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Twins select Larnach at No. 20 to open Draft

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | June 4, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins went with a collegiate outfielder with their first pick in the MLB Draft for the first time since 1969, selecting Oregon State's Trevor Larnach with the No. 20 overall selection on Monday night. They kept up the theme of selecting college position players early in the Draft, taking catcher Ryan Jeffers from UNC Wilmington with the No. 59 overall pick in the second round.

Larnach, the 26th-ranked Draft prospect by MLB Pipeline, is a left-handed hitter with patience and power, as he hit .324/.447/.637 with 17 homers, 13 doubles and 64 RBIs in 55 games with the Beavers this season. The Twins already have a deal in place with Larnach, but he can't sign until Oregon State is eliminated from the postseason. The pick carries a slot value of \$3.1 million.

"It's exciting, it's what you wait your whole life for," Larnach said. "It's a dream come true. It's one stage in my life, but I'm ready to tackle any obstacles that come up."

The 6-foot-4, 205-pounder is a corner outfielder with a strong arm, which could profile better in right field. But the Twins see him more as a player who could move quickly through the system because of his offensive ability.

"He's definitely a corner outfielder and he think he throws enough and moves enough to play right," scouting director Sean Johnson said. "This is really about an offensive player with upside and power."

Larnach is a career .296/.417/.494 hitter at Oregon State, as he developed his power this year, going from three homers in '17 to 17 this year. He said he worked on his swing throughout the offseason with three-hour sessions with a private hitting coach that he said he couldn't name because his job title wouldn't permit it.

"I've done everything from changing my batting stance to my mechanics like working on the load and working on the gather," Larnach said. "I'm not done yet. There are still things I need to do."

Johnson said analytics played a role in their selection, as Larnach posted high exit velocities at Oregon State that even surpassed last year's first-round pick Brent Rooker, who has had a strong start to his professional career.

"Our analytics team looked at Trackman and he had a pretty low launch angle, but his exit velocity was right in the top of the country," Johnson said. "It was just ahead of Rooker, who obviously had an awesome spring last year. This guy represented our scouting department with our R&D group coming together to line up what we saw with our eyes."

The Twins place a high priority on makeup -- which was a strong factor in their selection of Royce Lewis with the No. 1 overall pick last year -- and Johnson said Larnach checked every box and stepped up when the club's star player, Nick Madrigal, went down with an injury. Madrigal was the No. 4 overall pick by the White Sox.

"All our reports on the makeup, and we dug in pretty hard here, was an outstanding kid with a growth mindset and open-minded to being coached," Johnson said. "He's a student of the game and a hard worker."

Larnach said his passion for the game is why he believes he'll be able to make an impact with the Twins down the road.

"I've been working my tail off since high school," Larnach said. "I've been getting results, but I feel like I can go higher and develop mentally and physically."

Jeffers, meanwhile, was not ranked among the Top 200 Draft prospects by MLB Pipeline, but he has strong offensive potential, much like Larnach, and fits an organizational need for catching. Jeffers' pick carries a slot value of \$1.1 million.

Jeffers, 21, hit .320/.472/.600 with 16 homers and 54 RBIs in 58 games this season and is a career .325/.450/.631 batter in his three seasons with UNC Wilmington. He's 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds, but there are concerns about his hands and reactions defensively behind the plate.

"He's an offensive-minded catcher," MLB.com's Jim Callis said. "The question is on his catching ability. I think the consensus among some teams is he might not stick behind the plate. But the Twins obviously think he can catch."

The Draft continues on Tuesday with Rounds 3-10. The MLB.com preview show begins at 11:30 a.m. CT, with exclusive coverage beginning at noon CT.

Twins pick Oregon State outfielder Trevor Larnach in first round of MLB draft **La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018**

Trevor Larnach hit three home runs over 88 games during his first two seasons at Oregon State.

Then he worked on his swing. He filled out. Balls began clearing fences all over the Pacific-12.

And that power surge made believers out of the Twins, enough that they took him with the 20th overall pick of baseball's amateur draft Monday.

Larnach, whose Beavers play host to the Gophers this weekend in an NCAA super regional with a trip to the College World Series at stake, is viewed as a power prospect on the rise, a potential corner outfielder who can provide plenty of pop for the Twins.

In the second round, the Twins selected another college player, catcher Ryan Jeffers from North Carolina Wilmington. The 6-2, 220-pound Jeffers has power potential, but evaluators aren't sure if he will stick as a catcher.

Larnach's transformation into a legitimate power threat took place during the offseason.

"As the offseason goes on, you have about six months before the seasons starts and that's quite a lot of time to work on some stuff," Larnach said. "And there's an individual who's name I can't say who I've been working with. It was an every night thing during the offseason. We worked on everything, from the approach to mechanics, which was the most important part as far as allowing that power to play in the games.

"I've done everything to changing my batting stance, getting into my back hip a lot more, using my hips, working on the load, working on the gather. So much different stuff that I've learned. There's still even more stuff that I still need to do. I'm not done yet. This is still one stage of my life."

Larnach said those sessions went as late at 11 p.m. some nights, as he worked to perfect his craft.

Twins scouting director Sean Johnson watched Larnach go off at the Sanderson Ford College Baseball Classic Feb. 16-19 at Surprise, Ariz. That's when Larnach, a lefthanded hitter listed at 6-4 and 205 pounds, opened eyes.

"We saw him hit some long home runs to center field, to the opposite field and left," Johnson said. "And that's when he kind of got on our radar for our pick 20 slot.

“He’s taken a step forward. I think going into the year he was probably not in the conversation. He’s certainly has performed to get himself into the first round.”

Larnach is hitting .327 with 17 home runs and 65 RBI in 58 games for the second-ranked Beavers. He is the 27th-ranked prospect according to Baseball America.

The Twins project him to be a corner outfielder, with enough range to do a solid job. His arm is considered average. But it continues to get stronger after injuring his elbow while dunking a basketball while at College Park High School, in his hometown of Pleasant Hill, Calif.

Johnson said the Twins blended analytics with what the scouting reports revealed. Larnach’s launch angle is low, but his exit velocity was among the highest in the country, based on stats provided by stadiums that have installed the TrackMan baseball system.

His exit velocity was higher than outfielder Brent Rooker’s was in college. And the Twins drafted Rooker, the promising first baseman-outfielder now at Class AA Chattanooga, with the 35th overall pick last year.

“He’s somewhat of a college player who hasn’t hit his full ceiling yet,” Johnson said. “His body has gotten bigger and stronger. His body has filled out. His raw power has taken another step forward this spring. Obviously he has performed at a high clip. We are certainly excited to have him.”

Johnson said that the Twins already have the framework of a deal in place with Larnach and expect to sign him shortly after his college career is over. The assigned value of the 20th pick is \$3.1 million.

The Gophers can expedite that signing this weekend. Larnach, of course, wants a longer run in the postseason. But he can’t wait to begin his Twins career.

He is excited to be selected in the same round as college teammate Nick Madrigal, a shortstop who was selected by the White Sox fourth overall.

“Expectations were all over the place,” Larnach said. “I was pretty stressed on where I was going, who was getting picked. I couldn’t wait any longer.”

Zach Littell expected to get called up by Twins for Tuesday doubleheader start
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | June 4, 2018

Righthander Zack Littell is expected to be called up as the 26th player and make one of the starts Tuesday when the Twins play the White Sox in a doubleheader at Target Field.

Manager Paul Molitor would only confirm that Littell is being considered.

The single-admission doubleheader, with the first game scheduled to start at 3:10 p.m., was scheduled after three consecutive games against the White Sox were postponed because of bad weather in April. Fernando Romero will start the other game for the Twins.

“It’s not settled,” Molitor said. “We’re looking at options. Everybody knows there are things we’ve done in Triple-A to help set ourselves up. We have to figure out how we want to use the 26th man or other roster moves depending on how things go (Sunday) that would probably influence how we want to go into Tuesday.”

It would be a quick rise for Littell, acquired from the Yankees for Jaime Garcia last July. Littell was 0-3 with a 5.87 ERA at Class AA Chattanooga before being promoted to Class AAA Rochester. Once there, he turned things around. He’s 1-1 with a 2.57 ERA in five outings for the Red Wings, including four starts. In 28 innings, Littell, 22, has given up eight earned runs on 20 hits and 10 walks with 30 strikeouts.

Righthander Aaron Slegers and lefthander Stephen Gonsalves of the Red Wings also are available to pitch, so the Twins have options for the spot start.

Twins castoff John Ryan Murphy is suddenly baseball's best power hitter
Michael Rand | Star Tribune | June 5, 2018

Welcome to the Tuesday edition of The Cooler. Let’s get going:

*One of the most lopsided trades in the wrong direction in Twins history happened in the 2015 offseason, when Minnesota traded outfielder Aaron Hicks to the Yankees for catcher John Ryan Murphy.

At the time, it seemed like a reasonable swap. Hicks had a .225 batting average and .655 OPS in nearly 1,000 plate appearances with the Twins, and Minnesota had a steady stream of promising young outfielders — led by Byron Buxton — knocking on the door to replace him. Murphy was coming off a good year in part-time duty for the Yankees, and the Twins very much needed a long-term catching solution.

With the Yankees, though, Hicks has become a version of the player the Twins always hoped he could be. From the start of 2017 until now, he has 20 home runs and a .365 on-base percentage while being an above-average outfielder. Those numbers would look pretty good in Minnesota right now.

Murphy? He played in 26 games at the start of the 2016 season, and his hitting was so dreadful the Twins banished him to the minors. The only memorable thing about his time here is that he had an excellent walk-up song (“No Diggity” by Blackstreet).

He never returned to the big club and was traded to Arizona in the middle of last season. I kind of forgot about Murphy at that point and assumed his career would just fizzle out. But I was watching a random Diamondbacks game Monday night, and who do I see at the plate? Murphy.

Not only that, I see his stats flashed on the screen: 8 home runs and an OPS of nearly .900. Then the ESPN broadcasters start talking about him and announce that he has the most home runs per plate appearance of any player in the majors this season.

Here’s verifiable evidence of Murphy hitting one of his eight blasts this season:

If you’re counting at home, he has 8 homers and an .887 OPS in 91 plate appearances this year for the D-Backs.

He had 1 home run and a .413 OPS for the Twins in 90 plate appearances.

The Twins lost the first Murphy trade. It’s too soon to say they lost the second one, since they actually snagged promising young reliever Gabriel Moya in last summer’s deal. But yeah, they definitely bought high and sold low on Murphy.

Twins draft Oregon State slugger Trevor Larnach in first round **Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | June 5, 2018**

Trevor Larnach went from hitting three homers as a sophomore at Oregon State to 17 this season as a junior, when the corner outfielder was a Golden Spikes Award semifinalist. Some of those were of the tape-measure variety.

Along the way the 6-foot-4, 210-pound left-handed hitter posted one of the top average exit velocities in the nation despite a lower launch angle, which helped convince the Twins to take him with the 20th overall selection Monday night in the first round of the amateur draft.

“I’m well aware of that kind of stuff,” Larnach said after agreeing to terms with the Twins. “I know it’s the era of launch angle and exit velocity. I’ve educated myself on it. I’m glad it caught their attention.”

Slot value for the 20th pick was \$3.12 million.

Larnach’s average exit velocity this year, according to Twins scouting director Sean Johnson, was higher than the eye-popping figure Double-A Twins slugger Brent Rooker posted at Mississippi State a year ago before they took him 35th overall. This weekend the Beavers slugger will face the University of Minnesota in the super regional.

“He’s a college player who hasn’t hit his stride yet,” Johnson said. “His body has gotten bigger, stronger, but he’s still filling out. His raw power has taken a step forward this spring. He’s performed at a high clip.”

Larnach’s “growth mindset,” Johnson said, combined with the metrics and potential for continued changes to his powerful swing sold the Twins on the first college outfielder they’ve drafted in the first round in nearly half a century.

Their previous college outfielders taken that high were Arizona State’s Paul Powell in 1969 and Alexander Rowell from Luther College in 1968.

“It was a collaborative decision,” Johnson said. “Our scouting department and our R&D group, we kind of came together to sift through a few statistics that gave him some trouble and lined up the visual scouting performances we’d seen and the evaluations and we put it together to make this guy make sense at our pick.”

Larnach, who went unsigned by the San Diego Padres as a 40th-round pick out of high school in Pleasant Hill, Calif., opened eyes this spring by carrying second-ranked Oregon State while star second baseman Nick Madrigal was injured. Madrigal went fourth overall to the Chicago White

Sox, and the two friends have already joked about future wars in the American League Central.

Recommended by area scout Kyle Blackwell, Larnach is the Twins' lowest first-round pick since 2011, when they took North Carolina shortstop Levi Michael 30th overall. Michael reached Triple-A but was released this spring.

The Twins have taken position players in four of the past five years with their top selection.

Larnach, 21, has hit .327 this season with 65 runs batted in over 58 games. He credited an unnamed hitting coach with helping him remake his swing since arriving in Corvallis, Ore., changing everything from his stance to his load and other fine points of hitting.

Their sessions would run into the wee hours, often lasting two or three hours at a time, he said.

"I've been working my tail off ever since high school," Larnach said. "I keep on getting more and more results, but I feel like I can go a lot higher. There's a lot more mechanical adjustments I can make. I'm not done yet. This is one stage of my life."

With their second-round pick, the Twins took UNC-Wilmington catcher Ryan Jeffers at No. 59 overall. At 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds, Jeffers has plus raw power despite being ranked 295th among this year's draft prospects by Baseball America.

Jeffers, whose slot carries a value of \$1.14 million, joins Ben Rortvedt (56th overall in 2016) as recent second-round catchers taken by the Twins.

BRIEFLY

Right-hander Zack Littell will make his big-league debut at age 22 during Tuesday's doubleheader against the Chicago White Sox, according to a person with direct knowledge. Littell, acquired last season from the New York Yankees in the Jaime Garcia deal, had a 2.57 ERA in five May outings for Triple-A Rochester.

Catcher Cameron Rupp was signed to a minor-league deal and assigned to Rochester after opting out of his Triple-A deal with the Texas Rangers. Rupp, 29, averaged 15 homers the past two seasons in the majors with the Phillies and has thrown out 31 percent of attempted base stealers in the majors.

Kentucky junior pitcher Sean Hjelle, a 2015 Mahtomedi High graduate, was selected 45th overall by San Francisco. Hjelle, a 6-foot-11 right-handed starter, was the 2017 Southeastern Conference pitcher of the year.

Twins make Oregon State outfielder Trevor Larnach the 20th pick in MLB first-year player draft **Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | June 4, 2018**

The Twins have drafted Oregon State outfielder Trevor Larnach with the 20th pick in the 2018 first-year player draft.

Coincidentally, the University of Minnesota Gophers will play Oregon State in the NCAA Tournament Super Regional. Larnach has hit .330/.452/.632 with 17 home runs this year for the Beavers.

"We think this guy's evolution as a hitter is on the uptick," said Twins scouting director Sean Johnson. "He's somewhat of a college player that hasn't hit his full ceiling yet, his body is filling out. He's hitting at a high clip and we've excited to have him."

Johnson said that the Twins relied to a degree on analytics, which said that Larnach's average exit velocity was one of the best in the country this year, even better than one of last year's early-round draft picks, Brent Rooker. Johnson said that Larnach's average launch angle was a little low but the exit velocities helped confirm what the scouts were seeing — that Larnach can punish a baseball.

Johnson said that the team of Twins scouts worked with the club's research & development team and "Lined up the visual scouting performance [with the stats] and kind of put it together to make this guy make sense at our pick."

One year after owning the No. 1 overall pick in the June draft, the Twins saw their draft position fall considerably to 20 — a good sign that means it was a relatively successful season last year.

Lewis, the top pick from a year ago, is playing well in the low minors and is looking right now like a good pick. That's a good sign for Twins fans, since that was the first draft under CBO Derek Falvey and new scouting director Sean Johnson.

"I would say it's more stressful than picking [first], honestly," Johnson said. "There's not much difference on our board between [candidates] 8 and 20."

One year later, selection of Royce Lewis continues to look like a good pick for the Twins
Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | June 4, 2018

The Twins got some criticism on draft night last year for their selection of shortstop Royce Lewis with the first overall pick in the draft.

They had a new baseball boss, Derek Falvey, and a new guy running the draft in Sean Johnson. And who could forget the most hyped high school prospect of that class, Hunter Greene? Many fans wanted the prep shortstop with a big fastball, and part of the reason was that no other player had the level of media coverage. Especially not Royce Lewis.

Fast-forward a year, to draft night 2018, and the Twins no longer need to pick at the top of the draft. Lewis is a year into his pro career and making the Twins look smart for picking the affable young leader with a good bat and lofty goals.

How is the Lewis selection looking today? Here's a look at the 5 or 6 players who likely were considered at 1-1 last year. In short: One year after the 2017 draft, the Lewis selection continues to look like a good pick for the Twins.

1. Royce Lewis, high school shortstop, Twins.

As a high schooler in California, Lewis didn't get nearly the pub that Greene had. Some evaluators wondered if he'd eventually end up in centerfield, even though the Twins have said that they think he'll stick at shortstop. So far in his pro career, Lewis certainly has the look of a guy who was picked first overall. You expect those players to be standout prospects and eventually impact players in the big leagues. Often the question revolves around "when" they'll reach the big leagues and not "if" they'll make it.

Lewis is playing for Cedar Rapids in the Midwest League (full season A-ball), and it's going pretty well. He's hitting .297/.344/.413 with 11 doubles and 3 homers, and he's stolen 15 bases in 16 tries. The guess here is that Lewis will play in the all-star game in that league before the Twins entertain the idea of moving him to high-A in the Florida State League. He turns 19 on Tuesday, so time certainly is still on his side to rise up through the ranks and eventually arrive at Target Field. Depending on how he handles the next two levels, that promotion might not be as far away as we would have thought at this time last year.

Note: Drafting and signing Lewis for about a half-million bucks cheaper than the Red signed Greene — in addition to the way the Twins handled their first few picks overall — freed up Minnesota's decision makers to get aggressive and sign a prep pitcher that they liked, Blayne Enlow, for way above the recommended slot value.

2. Hunter Greene, high school pitcher/shortstop, Reds.

Greene was touted for his 100 mph fastball before the draft, and Sports Illustrated drove the hype train with a big feature on "Baseball's LeBron or the new Babe."

It wasn't Greene's fault that those comparisons got thrown around on a magazine headline, but in the first year of his pro career it looks right now like both comparisons were a stretch. In 10 starts this year in the Midwest League, Greene has a 6.32 ERA and a 44:15 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 31 1/3 innings. Last year as a hitter was 7-for-30 in limited reps with two doubles and a triple. Maybe there's a two-way star in there — the next Shohei Ohtani? — but for now it looks like his best shot to be an impact Major League is on the mound.

3. MacKenzie Gore, high school left-handed pitcher, Padres.

Gore was a high school lefty that had a lot of fans in draft rooms around the country. He's also pitching in the Midwest League but he's only made three starts this year — 9 earned runs in 8 innings — reportedly because of problems with blisters.

4. Brendan McKay, college first baseman/pitcher, Rays.

McKay was tabbed to be Shohei Ohtani before Ohtani was Ohtani.

McKay started in earnest the conversation about the viability of two-way players making their way to the Majors. Ohtani is about 6 months older than McKay and the latter is playing ball in the Florida State League. McKay, a product of Louisville, was promoted in mid-May to high-A, and in 10 games at that level he's hitting .200/.364/.257. It seems there's now an open question about whether McKay will be the kind of offensive threat that changes games on the mound and at the plate. There are relatively fewer questions, though, about whether he'll make it as a pitcher. Between the two full-season levels this year, McKay is carrying a 1.51 ERA and extraordinary 59:3 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 41 2/3 innings.

To date, McKay and Lewis look like the two best minor leaguers from the top of the 2017 draft class.

5. Kyle Wright, college pitcher, Braves.

Wright opened the season at Double-A for the Braves, and there's some good news and bad news. On the bright side, he's advanced farther than any of the four players drafted ahead of him, since he was a college guy and only focusing on one side of the game. He's got a 4.37 ERA and 55 strikeouts in 57 2/3 innings in the Southern League at 22 years old. But on the downside, Wright has walked 25 hitters in those innings, and that rate probably will have to improve for him to be a real impact pitcher as he climbs the ladder to the Major Leagues.

Emerging star Rosario fueling Twins surge

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | June 5, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — With Eddie Rosario dug in the dirt for Minnesota in the ninth inning of a tied game and one runner on, his arms wiggling the bat as they hovered over home plate, the 2-1 fastball from Cleveland closer Cody Allen came in chest high at 94 mph.

Most players would've let that pitch go.

Rosario let it rip.

The ball soared over the 23-foot wall above right-center field, and Rosario exuberantly raced around the bases with his right arm and right index finger extended Sunday in celebration of a walk-off Twins win on his third home run of the afternoon .

"I've seen a lot of good days in the big leagues, but I don't know if I've seen one that was more dramatic than that as far as the first inning all the way through the end," said 61-year-old Twins manager Paul Molitor, whose Hall of Fame playing career lasted 21 seasons.

Rosario's homers in the first and seventh innings also gave the Twins the lead on their way to a third straight victory over the division-leading Indians. For extra effect, the proud native of Puerto Rico had his parents and two brothers in the seats along with his wife and their three children.

"Whatever happens in the game, homer, double, base hit, I'm going to play hard," Rosario said. "Sometimes you feel like you're going to have a good game. But today, everything happened. Sometimes you try to hit homers, and today I hit three homers. That was special."

One-third of the way through an unpredictable season for the Twins, headlined so far by several setbacks and some bad luck leading to a losing record for the last six weeks, the emergence of Rosario as their best everyday player has fittingly been a bit of a surprise too.

Center fielder Byron Buxton and third baseman Miguel Sano have long been the organization's most-heralded prospects. First baseman Joe Mauer has been a franchise cornerstone for 15 years. Second baseman Brian Dozier was an All-Star in 2015 who hit 104 home runs over the previous three seasons.

Instead, their lanky left fielder who was prone to erratic stretches of play over his first three years in the major leagues is the one carrying the lineup. Any question about who the team's strongest candidate for the All-Star team this summer was answered over the weekend by those rousing, rhythmic chants of Rosario's first name: "Ed-die! Ed-die! Ed-die!"

After becoming the first player in Twins history with multiple three-homer games, Rosario is either leading or tied for the team high in games played (55), runs (36), hits (69), home runs (13), RBIs (40), stolen bases (five), batting average (.317) and slugging percentage (.573). His on-base-plus-slugging percentage (.926) is also a team best and 90 points higher than his previous career high set in 2017, when he broke out with 27 homers and a .290 batting average.

"I feel more strong," Rosario said. "I know last year, after the summer, I felt good. I had a good August. But this year, I wanted to start and do the same thing as last year when I finished. I feel good."

Selected in the fourth round of the 2010 amateur draft, Rosario debuted in 2015 and was sixth in American League Rookie of the Year voting after leading the majors with 15 triples and tying for second with 16 outfield assists. He was sent to Triple-A for six weeks in 2016, though. Until last June, Rosario's body of work was painted as much by overly aggressive baserunning gaffes and strikeouts on pitches well out of the zone as it was by power, speed and defense.

Then he made significant strides last summer. He has only progressed further this spring. Against the Indians, a four-game series that was critical for the Twins to avoid sliding too far down the AL Central standings, Rosario went 7 for 15 with four walks, four homers and eight RBIs.

"He's understanding where he's hitting. His opportunities to drive in runs sometimes just by taking a good at-bat and hitting a single has worked pretty well for him to," Molitor said.

His tendency to swing at pitches out of the strike zone sure hasn't been a problem. Indians starter Trevor Bauer threw Rosario a first-pitch fastball in the third inning on Saturday that was so far inside Bauer lamented later it was "in his own batter's box." He hit it hard enough for a two-run

homer.

The fastball from Mike Clevinger in the first inning on Sunday was about a foot off the plate, and Rosario drove it the other way into the left-field seats. The curveball by reliever Tyler Olson in the seventh was low and inside, but Rosario smashed it over the wall in right-center.

“Oh, man,” Dozier said. “He is locked in.”

Preview: Twins vs. White Sox

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | June 5, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Right-hander Zack Littell will be summoned from Triple-A Rochester and start at least one game Tuesday as the Minnesota Twins host a doubleheader against the White Sox at Target Field.

Acquired last July in a deal that sent Jamie Garcia to the New York Yankees, Littell went 0-3 with a 5.87 ERA at Double-A Chattanooga but turned things around after a promotion to Rochester, where he's 1-1 with a 2.57 ERA in five outings, including four starts. He has held opponents to eight earned runs, 20 hits and 10 walks while striking out 30 in 28 innings.

But which game Littell starts — and who starts the other — remains to be seen.

“It’s not settled,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “We’re looking at options. Everybody knows there are things we’ve done in Triple-A to help set ourselves up. We have to figure out how we want to use the 26th man or other roster moves depending on how things go (Sunday) that would probably influence how we want to go into Tuesday.”

Right-hander Reynaldo Lopez gets the Game 1 start for the White Sox, who enjoyed a day off Monday after a successful weekend against the National League-leading Milwaukee Brewers.

Lopez was charged with seven runs in two innings his last time out, snapping a strong two-game stretch in which he allowed two runs in 15 combined innings.

He has faced Minnesota once already this season, allowing five runs (four earned) in 6 2/3 innings of Chicago’s 6-5 victory on May 3.

Lopez has been a bright spot in an otherwise frustrating season of rebuilding on the South Side.

“It’s a little bit difficult, but as a starter you just keep your mind on what’s next, go start by start,” Lopez said. “I’m just trying to keep grinding and find ways to learn, to keep improving. It’s not easy in the situation we’re in, but we have to keep our focus.”

Right-hander Lucas Giolito, who allowed four runs (three earned) in 6 1/3 innings against the Twins on April 12, gets the nod for the nightcap.

While the players enjoyed a break, the Sox’s front office was busy, making a handful of moves before the team opens the series against the Twins at Target Field.

Infielder Matt Davidson was reinstated from the 10-day disabled list and infielder Matt Skole and catcher Alfredo Gonzalez were optioned to Triple-A Charlotte.

Davidson has been out since May 25 with back spasms. Before that, he was batting .243 with six doubles, 11 home runs and 28 RBIs.

Gonzalez had one hit and an RBI in three games with the White Sox and Skole went 3-for-11 with a home run after he was brought up from Charlotte on May 28.

The Sox will need to make an additional move ahead of the series opener.

Minor leaguer to start one of Twins’ two games vs. White Sox

STATS | Fox Sports North | June 4, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Right-hander Zack Littell will be summoned from Triple-A Rochester and start at least one game Tuesday as the Minnesota Twins host a doubleheader against the White Sox at Target Field.

Acquired last July in a deal that sent Jamie Garcia to the New York Yankees, Littell went 0-3 with a 5.87 ERA at Double-A Chattanooga but turned things around after a promotion to Rochester, where he's 1-1 with a 2.57 ERA in five outings, including four starts. He has held opponents to eight earned runs, 20 hits and 10 walks while striking out 30 in 28 innings.

But which game Littel starts — and who starts the other — remains to be seen.

“It’s not settled,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “We’re looking at options. Everybody knows there are things we’ve done in Triple-A to help set ourselves up. We have to figure out how we want to use the 26th man or other roster moves depending on how things go (Sunday) that would probably influence how we want to go into Tuesday.”

Right-hander Reynaldo Lopez gets the Game 1 start for the White Sox, who enjoyed a day off Monday after a successful weekend against the National League-leading Milwaukee Brewers.

Lopez was charged with seven runs in two innings his last time out, snapping a strong two-game stretch in which he allowed two runs in 15 combined innings.

He has faced Minnesota once already this season, allowing five runs (four earned) in 6 2/3 innings of Chicago’s 6-5 victory on May 3.

Lopez has been a bright spot in an otherwise frustrating season of rebuilding on the South Side.

“It’s a little bit difficult, but as a starter you just keep your mind on what’s next, go start by start,” Lopez said. “I’m just trying to keep grinding and find ways to learn, to keep improving. It’s not easy in the situation we’re in, but we have to keep our focus.”

Right-hander Lucas Giolito, who allowed four runs (three earned) in 6 1/3 innings against the Twins on April 12, gets the nod for the nightcap.

While the players enjoyed a break, the Sox’s front office was busy, making a handful of moves before the team opens the series against the Twins at Target Field.

Infielder Matt Davidson was reinstated from the 10-day disabled list and infielder Matt Skole and catcher Alfredo Gonzalez were optioned to Triple-A Charlotte.

Davidson has been out since May 25 with back spasms. Before that, he was batting .243 with six doubles, 11 home runs and 28 RBIs.

Gonzalez had one hit and an RBI in three games with the White Sox and Skole went 3-for-11 with a home run after he was brought up from Charlotte on May 28.

The Sox will need to make an additional move ahead of the series opener.

Twins select Oregon State OF Larnach with 20th pick in MLB draft
Staff Writer | Fox Sports North | June 4, 2018

The Minnesota Twins selected Oregon State outfielder Trevor Larnach with the 20th pick in the MLB draft on Monday night.

A junior, Larnach is hitting .327 with 17 home runs and 65 RBI in 58 games for Oregon State this season. The 21-year-old is a native of Pleasant Hill, Calif., and went 4-for-10 at the Corvallis Regional, helping the No. 3 Beavers advance to the super regional, where they’ll take on Minnesota in a best-of-three series.

The 20th pick carries a slot value of \$3.12 million. Larnach was a 40th-round selection of the San Diego Padres in 2015, but declined to sign.

The Twins hadn’t used their first pick on a college outfielder since 1969.

In the second round, Minnesota selected catcher Ryan Jeffers out of UNC-Wilmington. Jeffers, who is 6-foot-4, 228 pounds, hit .327 (69-for-211) with 22 doubles, 16 home runs and 59 RBI in 60 games as a junior in 2018. In three seasons with the Seahawks he hit .327 (138-for-422) with 44 doubles, 27 home runs and 96 RBI in 125 games.

Twins slugger Eddie Rosario quietly becoming MLB's most underrated player
Alec Brzezinski | Sporting News | June 4, 2018

Twins slugger Eddie Rosario is quickly becoming one of MLB's best hitters.

Though not yet a household name — mainly because of the small market he plays in — Rosario has been one of baseball's most dangerous hitters this season. He hit three home runs Sunday, including a dramatic walkoff to help Minnesota defeat the Indians, 7-5.

The three home runs gave Rosario 13 already this season, while maintaining a classy .317/.352/.573 slash line with 40 RBIs. It was the ninth time a Twin hit three home runs in a game, but Rosario became the first to do it twice.

So why aren't more people talking about the 26-year-old outfielder?

Rosario just raked four home runs with eight RBIs while helping the Twins take three of four games against the Indians. His power should come at little surprise, considering he bashed 27 home runs with 78 RBIs last season.

Guys like Aaron Judge and Cody Bellinger became instant stars last season while consistently sending baseball out of the ballpark. But Rosario might be the best all-around player out of the three.

While the Twins have disappointed this season (25-30), Rosario looks like a future superstar, one that is already putting up elite numbers.

TA30: The MLB power rankings have the Red Sox cruising, the Pirates sinking and the Dodgers reviving
Matthew Kory | The Athletic | June 4, 2018

23. Minnesota Twins (last week: 22)

Eddie Rosario hit three homers to beat the Indians on Sunday, and it didn't look like any of the three pitches he hit out were strikes. So how do you pitch a guy who hits pitches a foot outside, and three inches too high, both for home runs? Do you throw him 80 mph meatballs down the middle? Whatever the trick is, the Indians might want to figure it out.

Buy, Sell or Hold? How every MLB team should spend their next two months
Jim Bowden | The Athletic | June 5, 2018

Most major-league general managers tend to break the season down into three parts. The first two months, in April and May, they get to know their team — are they contenders, or do they need to start rebuilding? And what are the organization's precise acquisition needs? The next two months, June and July, are used to prepare, negotiate and try to make any trades necessary either to contend, to improve chances of winning in the postseason, to rebuild for future years, or sometimes just to maintain the status quo. Then in the final two months of August and September, GMs are preparing for final waiver trades, September call-ups, roster tweaks, postseason rosters, or starting to play younger players to benefit them down the road.

So, with two months of the season gone, and the draft over, it's a good time to look at all 30 teams to see how each of them should be spending their next two months.

Minnesota Twins

BUY OR SELL: BUY

The Twins are good enough to contend with the Indians for the division and also for the second wild-card berth, especially if they can get four of their most important bats going: Byron Buxton, Miguel Sanó, Logan Morrison and Brian Dozier, all of whom have struggled. The Twins need to attempt to improve their catching situation, which is a little short after the season-ending injury to Jason Castro. Perhaps a trade for the Dodgers' Austin Barnes, the Red Sox's Blake Swihart or the Rays' Wilson Ramos might make sense.

How analytics helped the Twins choose Trevor Larnach as their first-round pick
Dan Hayes | The Athletic | June 5, 2018

Everything that Oregon State outfielder Trevor Larnach did on the field this season impressed the Twins.

The Twins used the 20th overall selection of Monday's amateur draft to pick Larnach, who has hit .327/.455/.626 with 13 doubles, 17 homers and 65 RBIs this season. What's more, Larnach improved his draft stock by stepping up for the 47-10-1 Beavers after fellow teammate and first-rounder Nick Madrigal suffered an injury and missed 26 games. Larnach's outstanding 2018 campaign also follows a strong showing in the Cape Cod League last summer.

Combine those factors with a strong analytical assessment and the Twins were pleased to find Larnach — whom scouting director Sean Johnson says already has an agreement in place — available when they picked on Monday night.

"He's a college player who hasn't hit his stride yet," Johnson said. "His body has gotten bigger, stronger, he's still filling out. His raw power has taken a step forward this spring."

MLBPipeline.com had Larnach — who projects as a corner outfielder — rated as their 26th overall draft prospect on the board. BaseballAmerica.com ranked Larnach 27th overall. MLBPipeline graded Larnach's hit and power tools at 55 on the 20-80 scouting scale.

Larnach displayed his above-average power more often this season, increasing his homer total by 14 from three round-trippers as a sophomore. He also finished with 11 more extra-base hits.

Larnach said the increase was the result of working on his swing for several hours a day during the offseason. A student of the game, Larnach knew he'd be a key player in the Oregon State lineup and wanted to tap into his power.

"We worked on everything from approach to mechanics, which is the most important part as far as allowing that power to play in the game," Larnach said. "I've done everything from changing my batting stance ... using my hip a lot more, working on the load, working on the gather. There's so much different stuff that I've learned and there's even a lot more that I still need to do. I'm not done yet."

The Twins suspect Larnach has only begun to discover his power. They compared the exit velocity Larnach's bat creates with Brent Rooker, whom the Twins selected with the 35th pick in the 2017 draft. Even though some other undefined areas may have deterred them, the Twins said Larnach's analytics matched up with a lot of what their scouts saw. That pairing has them pleased with their pick.

"He had a pretty low launch angle, but his exit velocity was right at the top of the country," Johnson said. "He was just ahead of Rooker, who obviously had an awesome spring last year. Those were some things, a collaborative decision, we just felt like this guy represented what our scouting department and our (research and development) group, we kind of came together to sift through a few statistics that gave him some trouble and lined up the visual scouting performances we'd seen and the evaluations and we put it together to make this guy make sense at our pick."

Now in their second season running the Twins, chief baseball officer Derek Falvey and general manager Thad Levine have more information at their fingertips while conducting the draft than they did a year ago. Beginning last August with the addition of Daniel Adler, the Twins hired anywhere between 5-10 employees to fill out their research and development department. More input from R&D in the forms of new models and systems has provided the Twins with more sources of information when conducting the draft.

"We're using a lot of models and systems and evidence to help us drive our draft board and help us make the best decisions," Falvey said. "We're able to use it to help inform discussions and conversations around what we think translates to being successful at the major-league level. It will help us differentiate."

Though there isn't a team emphasis on exit velocity at Oregon State, Larnach is familiar with the subject. He's aware it's the byproduct of his late-night offseason workout sessions with an instructor.

Monday was the kind of day that made all the effort worth it for Larnach, who can't officially sign until the Beavers are eliminated from the College World Series — they host the Gophers, coincidentally, in this weekend's Super Regional. He was at a draft party seated next to Madrigal when he was selected fourth overall by the Chicago White Sox. Though he had an idea he'd be picked on Monday — several mock drafts had him going 14th to the Seattle Mariners — Larnach was stressed until the Twins called.

"I know it's the era of launch angle and exit velocity and all that type of stuff," Larnach said. "I've kind of educated myself on it and learning the swing and mechanics.

"I'm glad I caught their attention."