



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

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Twins avoid sweep in Chicago behind Diamond's strong outing

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 9/19/13

CHICAGO – Scott Diamond resembled the pitcher who went 12-9 last season on Wednesday, not the one who is 6-11 this year.

By attacking the strike zone early in the count, Diamond was able to induce plenty of ground balls and zip through easy innings. He set the tone for the Twins, who beat the White Sox 4-3 to avoid being swept in the three-game series at U.S. Cellular Field.

"It's taken a long time," Diamond said. "I'm a little disappointed in that."

Diamond had bone chips removed from his elbow during the offseason and was a little behind the other pitchers when he reported to spring training. He tried to cram a full throwing program into a smaller window than normal. Eventually he backed off, then wasn't effective when he took the mound. He was 5-10, and frustrated, when he was sent down Aug. 1. He's back up for September and, on Wednesday, broke a personal five-game losing streak.

Diamond held the White Sox to three runs over 6½ innings on five hits, two walks and no strikeouts. He's far from a power pitcher, and Wednesday marked the seventh consecutive start in which he's gotten one or no strikeouts.

"I might have created some bad habits because of [rushing during spring training], but we are slowly getting rid of them," he said. "It has taken just a little longer than I wanted."

Diamond entered the seventh having given up only one run, but Jordan Danks hit a two-out, two-run single off him as Chicago pulled within 4-3. Still, Twins manager Ron Gardenhire was pleased.

"He attacked the strike zone a lot better and did his job," Gardenhire said. "That was a huge performance and a confidence booster for him."

The bullpen took over, with Casey Fien and Jared Burton setting up Glen Perkins for his 36th save.

Hendriks out, De Vries in

After going 1-3 in eight starts with a 6.87 ERA, the Twins have seen enough of Liam Hendriks, at least for now.

Hendriks has officially been lifted from the starting rotation and replaced with righthander Cole De Vries. De Vries, who is from Eden Prairie and played for the Gophers, replaced Hendriks in the first inning Monday and pitched five innings.

It's been a challenging year for De Vries, who was in the Opening Day starting rotation when he landed on the disabled list because of a forearm strain. He didn't pitch in a game until late May, then had to work his way up to Class AAA Rochester, where he was 3-4 with a 7.02 ERA. He threw seven shutout innings in his final start for the Red Wings before being called up to the Twins. Now he gets a chance to prove he belongs in consideration for a spot on the 2014 staff.

Fan interest

The Twins still announce crowds of 25,000-plus at games despite the team being on the verge of losing 90-plus games for the third consecutive season. Teams in the playoff race, such as Oakland, Tampa Bay and Cleveland, aren't drawing many fans.

During a recent 10-game homestand that included games against the Rays and Rangers, Oakland drew only three crowds of more than 20,000 and one of more than 24,000.

Oakland fans usually step up in crunch time, but haven't yet.

"I know they haven't drawn great, but it's been like that for a while," Gardenhire said. "They are pretty passionate fans. They know more things about my family than I do. When the game is going on, they have some great lines."

Etc.

- Twins catcher Joe Mauer, still recovering from a concussion suffered Aug. 19, worked out at home for a third day in a row. Twins General Manager Terry Ryan called it "another good day," although it is unclear how much work the Twins are having Mauer do at home.

- Twins rookies — all 17, plus one freshman bullpen catcher — were put through the annual hazing after Wednesday's game. Their clothes were hidden and replaced with crazy outfits, with most of the players boarding the bus to the airport in drag.

Decision looms on keeping or firing Twins' manager Gardenhire

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 9/19/13

The same sign Ron Gardenhire hung in his office at the Metrodome, the one that reads "Improvise and Overcome," hangs in his office at Target Field.

On another wall is a copy of a Star Tribune sports section from his first game as Twins manager, an 8-6 victory over Kansas City on April 1, 2002. Another wall is lined with scorecards from memorable wins: Win No. 1; the game that clinched the division in 2002; win Nos. 300, 500 and 600; the last game at the Dome; Game No. 163 against the Tigers in 2009; and win Nos. 700, 800 and 900.

The next memento will be the lineup card from win No. 1,000. Gardenhire sits at 997-937 after the Twins defeated the Chicago White Sox 4-3 on Wednesday.

But will it be the final keepsake he collects as manager of the Twins?

Gardenhire's contract expires after this season, and there has been no indication from Twins management whether he will be invited back as the club nears the end of a possible third consecutive season of 90-plus losses. There figures to be a range of emotions when he becomes the 60th manager in major league history to reach the 1,000-win milestone.

Gardenhire, 55, has shown no signs of stress over his uncertain future. He has been engaging and pleasant in the clubhouse, as he has been throughout his career, and his sense of humor has remained intact.

"Carol [his wife] and I obviously talk about it," he said. "The 'what ifs?': What if we're not here next year, where are we going to go? Because my kids are up here. They live up here, work up here. So it would be naive to say we didn't think about it and talk about it. But it's not something I'm overwhelmed by."

Those who have known Gardenhire throughout his professional career, as a player, coach and manager, believe he was a natural to be in a dugout, running a team.

"When we got him over here to manage Kenosha in 1988, there was no doubt he was going to become a major league manager, even back in A-ball," said Twins General Manager Terry Ryan, whose relationship with Gardenhire goes back to the 1980s when they were in the Mets organization. "He just had that presence and he had the respect of players."

He has, through his 26 years with the Twins organization (12 as manager), also gained the respect of his peers.

"I think Gardy has a very, very broad baseball mind and is in tune with fundamentals in every area," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia, the only current baseball manager in the majors with more tenure with one team (14 years) than Gardenhire. "He understands what's needed on a team to be successful. He's made the most of whatever talent he's had on his roster, taking advantage of every aspect."

Twins players who have experienced Gardenhire during good times — he led the club to six division titles in his first nine seasons — say he has adapted well from working with elite players to teaching inexperienced ones.

"I think the players here see him as part of the solution and not part of the problem," closer Glen Perkins said, "and that we can win with him."

Adapting to the talent

Behind his office desk sits the 2010 AL Manager of the Year Award, which he received after five consecutive runner-up finishes.

On his watch, he's had two MVPs (Justin Morneau and Joe Mauer), a two-time Cy Young winner (Johan Santana), three players win Silver Slugger awards (Morneau, Mauer and Josh Willingham) and four players win Gold Glove awards (Mauer, Santana, Torii Hunter and Doug Mientkiewicz).

But while the victories and the awards have dried up the past few years, Gardenhire still believes he's improved as a manager in several key areas.

"I think you change," he said. "Back then I was a little more confrontational. I wasn't afraid to get in players' faces, screaming. I think I've kind of realized that players are giving you everything they have and I'm not as confrontational. I think I understand how to handle players better than I did before."

He will still yell, like he did during a game in Boston this season when rookie Aaron Hicks casually flipped a ball after catching it. Gardenhire let Hicks have it after the inning was over. But because he's had to manage so many inexperienced players over the past couple years, he has become more of a teacher than a screamer.

"He's made a better effort to get more out of those guys," Perkins said. "I think you've seen that with guys like [second baseman] Brian Dozier, the improvement he's made as the season has gone on. And the guys in the bullpen, putting them in positions where they can be successful."

For years, Gardenhire led active managers in ejections, but now runs second to Detroit's Jim Leyland. He admits he's less confrontational with umpires than he used to be, partially because he's developed relationships with many of them and better understands their challenges.

But when strategy calls for it, Gardenhire is still willing to get tossed. Some Twins players have picked up the tab for Gardenhire's fines, after their manager got thrown out to protect them and keep them in the game.

"Get the umpire mad at me so the player can get out of there," Gardenhire said. "But I have calmed down quite a bit."

'Part of baseball life'

As soon as Ryan announced after last season that Gardenhire's contract wouldn't be addressed until this offseason, it appeared a challenge had been delivered: Show improvement, or be shown the door.

When the Twins failed to make a splashy move during the offseason, it looked as if Gardenhire would have a tough time leading the club to tangible improvement in the standings. The Twins headed to camp with no clear No. 1 starter in the rotation and a daily lineup sprinkled with inexperience.

"It is part of the baseball life," Gardenhire said of his situation. "I'll just wait and see at the end of the season. We'll see what happens and we will go from there."

Gardenhire won't be judged on his record alone, Ryan said. The progress made by young players such as Dozier and rookie relievers Ryan Pressly and Caleb Thielbar could influence the decision. A wave of young talent, led by elite prospect Miguel Sano, should start to reach the majors next season. The Twins' 2014 manager will need to prove that he can develop up-and-coming players, as Gardenhire did during his early years with the Twins.

But the past three disastrous seasons have put Gardenhire in a perilous position.

"What have we done [lately], that's a natural thought in baseball," Ryan said of a possible managerial change. "We have struggled. I'm the one who has given him the players. ... We've got to have the talent for any manager or coach to succeed. But we know where we are and we have a pretty good idea of where we are going. I'm not trying to pretend that he's got the most talented roster we have ever seen."

Said Perkins: "He didn't change how he manages, that's not what has contributed to us losing here. Or changing his style or that he's out of touch. It's not that. [The solution is] better players. It's more talent."

Gardenhire says he knows he doesn't want to manage into his late 60s, because he wants to spend time with his grandchildren. But he definitely wants to return and turn the Twins into a winner again before he departs. He said he has no health issues that would cause him to step away on his own.

"I like what I'm doing," Gardenhire said. "I'm not ready to retire now."

And his office still has space for more mementos, starting with that lineup card for victory No. 1,000.

TwinsCentric: Hendriks has run out of chances

Nick Nelson, Star Tribune – 9/18/13

Liam Hendriks is still only 24 years old. He owns a career 2.99 ERA in the minor leagues. He was dominant against Triple-A hitters as recently as last year. In so many respects, it seems far too soon to consider giving up on the Australian righty.

Yet, after watching his downright miserable performance in Chicago on Monday night, it's awfully difficult to come away with any conclusion other than this: The Twins need to move on.

Hendriks' latest outing is the lowlight in what's been a tumultuous major-league career. He's had plenty of clunkers across the past three seasons, in which he is 2-13 with a 6.01 ERA, but Monday's dud truly takes the cake. Going against a White Sox club that was averaging a league-low 3.64 runs per game and had scored just seven times in its past six contests, Hendriks coughed up seven runs on five hits and three walks while recording only two outs.

It has always been somewhat apparent from watching him that Hendriks doesn't really have the stuff to be an effective major-league pitcher, but his youth and his superb numbers throughout most of his minor-league career (not to mention a death of appealing alternative options in the high levels) have led many -- including myself -- to urge for the right-hander to see more opportunities.

And the Twins have given him those opportunities. They let him roll for 16 starts last year despite his consistently poor results. And this season, even though he was coming off his worst season in the minors (he went 4-8 with a 4.67 ERA in Rochester) the Twins called him up here in September so he could try to finish on a high note.

Instead, Hendriks has done the opposite. In what was likely his final start of the season, he was as bad as could be. And the timing could hardly be worse for the Aussie, who will be out of options next year. With the Twins badly needing to improve their organizational talent during the offseason, it's no longer palatable to dedicate a 40-man roster spot to someone who has unfortunately been one of the chief contributors to their pitching woes over the last couple years.

Minnesota Twins: Old Scott Diamond back with Chicago gem

Mike Berardino, Pioneer Press – 9/18/13

CHICAGO -- Here, at long last, was the Scott Diamond the Twins had hoped to see atop their rotation all season.

Winning a big-league decision for the first time in nearly three months, the stylish left-hander retired the first eight Chicago White Sox batters Wednesday afternoon and took a three-hitter into the seventh inning of a 4-3 victory at U.S. Cellular Field.

Three relievers helped secure the final eight outs, but Diamond (6-11) was the story, even after giving up a two-run single to Jordan Danks that accounted for the final margin of the 19th and final meeting this season between the American League Central rivals.

"That was a huge performance," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said, "and a confidence booster for him."

Winless in eight big-league starts since beating the White Sox at Target Field on June 20, Diamond hadn't won on the road since May 7 at Boston. It didn't feel that long to him, however, after going 5-0 with a 2.06 earned-run average in seven starts at Triple-A Rochester.

He called his Aug. 1 demotion an opportunity to "reset" his disappointing follow-up to a 12-win rookie season in 2012. Throwing once again to journeyman catcher Eric Fryer, who handled Diamond in five of his final seven starts at Rochester, Diamond repeatedly got ahead in the count and kept the ball down.

It all looked so easy, you couldn't help but wonder if Diamond's recovery from arthroscopic surgery to remove bone chips from his throwing elbow in December hadn't been underestimated.

"Physically, it hasn't bothered me," he said. "Maybe mentally there's been a little block."

The lack of "finish" on Diamond's pitches, for instance, could be traced -- at least early on this season -- to not fully trusting his elbow after having those chips removed.

Opening Day starter Vance Worley and fellow right-hander Liam Hendriks also had bone chips removed from their throwing elbows last summer/fall, and both wound up spending the bulk of this season at Rochester after opening the year in the big-league rotation.

"I'm not using it as an excuse," Diamond said. "I just haven't pitched well this year. I've had to get over some things."

A dip in velocity might have caused Diamond to reach back for a little more fastball during the first half. As a result, his command suffered, and for a touch-and-feel pitch like Diamond, that can be deadly.

"I think because my velocity was down a little bit, I was compensating," he said. "Now that everything feels more normal, I'm confident with everything. I'm able to make quicker adjustments. I think that's the biggest thing."

Fryer, who even has a knack for getting Diamond back on track with his mechanics, helped guide the lefty through 6 1/3 innings. Even though Diamond failed to record a strikeout for just the third time this season, he was back to his old upbeat self after scattering five hits and two walks.

"It's taken a long time," he said. "I'm a little disappointed by that, but hopefully this is a good sign."

Looking back, perhaps Diamond rushed through a truncated spring training in order to rejoin the rotation by April 13. His offseason throwing program had been shortened by a month because of the December workout injury that led to surgery.

"Nobody ever put pressure on me to do that," he said. "That was all me. I might have created some bad habits from that, but we're slowly getting rid of them."

Diamond, set to be married Dec. 7, has even more reason to look forward to this offseason now that he's healthy again. He was talking about this recently with Twins pitching coach Rick Anderson, and the 27-year-old lefty could hardly contain his excitement when looking ahead Wednesday.

"I think just having a clean offseason, where I can continue to work out and have my normal throwing program, will be huge for me," Diamond said. "Just knowing next year I'll be able to come in healthy and just come out firing."

Twins Project 2014: Catching solid as long as Joe Mauer behind plate

Mike Berardino, Pioneer Press – 9/18/13

As the Twins try to avoid a third straight 90-loss season, the greater concern is figuring out how to stop the slide moving forward.

"Disappointed is the way I look at this season," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said Wednesday. "You try to figure out why. We see all the reasons. All you have to do is look on paper: the strikeouts, the (earned-run averages). We know why. Now, how are we going to fix it?"

Over the next 12 days, carrying through the end of the regular season, the Pioneer Press will take a position-by-position look at what the Twins currently have, what talent is on the way, and what sort of offseason targets they might identify in order to bring a winner back to Target Field.

We're calling it Project 2014: Remaking the Twins.

CATCHER

What's here: Six-time all-star Joe Mauer remains the Twins' franchise player, but his future at the position has come into question with this monthlong absence following the first diagnosed concussion of his professional career. Veteran backup Ryan Doumit caught six games after landing on the concussion disabled list on Aug. 8, but he has put away his catcher's gear until next spring. Doumit's experience is a plus, but a dip in offensive production has hurt his potential trade value. Even with Mauer missing significant time, Twins catchers led the majors in on-base percentage (.381) and slugging (.478) and were tied for eighth in home runs (20).

What's on the way: Josmil Pinto, 24, has slugged his way into the conversation after a standout offensive season at the top two minor league levels. Pinto's defense needs plenty of work, but he could be part of a catcher rotation next season, especially if Mauer's time behind the plate is curtailed or he makes the permanent move to first base. Versatile Chris Herrmann has thrown out 7 of 18 (39 percent) attempted base stealers while making 22 of his 34 starts behind the plate. Behind them in the pipeline, the Twins also have Eric Fryer and Dan Rohlfing.

Contract status: Mauer, 30, is signed through 2018 for \$23 million per season. He isn't going anywhere. Doumit, 32, is due \$3.5 million next season in the final year of his two-year extension.

Outside options: None would seem necessary unless Mauer unexpectedly shelves his catcher's gear and the Twins decide Pinto and/or Herrmann need more seasoning. It probably would be ideal to add a catcher-first baseman to the mix, but only if Justin Morneau isn't re-signed to reclaim his former position. Of the current catching group, Mauer is the only one to see time at first this season.

Minnesota Twins: Plenty of candidates for minor league awards

Mike Berardino, Pioneer Press – 9/18/13

CHICAGO -- Byron Buxton would seem to be the odds-on favorite for Twins Minor League Player of the Year, aka the Sherry Robertson Award, which should be announced in the coming days.

Buxton, after all, was honored last week as Baseball America's overall Minor League Player of the Year.

However, that award is heavily weighted toward prospect status, while the Twins seek to honor overall production and progress.

With that in mind, Buxton could receive stiff competition from the likes of Chris Colabello, Miguel Sano, Josmil Pinto, Adam Brett Walker II, Jorge Polanco, D.J. Hicks and Danny Santana.

On the pitching side, left-hander Drew Albers would appear to be at the head of the list for the Jim Rantz Award after going 11-5 with a 2.86 earned-run average in 22 starts at Triple-A Rochester.

However, the former independent leaguer will receive competition from fellow starters Kyle Gibson, Logan Darnell, D.J. Baxendale, Taylor Rogers and Mason Melotakis.

In addition, Michael Tonkin went a combined 21 for 25 in save opportunities at the top two minor league levels, and fellow right-hander Zach Jones posted a 1.85 ERA as the closer at Class A Fort Myers.

"It all depends what you're going for, if you're going for prospects or if you're going for guys that have really pitched well at the higher levels," Albers said. "We have some good arms in the system that are coming up. It will be fun to see where we can go the next few years."

As for his own chances, Albers said winning the award "would be a tremendous honor, especially in the farm system the Twins have right now."

The Twins are widely considered to have one of the game's top-five farm systems.

"There's a lot of great players and a lot of future MLB stars," Albers said. "If that would happen, I would be very honored. If it doesn't, so be it. Just to be in that conversation is quite an honor."

Oswaldo Arcia and right-hander B.J. Hermsen won the awards for the Twins' minor league player and pitcher of the year, respectively, last season.

While Arcia has spent much of this season in the majors, ranking among American League leaders in slugging percentage by a rookie, Hermsen struggled through a 1-10 season with a 4.81 ERA at Double-A New Britain. Hermsen did better once he was sent to the bullpen, posting a 3.86 ERA in 16 outings.

Briefly

Twins Double-A infielder **A.J. Pettersen** will have surgery this week to repair an injury to his left wrist. Pettersen, drafted in the 25th round in 2011 out of the University of Minnesota, hit a combined .201 at Class A Fort Myers and Double-A New Britain this season. Twins general manager **Terry Ryan** said Pettersen had played through wrist pain for a good portion of the season, "which is admirable."

Minnesota Twins: Eduardo Escobar plans a busy winter of baseball

Mike Berardino, Pioneer Press – 9/18/13

CHICAGO -- Twins general manager Terry Ryan is careful not to label Eduardo Escobar as a utility player, pointing out the speedy switch-hitter is still just 24.

Escobar posted a .380 on-base percentage and slugged .500 in 166 at-bats for Triple-A Rochester after a midseason demotion. Of the 41 regular-season starts Escobar made for the Red Wings, 29 came at shortstop.

That will be his primary position in the Venezuelan Winter League, where he will play for Caribes and manager Al Pedrique, a former big-league shortstop. Escobar was traded from La Guaira last year for two young pitchers.

Opening Day is Oct. 10, which won't give Escobar much recovery time, but he plans to be there from the start and play all the way through January for a team based nearly six hours from his home of Palo Negro.

"Two weeks off, then right back at it," he said. "I have to keep getting better."

Escobar started Wednesday for the second time in the Twins' three-game series against his former team.

He got his fifth start in place of Brian Dozier at second base on Monday. This time it was shortstop Pedro Florimon whose spot he filled for the 18th time this season.

His other 12 starts in the majors this year have come at third base in place of Trevor Plouffe.

For the year, Escobar entered with a .556 slugging percentage against the White Sox, his highest figure for any opponent against whom he had more than eight at-bats. Two of his three home runs this year had come against the White Sox, who traded him to Minnesota in July 2012 along with left-hander Pedro Hernandez for pending free agent Francisco Liriano.

Diamond more polished as Twins hold off Sox

Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com— 9/18/13

CHICAGO -- After suffering through a sophomore slump most of this year after posting a solid 3.54 ERA as a rookie last season, Scott Diamond is hoping to end the season with positive results to bring with him into next season.

His outing against the White Sox on Wednesday afternoon was a good launching point, as he bounced back from a shaky outing his last time out to register a quality start that helped lead the Twins to a 4-3 win in the finale at U.S Cellular Field, after the White Sox took the first two games of the series.

Diamond, who gave up five runs in 4 2/3 innings in his return to the rotation in his last start after a stint at Triple-A Rochester, fared much better against the White Sox. The left-hander went 6 1/3 innings, giving up three runs on five hits and two walks. It was his first quality start with the Twins since July 26 and his first win since June 20, also against the White Sox.

Diamond, who had a late start to the season after having bone chips removed from his elbow in December, figures to make at least one more start this year, and possibly two, depending on how the rotation shakes out next week.

"I think going down to Rochester was a reset for me, so I'm just trying to build off that," said Diamond, who posted a 2.02 ERA in seven starts at Triple-A after being optioned in early August. "Personally, it hasn't been that long since I got a win, but up here, it had been a while. I'm just hoping to finish the season strong. Even with the [elbow surgery] in December last year, I'm still holding strong and fighting until the end. So I'm pretty happy with it."

Diamond served up a solo shot to Alejandro De Aza to lead off the fourth inning, but he mostly cruised until running into trouble in the seventh.

Diamond walked Paul Konerko to open the inning before surrendering a one-out double to Marcus Semien. He then gave up a two-run single to Jordan Danks that knocked him from the game. Right-hander Casey Fien came in and was able to hold the lead for the Twins, striking out Josh Phegley and getting Leury Garcia to ground out to end the inning.

"I was really happy," manager Ron Gardenhire said about Diamond's performance. "He got us deep in the game. He got ahead in the count for the most part. He almost got us through the seventh. It looked like he left one up and Danks rode one through."

Diamond outpitched White Sox left-hander John Danks, who struggled early but settled down, giving up four runs on seven hits over seven innings with two strikeouts.

"There are some things I did today that were good," Danks said. "Obviously, the first two innings weren't. I think I probably got more ground balls today than I had all year. That's definitely a main focus of mine this offseason, that's how you keep the ball in the ballpark and give yourself a chance to go deeper in the game."

Minnesota scored in the first inning on an RBI single from Oswaldo Arcia to plate Alex Presley before adding on three more runs in the second. Chris Colabello, Eric Fryer and Brian Dozier each had RBI singles in the second inning.

Diamond, who retired the first eight batters he faced, said pitching with the early lead was beneficial, as it allowed him to pitch with more confidence and get ahead of White Sox hitters.

"It makes my job easy," Diamond said. "With us piling it on early, it means we have them on their heels. It means they have to take pitches, which makes my job easier because I can be aggressive and pitch ahead. So I was able to do that and the first couple innings rolled pretty easy for me."

The Twins hung on from there, with Jared Burton tossing a scoreless eighth before handing it over in the ninth to closer Glen Perkins, who picked up his 36th save. It helped the Twins claim their fourth win over their last 14 games.

"We went to our bullpen pretty early in the first two games, so at least this time we got it to the right guys this time where we could finish it off," Gardenhire said. "They did a real nice job coming in."

Twinsbaseball.com NOTEBOOK: With Twins, Presley seeks outfield routine

Rhett Bollinger, MLB.com– 9/18/13

CHICAGO -- Before being traded from the Pirates to the Twins in exchange for Justin Morneau on Aug. 31, outfielder Alex Presley found himself in an organization with a young outfield that appears to be cemented for years to come, anchored by Andrew McCutchen and Starling Marte.

So when Presley put on a Twins uniform for the first time, he knew September would be a chance for him to make an impression in his quest to become an everyday player in the big leagues.

"It's a good opportunity to be able to get consistent at-bats and show what I can do on a regular basis," said Presley, who went into Wednesday's series finale against the White Sox hitting .297 (19-for-64) with three doubles, a homer and seven RBIs in 16 games for the Twins.

"It seems wide open here right now. In Pittsburgh, there are a couple of [outfield] positions that are pretty much set for years to come most likely, so it's definitely a good chance to try to make a name for myself in a new place."

Presley, who had multiple trips between the Pirates' Triple-A affiliate and the big league club, said the key to his ability to stay consistent has been keeping his routine.

"You just try to do the same thing every day," he said. "You know what works for you and [while] it was tough to go up and down, to try to keep a rhythm at the plate, the routine and things of that nature are big to perform on the field no matter what the circumstances."

In first start behind dish, Fryer gets familiar 'mate

CHICAGO -- Catcher Eric Fryer made his first start with the Twins on Wednesday since being called up from Triple-A Rochester on Sept. 9, catching former Red Wings teammate Scott Diamond.

Prior to getting the nod for the series finale against the White Sox, Fryer had made three plate appearances in two games, homering on Sept. 11 against Oakland.

"It's exciting," Fryer said. "I get to catch Scott; I've caught him down in Triple-A, so I'm familiar with him. I'm looking forward to getting out there and getting behind the plate."

Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said he was looking forward to seeing Fryer behind the plate.

"I'm excited [to play him]," Gardenhire said. "I talked to Scotty earlier about how they worked together down [at Triple-A], and I thought this would be a good game to let those two go together. I wanted to get this kid a chance to catch. He works his tail off and has done everything we've asked and had a good year at Triple-A. So this would be a nice time to get him out there."

Target Field remains big draw for Twins fans

CHICAGO -- While playoff contenders such as the Athletics, Indians and Rays have had a tough time drawing a crowd, the Twins have still drawn a good number of fans to Target Field despite being in fourth place in the American League Central.

Going into Wednesday, the Twins were 17th out of 30 teams in attendance. Oakland, Cleveland and Tampa Bay were 25th, 28th and 30th, respectively.

"People love coming to Target Field," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "It's a great atmosphere. You just have to understand Twins fans more than anything else. They're passionate. ... More than anything else, they love baseball. What better venue to come to than Target Field to watch a baseball game?"

Gardenhire added that when teams like the Athletics, Indians or Rays make the postseason, they'll start filling the seats again.

"We're going to Oakland [after the White Sox series], and they haven't drawn great," he said. "But it's been like that for quite a while. ... The fans that do go are passionate about baseball. It's the same way in Cleveland. ... But they'll get there. The closer they get, and if they make the playoffs, they'll pack the place."

Bullpen has been a 'constant' for Twins in '13

CHICAGO -- Twins general manager Terry Ryan said on Wednesday that despite a difficult season, Minnesota's bullpen has been a bright spot.

"For the most part, I think as a whole, the bullpen has done a decent job," Ryan said. "That's the one constant on this ballclub is that we've had about the same bullpen for the better part of the year."

Going into Wednesday's series finale against the White Sox, the Twins' bullpen had posted a 3.34 ERA, whereas the starting rotation had a 5.17 mark.

One reliever in particular that Ryan said has been impressive is Ryan Pressly, who going into Wednesday had a 3.56 ERA in 46 appearances for Minnesota after only 34 appearances between Class A and Double-A in 2012.

"For a guy that's not had any experience above Double-A -- and he had very little experience at Double-A -- he's handled himself," Ryan said. "[With] his poise and his ability to handle troublesome innings, he's done OK. He's thrown the ball over the plate for the most part."

Worth noting

- Twins catcher Joe Mauer, who has been out with a concussion sustained on a foul tip on Aug. 19, stayed home to work out for a third straight day, according to Twins general manager Terry Ryan. Ryan said that Mauer is feeling good, but Twins trainer Dave Pruemer recommended Mauer to work out at home instead of at Target Field this week. There's still no timetable for his return.
- Going into Wednesday's series finale against the White Sox, Trevor Plouffe had hit safely in 12 of 16 September games, including eight multihit games. He was hitting .381 (24-for-63) on the month, sixth best in the American League. His 24 hits ranked second in the league behind Jose Altuve of the Astros (30).
- Reliever Jared Burton made his career-high 69th appearance for the Twins on Tuesday night, pitching a scoreless eighth inning. The right-hander had also tossed a career-high 64 innings on the season going into Wednesday. Minnesota was 80-53 in games pitched by Burton since the beginning of the 2012 season.

Mackey: Twins might have up to \$40 million to spend, if they choose

Phil Mackey, 1500ESPN.com-- 9/18/13

Here's the bad news: The Minnesota Twins are probably going to lose 90 games for the third consecutive season. They'd need to go 8-3 the rest of the way in order to avoid 90 losses, and the remaining schedule is pretty brutal.

The good news is the offseason begins soon, and the Twins -- with [Justin Morneau](#), [Nick Blackburn](#) and [Mike Pelfrey](#) coming off the books -- could have up to \$40 million (in average annual value) to spend this winter, should they choose to.

Money owed to players on 25-man roster in 2014:

[Joe Mauer](#): \$23 million

[Josh Willingham](#): \$7 million

[Kevin Correia](#): \$5.5 million

[Glen Perkins](#): \$3.75m (+ estimated \$1m in performance bonuses, per MLB source)

[Ryan Doumit](#): \$3.5 million

[Jared Burton](#): \$3.25 million

[Brian Duensing](#): ~\$2 million (arbitration estimate)

[Trevor Plouffe](#): ~1.5 million (arbitration estimate)

[Anthony Swarzak](#): ~1.2 million (arbitration estimate)

**Salary information per multiple sources, including Baseball Prospectus*

If we fill the rest of the roster out with pre-arbitration players who make around \$500,000 (near league minimum) - guys like [Josmil Pinto](#), [Casey Fien](#), Aaron Hicks, etc. - we get a 25-man roster that adds up to approximately **\$60 million in payroll**.

All signs point to an approved payroll of somewhere between \$90 million and \$100 million in 2014, according to people within the organization.

Now, the big question is how much of it will the Twins spend?

Historically, the Twins have not handed out large contracts in free agency. Willingham's \$21 million, three-year deal is actually the largest free agent deal in team history.

Even with the Twins' historical aversion to big free agent contracts, it fascinates me how many people still continue to believe "the Pohlads never spend any money." Or my personal favorite, "The Pohlads lied about spending more after Target Field was built."

Put down the Natty Ice and pay attention.

In the Twins' final year at the Metrodome, the team payroll was \$65 million. It jumped up to \$97 million in 2010, the first year at Target Field. It then jumped again to \$113 million in 2011 because the Twins (mistakenly) believed they were on the verge of a World Series push. The Twins flushed \$100 million down the toilet on the 2012 payroll, then scaled back to \$82 million in 2013.

According to all parties involved - owner Jim Pohlads, president Dave St. Peter and general manager Terry Ryan - the payroll being scaled back in 2013 was strictly a front office, baseball-driven decision. Zack Greinke and Anibal Sanchez were being offered \$147 million and \$88 million, respectively, by contending teams. They weren't coming to Minnesota, and it didn't make sense to overspend on mid-rotation guys who wouldn't make much of an impact on a team in transition.

The Twins should have framed 2013 as a rebuilding year, but they chose not to. In a transition/rebuilding-year sense, Pelfrey's contract (one year, \$4 million) was worthwhile. Correia's (two years, \$10 million)? Meh...

Beyond that, Edwin Jackson signed for \$52 million over four years with the Cubs. He is 8-16 with a 4.75 ERA. Brandon McCarthy (two years, \$15.5 million) has a 4.58 ERA in the National League. Ryan Dempster (two years, \$26.5 million) has a 4.64 ERA with the Red Sox. Dan Haren (one year, \$13 million) owns a 4.88 ERA in Washington. Joe Blanton (two years, \$15 million) is one of the worst pitchers in baseball. The list doesn't get much better as we go down.

You be the judge of this winter's crop of free agent pitchers, which includes Tim Lincecum, Matt Garza, Phil Hughes, A.J. Burnett, Jason Vargas and even Johan Santana. Masahiro Tanaka, the Japanese phenom pitcher, could also be up for bid this offseason.

There are two important questions to ask when headed into the offseason with only \$60 million tied up in payroll:

Assuming he still has permission, how much of it will GM Terry Ryan spend?

And how comfortable is Ryan when it comes to spending?

Remember, from 1995 through 2007, when he stepped down after his first stint, Ryan operated under strict budget constraints. He chose - wisely, in my opinion - not to go crazy in free agency last offseason. But with top prospects Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano on the horizon, the Twins have a chance to supplement their in-house talent with some free agent pick-ups - or, perhaps via trade(s) -- as long as those additions help the team beyond 2014.

It's also worth noting this is really the first time Ryan has ever had *this* much cash in his pocket as GM heading into the offseason.

Stay tuned.

Minnesota Twins look to the 2014 and 2015 MLB seasons

Steve Adler, Washington Times Communities – 9/18/13

CHICAGO, September 18, 2013 — The Better Luck Next Year series has been looking at teams that are no longer in contention for the playoffs. Saturday's article looked at the San Francisco Giants, who were unable to repeat. Today's article looks at the Minnesota Twins and their failed season. Better luck next year, Minnesota Twins.

To read about all of the teams that have been eliminated so far, click [here](#).

What Went Right: What once was thought of as a poor choice by the Twins, taking Joe Mauer over Mark Prior, has proven to be the correct decision. Mauer has produced another great season for the Twins with a slash line of .324/.404/.476 while producing 5.4 WAR, according to baseball-reference. Mauer saw two-thirds of his at bats at catcher while seeing the rest at first base and designated hitter. While he may continue to see more of his at bats at positions other than catcher, Mauer remains far and away the Twins best player and an anchor for the franchise that has talent on the way.

The Twins entered the season with the tenth ranked farm system according to Baseball America. Minnesota's farm system is headlined by two of the top prospects in baseball, Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano. Sano is considered one of the top power hitting prospects in the minors and posted a .280/.382/.610 line with 35 homeruns across two levels; A and AA. While it is debatable whether or not Sano can stay at third base, his bat will likely play well enough in the outfield if he does not.

Byron Buxton, meanwhile, has drawn comparisons to Mike Trout and Willie Mays, and while those comparisons are indeed lofty he posted a .334/.424/.520 line with 12 homeruns and 19 stolen bases across A and A+ levels. It is likely that Sano and Buxton will not make it to Target Field before September of 2014 or 2015, but their progress has Twins fans, and baseball fans, excited.

Although closers on a bad team are typically a waste of assets the Twins have Glen Perkins signed through 2016 at a reasonable rate. Perkins has been one of the best closers in baseball with an ERA+ over 160 for the third year in a row while striking out 32.2% of the batters faced and just a 5.7% walk rate. While Perkins could be traded for prospects, the return on closers is not really high and having Perkins at the back of the rotation may allow some of the Twins' pitching prospects to feel the game is in good hands when they exit.

Finally, the Twins are out from under the Justin Morneau contract. While Morneau was once considered a cornerstone of the team, he has simply not been the same since suffering a concussion in 2010 posting a line of just .259/.315/.426 with the Twins this year. The Twins traded him to the Pirates at the trade deadline and will no longer be paying him \$14-15 million per year.

What Went Wrong: Joe Mauer suffered a concussion on August 14 and has not returned to the lineup, as he is still suffering from lingering symptoms. It is likely, given the short amount of time left in the season, that he will not return until next year. It is an area of concern, as everyone recovers from concussions differently. Secondly, Kevin Correia logged the most innings, 173.1, on the Twins pitching staff this year. While Correia pitched near league average with an ERA+ of 95 (league average is 100), he is not likely to be with the team when they are contending again. The Twins have some pitching on the way and drafted Kohl Stewart in the draft this year, but he is likely years away. Kyle Gibson is one of the pitchers that the Twins have developed, but he struggled this year in his first trip to the majors, albeit in a small sample. Gibson threw 51 innings posting a 65 ERA+ while striking out just 12.2% of batters faced although he walked 8.4% of batters, which is close to league average.

What to Look For in 2014: The Twins are likely to struggle again next year as their impact prospects appear to be at least a year from providing an impact at the major league level. The hope will be that Mauer can come back strong from his concussion, the team can develop some pitchers as they have in the past, and that the prospects can continue to develop.

Free Agents/Options: Mike Pelfrey

Scott Diamond earns win despite extending unusual strikeout streak

Mark Townsend, Yahoo! Sports Big League Stew – 9/18/13

Minnesota Twins left-hander Scott Diamond fared pretty well on Wednesday afternoon, holding the Chicago White Sox to three runs on five hits over 6 1/3 innings. That was good enough to earn his sixth victory of the season, but more importantly for Minnesota helped them avoid a three-game series sweep at the hands of Chicago with a 4-3 win.

It was also good enough to move Diamond into some rare company. According to Hardball Talk's Matthew Pouliot, Diamond became only the sixth pitcher this season to win a game he started without recording a single strikeout. The other pitchers on that list include Jeremy Guthrie, Joe Kelly, Jeff Locke, Kyle Lohse and Jake Westbrook. However, unlike those pitchers, Diamond's outing was much closer to the norm than an outlier with a positive, though unlikely result.

Over his past seven major league starts dating back to July 1, Diamond has only struck out five batters total over 35 1/3 innings, and never more than one batter in any single outing. Not surprisingly, Diamond has struggled over that time posting a 1-4 record with a 6.37 ERA. But the string of starts again puts him in rare company, because the last time a starting pitcher sustained that type of streak for seven games or longer was 1989 when Dave Schmidt of the Baltimore Orioles did it nine games in a row.

Schmidt didn't fare much better, going 1-7 with a 7.51 ERA.

Over the past 30 years, only former Montreal Expos and San Francisco Giants left-hander Kirk Rueter, who's career spanned 1993-2005, has been able to put together a good stretch when the strikeout pitch eluded him. He once had a six-game streak of zero or one strikeout performances bridging the 2002-2003 seasons, and ended up a respectable 3-0 with a 3.18 ERA over that stretch.

Basically what we're learning based on these numbers and outcomes is the strikeout is a necessary weapon if a pitcher hopes to achieve short term and long term success at the big league level. That much should go unquestioned. However, on a given night, it can escape a pitcher and have little impact on his overall performance.

So then what is the outlook for Diamond?

Well, over two big league seasons, he's accumulated only 136 strikeouts in 291 2/3 innings. That's not exactly encouraging, and odds are he won't be the pitcher to buck the strikeout trend, but it does make him a fascinating pitcher to study going forward.