Twins' offense goes cold in dreary loss to Rangers
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | August 4, 2017

The mid-50s temperatures suggested football weather, and so did the late-September-sized crowd in Target Field. The Twins may be intent upon proving their front office wrong, may be determined to create a hot streak that carries them back into playoff contention. But on Thursday, they reminded everyone that winter is on its way.

The Twins' offense, in fact, appears to be in hibernation already.

Texas righthander A.J. Griffin and three relievers limited the Twins to just three hits, the second time in three days they’ve sputtered to that season low, and Minnesota fell seven games behind Cleveland in the AL Central race with a 4-1 loss to the Rangers, their eighth defeat in the past 10 games.

“We’ve been having a little bit of a lull offensively,” understated Twins manager Paul Molitor, whose team hasn’t scored a run after the sixth inning in its past eight games. “We didn’t hit many balls hard tonight.”

Another sure sign of September? Using extra players who weren’t in the team’s plans when the season started. August may be only three days old, but the Twins debuted veteran righthander Dillon Gee on Thursday, bringing their roster of pitchers used in 2017 to 30 — a franchise record. True, the old mark of 29 stood for only 10 months, having been set late last season, but it’s an accurate representation of the constant scramble the Twins have undertaken this season to locate major league pitchers.

Gee, though, was effective in his Twins debut, pitching three scoreless innings before surrendering back-to-back singles to open the eighth inning. The pitcher he relieved, though, couldn’t really say the same. Adalberto Mejia, who had allowed two or fewer runs in six of his past eight starts, was inconsistent this time, and right from the start. He gave up a walk and two singles to fall behind 1-0 before he retired a single hitter, but he bounced back by whiffing the next five hitters in a row.

“The first inning, I couldn’t get a grip on the ball,” said Mejia, whose last victory was exactly one month ago. “I think the weather was too cold for me. My hand was too numb.”

He warmed up and settled down for a while, but the Rangers batted around in the fourth inning, scoring three runs after two were out. A double by Mike Napoli and a walk to Carlos Gomez after getting ahead of the former Twins outfielder 0-2 got the lefthander in trouble, and Joey
Gallo made things worse. Mejia got ahead 0-2 again with a pair of slow sliders, but when he kept feeding the same pitch to the Rangers’ second-year slugger, Gallo finally made him pay.

“I don’t think [the pitch] was horrible, it’s the repetitiveness of the pitch — giving a guy a chance to see the spin and knowing where it has to start to be hittable,” Molitor said. “[Gallo] chased a couple early, then didn’t bite on the 0-2 one, and eventually [Mejia] got one out there where he could get extended and still pull it a fair amount of distance.”

Yeah, about 435 feet, more or less, landing in the upper deck in right-center, his 29th blast of the season.

For the trouble the Twins’ pitching caused, though, the real culprit lately remains the Twins’ offense, which has been powerless since Monday’s trade of closer Brandon Kintzler signaled the front office’s skepticism about their chances of a late charge to the postseason. Minnesota has 13 hits and six runs in the three games since then.

Only a walk to Robbie Grossman to lead off the third inning cost Griffin; Byron Buxton slapped a double into the left-field corner, and Grossman sprinted home from first base.

Postgame: Dillon Gee provides what Twins have lacked all year: Long relief
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | August 4, 2017

He’s only pitched once, but it already seems like Dillon Gee is going to be a big help to Paul Molitor. The Twins’ manager has been hamstrung all season by the lack of a long reliever, someone to pitch 3-5 innings when the starter falters early or a game goes extra innings. Each time it happens, the Twins have to scramble for pitching for the next few days, and usually are forced to call someone up from the minors.

“He kind of gave us an idea [that he’s] a piece that’s been missing, a guy that can come in and eat some innings up in those type of ballgames,” Molitor said after Gee’s debut for the Twins on Thursday. “He did a nice job.”

He recorded nine outs, in fact, before he gave up a hit. That made Gee the first Twins reliever in more than two months, since Adam Wilk’s 3.2-inning stint on May 21, to contribute three innings.

It was a long time coming, though. Gee spent five days with the Twins last month as an emergency arm in an overtaxed bullpen, but was sent to Rochester without getting into a game. This time, he’s been in a Twins uniform since Monday.

“It felt really good. ... When I got hot in the pen, it felt like same old thing, like I was getting ready for a start,” said Gee, who went 3-1 with a 2.00 ERA in five starts at Triple-A. “The last time, I hadn’t pitched in more than a week. I was glad to be able to go down and get my innings built up and get a little sharper.”

Not that he objects to long stints between appearances. That’s the job, he said.

“I’m the long guy. If you’re not using me, it’s probably a pretty good thing,” he said. “My job is to come in and try to get deep into games and eat innings.”

Gee started the season with Texas, but was released in June. Did that add any extra incentive on Thursday?

“No, I’m starting to face teams that have released me a couple times now,” Gee joked. “You can’t have a grudge against everybody.”

Trevor Hildenberger makes impression in Twins relief role
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | August 4, 2017

Trevor Hildenberger had almost three dozen friends and family members in the stands at Oakland Coliseum last weekend, all waiting for him to pitch. When he finally did, in the ninth inning of a tie game Sunday, he nearly gave them a memory that would last for a long time.

“They came for three days, saw me throw five pitches, and give up a walk-off tater,” Hildenberger said with a laugh. He can smile about it now, because it didn’t actually happen. Matt Joyce’s blast to left field just missed carrying over the wall, and instead bounced off the top for a leadoff double. And what came next is something that has given Paul Molitor something to think about in these last couple of Brandon Kintzler-less months of the season: Hildenberger struck out five of the next seven batters and kept the score tied.

“He’s pitched well. He’s getting opportunities that seem like more of the game-on-the-line situations,” said Molitor, the Twins manager who
must navigate his way through the late innings without his closer, who was traded to Washington one day after Hildenberger’s big moment. “Especially with the way we are right now, he’s one of those guys I’d like to get in there and see how he responds in those situations.”

It would represent a change for the sidearmer, who until Sunday had appeared in 11 big-league games, all but one of them either when the Twins led by five runs or were trailing. Hildenberger has 52 minor league saves since being drafted in the 22nd round in 2014, so he knows late-inning pressure and believes he can handle it. One of the people who convinced him of it? Kintzler.

“I actually had a talk with Kintzler in spring training this year. I got in a game and it sped up on me a little bit. I got away from my mechanics, I wasn’t holding runners. I needed to get one out, and I think it took me four, five hitters,” Hildenberger said. “Kintzler came in the next inning, pitched, and then he sat me down and talked to me about slowing the game down. You have to center yourself and realize they’re the same hitters as anywhere. If you execute your pitches, you can get them out. That’s a talk I’ll never forget and am really thankful for. I learned a lot of things from him, but that was a huge one.”

He’d like to help out in Molitor’s protect-a-lead rotation, and believes Sunday’s outing gives him the confidence to do so. “It ended up being an outing I can take positives out of. I feel like I made big pitches in big situations, RBI situations,” Hildenberger said. “I’m just concentrating on stringing together some good outings, putting up zeroes and helping the team win. If that includes big situations late in games, I’m ready for it.”

Perkins on mound

Glen Perkins needed only 15 pitches to dispose of three Jupiter Hammerhead hitters on Thursday, recording a strikeout and two flyouts for Class A Fort Myers. The three-time All-Star closer, recovering from shoulder surgery more than a year ago, will return to the Twin Cities this weekend to host Fifteen’s 5K, his charity race, and then probably join Class AA Chattanooga to resume his rehab assignment.

“We’ll try to bump up the competition a little bit,” Molitor said. “Everybody is glad that it’s advancing, stuff-wise.” Perkins’ fastball has topped out at 90 miles per hour, Molitor said.

Etc.

• Kyle Gibson will rejoin the Twins on Saturday and start that night’s game against the Rangers, Molitor said. Gibson, who lost his spot in the rotation to Jaime Garcia nearly two weeks ago, reclaims it now that Garcia has been traded. Gibson pitched five shutout innings at Indianapolis on July 27.

• Phil Hughes still plans to meet with another specialist, but “they’re contemplating a surgery in the short term,” Molitor said, to address the symptoms of thoracic outlet syndrome that still afflict him. “It’s not 100 percent that that’s going to happen, but that’s where it’s trending.”

Adalberto Mejia on the mound as Twins open a six-game homestand

It’s a gorgeous night for a game at Target Field. A football game, I mean.

Actually, now that the rain has passed, the 55 degree weather is a nice change from the normal August heat — as long as it’s only temporary. (We’re back to the high 70s tomorrow, I’m told.) It’s almost too bad the Twins couldn’t market a night like this ahead of time: Sweater Weather Night, or Fall Preview Night, something like that.

The Twins haven’t generated much heat on the field lately, especially in the late innings. Minnesota hasn’t scored after the sixth inning in the last 10 days, and as a result, have all but dropped out of the playoff race. They trail Cleveland by six games in the AL Central, and while they’re only 3 1/2 games out of the second wild-card spot, there are four teams ahead of them. A long spell of winning would change the outlook, but the Twins haven’t put together a streak longer than four games all year, and the last one of those was in May.

They’re back home for six games starting tonight, with Adalberto Mejia on the mound, and Paul Molitor was trying to stay optimistic.

“The guys that have been doing the job for us have put us in this position. They had a couple of hiccups,” Molitor said of the Twins’ 2-6 road trip to the West Coast. “Timing is a big part of this game, and hopefully yesterday Ervin [Santana] picked us up and we can find a way to come out and back it up today.”

Molitor announced that Kyle Gibson will return from Class AAA Rochester to start Saturday’s game against the Rangers. Gibson steps into Jaime Garcia’s spot in the rotation, which seems only fair, since Garcia took Gibson’s spot for his lone Twins start.
Here are the lineups for tonight’s opener of a four-game series with the Texas Rangers, who probably didn’t expect to need their jackets and sweatshirts in early August:

RANGERS

DeShields LF
Andrus SS
Mazara RF
Beltre 3B
Napoli DH
Odor 2B
Gomez CF
Gallo 1B
Chirinos C
Griffin RHP

TWINS

Dozier 2B
Kepler RF
Sano 3B
Mauer 1B
Escobar SS
Rosario LF
Grossman DH
Castro C
Buxton CF

Mejia LHP

Twins set unwanted record as they go quietly in 4-1 loss to Texas Rangers

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | August 3, 2017

The reeling Twins set a club record in Thursday night’s 4-1 loss to the Texas Rangers, but not exactly the kind they want to trumpet as this once-promising season continues to slip away.

When Dillon Gee, the journeyman right-hander called up this week from Triple-A Rochester, entered for the fifth inning in relief of rookie lefty Adalberto Mejia (4-5), it marked the 30th different pitcher to appear this season for the Twins.

That’s one more than it took the Twins to get through last year’s club-record 103-loss season. In case you hadn’t noticed — and in spite of Thursday’s mid-50s chill — the dog days of August are just beginning.

“There’s just a lot more movement around the game now,” Gee said after tossing three scoreless innings in his Twins debut. “It seems the game now is getting to a lot of piecing the whole time instead of just letting guys be. It’s sometimes tough to get on those rolls when you’re not getting consistent innings.”

While Gee struck out four against a Rangers team that released him in June, the Triple-A Red Wings have also churned through a franchise-record 35 pitchers this year. When lefty Dietrich Enns, acquired Sunday from the New York Yankees in the Jaime Garcia trade, starts on Friday it will push that number to 36.

“I want to say I was like No. 32 or 33,” Gee said. “When I was in Rochester that was a big thing. I knew down there they’d gone through a lot of
One powerful swing from Rangers first baseman Joey Gallo, a three-run blast that traveled an estimated 430 feet off Mejia in the fourth, was all the visitors needed to send the Twins to their ninth loss in 12 games. That dropped them seven games behind the division-leading Cleveland Indians, tying a season high.

Since sweeping a three-game series at Progressive Field June 23-25, the Twins have gone 12-21 while the Indians have gone 19-13. That’s how you turn a surprising half-game lead in the American League Central into a sizable deficit.

They also suddenly find themselves tied with the Rangers for the seventh spot in the wild-card standings, 4 1/2 games out.

A two-out walk to free-swinging Carlos Gomez, the ex-Twin, immediately preceded Gallo’s blast. It came after Mejia had Gomez in a no-ball, two-strike hole but couldn’t put him away.

While Mejia scuffled through bookend innings of 30 and 40 pitches in his four frames of work, fanning five straight once his fingers finally warmed up, Twins hitters could barely lay a glove on 29-year-old journeyman A.J. Griffin.

Limited to a run on two hits through the first six innings, they were completely flummoxed by a long-haired chap with an 86-88 mph fastball, a 66-mph curveball and a 5.77 earned run average through eight big-league starts this season.

On the disabled list since May 27 with an intercostal strain, Griffin was lifted after 81 pitches for reasons of precaution, not strategy. Three Rangers relievers finished off a combined 3-hitter, just the third time this year the Twins had been held to such a paltry output.

Two of those have come since Monday’s non-waiver trade deadline and the front office’s decision to ship starter Jamie Garcia and closer Brandon Kintzler into pennant races elsewhere.

While the Rangers went 2 for 12 with runners in scoring position, stranding nine runners, the Twins took just two at-bats with runners in scoring position. Both came after Robbie Grossman hustled around from first on Byron Buxton’s game-tying double into the left-field corner in the third, but Brian Dozier grounded out and Max Kepler flied out.

“We’ve been having a bit of a lull offensively,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “There’s some guys that are searching right now. We didn’t really hit many balls hard.”

This marked the 28th time the Twins had been held to two runs or fewer. Just three of those instances have come in their past 19 games, but the Twins are 4-24 overall.

Moments after Gallo’s 29th homer, first baseman Joe Mauer missed Robinson Chirinos’ foul pop for his first error in nearly 13 months (July 6, 2016).

**John Shipley: Twins are ticked. They should be, says Derek Falvey**

John Shipley | Pioneer Press | August 3, 2017

It took less than a week for the Twins to acquire left-hander Jaime Garcia and subsequently decide to send him to the New York Yankees for prospects.

“Things change quickly at times,” Twins president for baseball operations Derek Falvey said.

Indeed, they do.

On July 20, 11 days before Monday’s non-waiver trade deadline, the Twins had secured a series victory over the Yankees and pulled within a half-game of Cleveland in the American League Central. Ten days later, they were seven games out and sitting behind two division rivals that had each won nine straight games.


“You kind of get labeled as buyer or seller, and sometimes that’s warranted,” Falvey said. But not in this case, the first-year Twins boss insists. He still expects his team to play well into September, but he also wasn’t exactly reading tea leaves.
It wasn’t just that Minnesota had lost seven of nine games since taking two of three from the Yankees July 17-19, but that the teams they’re chasing for the division title and a wild card slot were a combined 18-0 during the same period. Falvey called it “the new reality.”

“When there was an opportunity we couldn’t pass up — to turn some short-term value in Jaime Garcia into some pieces we think can help us moving forward — that’s a tough decision,” he said. “That’s not reflective of how we feel about our guys or our club, it’s just those are the right, rational business decisions that you sometimes have to make.”

Veteran second baseman Brian Dozier still isn’t happy about it.

“It does suck,” he said without, it’s worth noting, a prompt. “I can speak for everybody and say that.”

Asked if he at least found comfort in the fact that Ervin Santana, the Twins’ coveted ace, is still in Minnesota — that it appears Falvey and GM Thad Levine believe the Twins can contend with largely the same team next season — Dozier winced.

“Oh yeah, but, I can be honest with you here: No one — I’m not going to say ‘cares,’ because that’s a tough word to say — but no one really cares about next year right now,” he said.

“I’m excited. I’m here next year. I hope we win, and I think we will. But we care about right now. You ask anyone in here, they feel the same way. They want to win now.”

This is a difficult time of the season for fans whose teams are moving in the wrong direction. Players, too. After a hundred or so games, they see their rivals getting all the stuff they asked Santa for. Thursday’s game against the Texas Rangers at Target Field was played in a crisp 55 degrees Fahrenheit — playoff weather.

There’s nothing that says the Twins won’t make it there for real, but the peripherals indicate otherwise. The Twins needed two things to bolster their playoff chances — starting pitching and relief pitching. They got halfway there before trading away valuable bits of each for a trio of arms the brass believes will pitch at the major league level. Just not now.

“Is it going to be easier to win? Absolutely not, to be point blank with you here,” Dozier said. “It might be a little more of an uphill battle, but at the same time I find it as motivation.”

That’s the right thing to say, but Dozier isn’t being a politician. Never one to hide his feelings, Dozier has only become more candid while growing into the Twins’ clubhouse leader. The players, he said, returned from the west coast Thursday with chips on their shoulders.

One gets the sense he’d like to take the trade deadline and shove it in someone’s non-waiver. That’s good, Falvey said. “I want our guys,” he said, “to be a little bit upset when things don’t go exactly the way they want them to.”

They didn’t, and they are.

**Rangers’ Adrian Beltre a familiar foe for Ervin Santana, Bartolo Colon**

*Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | August 3, 2017*

Twins manager Paul Molitor was looking forward to welcoming the 31st and newest member of baseball’s 3,000-hit club, Texas Rangers third baseman Adrian Beltre.

Twins starters Ervin Santana and Bartolo Colon planned to pay their respects for a different reason after Beltre, their Dominican Republic countryman, became the first from that baseball-rich country to reach that career milestone.

“He has a lot of base hits against me too,” Santana said with a laugh on Thursday afternoon. “He’s got a couple homers too, I think.”

Five homers, actually, which is tied with former Twins right-hander Livan Hernandez for second-most off Beltre’s bat in his remarkable career. Colon, who starts Friday, has allowed a majors-leading six homers to Beltre in a matchup that dates to 2002 and an interleague showdown between Colon’s Cleveland Indians and Beltre’s Los Angeles Dodgers.

Colon, 44, declined to answer questions about Beltre, 39, due to his proscription on interviews on the eve of his starts.
Beltre, who signed a free-agent deal with the Seattle Mariners in 2005, has played all but one of the past 13 seasons (2010, when he was with the Boston Red Sox) in the American League West.

With 76 plate appearances against Colon, Beltre has faced only two pitchers more often: Jered Weaver (99) and the retired Kevin Millwood (87). While Beltre has a .270 batting average and .884 combined on-base/slugging percentage against Colon, he is just 5 for his last 34 (.147) against him since the start of 2008.

Two of those hits, however, have left the yard.

Against Santana, who threw a complete game Wednesday at San Diego and will miss Beltre this season, Beltre is hitting .238 in 68 trips (sixth-most).

Dan Haren’s 24 hits allowed are the most for Beltre against any pitcher. Colon ranks fourth with 20 hits allowed, while Santana have given up 15 to his countryman.

“Don’t forget to look at strikeouts, too,” Santana said.

Indeed, Santana has fanned Beltre nine times, while Colon has 10 strikeouts of the future hall of famer.

“I don’t know Adrian particularly well,” Molitor said. “We’ve had a couple of conversations along the way. He’s always been very gracious. He seems very aware of the history of the game and respects the people that have traversed through the game.”

PERKINS PLAN

Rehabbing reliever Glen Perkins started and worked a scoreless first inning for Class A Fort Myers — his fifth outing overall — on Thursday night.

If he comes through that without any issues, he could be moved up to Double-A Chattanooga for his next outing next week.

First, however, Perkins will fly back to the Twin Cities to host his annual charity event, Fifteen’s 5K, on Sunday morning at Target Field.

Although Perkins had a 10.13 earned run average for the Miracle, including a two-run homer allowed on Monday, Molitor suggested the raw numbers didn’t tell the whole story.

“I think everybody is glad that it’s advancing stuff-wise,” Molitor said as Perkins works back from major shoulder surgery on June 23, 2016.

Perkins, whose 30-day rehab window runs through Aug. 20, has yet to top 90 mph with his fastball, Molitor said. The Twins hold an option for Perkins’ services at $6.5 million in 2018, but the three-time all-star had been able to give them just two big-league innings since the start of 2016.

“The guy’s been here a long time,” Molitor said. “He’s from here. He’s been a big part of a lot of these teams here the last few years, and we’re trying to get him ready to pitch the best that we can, regardless of the circumstances.”

BRIEFLY

Kyle Gibson will be recalled from Triple-A Rochester to start Saturday. Gibson allowed one hit and no walks over five innings on July 27 in a rain-delayed game at Indianapolis, so he will be working on eight days’ rest.

Phil Hughes, on the 60-day disabled list with a recurrence of thoracic outlet syndrome, appears headed for a follow-up surgery to correct the condition. “It’s not 100 percent, but I think that’s where it’s trending,” Molitor said.

Right-hander Trevor May played catch Thursday for the first time since undergoing Tommy John surgery on his throwing elbow on March 22.

Third-base coach Gene Glynn missed Thursday’s game to deal with a personal matter. First-base coach Jeff Smith shifted across the diamond to take his place, and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez coached first. ... Glynn missed the Twins’ pregame donation of $160,000 to help rebuild Tink Larson Field in his hometown of Waseca.
Stellar Gee goes long in Twins debut
Shane Jackson | MLB | August 4, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- Minnesota manager Paul Molitor peered in closely as Dillon Gee took the mound on Thursday at Target Field. He wanted to see what his newest reliever could offer.

Gee made his Twins debut during a 4-1 loss to the Rangers in the series opener. Against the very team with which he parted ways back in June, Gee tallied a total of nine outs, preserving the bullpen after a short start by left-hander Adalberto Mejia.

In fact, Gee became the first Minnesota reliever to record at least nine outs since Adam Wilk logged 11 on May 21. Gee allowed just two hits, a pair of singles that chased him in the eighth, to go along with his four strikeouts.

"I told him I hadn't seen him pitch, so it was just a matter of time before he got an opportunity," Molitor said. "He gave us an idea on a piece that has been missing. A guy that can come in and eat some innings in those type of ballgames. He did a nice job."

But it was a scene that seemed improbable just a couple months ago.

The Rangers designated Gee for assignment on June 16 after he posted a 4.15 ERA in four outings. He then elected for free agency on June 18. Just a few days later, Minnesota claimed him and put Gee in the big league bullpen on June 22. However, after a few days of not being called upon, the club optioned him to Triple-A Rochester.

Gee stayed there for the entire month of July, where he posted a 2.00 ERA in five starts and awaited his next opportunity. It just so happened it came against his former teammates.

"I'm starting to face teams that released me a couple times now, so I can't have a grudge against everybody," Gee said. "It's just a business, it's just the way it goes. I just try to do well on whatever team I am on at the time."

Gee made sure to make the most of his first showing with the Twins, nonetheless. In his first test, Gee struck out Adrian Beltre with a four-seamer and then got Mike Napoli to swing through the same pitch to end the next at-bat.

In the sixth, Gee walked one batter and hit another before leaving a pair of runners at the corners. He cruised through the seventh, including aninning-ending strikeout of Napoli on a changeup. It matched his season high in strikeouts, as he recorded just 10 whiffs in four games with the Rangers.

But more than that, it was a welcoming sign for a club that has struggled on the mound for much of the year. Gee was the team's 30th pitcher used in 2017, which set a franchise record. And he showed promise in a role that has hindered the Twins this year -- long relief.

"I like it, I feel comfortable in it. It's a role you have to have," Gee said. "[Molitor] said that's my role and it will be nice to have a long guy. They haven't really had a guy down there to eat innings when you need it. Our relievers did awesome tonight, so that was nice to see."

Perkins progressing in labrum surgery recovery
Rhett Bollinger | MLB | August 3, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- All signs point to Twins left-hander Glen Perkins moving in the right direction.

Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said that Perkins is slated to throw another inning in relief for Fort Myers, the team's Class A Advanced affiliate, on Thursday. If all goes well, he could potentially move up to Double-A Chattanooga at some point next week.

"I'm hoping the trend of good health continues, as far as how he's feeling," Molitor said. "If everything goes well tonight, we are considering getting him up to Chattanooga next week. Bump the competition a little bit and see how we do."

Perkins, who underwent shoulder labrum surgery in June 2016, will return to Minneapolis over the weekend for a charity event. The team will then decide what to do with him next.

The former closer hasn't pitched for the Twins since April of last year. In two appearances for Fort Myers, Perkins has allowed three runs off four hits over a total of 1 2/3 innings of work. However, his fastball remains between 88-90 mph and his stuff appears to be advancing.
Though Perkins, 34, appears to be progressing, it remains to be seen whether he will ever return to the Twins. His contract is set to end at the end of the season, which is just two months away.

"That's one of those circumstances you can't control," Molitor said. "We are trying to get him ready to pitch the best we can, regardless of the circumstance that he's nearing the end of his contract."

Worth noting
• Molitor admitted that the team is contemplating a surgery for right-hander Phil Hughes in the near future. On July 18, Hughes was placed on the 60-day disabled list with a recurrence of thoracic outlet syndrome symptoms. He underwent the same season-ending surgery on July 6 of last year, in which a rib was removed to relieve nerve pressure on his right shoulder.

"It's not 100 percent that's what is going to happen, but I think that's where it is trending," Molitor said.

• Right-hander Kyle Gibson was announced as the starter for Saturday's tilt with the Rangers. Gibson last pitched for Minnesota on July 22, before his demotion. He has posted a 6-8 record with a 6.08 ERA in 18 starts for the Twins this season.

Twins held to three hits in loss to Texas
Rhett Bollinger and T.R. Sullivan | MLB | August 4, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- Right-hander A.J. Griffin threw six strong innings in his return from the 60-day disabled list and was backed by a three-run homer from Joey Gallo to lift the Rangers to a 4-1 win over the Twins on Thursday night at Target Field.

"We got a win on Wednesday night, to stack another win on top of it, obviously we need that right now," Rangers manager Jeff Banister said. "We need to put some wins together. Just a tremendous start by A.J. Griffin."

Griffin, who had been out since May 26 with a left intercostal strain, allowed one run on two hits and a walk with four strikeouts. It was his first win since May 9. The lone run he allowed came on an RBI double from Byron Buxton in the third.

"We've been having a bit of a lull offensively," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "There are some guys searching right now. We didn't really hit many balls hard tonight. It was just a matter of hitting a lot of balls in the air."

Griffin out-pitched Twins rookie left-hander Adalberto Mejia, who lasted four innings, surrendering four runs on seven hits and three walks. Mejia gave up a run in the first on an RBI single to Nomar Mazara before serving up Gallo's three-run home run in the fourth.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Gallo goes deep on 1-2: Gallo's three-run home run in the fourth inning was his 29th of the season, but just his sixth off a left-hander. It was also just the second time this season Gallo has hit a home run on a 1-2 pitch. He struck out on a 1-2 pitch from Mejia in the second inning. Mike Napoli scored on the home run, having reached base on a one-out double after left fielder Eddie Rosario couldn't make a sliding catch of his fly ball down the line.

"Whether it's a home run or a strikeout, I'm just trying to put the bat on the ball," Gallo said. "I got pretty lucky -- if that pitch had been a few inches off the plate, it would have been a different story."

Mazara delivers against lefty: Mazara's first-inning single drove home Delino DeShields and was his first RBI off a left-hander since June 20. It also ended Mazara's 0-for-22 skid against left-handed pitching.

"The first inning, I couldn't get a grip on the ball," Mejia said. "I think the weather was too cold for me and my hand was kind of numb. But after that, I was able to get more control of the ball."

QUOTABLE

"I had the first-day-of-school jitters. Little excited, a little nervous. It was good to get back out there." – Griffin

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Long reliever Dillon Gee became the 30th pitcher used by the Twins this season, which set a franchise record. Gee, who threw three-plus
scoreless innings, was previously designated by assignment by the Rangers on June 16, and refused his Minor League assignment on June 19.

"I felt good," Gee said. "I came into the game trying to keep it close and give us a chance. And for the most part, I was able to do that."

WHAT'S NEXT
Rangers: Martin Perez pitches against the Twins at 7:10 p.m. CT Friday at Target Field. Perez is 0-3 with an 8.31 ERA in his last three starts. He is also 1-3 with a 4.62 ERA in seven starts on the road and 0-2 with a 3.32 ERA in three career starts against the Twins.

Twins: Veteran right-hander Bartolo Colon (2-9, 7.70 ERA) starts for the Twins against the Rangers on Friday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Colon is coming off his best start with the Twins, allowing three runs over 6 1/3 innings against the A's.

Colon seeks continued success vs. Rangers
T.R. Sullivan | MLB | August 3, 2017

Right-hander Bartolo Colon makes his 35th career start against the Rangers when he pitches for the Twins at 7:10 p.m. CT on Friday at Target Field. He will be opposed by left-hander Martin Perez.

Colon is 20-9 with a 3.57 ERA in his career against the Rangers. It’s the most wins by an opposing pitcher in Rangers history and his most against any one opponent in his 20-year career.

Colon is 0-1 with a 5.87 ERA in three starts since the Twins signed him to a Minor League contract and added him to their Major League roster on July 18. Including his time with the Braves, Colon is 0-5 with an 8.83 ERA in his last eight starts. This will be his 517th Major League start, the 41st-most in Major League history.

Perez is 0-3 with an 8.31 ERA in his last three starts. He is also 1-3 with a 4.62 ERA in seven starts on the road and 0-2 with a 3.32 ERA in three career starts against the Twins.

"I just need to keep doing my job and try to be a better pitcher every time out," Perez said.

Opponents are hitting .316 off Perez this year, the highest for any qualifying pitcher in the American League. His 14.82 baserunners per nine innings is the third highest.

What to watch for
• Twins second baseman Brian Dozier is hitting .318 off left-handers, 17th-best in the American League. He is 3-for-9 off Perez.
• Adrian Beltre is 20-for-74 with six home runs off Colon. That’s his most home runs off any pitcher in his career. The 20 hits are tied for the fourth most.
• Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus is hitting .301 off right-handers this year with a .482 slugging percentage. Both are the highest of his career.

Wetmore’s 5 thoughts: Who will be the Twins closer now that Brandon Kintzler is gone?
Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | August 3, 2017

Before the Twins traded closer Brandon Kintzler to the Washington Nationals, one of the arguments I heard against such a trade was that the Twins didn’t have anybody lined up who could succeed Kintzler in that role if he left town.

I have to admit I thought the logic was a little silly.

Short memory?

It wasn’t until last June that Brandon Kintzler found himself in the role, and even then, he wasn’t the lone pitcher tabbed to get outs in the 9th inning. At that time, the Twins had cycled from Glen Perkins (injured) to Kevin Jepsen in the closer’s role, and Jepsen didn’t get the job done.

So now that Kintzler is gone, who should close games for the Twins? I’ve got a few candidates in mind. First, some background on Kintzler’s emergence as the team’s trustworthy closer.

Manager Paul Molitor had little choice last June but to back off Jepsen. And at the time, the Twins didn’t have much in the way of closing experience on the roster. So Molitor decided it was time for a closer-by-committee approach to the 9th inning, using Kintzler and lefty Fernando
Abad based on matchups.

I found myself wondering in the past two days if the group that is now upset the Twins are without an experienced closer would also have thrown a fit at the time Kintzler was elevated into the role due to his lack of experience closing games.

Here’s what Kintzler said after his first save – after which he proved capable of shutting the door, closing 45 of his 52 chances in a Twins uniform.

“It was a little more exciting than I thought it was going to be,” Kintzler said at the time. “I tried to downplay it going into it because I’ve pitched the 8th many times, but obviously you can’t practice the intensity of (closing). It was a lot of fun.”

Then he picked a walk-in song – Eminem’s Lose Yourself – and became a closer. Sometimes that’s how it works.

I don’t know how the next chapter is going to play out for the Twins. I do have 5 candidates to consider for the job. Here they are.

Taylor Rogers

The lefty was excellent early this season, and worked his way into the primary setup role in front of Kintzler. Rogers pitched a scoreless inning against the Yankees on July 19 to trim his ERA to 1.93 on the season (37 1/3 innings). The Twins had won the previous 10 games in a row in which Rogers pitched, and that was No. 11.

Since that day, though, he’s given up at least one run every time he’s been out, and his ERA has ballooned nearly two full runs to 3.79. That includes a pair of 3-run homers to his name. It’s just generally been a bad 10 days for Rogers (3 innings) that also coincides with the Twins sliding down the standings. Such is the life of a reliever.

Given the way he’s pitched lately you could understand why Molitor might be hesitant to hand the job over to him exclusively. If it wasn’t for a bad 10 days, he’d be the natural next-in-line.

Matt Belisle

This one was suggested by my colleague, Phil Mackey. I guess technically I don’t have to give him credit for it, since he won’t read this column to see the props, but I think it’s worth tipping the cap.

If you judge a pitcher off ERA – admittedly dangerous for a reliever — Belisle had been a disaster through mid-June this season. The Twins signed him to be a leader and pitch important late innings. He wound up in sort of a setup role and he had a horrible 8.22 ERA, with 21 earned runs in 23 innings, through June 14. The Twins would counter by saying that Belisle was mostly good, and he’d had occasional outings where he blew up and that made his ugly ERA look worse than his actual performance. Indeed, 18 of his 21 earned runs came in just 4 outings — two of those outings were on the second night of back-to-back work for the 37-year-old, and the other two were on one day of rest.

Since then, the Twins have only asked Belisle to get outs on consecutive days twice, a span of 17 appearances. He’s been great. Whether it’s positive regression or smarter usage of an aging reliever or some combination, Belisle has given up just 1 earned run in his past 19 2/3 innings, shaving his once-ugly ERA to a more reasonably 4.64 in about 6 weeks.

My primary argument against Belisle as the only closer would be the inability to use him multiple days in a row. Then again, there’s no mandate that says one reliever must hold the job by himself. And as Mackey suggests, Belisle will be a free agent this winter and a few saves could theoretically make him a candidate to be traded using waivers in August.

Trevor Hildenberger

If you using defense-independent stats like FIP or xFIP, there’s a case to be made the Hildenberger has been the Twins’ best reliever this season. (His 2.58 FIP is best among Twins relievers by nearly a full run, among relief pitchers with at least 10 innings logged this season.) He’s only pitched 17 1/3 innings, so he’s far from a proven commodity. But I’ve been impressed by a few of his outings this year, and think he’s potentially a real weapon for the Twins in future seasons.

I’m a little reserved in my optimism there because I do wonder how hitters will adjust to the funky arm slot – Hildenberger’s a right-handed side-arm – once they’ve seen him a few times. But so far he’s shown the ability to command his fastball, which sets up a great changeup, and he can also change his arm slot for deception and pump some heat when he needs a swing and a miss.
He’s struck out 26.4% of hitters he’s faced this season and walked just 4.2%, which ties Ryan Pressly for best in the Twins bullpen for the widest gap between strikeout rate and walk rate (+22.2%).

Molitor has said he’s not planning to name a new closer in the short-term. When asked about Hildenberger on Thursday, the manager said he wants to see him in those tense moments of games to gauge how the rookie responds.

Ryan Pressly

Pressly, in my mind, has been one of the biggest under-achievers on the team this year. Perhaps I put unfair expectations on him. You watch him throw a bullpen in Fort Myers, Florida, and you think that nobody on the staff has nastier stuff than the hard-throwing righty. He’s also near the top of the charts in terms of spin rate on his fastball (good for attacking hitters up in the strike zone) and also on his curveball, all mixed in an arsenal that also includes mid-to-high-90’s velocity.

His numbers don’t match those lofty expectations this season. Not even close. It’s been a bad year for Pressly, and it comes at a surprising time, as I’m guessing the Twins were hoping he’d take one of their late-inning roles and run with it at age 28.

I think it’s worth pointing out that Pressly’s gotten a bit unlucky this year. Fly balls are turning into home runs at the highest rate of his career — by far. Nearly one-quarter of the balls opponents have hit in the air against Pressly this year have left the park. That’s the third-highest rate in the Majors for regular relievers, and almost twice as high as the MLB average rate of fly balls turning into homers. When the other team puts the ball in play against Pressly, they’ve hit .349 this year, which is way higher than his career .303 BABIP, and also much higher than the league average this season. More balls in play have fallen for hits than usual this year against Pressly, and it’s possible that higher rate can be explained by bad luck.

The peripheral stats can help us understand some context surrounding Pressly’s performance this year. Still, it’s hard to say that he’s earned a high degree of trust associated with being the guy at the back end of a bullpen.

Yes, Pressly has strikeout stuff, and he’s done a fairly good job at limiting free passes this season. The problem with recommending him for a closer’s position is that he’s got a 6.68 ERA for the season. Put simply, it’s hard to imagine him in the 9th inning because he hasn’t gotten the job done in lower-leverage roles.

Some bad luck plays into it, but the fact remains that more than 33 innings into the season, Pressly hasn’t lived up to expectations. If you had asked me in spring training who would take the closer’s role if Kintzler was traded, I would have said Pressly. Now that seems like a stretch.

How about some dark horses?

With varying degrees of seriousness, here are three other candidates.

Glen Perkins

Perkins pitched an innings for the Fort Myers Miracle on Thursday, as he continues his rehab assignment. He’s been down an awfully long time, but it’s possible that he’s close to a return to the big leagues. Molitor said that the planned next step is to send Perkins to Double-A Chattanooga to up the level of competition for the three-time all-star closer. Molitor also said Perkins’ velocity is up to 90 mph. I’ll bet he could get by with that, although he definitely wouldn’t be his formerly dominant self. A few more ticks up on the fastball, though, and the Twins might be in business.

John Curtiss

I doubt the Twins would call up a minor leaguer and ask him to close games in the big leagues. OK, I’ll go a little stronger. That won’t happen. It doesn’t change the fact that Curtiss is having a great year in the minor leagues and probably doesn’t get the shine he deserves. He was recently promoted to Triple-A Rochester after dominating at Double-A Chattanooga. On the season, he’s a perfect 18-for-18 in save opportunities, and he’s got a 1.38 ERA in 39 innings out of the ‘pen. Couple that with his eye-catching 57:17 strikeout-to-walk ratio and you’ve got a guy who might earn himself a call-up before the season’s over. It’s no sure thing because he’s not on the 40-man roster, but it could happen. I for one am curious to see what he can do against big league hitters.

Sometimes when my takes aren’t quite hot enough I’ll have colleagues pin me down and ask for predictions. I predict that Randy Johnson will not come out of retirement to close baseball games for the Twins in 2017.
Gallo goes deep again, Rangers top Twins 4-1 to start series
Associated Press | August 4, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Joey Gallo has made plenty of progress at the plate this season for the Texas Rangers.

Those home runs just keep going and going, too.

Gallo’s latest massive homer was a three-run shot in the fourth inning Thursday night that spurred the Rangers to a 4-1 victory over the Minnesota Twins, making A.J. Griffin a winner in his first start in more than two months.

Gallo has 29 home runs this year, with four long balls in the last three games.

“He’s getting better every day that he goes out there,” manager Jeff Banister said, praising Gallo’s evolution beyond a pure pull hitter.

After swinging and missing twice at sliders from Twins starter Adalberto Mejia, Gallo let one go in the dirt. Then he drove the next pitch, another slider, into the front of the second deck above right-center field with two outs to break the tie.

Twins center fielder Byron Buxton just turned around and stared straight up as the ball soared over his head. The estimates by Major League Baseball’s Statcast tracking system were a distance of 430 feet and an exit velocity of 108 mph off the bat.

“I got pretty lucky. If that pitch was maybe a couple more inches off the plate, I’m probably not doing this interview,” Gallo said. “That’s baseball.”

Though still prone to extended slumps and voluminous strikeouts, the 23-year-old Gallo has capably settled in after two seasons of going back-and-forth to the minor leagues. This was his first major league game at Target Field, where he wowed at the All-Star Futures game with a long home run and a batting practice bop that broke a window on a truck parked on the plaza beyond right field for a promotion.

Byron Buxton’s RBI double was one of only three hits all night by the Twins, who returned from a 2-6 road trip to California. They had the lead with six outs to go in four of those losses, with three coming in the opponent’s final at-bat.

BACK IN ACTION

Griffin (5-2) gave up one run and two hits over six innings, a resounding return from a muscle strain in his chest. He last started on May 26 and last won on May 9.

“I had those first-day-of-school jitters a little bit last night and stuff,” Griffin said. “Excited, and a little nervous.”

SO CLOSE

Mejia (4-5) let the first three Rangers batters reach base, with Nomar Mazara driving in a run with a single, but the rookie lefty rebounded to not only strike out the side but fan the first two hitters of the second inning, too. Mejia was then one strike away from escaping the fateful fourth as well, until Gallo made him pay for a slider that caught too much of the plate.

“It’s the repetitiveness of the pitch, and the guy having a chance to see the spin and knowing where it has to start to be hittable,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

GEE, ANOTHER ONE?

Dillon Gee relieved Mejia to start the fifth, becoming the franchise-record 30th pitcher used by Minnesota this season. Gee, who was let go by the Rangers on June 16, has been on the Twins’ roster for seven days. He finally got in.

“Hey, man, I’m the long guy. If you’re not using me it’s probably a pretty good thing,” Gee said.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Rangers: Griffin came off the 60-day DL after being sidelined with a strained left intercostal muscle. RHP Clayton Blackburn, who was on the roster for three days but did not pitch, was sent to Triple-A Round Rock to make room.
Twins: LHP Glen Perkins (shoulder) pitched a scoreless inning for Class A Fort Myers in a rehab outing and will likely be moved up to Double-A Chattanooga next week. His fastball has maxed out at 90 mph. Perkins has not appeared for the Twins since April 10, 2016.

UP NEXT

Rangers: LHP Martin Perez (5-9, 5.13 ERA) pitches Friday night, after a season-most eight runs allowed over 4 1/3 innings against Baltimore in his last turn. He has lost three straight starts.

Twins: RHP Bartolo Colon (2-9, 7.70) takes the mound for the fourth time since joining the team following his release by Atlanta. The 44-year-old has given up 10 earned runs in 15 1/3 innings, without a victory. Molitor also announced that RHP Kyle Gibson will return from Triple-A to start on Saturday.

Phil Hughes Likely To Undergo Surgery
Jeff Todd | MLB Trade Rumors | August 3, 2017

Twins righty Phil Hughes will very likely need surgery that’ll end his season, manager Paul Molitor told reporters including Mike Berardino of the St. Paul Pioneer-Press (via Twitter). The 31-year-old has been weighing a procedure to further address ongoing symptoms of thoracic outlet syndrome. Meanwhile, it seems lefty reliever Glen Perkins is still pushing to return before the year is up. Berardino tweets that he’s expecting to move up to Double-A after making an appearance tonight.