



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

Tuesday, August 21, 2012

- Clemens to pitch for Gaetti's minor-league team. Associated Press (Rieken) p. 1
- Span to have MRI on clavicle. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 3
- Twins take Blackburn, Nishioka off 40-man roster. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 4
- Twins end five-game skid by beating A's. Star Tribune (Neal) p. 6
- Minnesota Twins dump Nick Blackburn, Tsuyoshi Nishioka from 40-man roster. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p. 7
- Minnesota Twins push back Carl Pavano's rehab start. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p. 8
- Minnesota Twins: One MRI down, one to go for Denard Span. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p. 9
- Minnesota Twins' Ron Gardenhire not interested in playing spoiler. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p. 9
- Twins 7, A's 2: Minnesota snaps five-game skid. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p. 10
- Span undergoes MRI, sits for seventh straight game. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 10
- Offense provides Duensing with plenty of help vs. A's. MLB.com (Bollinger) p. 12
- Willingham, Mauer, Florimon help Twins bounce back from weekend sweep. Associated Press (Staff) p. 13
- Duensing, Twins bounce back in rout of A's. Associated Press (Staff) p. 14
- Twins outright RHP Nick Blackburn to Triple-A. FSNorth.com (Mason) p. 16
- Twins trying to halt revolving-door rotation. FSNorth.com (Mason) p. 17
- Twins aim for second straight win in Oakland. Associated Press (Staff) p. 18
- Top Twitter Mentions p. 19

Clemens to pitch for Gaetti's minor-league team

By: Kristie Rieken, Associated Press- 8/21/12

HOUSTON - When Roger Clemens pitches Saturday night for the Sugar Land Skeeters it will be the first time the 50-year-old has taken the mound in almost five years.

Will he still be the Rocket who intimidated hitters in the majors for more than 20 years? Or will his extended absence and age leave him struggling against players less skilled than the ones he used to face?

Clemens signed with the Skeeters of the independent Atlantic League on Monday and he is expected to start for the minor league team on Saturday at home against Bridgeport.

"His fastball was clocked at 87 mph. All of his pitches were working," said Randy Hendricks, Clemens' agent. "He threw a three-inning simulated game after an extensive workout warmup."

Clemens and Skeeters manager Gary Gaetti have been talking about this "for months," Hendricks said. Clemens is expected to discuss his decision Tuesday during a news conference in Sugar Land, about 20 miles southwest of Houston.

His signing has some wondering if it is the first step in a return to the majors.

Minnesota Twins manager and fellow Texas Longhorn Ron Gardenhire cracked a joke when asked about Clemens on Monday.

"I'll take that Longhorn any day. I don't know all the rules, but I'll be tampering: We do have a spot, right?" Gardenhire said, chuckling.

Clemens, acquitted in June of charges he lied to Congress when he denied using performance-enhancing drugs, hasn't played for a team since pitching for the New York Yankees in 2007 at the age of 45. He went 6-6 in 18 games with a 4.18 ERA that season.

Texas Rangers pitcher Roy Oswalt, a former teammate of Clemens with the Astros, is excited about his friend's return to baseball.

"I think he's going to show everybody that all that stuff that he had to go through had nothing to do with the success he had in the big leagues," Oswalt said. "He said he's going to do it a little bit and see how his body responds. I wouldn't be surprised next year if he's pitching in the big leagues for somebody."

Clemens has been throwing batting practice to one of his sons often, and Oswalt said that Clemens "feels pretty good."

Yankees manager Joe Girardi, who is three years younger than Clemens, said it is difficult to get that urge to compete out of your blood.

"He's always loved to compete," Girardi said of Clemens. "That's who he is. He kept coming back. There were times he felt he couldn't quite go a full season, but he gave it as much as he had. He loved to compete. That's a hard thing to replace is that competition. Guys miss it."

Clemens had two great seasons with the Astros after he turned 40, going 18-4 with a 2.98 ERA in 2004 to win his record seventh Cy Young Award. He was 13-8 with a career-low 1.87 ERA in 2005.

Clemens earned \$160 million and won 354 games in a 24-year career with the Red Sox, Blue Jays, Yankees and Astros. His 4,672 strikeouts are third-most and he was named to 11 All-Star games.

Now he will see what he has left for the Skeeters. He joins a roster that includes former major league pitchers Tim Redding and Scott Kazmir and Jason Lane, a teammate of Clemens' on Houston's 2005 World Series team.

"That's great, if he thinks he can do it," Gardenhire said. "He worked harder than anybody I've ever seen. His routine and program, I don't think too many people could stay with that. If he has continued to work out, he's probably in good enough shape. (He's) a big strong Texan."

It isn't clear how long Clemens will pitch for the Skeeters.

"This is a one-game-at-a-time thing," Hendricks said. "Let's see how he does on Saturday."

Some in baseball weren't quite as keen on the idea as Oswalt.

"He didn't travel with the Astros half the time toward the end there," Oakland pitcher Brett Anderson said. "I can't imagine him traveling for the Sugar Land Skeeters. I'm sure they'll draw a good crowd and it will be fun, but it's kind of those things you read about it and you're like: 'What's he doing?'"

Clemens is set to appear on the Hall of Fame ballot going to voters late this year. If he plays in another major league game, his Hall consideration would be pushed back five years.

Clemens was accused of using steroids and HGH in the Mitchell Report on drugs in baseball, something he denied. The Justice Department began an investigation concerning whether Clemens had lied under oath, and in 2010 a grand jury indicted him on two counts of perjury, three counts of making false statements and one count of obstructing Congress when he testified during a deposition and at a hearing that he never used any performance-enhancing drugs.

He was acquitted of all the charges on June 19 after a 10-week trial and has largely stayed out of the public spotlight until now.

"I think he's going to come back and try to prove a lot of doubters wrong," Oswald said.

The signing was first reported by Houston television station KRIV.

Span to have MRI on clavicle

By: La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 8/21/12

OAKLAND, CALIF. - After missing seven games because of a sore clavicle/neck area, Twins outfielder **Denard Span** is being examined again.

Span had an magnetic resonance imaging exam of his neck on Monday, which came back negative. On Tuesday he will have an MRI of his right clavicle.

Span injured himself Aug. 12 trying to make a falling catch in center field. He thought he would be ready in a few days, but continues to feel discomfort.

The Twins still won't say he's a candidate for the disabled list, but they ordered the exams to make sure nothing more serious is bothering him.

"Basically we're doing that just to make sure we're not missing anything," Twins assistant general manager **Rob Antony** said. "We want to rule everything out and give him peace of mind."

Pitching switch

The Twins aren't the only team in this series with plans to alter their pitching rotation.

Oakland is activating lefthander **Brett Anderson** from the disabled list to start Tuesday. Anderson has not thrown a pitch in the majors since June 5, 2011, because he tore the ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow and had Tommy John surgery.

In five rehab starts for Class AAA Sacramento, Anderson was 1-1 with a 4.62 ERA, walking just five batters in 25 1/3 innings.

Anderson, 24, is 21-23 in his career with a 3.66 ERA. Before the injury, he showed flashes of being a top-of-the-rotation starter.

Swarzak is back

Righthander **Anthony Swarzak** pitched a scoreless inning Sunday in his first appearance since coming off of the 15-day disabled list because of shoulder soreness.

Swarzak filled various roles before he was injured, serving as a long and short reliever and even got a few starts. It will take a while, and a few outings, before the Twins are comfortable with him being so versatile again.

"I'm just glad he's healthy," Twins manager **Ron Gardenhire** said. "He's really never had any kind of arm problem, so we were concerned about that. But he bounced back just fine from it.

"The ball came out of his hand good. I was worried about him being a little rusty. We put him in a tighter game than we wanted to but we needed an inning and he got through it just fine.

"I don't think we're ready to stretch him out to four or five innings or anything like that --like he was before. But we'll kinda build into that maybe two to three innings and see how he's doing. We'll watch him early and go from there."

Etc.

- **Carl Pavano** will skip his scheduled start Tuesday for Class A Fort Myers and instead fly to New York to have his shoulder examined by **Dr. David Altchek**. It sounds bad, but Pavano wanted to visit Altchek all along to make sure he was going about his rehabilitation properly. When he found out he could see Altchek on Tuesday, he was allowed to push his start back. Pavano has been plagued by shoulder weakness since the beginning of the season and has not pitched since June 1.

- Righthander **P.J. Walters**, also coming back from a sore shoulder, had no problems on Monday after throwing three scoreless innings Sunday.

- Oakland traded for shortstop **Stephen Drew** from Arizona for minor league infielder **Sean Jamieson**.

Twins take Blackburn, Nishioka off 40-man roster

By: La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune- 8/21/12

OAKLAND, CALIF. - The Twins not only sent righthander Nick Blackburn to Class AAA Rochester on Monday, they outrighted him off their 40-man roster. And the club didn't stop there, as they also outrighted embattled infielder Tsuyoshi Nishioka.

They are the latest moves of an organization in the middle of a second straight disastrous season.

In order to a player to be outrighted off the 40-man roster, that player has to clear waivers. So every club passed on Blackburn and Nishioka. That's not surprising, but still a reflection of how this year has gone. As Twins assistant general manager Rob Antony pointed out, "When you're taken off the major league roster and 29 other clubs pass on you, it tells you you're not doing very well."

Unless they are put back on the 40-man roster, neither Blackburn nor Nishioka will be eligible to return to the Twins when minor league seasons wind down and major league rosters expand Sept. 1. However, Antony told Blackburn that if he pitched well enough with the Red Wings, he could be returned to the 40-man roster in September and called up.

"I talked to Nick [Monday] to let him know and told him, 'Go down there, try and get straightened out and when September comes we'll evaluate the situation.' There's no guarantees he'll come back," Antony said. "We could select him and bring him back if we want, or he could not be back this year -- whatever we think is the right situation when the time comes."

As of now, no one from the projected Twins rotation on Opening Day -- Blackburn, Carl Pavano (60-day DL), Scott Baker (60-day DL), Francisco Liriano (traded) and Jason Marquis (released) -- are on the 40-man roster.

Blackburn, 30, is 4-9 with a 7.39 ERA in 19 starts, and it's his third consecutive losing season. He was 22-22 with a 4.04 ERA over his first two full years, decent numbers for an end-of-the rotation starter. Since then, he's 21-31 with a 5.56 ERA.

He entered the season coming off a strong spring training (2.12 ERA) but struggled early. He had a bizarre run in April when his shoulder cramped up during a game, then there was unexplained soreness in his rib cage area. Finally, a sore left quad landed him on the disabled list in May.

When he returned, he couldn't keep the ball down and suffered the consequences, often putting the Twins in early deficits.

"A couple of injuries and he never really recovered from it coming back," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He didn't really have the same sinker. He had a couple ballgames where the ball sunk down pretty good. And it looked like he was finding his way. But he's been inconsistent."

Scheduled to make \$5.5 million in 2013 in the final year of a four-year, \$14 million contract, Blackburn probably will be back next year to fight for a spot in the starting rotation.

The Twins will announce on Tuesday who will be added to the major league roster to replace Blackburn and start on Wednesday at Oakland, but indications are that righthander Liam Hendricks is the leading candidate at Rochester.

Nishioka came to the Twins last season in a splashy, three-year, \$9.25 million deal -- in addition to a \$5.3 million posting fee -- as the answer at short.

His play has forced the Twins to draw a different conclusion.

After batting .226 and breaking his left leg last season, Nishioka didn't have a shot to make the club out of spring training. But, based on reports that his play had improved, the Twins called him up and played him in three games in Cleveland two weeks ago.

His sacrifice fly helped the Twins win on Aug. 7. Other than that, Nishioka was 0-for-12 and a disaster in the field.

Nishioka appears to be one step from having his contract bought out, or sold, and his ties with the Twins severed as he is one of the worst acquisitions the club has ever made.

"We'll discuss all that after the season's over," Antony said. "I can honestly say we have not talked about any of that right now. We're trying to get him better. He had been playing better and they said now was as good a time as any to give him a shot; we gave him a shot and it just didn't work out."

Twins end five-game skid by beating A's

By: La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune- 8/21/12

OAKLAND, CALIF. — If the Twins need motivation through the dog days, they can embrace the spoiler role. Their game on Monday night was the first of seven this week against playoff contenders.

But they also entered with a five-game losing streak and having lost nine of their previous 10 games. So manager Ron Gardenhire wasn't in a role-playing mood.

"It's not even about the other team," Gardenhire said. "It's about us getting back to winning ballgames, playing a better brand of baseball ourselves. Pitching, get our offense going again because we are scuffling enough. We can't really worry about the other guys. That's spoiler role, you start watching and it irritates people more when you play well."

It's amazing what a team can do when it's not playing from behind early, when it's not creating hair-raising situations with walks or when it's not committing costly errors. Brian Duensing was sharp on the mound, the Twins executed all over the field and everyone seemed to have a hand in a 7-2 victory over Oakland that ended their losing streak.

The Twins clubhouse, which Gardenhire fretted about before the game, was in a much better mood after this one.

"We were due," Gardenhire said.

Josh Willingham was 3-for-5 with two RBI. Joe Mauer was 3-for-5 with two RBI. Shortstop Pedro Florimon, whose bat is not supposed to be anywhere as good as his glove work, was 3-for-3 with three runs scored and is 6-for-12 with two walks in four games since being called up from Class AAA Rochester.

"He's been running around real nice, giving us good at-bats, some nice swings," Gardenhire said. "I'm kind of fond of the defense. I like to see the defense."

Duensing (3-8) struck out seven in six innings to earn only his second win as a starter this season. He had pitched at least six innings in each of his past four starts but was sharper on Monday.

Righthanded hitters have had their way with Duensing, batting .320 off him with five homers and a .837 on base-plus-slugging percentage coming in. They collected five hits off him Monday, but Duensing limited the damage by spinning more curveballs at them. He got the strike calls on the outside corner and at the knees all night.

"Our gameplan for myself with [Mauer] was that we had to keep them honest going in, and we had to use the curveball and get ahead, get me over and try to get ahead in the count," Duensing said. "I don't know if ever I was able to have such success with it, especially late in the count. Try to keep them off balance and I thought we did a pretty good job of that tonight."

Willingham got the Twins off to a fast start with an RBI double in the first inning then scored on a bases-loaded walk by Trevor Plouffe, who had fallen behind the count 0-2 to A's starter Brandon McCarthy.

The Twins made it 4-0 in the second inning when Darin Mastroianni's RBI single drove in Pedro Florimon and Willingham's two-out infield single scored Mastroianni.

Oakland scored single runs in the second and third innings to make it 4-2. But Florimon and Ben Revere led off the fourth with singles, Mastroianni bunted them over and Mauer drove both home with a single to right to give the Twins a 6-2 lead.

Mastroianni added a sacrifice fly in the seventh.

When the Twins aren't playing from behind -- a frequent occurrence lately -- they can employ their running game and move runners over. And the whole group wore down McCarthy (6-5), who needed 86 pitches to get through 3 1/3 innings before being removed from the game.

"We put some nice swings out there," Gardenhire said.

Things weren't perfect. Plouffe double-clutched on Yoenis Cespedes' grounder in the second. Florimon -- gasp -- committed a throwing error in the third on Coco Crisp's grounder, then second baseman Jamey Carroll was charged with an error when he couldn't hold on to a throw as Crisp stole second, then advanced to third.

Funny, both runners ended up scoring for Oakland. But Duensing was in form for most of the night, and offense stringed together good at-bats.

Minnesota Twins dump Nick Blackburn, Tsuyoshi Nishioka from 40-man roster

By: John Shipley, Pioneer Press- 8/21/12

OAKLAND, Calif. -- And then there were none.

Nick Blackburn became the last member of Minnesota's projected 2012 rotation to lose his job, through either injury or incompetence, when he was taken off the 40-man roster Monday, Aug. 20, and sent to Class AAA Rochester.

The Twins also took infielder Tsuyoshi Nishioka off the 40-man, clearing two spots and giving the club the flexibility to call up some new faces when active rosters are expanded from 25 to 40 on Sept. 1. Both players cleared waivers, during which time all major league clubs had a chance to claim either and assume his contract.

"When you're taken off the major league roster and 29 other clubs pass on you, it tells you you're not doing very well," assistant general manager Rob Antony said.

Blackburn hasn't won a start since June 22 and was candidly discouraged after giving up 11 hits and five earned runs in a 5-3 loss to Seattle last Friday. With a 4-9 record and 7.39 earned-run average, it was clear that whatever ails him could no longer be taken care of in the majors.

"It's not fair to him, it's not fair to the team, it's not fair to the fans," Antony said. "When he's struggling like he is, we need to send him down there and have him try to iron things out and work it out down there."

The Twins will recall a minor leaguer to take Blackburn's spot on the active roster and in the rotation, most likely right-hander Liam Hendriks, who is winless in seven major league starts with a 6.71 ERA but is 9-3 with a 2.20 ERA in 18 starts at Class AAA Rochester this season.

Blackburn was scheduled to pitch the series finale against the A's on Wednesday.

"Whoever we call up here will slide right into his spot," manager Ron Gardenhire said.

Blackburn, 30, joins Scott Baker, Carl Pavano, Francisco Liriano and Jason Marquis as members of this season's projected rotation to be demoted, traded or DL'd this season. None, in fact, are currently on the Twins' 40-man roster: Baker (surgery) and Pavano (shoulder) are on the 60-day disabled list; Liriano was traded to the White Sox after losing his job briefly in May; and Marquis was released after going 2-4 with an 8.47 ERA in seven starts.

But Blackburn's problems go further back than this season. Since a terrific stretch in early 2011, when he went 5-1 with a 2.29 ERA from May 4-June 22, he has made only five quality starts in 30 appearances, going a combined 5-14 with a 7.26 ERA -- not what the Twins anticipated when they signed him to a four-year, \$14 million extension prior to the 2010 season.

The Twins owe him \$5.5 million next season.

"As far as next year goes, he's still a member of our organization and I suspect, unless we traded him in the offseason, he'll be back in spring training trying to win a job on the club," Antony said.

That might not be the case for Nishioka, who seems to have failed his latest audition with the major league club during a three-game series at Cleveland Aug. 6-8, when he was charged with two errors at second base -- it was initially three but one was overturned when Cleveland asked for a review -- and went 0 for 12 with a sacrifice fly. The former Japan League all-star never looked comfortable, moving late to cover first on one play, forgetting where to be on a relay throw on others.

Signed to a three-year, \$9.25 million contract after winning the Nippon Professional League batting title in 2010, Nishioka has a .214 batting average with 14 runs scored and 14 errors in 71 major league games. He was released from the 40-man roster after being scouted by general manager Terry Ryan, who wanted to see if the Cleveland series was indicative of his play. He stayed three more games with the Twins before being sent back down.

"He had been playing better (at Rochester) and they said now was as good a time as any to give him a shot," Antony said. "We gave him a shot and it just didn't work out."

The Twins still owe Nishioka \$3 million in 2013 and have a team option with a \$250,000 buyout in 2014. If Nishioka decided to try playing in Japan again next season, a team would have to buy out the rest of his contract with the Twins, which might be a best-case scenario for Minnesota.

Asked if the Twins might try to buy out the rest of the deal at a reduced rate, Antony said, "We'll discuss all that after the season's over. I can honestly say we have not talked about any of that right now."

Minnesota Twins push back Carl Pavano's rehab start

By: John Shipley, Pioneer Press- 8/20/12

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Carl Pavano had his latest rehab start pushed back so he can visit orthopedic specialist Dr. David Altchek in New York. He was scheduled to throw four innings and about 60 pitches for Class A Fort Myers on Tuesday, Aug. 21.

After his last start, Pavano told mlb.com he was struggling with his velocity, a problem since spring training. Twins assistant general manager Rob Antony said the meeting with Altchek, who has performed shoulder and elbow surgery on Pavano, is about giving the pitcher some peace of mind.

"He just wants to make sure there's nothing in there that's inhibiting him," Antony said.

Pavano is 2-4 with a 6.00 earned-run average in 11 starts with the Twins. Suffering from weakness and pain in the shoulder, he struggled with his velocity, throwing consistently in the low- to mid-80s. According to fangraphs.com, Pavano averaged 89 mph in 2011 and just over 86 mph this season.

After an MRI exam, Pavano was diagnosed with inflammation in the capsule of his right shoulder.

Minnesota Twins: One MRI down, one to go for Denard Span

By: John Shipley, Pioneer Press- 8/20/12

OAKLAND, Calif. -- An MRI exam on Denard Span's stiff neck and shoulder taken Monday, Aug. 20, revealed no damage but the Twins center fielder will have another taken of his clavicle, as well.

Span missed his seventh straight game since being injured while trying to make a sliding catch on Aug. 12. X-rays taken then were negative, but Span has been unable to swing a bat without pain since.

"Basically we're doing (the MRIs) just to make sure we're not missing anything," assistant GM Rob Antony said.

Ben Revere started Monday's late game against the A's in center field and was the Twins' leadoff hitter, while Darin Mastroianni took Revere's place in right. Span will have an MRI taken of his clavicle on Tuesday in San Francisco.

Minnesota Twins' Ron Gardenhire not interested in playing spoiler

By: John Shipley, Pioneer Press- 8/20/12

OAKLAND, Calif. -- This week's series against the A's is one of many against teams fighting for a postseason spot but Twins manager Ron Gardenhire isn't ready to embrace the role of spoiler.

The Twins entered Monday's late game at the Coliseum having lost nine of 10 games.

"Right now it's not even about the other team; it's about us getting back to winning ballgames, playing a better brand of baseball ourselves," Gardenhire said.

The Twins move on to Texas for a four-game series starting Thursday, and still have to play series against the White Sox (2), Tigers (2) and Yankees.

"We can't really worry about the other guys," said Gardenhire, whose team fell 20 games under for the first time this season after a 5-1 loss Sunday at Seattle. "Right now we need to find something for ourselves, this clubhouse. We're scuffling enough right now.

"There for awhile we were playing pretty good baseball, and we have to get back and find ourselves before we worry about trying to knock somebody else's head off. We have to straighten ourselves out."

Twins 7, A's 2: Minnesota snaps five-game skid

By: John Shipley, Pioneer Press- 8/21/12

Josh Willingham went 3 for 5 with two RBIs and a run scored against his former team as Minnesota snapped a five-game losing streak in front of an announced crowd of 10,274 Monday, Aug. 20, at Oakland Coliseum.

Brian Duensing (3-8) won for the second time in nine starts this season, holding Oakland to two runs, one earned, on five hits and a walk in six innings. He struck out a season-high seven.

Willingham, who signed with Minnesota last winter after one season with the A's, hit RBI singles in the first and second innings as the Twins took a quick 4-0 lead on an Oakland team that started the night 1-1/2 games out of a wild-card spot. They chased starter Brandon McCarthy after he gave up six earned runs on 10 hits and a walk in 3 1/3 innings.

MEANING: The Twins won for the first time on this 10-game road trip (1-3) and for the second time in 11 games.

ETC.: Rookie shortstop Pedro Florimon went 3 for 3 with a walk and scored three runs to raise his batting average to .500 (6 for 12) since being recalled from Class AAA Rochester on Aug. 15. ... After going 0 for 10 with runners in scoring position in Sunday's loss at Seattle, the Twins were 4 for 11 on Monday.

UP NEXT: at Oakland, 9:05 p.m. Tuesday, FSN, KSTP-AM 1500

Span undergoes MRI, sits for seventh straight game

By: Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com- 8/20/12

OAKLAND -- Center fielder Denard Span underwent an MRI exam on his neck on Monday, and was again held out of the lineup for a seventh straight game on Monday against the A's.

Span, who is scheduled to have another MRI exam on his right clavicle on Tuesday, originally hurt his shoulder landing awkwardly while trying to make a diving catch on Aug. 12. The MRI on his neck came back clean.

"He couldn't get through both of them today," assistant general manager Rob Antony said of the MRI exams. "Basically we're doing that just to make sure we're not missing anything. We want to rule everything out and give him peace of mind."

With Span out, Ben Revere started in center field with Darin Mastroianni getting the start in right field.

Blackburn outrighted to Triple-A Rochester

OAKLAND -- The Twins outrighted struggling right-hander Nick Blackburn to Triple-A Rochester, and will recall a starting pitcher on Tuesday to start on Wednesday against the A's. In addition, Minnesota also outrighted infielder Tsuyoshi Nishioka, who will remain on the Rochester roster.

Blackburn was removed from the 40-man roster after having a rough time with the Twins, posting a 7.39 ERA in 19 outings. His last start came Friday, when he gave up five runs on 11 hits over 5 1/3 innings.

He'll be a starter in Rochester, and Twins assistant general manager Rob Antony said Blackburn will have to pitch well to be back up with the club again this season, as he's no longer on the 40-man roster.

"I talked to Nick today, let him know and told him, 'Go down there, try and get straightened out and when September comes, we'll evaluate the situation,'" Antony said. "There's no guarantees he'll come back. We could select him and bring him back if we want, or he could not be back this year -- whatever we think is the right situation when the time comes."

Blackburn is still owed \$5.5 million next season, and will have to earn a spot with the club, according to Antony.

"As far as next year goes, he's still a member of our organization," Antony said. "I suspect, unless we trade him in the offseason, he'll be back in Spring Training trying to win a job on the club."

With Blackburn out, the Twins need a starter for Wednesday, and it's expected to be right-hander Liam Hendriks, who last pitched for Rochester on Friday. The 23-year-old has been impressive with the Red Wings with a 2.20 ERA in 16 starts, but it hasn't translated with the Twins, as evidenced by his career 6.71 ERA in 12 outings.

Nishioka, who is also owed \$3 million next year, struggled in three games with the Twins this year, going 0-for-12 with two errors and several other misplays in the field.

"I'm sure it's a pride thing for any player," Antony said. "No. 1, it's tough to be in the Minor Leagues; but No. 2, when you're taken off the Major League roster and 29 other clubs pass on you, it tells you you're not doing very well."

The team now has 38 players on its 40-man roster.

Walters, Gibson show progress in rehab outings

OAKLAND -- The Twins received good reports on rehab starts from right-handers P.J. Walters and Kyle Gibson, who both pitched in the Minors on Sunday.

Walters, on the disabled list since June 14 with right shoulder inflammation, tossed three scoreless innings for Triple-A Rochester. He struck out six and walked two while throwing 59 pitches.

"He was fine," Twins assistant general manager Rob Antony said. "He felt good, everything's fine there."

Gibson, meanwhile, made his second rehab start with Class A Advanced Fort Myers. The right-hander, who is coming off Tommy John surgery last September, gave up just one run on three hits over four innings.

He's now pitched in nine games in the Minors this season, posting a 2.49 ERA with 23 strikeouts and five walks in 21 2/3 innings.

Right-hander Carl Pavano was scheduled to make a rehab start with Fort Myers on Tuesday, but will instead meet with Dr. David Altchek in New York. Pavano, on the disabled list since June 4 with right rotator cuff weakness, has been conferring with Altchek, but wanted to meet with him in person.

Antony, though, said that Pavano hasn't suffered a setback and that it was the only day Altchek could meet with Pavano. He's expected to make another rehab start in a few days.

Offense provides Duensing with plenty of help vs. A's

By: Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com- 8/21/12

OAKLAND -- For a struggling rotation trying to find consistency from its starters, Brian Duensing has been a bright spot since being moved back to the starting rotation on July 26.

The left-hander, who has been shuffling between being a reliever and a starter this season, has been able to pitch deep into games recently, and it was again the case Monday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

Duensing turned in a quality start, and the offense did the rest in a 7-2 win over the A's that snapped a five-game losing streak for the Twins.

He now has a 3.77 ERA in five starts since he rejoined the rotation and has pitched at least six innings in each of those outings.

"I'm feeling more comfortable," said Duensing, who improved to 3-8 with a 4.46 ERA. "I've thrown more strikes down in the zone for the most part. I've had a couple shaky innings here and there, but I thought tonight I was able to make some good pitches in key situations. We're starting to put some things together and hopefully we'll keep it going."

Duensing, making his ninth start of the year, allowed two runs (one earned) on five hits and a walk over six innings. He also struck out a season-high seven batters, which was his highest total since striking out nine against the Indians on Aug. 13, 2011.

"We just want him to take the ball and give us a chance to win a game and that's what he did," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "When he starts trying to pump the ball up to 93-94 mph he gets himself in trouble. He stayed within himself, he used his changeup, used his slow breaking ball and he moved the ball in and out. That's how he has to pitch."

Duensing was staked an early lead by the Twins, who scored two runs in the first against right-hander Brandon McCarthy. Josh Willingham brought home the first run against his former team with an RBI double before Trevor Plouffe walked with the bases loaded.

Minnesota added two more runs in the second when Darin Mastroianni and Willingham both provided RBI singles.

The A's got on the board in the bottom of the inning on an RBI double from Josh Donaldson to score Yoenis Cespedes.

Oakland scored again in the third and was helped by a throwing error from Pedro Florimon on a grounder hit by Coco Crisp. Crisp later scored on an RBI groundout after stealing second base and reaching third on an errant throw from catcher Joe Mauer.

But the Twins scored twice in the fourth on a two-run single from Mauer to score Florimon and Ben Revere, who both singled and advanced on a sacrifice bunt from Mastroianni.

"It was a mess, from beginning to end," said McCarthy, who gave up six runs on 10 hits and a walk to fall to 6-5 with a 3.16 ERA. "I just mechanically felt completely out of whack with everything. That's pretty much what showed. I was horrible in the bullpen and had nothing at any point. It's been a long time since I had a day like this, where you just want a rewind button in the first inning and start all over."

Florimon, who went 3-for-3 with a walk, sparked another rally in the eighth against reliever Travis Blackley, reaching on a leadoff single and later scoring on a sac fly from Mastroianni.

"He's been pretty good," Gardenhire said of Florimon, who is 6-for-12 with two walks since being called up from Triple-A Rochester last week. "He's been running around real nice, giving us good at-bats, some nice swings. I'm kind of fond of the defense. I like to see the defense. He made that high throw today. ... He's got to get rid of it a little quicker. But he's calmed that position down out there. Plus, he's put out some really nice swings."

Willingham, Mauer, Florimon help Twins bounce back from weekend sweep

By: Staff, Associated Press- 8/21/12

OAKLAND, Calif. -- **Josh Willingham** drove in two runs against his former team, **Joe Mauer** hit a two-run single and the Minnesota Twins snapped Oakland's four-game winning streak with a 7-2 victory over the Athletics on Monday night.

The skinny

Brian Duensing (3-8) struck out seven and walked one in six innings to win for the first time in three starts after consecutive losses, helping the Twins bounce back from a three-game weekend sweep at Seattle to begin a 10-game road trip.

Darin Mastroianni had an RBI single and added a sacrifice fly in the eighth and No. 9 hitter Pedro Florimon joined Willingham and Mauer with three hits apiece for Minnesota, which went 4 for 11 with runners in scoring position a day after missing in all 10 such chances in the series finale at Seattle.

Oakland had its five-game home winning streak snapped with just the club's 11th defeat in 37 games at the Coliseum since June 6. But the A's will have a new addition to their lineup come Tuesday night's middle game of the series. The team announced in the seventh inning it had acquired veteran shortstop Stephen Drew from Arizona for minor league infielder Sean Jamieson.

A's starter Brandon McCarthy (6-5) surrendered three straight one-out hits in the first, including Willingham's RBI double. **Trevor Plouffe** also drew a bases-loaded walk as the Twins took a quick 2-0 lead.

McCarthy's night was done after he gave up Willingham's third hit, an infield single in the fourth. Travis Blackley pitched 5 2-3 innings of relief.

McCarthy, Oakland's opening day starter, was knocked out after 3 1-3 innings for his shortest outing since also going 3 1-3 on Aug. 12 last year against Texas. His 10 hits allowed matched his second-highest total of the season and he was tagged for a season-high six runs.

The lanky right-hander has lost back-to-back starts during a three-start winless streak that followed a 6-0 stretch over seven outings before going on the disabled list from June 24-Aug. 10 with a strained throwing shoulder.

Josh Donaldson hit a run-scoring double and Josh Reddick added an RBI groundout for the A's, who had won four straight games to move a season high-tying 10 games over .500 - but they missed going 11 games over for the first time since finishing the 2006 season at 93-69. That team was the last to make the playoffs, reaching the AL championship series before being swept in four games by the Tigers.

Derek Norris had two hits to lead Oakland, which couldn't do much against the lefty Duensing. He allowed two runs and five hits.

Former Oakland star Willingham received scattered boos from the small crowd of 10,274 when he came to the plate in the first. Most of those fans were gone by the late innings with the A's trailing.

Minnesota ended a three-game skid in the series with the A's after being swept at home in the teams' first games following the All-Star break. The Twins took all three meetings in late May.

Numbers game

1-7: Pedro Florimon's record in eight big league games

91: RBIs for Willingham

Health report

Minnesota played without CF **Denard Span** for the seventh straight game because of a sore right shoulder. He underwent an MRI exam on his collarbone Monday in San Francisco and is scheduled for an MRI on the shoulder Tuesday.

On deck

Tuesday: @ A's, 9:05 p.m. RHP Cole De Vries (2-4, 5.04) vs. RHP Dan Straily (1-0, 3.18)

Wednesday: @ A's, 2:35 p.m. RHP **Nick Blackburn** (4-9, 7.39) vs. LHP Tommy Milone (9-9, 4.03)

Duensing, Twins bounce back in rout of A's

By: Staff, Associated Press- 8/20/12

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- Manager Ron Gardenhire ran down the list of everything that went right for his Minnesota Twins this time. Timely hitting and a solid outing from Brian Duensing to start.

"We were due," Gardenhire said.

Josh Willingham drove in two runs against his former team, Joe Mauer hit a two-run single and the Twins snapped Oakland's four-game winning streak and a five-game skid of their own with a 7-2 victory over the Athletics on Monday night.

Brian Duensing (3-8) struck out seven and walked one in six innings to win for the first time in three starts after consecutive losses, helping the Twins bounce back from a three-game weekend sweep at Seattle to begin a 10-game road trip.

Darin Mastroianni had an RBI single and added a sacrifice fly in the eighth and No. 9 hitter Pedro Florimon joined Willingham and Mauer with three hits apiece for Minnesota, which went 4 for 11 with runners in scoring position a day after missing in all 10 such chances in the series finale at Seattle.

Coming off a series sweep in Seattle that dropped them a season-low 15 games out of first place in the AL Central, the Twins came through

with the big hits when it mattered.

"Right from the get-go. We got some runs in there early, had a little bit of a lead and kept getting some base hits and quality at-bats," Gardenhire said. "And Duens did his thing. It was a nice night. We got to run around the bases a little bit. Some guys had some good nights."

Oakland had its five-game home win streak snapped with just the club's 11th loss in 37 games at the Coliseum since June 6. But the A's will have a new addition to their lineup come Tuesday night's middle game of the series. The team announced in the seventh inning it had acquired veteran shortstop Stephen Drew from Arizona for minor league infielder Sean Jamieson.

Oakland's players found out when the swap was announced over the public address system.

"He plays the same position, so I guess we'll see what happens," current shortstop Cliff Pennington said.

A's starter Brandon McCarthy (6-5) surrendered three straight one-out hits in the first, including Willingham's RBI double. Trevor Plouffe also drew a bases-loaded walk as the Twins took a quick 2-0 lead.

McCarthy's night was done after he gave up Willingham's third hit, an infield single in the fourth. Travis Blackley pitched 5 2-3 innings of relief.

McCarthy, Oakland's opening day starter, was knocked out after 3 1-3 innings for his shortest outing since also going 3 1-3 on Aug. 12 last year against Texas. His 10 hits allowed matched his second-highest total of the season and he was tagged for a season-high six runs.

"Beginning to end, mechanically I felt completely out of whack," he said. "I just didn't feel I had any idea where the ball was going. I was horrible in the bullpen. Nothing at any point felt right. It's been a long time since I've had a day like this where I want a rewind button to get back to the beginning and start over."

The lanky right-hander has lost back-to-back starts during a three-start winless streak that followed a 6-0 stretch over seven outings before going on the disabled list from June 24-Aug. 10 with a strained throwing shoulder.

"It was completely one of those days almost mentally just write off as fast as you can as just being a fluke thing and get back to work," he added.

Josh Donaldson hit a run-scoring double and Josh Reddick added an RBI groundout for the A's, who had won four straight games to move a season high-tying 10 games over .500 -- but they missed going 11 games over for the first time since finishing the 2006 season at 93-69. That team was the last to make the playoffs, reaching the AL championship series before being swept in four games by the Tigers.

Derek Norris had two hits to lead Oakland, which couldn't do much against the lefty Duensing. He allowed two runs and five hits.

"It was fun. That's the way the game should be played, and that's the way we tend to play the game," Duensing said. "For us to be able to go out there and execute and get runners on and score first, it's what you ask for."

The A's seemed to appreciate the front office's efforts to keep improving the surprise contender.

"He's a good player, so if he comes along and jumps in and fits in and helps us win, we're all for it," second baseman Jemile Weeks said of Drew. "I guess they're trying to make a push."

Former Oakland star Willingham received scattered boos from the small crowd of 10,274 when he came to the plate in the first. Most of those fans were gone by the late innings with the A's trailing.

Minnesota ended a three-game skid in the series with the A's after being swept at home in the teams' first games following the All-Star break. The Twins took all three meetings in late May.

NOTES: Minnesota played without CF Denard Span for the seventh straight game because of a sore right shoulder. He underwent an MRI

exam on his collarbone Monday in San Francisco and is scheduled for an MRI on the shoulder Tuesday. ... Florimon stole his first career base in the second inning for the Twins after a leadoff single. ... A's LHP Brett Anderson is back from Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery, set to make his season debut Tuesday night. Anderson was activated from the 60-day disabled list Monday, ready to pitch in the major leagues again for the first time since undergoing surgery 13 months ago. ... Coco Crisp stole his 27th base. ... McCarthy was handed his first career loss to the Twins in five starts and 10 appearances. He beat Minnesota on July 31 with a nine-strikeout performance. ... Oakland will make corresponding moves to its 25-man and 40-man rosters upon the arrival of Drew, who returned in late June from a serious ankle injury that sidelined him for 137 games. He is hitless in his last 15 at-bats.

Twins outright RHP Nick Blackburn to Triple-A

By: Tyler Mason, FSNorth.com- 8/20/12

The Minnesota Twins have outrighted struggling right-hander Nick Blackburn to Triple-A Rochester. The team will make a corresponding move to fill Blackburn's spot on the 25-man roster prior to Tuesday's game in Oakland.

Minnesota also outrighted infielder Tsuyoshi Nishioka, who is currently playing for Rochester. The moves mean that both Blackburn and Nishioka are no longer on the Twins' 40-man roster.

In 19 starts with the Twins this season, Blackburn was 4-9 with a 7.39 ERA. He was optioned to Triple-A once already this season. Since being called back up, Blackburn was 0-4 with a 6.11 ERA in six starts since July 20. He allowed four or more runs in four of those six starts.

The Twins now have only 38 players on their 40-man roster.

Twins trying to halt revolving-door rotation

By: Tyler Mason, FSNorth.com- 8/20/12

There were already going to be plenty of question marks surrounding the Minnesota Twins' rotation for the 2013 season. For a while, Nick Blackburn didn't appear to be one of the question marks.

But the Twins outrighted Blackburn to Triple-A Rochester on Monday, which changes at least his immediate future with the club. Outrighting a player is different than optioning a player to the minors. By being outrighted, Blackburn is no longer on the team's 40-man roster — a sign that the club is prepared to move in a different direction.

When a player is outrighted, he must first clear waivers before the major league team can assign him to the minors. That means 29 other teams passed on Blackburn, who was 4-9 with a 7.39 ERA in 19 starts with Minnesota this season.

With Blackburn off the 40-man roster at this point in the season, it's highly unlikely he'll be put back on it in order to be a September call-up in a week and a half. So how does Blackburn factor into Minnesota's rotation in 2013? Earlier this month, Twins general manager Terry Ryan said Blackburn would be "in the mix" next year but will have to earn a spot in the rotation.

"There are days that there'd be no question ... when you watch him that, 'OK, he might string one together here,'" Ryan said earlier this month. "Obviously there are other times that things have not gone well. But he'll be in the mix."

That fact became even more evident after Monday. Blackburn will be in the final year of his contract in 2013, when he'll make \$5.5 million. The Twins have an \$8 million club option on Blackburn for 2014, but it appears unlikely that option will get picked up.

So a look at Minnesota's current rotation will yield a much different picture than what the Twins broke camp with this spring. None of Minnesota's five current starters were in the rotation to start the season. Left-hander Francisco Liriano was traded to Chicago. Jason Marquis is also gone after a brief and unsuccessful stint with the Twins; he's now with San Diego after Minnesota released him in late May.

Veteran right-hander Carl Pavano has been on the disabled list since June 4. Scott Baker has missed the entire season after having Tommy John surgery. Liam Hendriks — whose 2012 season was briefly delayed due to food poisoning — has spent much of the year with Rochester.

Three of Minnesota's five current starters — Samuel Deduno, Scott Diamond and Cole De Vries — began the year in the minors. Left-hander Brian Duensing, who started Monday against Oakland, was in the bullpen to begin the season. Whoever is called up to take Blackburn's spot in the rotation (possibly Hendriks) will be yet another pitcher who has spent most of the year in the minors.

As a result of the inconsistency, Minnesota's starting rotation has posted the worst ERA in the American League (5.47) prior to Monday. Only Colorado's starters have a worse ERA (6.22).

There's a chance the Twins could see right-hander P.J. Walters return this season. Walters has been on the disabled list a right shoulder injury, but made a rehab start Sunday for Rochester. In that start, Walters pitched three scoreless innings with six strikeouts — an encouraging sign for a Twins team needing any positive pitching news it can get.

Minnesota doesn't have a ton to play for in the final month and a half of the season, but it will serve as an audition of sorts for several Twins pitchers. It appears Blackburn, entering the final year of a four-year, \$14 million deal, will be among the cast of pitchers waiting in line for an audition.

Only time will tell if he can land the role.

Twins aim for second straight win in Oakland

By: Staff, Associated Press- 8/21/12

Although it's three weeks past the non-waiver trade deadline, the Oakland Athletics made a couple moves Monday that should bolster their roster for a playoff push.

Sidelined for more than 14 months after Tommy John surgery, Brett Anderson is slated to take the ball against the Minnesota Twins on Tuesday night, when he should have Stephen Drew behind him at shortstop.

Anderson was activated from the 60-day disabled list prior to Monday's 7-2 loss to the Twins, which snapped Oakland's four-game winning streak, and will be appearing in his first game since June 5, 2011. The 24-year-old left-hander has lost more than 20 pounds from his previous playing weight of 248, and noticed he felt stronger later in games during his minor league appearances.

In six rehab starts, he went 1-1 with a 4.97 ERA.

"We feel like this could be a nice little shot in the arm for us," manager Bob Melvin said.

The A's (65-56) are obviously hoping the acquisition of Drew from Arizona on Monday for minor league infielder Sean Jamieson will do the same.

The 29-year-old Drew is batting .193 with two home runs and 12 RBIs in 40 games since coming back June 26 from a fractured right ankle that sidelined him for nearly a year. Despite his unflattering numbers, the A's haven't been getting much production as it is from Cliff Pennington and Adam Rosales. Oakland's shortstops are last in the majors in batting at .188 and in RBIs with 30.

"It'll be refreshing and a new start," Drew said. "It's a good feeling to go over there and still be competing (for the postseason)."

The A's are a half-game back of Baltimore for the AL's final playoff spot.

"I want to go out there and pitch well because we need to win ballgames," said Anderson, who must earn and keep his spot in the rotation. "So it's going to be that much more pressure filled, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Anderson won 11 games as a rookie in 2009 and led all Oakland starters with a 2.80 ERA in 19 games the following year. Before his injury last season, he was 3-6 with a 4.00 ERA.

He is 2-1 with a 2.08 ERA in his last three starts against the Twins with 14 strikeouts to one walk over 21 2-3 innings.

This will be his first time facing Josh Willingham, who has been wreaking havoc on his former team this season.

Willingham went 3 for 5 with a double and two RBIs Monday - just the second win in 11 games for Minnesota (51-70) - and is batting .444 with five homers and 14 RBIs in seven games against Oakland this year.

Minnesota rookie Cole De Vries (2-4, 5.04 ERA), who allowed four runs and eight hits in four innings of Wednesday's 5-1 loss to Detroit, has already faced the A's twice. The right-hander gave up two hits in five scoreless innings May 29 while walking five, but yielded seven runs in five innings of a 9-3 loss July 14.

Yoenis Cespedes is 2 for 3 with a homer and double against De Vries, while Josh Reddick is 2 for 5.

Cespedes, who singled and scored Monday, is 9 for 18 with six RBIs and six runs in four games against Minnesota this year.

[gabriela lozada](#) [@gabriela_lozada](#) It felt SO great to watch a [@Twins](#) game tonight. Especially to see them win :)

[Glen Perkins](#) [@glen_perkins](#) "[@Twins](#): Here's the latest example of why Joe Mauer is head and shoulders above just about every catcher in [@MLB](#)" [#ShamelessPlug](#)

[abby jo pekarna](#) [@AJPekarna](#) Bed time!!! Goodnights [@Twins](#) you were a great way to end my night tonight!!! [#MNTwins](#)

[Matt Pankratz](#) [@czmilosz](#) Nice win tonight [@BrianDuensing52](#) thanks for helping turn the [@Twins](#) around!

[Kirsten Zeise](#) [@KikiZeise](#) Florimon got his first ever [@MLB](#) win tonight after his 7 games with the twins & orioles! It's about time! Way to go [@Twins](#)!

[Brent Walby](#) [@where_is_walbo](#) Man, this Florimon is fun to watch for the [@Twins](#). Whether it's his bat or glove, he is putting on a show tonight [#MNTwins](#)

[Señor Djerfo](#) [@djarv21](#) Amazing [@Twins](#) fans if you ask me! <http://instagr.am/p/Ok70fgvyUR/>

[Jill Robert](#) [@DiamondDarling7](#) Just saying that I'm seriously exhausted. Can't go to bed until [@Twins](#) are over though.