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Looking for better results, Gibson faces Angels
Shane Jackson | MLB.com | July 4, 2017

The Angels and Twins continue a three-game set at Target Field on Tuesday, as a pair of right-handers take the mound. Los Angeles’ JC Ramirez and Minnesota's Kyle Gibson will face off during the Independence Day matchup.

Gibson (4-6, 6.11 ERA) allowed five runs (three earned) across 5 2/3 innings against the Red Sox in his last start. Meanwhile, the Dodgers tagged Ramirez (7-6, 4.60) with six runs (five earned) in 5 2/3 innings in his previous outing.

Ramirez has faced the Twins once, on June 2 at Angel Stadium. He gave up three homers in 4 1/3 innings, allowing seven runs and recording three strikeouts. Gibson started for the Twins that night, tossing 5 2/3 innings of two-run ball to earn the victory.

Things to know about this game

• Gibson has made seven career starts against the Angels, going 1-2 with a 5.77 ERA over 39 innings.

• Some of Gibson’s struggles this season can be attributed to a bit of misfortune. There’s a noticeable gap between Gibson’s expected batting average against (.282), a Statcast metric that takes into account the quality of contact, and his actual figure (.317). The right-hander is also yielding a .204 average against on “poor contact”, the second-highest rate among pitchers who have thrown at least 1,000 pitches, well above the league average of .142.

• Ramirez has not allowed a run in the first inning in any of his last four starts, dating back to June 13. Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw has the longest active such streak (11).
Mauer, Kepler HRs power Twins past Angels
Rhett Bollinger & Shane Jackson | MLB.com | July 4, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- Rookie Adalberto Mejia threw seven strong innings, backed by homers from Joe Mauer and Max Kepler, to lead the Twins to a 9-5 win over the Angels on Monday night at Target Field.

Mauer hit a two-run homer as part of a three-run second, while Kepler -- who had four hits and three RBIs -- added a solo shot in the fifth off Angels starter Alex Meyer, who allowed five runs over five innings against his former team. Meyer gave up six hits, walking four and striking out six.

The Twins hadn't had a starter go seven innings since June 21, but Mejia (4-3) helped save the bullpen with his outing. The lefty gave up three runs on nine hits and a walk, striking out five.

"[Mejia] stepped up," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Offensively, it was nice to see a lot of guys contribute. Joe's homer early was huge and we kept adding on, which was big for us at the end of the game. It was just a good night. We ran the bases aggressively, and we made some nice plays defensively."

After being selected as an All-Star for the first time in his career on Sunday, Twins third baseman Miguel Sano collected three hits, including a two-run double in the sixth that made it 7-2. Luis Valbuena hit a leadoff homer in the seventh for the Angels, and Martin Maldonado had a two-run shot in the eighth, but the Twins scored a pair of runs in the eighth on an RBI single from Kepler and a wild pitch.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED
Costly balk: With two outs and runners at first and third in the second, Meyer tried to pick off Byron Buxton at first base, after Buxton tried to steal on the previous pitch that was fouled off by Mauer. But Meyer was called for a balk, bringing home a run as he appeared to be rattled by the call. On the next pitch, Mauer crushed a two-run homer to give the Twins a 3-0 lead.

"That's just part of it, you have to be better at handling it than I was," Meyer said. "I was just confused. I honestly didn't know what I did. The umpire told me I was moving my leg, and I didn't think I was. It's obviously something I will have to look at and make an adjustment."

Mejia settles down: The Angels opened the fourth with three straight hits, including a two-run single from Andrelton Simmons, to cut their deficit to 4-2. But Mejia prevented further damage, getting Maldonado and Valbuena to fly out to center before striking out Danny Espinosa to end the inning.

"I was always calm," Mejia said. "I just tried to think about getting the batters out, and stayed calm."

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS
Maldonado's nine home runs are the most by an Angels catcher prior to the All-Star break since Bengie Molina had nine in the first half of 2003.

TWINS MAKE ROSTER MOVE
After the game, the Twins activated infielder Ehire Adrianza from the 10-disabled list and optioned first baseman/designated hitter Kennys Vargas to Triple-A Rochester. Adrianza had been out since June 22 with a stomach ailment that caused him to lose 10 pounds. Vargas had been slumping recently, hitting .231/.271/.410 with seven homers in 44 games.

DOZIER SCRATCHED
Twins second baseman Brian Dozier was scratched from the lineup with lower back tightness, and is day to day. Mauer replaced him atop the lineup, while Eduardo Escobar started at second.

WHAT'S NEXT
Angels: Right-hander JC Ramirez (7-6, 4.60 ERA) is slated to start for the Halos on Tuesday at 11:10 a.m. PT. He faced the Twins on June 2, allowing three home runs across 4 1/3 innings. Last time out, the Dodgers tagged Ramirez with six runs (five earned) over 5 2/3 frames.
Twins: Right-hander Kyle Gibson (4-6, 6.11) starts for the Twins in the second game of the series on Tuesday at 1:10 p.m. CT on Independence Day. Gibson gave up five runs (three earned) over 5 2/3 innings in a loss to the Red Sox on Thursday.
MINNEAPOLIS -- Coming off a road trip of 11 games in 10 days that didn't feature many strong performances from their starting pitchers, the Twins were hopeful rookie left-hander Adalberto Mejia could give them some length against the Angels on Monday.

Mejia did, throwing seven strong innings to give the bullpen some much-needed rest in a 9-5 win at Target Field. It was the first time a Twins starter went seven innings since June 21, and the first other than Ervin Santana or Jose Berrios since Mejia went seven on May 21.

"He stepped up," manager Paul Molitor said. "He's been giving us some good games here as of late. It was nice to see him go deep tonight. I don't know the last time we had someone go seven innings other than Santana or Berrios. It was a pick-me-up for us."

Mejia threw 69 of his 103 pitches for strikes, while allowing three runs on nine hits and a walk, with five strikeouts. The left-hander reached 95 mph with his fastball, while mixing in 29 changeups and 28 sliders to keep hitters off balance.

"It feels good to help the team like that," said Mejia, who improved to 4-3 with a 4.32 ERA. "I've been trying to pitch far into games, and little by little, it's been happening."

Mejia has been pitching better of late, posting a 2.01 ERA over his last four starts. The 24-year-old with 12 career starts said he's feeling more comfortable in the Majors, and that he's learned not to panic or put extra pressure on himself on the mound.

Mejia said he kept that mentality in the fourth, when he allowed three straight hits, including a two-run single from Andrelton Simmons to cut the Twins' lead to 4-2. But Mejia settled down, not allowing another run until Luis Valbuena's leadoff homer in the seventh.

"It helps me stay calm like I've been," Mejia said. "It's been working. Just throwing strikes and getting hitters out, that mentality has been working for me. It helps to know it's been working."

Mejia's recent run has impressed Molitor, especially considering those four starts have come against the Indians (twice), Red Sox and Angels.

"It's one of those things where he's faced good teams and he's held his own," Molitor said. "He's starting to trust that his stuff can play up here. It's nice he's using all his pitches. The changeup is obviously a good pitch but with that slider we saw some swings and misses down and in against righties."

MINNEAPOLIS -- Hall of Famer Rod Carew took an important step in his recovery from heart and kidney transplants, as he flew for the first time since the operation in mid-December. Carew returned to Minnesota, where he played with the Twins from 1967-78.

Carew, along with his wife, Rhonda, met with both of his former organizations -- the Twins and Angels -- at Angel Stadium in Anaheim on June 1. But this time, he made it to Target Field for the first time since last summer, when he was still on the transplant waitlist. The Angels, who he played for from 1979-85, were in Minneapolis on Monday.

"It's great to come back. This is my first trip flying, so I was really looking forward to it," Carew said. "Every time I come back to the Twin Cities, I feel like I'm coming back home. I was a kid when I started playing here. A lot of people saw me grow up and do a lot of good things with this organization, so it's good to come home."

Carew, who suffered a massive heart attack while golfing near his home in Southern California on Sept. 20, 2015, said he continues to rehab after the surgeries with the help of Rhonda, and is getting stronger by the day. But his main message, in conjunction with the Heart of 29 Campaign, is for people to get their hearts checked, because he thought he was healthy before suffering the nearly fatal heart attack.

"I've been doing some cardio rehab, and things are coming along good," Carew said. "It's been something that I don't want to go through again. I don't want any of my friends or anyone that I know to go through, because it was something else. I'm so grateful my partner [Rhonda] was there with me throughout the whole trip."

Carew, an 18-time All-Star and seven-time batting champion, was honored before the game with a ceremony looking back at his 1977 season in which he won the American League MVP Award, and nearly hit .400. He finished at .388, but said he'll never forget going over the .400 mark on June 26 of that year with a 4-for-5 performance.
"I've won quite a few awards throughout the 19 years that I played in the big leagues, but the one thing that I always tell people, it's not the seven silver bats that I won, or the MVP Award, or the Rookie of the Year," Carew said. "It's one day playing out a the old Met Stadium against the White Sox, and getting six standing ovations during the course of the ballgame."

Carew, who threw out the first pitch, met with his old friend, and Twins legend, Tony Oliva -- the two were roommates on the road -- and also caught up with Twins manager Paul Molitor and Angels skipper Mike Scioscia. Both clubs wore Heart of 29 patches during the game.

"We were fortunate to catch up in Anaheim, and he spoke to our club out there, giving a powerful message about taking advantage of every day," Molitor said. "For him to travel for the first time since the procedure and be here, it just brings tremendous awareness to his cause. And the fact that we're acknowledging one of the best players in the history of the game."

**Adalberto Mejia gets homestand started right as Twins top Angels**

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2017

The Twins are looking for someone to step up and join Ervin Santana and Jose Berrios as a reliable arm in the rotation.

Maybe they should be looking for someone to pitch like Adalberto Mejia.

Mejia has been the best thing going for Twins starters of late, as he showed again Monday night in beating the Angels 9-5 at Target Field. The lefthander has won his past three starts, an achievement that Santana or Berrios can't boast right now.

Mejia went seven innings to match a career high. He is the first Twins pitcher since Berrios on June 21 — 13 games ago — to go that deep into a game. The last Twin other than Santana or Berrios to pitch at least seven innings? That would be Mejia, on May 21 vs. Kansas City — 42 games ago.

Joe Mauer and Max Kepler homered for the Twins, with Kepler’s blast part of a four-hit night. An announced crowd of 36,182, Target Field’s largest since Opening Day, was on hand for the game and the fireworks show afterward.

Mejia (4-3) gave up three runs on nine hits and a walk with strikeouts. With a five-run lead, Twins manager Paul Molitor sent Mejia out for the seventh inning having thrown 90 pitches. Luis Valbuena greeted him with a first-pitch home run, but Mejia got the next three outs.

"It feels good to be able to hold a team like that," Mejia said. "I've been trying to go this far in the games, and little by little it's been happening."

Molitor knows he won't manage meaningful games during the second half of the season if there's a dropoff from his rotation after Santana and Berrios. If Mejia is going to step up as the No. 3 starter, the rookie has to continue to work on finishing off hitters.

For instance, he faced only three batters in the third inning, but he needed 18 pitches to get through it. He threw 21 pitches in the fourth, pitching out of trouble after the first three Angels got hits to cut the Twins’ lead to 4-2. Mejia should be aiming for more innings like the second, when he threw only eight pitches, or the fifth, when he threw 11.

Mejia, 24, had scoreless outings in each of his previous two starts, but he needed 104 pitches to get through five innings at Cleveland and 101 in 5⅔ innings at Boston.

"He is facing good teams and he has held down some pretty good lineups," Molitor said. "I just think he's starting to trust that his stuff can play up here.

"It's nice that he's using all of his pitches."

The Twins gave Mejia a 3-0 lead in the second inning by working over former Twins righthander Alex Meyer. With runners on first and third, Meyer was called for a balk, scoring the game’s first run. His next pitch was hammered by Mauer into the bullpens in left center for a two-run homer.

Kepler hit an RBI double in the third and added a solo homer in the fifth, and Sano, who will join Santana at the All-Star Game next week in
Miami, added a two-run double in the sixth for a 7-2 Twins lead.

The Angels pulled within 7-5 when Martin Maldonado hit a two-run homer off Tyler Duffey in the eighth, but the Twins got the two runs back in the bottom of the inning and Brandon Kintzler closed it out.

Mejia helped get the Twins' homestand off to a winning start after they lost six of eight to go 5-6 on their recent road trip. Now they look to finish strong before the All-Star break.

"We needed a little pick-me-up there," Molitor said, "and he gave it to us."

**Rod Carew receives warm welcome upon his return to Twin Cities**

*La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2017*

Rod Carew was worried about his fastball.

The seven-time American League batting champion with the Twins was asked to throw out the first pitch during his return to Target Field on Monday, so he headed for the indoor batting cages to test his arm.

"I don't know how I'm going to get it up there," he said.

Carew, 71, later took to the field under a standing ovation, making his first Minnesota appearance since undergoing a heart transplant on Dec. 16. The Hall of Famer walked out to second base and doffed his cap. The stadium videoboard showed a picture from 1977 — when his run at batting .400 ended at .388 — in which Carew was in a similar pose.

He then walked to the front of the pitcher’s mound and delivered a strike to old friend Tony Oliva as fans cheered.

It's been a long road for Carew since he suffered a massive heart attack in September 2015. But he has made strides since surgery and has been cleared to travel, and the Twins couldn't wait to honor him for his MVP season 40 years ago as well as his rookie of the year campaign in 1967.

Carew also is using the time to promote his Heart of 29 campaign to encourage people to have their hearts checked regularly.

"It's great to come back," said Carew, who also met with the Twins before they played the Angels in California last month. "This is my first trip flying, so I was really looking forward to it. Every time I come back to the Twin Cities I feel like I'm coming back home."

Carew stopped by Twins manager Paul Molitor’s office Monday afternoon for a chat. Then he spoke to some players in the batting cages.

"For him to travel for the first time since the procedure and be here just brought some tremendous awareness of his cause, the Heart of 29 program, and the fact that we are going to acknowledge one of the greatest players in the history of the game," Molitor said.

Dozier scratched

Twins second baseman Brian Dozier was scratched less than an hour before Monday's game because of lower back tightness.

The Twins didn't believe the injury was serious. Eduardo Escobar took over at second base and batted second while Joe Mauer moved up to the leadoff spot, only the second time all season Mauer has hit first.

Santiago situation

Molitor met with Hector Santiago on Monday to make sure they were on the same page after the lefthander's outing Sunday at Kansas City.

Santiago, apparently without discussing it with the coaching staff, took a few miles off his fastball in an effort to throw more strikes. According to Brooks Baseball, his fastball averaged 87.48 miles per hour Sunday, about 3 mph slower than usual.

Molitor saw that, unaware it was intentional, and removed Santiago in the fourth inning. "Watching it, it didn't seem right to me," Molitor said. "It got to a point where I thought it was the best decision. I will stand by the decision."

Santiago also questioned the positioning of the outfield when he gave up a run-scoring double to Eric Hosmer. But Molitor was more concerned
about Santiago's game plan and wanted to talk with him.

"I don’t have any problems with players’ emotions and being able to express what he feels," Molitor said. "Hector has been really, really good for me as far as taking the ball and stepping up when I needed him."

Santiago was seen entering Molitor's office moments after the manager met with the media.

Etc.

- Infielder Ehire Adrianza (right oblique strain) will be activated from the disabled list Tuesday, with Kennys Vargas sent back to Class AAA Rochester. Vargas went 1-for-4 as the designated hitter Monday.
- Lefthander Craig Breslow (right thoracic rib soreness) threw around 40 pitches during a simulated game and said the session went well.

**Scoggins: Target Field fences too distant? Not anymore**

*Chip Scoggins | Star Tribune | July 4, 2017*

Twins President Dave St. Peter has an admission. Home runs were hit so infrequently at Target Field its first two years of operation that team executives developed a plan to move the fences in.

“Terry Ryan to his credit said it was way too early to consider anything of that thought,” St. Peter said of the former Twins general manager.

Good thing they took his advice. Target Field suddenly has become a launching pad without any adjustments.

Target Field had produced 127 home runs this season a rate of 3.02 per game, third-highest in Major League Baseball, according to ESPN’s Home Run Tracker website.

That’s 11 more home runs in 42 games than what the stadium had in its inaugural season: 116. Nearly twice as many homers are being hit now as in 2010, when Target Field ranked 27th in home runs.

In fact, the stadium is on pace for more home runs this season than the first two seasons combined. The Twins and Angels combined for four more Monday in a 9-5 Twins victory.

“I know they didn’t move the fences in,” Brian Dozier joked.

“The weather [during a June homestand], it’s been flying out more than I’ve ever seen it,” Joe Mauer said.

“I’m a firm believer in it — and I don’t know if there is science behind it or not — but the concrete drying,” Jack Morris said.

“Al Gore is smiling somewhere,” Paul Molitor said, laughing.

So add global warming to the list, along with curing concrete, shifting wind patterns, abysmal pitching, more power hitters and a leaguewide love affair with home runs.

Let’s start with the fact that home runs have increased dramatically. MLB teams combined to hit 5,610 home runs last season, second-highest total in history behind 5,693 in 2000. The league is on pace to obliterate that record this season.

The reward of a home run has lessened negative perceptions of strikeouts.

“Guys are swinging out of their shoes,” said Morris, former World Series pitching hero. “Strikeout is not a big deal, but a home run is kind of cool.”

But why has Target Field in particular experienced such a significant uptick?

Poor pitching seems the most logical explanation and prevailing factor. The Twins had a staff ERA of 3.95 in 2010, giving up 64 home runs at home. Their ERA plummeted to 5.08 last season (29th in the league), when they surrendered 114 home runs at Target Field.
Their staff already has given up 74 homers at Target Field this year, second-highest total at home in baseball.

However, Twins hitters also are launching more homers at home. They hit 52 in 2010 compared to 98 last season and 53 this season.

Doziers credits a lineup more equipped to smash.

“I feel like we've got a lot of power on the team this year,” he said.

Mauer’s theory on weather has merit. The ball travels better in day games and in warmer weather. According to Mark Seeley, professor and extension climatologist at the University of Minnesota, 21 of the first 30 home games had warmer-than-normal temperatures.

“Less dense air, longer fly balls,” Seeley said in an e-mail.

Now about that concrete settling ...

That theory has evolved into a punchline over the years. Just wait until the concrete settles ... The origin apparently stems from a comment made by former AL MVP Jason Giambi, who suggested that balls might travel further once concrete in the new stadium cured.

That theory has been passed along enough over the years that multiple people interviewed offered that explanation. St. Peter was not one of them.

“I’m not a physicist or an engineer,” he joked.

Whatever the case, Target Field is shedding its reputation as a pitcher’s park. Not to everyone though.

“That honestly, I would rank Target Field as one of the worst to hit one out of,” Dozier said. “Down the lines it plays pretty true. What we talk about it being a graveyard is right-center to left-center, night games, gobbles up home runs. You can ask anybody around the league on that.”

Anthony Swarzak has pitched at Target Field for the Twins and as an opponent. Now with the White Sox, he agrees with Dozier.

“In my mind I think this is a pitcher’s park,” he said. “If you can keep them hitting the ball to center field — other than [Miguel] Sano — you’re going to be all right.”

St. Peter calls Target Field “pretty fair” and says it “probably plays somewhere in the middle. I’m not sure it’s fair to label it as a pitcher’s park or hitter’s park.”

That was their original goal in creating the stadium’s dimensions. In a span of eight seasons, the ballpark has a chance to finish in the top five and bottom five in the majors in home runs.

“At this point, I can assure you there are no plans to move the fences in or out,” St. Peter said.

Even Twins aren't above scrounging for clothes in team's lost and found

Aaron Reiss | Star Tribune | July 4, 2017

Tyler Duffey admitted it — he has worn another man’s underwear.

But the circumstances, to the Twins reliever, made it completely acceptable. It was a pair of long johns, on a chilly day, while playing in Rochester, N.Y., and he grabbed them from the team’s lost and found.

Yes, even in professional baseball, where players’ lockers sometimes overflow with team apparel, there is a lost-and-found locker. It’s rarely utilized, players said, but some men with seemingly endless supplies of clothing would prefer something not go to waste.

So Duffey pilfered the long johns.

“I’d wear another layer in between,” he explained. “And that was in minor leagues.”

Fellow reliever Buddy Boshers, a locker neighbor, groaned in disgust.
“Hey, I don’t care,” Duffey said. “It was cold in Rochester. They were Jose Pinto’s. I think. I’m pretty sure.”

“And you stole them,” Boshers said.

Duffey emphasized that he did not steal the long johns. But he did not return them.

“He didn’t want them,” Duffey said. “They were in the lost and found, so they became mine.”

Most poaching of teammates’ clothing occurs at the end of seasons, when it’s clear something that has gone into the “abyss” for six months will not return to its owner.

“It’s a never-ending pile of clean laundry, and toward the end of the year you can sift through and see what you want out of it,” Duffey said. “I’m notorious.”

Duffey once took home a pullover. He planned to gift it but realized it had been worn for much of the season. It was “trash,” he determined.

Backup catcher Chris Gimenez scanned the lost and found recently, hoping to find his promotional “K Cancer” shirt. He figured it was there because he had written his No. 38 in a corner of the shirt, not on the collar, and this was where equipment managers leave clothing where once inked-on numbers have washed off.

Gimenez thumbed through hangers to look for his XL shirt. Shoes filled the floor space below the locker. Pairs of sliding shorts rested on a wall-mounted hook. The catcher shared a rule.

“I’m definitely not going dumpster diving for somebody’s underwear,” Gimenez said. “A shirt? All right, I can deal with that.”

He has taken sliding shorts from a lost and found once during his career, but they were his size and brand, so he “felt like it was a pretty educated guess” they originally were his.

Twins clubhouse staffer Frank Hanzlik said the clothes most prone to ending up lost are ones that aren’t team-issued.

“Usually it’s found,” Brian Dozier said. “But sometimes we’ve got to go to another level.”

That means another club shipping even a single item to the Twins if a player leaves something on the road. Hanzlik compared it to leaving a phone charger at a hotel. You could buy a new one, but you want yours.

When you play as often as big leaguers do, you develop comforts and superstitions. Robbie Grossman wears a discontinued model of wristband he’s careful not to lose. For road trips, Byron Buxton packs two of “pretty much everything” except warmup shoes and shower shoes, which he said he never forgets.

“When we go on the road, everybody triple checks everything,” the center fielder said.

Form-fitting base layers can become increasingly comfortable with each wear and wash — and therefore more precious. And then there’s superstition.

Gimenez said when he played for the Seattle Mariners, a teammate would number each of his athletic supporters, a practice Gimenez adopted. The player hit well in jock No. 16, which he once left in California, Gimenez said. The opposing club mailed it to the Mariners.

Hanzlik said these instances are rare but that all players receive such treatment if they request it. Boshers believes it depends on how valuable a player is to the team.

Duffey asked a different question: “How lucky is that jock?”

Multiple players in the Twins clubhouse agreed Miguel Sano is the most prone to losing items. The 24-year-old, whose double locker overflows next to the lost and found, offered a simple explanation.

“I have a lot of stuff,” he said. “I have a lot of cleats. A lot of shirts. Sometimes, when I use, I don’t put my number. This is because they got lost
and found.”

Sano is not a superstitious man. He said he likes to wear different shirts throughout the week.

Asked whether he’s ever taken another teammate’s clothing, he looked at the dugout floor and admitted he had, as a practical joke. But there is a line he will not cross:

“I would never use underwear from somebody.”

**Twins will be careful with Brian Dozier’s sore back, other notes**

*La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 4, 2017*

DOZIER’S SORE BACK: Brian Dozier told the Twins he woke up Monday with some back spasms but thought he would be ready to play once he got warmed up. "But batting practice was difficult,” Molitor said. That led to Dozier being scratched about an hour before the scheduled first pitch. The Twins will be very cautious with Dozier, so I don’t expect him to be in the lineup on Tuesday since it’s a day game. It could be a blessing in disguise for Dozier. I think he still has some lingering issues with his left ankle, which he rolled last month while playing second base.

ROSTER MOVE: After the game, the Twins reinstated Ehire Adrianza off the disabled list and optioned Kennys Vargas to Class AAA Rochester. Vargas actually was 1-for-4 on Monday but as batting .133 over his previous 14 games. He has stopped drawing walks and needs to take a step back and regroup. One of the reasons the Twins didn’t bring Byung Ho Park up north -after a strong camp - was to give Vargas at bats. Twins manager Paul Molitor said at the time that the move was temporary, but it wasn't. Vargas was to get his chance this year, and has blown it. The combination of Molitor needing Robbie Grossman in the lineup and a 13th pitcher mean someone has to go, and that's the guy hitting .142 over his last 15 games. The coaching staff has given Vargas some things to work on while at Rochester. Who knows when he will be back? The Twins might need to carry 13 pitchers the rest of the season.

MEYER’S BALK: Alex Meyer and Angels skipper Mike Scioscia weren't very pleased about Meyer being charged with a balk in the second inning. But the Twins believe Meyer buckled his front leg, a move righthanders trying to get away with. "I think a lot of teams are teaching it now, to some degree, because it is so quick it is hard to detect unless you slow it down," Molitor said. That allowed the first run of the game to score. Meyer then served up a two-run homer to Joe Mauer. Meyer showed a lot of promise with the Twins, and some fans are still howling after he was part of the Nolasco-Santiago trade. But Meyer showed some tendencies the Twins are familiar with. He let the second inning get away from him. He's walked at least four batters in seven starts this season, tied for the most in baseball. Santiago is clearly struggling, but it is not judgment day for this deal yet.

**Twins pull out of slide, beat Angels behind Mejia**

*Chad Graff | Pioneer Press | July 3, 2017*

Twenty-one outs through a much-needed quality start from a Twins pitcher, Adalberto Mejia smacked his hand into his mitt and waved his hat to cheering fans, who recognized the importance of his strong outing.

Mejia’s performance led to a slump-busting 9-5 victory by the Twins over the Los Angeles Angels on Monday night at Target Field in front of 36,182 fans, the most since Opening Day.

A team with one of major league baseball’s worst starting staffs had endured one of its worst stretches in the past week, which led to six losses in eight games. A Twins starter hadn’t thrown six full innings a full week, leaving an already beleaguered bullpen in need of help.

On Monday, Mejia, who hadn’t thrown six innings in a month, worked his way out of jams to pitch seven innings of three-run baseball while striking out five. Even as the Angeles knocked nine hits against Mejia, he managed damage and earned his fourth win of the season.

“He’s stepped up and has given us some good games of late,” manager Paul Molitor said. “It was nice to see him go deeper. I don’t know the last time we had seven innings from someone other than (Ervin) Santana or (Jose) Berrios. We needed a little pick-me-up there, and he gave it to us.”

Mejia’s outing was just the second quality start for the Twins in the past 13 games, the only other one coming from Santana.

Meanwhile, Twins hitters peppered former teammate Alex Meyer, traded to the Angels last season, and chased the right-handed starter after five innings.
The Twins (42-40) never trailed after a three-run second inning came courtesy of a first-pitch fastball that Joe Mauer deposited into the bullpen in left-center field for a three-run homer.

The Twins improved their home record to 17-25 in successfully opening the second half of the season.

Max Kepler, with a fifth-inning homer and eighth-inning RBI, and Miguel Sano, with a two-run double in the seventh, provided insurance for the Twins, who tallied 13 hits.

“Offensively, a lot of guys contributed,” Molitor said. “Joe’s homer was big and gave us a cushion early, and we kept adding on to it which made a big difference at the end of the game. It was just a good night.”

Mejia’s start was especially promising for a team that has relied heavily on Santana and Berrios. If his last three outings are any indication, Mejia could help solidify a rotation that seems always in flux.

Monday’s win was Mejia’s third straight after not allowing a run in his previous two starts, wins in Cleveland and Boston.

“I just think he’s starting to trust that his stuff can play up here,” Molitor said. “And it’s nice when he’s using all his pitches. The changeup is obviously a good pitch, but so is that slider when he stays on top of it. The more success that comes his way in terms of going deeper in games and putting wins next to his name, I think he feels better about what he’s doing.”

The Angels got within two runs in the top of the eighth inning after Tyler Duffey allowed a two-run homer, but the Twins plated a pair on their next trip to the plate.

Mejia’s strong night meant only Duffey and Brandon Kintzler were needed out of the bullpen, a rare easy night for that group.

“It feels good being able to help the team like that,” Mejia said. “I’ve been trying to go this far in games, and little by little it’s been happening.”

Twins manager Paul Molitor doesn’t anticipate problems after communication issues Sunday

Chad Graff | Pioneer Press | July 3, 2017

A day after miscommunication between manager Paul Molitor and pitcher Hector Santiago closed the Twins’ road trip with a sixth loss in eight games, Molitor said he stood by his decision to pull Santiago after just 58 pitches, which prompted the pitcher to vocalize his dismay Sunday.

But before the Twins began a seven-game homestand Monday that leads into the all-star break, Molitor said he planned to meet with Santiago about their lapse in communication.

“I don’t anticipate any problems,” Molitor said.

At the heart of the issue Sunday was Santiago’s velocity. He said was throwing his fastball around 5 mph slower than usual in order to throw more strikes. Molitor said he felt he needed to pull the starting pitcher early, in part because of the dip in velocity, to keep the Twins in the game.

“I’ll stand by the decision,” Molitor said. “I didn’t have a lot of confidence in how it was going to proceed from that point.”

Molitor said he’s not opposed to his pitchers throwing their fastball slower early in an at-bat to try to get ahead of hitters, adding that staff ace Ervin Santana will occasionally do it.

But he didn’t feel Santiago was doing it effectively enough Sunday when he allowed four earned runs in 3 1/3 innings.

“It just didn’t add up for me in watching that,” Molitor said. “I get trying to throw more strikes. And guys can pitch with fairly significant variance to their fastball where it’s 87-93 mph. But it just seemed a little funny to be watching him throw what I thought were significantly slower speeds.”

Molitor said that in the course of a long season, disputes are bound to occur in the clubhouse. He added that Santiago has been a good teammate this season and wasn’t upset that the pitcher voiced his displeasure after the game.

“I don’t have a problem with a player’s emotion and being able to express what he feels,” Molitor said. “Hector has been really good for me
stepping up when I needed him, including taking that extra-inning game when I needed him earlier in the year.”

SANO READY FOR ASG

With third baseman Miguel Sano, 24, bound for the All-Star Game next week, Molitor was reminded that it was only 18 months ago that the Twins decided to try to move the 260-pounder to right field.

“Whose idea was that?” Molitor joked.

The manager said he wasn’t surprised that it took Sano only three MLB seasons to reach an All-Star Game. He entered Monday’s game with 20 home runs and a .272 batting average.

“I think we all thought that would happen,” Molitor said. “I don’t know if it’s overly early based on what I thought that kid was always capable of. It was just a matter of how he was going to put it together. He’s learned a lot about playing up here in a short time. What the commitment is, your ability to bounce back.

“The game is not always going to come to you easily. You’ve got to overcome a lot of adversity. All these areas, he’s grown exponentially in a really short time. And there’s still a lot more in there.

“I think that’s the exciting part for Twins fans. When he really gets it and can start doing some of these things day in and day out for a full season, it’s going to be really special.”

BRIEFLY

Molitor indicated that injured utility infielder Ehire Adrianza could be activated from the disabled list Tuesday, but the team wasn’t yet sure who would be sent down to make room for Adrianza. ... Injured reliever Craig Breslow worked out at Target Field on Monday, but the team isn’t sure yet when Breslow will face live hitting. ... Brian Dozier was a late scratch from Monday’s lineup because of lower back tightness.

Twins legend Rod Carew returns to throw out first pitch
Chad Graff | Pioneer Press | July 3, 2017

Six months after a 13-hour heart and kidney transplant, Twins legend Rod Carew wore a retro Twins jersey Monday and doffed his cap, back in Minnesota for the first time since a surgery he called life-changing.

Fifteen months after suffering a heart attack, Carew received the organs of a deceased former NFL player in December. He has become an advocate for organ donors, returning Monday in part to share that message.

“I carry him with me every day inside,” Carew, 71, said of Konrad Reuland, who died at 29 and donated his organs. “They’re part of our family now.”

Partnered with the Twins and his wife, Rhonda, Carew has started a Heart of 29 campaign to raise awareness of heart disease.

The seven-time batting champion threw out the ceremonial first pitch Monday to good friend and fellow Twins legend Tony Oliva before the Twins’ game against the Angels, one of two planned trips this season to Target Field.

He met before the game with fellow hall of famer Paul Molitor, who joked he’d find a lightweight baseball for Carew to throw.

“I haven’t picked up a ball since my operation,” Carew said. “It’s been awhile.”

Even with his MVP season in 1977 and rookie of the year campaign 10 years before that, Carew said the highlight of his career was during a 1977 home game when he received six standing ovations as his batting average climbed above .400 via a 4-for-5 game. He finished that season with a .388 average and ended his career with a .328 average.

“I won quite a few awards throughout the 19 years I played in the big leagues, but the thing that I always tell people is it’s not the silver bats that I won or the MVP Award or the rookie of the year,” Carew said. “It was one (June) day at the old Met Stadium against the White Sox and getting six standing ovations during a ballgame. ... They had watched me grow up.”
Monday’s visit came via Carew’s first flight since the December surgery. He said he hopes to return to full health and be able to golf again in the coming months.

“I’m moving slower,” he said. “Other than that, I’ve been doing some cardio rehab. Things are coming along good. They’re pushing me and making sure I get my work. I’m also trying to push myself.”

When the Twins were in Southern California a month ago for a series against the Angeles, Carew visited and spoke in the clubhouse.

“He had a powerful message about taking advantage of every day,” Molitor said. “For him to travel for the first time since the procedure (is great), and he’s brought some tremendous awareness to his Hearts of 29 program. And the fact is we can acknowledge one of the greatest players of the game.”

Carew said he had been excited for his trip to Minnesota to “visit old friends” and return to the ballpark.

“I was very much looking forward to it,” Carew said. “Every time I come back to the Twin Cities, I feel like I’m coming home. I was a kid when I started playing here.”

Kepler’s 4 hits lift Twins over Angels
Associated Press | July 4, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS — The Twins have sought consistent starting pitchers all season behind Ervin Santana and Jose Berrios.

Another continues to emerge.

Max Kepler tied a career high with four hits, including a home run, Adalberto Mejia earned his third straight win and the Twins beat the Los Angeles Angels 9-5 Monday night.

Joe Mauer also homered and Miguel Sano had three hits for Minnesota, which won for just the third time in nine games.

Mejia (4-3) allowed nine hits and three earned runs in seven innings. He’s given up five earned runs in 22 1/3 innings over his past four starts after allowing eight in a June 12 start. His ERA has dropped from 5.53 to 4.32 in that span.

“Really just being calm, relaxed, being able to throw strikes. Tell myself to throw strikes is what really has kept me focused,” Mejia said through an interpreter.

Prior to Monday, no Twins pitcher other than Santana or Berrios had thrown at least seven innings since Mejia on May 21.

“It’s one of those things where he’s faced some good teams and he’s held off some pretty good lineups,” manager Paul Molitor said. “I just think he’s starting to trust that his stuff can play up here. It’s nice when he’s using all his pitches.”

Sano hit a two-run double in the sixth for a 7-2 Twins lead in front of 36,182 fans, Minnesota’s largest crowd since Opening Day.

Luis Valbuena and Martin Maldonado homered and Andrelton Simmons had three hits for Los Angeles, which has lost four of five.

Angels starter Alex Meyer (3-5) allowed six hits and five earned runs in five innings. The former Twin also walked four and hit a batter.

One strike from getting out of the second inning, Meyer’s balk allowed a run to score. Mauer hit the next pitch out for a two-run home run.

Meyer admits frustration got the better of him.

“You got to be better at handling it probably than I was. I was confused; I honestly didn’t know what I did. Umpire’s telling me I was moving my leg and I didn’t think I was. I’ll have to look at it.”

Kepler, who hit .215 in June, had an RBI double in the third to make it 4-0 and added a solo homer in the fifth. He’s 8 for 13 in four July games with a home run and four doubles.

“You trust your preparation,” Molitor said. “He’s got a beautiful swing. He’s got a quick bat. He’s got a good enough eye. It’s just a matter of
going up there and trusting it.”

Simmons had a two-run single in the fourth for the Angels to end a streak of 13 2-3 scoreless innings for Mejia. Valbuena crushed a solo shot midway up the right field grandstand in the seventh. Maldonado hit his career-high ninth home run in the eighth, a two-run shot off Tyler Duffey.

WELCOME SIGHT

Hall of Famer Rod Carew returned to Minnesota for the first time since having a heart and kidney transplant on Dec. 16, 2016. Carew played with the Twins from 1967-78 and Angels from 1979-85. Both teams have retired his No. 29. He threw out a ceremonial first pitch as Minnesota celebrated the 40th anniversary of Carew’s 1977 MVP season and 50th Anniversary of his 1967 AL Rookie of the Year season.

TRAINERS ROOM

Angels: OF Mike Trout will not play in next week’s All-Star Game as he continues to rehab from a left thumb ligament injury suffered May 28. … Starting RHP Matt Shoemaker is expected to throw three or four innings in his first rehab start Tuesday with Class A Inland Empire. He’s been on the disabled list since June 15 with a right forearm strain.

Twins: 2B Brian Dozier was a late scratch with lower back tightness. He’s listed day to day. … IF Ehire Adrianza was activated after the game with 1B/DH Kennys Vargas sent to Triple-A Rochester. Adrianza had been on the disabled list since June 22 with abdominal issues.

UP NEXT

The Angels’ JC Ramirez (7-6, 4.60) is scheduled to face Minnesota’s Kyle Gibson (4-6, 6.11) in Tuesday’s holiday matinee.

**Twins’ Dozier late scratch with tight back**
Associated Press | July 3, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota second baseman Brian Dozier was removed from the starting lineup about an hour before the Twins’ game against Los Angeles due to lower back tightness.

The team lists Dozier as day to day.

Dozier is hitting .248 this season with 13 home runs and 38 RBIs. Both are second-best on the team behind All-Star third baseman Miguel Sano, who has 20 home runs and 58 RBIs.

First baseman Joe Mauer led off Monday for the second time this season and Eduardo Escobar played second.