple-A Rochester, while Tyler Duffey's best chance to make the club is in long relief, but even that is now a long shot.

The Twins have been active in Spring Training, trading for Odorizzi, signing Logan Morrison and agreeing to terms with Lynn. While some of those moves are pushing players into lesser roles, Molitor said the consensus is the clubhouse is happy the front office is continually making improvements.

"I think we can sense that," Molitor said. "Everyone is, with good reason, excited about what lies ahead. I think this is an attractive place to come to right now, given the direction and the talent level and all those things."

Camp battles

- Non-roster infielder Erick Aybar, who was dealing with a ribcage injury, made his return and went 2-for-2 with a two-run single in Sunday's game. He's competing to make the club as a utility man, but isn't likely to make the Opening Day roster unless Miguel Sano is suspended or a player suffers an injury.
- Outfielder Zack Granite, competing with Robbie Grossman to be the club's fourth outfielder, went 1-for-3 and is hitting .148 this spring. First baseman Kennys Vargas, who is expected to be the odd man out for an Opening Day roster role, went 0-for-3.
- Catcher Mitch Garver remains the favorite to be the backup catcher, but he has struggled offensively this spring. Garver went 0-for-3 Sunday and is hitting .063.
- Right-hander Fernando Romero, ranked as the club's No. 2 prospect by MLB Pipeline, is expected to open at Triple-A Rochester as a starter, but continues to be a tantalizing option in relief, as he's now thrown eight no-hit innings this spring, including three perfect innings against the Rays Sunday.

"Sometimes you have to know how to control the situation, but at the same time, I've been feeling really excited," Romero said. "All we have to

do is keep working."

Injury updates

- Morrison is slated to return to the lineup on Tuesday against the Orioles after suffering a right glute strain while running the bases on Wednesday.
- Infielder Ehire Adrianza has been out since Tuesday with a left calf strain, but is expected to return on Monday or Tuesday, Molitor said.
- Left fielder Eddie Rosario remains sidelined with tendinitis in his right arm and has yet to resume throwing, as his recovery has been a bit slower than expected. He's likely to return at designated hitter to get at-bats before he sees action in the field.

Up next

- The Twins and Hughes head north for a night game against the Yankees on Monday at 5:35 p.m. CT, live on MLB.TV. It's the third start of the spring for Hughes, who threw a two-inning live bullpen session on Friday to get ready for the outing. Other pitchers expected to see action include Mejia, Tyler Kinley, Trevor Hildenberger and Taylor Rogers.

Jimenez stays hot to lead prospect performers

Mike Rosenbaum | MLB.com | March 11, 2018

A day after he came off the bench and delivered a key pinch-hit home run against his former organization, Eloy Jimenez continued to showcase his robust power on Sunday, launching a solo home run in his first at-bat as the White Sox faced the D-backs.

Jimenez, MLB Pipeline's No. 4 overall prospect and No. 1 on the White Sox Top 30 list, followed his solo shot with a triple to center field in his second at-bat. He reached via a walk in his third appearance and was subsequently replaced on the basepaths by Daniel Palka.

Held out of game action for much of the spring so far due to a tender left knee, Jimenez, 21, had logged just one at-bat before he connected on his first spring homer Saturday -- an opposite-field shot on an 0-2 breaking ball which, at the time, provided the White Sox with a lead. Jimenez homered on the second pitch he saw on Sunday, once again driving the ball over the wall to the opposite field.

Traded from the Cubs to the White Sox last July in the Jose Quintana deal, Jimenez slashed .312/.379/.568 with 19 home runs in 89 games between the two organizations. He was particularly impressive after a mid-August promotion to Double-A Birmingham, where he produced a .353/.397/.559 line with three home runs and 24 hits in 18 games. Following the season, the White Sox added Jimenez to their 40-man roster.

Other top prospect performances from Sunday's action:

- No. 16 overall prospect Kyle Tucker (Astros' No. 2) singled, stole a base and plated a run with a sacrifice fly in a 1-for-3 performance that improved his spring average to .387. Catcher Garrett Stubbs (No. 24) connected on a fifth-inning solo home run, his first Grapefruit League homer, against Mets left-hander Jason Vargas, while right-hander Rogelio Armenteros (No. 12) tossed two scoreless frames in relief, allowing one hit and two walks with a pair of strikeouts.
- No. 56 overall prospect Keston Hiura (Brewers' No. 1) upped his spring average to .409 with a 2-for-2 performance. His second hit, a two-out RBI single, capped a three-run comeback in the top of the ninth by Milwaukee as they rallied to beat Cleveland, 5-4.
- No. 68 overall prospect Fernando Romero (Twins' No. 2) continued his unblemished spring campaign as he fired three perfect frames with two strikeouts in relief against the Rays. The 23-year-old right-hander has yet to allow a hit in the Grapefruit League across eight innings and four appearances. He's issued just one walk in that span while striking out eight.
- No. 98 overall prospect Ryan Mountcastle (Orioles' No. 2) came off the bench to collect two hits, including a three-run home run, his second spring homer, in the ninth inning of Baltimore's 7-3 win over Boston. On the mound, Orioles No. 4 prospect Hunter Harvey picked up his first spring win in his third start for Baltimore. Working three innings, the right-hander allowed two runs (one earned) on four hits and one walk while striking out four. A host of other young Orioles hurlers were impressive in relief of Harvey, as Tanner Scott (No. 6), Keegan Akin (No. 9), Michael Baumann (No. 15), Brian Hanifee (No. 10) and Zac Lowther (No. 17) combined to allow one earned run on four hits in 4 2/3 innings.
- Marlins No. 9 prospect Brian Anderson enjoyed a big day at the plate, going 2-for-2 with a three-run home run, a double and three runs scored in Miami's 7-5 win over the Yankees. The home run was his second of the spring. After finishing 2017 as Miami's everyday third baseman, Anderson could break camp in the same role should Martin Prado not be ready. Hard-throwing right-hander Sandy Alcantara (Marlins' No. 3) worked the final four innings for Miami to record the save. He allowed three runs (two earned) on three hits (two home runs) but issued just one walk and struck out three.

- Pirates No. 9 prospect Kevin Kramer plated No. 45 overall prospect Austin Meadows (Pirates' No. 2) with his second triple of the spring and is now batting .357 with four RBIs through 14 at-bats. More significant was that Kramer, a natural second baseman, started the game at shortstop, a position he's appeared at in just four games in his Minor League career. Also standing out on Sunday was starter Clay Holmes (Pirates' No. 19), who tossed three scoreless innings, allowing one hit and striking out a pair, to earn his second Grapefruit League win.

- Braves No. 16 prospect Dustin Peterson connected on a two-run shot against the Tigers, his second home run in as many days. The 23-year-old outfielder is having a strong spring in big league camp, hitting .316/.350/.684 thanks to four hits in his past seven at-bats.

- Indians Nos. 22 and 30 prospects Ryan Merritt and Shawn Morimando combined to allow one hit over five scoreless innings as Cleveland defeated the Royals, 3-0. Morimando tossed three hitless frames in relief of Merritt, and each left-hander struck out a pair in the game.

Twins release Anibal Sanchez in order to clear space for Lance Lynn

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 11, 2018

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. — Anibal Sanchez's three-week career with the Twins came to an end Sunday morning, just a couple of hours before he was supposed to pitch against the Rays. As Sanchez gathered his equipment for the one-hour bus ride to Charlotte Sports Park, manager Paul Molitor called the veteran righthander into his office to tell him that the Twins were releasing him instead.

The reason had nothing to do with how Sanchez pitched this spring, general manager Thad Levine said. It was about the Twins' increasingly crowded roster, and particularly the impending signing of free agent righthander Lance Lynn. The Twins' needed Sanchez's roster spot, true, but the bigger issue was that they could no longer deliver the innings that they promised him when he signed.

“When we signed him, we did not have Jake Ozorizzi, and we did not have something else in the pipeline,” said Levine, referring to Lynn without confirming his signing. “So really, the opportunity for real innings was dwindling. ... We had represented an opportunity that was no longer there for him, so we wanted to give him every opportunity to get another chance with another big league team.”

Sanchez pitched four innings in Grapefruit League play, shutting out Boston without allowing a hit for two innings on Feb. 27, but surrendering six runs on five hits against the Pirates on March 4.

By releasing Sanchez on Sunday, the Twins owe the veteran one-sixth of his non-guaranteed \$2.5 million contract, or \$417,000. Had they waited until Monday, the termination pay would have risen to \$625,000.

With Sanchez out, Aaron Slegers gets the start today against the Rays, with Addison Reed and Zach Duke also scheduled to pitch. Here are the lineups:

TWINS

Mauer DH
Aybar SS
Escobar 2B
Sano 3B
Vargas 1B
Heisey LF
Granite CF
Garver C
LaMarre RF

Slegers RHP

RAYS

Johnson CF
Gomez RF
Duffy 3B
Cron 1B
Ramos C
Hechavarria SS

Wendle 2B
Sucre DH
Snyder LF

Faria RHP

Twins day at camp: Anibal Sanchez let go after three weeks

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 11, 2018

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. – Anibal Sanchez’s three-week career with the Twins came to an end Sunday morning, a couple of hours before he was supposed to face the Rays. As Sanchez gathered his equipment for the one-hour bus ride to Charlotte Sports Park, manager Paul Molitor called the veteran righthander into his office to tell him that the Twins were releasing him instead.

“That was a tough one,” Molitor said of the meeting. “I can’t say he got a very large opportunity in the short time he was with us.”

The reason had nothing to do with how Sanchez pitched this spring, General Manager Thad Levine said. It was about the Twins’ increasingly crowded roster, and particularly the impending signing of free-agent righthander Lance Lynn. The Twins needed Sanchez’s roster spot, but the bigger issue was that they could no longer deliver the innings they promised him when he signed.

“When we signed him, we did not have Jake Odorizzi, and we did not have something else in the pipeline,” said Levine, referring to Lynn without confirming his arrival. “So really, the opportunity for real innings was dwindling. ... We had represented an opportunity that was no longer there for him, so we wanted to give him every opportunity to get another chance with another big league team.”

Sanchez pitched four innings in Grapefruit League play: two hitless innings vs. Boston on Feb. 27 followed by a six-run, five-hit outing vs. Pittsburgh on March 4.

By releasing him Sunday, the Twins owe Sanchez one-sixth of his nonguaranteed \$2.5 million contract, or \$417,000. Had they waited until Monday, the termination pay would have risen to \$625,000.

Mauer bats leadoff

Joe Mauer batted leadoff Sunday for the first time this spring, but it wasn’t really a signal that the first baseman might bat atop the order much this season, Molitor said.

“There’s going to be times, maybe, whatever the circumstances might be — a day off for somebody or an injury — where he’s always an option for that spot,” Molitor said of Mauer, who batted first only three times last year, and eight times in 2016.

Mostly, Molitor said, Mauer batted first to make sure he batted three times before the customary mass substitution in the fifth inning.

“I want to build his at-bats as intelligently as I can, so he got on the bus today, got up here and got three good at-bats,” Molitor said. “... His timing’s good, he’s feeling good, so I’m just trying to monitor and keep him on schedule the last two weeks.”

Etc.

- Infielder Ehire Adrianza is recovering from a strained right calf that has kept him out of action since Tuesday. “He tried to play through it for a few days without saying anything,” Molitor said. “But he’s doing well.” Adrianza could be back in the lineup Monday, he said.

- Logan Morrison’s strained right gluteus muscle is improved, too, and Molitor expects to have him in the lineup Tuesday.

- The tendinitis in Eddie Rosario’s right arm hasn’t subsided as quickly as the Twins had hoped, and the team canceled a throwing session for him. Molitor said he might use him as a designated hitter in order to get him at-bats before he’s ready to return to left field.

- Erick Aybar had some rib cage soreness that kept him out of action for a few days, but he played shortstop on Sunday and collected two hits.

Up next

Phil Hughes returns to the spring camp where his career began — Steinbrenner Field in Tampa — to face the Yankees.

Twins' acquisition of Lance Lynn rewarded patient strategy

Michael Rand | Star Tribune | March 12, 2018

Four thoughts from the busiest sports month of the year:

- If this MLB offseason could be compared to a hand of the popular poker game Texas Hold'em, we could make this assessment: The Twins just defeated their critics and rivals with a patient approach and a great outcome on the river — the final of the seven cards revealed to each player.

The outcome has them shelling out \$12 million for one season of pitcher Lance Lynn's services instead of collecting a big pot, but they're clearly counting on a bigger payoff down the road.

The Twins looked to be in a position of overpromising and underdelivering when they came up short in their bid for Yu Darvish. The Jake Odorizzi trade was a nice touch, but it also led to this conclusion: If that's the final move, it doesn't feel like enough.

Instead, they waited out a strange free-agent market to land 38-homer slugger Logan Morrison and then this weekend Lynn, another better-than-average pitcher for the rotation.

To make it even better, the Twins made it seem like they were done after the Odorizzi move. Now they didn't just get their guy, they flipped the script to underpromising and overdelivering.

It's almost like Derek Falvey and Thad Levine knew the final card was there all along.

- I've lost track of how many tours I've taken of new or renovated sports facilities in the Twin Cities in the past decade, but suffice to say it's approaching double digits now when you count colleges and practice spaces.

The latest was Friday, when the Vikings showed off their impressive new headquarters in Eagan.

It's fine to be sentimental about the outdated Winter Park in Eden Prairie or the half-century spent holding training camp in Mankato. But the Twin Cities Orthopedics Performance Center is a modern marvel for the current era.

It's spacious. It has top-notch training, recovery and technical spaces. It's surely no accident that it opened just in time to show off to free agents this week.

Every team in town wants a space like that, and pretty much all of them have one now. Less than a year from now, Minnesota United will join the mix when its new stadium opens in St. Paul.

Maybe then all the teams will be done building or upgrading for a while, but I doubt it.

- Speaking of Minnesota United, the outlook heading into Saturday's home opener against Chicago is a lot more optimistic than it was a year ago. In their inaugural Major League Soccer season, the Loons were throttled 5-1 to start the year at Portland before their home debut. This year? A one-goal loss and a one-goal win are in the books.

- As dicey as things have turned lately for the Timberwolves, they're even rougher for the Spurs. The Western Conference standard-bearers for long-term success are 2-8 in their past 10 games and have a very difficult closing slate. San Antonio has made the postseason 20 years in a row. That streak is in real jeopardy.

Top prospect Fernando Romero continues to impress in Twins' 6-5 victory over Rays

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 11, 2018

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. – Fernando Romero faced nine hitters Sunday and retired them all, but by now, that's no surprise. The righthander is one inning from a piecemeal no-hitter.

Romero struck out two, walked none, and increased his spring total to eight innings without allowing a hit, helping the Twins roll to their fourth consecutive Grapefruit League victory, 6-5 over the Rays at Charlotte Sports Park. The 23-year-old Dominican, widely considered the Twins' top righthanded pitching prospect, has struck out eight batters and walked only one in four spring appearances.

“It’s been good so far. We’ve been working on the mechanics and delivery, and how to finish stronger,” said Romero, who has mostly faced minor leaguers in the late innings of exhibition games. “I’ve been feeling really excited.”

So has Twins manager Paul Molitor, and it’s not just because Romero throws his fastball 96-98 miles per hour. It’s the other pitches that have Molitor especially enthused.

“The fact that his offspeed pitches are coming out [so well] is really encouraging. He doesn’t just rely on overpowering people,” Molitor said. “He’s got good tilt on both the changeup and the slider. You can see those righthanders are having trouble getting the ball up on the inside of the plate.”

With no experience above Class AA, Romero is likely to open the season at Class AAA Rochester, but he is making an impression on his future big-league manager.

“It was a really good day for him. He’s pitching very confidently,” Molitor said. “I would think he’s feeling really good about how he’s throwing the ball. There’s not too much hard contact, he’s throwing it over, getting a lot of swings and misses. Not much not to like.”

Same goes for the Twins offense. One day after rain obliterated the Twins’ nine-run first inning against Boston, Minnesota struck for five runs in the second inning Sunday behind a bases-loaded walk to Joe Mauer, followed by two-run singles from Erick Aybar and Miguel Sano.

With Twins' spring-training acquisitions, we ask again, what's not to like?

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | March 12, 2018

What’s obvious is that Derek Falvey and the Twins’ front office has been aggressive throughout the off-season in seeking upgrades for the roster.

PORT CHARLOTTE, FLA. – The Twins had completed the third day of workouts for pitchers and catchers on Feb. 16 when an announcement was made that they had signed veteran starter Anibal Sanchez to a contract that would put him on the 40-player roster.

The Twins could get out of the deal for less than \$500,000 if a decision was made within 25 days. The Star Tribune posted its story online that night and there were a few dozen comments, a good share of which saw this as the big move that baseball boss Derek Falvey and General Manager Thad Levine were planning to offer as the reinforcement for the 2018 starting pitching.

One of the early commenters stated: “At last the missing piece to our pitching puzzle! Love the aggressive approach by owners and management.”

It was soon followed by this: “Pohlad Cheap doesn’t cease because he hires a new general manager, you know.”

And then “Benelli2” had a post with full insight: “We now know that Falvey never intended to sign a legitimate starter ... he was mainly brought in because Pohlad knew he’d be ever OK with following the orders of ownership not to spend money.”

Two days later, the Twins traded shortstop prospect Jermaine Palacios to Tampa Bay for Jake Odorizzi, a starter with a solid history. On Saturday, the reports surfaced that the Twins were in agreement with starter Lance Lynn on a one-year, \$12 million contract.

The three-week period between adding Odorizzi and Lynn also had included the signing of free agent Logan Morrison, the slugger of 38 home runs last season for Tampa Bay.

In the interest of fair play, I checked the comments on the Star Tribune’s initial stories on the acquisitions of Odorizzi, Morrison and now Lynn, to see if “Benelli2” or the other two posters cited here had checked in to express opinions.

I couldn’t find those anonymous handles among the responses. All can be comforted the Twins released Sanchez on Sunday morning to make room for Lynn, and also by this:

The Pohlads, coming off the two lowest attendance seasons since 2005, have now allowed the 2018 payroll to reach \$128 million, which would be an Opening Day record by \$15 million over 2011.

That one didn’t work out: injuries, horrible pitching and a proposed new shortstop (Tsuyoshi Nishioka) who couldn’t play led to a 19-50 finish, a 63-99 record, and the firing of General Manager Bill Smith.

A similar result with a record payroll in 2018 does not seem likely. Joe Mauer, one of the injured at the start of the Twins' long, sad slide in 2011, was taking batting practice before Sunday's exhibition with the Rays.

Asked about the Lynn addition, Mauer said: "It's pretty good. I was here 14 years and never saw a spring like this. It's a new approach for the Twins, for sure."

The Twins reinforced the bullpen with free agents Fernando Rodney, Zach Duke and Addison Reed this winter. They have now added Morrison, Odorizzi and Lynn.

This is not a suggestion to schedule a victory parade when the Twins arrive in Minnesota for Opening Day on April 5.

Two years ago, when they looked outstanding in spring training, regrettable columns ("What's not to like?") were authored, and then they went an all-time worst 59-103 and Terry Ryan was replaced as the baseball boss.

Yup. Things can go sour. Already, Eddie Rosario has a sore arm, Miguel Sano still is awaiting word from Major League Baseball on a possible suspension, and there are two more weeks left in Florida for Lynn to get geared up for possible inclusion in the season-opening rotation.

Manager Paul Molitor chose not to comment on Lynn matters Sunday, with the signing still unofficial, but did say this in Mollie-ese about the Twins becoming a landing spot for free agents:

"I have to preface it by saying some players just wanted a home, period. But we had an active winter and spring, and I think people, by word of mouth or what they've witnessed ... it's an attractive place."

Molitor applauded the "supplementation" of the roster — that's Mollie-ese, right there — and added, "We have to see how it all works out, obviously."

What's obvious is the Falvey brain trust has been aggressive all winter and into spring in seeking upgrades.

The message from the front office was the Twins were basically done after the Morrison signing. Then, Lynn became available for one year, \$12 million, and it was too good to pass up — for Falvey, for Levine and for Jim Pohlada.

Let me speak for "Benelli2" and other posters and say, as Twins fans, they have to be impressed.

Somehow, Twins became the winter destination of choice for MLB free agents

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | March 12, 2018

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Whether it's by secondhand recommendation, industry reputation or even a Yelp review or two, something strange has happened in Major League Baseball this spring: The Twins have become a more desired offseason destination than Las Vegas.

Lance Lynn headed for Fort Myers on Sunday to undergo a physical exam, and the righthanded starter is expected to sign a one-year contract Monday, making him the latest in a series of players who chose the Twins over competing — sometimes better — offers.

The reason is simple, according to Zach Duke, another of the Twins' seven free-agent signees. "The feeling around the game is, we're going for it," the veteran lefthander said Sunday. "We've got a great bunch here, and we can do some great things. That's attractive to people."

So it seems. This winter's bizarrely frigid market for available talent ultimately has worked to the Twins' advantage, to the point where some free agents grew intent upon becoming Twins and wouldn't take no for an answer. When Lynn — like first baseman Logan Morrison before him — didn't receive sufficiently lucrative long-term contract offers that they had expected, they eventually elected to accept shorter, cheaper deals and try the market again later.

And in both cases, a source with knowledge of the negotiations said, they took a bit less money (on already hugely discounted deals) in order to join the Twins.

"By word of mouth, or what they've witnessed, it's an appealing place, for whatever reason," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We've been able to get some people on our radar and land a significant amount of supplementation to our roster. ... It's an attractive place to come right now, given [our] direction and the talent level."

Morrison was reportedly influenced by the opinion of Jake Odorizzi, his former Rays teammate who was acquired in a late February trade. Morrison, in turn, had been working out with Lynn, among others, at Cressey Sports Performance in Jupiter, Fla., so Lynn likely had firsthand reports about the transformation of the Twins' pitching staff this winter.

Improving by 30 games and reaching the wild-card game last year undoubtedly helped the Twins get noticed, too.

"You look at what we were able to do last year, and then we basically brought everyone [in the lineup] back, plus filled some holes," said catcher Jason Castro, a free-agent acquisition last offseason. "If you're a free agent and you're looking at that, at what the team is shaping up to look like, this definitely feels like an exciting place to be."

The midcamp moves have been mostly applauded by Twins fans, and they are not the only ones growing enthusiastic about the 2018 season. The buzz in the Twins' own clubhouse is unmistakable, too.

"That was what everyone was talking about today," Castro said. "Guys were really excited when they heard the news."

Added All-Star righthander Ervin Santana: "It feels like everybody is happy and wants to win. I don't know how to describe it, but you can feel it in here — anything can happen. We made the playoffs last year, and we've improved the team."

Lynn is a smart addition, Castro said, because he has a fastball-first approach that is unlike the styles of his new teammates.

"He's got really good, dominant stuff. He has an explosive fastball, and can really pitch off of it," Castro said of the 30-year-old former Cardinals pitcher. "I feel like that's kind of becoming rare these days, guys that really attack you with [velocity] and come right at you with fastballs."

With only a one-year contract, Lynn will be trying to reinforce his value for another run at free agency next fall, when signing him won't come tied to the loss of a draft pick, as it does for the Twins. And if he is upset at how this offseason went, at having to accept a contract that's a few million short even of the \$17.4 million qualifying offer the Cardinals made and Lynn rejected, perhaps that's good for the Twins, too.

"The competitive nature that's in all of us is going to maybe forge some sort of chip on his shoulder. You want to go prove yourself, and that's only going to benefit us," Castro said. "I'm excited to get to work with him. It's going to be fun."

Lance Lynn signing has Twins players thinking big about 2018

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | March 11, 2018

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Joe Mauer received confirmation of the latest big Twins addition on Saturday evening via text message from Logan Morrison, his teammate for less than two weeks.

Former St. Louis Cardinals right-hander Lance Lynn had agreed to terms on a one-year, \$12 million deal with the Twins, pending a physical Sunday and Monday, according to a person with direct knowledge. Morrison, Lynn's workout partner at Cressey Sports Performance in Jupiter, Fla., couldn't wait to share the news with Mauer.

"I'm pretty pumped up, man," Morrison said Sunday morning in the Twins clubhouse. "I was texting with Joe last night. I think I said, 'Let's go' with about a million exclamation points. He sent me an emoji back of the Napoleon Dynamite guy going like this."

Here Morrison bowed his head and clenched his left fist, pulling it down in a dramatic, celebratory motion. When Mauer is throwing around memes, you know it's a big day for the Twins.

"For sure, he's been the face of your franchise for 17 years," Morrison said of Mauer. "If this is his last year here, being able to send him out a winner would be pretty cool."

Mauer, entering the final season of his eight-year, \$184 million contract, is understandably pleased to see the Twins adding a significant piece in three of the past four weekends since spring training opened on Valentine's Day. He doesn't know Lynn that well other than facing him a few times in spring and interleague play, but the three-time 15-game winner and two-time World Series participant enters with a strong resume.

"Just what I've seen from the other dugout, he looks like a competitor, comes right after you," Mauer said. "I know he eats up a lot of innings. That will be a good thing for us."

Lynn, 30, joins fellow right-hander Jake Odorizzi and Morrison, expected to be the Twins' primary designated hitter, in the Twins' continued "spring forward" efforts that go well beyond the clock on the wall.

“It’s been an interesting offseason, an abnormal offseason,” Mauer said. “To be able to add a guy like Lynn or Morrison at this stage of the year or offseason — I don’t know, are we still in offseason? — to be able to add talent like that is definitely something I really haven’t seen in my time here. I’m definitely happy to welcome those guys.”

Lynn already comes highly recommended by new Twins reliever Zach Duke, who played with him for parts of two seasons in St. Louis. The handful of players in the Twins’ clubhouse who know him from workouts with Eric Cressey, the noted strength-and-conditioning guru with bases in South Florida and Massachusetts, vouch for Lynn as well.

“Lance is great,” said reliever Tyler Kinley, a Rule 5 pick in December. “Between the lines he’s an animal on the mound: all about competing, all about winning. But off the field and knowing him in the gym and playing catch with him, he’s a great guy. He’s funny. He’s good to be around. He’s loose. He’s hilarious.”

Lynn grew up near Indianapolis and pitched in college at Ole Miss, so his homespun humor has made him a media favorite for years.

“In the weight room and on the field, he’s a gamer and a half,” Kinley said. “I’m excited to be with him. Between him and Logan and all those guys (at Cressey), I was like a sponge walking around everywhere, just (soaking up) anything they say.”

Morrison did his best to help recruit Lynn to the Twins, who were reportedly outbid by teams that didn’t carry as much competitive or personal appeal to Lynn.

“I didn’t go out there and tell him to take less to come here, but I definitely wanted him to come,” Morrison said. “I feel like that’s one of our areas to improve is starting pitching. Getting a horse like that is pretty exciting. I’m ready to get this thing going.”

Lynn’s off-field traits are just as important as what he’ll bring to the mound.

“Solid human being,” Morrison said. “I think he’s going to fit in well here. It’s not hard to fit in here, though. Nice guy, but what I like is he’s ultra-competitive and knows how to separate the two. Dude, I mean, his numbers speak for themselves. He’s a really solid pitcher, and I’m really excited to have him. I’m ready to get this thing going.”

Monday will mark the one-month point since Cressey posted a video clip on his Twitter account showing Lynn pitching to Morrison in a live batting practice session in Jupiter. It carried the hash tags #freeagentfun and #AdventuresofLoMoandLance.

Could Morrison possibly have envisioned this outcome back on Feb. 12?

“I did not think about that at all, but it’s pretty cool to see that actually come into fruition,” he said with a smile. “I’m excited, man. Minneapolis should be excited. It’s going to be a fun summer.”

Told all of baseball is talking about the Twins, Mauer looked ahead just a bit.

“Hopefully,” he said, “they’re talking about us in October and beyond.”

Young Fernando Romero continues to impress Twins

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | March 11, 2018

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Young Twins right-hander Fernando Romero worked three perfect innings Sunday to push his string of no-hit innings this spring to eight with just one walk and eight strikeouts.

The 23-year-old from the Dominican Republic is almost certain to start his season at Triple-A Rochester, but he is making the most of his opportunities in big-league camp.

“I don’t really know what the plan is, but I’m not worried about making the big team,” Romero said. “I’ll take any decision. I got no problem with it. I’ll do whatever they want. I’m just worried about getting those hitters out as quick as possible.”

Romero estimated he threw eight change-ups during his 33-pitch outing, which caused manager Paul Molitor to praise the “tilt” on both that pitch and a power slider he throws at 88-91 mph. Romero used his four-seam fastball just twice but still managed to hit 94 mph 10 times while working

on a two-seam offering that regularly tied up right-handed hitters.

“Always, man, we’ve got to go in,” Romero said. “That’s what I’ve been working on. I’m trying to feel my wrist working.”

Rated the game’s 68th-best prospect by MLB.com, Romero uncharacteristically fell behind with ball one to six of nine hitters. The key was avoiding 2-0 counts until his last batter, when second baseman Taylor Featherston made a diving stop to preserve the spring no-no.

“I’m just attacking the zone early,” Romero said. “That’s all. After you get that first-pitch strike, you’re able to do whatever you want.”

TWINS RELEASE SANCHEZ

Veteran right-hander Anibal Sanchez was given his unconditional release early Sunday, hours before he was to make his first spring start for the Twins..

Sanchez, 34, posted a 13.50 earned-run average in just two outings covering four innings after signing a non-guaranteed one-year deal at \$2.5 million last month. The former Detroit Tigers and Florida Marlins standout is owed 30 days in termination pay or about \$403,000 with the move.

Had the Twins waited until after Tuesday to release Sanchez, they would have owed him 45 days or \$605,000 under paragraph 7(b)(2) of the uniform player’s contract.

“We wanted to give him every opportunity to sign with another big-league team and compete for their rotation,” Twins general manager Thad Levine said. “It had everything to do with what we represented. The opportunity was not there for him anymore.”

Since Sanchez was signed on Feb. 16, the Twins have traded for veteran right-hander Jake Odorizzi and agreed to terms, according to a person with direct knowledge, on a one-year, \$12 million deal with veteran right-hander Lance Lynn, pending a physical.

Lynn was due in Fort Myers on Sunday for tests that could spill over into Monday, but with Sanchez scheduled Sunday at the Tampa Bay Rays, the Twins chose not to wait around any longer. Had Sanchez been injured while on their 40-man roster, they would have been responsible for his rehab.

“We just felt our starting rotation was starting to take shape, and he was not likely to be in it,” Levine said.

The soft-spoken Venezuelan, author of a no-hitter as a rookie in 2006 and winner of 90 games in 12 big-league seasons, made an impression during his brief time with the Twins.

“I think in a short period of time here he had a real impact on some of our young players and quite frankly some of our veterans as well,” Levine said. “He handled the conversation extremely professionally.”

Sanchez, who spent part of last season in the bullpen as well as Triple-A with the Detroit Tigers, had already received a \$5 million buyout from the Tigers on a \$16 million option for this season. The Twins did not discuss a bullpen role with Sanchez before his release.

MORRISON UPDATE

Twins designated hitter Logan Morrison, out since Wednesday with a strained right glute, hopes to return to the lineup at home on Tuesday.

“We’ll see. I’m not rushing it,” he said Sunday morning.

Although it appeared Morrison might have suffered the injury on a hard slide while scoring from second on a short single at JetBlue Park against the Boston Red Sox, he said it actually happened the game before that while going 0 for 3 at home.

“It was bothering me before that, and I didn’t know,” Morrison said. “I don’t know exactly what happened. I think I felt it after the second game when I went 0 for 3 or something and just jogged to first. I don’t even know what I did.”

Morrison, who didn’t sign with the Twins until Feb. 28, still has a little over two weeks to get ready for Opening Day.

ROSARIO STILL OUT

Left fielder Eddie Rosario, who last played on March 4, continues to deal with tendinitis in his right triceps.

“I know this has gone a few more days than what we initially represented,” Levine said. “But with where we are in the spring, we just want to make sure he’s symptom-free before we put him back in a game. Clearly we’re not concerned at all about getting him ramped up for Opening Day.”

Rosario had initially been cleared to resume throwing on March 9, but the training staff opted to give him a few more days of recovery.

“That’s moving a little slow,” Molitor said.

Utility man Ehire Adrianza is day to day with a minor left calf strain after trying to play through it for a few days. Adrianza, hitting .348 with a .565 slugging percentage in 23 spring at-bats, hasn’t played since Tuesday, when he manned left field for the first five innings.

Adrianza should return early in the week, Molitor said.

Fellow utility man Erick Aybar, who had been dealing with a side issue, started at shortstop and had two hits: a double and a two-run single.

BRIEFLY

Aaron Slegers started in place of Sanchez and gave up a three-run first.

Miguel Sano was fine after a foul ball bounced straight up and struck him in the right cheek.

Anibal Sanchez released by Twins after three weeks with team

Staff Writer | ESPN | March 11, 2018

The Minnesota Twins released veteran right-hander Anibal Sanchez on Sunday to create a roster spot for Lance Lynn, who reportedly agreed to a deal with the club Saturday.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Lynn reportedly reaches 1-year deal with Twins

The Twins continue to be busy, reportedly agreeing to a one-year, \$12 million deal Saturday with veteran right-hander Lance Lynn.

Lynn's deal is for one year and \$12 million, according to multiple reports.

Sanchez had agreed to a one-year deal with the Twins last month.

He has a 90-94 record and 4.09 ERA over 12 seasons with the Miami Marlins and Detroit Tigers.

Sanchez pitched a no-hitter as a rookie with the Marlins on Sept. 6, 2006, and led the American League with a 2.57 ERA in 2013 with the Tigers.

But he had a 6.41 ERA last season in 105 ⅓ innings, and the Tigers declined his option, making him a free agent.

Baseball America's J.J. Cooper on Twins' system, prospects

Jake Depue | ESN 1500 | March 12, 2018

After being ranked No. 2 overall in 2015, the Twins’ farm system dropped in Baseball America’s rankings in 2016 and 2017, as Byron Buxton, Miguel Sano, J. O. Berrios and others graduated to the big leagues.

Heading into 2017, Baseball America ranked Minnesota as having the No. 22 system in baseball. Drafting first overall, of course, can change that in a hurry. In last year’s draft, the Twins added Royce Lewis with the top pick, who had a strong first season in the minors. Perhaps even more importantly, they added a number of high-upside prospects in the first few rounds. 2017 draft picks Brent Rooker (35 overall), Landon Leach (37) and Blayne Enlow (76) helped elevate Minnesota’s system to No. 12 in Baseball America’s rankings at the start of 2018.

Last week, I talked with Baseball America executive editor J.J. Cooper about the Twins’ system. Here’s what he had to say about the farm system as a whole, and some of its top prospects.

On the state of the Twins' system

You look at them now, it's fair to say they jumped up a lot. Picking number one helps. It's not just Lewis; Brent Rooker and other guys. This is a system that could rank significantly higher even by midseason. They have the opportunity to take another step forward.

It has a very clear number one [Lewis]. Three through eight is very bunched together. You could make a case for Nick Gordon at eight or three. Make a case for Rooker at three [he's seven]. If Rooker goes out and produces in 2018 like he did in 2017, he's going to be a top 50 prospect. Wander Javier, Lewis, a lot of guys in the system are early enough in their pro careers, they don't even have to be significantly better in 2018. Just doing what they did last year, but at a higher level [of the minor leagues], will really raise their prospect stock. The Twins have a number of those guys.

On the Twins' decision to take Lewis No. 1, and whether he can stick at shortstop

There were a number of guys grouped together [in the draft]. There was nothing where Lewis was ever not a credible top of the draft candidate. He was the best player on the Team USA 18-and-under team the summer before. There were a lot of very good markers there of a top talent.

I think he can stick [at shortstop]. It really depends partly on what is your team's expectations. Some teams have different viewpoints at shortstop than others. I don't see him being a prototypical 70 defender. I don't see him being Lindor. But that doesn't mean he can't play shortstop, especially if he hits the way everyone expects him to hit. Those are the kind of tradeoffs you make.

Could Fernando Romero end up in the 'pen? What's his ceiling if he remains a starter?

I'd say there's a pretty good chance he ends up in the 'pen. Especially with the moves they made, it potentially makes it more likely he could help them in the 'pen this year. If he's useful and helpful, it's more likely they'd keep him in that role. They have a pretty deep Triple-A rotation. There's less likelihood they'll need Romero for 15 starts in the big leagues. If they are in contention, that stuff would look really good coming out of the 'pen later in the year.

Pure stuff wise, he could be a two or a three [as a starter]. He's clearly not there yet. Command has to get better. I don't think the third pitch is there yet. Better against righties than lefties. If it all comes together, absolutely.

On Stephen Gonsalves' minor league numbers, and how he projects in the big leagues

His stuff has always played better than readings. He showed that he needs more time at Triple-A. First time the invisiball wasn't working as well. There's enough stuff there. If your expectations are middle of the rotation, that's probably too much. Back end, that's absolutely in the range of possibilities for him.

Can Nick Gordon play shortstop?

The reports we have, there's more and more skepticism about whether he'll be a regular shortstop. More and more nudging that he ends up at second. That did reflect in his ranking a little bit. There are legit questions about whether he's ever going to be an everyday shortstop. He's yet to answer all those questions. Plenty of arm strength, accuracy needs to get a little bit better. Range wise, how much are you expecting? Some teams are okay with an average range-wise defender, other teams want a true plus defender. We don't talk to a whole lot of scouts that project plus range on Nick Gordon.

Could Brent Rooker be fast-tracked?

He's a launch angle guy. Retooled his swing. Some natural development. It's not all that unusual to see guys who are good hitters take a step forward their junior year [in college]. He gets the ball more consistently in the air and he's strong enough that good things happen. We saw it last spring and as a pro with the Twins. The 40 games he had in High-A was pretty remarkable.

It's not a guarantee, but the majority of guys who have been the best hitters in the SEC and have gone high, have moved quickly. [Alex] Bregman, [Andrew] Benintendi, they didn't need a lot of time in the minors. Rooker's on a similar path. A Double-A assignment wouldn't be insane. How many guys can say in their first full season they're ready for double A?

Why is Zack Littell not ranked higher after his great 2017?

There are some legit questions. His stuff is solid, not spectacular. The fastball is good, it's solid. He could end up having two, maybe even three average pitches. That's a pretty good assortment; could produce useful innings in the majors. There's not a whole lot of upside, that's how I would put it. Back end. Gonsalves, Littell are fours/fives. But there's a lot of value in that.

On Tyler Jay's health and development

We've seen very little of a healthy Tyler Jay over the last couple years. In the AFL [Arizona Fall League], stuff wise, he was not as sharp as what we've seen from Tyler Jay at his best. He doesn't seem like he can hold up as a starter. Now the question is can he get his stuff back as a reliever. You're really counting on him having two plus pitches [slider and fastball], and right now he's not showing two plus pitches. That's going to have to develop from him. Hopefully in 2018 we get to see what a healthy Tyler Jay can do.

Can LaMonte Wade be an everyday player? Will his power develop?

I like the OBP. Like the way he can hit. I rarely come across guys that project him as an everyday guy. There are guys who have his skillset who come into a little more power as they get older. It's easier to develop power if you can hit. He's more of a corner outfielder than a center fielder. Put that all together, it's more of a fourth outfielder profile.

Can Lewis Thorpe develop into a big league starter after two injury-plagued seasons?

At least he did come back. Can he stay healthy? Last year was a very positive sign. They clearly see something there. He's really kind of making up for some lost time. He's a guy who can take a step forward. No doubt about that. If he shows the stuff he showed last year, over a full season at Double-A, that answers a lot of questions.

Can Rule 5 pick Tyler Kinley stick in the Twins' pen? Is he an upgrade over former Twins relief prospect Luke Bard?

Looking at where they are, I find it unlikely. The reason I say that is when you look at Rule 5, the first things that stands out is, is the team trying to contend? Most Rule 5 picks I'd argue are not ready to just help you as a normal member of the roster. If you're a team like the Twins who are out there competing, you can't carry him unless he's legitimately earning his spot. For me, that's going to be hard to do. He doesn't have a whole lot of track record to show he's ready to do that.

He's got plenty of fastball. Is he going to throw enough strikes? Stuff is MLB quality, especially the fastball. Pretty similar [to Bard]. We have Bard as slightly less risky with similar upside. There's a decent chance they get Luke Bard back. Same story. Angels are going to contend, Bard's going to have to show that he can stick.

On shortstop prospect Wander Javier

We were high on Javier. [Baseball America writer] Ben Badler was a big Javier believer. Great all-around skillset. Even if he's not a shortstop, he's showing the bat is everything you're looking for in a middle infielder. He's ready for full season ball. Cedar Rapids [the Twins' Low-A affiliate] will be really fun to watch.

Who else should Twins fans keep an eye on?

Brusdar Graterol. I'm fascinated to see what he's going to do over a full season. I'm a fan of Enlow. I think that Cedar Rapids team is going to be one of the better teams in the minors. It should be a very loaded team.

Wetmore: What does Twins rotation look like after signing Lance Lynn?

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | March 11, 2018

Stop me if you've heard this before. The Twins, after looking set to start the season with the roster they had, added an impact player at a low cost when the price was too much to pass up. Signing Lance Lynn adds another relatively low-risk arm to the mix and it addresses one of the two main pursuits of the Twins' front office this winter.

Well, spring, to be more precise.

The Twins may have taken their time getting going this offseason, but they can join the club on that one. Only a couple of teams made their big moves early this winter. Here's the list of players the Twins have signed this offseason to deals that look like low-risk moves: Fernando Rodney, Addison Reed, Zach Duke, Michael Pineda, Lance Lynn, Logan Morrison; they also traded a low-level prospect for two pre-free-agency years of Jake Odorizzi.

It's hard to see the offseason as anything but a win. They didn't get Yu Darvish. But for the volume of adding Lynn and Odorizzi, their report card would come back with an 'A' if it found its way onto my desk.

What does it mean for the rotation? As always, a lot will depend on health. We'll take a look at what the starting five could look like now. There's plenty to be said for just having a room full of mid-rotation starters that you feel pretty good about. That's a step forward from last year's club, which made the postseason on the strength of its hitting and fielding.

[Bonus listening: The latest episode of the Touch 'Em All podcast is all about the impact of signing Lance Lynn.

Some quick-hit stats:

3.38 – Lance Lynn's career ERA. Some peripheral stats haven't been as excellent, but it's hard to ignore a guy who is at almost 1,000 MLB innings and has never had a season of a 4.00 ERA or worse.

19.7% — Strikeout rate in 2017, a career-low. That's Lynn's only season post-Tommy John surgery, so it could be indicative of who he is as a pitcher now. (Maybe.)

10.1% — Walk rate for Lynn last year, also a career-worst. That would have been worst on the Twins' staff last season, just barely higher than Hector Santiago's 10% walk rate (and Adalberto Mejia's 9.9%). We've excluded from our analysis guys like Adam Wilk, Nick Tepesch, Tim Melville, Alex Wimmers and Jason Wheeler. That's a lot of names but not a lot of quality innings.

That's kind of the point of signing Lance Lynn, actually.

2016 – Missed the full season after Tommy John surgery. He's pitched one full healthy season since his surgery.

95 – The Twins surrender the 95th pick in the draft for the right to sign Lynn, who rejected the Qualifying Offer from the Cardinals. He settled for a one-year deal worth less than the QO. In hindsight, maybe he should've accepted it? No. 95 is the Twins' fourth-highest draft choice.

2019 – Lynn will be a free agent again in a top-heavy class next winter. He'll be 31, and is essentially betting on himself to have a big year in what will become his second consecutive walk year.

—

Lynn's addition makes 3 guys that I think you can pencil in for 32 starts:

Jake Odorizzi
J.O. Berrios
Lance Lynn

Then when Ervin Santana returns in late April or early May, he should be considered in that first group of arms. He's in the final year of his deal with the Twins – probably – but he pitched so well last year for Minnesota that he's a decent bet to be a mid-rotation-level starter in 2018. If Santana makes 25 starts and those other three stay healthy, other starts are going to be hard to come by. It would only leave 40-some starts for the rest of the staff. But as always, it's hard to predict health, and I go into every season now thinking about the team's top-8 or -9 starters instead of just the top-5.

Every other member of the pitching staff, in my opinion, will get used to pitching for his job. Pick a fifth starter from this group and rotate through as injuries and ineffectiveness warrant a change. Remember that the Twins used an incredible 16 different starting pitchers to get through last season. That number shouldn't be as high this year, but it's important to remember that no team ever gets to use its first 5 starters exclusively.

Anibal Sanchez – cut on Sunday to make room on the roster for Lynn.

Phil Hughes – In camp with two years and more than \$26 million left on his contract. After a second surgery to relieve the symptoms of Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, the question is simple. Can he back get to health and effectiveness?

Kyle Gibson – Struggled badly early on last year but had a great final 12 starts. The sign of a new Gibson?

Adalberto Mejia – A well-regarded lefty prospect a couple of years ago. Is it too much to ask to attack the strike zone?

Trevor May – Starts the season on the disabled list. Targeting a June 1 return. Could be a rotation weapon when healthy.

Tyler Duffey – He's stretched out to be a starter but the rotation is getting very crowded. Will he start the year in the minors or back in the Twins' bullpen?

Prospects:

I would expect all of these pitchers to begin the year in the minor leagues, but each one has the potential to make a start at some points this season.

Aaron Slegers
Stephen Gonsalves
Fernando Romero
Zack Littell
Felix Jorge
Dietrich Enns

Twins release Anibal Sanchez to make room for Lance Lynn **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | March 11, 2018**

The Twins said that they thought they could fix him. Anibal Sanchez made a couple of appearances in Twins spring training, and now he's back on the job market.

The Twins have released Sanchez, the team said, to make room for free-agent starter Lance Lynn.

Sanchez, 34, was once a star pitcher, but he's a few years removed from usable and 5 years removed from being a star.

In the past 3 seasons combined, he has a 5.67 ERA in 415 2/3 innings. The Twins said that analytics could be the key to fixing Sanchez — at least to get him back to a usable rotation arm. He was in camp on a sort of spring training tryout. He'll get some money for his release, but he won't get his contract guaranteed for the full value.

The fixing — which may have been as simple as asking him to drop a few bad pitches — likely will no longer be on Minnesota's watch.

I was skeptical that the move would have turned out a No. 5 starter. The risk, I suppose, was relatively low. But once it came time to clear a roster spot for Lynn, Sanchez looks like a fairly easy target.

Twins release Anibal Sanchez **Ashley Varela | NBC Sports | March 11, 2018**

The Twins have released right-hander Anibal Sanchez, according to a report from Phil Miller of the Star Tribune. The move is intended to clear roster space for Lance Lynn, who was acquired on a one-year, \$12 million deal on Saturday. Sanchez signed with the club on a one-year, \$2.5 million deal of his own last month, but the contract was not fully guaranteed. He'll receive \$417,000 after spending three weeks in camp with the Twins.

Sanchez, 34, was on the cusp of his first season with the team after finishing up a six-year campaign with the Tigers. In 2017, he produced his worst numbers during that span, going 3-7 in 17 starts and turning in a 6.41 ERA, 2.5 BB/9 and 8.9 SO/9 in 105 1/3 innings. It came as little surprise when the Tigers declined his \$16 million option at the end of the year, choosing instead to fork over the \$5 million buyout as Sanchez entered free agency.

While it originally looked like the veteran righty stood a decent chance of earning a spot in the Twins' rotation, the recent acquisitions of Lance Lynn and Jake Odorizzi forced him out of the running for a starting role. At least, that's the reason general manager Thad Levine gave Sunday, insisting that Sanchez's release had more to do with the new starters the club acquired over the last month and not with any facet of his performance in camp. Sanchez was originally scheduled to start the Twins' Grapefruit League game against the Rays on Sunday. He's 0-1 in two appearances this spring with five hits, six runs and five strikeouts scattered over four innings.

Twins, Indians Headline Quiet Offseason in the Rebuilding AL Central **Jon Tayler | Sports Illustrated | March 8, 2018**

The offseason is over, spring training is in full swing, and despite a few notable names still available on the market, most if not all teams have called it quits in terms of signings and trades. So it's time to look back on just what every squad did this winter and hand out grades for the moves made—or, in some cases, for those they avoided making. First up: the American League East.

Players with an asterisk next to their name were re-signed as free agents.

CLEVELAND INDIANS

2017 Record: 102–60, first place in AL Central

Key Additions: 1B Yonder Alonso

Key Departures: OF Jay Bruce, OF Austin Jackson, 1B Carlos Santana, RHP Bryan Shaw

When you win 102 games and have your division sewn up by early September, it's tempting to sit tight in the offseason, trusting that the roster that carried you that far can simply do it again. That appears to have been the Indians' plan, as Cleveland was almost entirely absent from the free-agent market and trade talks. Alonso was the lone notable addition, brought in to replace Santana; if that move feels underwhelming given what Santana brought to the table as a patient power hitter with sneaky good defense, you're not alone. Alonso is a fine piece on a budget, but the Indians could have done better. As is, they'll enter the season with first base weaker than last year and big questions in the corner outfield spots with Bruce gone, as well as down a valuable setup reliever in Shaw. A third straight AL Central crown is almost assured given how bad the rest of the division is, but the Indians missed a chance to add talent and keep pace with the Astros and Yankees.

Grade: C

MINNESOTA TWINS

2017 Record: 85–77, second place in AL Central; finished second in AL wild card

Key Additions: LHP Zach Duke, 1B Logan Morrison, RHP Jake Odorizzi, RHP Michael Pineda, RHP Addison Reed, RHP Fernando Rodney

Key Departures: RHP Bartolo Colon, LHP Glen Perkins, LHP Hector Santiago

The moves that the Twins made were solid and sensible, befitting their bone-deep Midwestern aesthetic. Morrison and Reed came on the cheap in this depressed free-agent market, and both bolster areas of need—the former bringing power to a lackluster DH role, the latter acting as the new setup man for the volatile yet entertaining Rodney. Odorizzi was also landed for little, costing only a lower minors shortstop, and will bring needed depth. But while these additions all help, it's hard not to feel disappointed by Minnesota's offseason, lacking as it does the acquisition of a true No. 1 pitcher for a rotation that is thin and will be without Ervin Santana for the first month of the season. With Jake Arrieta, Alex Cobb and Lance Lynn still available, there's no real excuse, save financials, for the Twins to have to turn to Kyle Gibson and Adalberto Mejia in the starting five. There's still time to fix that, but it seems like Minnesota is reluctant to do so.

Grade: B-

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

2017 Record: 80–82, third place in AL Central

Key Additions: 1B Lucas Duda, SS Alcides Escobar*, RHP Jesse Hahn, OF Jon Jay, RHP Wily Peralta, RHP Ricky Nolasco

Key Departures: LHP Scott Alexander, OF Melky Cabrera, OF Lorenzo Cain, 1B Eric Hosmer, LHP Mike Minor, 1B/DH Brandon Moss, 3B Mike Moustakas, RHP Joakim Soria, LHP Jason Vargas

The bill finally came for the Royals' 2014 and '15 runs, and it wasn't pretty. Gone are the major pieces of the latter year's World Series title, with Hosmer and Cain having signed with the Padres and Brewers, respectively, and Moustakas still searching for a home. Perhaps he returns to Kansas City, which could desperately use a better third baseman than current incumbent Cheslor Cuthbert. But it's astonishing how many holes the Royals left open this winter, choosing to patch them either with cheap and middling internal options like Cuthbert or passable bench players like Duda, Escobar and Peralta—no one's idea of championship-caliber starters. This offseason was an ugly one for a team that's seemingly embraced a rebuild, though there isn't much to be enthusiastic about with regards to stage one of that teardown.

Grade: C-

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

2017 Record: 67–95, fourth place in AL Central

Key Additions: LHP Luis Avilan, C Wellington Castillo, RHP Miguel Gonzalez, LHP Hector Santiago, RHP Joakim Soria

Key Departures: None

Entering year two of their complete overhaul, the White Sox opted to stick with what they had, having no veterans save Jose Abreu to dangle for prospects and losing no one of note from last year's squad. Instead, Chicago brought a plethora of unexciting veterans to the South Side to help eat some innings or cover up some problem spots. If nothing else, Avilan, Castillo and Soria are better than the players they're replacing and should bring some increased semblance of competitiveness to games. But the White Sox' focus remains 2019 and beyond, and while they may surprise some people, their offseason moves were designed simply to keep the boat afloat, not propel it forward.

Grade: C+

DETROIT TIGERS

2017 Record: 64–98, fifth place in AL Central

Key Additions: RHP Mike Fiers, LHP Francisco Liriano, OF Leonys Martin, C Derek Norris

Key Departures: 2B Ian Kinsler, RHP Bruce Rondon

Speaking of rebuilding teams that simply didn't try this winter, here are the Tigers, fully committing themselves to 100 losses by not making any moves of note. The one headline they made was in shipping Kinsler to the Angels for a pair of minor prospects, ending his four-year stay in the Motor City. Otherwise, Detroit finally cut ties with the talented yet wildly inconsistent Rondon and decided to buy low on the talented yet wildly inconsistent arms of Fiers and Liriano. The one truly regrettable move is Norris, who was suspended last year for a domestic violence assault and has seemed quite far from contrite about it. Worse is the news that Detroit's front office apparently didn't consider his suspension to be something worth discussing before signing him. This game is a business, but that one rankles something fierce.

Grade: C-

Aybar collects two RBI, Twins beat Rays 6-5

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | March 11, 2018

TWINS 6, RAYS 5

Aybar collects two RBI, Twins beat Rays 6-5

Three-time batting champion Joe Mauer doubled, drew a bases-loaded walk and scored while leading off for Minnesota.

Erick Aybar drove in two runs and collected two hits to raise his batting average to .375 in spring training games.

Jake Faria, slotted as the No. 3 starter as Tampa Bay experiments with a four-man rotation, struggled in his third outing. His ERA climbed to 16.62 after retiring just five batters and surrendering five runs — four earned — on seven hits and two walks.

The surprise big winners from MLB's ugly offseason

Tim Brown | Yahoo Sports | March 11, 2018

FORT MYERS, Fla. – William the security guard was at his post before dawn Sunday, at a gate through which Minnesota Twins players and staff pass. A disfigured creature stood just to Williams' left, about knee high. It gazed at William. It padded in circles, pecked at the sidewalk, then returned its gaze to William.

"I think," William said, "it's a cross between a duck and a turkey. That's what I'm going with."

A second guard approached.

"That," he stated with certainty, "is the most misunderstood duck," as though he could have submitted a fairly sizeable list of underappreciated ducks. "People mistreat them because they think they're ugly."

The man was right. They are ugly. He sighed.

“Just a friendly duck,” he said.

Sensing this, the creature left William and waddled for a while behind the second guard.

“A Muscovy duck,” the man said. “Just saw a show on ’em.”

Also, a Barbary duck, as it is more likely to be described on your local eatery’s menu.

There are other things to write about in this camp, such as the Twins being total vultures, inside a month having freed Jake Odorizzi from the rebuilding Tampa Bay Rays, and rescued Logan Morrison and Lance Lynn from their never-ending offseasons, and before that signing Addison Reed, Fernando Rodney and Zach Duke (along with Michael Pineda, who will spend this season recovering from Tommy John surgery.) The point about the duck is one man’s duck-turkey monster is another’s little friend (or dinner), in the same way one man’s free agency is another’s nightmare, in the same way one franchise’s profit drag is another’s road to relevance.

All depends on how you look at it, and whether you’re selling short-term hope or long-term promises/alibis, and then whether you’re in the right place at the right time when the prices fall on both. This is where a confounding offseason meets the opportunistic Twins. Where a bright, patient front office that a little more than a year ago set out to turn 103 losses into 85 wins and a wild-card experience allows the market to come to it, and walks away with a DH and a No. 3 starter for something short of \$20 million.

“We recognized relatively early in this offseason that there are different rules to this card game and we kept getting dealt different cards,” general manager Thad Levine said. “We had to figure out how to keep our head above water in this new game. So we were constantly adjusting. It would be a little disingenuous for me to say that we had any forecast associated with seeing that this was on the horizon and that we plotted these moves. We really were more reacting to how the market was unfolding and trying to make the most of our opportunities.”

By Monday or Tuesday, and assuming reasonable health, they’ll introduce Lynn. Morrison arrived in camp and, sort of joking but probably not, announced the Twins had gotten him so cheap they could certainly afford to sign Lynn, with whom he’d worked out in the offseason. That was about a week-and-a-half ago.

The moves were applauded in a clubhouse tasked with catching the Cleveland Indians in the AL Central, even a clubhouse – like the other 29 clubhouses – still tweaked over a winter that played poorly for their free-agent friends. Too many other teams seem content to play for tomorrow, or the next day. So, yeah, the small-market Twins got better, which is good for the game, and the free-agent market had to all but collapse in order to make it happen, which many would view as not good for the game.

“You recognize there’s a problem with the way free agency is being handled now,” starter Phil Hughes said Sunday morning. “But, we’re benefitting from a couple of these guys who shouldn’t have fallen into our laps. So, it is a little bit conflicting. Obviously you’re seeing a lot of one-year deals for these guys so they can get back into free agency next year and see if this issue rectifies itself. I’m not so confident that that’s all of a sudden just going to go away next offseason unless something changes. That part of it remains to be seen.

“Hey, we’ll take it. I don’t think anybody really foresaw Lance Lynn doing the deal he just did.”

So there are places where the baseball will be purposefully bad, and there are players out there – Greg Holland, Alex Cobb for two – who might actually take the sting out of bad. Except there’s the purposefully part, the self-inflicted part, like the made-up stomach ache before gym class. Now it’s a strategy, a plan, a process, presented like everybody else is too dumb or short-sighted to grasp the intricacies or the organizational genius. The townsfolk have laid down their pitchforks in order to get both hands around their Baseball Americas. And the Twins turned the weird, self-serving, slight-of-hand winter into what looks like another year of contending, like the caterers who leave with pockets full of silverware.

“Well,” first baseman Joe Mauer said, “it’s concerning what’s going on throughout the league. But, we were able to add some good talent.

“We’re going to have to sit down and evaluate that as players. The whole game. It’s definitely something different for both sides. We’re still kind of in it and still don’t know what to think of it as a whole. The situation here and my focus is getting ready for the season. I’m really excited to play baseball.”

Besides, Phil Hughes said, “You certainly would rather be the team getting these guys for sweetheart deals than the team not getting them.”

All depends on your perspective. Sometimes it’ll seem a situation couldn’t get any uglier. Sometimes it’s just a damned friendly duck.

Lance Lynn answers another question for the Twins, but plenty still remain

They still have plenty of questions to answer this season, but the Twins now have one fewer problem with Lance Lynn on board.

Saturday's deal for Lynn — who agreed to a one-year contract for \$12 million, pending a physical — isn't the kind of transaction that puts the Twins or any other team over the top. This isn't a Yu Darvish-type addition, a player who has the ability to help mask several of a team's deficiencies at once.

But signing Lynn and surrendering their third-round draft pick makes absolute sense for the Twins, who can now be considered a strong contender for the postseason given they have one fewer uncertainty in their starting rotation.

A season removed from Tommy John surgery, Lynn provides the kind of stability for which the Twins have been desperate after using 16 different starting pitchers during the 2017 season. Lynn has produced 14.9 f-WAR in his career, including 1.4 WAR in 2017 when he went 11-8 with a 3.43 ERA in 186 1/3 innings.

Lynn doesn't come without his flaws, as his 3.77 walks per nine innings and 4.82 Fielding Independent Pitching in 2017 would suggest he could regress. But in adding Lynn, Jake Odorizzi and Logan Morrison since they arrived in Fort Myers, the Twins have strengthened themselves in three areas that could previously have been considered questionable.

Even with Ervin Santana out until at least mid-April, Lynn and Odorizzi give manager Paul Molitor strong options for the four-man starting rotation he's said he plans to utilize in the early going.

So with the pitching staff and designated hitter now sufficiently addressed, let's look at the other big questions that could determine whether or not the Twins reach the postseason in consecutive seasons for the first time since 2009-10.

Miguel Sano

A possible suspension and his ongoing health concerns loom large for Miguel Sano in 2018. (Credit: Mark J. Rebilas/USA TODAY Sports)

What kind of production can the Twins get out of Miguel Sano?

There's little doubt that Sano is a dangerous hitter as evidenced by his .496 career slugging percentage, 124 wRC+ and 71 home runs. Sano also has a good sense for the strike zone, as his 12.3 percent walk-rate is 21st among hitters with at least 1,000 plate appearances the past three seasons.

But just how many trips to the plate Sano will take in 2018 could determine how far the Twins will go. Whether it's a potential suspension looming or his health, Sano could miss significant time this season. Even if he doesn't receive a lengthy penalty for his involvement in an alleged off-the-field incident dating back to 2015, how much he is able to play certainly is a question mark.

Sano had offseason surgery in November to insert a metal rod into an ankle that kept him out of action for most of the final six weeks of the 2017 campaign. While he considerably exceeded the team's expectations for returning to the lineup, Sano has been limited to an average of 489 plate appearances the past two seasons. Morrison's presence in the middle of the lineup should certainly help alleviate any absences, but the Twins would love if Sano could stay on the field for 600 plate appearances.

Can Byron Buxton continue to perform offensively as he did in the second half?

The Gold Glove-winning center fielder has more than proven his worth in the field with an assortment of jaw-dropping catches that have saved his pitcher's bacon numerous times. But Buxton showed an indication he could potentially live up to the monstrous hype bestowed upon him when he was a prospect in the second half. After he produced a .594 OPS and struck out 87 times in his first 283 plate appearances, Buxton rebounded in the second half to hit .300/.347/.546 with 24 extra-base hits, including 11 home runs. The shift accounted for an increase in Buxton's wRC+ from 59 to 130.

If Buxton performs more as he did in the second half, that's an MVP-caliber player whom the Twins currently have slotted for the bottom half of their lineup. If he's more the first half player, a Twins offense that finished fourth in the American League in runs scored last season could struggle.

Which Jorge Polanco will the Twins get?

If it's somehow possible, the Twins' shortstop had an even bigger differential between his first and second half wRC+ than Buxton. Whereas Buxton's jumped 71 points, Polanco's surged by 75 points after a difficult pre-break performance.

After producing a .757 OPS in 270 plate appearances in his rookie season, Polanco struggled and hit .224/.273/.323 in 287 first-half plate appearances in 2017. Some of that could be attributed to Polanco struggling to cope with the death of his grandfather, Maximo, who passed away in June. Manager Paul Molitor said earlier this spring he wasn't sure if that was why Polanco had trouble at the plate, but said he'd seen the youngster struggle with confidence for the first time in his career. Compare that to several months later when Polanco hit third in the lineup for a

team in the midst of a postseason chase. Polanco bounced back and hit .293/.359/.511 with 10 home runs and 43 RBIs.

Max Kepler

Lefties were kryptonite for Max Kepler last season. The Twins would love to see him improve there to also keep his glove on the field. (Credit: Adam Hunger/USA TODAY Sports)

Can Max Kepler take the necessary steps forward?

One area where the Twins still appear to be short-handed is in their ability to hit left-handed pitchers. Kepler personifies those issues well.

A fantastic defender in right field — he has produced 11 Defensive Runs Saved the past two seasons — with solid power, Kepler rakes right-handed pitchers. Kepler hit .272/.343/.484 with 17 homers and 57 RBIs in 431 plate appearances against righties in 2017. But, Kepler had only a .453 OPS in 137 trips against southpaws last season. A similar performance in 2018 could force the Twins to keep Kepler's outstanding glove off the field at times in lieu of a platoon partner, with Robbie Grossman being the top candidate.

Is Joe Mauer back to his old self?

Teammate Brian Dozier said earlier this spring he believes that Mauer's offensive resurgence in 2017 was due to the first baseman finally getting back to 100 percent health after dealing with the effects of a concussion for several years. Mauer, who produced a combined 103 OPS-plus in the three seasons after he suffered the 2013 concussion, rebounded against left-handers in particular and hit .305/.384/.417 overall with seven homers and 71 RBIs in 597 plate appearances.

Mauer's .754 OPS against lefties was his highest since 2013 and made him once again an all-around pain in the ass for pitchers. Through it all, Mauer was always a difficult out because of his great eye and ability to hit the opposite way. But last season he added more punch to the offense and if he can repeat that, the Twins would be much better off. Whether or not he can do it again at age 35 remains to be seen, however, Mauer said he feels great and is excited about the team's chances.