



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

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Twins rally doesn't hold up in 8-6 loss to Oakland

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 9/20/13

OAKLAND -- It initially looked like two teams were playing out the string on Thursday.

Less than 12,000 fans were in attendance. There was dead grass in center field and a threat of sewage backup in the home dugout. Yet the Overstock.com Coliseum is home to the A.L. West leading Athletics, who entered play with a magic number of five to clinch the division title.

And as the game went on, you began to see why Oakland is in the top spot in the division.

Down 3-2, the A's stormed back to take a lead. When the Twins' youngsters responded, the A's had something for them too.

Coco Crisp then put the Twins away with a two-run homer in the ninth, completing Oakland's 6-4 victory.

"We kept coming back and finally we got a lead and they jumped us right away again," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "Not only did they jump us, they hit them in the seats. If we kept them in the ballpark we might have had a better opportunity to win it. I was proud of the guys' effort out there."

>The Twins led 3-2 in the sixth. Reliever Brian Duensing retired the first two batters of the inning but Oakland sent Alberto Callaspo up to pinch hit, and the infielder homered to tie the game at 3-3.

This is nothing new from Callaspo, who has been a pest to the Twins from his days as a Royal and Angel. He's a career .295 hitter against them, but his seven homers against the Twins tie for the most against any opponent.

Crisp singled, and Duensing was lifted for Anthony Swarzak. Josh Donaldson singled to put two runners on first and second. Then Jed Lowrie blasted a three-run homer to right-center on a 1-2 pitch to put Oakland ahead 6-3.

But the Twins didn't roll over.

Oswaldo Arcia hit an opposite-field home run off of Brett Anderson in the seventh to make it 6-4. In the eighth, the Twins got a run off of a fielder's choice and another on Brian Dozier's single off of Lawrie.

Shairon Martis was pitching for the Twins at the time. If they had taken the lead, Casey Fien was warmed up and ready to enter the game. Since it was tied, Gardenhire sat down Fien, who had pitched in three for the past four games. Martis looked good in getting through the seventh. He didn't want to burn Fien. So Gardy took the chance.

And Crisp made the Twins pay.

Trevor Plouffe left the game after striking out in the seventh inning. He's been battling a sore left wrist that goes back to when he was at Class AAA Rochester in May on a rehab assignment.

"I don't think it's anything bad, just a bad swing," Plouffe said. "We iced it and I have full range of motion. Hopefully I come in tomorrow and be able to play. That's what I expect."

What's really bruised is his pride. Plouffe chased a ball into the expansive foul territory here earlier in the game. He reached the mound in the bullpen, stumbled over it and crashed. The fans roared in delight.

"I looked at the replay," he said. "It looked pretty bad. It could have been a lot worse. I know I'm not the first one and know I won't be the last."

We'll finish this early-morning report with a stat attack:

- Oakland has won 10 of its last 13 games
- Righthander Dan Straily threw a career-high 106 pitches
- The Twins have lost 11 of their last 16 games
- Oswaldo Arcia is tied for the lead among AL rookies with 13 home runs and 31 extra-base hits
- Josmil Pinto is batting .388 this month

Souhan: Here's a thought, Gardenhire for Ron Washington

Jim Souhan, Star Tribune – 9/20/13

The manager is under fire. It may be time for him to move on, but there is a way to make it work for everyone.

The manager played in the Twins' organization in the 1980s, hoping to build a career as a utility infielder, but found himself pushed inevitably toward coaching. He gained a reputation as an expert on infield play, helping transform key players on winning teams, and eventually landed his own managing job.

He finished near the top of the American League in the Manager of the Year voting frequently, and became known for his humor and Southern colloquialisms. The man can tell a story, but his current story has grown stale. His team isn't what it once was, and whether the slippage is his fault or not, change for change's sake might be productive.

He should trade places with Ron Gardenhire.

If ever two teams should consider swapping managers, it's the Texas Rangers and the Twins. Ron Washington and Gardenhire are good managers who could use a fresh start.

Gardenhire grew up in Oklahoma and was an All-America shortstop at the University of Texas. He hasn't had a decent team to manage since 2010, when he was named American League Manager of the Year.

Although he professes loyalty to the Twins and General Manager Terry Ryan, he's got to be sick of sending the likes of Liam Hendriks to the mound. Moving to Texas would give him the kind of jump-start that seems to have reinvigorated Terry Francona in Cleveland and helped make the Indians surprise contenders this season.

He'd manage a much better team in his home region, and no one could say that his players needed to hear a new voice. He would be the new voice.

I first met Washington in the visiting dugout in Oakland. Kirby Puckett called him over, and the two sat and told stories for an hour. Washington just missed playing on the 1987 Twins World Series champion, when Al Newman won the utility infielder job in spring training.

Maybe Washington has lost his influence in the Rangers clubhouse, or maybe the Rangers just aren't as good at the Oakland A's. Either way, he might welcome a chance to work in a place where winning 90 games isn't expected, where developing great young players such as Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano could define the next portion of his career.

Washington and Gardenhire are friends. They're among the most personable managers in the game. They're both baseball lifers who will wind up landing managerial jobs in the future if they are indeed fired next month.

Instead of these franchises considering firing managers they value, why not just trade them?

The Rangers would get a guy who looks and sounds like an actual Texas Ranger, allowing them to save money on mascots, and the Twins would get a new guy to yell a whole different brand of cuss words at Trevor Plouffe. Washington might be the most creative cusser in major league baseball. He can use a certain word as a noun, adjective, exclamation and gerund all in the same sentence.

If Gardenhire and Washington didn't work out in their new jobs, each team could fire someone in whom it had little emotional investment.

Terry Ryan should make this deal. It wouldn't be as splashy as A.J. Pierzynski for Joe Nathan and Francisco Liriano, but it would be a lot better than J.J. Hardy for Jim Hoey.

During trying season, Twins bullpen has responded favorably

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 9/20/13

OAKLAND, CALIF. – During a road trip to Texas in late August, Twins pitching coach Rick Anderson called a meeting to deliver a stern message.

"We're at the point of the season, boys, where I know you are tired," he told them, " but I don't want to hear about you being tired. Once you start talking about being tired you are going to be tired. We have a month to go. We can play the spoiler. You guys get the energy, we are playing for pride. Don't let your energy down."

Anderson had a right to worry about a late-season letdown. He has gone to the same pitchers time and time again this season and, for the most part, they have responded.

The Twins entered Thursday with 533 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings thrown by their relievers — the most in the majors by 19 innings. That workload can mean trouble for a bullpen, but it has posted a 3.32 ERA that is seventh in baseball and third in the American League. Impressive numbers for a bullpen that, other than closer Glen Perkins, doesn't have a mid-90s fastball in it.

Righthanders Jared Burton and Casey Fien are tied for third in the league with 70 appearances. Brian Duensing is tied for eighth with 68. With two more appearances by Duensing, the Twins will have three relievers with 70 appearances for the first time since

2009, when Matt Guerrier, Jose Mijares and Joe Nathan did so. Perkins was the only pitcher to appear in at least 70 games last season, and the Twins had no one reach the mark in 2011.

That's why Anderson has watched their workloads carefully.

"I know they are beat up and tired but I want them to finish strong," Anderson said. "and if I can give them an extra day to keep them strong that will help."

The have put up numbers and, for the most part, have stayed healthy. The only real issue was a sore shoulder that limited righthander Josh Roenicke to seven innings in June but has since worked through it.

"That's the one constant on this ballclub," Twins General Manager Terry Ryan said. "The bullpen has been the most positive thing we've got."

Unfortunately for the Twins, there haven't been enough meaningful games for the unit to show what it can do. When the Twins have a lead to protect they have been efficient. After losing the first two games of the series against Chicago this week, Fien, Burton and Perkins combined to throw the final 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings on Wednesday in a 4-3 victory over the White Sox. Perkins earned his 36th save — his second appearance since Sept. 10.

Some more interesting things about the bullpen:

Rookies have contributed. Caleb Thielbar debuted in May and he began his career with a club-record 17 appearances without an earned run. He later went 31 at-bats without giving up a hit.

"He settled in pretty well," Perkins said. "With his delivery, he hides the ball well and has gotten the job done."

Ryan Pressly was a Rule 5 draft pick but pitched like he belonged, posting a 3.56 ERA in 73 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings.

And Anthony Swarzak has been an innings-eating horse, leading the majors with 92 $\frac{2}{3}$ relief innings while posting a 2.82 ERA. Swarzak and Pressly have entered games when starters have been knocked out early, saving the other arms in the bullpen.

The mix has clicked for the Twins this season, as Anderson has had an arm for almost every occasion.

"They have been there for us all year," Anderson said. "I respect every one of them. They have not turned down the ball. And there are times when I have thrown them three days in a row. For me, they have been my heroes. They are all gamers and they have picked each other up."

Twins notes: De Vries getting start; Mauer works out at Target Field

La Velle E. Neal III, Star Tribune – 9/20/13

Cole De Vries on Sunday will make the start he was supposed to make back in April.

"No kidding," said De Vries, a former Gophers pitcher.

It's been a challenging year for De Vries, who earned a spot in the rotation out of spring training by posting a 0.53 ERA over 17 innings. But he came down with forearm soreness during his final outing of camp and missed a month.

His troubles didn't end there. When he did come back, his arm didn't feel right, but he tried to fight his way through it. After a July 2 start at Class AAA Rochester, he took a cortisone shot in his elbow for inflammation and missed another month.

He returned to the mound and worked his way back to Rochester for one start on Aug. 29, throwing seven shutout innings. He was called up after that.

"I finally feel like I'm back to 100 percent," he said. "It only took five months, but what are you going to do?"

Mauer update

After working out for three days at home, Twins catcher **Joe Mauer** moved his concussion recovery back to Target Field on Thursday.

"Mauer had a decent day at our stadium and went through some cardio work," Twins General Manager **Terry Ryan** said. "So some positive news on that. Slowly but surely he's getting better, and today was one of the better days. He'll be back at the stadium [Friday]."

Thursday marked one month since he suffered a concussion after being hit in the facemask with a foul ball. Then he had a setback last week.

Pinto vs. Ramos

Gardenhire was asked to compare rookie catcher **Josmil Pinto** to former Twins catching prospect **Wilson Ramos**, who played a few games in the majors before being traded to Washington for **Matt Capps** in 2010.

"One guy was built to be a catcher [Ramos] and the other guy turned into a catcher," Gardenhire said. "Both are strong young men with a big heart and big desire. You definitely see that in both those guys."

In 71 games with Washington, Ramos is batting .278 and has tied a career high with 15 home runs and set a career high with 55 RBI. Pinto has a way to go, but has made a good impression at the plate in his first 13 games, batting .356 with two homers and seven RBI.

Etc.

• Oakland slugger **Yoenis Cespedes** was out of the starting lineup Thursday a day after taking a cortisone shot in his right shoulder to treat some tendinitis. He could return to action Friday.

Thursday (Gardenhire's career wins and ejections) edition: Wha' Happened?

Michael Rand, Star Tribune – 9/19/13

Two thoughts about Ron Gardenhire's managerial career on the heels of [La Velle E. Neal's story on his future](#):

*Gardenhire is three victories away from 1,000 in his career as a manager -- a feat that would make him 1 of 60 managers in MLB history to reach that milestone. (Sort by wins on that link).

Just how impressive is that feat?

Well, per that link (sorted by games), there have been 680 men credited with managing at least 1 MLB game. There are 390 who have managed at least 162 games, the equivalent of one full current season. So it's fairly select company, which goes on the plus side for Gardenhire.

Being around long enough is a testament to longevity, and Gardy's stay has not been without its faults. His winning percentage of .516 is just 103rd all-time, even though he is 60th in victories.

*Because there has been so much talk this week of coaches missing time on the field, we wondered about Gardenhire and just how much time he has missed because of ejections.

Gardenhire has been ejected 67 times in a career that spans 1,934 games. That means he has missed at least a portion of 3.5 percent of the career games he's managed because of an ejection. We don't have the energy to look up exactly when Gardenhire was ejected in each game, but let's say halfway through as an average -- 4.5 innings missed for each one, or the equivalent of 33.5 total full games.

The all-time ejection leader is Bobby Cox, who retired with 158 in 4,508 career games. That means Cox was ejected in 3.5 percent of his games as well. It would be hard for Gardy to catch him, but he is at least on the right pace.

Minnesota Twins: Gene Glynn has a merry go-round at AAA Rochester

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/20/13

OAKLAND, Calif. -- One afternoon this week, Gene Glynn was throwing early batting practice to a group of young Twins when it dawned on him.

He had managed all seven of them this year at Triple-A Rochester.

You could have swapped out those seven for another seven and then repeated the exercise before you would have (barely) run out of current Twins who wore the Red Wings colors this season.

Of the 33 players on the Twins' active roster heading into Thursday night's game against the Oakland A's, a whopping 20 of them had spent at least some time with Rochester. That included Josh Willingham and Trevor Plouffe, who passed through on rehab assignments.

"That was a fun team," Twins first baseman Chris Parmelee said. "It was a blast. You go down there, lot of free agents, you haven't met some of the guys yet. They welcomed me with open arms down there."

A team that started 2-11 and had Twins officials worried about a potential disaster somehow morphed into a group of "Hot Wings" that reached the postseason for the first time since 2006.

This is the 35th year in professional baseball for Glynn, the former two-sport star at Waseca (Minn.) High School and Mankato State University. His journey has taken him through seven years as a Montreal Expos minor league infielder and later 13 seasons as a big-league coach in Colorado, Montreal, Chicago and San Francisco.

He was coaching third for the Blake Street Bombers when the 1995 Rockies reached the postseason in their third season of existence and the next year, when they broke all kinds of offensive records.

He held the same job for the 2003 Giants when he sent J.T. Snow barreling into the final out of the division series against Pudge Rodriguez and the Florida Marlins.

And yet, ask Glynn about this season in Rochester, and the September coaching call-up can't help but smile.

"I would say I had more fun this year," he said, "with that group of guys than any team I've ever been with."

Those who played for and watched that team roar back to make the playoffs on the season's final day, going 77-59 after that nightmarish start, aren't surprised.

Glynn never brought a boa constrictor into the clubhouse the way his friend Joe Maddon did this year with the Tampa Bay Rays, for whom he scouted from 2007-11. Yet Glynn, who turns 57 on Sunday, still managed to keep things moving in the right direction without such gimmicks.

"Gene did an unbelievable job," Twins left-hander Drew Albers said. "He was a calming presence. He still made it fun coming to the ballpark. He kept a positive environment in the clubhouse. He made you want to play for him and do well for him."

Sixty-six players cycled through the Rochester roster this year, including 33 pitchers. Glynn used 15 left fielders, 15 starting pitchers and had 12 different relievers save at least one game.

At one point early in the season he had five catchers at his disposal, including turnaround catalyst Dan Rohlifing, yet Glynn found a way to kept them all involved.

"We had guys that really respected the game, and they played hard," Glynn said. "It was a good atmosphere. It was a good group, a goal-oriented group."

Step out of line, however, and Glynn would be quick to set you straight.

"He's loyal, but not to a fault," Twins general manager Terry Ryan said. "There's a difference."

The Twins had tried twice previously to hire Glynn, once in the fall of 1998 and again after the 2002 season. Each time a big-league job offer came through before former farm director Jim Rantz could find a fit for him in the system.

After these past two years at Rochester, it appears the Twins and Glynn have finally found that fit.

"He can get down to some business if he sees some things he thinks aren't right," Ryan said. "He is a team guy. There's no individualist in Gene Glynn. Regardless of your status as a prospect or non-prospect, veteran or rookie, if you're not a team guy, you probably are going to have some problems with Gene."

For the 2013 "Hot Wings," there was far more fun than there were problems.

A's 8, Twins 6: Oakland slugs way to series opener win

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/20/13

RECAP: Playing their final road series of the year, the Twins gave up three homers in their final three defensive innings, including a two-run shot by Coco Crisp off Shairon Martis (0-1) in the eighth. Earlier, Alberto Callaspo's pinch homer off Brian Duensing tied the game at 3 in the sixth, and Jed Lowrie added a three-run shot that same inning off Anthony Swarzak. Chris Parmelee went 3 for 3 with a walk and scored the Twins' first run. Oswaldo Arcia added his 13th homer of the year, giving him 23 combined homers this year (including Triple-A).

MEANING: Losing for the seventh time in nine games, the Twins must finish 8-2 in order to avoid a third straight 90-loss season.

ETC.: 3B **Trevor Plouffe** went 0 for 5 with three strikeouts before being lifted with a sore left wrist. ... Twins starter **Kevin Correia** issued five walks for the second time this season, one off his career high. He walked five in the months of April and May. ... Coming in, the Twins were 18-13 on the road since July 13. Only the Dodgers (21-9) and Angels (19-16) had more wins away from home in that span. ... The A's took two of three at Target Field last week, outscoring the Twins by a combined 26-5 in the final two games.

UP NEXT: at Oakland, Friday, 9:05 p.m.; TV: FSN. Radio: KTWIN.

Minnesota Twinsights: Update on Trevor Plouffe's injured left wrist

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/20/13

Minnesota Twinsights after 8-6 loss to the Oakland A's:

–At least twice this season, I have asked Trevor Plouffe if he was playing through any physical problems.

Each time he refused to grasp at what could be construed as an excuse for an admittedly "disappointing" season.

Well, now it can be told.

The pain in Plouffe's left wrist finally got so bad on a swing-and-miss in his fifth and final at-bat Thursday (0 for 5, 3 strikeouts) that he was replaced at third base by Eduardo Escobar for the bottom of the eighth.

The Twins announced the injury as left wrist soreness and said the third baseman would be evaluated again Friday. He is officially listed as day-to-day.

Plouffe blamed the flare-up on an “awkward swing” on his first pass in the eighth and revealed he has been “managing” the pain since his rehab assignment at Triple-A Rochester. If that seems like a long time ago, it was. He played four games for the Red Wings between June 10 and June 14.

“When you swing and miss, the force generated, the extension, the follow-through that I have (cause pain),” he said. “I just felt it right there in that at-bat. I don’t know exactly why. I don’t think it’s anything bad really. Just a bad swing.”

Team trainers applied ice and tested Plouffe’s wrist afterward, which showed “full range of motion,” he said.

“Hopefully I’ll be able to come in (Friday) and be able to play,” he said. “That’s what I expect.”

Plouffe has started all but seven of the 88 games the Twins have played since he came off disabled list on June 15, his 27th birthday.

He hit just .189 in July with 26 strikeouts in 90 at-bats. He followed that up by hitting .196 with 27 more strikeouts in August.

Overall, since July 1, he has hit .232 with 69 strikeouts in 259 at-bats. Still, he managed to put together a three-week stretch where he lifted his batting average 25 points since Aug. 27.

–How about Plouffe’s skidding trip across the home bullpen mound while chasing Seth Smith’s foul pop in the second inning?

“I looked at the replay. It looked pretty bad,” Plouffe said. “It could have been a lot worse. I know I’m not the first one to do that, probably won’t be the last.”

The back of his right hand still bore a couple of strawberries. “Battle wounds,” he called them.

The fall didn’t aggravate his left wrist, he said. Plouffe got up with a smile on his face and said there was nothing any of his teammates could have done to warn him of the impending doom.

“I looked up, saw the ball, looked where I was going and didn’t think I was on the course for that — and sure enough I was,” he said. “About as dead-on as you can get. All you’re thinking out there is you know you have a lot of room, you know you want to get the ball and before you know it you’re on the floor.”

–Three Twins relievers gave up big home runs in this defeat.

Pinch hitter Alberto Callaspo got Brian Duensing for a game-tying home in the sixth. It was the first by a right-handed hitter off Duensing in 110 at-bats this season; he gave up six homers in 274 at-bats against righties last year.

Newcomer Shairon Martis gave up the game-deciding two-run shot to Coco Crisp in the eighth on a slider that didn’t slide.

But the biggest blow might have been Jed Lowrie’s three-run shot off Anthony Swarzak to cap Oakland’s four-run sixth.

Lowrie went down and got the 1-2 fastball from Swarzak, who faced two batters and failed to record an out for the first time in his major league career (128 appearances).

“I threw that to the complete opposite location of where I was trying to go,” he said. “I wanted to go up and away and instead I threw it down and in. That’s a location where you never want to throw it to a left-hander.”

It was the seventh homer of the year off Swarzak — all by left-handed batters.

Minnesota Twins Project 2014: First base

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/20/13

Carrying through the end of the regular season, the Pioneer Press is taking 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.

FIRST BASE

Who's here: Former first-round draft pick Chris Parmelee, the 2012 Opening Day right fielder, was recalled in September after a midseason demotion to Triple-A Rochester. Questions remain about his ability to hit consistently, especially after he put up disappointing numbers -- at age 25 -- with the Red Wings (.318 on-base percentage in 198 plate appearances). Independent league discovery

Chris Colabello doesn't have Parmelee's pedigree, but the production (31 combined homers and Triple-A batting and slugging titles) earned the 29-year-old MVP honors in the International League along with a spot on Baseball America's Minor League All-Star team. Those two have been sharing duties since the Aug. 31 trade that sent longtime starter Justin Morneau to Pittsburgh. Third baseman Trevor Plouffe has limited experience at first. Oh, and some guy named Joe Mauer might need to pick up more games at first after suffering the first diagnosed concussion of his career while catching against the New York Mets on Aug. 19.

Who's on the way: Journeyman Jeff Clement, a former third overall pick as a catcher, started ahead of Parmelee in Rochester's final two playoff games but was not added to the 40-man roster for September. Reynaldo Rodriguez, 27, slugged .482 at Double-A New Britain but isn't considered a prospect. Keep an eye on a pair of 23-year-olds: Kennys Vargas, who slugged .468 at Class A Fort Myers, and D.J. Hicks, who drove in 110 combined runs between low-A Cedar Rapids and Fort Myers. And don't forget 20-year-old German slugger Max Kepler, who split his time at Cedar Rapids between first and the outfield but could hop on the fast track after being assigned to the Arizona Fall League.

Contract status: See below.

Outside options: Morneau is 32 and in the middle of a pennant push with the Pirates. Even if he leads them to their first World Series appearance since Bert Blyleven was pitching for them, the Twins figure to have an even-money shot of bringing him back as a free agent. That's what happened with former closer Rick Aguilera in the mid-'90s, and Twins fans are hanging onto that precedent when it comes to the popular Morneau. Heck, the Twins even nominated him for the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award -- announced after he was traded to Clemente's former team. Paul Konerko, Mike Napoli and James Loney should hit the free-agent market this winter, but the Morneau talks will be the focal point for Minnesota. The toughest part will be putting together an offer that's fair and equitable without insulting a former MVP coming off a six-year, \$80 million contract. Best guess is that a two-year offer with a low base and performance incentives that could push Morneau's total take to somewhere between \$12 million and \$16 million might get it done. Keep in mind Morneau had yet to homer through his first 56 at-bats as a Pirate, slugging just .339 in September.

Minnesota Twins: Grandfather's illness weighs heavy on De Vries' next move

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/19/13

OAKLAND -- It will be with a heavy heart that Twins right-hander Cole De Vries takes the mound Sunday for his first big-league start in more than a year.

Leonard De Vries, the pitcher's 90-year-old grandfather, is battling a rare sarcoma that has spread from his liver and spleen to his blood and blood vessels. The pitcher was able to spend a few days with his ailing grandfather in Bloomington this July, but the elder De Vries' condition has worsened.

"It's a really fast-moving cancer," De Vries said. "That was really nice of the Twins to let me do that in July. I know he really appreciated that. I spent time with him every day."

De Vries, taking the place of fellow right-hander Liam Hendriks in the rotation, had a long talk on the field Thursday afternoon with pitching coach Rick Anderson. They talked a little about Sunday's start, but mostly about the pitcher's grandfather and whether De Vries should accept an invitation to pitch for Aragua in the Venezuelan Winter League.

De Vries, 28, has worked just 86 innings this year at five different levels after a forearm strain cost him his spot in the season-opening rotation. If not for the "extenuating circumstances" in his family, the former Eden Prairie High School and University of Minnesota standout said he would gladly head to winter ball for the first time.

Aragua officials would like a decision by Oct. 1, about nine days before the Venezuelan winter season starts. De Vries is wrestling with his decision, knowing a winter-ball stint would probably be best for his career and also that the Twins would prefer he go.

Asked which way he is leaning, he said he has "no idea" and will wait to speak with Twins general manager Terry Ryan before deciding.

At best, De Vries would probably only pitch the first half of the Venezuelan season, returning home in time to join his family for the holidays.

In 16 minor-league starts this year, De Vries went 4-6 with a 4.96 earned-run average. He spent the second half of last season in the Twins' rotation, going 3-0 with a 1.02 ERA in his final three starts before a line drive off his chest ended his season on Sept. 8.

Minnesota Twins: Joe Mauer back at Target Field

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 9/19/13

OAKLAND -- For the first time in four days, Joe Mauer felt well enough to venture out to Target Field for his workout on Thursday.

Marking the one-month point since he suffered the first diagnosed concussion of his professional career, Mauer worked with rehab coordinator Lanning Tucker and increased both the length and intensity of his off-field workout, Twins general manager Terry Ryan said.

"He didn't do any baseball activity, but he did some of the leg work and that type of (exercise)," Ryan said. "He's making some progress. He had a pretty good response when he got to the stadium."

Entering Thursday's play, the Twins had gone 11-17 since Mauer's concussion put him on the disabled list.

Mauer had stayed home the previous three days at the suggestion of head trainer Dave Pruemer. The decision was made to let all headaches and other post-concussion symptoms disappear before having Mauer push himself again.

Ryan said Mauer's latest round of concussion testing took place about a week ago. He must be cleared by both Twins doctors and physicians from Major League Baseball before he can return to the active roster.

The season ends Sept. 29, but a trip to Fort Myers, Fla., for instructional league would be possible if Mauer runs out of time. Instructional league games run through Oct. 8.

Twins drop back-and-forth affair in Oakland

Jeff Kirshman / MLB.com – 9/20/13

OAKLAND -- Beginning with Thursday's series opener in Oakland, the Twins will finish their season against three playoff-contending teams. This is a stretch to be relished in the eyes of manager Ron Gardenhire, and his team demonstrated as much in a back-and-forth battle that featured five lead changes.

But one team is poised to win its second straight division title while the other has a chance to lose 90 games for the third consecutive year. Ultimately, the ballclub with playoff aspirations prevailed, as the Twins (65-87) fell to the A's (90-63), 8-6, at O.co Coliseum after Shairon Martis surrendered a go-ahead two-run home run to Coco Crisp in the eighth inning.

"They came up with big hits, they kept getting the lead and we kept coming back. Finally we got a lead, and they jumped us right away again," Gardenhire said. "And not only did they jump us, they hit them in the seats. If we could keep them in the ballpark, we might've had a better opportunity to win."

Crisp's home run, his career-best 21st of the year, spoiled a valiant comeback effort by the Twins, who scored two runs in the top of the inning to tie the game, 6-6. Minnesota's bullpen has been one of its greatest points of pride in an otherwise forgettable season, entering Thursday with a 3.32 ERA compared to a 5.16 ERA from its starters.

On Thursday, though, it was the bullpen that couldn't support starter Kevin Correia. Four Twins relievers combined to yield six runs in three innings, including Anthony Swarzak, who gave up two runs off two hits and didn't record an out.

"That hasn't been the norm," Gardenhire said.

Correia tossed five innings and battled through a 35-pitch fourth in which eight batters came to the plate. The right-hander limited the damage to two runs despite issuing five walks and exited after throwing 101 pitches.

"Normally I would throw a pitch and kind of err on the plate than off the plate. I just didn't feel comfortable doing that tonight," Correia said. "I didn't want to give in. As you saw after I got out, if you make a bad pitch, these guys are sneaky powerful."

Oakland, which shrank its magic number to four in the American League West race, has benefited from an onslaught of home runs of late, hitting three Thursday to increase its total to a Major League-best 60 over 40 games since Aug. 9.

Alberto Callaspo's solo shot and Jed Lowrie's three-run blast both came with two outs in the sixth to take the lead, but the Twins responded with RBIs by Chris Herrmann and Brian Dozier to tie the game in the eighth.

"We're facing a good team right now," said Trevor Plouffe, who exited the game early with left wrist soreness but said he expects to play Friday. "They can pitch and have clutch hitting, and for us to battle like that shows we're professionals and not going to give up."

The Twins struck first in the third inning when Chris Parmelee beat out a throw from second base off the bat of Alex Presley, and they scored two more in the sixth inning off RBI singles by Josmil Pinto and Pedro Florimon.

Pinto is batting .367 since Sept. 1 -- the highest average among American League rookies and third highest among all rookies -- and has reached base safely in 11 of his 13 starts. The Twins have lost four of their last six games, seven of their last 11 and 11 of their last 16 as they opened their final road series of the season. The effort is still there, as was evident by their play Thursday.

"Another win isn't really going to change our season that much. I'm just going to go out there and throw a good game," Correia said. "Wins and losses are kind of out of our hand, but at this point in my career I'm trying to win games. I'd rather give up a few runs and get the win than throw a good game and not get the win. Losing is not that fun. I'd love to go into the offseason with a W."

Twinsbaseball.com NOTEBOOK: GM encouraged by Mauer's progress from concussion

Jeff Kirshman / MLB.com – 9/19/13

OAKLAND -- Twins general manager Terry Ryan was happy to report prior to Thursday's series opener against the A's that catcher Joe Mauer has responded positively to treatment with his concussion and that he could rejoin the team upon its return to Minnesota on Monday.

"Slowly but surely he's getting better, and today was one of the better days," Ryan said. "That's better than what I've been telling you. He's making some progress."

It's been exactly a month since Mauer suffered a concussion off a foul tip on Aug. 19. He's been working out at home but is expected to return to Target Field on Friday as he continues to progress. Both the length and intensity of his workouts have increased, Ryan said, and his symptoms have lessened.

"If he continues to have no symptoms, you'll see him," Ryan said. "I'm holding out hope that we ultimately can get him back on the field. So we're working toward that."

Twins trainer Dave Pruemer recommended Mauer work out at home instead of at Target Field, which he's done the past handful of days, though Ryan made a point of saying that the opportunities to exercise are available at Mauer's home.

Minnesota's All-Star catcher, who 's batting .324 with an .880 OPS, 11 home runs and 47 RBIs in 113 games this season, has not had an impact test in a week.

"It's nice to hear that he's feeling better," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We were at home and he definitely wasn't feeling good when we left. He went through some good times and we know there's going to be some steps backward. Just to hear that he's had a couple good days in a row is a good thing.

"As long as he can come to the ballpark and hang out, that'll be good enough for us. Hopefully we can get him back on the field, but the big thing is his health. Just get him healthy. That's what we're after."

De Vries returns to rotation for road finale

OAKLAND -- Perhaps the circumstances aren't as ideal as manager Ron Gardenhire would've liked, but Cole De Vries was named Minnesota's starter for Sunday's series finale against the A's -- the Twins' final road game of the year.

De Vries was set to be a part of Minnesota's rotation to open the year but has battled through a right forearm strain. He replaces Liam Hendriks, who turned in the worst outing by a Twins pitcher this season in his last outing, giving up seven runs in the first inning of a 12-1 loss to the White Sox on Monday.

Hendriks recorded just two outs against five hits and three walks while throwing 41 pitches. It marked the first time the Twins gave up seven runs in a first inning since July 28, 1997, against the Royals.

"The whole reason to start Cole is somebody had to do bad, and I'm not really excited about the guy who did bad," Gardenhire said. "It'll be nice to see Cole go out there and take the mound again. He pitched pretty well for us last year in some big games against some good teams.

"It'll be interesting to see how he does out there as a starter and gets through this thing, but on the flipside of it, I was hoping that Hendriks would take off and show us a little something. It didn't work out, so we'll make that adjustment right now, but there's a good chance there might be more adjustments as we go along."

De Vries posted a 4.11 ERA in 17 appearances (16 starts) with the Twins last year. He has yet to start in 2013 and has pitched in just two games with the Twins. He was 4-6 with a 4.96 ERA in the Minor Leagues this year.

"With what he had done the year before, you'd hope that he'd take off and see what he could do anyway," Gardenhire said. "He knows how to change speeds and move ball in and out. We wanted to see that. He was doing well in the job, but then injuries happened. If he wants to start, he's going to get his opportunity."

Plouffe swinging hot bat in September

OAKLAND -- The Twins have seen a bump in production from Trevor Plouffe of late. The third baseman has recorded a hit in 12 of 17 September games and reached base safely in eight of his past 17 plate appearances entering Thursday's action.

Plouffe has eight multihit games in September, and he's been held hitless in just seven of 30 games since Aug. 18. His 24 hits in this final month of the regular season rank second in the American League behind Jose Altuve, who had 30.

"He's covering the field," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "You see him shooting balls to right field and pulling the balls he's supposed to. Confidence snowballs, and you feel confident and the ball looks bigger than it normally does, and right now, it looks like he's seeing it pretty well."

Colon looks to stay sharp in matchup with Albers

Quinn Roberts / MLB.com – 9/20/13

The A's are getting closer to their goal of winning the American League West for a second consecutive season. Their magic number sits at four after an 8-6 win over the Twins on Thursday.

Oakland turns to Bartolo Colon on Friday night as the A's take on the Twins at O.co Coliseum, hoping that number can be whittled down even further.

Colon (16-6, 2.73 ERA) has been on a roll since being reinstated from the disabled list on Aug. 29, going 2-1 with a 1.13 ERA.

He earned a second straight win on Saturday against the Rangers, allowing seven hits in eight innings. Colon also struck out seven and walked only one.

"Boy, that was like mid-June Bartolo," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You could tell he really had great command of his fastball, good velocity, great movement."

Left-hander Andrew Albers (2-3, 3.81 ERA) will be on the hill for the Twins as he faces the A's for the first time in his career.

The rookie took a loss against the Rays on Saturday, allowing four runs on six hits in four innings.

Twins manager Ron Gardenhire knows Albers could have his hands full with the A's lineup.

"They have a lot of variety of hitters that can drive a baseball. They can run around the bases. They can do a lot of stuff. They bunt more than they used to and they hit-and-run," Gardenhire said. "They're a very active baseball team and a very talented team."

Twins: Mauer's progress encouraging

- Catcher Joe Mauer is responding positively to treatment for his concussion, general manager Terry Ryan said Thursday. He believes that Mauer could return to the team as early as Monday.

"Slowly but surely he's getting better, and today was one of the better days," Ryan said. "That's better than what I've been telling you. He's making some progress."

He's been working out at home since suffering a concussion off a foul tip on Aug. 19 but is expected to return to Target Field on Friday. Both the length and intensity of his workouts have increased, Ryan said, and his symptoms have lessened.

A's: Cespedes could return Friday

- Yoenis Cespedes was out of the starting lineup against the Twins on Thursday because of a cortisone shot he received after Wednesday's game to diminish the pain in his right shoulder.

Cespedes, diagnosed with tendinitis in the shoulder on Tuesday after injuring it around two weeks ago, could be back in the lineup as soon as Friday.

When he does return, Cespedes is expected to continue DHing for at least a day or two before testing his shoulder in the outfield.

"We want him in the outfield, and we want him to throw," Melvin said. "Sometimes that speeds up the process. He has been feeling better with it as of late, but we felt this could speed it up even more so and give us a better chance to get him in the outfield sooner than later."

Worth noting

- The Twins have gone 19-11 against the AL West this season, winning nine of their last 14 games.

- A's starting pitchers have allowed two runs or fewer in 10 of the last 12 games.

Twins hoping Joe Mauer will return

Associated Press – 9/19/13

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Minnesota Twins catcher Joe Mauer provided enough encouraging signs during his workout Thursday that general manager Terry Ryan and manager Ron Gardenhire remain optimistic he will play again this season after a concussion.

"I'm holding out hope, as you know, that we ultimately can get him back on the field, so we're working toward that," Ryan said before the club opened a four-game series at Oakland.

After Mauer spent three days at home, he returned to the ballpark to do some cardio exercise and leg work. He hasn't resumed baseball activities, but that could come soon.

Mauer is no longer experiencing headaches or other concussion symptoms, Ryan said. The GM hadn't spoken to Mauer, but was in touch with the training staff.

Ryan said keeping Mauer at home for a few days seems to have proved the right move considering his session Thursday. While Ryan didn't have specifics on how long Mauer was able to exercise, he believed it was more than last time.

"So there's some positive news on that," Ryan said. "Slowly and surely he's getting better and today was one of the better days. He'll be back at the stadium tomorrow. We'll take him when we can get him. He didn't do any baseball activity but he did some of the leg work and that type of stuff. That's better than I've been telling you. He's making some progress."

Mauer took a foul ball in the mask on Aug. 19. Mauer hasn't had an IMPACT concussion test for about a week, but he is expected to re-join the team Monday back in Minneapolis if all continues to progress.

"It's exciting," Gardenhire said. "I'm just hoping Joe gets on the baseball field. Nice to hear him feeling better. We were at home and he definitely wasn't feeling good when we left. He went through some good times and we knew there were going to be some steps backward. Just to hear when he has a couple of good days in a row is a good thing. We'll just see when we get home, we'll get through this road trip. Whatever happens, happens. As long as he can come to the ballpark and hang out, that would be good enough for us. Hopefully he'll get on the field, but the big thing here is his health. Just get him healthy, that's all we're after."