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**Twins can't back Lynn's 9-K home debut**  
**Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | April 9, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Right-hander Lance Lynn threw five scoreless innings with nine strikeouts to bounce back from a shaky season debut and hold the high-octane Astros in check early, but the Twins couldn't capitalize on scoring opportunities against Justin Verlander and Houston's bullpen in a 2-0 loss in the series opener on a cold Monday night at Target Field.

Starting with a game-time temperature of 35 degrees, Lynn didn't have his best control, walking four after he walked six in his first outing, but he used strikeouts to get out of several jams and allowed just three hits. He needed 105 pitches to get through the five frames, which he felt was the most important stat of the game.

"I look at it as 105 pitches in five innings," said Lynn. "That's not good enough in my opinion. The strikeouts are good, the walks are too many. Too many pitches, not enough innings."

When Lynn was told he's now thrown eight scoreless innings since giving up five runs in the opening inning of his first start, he didn't hesitate to say he doesn't feel like he's on a roll.

"It feels miserable," said Lynn, who has a 5.00 ERA. "I feel like I've gotten off to the worst start I've ever got off to in the big leagues. It needs to change real quick. Good thing is there's a lot of season left, so I'll be all right."

Lynn ran into trouble in the second, walking Marwin Gonzalez and giving up a hit to Brian McCann, but then bounced back to strike out J.D. Davis, Jake Marisnick and Derek Fisher to get out of the inning.

He walked Alex Bregman with one out in the fifth, but Bregman was caught stealing before Lynn struck out Jose Altuve looking to end his

outing. It was one of three strikeouts looking for Lynn, who induced 15 swings-and-misses on the night.

The Astros scored their first run in the sixth after Carlos Correa opened the frame with a double off lefty Taylor Rogers. Rogers recorded two big outs before handing it over to Trevor Hildenberger, who surrendered the go-ahead hit on an RBI single to Davis to left.

Houston tacked on another run in the eighth on an RBI double from Gonzalez that was misplayed by left fielder Eddie Rosario. Rosario also let Davis' go-ahead hit get past him for a two-base error, but Davis was stranded at third in the sixth.

It was more than enough offense for Verlander, who threw seven scoreless innings, allowing four hits and a walk with nine strikeouts. Minnesota's biggest scoring threat came against him in the eighth when it had runners at the corners with nobody out, but he kicked it up a notch to escape the jam.

The Twins made it interesting in the eighth, loading the bases with one out after an overturned call at second base, but reliever Chris Devenski came in and got Rosario to ground into a first-pitch double play to keep Minnesota scoreless. In the ninth, Byron Buxton nearly tied the game with a two-run homer off Ken Giles, who was brought in with two outs, only to see it go just foul down the left-field line.

"I did [think it was fair] for a little bit and then once it got toward the outfield, you could tell it started switching directions," Buxton said. "So, it is what it is."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Twins can't capitalize: Jason Castro led off the sixth inning with a stand-up double, and Brian Dozier followed with an infield single to get the Twins in scoring position. But Verlander answered by striking out Joe Mauer and Miguel Sano in succession -- with his fastest pitch of the night, a 96.4-mph fastball, coming on the third strike to Sano. Verlander then forced Rosario to pop up to end the inning.

"He has that ability to have another gear when [there's] a little bit of traffic on the bases there," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We had first and third with nobody out and he got a couple punchouts and a popout. We couldn't get a big hit."

Bullpen gives up lead: With Lynn out of the game to start the sixth inning, Houston went to work right away against the bullpen. Correa led off the inning with a double to left off of Rogers and later scored when Davis lined a single to left that turned into extra bases when the ball skipped past Rosario to the warning track. The RBI was Davis' first of the season.

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Lynn has now issued 10 walks in his first two games with the Twins, which is the most he's ever surrendered over two consecutive starts in his seven-year career.

#### MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Mauer was ruled out on a force when Bregman threw to Altuve at second base. After a review, the umpires overturned the call and ruled that Mauer beat the throw to the bag and was safe to load the bases with one out. Rosario then grounded into a double play.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

The Twins will face off again with the Astros on Tuesday night as Jake Odorizzi takes the mound at 7:10 p.m. CT at Target Field. The 28-year-old righty, who has a 2.61 ERA in two starts, is seeking his first win in his home debut.

#### **Hughes in mix as Twins map out rotation** **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | April 9, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- After Sunday's game against the Mariners was postponed due to inclement weather, the Twins won't need a fifth starter until Friday night's home matchup with the White Sox, and right-hander Phil Hughes remains in the mix for that role.

The Twins, who opened the year with a four-man rotation, were slated to need a fifth starter for the first time on Wednesday, but the postponed game changed their plans. Right-hander Kyle Gibson will now start on Wednesday against Houston with right-hander Jose Berrios scheduled to start the series opener against the White Sox on Thursday.

Hughes, who is on the 10-day disabled list with a left oblique strain and is coming off a second surgery to alleviate thoracic outlet syndrome, started on Thursday with Class A Advanced Fort Myers. He allowed three runs on eight hits with five strikeouts.

"We're just trying to keep [Hughes] on track the best as we can to be someone who we consider for that day," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "I

think he's probably going to throw another side [session] tomorrow or Wednesday. Just to make sure that he's staying as sharp as he can, given the fact that he hasn't faced Major League hitters in a while."

After Friday's start, the Twins won't need a fifth starter again until April 24, which could be a factor in the decision. Hughes could be activated from the DL to make the start and then move to long relief, or the Twins could decide to bring up a different pitcher for a spot start before sending him down after the game.

But one issue is that Triple-A Rochester didn't play over the weekend, as all three of its scheduled games were postponed.

"There is a plan B and C, at least," Molitor said. "We're monitoring the best that we can. Those guys haven't played since [April 1], which was the last game they played down there [in Florida]."

Sunday's postponed game also means that Berrios is no longer lined up to start the first game in his native Puerto Rico against the Indians on April 17. But he's still on track to start the second game, on April 18, and it remains a priority to line him up for a start on his home island.

**Buxton receives hardware**

- Twins center fielder Byron Buxton was presented with the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year Award before Monday's game for his efforts last season. He'll also be presented the Rawlings Gold Glove Award for center fielder and the Rawlings Platinum Glove Award for best overall defender on Friday. Buxton joked he might need a bigger trophy case, but he was humble in receiving the awards, crediting the coaches and his teammates for his breakout year defensively in 2017.

"That trophy means a lot," Buxton said. "For me, it's more of an outfield trophy just because they're out there communicating with me. It plays a big part with how good my corner outfielders are as well."

**Santana to meet with doctors Tuesday**

- Twins right-hander Ervin Santana, who has had complications in his rehab from surgery on his right middle finger in early February, flew to Minneapolis on Monday night and will meet with team doctors on Tuesday. He's yet to make progress with his throwing program and is expected to find out more about his situation on Tuesday.

"I think he's probably starting to get a little bit anxious," Molitor said. "I haven't talked to him since we left, but I've heard that he wants to see what he can do to get approval to start trying to pick the pace up a little bit."

**Twins tidbits**

- The Twins took batting practice on the field for the first time in April on Monday night, as they've dealt with cold weather in Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Minneapolis.

- Former radio broadcaster Joe McConnell, 79, passed away on Sunday. He was the voice of the Twins from 1978-79 and the Vikings from 1971-76, among many broadcasting jobs over his career.

- Molitor said it's still too early to evaluate the performance of rookie relievers Gabriel Moya and Tyler Kinley this season. Moya remains a strong candidate to be optioned once the Twins need a fifth starter, while Kinley is a Rule 5 Draft pick and must stay on the roster all season or be offered back to the Marlins.

### **Justin Verlander too much as Twins squander chances in 2-0 loss**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 9, 2018**

Lance Lynn has pitched eight consecutive scoreless innings, including all five he pitched on Monday. Man, it must be nice to be on a hot streak already, right?

"No. It feels miserable," Lynn said after the Twins' 2-0 loss to the Astros. "I feel like I've got off to the worst start I've ever got off to in a big-league season. Yeah, it needs to change real quick."

Eddie Rosario knows how he feels.

In a what-next kind of night that only added to 10 days of frustration, Rosario missed two plays in the outfield that resulted in runs, then swung at the first pitch and made the final out in both the sixth and eighth innings, snuffing the Twins' best scoring chances. Combine that with a vintage performance by Justin Verlander, the most prolific Twin killer of the past decade, and Minnesota's first shutout loss in Target Field since last June 22 seemed almost inevitable.

“Justin, his ability to have another gear when things get a little bit more [dangerous] with traffic on the bases” is the trait of a former MVP and a two-time Cy Young winner, said Twins manager Paul Molitor. “We gave ourselves an opportunity but we couldn’t get a big hit.”

Rosario had a couple of chances, but his frustration over starting the season 6-for-30 has boiled over in demonstrations on the field — he threw his helmet 20 feet after ending the eighth inning with a double play — and overaggressiveness at the plate. Rosario, always the most aggressive of Twins hitters, swung at six of the eight pitches he saw on Monday, and never got the ball out of the infield.

“He’s going to swing,” Molitor said. “I was hoping they’d throw him a strike, because I had a feeling he’d be swinging” in the eighth inning, when the bases were loaded with one out. “He expanded [the strike zone] a little bit, and they got the double play.”

Rosario said there was more to the at-bat than simple aggression, though. Chris Devenski he knew, would throw him a changeup, and he was right. “I told myself, ‘I want to try to hit a changeup, try to hit into the middle,’” Rosario said. “Sometimes that happens. That’s baseball.”

VideoVideo (01:17): Twins righthander Lance Lynn says he's not happy about his four-walk performance Monday, even with nine strikeouts, because it forced his pitch count up too quickly.

So is trying to make a sliding catch of a J.D. Davis liner in left field, a ball that bounced past him and allowed Carlos Correa to score the game’s first run. And in the eighth, Rosario couldn’t catch up to a Marwin Gonzalez fly ball off the left field fence, allowing Correa to score from first.

But this is truly Twins baseball: Getting beat by Verlander. The future Hall of Famer is now 7-1 with a 2.47 ERA in Target Field, and he owns 18 career victories over the Twins, more than anyone in the past dozen years.

The former Tiger struck out nine, held the Twins to just three hits, and walked only one in seven strong but freezing innings. When the first two batters reached in the sixth inning Verlander simply struck out Joe Mauer, struck out Miguel Sano, and got Rosario to pop up.

All of which made Lynn feel like his five innings, even with nine strikeouts, weren’t enough.

“That’s not good enough. The strikeouts are good, the walks are too many,” said Lynn, who pitched in mid-30s temperatures. Was the cold a problem?

“He pitched in it too and got through seven, right?” Lynn said of Verlander. “I didn’t do my job.”

### **Byron Buxton thought he had tied the game, but only for a moment**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 10, 2018**

A couple of extras from a three-hour, 28-minute 2-0 game in freezing weather:

Byron Buxton was the game’s final batter on Monday. He nearly caused there to be more.

When an 84-mph slider from Astros closer Ken Giles creased the middle of the plate during his two-out, ninth-inning at-bat, Buxton pounced. He launched the ball about 360 feet down the left field line and threw the bat away, hopeful that he had tied the game with his first home run of the season.

He thought it would stay fair “for a little bit,” Buxton said afterward. “And then when it got toward the outfield, you could tell it started changing direction.”

It landed just to the left of the foul pole, a blast that had the crowd cheering, then groaning as it went foul.

“He got it out there a fair amount,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said, “but he’s been hooking some balls lately.”

Still, it was close enough that Molitor asked umpires to review it, just in case it had curled around the pole. No luck. And Buxton grounded out on a 98-mph fastball three pitches later to end the game.

The disappointment ended an 0-for-4 night for Buxton and dragged his average to .161 on the season. But the 24-year-old outfielder doesn’t believe this is one of those slow starts that have bedeviled him in his first three seasons. He’s happy with how he’s hitting, and has faith the results will come.

“I feel like I’ve been in a pretty good spot all year. My comfortability is there. Confidence is there. It’s just not falling our way yet,” Buxton said. “That’s baseball. Eventually things are going to start falling our way.”

XXX

Miguel Sano struck out three times on Monday, the third such game he’s had in eight starts this season. But like Buxton, Sano’s process is good, it’s just the results that are bad at the moment, Molitor said.

“I haven’t felt the need to” talk to the slugger about all the whiffs, Molitor said. “We’ve seen, even in at-bats that have been strikeouts, a lot of them have been pretty good. He’s been taking walks and seeing seven or eight pitches on his at-bats, too. Given that we haven’t had consistent games and the production has been decent, when we’ve needed a good at-bat, he’s given it to me.”

Indeed, Sano leads the Twins with eight RBIs, and he’s homered three times. And strikeouts, the Twins know, are just part of his game. Monday was the 53rd game in his career that Sano has whiffed three times; though he’s only 24, he has already long since blown past the franchise record for such games. Harmon Killebrew had 43 three-K games in 14 seasons in Minnesota, which stood as the record until last summer.

Molitor said it’s difficult to judge anyone yet, considering how disruptive the schedule and the weather have been thus far.

“I’ve got to get these guys to understand, we just haven’t really settled into consistent at-bats and consistent play and conducive conditions,” he said. The message? “Keep grinding. Hold your own as best you can until we can get used to playing day in and day out, which we haven’t done yet.”

### **Volume up, lights down: It's Fernando Rodney's awesome entry video** **Howard Sinker | Star Tribune | April 9, 2018**

Entry music for closers is a big deal.

Joe Nathan used Steel Dragon's Stand Up and Shout when he was the Twins' closer and Glen Perkins used Johnny Cash's God's Gonna Cut You Down.

But Fernando Rodney, the Twins' closer, has pretty much kicked them to the curb with a video of Live the Night by W&W and Hardwell and Lil Jon.

Those of us who stayed through Thursday's cold and successful opener for the Twins heard and saw the Target Field premier, which includes public address announcer Adam Abrams doing an introduction that would kill the vocal cords of mere mortals,

According to Twins' senior director of communications Dustin Morse, Rodney came to the team with the music and the Twins Production Team put this together.

"Our team loved it and got to work," Morse said,

If Rodney ever decides to move from baseball to pro wrestling, he's covered.

Our advice, Volume up, lights down. Whether or not you put on headphones depends of if you want to share it with those around you, or on the other side of the nearest wall. Or maybe you just want to wake people on a sleepy Monday.

Twins fans can only hope Rodney is as good as this video.

### **Twins' Byron Buxton honored as Defensive Player of the Year** **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 10, 2018**

It seemed a little incongruous Monday, talking about what the best defender in baseball can do to improve his defense. Or maybe that attitude is why he swept all the best-glove awards in 2017.

Byron Buxton accepted his Defensive Player of the Year award from Wilson Sporting Goods before Monday’s game, only four days before he will be presented a Rawlings Gold Glove as the best outfielder, and a Rawlings Platinum Glove as the best overall defender. And as the Twins

center fielder mused about the honors coming his way, he also mentioned the ways he wants to become better at his job.

“The biggest thing for me is to go out there and better myself. Get great jumps, get [good] reaction times,” Buxton said. “Work with my corner guys — communicating is what we do out there, and I need to be a better communicator.”

It’s not just calling off each other for fly balls coming down between them, Buxton said, but being aware enough to yell information that an outfielder tracking a ball can’t see.

“I know for me, it takes me one step from the track before I know I’m going to hit the wall. Communicating things like that helps us out,” he explained. “If I know I’m coming up to the wall, and [another outfielder] yells ‘One step!’, that’s enough for me to realize, if I’m looking at the ball, whether I can get up and catch it or back off before I hit the wall.”

Buxton

Buxton

Buxton’s manager said it’s hard to imagine the speedster fielding his position any better — but he’s glad he tries. “He’s got the tools to be at the top in almost every category, whether it’s first-steps, routes, closing speed, all those type of things,” Paul Molitor said. “I know when you go out and watch out outfielders work, he’s the leader. It’s wearing off on the other players as well as probably making him better. I think he’s going to continue to improve.”

Plan C might be in play

Phil Hughes remains tentatively scheduled to start Friday’s game against the White Sox, but Molitor hinted that the Twins haven’t definitively settled upon the righthander, on the disabled list since March 23 because of a strained left oblique. Hughes will throw a bullpen session Tuesday or Wednesday in Fort Myers, Fla., Molitor said.

“We’re just trying to keep him on track as best as we can to be someone who we consider for that day,” Molitor said. “He hasn’t faced major league hitters in a while.”

But Molitor said there is a Plan B — “a B and C, at least.” That might be because after Friday’s start, the Twins don’t need another fifth starter until April 24 in New York against the Yankees, 11 days after this week’s start. That seems to leave open the possibility that the Twins could call up another starter for one game, and replace him afterward with a reliever, pushing back Hughes’ 2018 debut till New York.

Complicating matters is the fact that because of weather, Class AAA Rochester went eight days without playing a game, and their pitchers “really haven’t had access to even a lot of bullpens from what I understand.”

Etc.

- Jason Castro felt some soreness in his right knee Sunday, a day after an awkward turn to retrieve a wild pitch seemed to bother him. But the pain had subsided by Monday, he said. The same couldn’t be said of his shin, however, after he fouled a ball “right above my shin guard. I mean, right above it.” His leg is being treated for a large bruise, but Castro caught Lance Lynn on Monday.

- Righthander Ervin Santana will be in the Twin Cities on Tuesday to have his right hand examined by Twins specialists, in hopes of being cleared to begin a throwing program.

### **Monday's Twins-Houston game recap**

**Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 10, 2018**

#### GAME RECAP

#### IMPACT PLAYER

Justin Verlander, Houston

Four hits, one walk and nine strikeouts in seven innings earned him his 18th career victory over the Twins.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

32 Extra-base hits, among the Twins' 66 total hits in 2018.

4 Twins starters, in their current four-man rotation, who have already recorded a scoreless start.

10 Total walks by Lance Lynn in consecutive starts, the most by a Twins pitcher since Samuel Deduno in 2012.

## ON DECK

The Twins, with Jake Odorizzi making his home debut, face another former Cy Young winner in Dallas Keuchel.

### **Twins face old nemesis Justin Verlander in opener of 3 games with Astros** **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | April 9, 2018**

It's been a year since the Twins last faced Justin Verlander, someone they regularly saw three or four times a year for a decade. They're pretty sure he hasn't changed much — unless he's gotten better.

"He's better now than he was a couple years ago," Twins manager Paul Molitor agreed. "No disrespect intended, but I thought there was a stretch there where he became a little bit more mortal. He's picked it up the last couple of years."

Tonight, however, will be the first time the Twins have faced the 2011 MVP as a Houston Astro. Molitor knows what to expect.

"He seems to have another level when he needs it, and there's not a lot of guys who can do that," Molitor said. "He can hang on to velocity, he can sustain it late in the game. His ability to make pitches, it's impressive. He's one of those guys who has enough weapons, you can't hit them all. [You have to] get in some hitter's counters and hopefully you guess right once in awhile."

Verlander is 17-9 with a 3.15 ERA in 34 career starts against the Twins, and he's even better at Target Field: 6-1 with a 2.74 ERA in 10 starts.

But the guy Molitor is focused on is his own starter, Lance Lynn. The big righthander allowed five runs in his first start of the season one week ago in Pittsburgh, and Molitor has a hunch that the follow-up will go a lot smoother. "We believe in Lance, that he's been an upgrade for us. [In his] first start, command was a little bit of an issue," the manager said. "I've got a good feeling about what he's going to be able to do for this team this year. I'm sure he's a little bit anxious to go out there and get after it again after the first start didn't go particularly well."

It's expected to be 35 degrees at first pitch, and headed down from there, yet another game played in adverse conditions. A visit by the reigning world champions would normally be an occasion for some big crowds and a lot of attention paid to the series, but the weather appears to be preventing that. Still, the Astros are 8-2 and look awfully fearsome.

"They've got pretty much everything you would want in a baseball team," Molitor said. "But whatever happens these three games is not going to be an overly large indicator of the direction of either of the two teams."

Here are the lineups for tonight's game, the first of three:

#### ASTROS

Springer DH

Bregman 3B

Altuve 2B

Correa SS

Gonzalez LF

McCann C

Davis 1B

Marisnick CF

Fisher RF

Verlander RHP

TWINS

Dozier 2B

Mauer 1B

Sano 3B

Rosario LF

Morrison DH

Escobar SS

Kepler RF

Buxton CF

Castro C

Lynn RHP

**Justin Verlander still too much for Twins in 2-0 loss to Houston Astros**  
**Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | April 9, 2018**

Justin Verlander may have been traded out of the American League Central last August, but the Twins still have to deal with him from time to time.

Monday night, with its game-time temperature of 35 degrees, offered their first look at the power-pitching right-hander since he won his first World Series with the Houston Astros. Career start No. 35 for Verlander against them went the way so many others did back in his Detroit Tigers days.

Verlander struck out nine across seven scoreless innings, and the Astros bullpen did the rest in a 2-0 win at Target Field. Rookie first baseman J.D. Davis delivered a two-out single in the sixth off Trevor Hildenberger to drive in the game's first run, and Marwin Gonzalez added a run-scoring double that Eddie Rosario overran in left in the eighth.

"We couldn't get a big hit," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "You've got to score to win, and we didn't score."

Now 13-2 in his past 20 starts against the Twins, Verlander improved to 7-1 with a 2.47 earned run average in 11 career starts at Target Field. He has lasted at least five innings in 30 straight starts against them and has failed to provide at least six innings just three times in his last 19 tries.

The 35-year-old allowed just two batters to reach safely through the first five innings. Joe Mauer accounted for both of those with a first-inning double that moved him within five hits of 2,000 and a fourth-inning walk that was his 14th off Verlander.

"I think he's probably better now than he was a couple years ago," Molitor said of Verlander before the game. "No disrespect intended, but I thought there was a stretch there where he became a little more mortal. I think he's picked it up over the last couple years."

The Twins' best chance against Verlander came in the sixth after Jason Castro led off with a fly-ball double to right and Brian Dozier reached on a swinging bunt. Even as he approached 100 pitches, Verlander buckled down.



First he got Mauer to chase a full-count fastball that was down and in. Miguel Sano followed with his third strikeout in as many trips, and Eddie Rosario popped up to second on the first pitch.

“Joe’s been locked in,” Molitor said. “That’s really one of the first times we’ve seen him expand.”

Even before Rosario’s pop reached its apex, Verlander strode rapidly off the mound, allowing himself a small double fist pump and barking “Let’s go!” as he neared the third-base dugout. Those last three outs were recorded on fastballs unleashed at 95, 96 and 95 mph.

“It seems like he’s got another level when he needs it,” Molitor said. “There’s not a lot of guys that can do that. They can hang onto velocity. They can sustain it late in the game, but the ability to make pitches, it’s impressive.”

Lance Lynn, making his second regular-season start for the Twins, was impressive as well, matching Verlander with zeros through the fifth but running out of pitches to extend their compelling duel. Lynn exited at 105 pitches after needing at least 20 pitches to get through each of the first four innings.

The right-hander walked four, struck out nine and ran three-ball counts to 10 of the 21 batters he faced. The Astros managed just three hits off him, including just one that left the infield. With a little more efficiency, Lynn might have challenged his career high for strikeouts, having fanned 12 Chicago White Sox in June 2012.

“Too many pitches, not enough innings,” Lynn said. “That’s disappointing for me. Only five innings, that’s not good enough.”

After starting the year with 21 straight scoreless innings by their rotation, the past five Twins starters have failed to get past the fifth.

The Twins loaded the bases in the eighth off Brad Peacock, but Chris Devenski came on to get Rosario on a double-play grounder to shortstop. Rosario stranded seven on the night as the Twins finished 1 for 11 with runners in scoring position.

“Offensively, he’s aggressive,” Molitor said. “He’s going to swing. I was hoping they’d throw him a strike because I had a feeling he’d be swinging. He expanded a little bit, and they got the double play.”

It was the second-coldest game in Astros history, trailing only an April 20, 1993 visit to Chicago’s Wrigley Field, where it was 26 degrees at first pitch. The Astros were playing their first game outside the state of Texas this season.

The Twins have dropped seven of eight to the Astros since the start of 2016. That includes a three-game sweep last Memorial Day week that saw them get clobbered by a combined 40-16.

It was the first shutout loss for the Twins after being blanked just twice in 2017. The first of those losses didn’t come until June 22, their 70th Game.

### **Byron Buxton has defensive role model in Tampa Bay’s Kevin Kiermaier** **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | April 9, 2018**

After Byron Buxton swept every possible defensive award last November, including the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year Award he was due to receive in an on-field ceremony before Monday’s game, the Twins’ center fielder heard from many of his peers.

In addition to Twitter kudos, Buxton also received text messages from opponents, some of whom he has met only in passing.

“You don’t really assume that guys are going to text you, especially from opposing teams,” Buxton said. “I’m very appreciative I had some guys not with this organization reach out to me.”

Tampa Bay Rays center fielder Kevin Kiermaier, the Rawlings Platinum Glove Award winner in 2015, was among those to send congratulatory messages to Buxton, who claimed the honor for 2017 via fan voting and the Society for American Baseball Research Defensive Index.

Buxton will receive that award, along with his first Rawlings Gold Glove, before Friday’s game. Along with Toronto’s Kevin Pillar and Jackie Bradley Jr. of the Boston Red Sox, Kiermaier is one of Buxton’s favorite active center fielders to study on video.

“I watch quite a few guys,” Buxton said. “Kiermaier was probably more of who I watched just because I feel like we play the same. He plays fearless. He’s like me. He wants nothing to fall, wants nobody to get a hit. I feel like his game and my game are defensively on the same level. He’s somebody to look up to.”

## ROTATION PLAN

Rushing Phil Hughes (oblique) back to the majors after one rehab start might not be the best way for the Twins to approach Friday's game against the Chicago White Sox. Not only would Hughes be working on three extra days' rest but the fifth spot in the rotation wouldn't come back around until April 24 at Yankee Stadium, 11 days later.

That's why Twins manager Paul Molitor said there's "B and C, at least" when asked about backup plans beyond Hughes, who is due to throw a second side session between starts on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Foul weather pushed Opening Day for Triple-A Rochester back to Monday, when Aaron Slegers started and worked six innings of one-run ball on just 66 pitches. Bullpen sessions have been at a premium amid three straight weather postponements, with the last game action in Fort Myers for the Red Wings coming on April 1.

"It's made it a little bit challenging to see how close those guys are to being ready to contribute when they haven't had a chance to pitch," Molitor said.

At Double-A Chattanooga, lefties Stephen Gonsalves and Lewis Thorpe started over the weekend, with Gonsalves working 5 1/3 shutout innings on 71 pitches Saturday.

## HOME AT LAST

Opening Day starter Jake Odorizzi will get to make his Twins home debut on Tuesday in better conditions than he faced last week in Pittsburgh, when the game-time temperature was 37 degrees and snow flurries marred his 4 1/3-inning start.

"As long as the wind's not bad, the cold is OK to deal with," Odorizzi said. "I'm ready to go."

Odorizzi called last week's start "a good precursor" to what he might face in the Twin Cities, where the former Rays pitcher has made a point of getting outside as much as he can to acclimate to the cold. That hasn't included snowball tossing with 2-year-old son Rhett, who made the move up from Florida without gloves.

"He's gone outside but no snowballs yet," Odorizzi said. "You don't really need gloves in Florida. We went to Target but they didn't have very much cold weather stuff because it's April. They'd already changed over to spring stuff."

## BRIEFLY

Ervin Santana (finger surgery) was due to fly into the Twin Cities on Monday night in advance of a Tuesday exam with Twins medical staff. "I've heard he wants to see what he can do to get approval to start trying to pick the pace up," Molitor said.

The Twins were able to take batting practice on the field Monday for the first time in April.

## **Preview: Twins vs. Astros**

**STATS | Fox Sports North | April 10, 2018**

Not even a late winter has been able to cool off the defending World Series champs.

At 11-2 following a 2-0 victory at the Minnesota Twins on Monday, the Houston Astros are off to their best start through 11 games since 1972. They've been flat-out dominant along the way, outscoring their opponents, 49-25, and will look to keep that going Tuesday when they continue their three-game series with the Twins behind left-hander Dallas Keuchel (0-1, 3.27 ERA) at Target Field.

The Astros were very rude guests during their visit to Minnesota last season, outscoring the Twins, 40-16, in a three-game sweep before going on to win their first-ever World Series title.

They took advantage of Minnesota's hospitality again Monday, despite another chilly night in the Land of 10,000 lakes, where weather prevented the Twins from playing Sunday and the temperature has in the low 30s at first pitch Monday.

Keuchel, an Oklahoma native who played collegiately at Arkansas, said he'd be ready for whatever Mother Nature has to offer.

"Bring a parka and have a bunch of heat packs," Keuchel said. "If you see me with my left hand in my pocket, I'm reaching for some warmth."

Keuchel did not face the Twins last season but is 2-2 with a 4.05 ERA in four career appearances against Minnesota, striking out 21 while walking 10 in 20 innings of work.

He took a no-decision in his only appearance so far this season, holding the Orioles to two runs (one earned) on five hits and four walks over five innings on April 4.

“I didn’t necessarily set the tone very well so that kind of contributed to the lackadaisical play,” Keuchel said. “But if we can scrape a win with how we played right there that’s a good sign. That means we’re a good team.”

Tuesday, though, might provide their toughest test yet.

Twins left-hander Jake Odorizzi has been dominant against Houston in his brief career, holding the to just one earned run in 19 innings of work, with a 2-0 record in three starts.

He’s struck out 24 batters in those contests without allowing a home run and his 0.47 ERA against the Astros is the best in MLB among all starters with at least three starts since 2014.

The only exception has been catcher Brian McCann, who comes into the game slashing .464/.531/.964 with three home runs and 10 RBIs in 28 at-bats against Odorizzi, who spent the last three seasons with the Rays before a spring trade sent him to Minnesota as the Twins try to build on a surprising run to the postseason in 2017.

“For me, it has been a really good move in the sense of giving me that extra energy in that this is a playoff team and a playoff atmosphere,” Odorizzi said. “We need to be prepared. And this gives you a little extra energy when you need it.”

He earned his first-ever Opening Day start but took no decision in that contest — a 3-2 Minnesota loss — as well as his second outing, when he allowed three runs on three hits and three walks while striking out two over 4 1/3 innings in a 73 victory over the Pirates..

### **Twins’ bats stymied in loss to Astros**

**Associated Press | Fox Sports North | April 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — Justin Verlander struck out nine over seven dominant innings, Carlos Correa had two hits and scored twice and the Houston Astros beat the Minnesota Twins 2-0 on Monday night.

Verlander (2-0) was in control throughout on a chilly night with a first-pitch temperature of 35 degrees. The right-hander gave up three hits and walked one while helping the reigning World Series champions match their best 11-game start by going 9-2.

Verlander improved to 11-1 in 14 games, including the playoffs, since being traded to Houston last season.

Ken Giles earned his first save of the season by getting Byron Buxton to ground out with a runner on third in the ninth.

Twins reliever Taylor Rogers (1-1) allowed a leadoff double to Correa in the sixth after coming in for starter Lance Lynn. Correa scored from third on rookie J.D. Davis’ liner to left field off reliever Trevor Hildenberger.

Davis entered the night 1 for 14 and drove in his first RBI of the season. Marwin Gonzalez added an RBI double in the eighth.

The cold night was all about the two starters, though.

Verlander allowed a one-out double in the first to Joe Mauer and then retired eight in a row before walking Mauer to lead off the fourth.

Verlander faced runners at the corners with no outs in the sixth after Brian Dozier’s swinging bunt, but he struck out Mauer and Miguel Sano before getting Eddie Rosario to pop out.

In eight regular season starts with Houston, Verlander is 7-0 with a 1.20 ERA.

Lynn pitched five scoreless innings in his first start at Target Field but departed early because of a rising pitch count. After walking six batters in his first outing of the year, Lynn walked four Monday to go with nine strikeouts on 105 pitches.

Minnesota loaded the bases in the eighth, but Eddie Rosario grounded into an inning-ending double play on the first pitch from reliever Chris Devenski.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Astros: OF Josh Reddick was held out with an illness. ... Yuli Gurriel (left hand surgery) was expected to play first and third base in a rehab game at Double-A Corpus Christi on Monday, and he's set to be the designated hitter there Wednesday.

Twins: RHP Ervin Santana (finger surgery) will be back in Minnesota on Tuesday to meet with team doctors. Manager Paul Molitor said he's heard Santana wants to see if he can get approval to do more in his rehab.

## UP NEXT

Astros: LHP Dallas Keuchel (0-1, 3.27 ERA) will make his third start of the season in Tuesday's evening contest. Keuchel gave up two runs — one earned — in five innings his last start against Baltimore.

Twins: RHP Jake Odorizzi (0-0, 2.51) will make his first start at Target Field as a member of the Twins. Odorizzi, who made three starts at the park with Tampa Bay, gave up three runs in 4 1/3 innings at Pittsburgh last week.

## **Lance Lynn says he feels 'miserable' after 'worst start' to the season of his career** **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | April 10, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — New Twins starting pitcher Lance Lynn went up against one of the best lineups in baseball and faced a guy who is turning back the clock and pitching like one of the best hurlers in baseball.

Five scoreless innings and 105 pitches later, he was not looking for any consolation.

The final free agent addition of the winter (and spring) pitched 5 shutout frames against the Astros, with 3 hits, 4 walks and a whopping 9 strikeouts. The Twins lost the game but Lynn helped them hang around. He got 15 swinging strikes in his 105 pitches and fanned 9 Astros hitters in the process. There are no moral victories here, but that idea has to be good for something, right?

"Well, you look at it as 105 pitches and 5 innings. That's not good enough, in my opinion," Lynn said. "The strikeouts are good, the walks are too many. Too many pitches, not enough innings."

Later, he continued: "No, it feels miserable actually. I feel like I've got off to the worst start I've ever gotten off to in a big league season. I need to change real quick," Lynn said. "The good thing is that there's a lot of season left, so I'll be OK."

It was a much better outing than Lynn's first start in a Twins uniform. He served up a grand slam in his first inning with the Twins in Pittsburgh. In total, he's now pitched 9 innings with the Twins and has allowed 5 earned runs on 6 hits with 12 strikeouts and 10 walks.

Lynn as among the group of free agents that waited until well into spring training to strike a deal with a new club. Lynn and the Twins agreed to a one-year deal March 10, and less than one month later he was making his second MLB start of the season in cold April weather.

Manager Paul Molitor noted afterward that Lynn didn't have his best command but commended the veteran starter because "he sure battled." Lynn blew warm air in his clenched pitching hand between pitches, and was checking his fingers between some pitches. He said that it was just because the weather was "a little chilly" and the seams burn more in the cold. "The seams on the fingertips have a little different drag when it's chilly out," he said.

The temperature was below-freezing by the time the game ended Monday. Did the cold have an impact on his performance?

"No, I mean, he pitched through it too and he got through 7, right?" Lynn asked, referring to Astros' starter Justin Verlander. "So, I didn't do my job, I need to go deeper. Two starts so far I haven't been able to go past the 5th in either one, and that's disappointing for me."

**Eddie Rosario ready to shrug off his rough game after 2-0 loss to Astros**  
**Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | April 9, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — The Twins lost a good ballgame to the defending World Series champs, 2-0, in a game in which Justin Verlander was great for 7 innings. It's hard to feel too distraught so early in a 162-game schedule, but Monday's game almost felt like a missed opportunity.

"We couldn't get a big hit and you've got to score to win," manager Paul Molitor said.

Eddie Rosario, in particular, had a rough ballgame for the Twins, and a couple of his plays defensively appeared to have made the difference.

In the 6th inning of a 0-0 game, the Astros put a runner on third base with two outs. Rosario tried to run in and catch a sinking line drive, but he couldn't get there, and the ball skipped past him for a 2-base error. The batter, J.D. Davis, didn't score that inning, and the runner from third base would have scored in every situation unless Rosario caught it. So, the play didn't actually impact the score, it just looked bad. "Yeah, it's hard to read. I tried as hard as possible to catch the ball but it did not happen. ... When I tried to stop the ball, but it's difficult," Rosario said.

Two innings later, Carlos Correa was on first base for the Astros, and Marwin Gonzalez lifted a ball to the wall in left field. Rosario ran back, took his eye off the flight of the ball as he looked for the wall, looked back up to the ball and it evaded his reach. Correa scored from first base and the Astros had a 2-0 lead.

"The sinking line drive, I don't think he really had much of a chance, and I don't think he recovered particularly well. And then the ball that Gonzalez hit, it just didn't seem like he tracked it very well," Molitor said.

The defense is on display. It stands out when it doesn't look right. Rosario's plate appearances were a drag on the Twins, too.

In the 6th inning, Jason Castro doubled against an outfield shift and Brian Dozier singled to put Twins runners at the corners with nobody out against Verlander. So Verlander turned up the heat. He struck out Joe Mauer and Miguel Sano in back-to-back tense plate appearances. Cleanup hitter Eddie Rosario walked up to the plate looking to drive some runs across. He swung at the first pitch — a Verlander fastball — and popped out in the infield to end the threat. Verlander pumped his fists as he walked off the mound after getting the heart of the Twins' order out in order.

Then, in the 8th inning, the Twins had the bases loaded and Rosario faced Chris Devenski. Another first-pitch swing, this time on Devenski's changeup down and out of the strikezone. Rosario made just enough contact to hit it off the end of the bat and ground into an inning-ending double play.

"Offensively, [Rosario's] aggressive, he's going to swing," Molitor said. "I knew that situation [in the 8th inning], I was hoping they'd throw him a strike because I had a feeling he'd be swinging. He expanded [the strike zone] a little bit and they got the double play. ... Probably wasn't a real good pitch to offer at in that situation."

After the game, a reporter asked Rosario if he wishes he'd laid off the first pitch in that key moment of the game.

"Yeah, maybe. But I know what he throws, I know he throws changeup. ... I want to try to hit it into the middle, but sometimes this happens. It's baseball," he said.

**Two possible wrenches in the starting pitching plan for Twins this weekend**  
**Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | April 9, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS — The Twins had a game called for weather Sunday, and as a result of that added off day they gave each starting pitcher an extra day of rest. Effectively, they kept their 4-man rotation in line and just bumped back their starting pitchers one day apiece.

Lance Lynn started Monday. Jake Odorizzi gets the ball Tuesday. Kyle Gibson is scheduled to start Wednesday. And J.O. Berrios will pitch on Thursday, thus keeping him in line to start a game in Puerto Rico when the Twins go there next week.

On Friday they'll need a fifth starter for the first time of this young season. Phil Hughes, who is currently pitching in Florida on a rehab assignment (oblique), could be healthy enough to get the ball for that Friday start. There's a fly in the ointment, though, with that otherwise straightforward plan.

The first possible problem is that the weather could get dicey again this weekend. You might ask: Which games will the Twins play and which will get postponed? Good question. Welcome to April in Minnesota.

The second possible sticking point is that if the Twins want to manipulate their roster to the Nth degree of optimal, they wouldn't carry a 5th starter when they don't need him — at least not in April.

We'll see how they react to the weather and the need for another starting pitcher in the near future. For now, here are at least a handful of things that they could be considering:

–Hughes last pitched in a game on April 5, when he used 65 pitches for the Fort Myers Miracle in high-A ball. He could be ready to come off the DL by Friday. He'd be on 7 days of rest, which would be slightly unusual but not an impossible circumstance for Hughes.

–To make room on the roster for Hughes, the Twins could option a reliever like Gabriel Moya, for example. But the Twins wouldn't need a 5th starter again until April 24 — nine games and 11 days later. Would the Twins be fine to carry another starter for those 9 games?

They seem to be pretty bent on not wasting roster spots on a given day. (In that case, they could option a reliever to make room for Hughes and then just use Hughes out of the bullpen until his next start; or, alternatively, they could just go with a 5-man rotation at that point if they chose; they could also call up somebody from the minor leagues and option him after the start, and bring back a fresh reliever with the vacated roster spot.)

–Triple-A Rochester Red Wings had their first 3 games postponed this year because of the weather. Rochester, N.Y., folks. Aaron Slegers was the first starter to take the ball for the Red Wings, and he pitched in their opener Monday (6 innings, 1 earned run on 5 hits). That puts Slegers out for Friday's start. The rest of the scheduled rotation was going to be Adalberto Mejia, Fernando Romero, Dietrich Enns and Myles Jaye. If each of those guys takes his scheduled start for Rochester this week then he'd be out of consideration for Friday's start for the Twins.

Stephen Gonsalves started for Double-A Chattanooga on Friday last week. Maybe he's on the list of backup plans. Lewis Thorpe pitched in one game of their doubleheader Saturday, but at that point we're really digging deep into Minnesota's starting options in the first two weeks of the season.

### **As the hardware starts piling up, Byron Buxton sets his defensive sights even higher** **Dan Hayes | The Athletic | April 10, 2018**

Byron Buxton will spend much of this week collecting the trophies he earned with a breathtaking defensive season in 2017.

Difficult as it may be to imagine, Buxton says he'd like to be even better this year.

No, really.

Back in January, legendary Twins center fielder Torii Hunter identified Buxton as having a growth mindset. He always wants to improve. Even though he's coming off of a particularly outstanding defensive season — one for which he received his Wilson defensive player of the year award on Monday and will take home a Gold Glove on Friday — Buxton said his desire is to get better once again. But Buxton, who lined out hard in the seventh inning and nearly hit a game-tying home run in the ninth of a 2-0 loss to the Houston Astros, didn't have many opportunities in the field on Monday night.

“Anything is possible,” Buxton said. “I can catch a lot more balls. I think the biggest thing for me is trying to go out there and keep bettering myself, getting great jumps, getting reaction times, helping out my corner guys. Communicating is a big part of what we do out there. Be a better communicator.”

There's no doubt Buxton has the skills to produce a better year. He and Cincinnati's Billy Hamilton are generally regarded as the fastest players in baseball and Buxton spends half the season in a home ballpark tailored for his speed.

But Buxton would have to clear a pretty high bar.

He produced 24 Defensive Runs Saved last season, according to Fangraphs.com — the seventh-best season from a center fielder since the statistic was created in 2002. His campaign was so good, it registers ahead of Hunter's fantastic 2003 and 2004 seasons.

Buxton also led the majors with 29 outs above average, according to Baseball Savant. The next best defender was Atlanta's Ender Inciarte, who had 21.

A veteran National League scout had trouble defining an area where Buxton possibly could get any better.

“To be honest, I don’t know,” the scout texted. “I gave him the highest defensive grade I could give a player in my report last year. He may just be being humble. He is really good.”

Buxton suggested that his award was the result of an all-around effort by the outfield.

There’s little doubt Buxton is surrounded by a pair of athletic defenders in Max Kepler and Eddie Rosario. While Kepler appreciates the compliment, he said Buxton is beyond deserving of his hardware. Oh, and he thinks Buxton already is a pretty good communicator, too.

“He lays his body out there on the line, sacrifices it to the wall better than anyone,” Kepler said. “He deserves all of it.

“He never hesitates. He’s not scared and doesn’t worry about ‘I could get hurt.’ That’s big having a center fielder that goes out all the way like that because there are guys who play tentatively and don’t catch the balls that he does.

“I don’t want to take anything for granted or jinx us, but we have a good feel for where we are.”

Even manager Paul Molitor knows it won’t be easy for Buxton to improve upon his ridiculous output. But if anyone can, Molitor suspects Buxton is the perfect candidate to perform the feat because of the way he works at it.

“He looks at things that are measurable,” Molitor said. “He’s got the tools to be at the top of almost every category. Whether it’s first step, routes, closing speed, all those type of things. And then I think he tried to address some of those things where he came up short a couple years ago. I know that when you go out and watch our outfielders work, he’s the leader. He’s the one who’s getting everybody else to try to get the most out of drills. It’s wearing off on the other players as well as probably making him better. I think that’s he’s gonna continue to improve out there. It’s hard to imagine how it can get a lot better, but I’m sure there are things that he’s trying to do.”

### **How the Twins improved their defense and became a playoff contender**

**Alex Stumpf | Sporting News | April 9, 2018**

The Minnesota Twins were 2017’s biggest surprise, going from 103 losses to a playoff spot due in large part to allowing 101 fewer runs. That swing came without making any notable pitching acquisitions or breakout performances, but through better defense and run prevention. 2018 may be even better, but to understand why, it’s important to know how the turnaround happened.

The first steps came during 2016 offseason with the hiring of the analytically-focused major league coach Jeff Pickler and the signing of free-agent catcher Jason Castro. A three-year, \$24.5 million deal seemed like a lofty sum to pay for Castro, who had only one 2-WAR season under his belt, but he was going to make the entire pitching staff better because of his pitch framing.

In 2016, Minnesota ranked second to last in the American League with -16.2 framing runs from their catchers, according to Baseball Prospectus. Castro finished third in pitch framing runs that year. It was a natural fit.

“I don’t think it [framing] was something that was specifically talked up at that point. I think it was understood,” Castro said on Minnesota’s recruitment that winter. “It wasn’t too long after [signing] that we talked about those sorts of things.”

Castro didn’t steal as many strikes in 2017, but he and backup Chris Gimenez still combined to be worth +8.2 runs, causing a near 25 run swing in the Twins’ favor.

While Minnesota’s pitchers now had better catchers to throw to, they had an even better defense behind them. In 2016, Twins fielders posted the worst fielding percentage in the AL (.979) and the second worst DRS (-60). In 2017, they had the second best fielding percentage in the league (.987), which, along with some defensive realignment, let them save 20 runs in the field.

Overall, the Twins allowed 101 fewer runs with their DRS and pitch framing improving by 104 runs.

The biggest changes were in the outfield. Robbie Grossman saw his defensive innings cut. The Miguel Sano experiment in right field was done, replaced by Max Kepler. Center fielder Byron Buxton broke out as well, jumping to the top of the Statcast leaderboards in defensive outs above average. Those three changes alone accounted for 40 of the 80 defensive runs saved.

Then there was Castro, who was +10 in the field, while his predecessor, Kurt Suzuki, was -12. That was apart from pitch framing, too. He, again, was the only notable addition to the defense. The pieces Minnesota had were just better utilized.

“I think a lot of it just takes care of itself in the types of players that we have,” Castro said.

And, of course, you can’t talk about run prevention without talking about shifts, which may be a bit of a tender subject in the Twin Cities because of Brian Dozier. But Dozier’s barking about unwritten rules are a negligible side effect to what some infield rearranging has done for Twins pitchers.

It’s not that they have just adopted shifting. Going by Fangraphs’ team splits leaderboards, the 2016 Twins shifted for 1,050 batters faced while the 2017 squad did so 1,134 times, marking only an 8 percent increase. The difference was the effectiveness of the shifts. In 2016, opposing batters recorded a .291 wOBA against the Twins when they were shifting, which was middle of the pack. In 2017, the league average against shifts dropped about three points. The Twins saw a 15 point drop, holding batters to a .276 clip — the fifth lowest in baseball.

Nobody in the locker room would divulge any company secrets on how Pickler and Co. did it, but getting Sano back in the infield and bouncing him around surely helped compared with the less defensively gifted Trevor Plouffe. That and a willingness to experiment.

“For the most part, we’re all pretty open to whatever they want us to do,” Buxton said. “We’re willing to do it, try it out, and if it doesn’t work, we just kind of put it to the side and go back to what we’re doing.”

Buxton is also a product of breaking from defensive norms, playing more shallow than most center fielders because his elite speed can take away bloop singles while still catching up to deep fly balls.

“We’re not afraid to try new things and try to challenge ourselves to get better,” he said.

Buxton believes that precise positioning leads to more wins, and with more wins, more confidence in the field. Confidence to not only trust precise positioning, but to lay out to try to make a diving play when the opportunity arises.

“It makes you more comfortable to go out there. To take more chances,” Buxton said. “We just went out there, played ball and had fun.”

Which leads us to the 2018 Twins, who seem destined to do better across the board in every aspect that sparked the turnaround.

Take small sample sizes with caution, but the Twins are deploying even more shifts per game in 2018, setting up a skewed alignment against 94 batters faced through their first seven games: an average of roughly one and a half an inning. Again, it’s not shifting for the sake of shifting. They’re holding batters to a .153 wOBA when they shift — the best mark in baseball.

Castro is a prime candidate to steal more runs behind the plate, especially with a year’s experience with his new staff. Buxton, Sano and Kepler are all a year older and wiser and should improve, too. And with a playoff berth behind them a flurry of offseason additions, Buxton says they are confident.

That confidence and those results were the selling points pitcher Addison Reed needed to sign with Minnesota this winter. He did not seem to care much about how they did it, just that they did it.

“As a player, I look at ERA, I look at wins, I look at losses. I don’t look at ‘wXRZ,’” Reed said, inventing a new stat. “You can tell a lot from your eyes, about how a team will be, how a team is.”

What Reed saw was a team that gave him the best chance to win. To get there, Minnesota had to look at their defense differently.

**Red Wings drop a 2-1 decision to Chiefs on a chilly opening night at Frontier Field**  
**Sal Maiorana | Democrat and Chronicle | April 9, 2018**

If you’re a baseball fan, you’ve surely heard the term “crisply played game” countless times through the years.

There was a crisply played game Monday night at Frontier Field, though the verbiage in this case had nothing to do with the pace of play, but rather, the crispness of the air.

The brave, parka-wearing fans who ventured out for the thrice-delayed Rochester Red Wings’ season opener were not rewarded for their heartiness as the Wings dropped a 2-1 decision to the Syracuse Chiefs. At some point, maybe Tuesday, they’ll get the feeling back in their outer extremities.



“This is Rochester. The fans are great,” said center fielder Zack Granite, who dropped a fly ball in the top of the ninth to set the Chiefs up for their winning run. “We appreciate anybody who comes out to watch us play and it doesn’t make us feel as cold when they’re sitting out there.”

There were nights this past January when the ice skaters at Manhattan Square Park were probably more comfortable in the elements than the crowd of about 700 (the announced, tickets-sold crowd was 3,286) that shivered in 34-degree weather to witness the 132nd opener for the longest continuously operated minor league baseball franchise in the United States.

The weather will change, we know this. Coats and ski caps will be replaced by T-shirts and ball caps, the beer will flow, food will be consumed, and exciting baseball will be played. But Monday night, for those who came to the downtown ice box, it was more about survival.

It’s a shame it had to be this way, the Wings playing their first game in a ballpark that was about 95 percent empty, but this isn’t the first time the North Division teams in the International League have had to endure an April like this.

Wings general manager Dan Mason, who hopefully was wearing long underwear beneath his traditional Opening Day tuxedo as he meandered through the stands greeting the patrons, refused to lament the situation.

Last year, the Wings’ first two games of the season, April 6 and 7 on the road in Syracuse, were snowed out. But by the time the Wings played their home opener on April 14, it was a balmy 59 degrees and 11,343 were in attendance.

As Mason told me Sunday after the opener was frozen out for a third straight day, it’s a roll of the dice every year with the weather. The Wings lost only three home dates in 2017 due to inclement weather, and they’ve already matched that in 2018. You just have to roll with it.

“It’s fun. It’s part of being a Rochester Red Wing,” said starting pitcher Aaron Slegers of the frigid conditions. “Everyone has to deal with it, including the hitters, so as soon as you can get that out of your mind the better off you’ll be.”

When he finally got onto the field Monday, Slegers looked every bit as good as he did last season, when he went 15-4 with a 3.40 earned-run average. The 6-foot-10 right-hander pitched six innings and gave up one run on five hits and a walk while striking out one.

“It was a little different,” Slegers said of the back-to-back-to-back postponements. “I don’t think I’ve ever had to experience a start day four times in a row, but it was OK. We were all ready to get out there and get the season underway.”

The only run Slegers allowed came in the top of the third, when Adrian Sanchez led off with a single and eventually scored when Slegers walked Andrew Stevenson with the bases loaded.

Slegers’ counterpart, 34-year-old Edwin Jackson, winner of 98 major-league games, wasn’t nearly as effective as he lasted just four innings, walking six and allowing two hits. The key, however, was that only one of those base runners scored, and that proved critical when the Chiefs won the game with their unearned run in the ninth.

In the bottom of the third, Rochester newcomer Jake Cave drew a one-out walk and after two more walks, Cave came home on a wild pitch by Jackson.

“We did a good job getting on base. You want to take advantage of that, that’s part of the recipe of scoring runs, but tonight we didn’t come in with some big hits where we could have scored some runs,” said manager Joel Skinner.

The 1-1 tie held up until the top of the ninth when Granite inexplicably dropped a ball hit into the right-center gap by Alejandro De Aza that resulted in a three-base error. De Aza scored moments later on a sacrifice fly by Chris Dominguez, meaning that reliever Tyler Duffey absorbed a loss despite not allowing a hit or a walk in three innings.

“It hit my glove,” said Granite. “I’m not used to that. Tough play, put it behind us and get after it tomorrow. Just a muff, just one of those things. It won’t happen again, don’t worry about that.”

**Brent Rooker erupts as Chattanooga Lookouts rout Birmingham Barons in series finale**  
**David Paschall | Times Free Press | April 10, 2018**

Chattanooga Lookouts first baseman Brent Rooker racked up impressive numbers last spring at Mississippi State and late last summer at Fort Myers in the high Single-A Florida State League.

The 23-year-old Rooker desires more productivity this year in his first full professional season, but it's not at the top of his objective list.

"First and foremost, I want to learn what my routine needs to be," Rooker said. "A lot of these guys have three, four or five years of experiences in pro ball, and I need to learn from them as far as what to do on a day-to-day basis to make sure I'm ready to play. It will obviously be a different schedule from college, and I expect to battle the ups and downs.

"It's 140 games and a lot of at-bats, and I've got to learn how to stay even-keel when things are going well and when things are not going so well. I just want to maintain some consistency throughout the year that will give me the best chance to continue to learn and continue to develop and, at the end of the day, produce."

The 6-foot-3, 215-pounder from Germantown, Tenn., already is dealing with an early dose of the downs after batting just .071 with seven strikeouts in his first 14 plate appearances through Chattanooga's first four games entering Monday night's series finale against Birmingham. In the finale, however, Rooker went 3-for-4 and drove in a run as the Lookouts cruised to a 5-2 win before an announced crowd of 2,040 at AT&T Field.

Chattanooga is off today before beginning its first road series Wednesday night in Pensacola.

This time last year, Rooker was shredding Southeastern Conference pitchers, hitting a robust .387 and playing all 67 games for a Mississippi State team that went 40-27 and finished with a No. 12 ranking. The Bulldogs advanced to an NCAA tournament super regional before losing to LSU in Baton Rouge.

Rooker tallied 23 home runs and 82 RBIs in those 67 games, and the Minnesota Twins selected him with their second pick of the first round (35th overall) last June and provided him a \$1.94 million signing bonus. After a 22-game stint at Rookie League Elizabethton (Tenn.) in which he hit .282, Rooker finished by hitting .280 in 40 games with Fort Myers with 11 homers and 35 RBIs.

"It was a long year," he said. "I started to play the second week of February in college ball, and then I finished up the first week of September. I think I played a little more than 130 games total. I got a little bit of a taste of what playing that many games in a season is like.

"It was whirlwind and a busy few months, going from the super regional to the draft the next day to Elizabethton, where I stayed a few weeks, to Fort Myers. It was a really good experience for me, and I really enjoyed my first year of pro ball."

Rooker, who played at Evangelical Christian before signing with MSU, realizes how fortunate his pro journey has been to this point from a proximity standpoint given the stops of Elizabethton, Fort Myers and Chattanooga.

"Obviously Fort Myers is the farthest of those from home," Rooker said, "but the travel wasn't so bad in the Florida State League, and you got to play in big-league spring-training stadiums. It was a fun first stop.

"I'm about four hours from home right here, so some family will get to come over pretty frequently, which will be fun."

### **Cedar Rapids Kernels improve to 3-0 with win at Peoria**

**Jeff Johnson | The Gazette | April 9, 2018**

PEORIA, Ill. — Ben Rortvedt's two-run single in the sixth inning helped give the Cedar Rapids Kernels a 3-1 win over Peoria in Midwest League baseball Monday night.

The Kernels are 3-0 to start the season.

Jose Miranda walked with two outs in the sixth for Cedar Rapids, with Andrew Bechtold following with a walk. A wild pitch by Peoria starting pitcher Evan Guillory moved the runners ahead a base, and Rortvedt came through with a hit that put the Kernels on top, 2-1.

An RBI double by Mark Contreras in the ninth added an insurance run for Cedar Rapids. Bechtold had three hits for the Kernels and Rortvedt two.

Kernels pitchers allowed 12 hits but only one run. Reliever Kevin Marnon picked up the victory with 2 2/3 innings of shutout baseball.

Jared Finkel threw the final two innings for the save. Starter Blayne Enlow gave up seven hits and a run, striking out two in 4 1/2 innings.

The teams play again Tuesday night.