



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

Friday, August 8, 2014

- Return to Oakland has Fuld fired up. Star Tribune (Miller) pg. 1
- When not starting, Twins' Suzuki stays ready in a pinch. Star Tribune (Miller) pg. 2
- Postgame: High pitch count routine for Lester. Star Tribune (Miller) pg. 3
- Thursday's recap: Twins-Oakland. Star Tribune pg. 4
- Lester nearly unhittable in shutout as Athletics blank Twins 3-0. Star Tribune (Miller) pg. 4
- Pregame: Vargas puts on a show, but Lester awaits. Star Tribune (Miller) pg. 5
- A's 3, Twins 0: Jon Lester dominant in complete-game three-hitter. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 6
- Saturday could be May Day, but Twins are playing coy. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 8
- Postgame Twinsights: Jon Lester tweaks his cutter, remains nearly unhittable. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 9
- Twinsights: Sam Fuld not in the lineup after slow start for Oakland A's. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 9
- Twinsights: Jordan Schafer wishes reeling Atlanta Braves no ill will. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 11
- Twisights: Saturday could be 'May Day' but Twins are playing coy. Pioneer Press (Berardino) pg. 11
- Rookie Pino has strong outing, but can't match Lester. MLB.com (Bollinger) pg. 12
- Twins still seeking spot starter for Saturday's game. MLB.com (Bollinger) pg. 14
- Fuld appreciates his time in Minnesota. MLB.com (Bollinger) pg. 14
- Kazmir looking for rebound outing vs. Gibson. MLB.com (Laws) pg. 15
- An attempt to answer why Kevin Correia still is making starts. 1500 ESPN (Wetmore) pg. 16
- New A's ace Lester three-hits Twins in a gem in Oakland. Associated Press pg. 17

Return to Oakland has Fuld fired up

Phil Miller / Star Tribune – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, CALIF. – The game was over, the kids were asleep, and Sam Fuld was getting ready for bed last Wednesday night in Kansas City, Mo. The road trip was going well — Fuld collected a hit in both of the first two games against the Royals, made a nice running catch, and all in all he was enjoying having his wife and kids around on the Twins' annual bring-your-family road trip.

Then the phone rang. Next thing he knew, Fuld was in a remake of "Family Vacation," driving across the Midwest in a van with three kids, all under 5 years old.

"We were expecting a six-hour drive," Fuld said of his unscheduled trip from Kansas City to Minnesota. "It turned into more like nine or 10 with all the stops."

The glamorous life of a ballplayer, huh?

Fuld had to make the impromptu trek up Interstate 35 because that phone call was from Rob Antony, the Twins assistant general manager, informing him late the night of July 30 that he was about to become property of the Oakland Athletics once more. The Twins the next day make the trade — Fuld for lefthander Tommy Milone — official about five hours before the trade deadline. By that time, Fuld was already nearing Des Moines.

"That was a trip down memory lane," Fuld laughed, because he spent parts of the 2008, 2009 and 2010 seasons with the Iowa Cubs. But he and his family finally reached the Twin Cities in their rented van, so Fuld could fly to Oakland while his wife packed up for yet another move.

The move caught him by surprise, the 32-year-old outfielder said, because he was settling in with the Twins. He noticed that Oakland backup outfielder Craig Gentry had broken his hand, but "when I got that phone call, I was caught off guard a little bit."

Not that he's complaining. He went from the last-place Twins to the first-place A's, a team he began the season with before being waived in April during a roster squeeze. "I can't ask for a better situation than here," he said. "It's fun, a great environment, and I feel like I fit in well."

Fuld wasn't in the lineup Thursday, but he had played in each of the six games before it. He had hit .217 over those six games, but with three stolen bases. He singled off Grant Balfour, stole second and scored the winning run in the 10th inning of Monday night's 3-2 victory over the Rays.

Fuld also made a highlight-reel catch-and-throw Saturday to nail the Royals' Alex Gordon at the plate, a play that got national attention because he somersaulted to the ground from the force of the throw.

"I expect I'll be moving around here, playing all three [outfield] positions, stuff I'm used to," Fuld said. "I'm excited."

He will miss Minnesota, though. "I loved the city. It was a privilege to play in that new ballpark," Fuld said of Target Field and the Twins. "I really enjoyed my time there."

He's not the only Fuld who will miss his three-month team, though. "They're used to packing up and traveling," he said of his three small children. "But my 2-year-old is upset — no more TC Bear."

When not starting, Twins' Suzuki stays ready in a pinch

Phil Miller / Star Tribune – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, CALIF. – In 48 innings this season, Royals pitcher Wade Davis has given up only one extra-base hit, and it was to a guy who wasn't even in the starting lineup.

Padres closer Joaquin Benoit's save Wednesday was nearly spoiled by a leadoff hit, collected by a guy who wasn't in the lineup.

Yep, Kurt Suzuki might consider pinch hitting "the hardest thing to do in baseball," but the All-Star catcher sometimes makes it look easy. In a season when Twins pinch hitters are batting just .190 with no home runs, among the worst in the American League, Suzuki almost makes manager Ron Gardenhire wish he was available for the late-inning duty every day.

"I've had some pretty good success pinch-hitting throughout my career," said Suzuki, in his eighth major league season. "But by no means do I think it's easy. ... Maybe it's something where I get lucky and get a hit once a day."

Maybe, but his 10-for-22 career success rate, a .455 average and .586 on-base percentage, is remarkable for a job in which players must come off the bench cold, knowing they will probably get only one at-bat in the game. It's a small sample size, admittedly, mostly because Suzuki has been a starter for most of his career, but it's a task that he takes seriously.

Being a catcher helps, too, he said. "I watch the game. I like to watch our pitchers pitch and see how they work hitters, see what's working and what's not," Suzuki said Thursday, when he gave the Twins their first base-runner with a clean sixth-inning single after Oakland's Jon Lester retired the first 15 batters he faced. "Doing that keeps me in the game a little bit more."

Spending a year with the Nationals made him aware of the need to be constantly ready, too, since NL teams pinch hit so much more frequently. So on days when he's not starting, "about the sixth inning, I just look at the lineup, see how it's going to turn over, and to which guys in the bullpen," he said. "You kind of have your mind-set — where might you hit if guys [get] on base, who you might face. ... You have to be ready all the time."

He has been this year. Suzuki is 2-for-5 with three walks, by far the most successful pinch hitter on the Twins. He doubled off Davis last week in Kansas City, driving in a run and ending the reliever's record streak of not giving up an extra-base hit all year. And his 10th-inning single Wednesday, followed by a sacrifice bunt to move him to second base, gave the Twins two shots at tying the score.

Still a mystery

The Twins aren't ready to reveal who will start Saturday's game against the A's, but it appears likely to be one of two pitchers at Class AAA Rochester — lefthander Kris Johnson or righthander Trevor May.

"We'll let you know tomorrow," was all Gardenhire would say about the opening, but the Twins did say that a roster move is anticipated after Friday's game, presumably to add that starting pitcher.

Johnson has made three starts this year for the Twins, posting a 4.73 ERA in 13½ innings. He is 9-5 with a 3.12 ERA at Rochester. May, the highly regarded prospect who has yet to pitch in the major leagues, is 8-6 with a 2.93 ERA.

Etc.

- Third base coach Joe Vavra might be out for a few weeks. The 54-year-old has been bothered all season by a bad hip and plans to undergo hip replacement surgery in the near future. Scott Ullger replaced Vavra at third a few weeks ago, as his mobility became increasingly limited, with Paul Molitor taking Ullger's spot at first base.

- Righthander Ricky Nolasco threw a bullpen session in Cedar Rapids, reporting no problems. He will make his second rehab start for the Class A Kernels on Sunday. First baseman Joe Mauer got Thursday off but will resume his rehab assignment Friday.

Postgame: High pitch count routine for Lester

Phil Miller / Star Tribune – 8/8/14

A handful of late-night notes after the Twins successfully avoided being no-hit by Jon Lester:

HE KEEPS PITCHING: You get so conditioned to the Twins' pitch-count philosophy, it's almost jarring to hear that someone has thrown 122 pitches, as Jon Lester did against the Twins on Thursday. (And James Shields, with 124, did in the Twins' 2-1 win over the Royals last week, come to think of it.) No Twins pitcher has thrown 120 pitches in a game since May 24, 2011, when Nick Blackburn threw 127 pitches in a complete-game win. For Lester, though, it's nothing out of the ordinary; tonight was the second time this season, and 16th time in his career, that he has eclipsed 120 pitches. Strangely, though: It's only the second time he pitched nine innings in running his pitch count that high, and first time since 2008.

CATCHING THEM AT GOOD TIME? Even though they have the major leagues' best run differential, by far, at plus-167, the A's have been having trouble scoring runs lately. Tonight's game was the fourth straight in which they've scored exactly three runs, and they're averaging only 2.86 runs in their past eight games. (Of course, when you have a pitching staff like Oakland's, there's no reason to panic; the three runs they scored the past four games were good enough for three wins.) Stephen Vogt's home run broke up an 0-for-23 skid for him, and Brandon Moss' fourth-inning double broke up his 0-for-18. And the Twins had to recognize the disease that afflicts Oakland these days: The A's were 1-for-10 with runners in scoring position.

PLENTY OF ROOM TO RUN: The Twins have now lost 10 straight games to the A's, and seven in a row at the concrete coliseum. This has always been a difficult place to play for the Twins; they haven't been more than one game above .500 here since 2000. And the style of play is certainly unusual. With all the foul ground, it seems that nearly every ball that might drift into the stands at Target Field is a potential out here. The teams combined for five foul outs tonight, which obviously holds down the offense.

Thursday's recap: Twins-Oakland

Star Tribune – 8/8/14

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Jon Lester

The veteran lefthander was perfect through five innings and ended up with a three-hit shutout, striking out eight and walking two. It was his fourth career shutout.

BY THE NUMBERS

3 Runs given up by Yohan Pino in 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

2 RBI by Stephen Vogt, who hit a two-run homer in the third inning.

9 Times the Twins have been shut out this year.

ON DECK

Righthander Kyle Gibson (10-8, 3.93 ERA) tries to keep up his hot streak as he takes on Athletics' lefthander Scott Kazmir (12-4, 2.53).

Lester nearly unhittable in shutout as Athletics blank Twins 3-0

Phil Miller / Star Tribune – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, CALIF. – Brian Dozier smacked a high fly ball into the left field stands at O.co Coliseum on Thursday night, tying the score 3-3 and breaking up Jon Lester's shutout.

Or so he thought.

"I guess the wind pushed it pretty good. Even after it landed, I thought it was fair," Dozier said. "I guess not."

Nope. The ball landed perhaps a foot or two foul, the home run didn't count, and the Twins' biggest threat died a few pitches later. Lester retired the first 15 batters he faced, and the final five, too, and recorded his fourth career shutout in the Oakland Athletics' 3-0 victory over the Twins.

"He was painting," Dozier said of the A's new lefthanded ace, who was acquired from Boston at last week's trade deadline. "Painting the corners, especially [with] that cutter. ... In and out with a cutter is pretty tough."

Lester has been tough on the Twins before, but he has probably never been as effective as in the past couple of months, which explains why Oakland dealt away their cleanup hitter, Yoenis Cespedes, to get him July 31. In his past 10 starts, Lester has given up 10 earned runs, going 6-0 with a 1.21 ERA — including a 2-1 victory over the Twins in Fenway Park in June — over that time.

"He was really good," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He made pitches when he had to and got out of situations."

Well, *situation*, singular. Only in the sixth inning did the Twins manage to put a runner on second base. Lester was perfect through five innings, and didn't even give up so much as a well-hit ball.

After those 15 up and 15 down, nothing but pop-ups and strikeouts and weak grounders, were the Twins thinking what the rest in the announced crowd of 22,108 starting to think?

"Oh, yeah," Dozier said. "We even mentioned it, so hopefully we kind of jinxed it there."

Kurt Suzuki — who got a decent hand as he approached the plate for the first time, a small recognition of his seven years of contributions to the home team — led off the sixth inning by lining a cut fastball into left field, preventing Lester (12-7) from collecting his second career no-hitter.

The Twins mounted an actual threat after Suzuki's single, with Chris Colabello following Suzuki's single with one of his own. Lester responded by striking out Eduardo Escobar and Danny Santana, but then made what looked like a fatal mistake, a four-seam fastball that Dozier applied plenty of backspin.

"I thought it was pretty much a home run, for sure. [When] it started out, I didn't think it was going to get it anywhere close to the foul line," Dozier said. "It's disappointing. Frustrating to go from very high to very low, really quick."

Dozier ended up walking to load the bases, but Lester escaped unscathed when Trevor Plouffe grounded out. The Twins managed only one more hit after that.

The A's collected all the offense they needed against Yohan Pino (1-4). In the third inning, Stephen Vogt hit a shot high into the right-field stands that scored Alberto Callaspo, who had walked, in front of him. The home run not only gave Oakland the lead, but it broke an 0-for-23 slump by Vogt.

Brandon Moss' slump wasn't quite as long — just 0-for-18 — but he broke it too, with a leadoff double in the fourth inning. All-Star catcher Derek Norris followed with an RBI double, but Pino and the Twins bullpen didn't crack again.

Pregame: Vargas puts on a show, but Lester awaits

Phil Miller / Star Tribune – 8/7/14

OAKLAND, Calif. -- If nothing else, Kennys Vargas may convince fans to show up a little early for Twins game in the future. His batting practice sessions are already entertaining.

Taking swings in his first visit to O.co Coliseum, Vargas launched a handful of towering blasts that had the early arrivals cheering, including one rocket that bounced off the window of a football luxury suite, probably 50 feet above the outfield wall. It's impressive.

But it's also meaningless, two hours before game time, because Vargas and his Twins teammates won't be facing a batting-practice pitcher tonight, the first of a four-game series with the A's. They get Jon Lester, Oakland's newly acquired lefthanded ace, a pitcher who has already held them this season to one run on four hits in Fenway Park. Minnesota actually has had some OK success in the past against Lester -- he's 2-4 with a 4.41 ERA in nine career starts against the Twins -- but now he's pitching in front of a better defense, in a more spacious ballpark.

"He's a good one, a big horse. He just keeps pouring it in there," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He cuts it, [has a] nice little changeup, a breaking ball. He's a very competitive pitcher."

The Twins will start Yohan Pino, who has lasted at least six innings in four of his last five starts. Here are tonight's lineups for the 9:10 p.m. CT start:

TWINS

Santana CF
Dozier 2B
Plouffe 3B
Willingham LF
Vargas DH
Arcia RF
Suzuki C
Colabello 1B
Escobar SS

Pino RHP

A'S

Crisp CF
Jaso DH
Donaldson 3B
Moss LF
Norris C
Reddick RF
Callaspo 2B
Vogt 1B
Sogard SS

Lester LHP

A's 3, Twins 0: Jon Lester dominant complete-game three-hitter

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Brian Dozier still can't believe the ball went foul.

"I didn't think it was going to get anywhere close to the foul line," the Twins second baseman said after Thursday's 3-0 loss to Jon Lester and the Oakland A's. "Even after it landed, I still thought it was fair, but I guess not."

Instead of a game-tying, three-run homer in the top of the sixth, Dozier was left to draw a five-pitch walk off Lester. When Trevor Plouffe bounced out to third to end the threat, the Twins' best scoring chance of a quiet night was gone.

Perfect until Kurt Suzuki's leadoff single in the single, Lester cruised home with a three-hit, complete-game shutout on 122 pitches. Working off a darting cut fastball, the recently acquired ace struck out eight and walked just two.

It was the fourth complete-game shutout of Lester's career, but just his second since the start of 2009. The other came last season in a one-hitter at Toronto on May 10.

No pitcher had thrown a complete-game shutout at the Twins in just over a year. Royals right-hander Jeremy Guthrie was the last to beat them in that fashion, tossing a four-hit, one-walk game at them last Aug. 5 in Kansas City.

"Lester was the story," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We just couldn't score."

Had Dozier's high fly down the left-field line stayed on the right side of the foul pole, it would have been his 20th homer of the year and the game would have taken on a different complexion.

Gardenhire said replays showed the ball went foul by "two or three inches," but the video evidence was clear enough to convince him not to challenge the call by third-base umpire Lance Barrett.

"It looked like it definitely was going to hit off the pole but it hooked at the last second, I guess," Gardenhire said. "It sure didn't look like it was going to be a foul ball."

Dozier, who hit a four-seam fastball, blamed the wind for pushing it foul.

"Disappointing, frustrating," he said, "to go from a very high to a very low real quick."

A crowd of 22,108 watched it at the cavernous O.Co Coliseum, where the Twins have lost seven straight, dating to August 2012.

Through five mesmerizing innings, Lester was perfect and the Twins were powerless against him.

Suzuki, making his first return to Oakland since signing with the Twins in December, finally broke the spell with a line-drive single over the head of shortstop Eric Sogard. Chris Colabello followed with a single up the middle, but there was no besting Lester on this night.

The only other hit off Lester was Oswaldo Arcia's two-out single up the middle in the seventh.

"It's the same stuff," Gardenhire said.

"He has all the pitches. He can do those things. We've seen it for many a year here."

Twins right-hander Yohan Pino fell one out shy of his fourth quality start in nine outings. If not for a Josh Reddick pop-up that Plouffe dropped in shallow left for his team-high ninth error, Pino would have escaped the sixth with just three earned runs on his line.

A's first baseman Stephen Vogt, snapping an 0-for-23 slide, blasted a two-run homer off Pino in the third inning. Consecutive doubles by Brandon Moss and Derek Norris to start the fourth gave the A's their third run.

For Moss, that hit ended a career-long hitless streak of 18 at-bats.

Lester, a pending free agent acquired from Boston at the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline, also beat the Twins on June 17 at Fenway Park. He allowed a run on four hits and a walk in 6 1/3 innings that night during a three-game Red Sox sweep in which the Twins were outscored by a cumulative 5-2.

This four-game weekend series against the team that has owned the majors' best record since June 18 could take on a similar low-scoring flavor.

Lester entered with a 2-4 career record and 4.41 earned-run average in 10 career outings against the Twins, even with that win in June. He struck out four Twins in his first spin through the lineup, getting veteran Josh Willingham and rookie Kennys Vargas back-to-back on put-away cutters.

After an 0-for-4, three-strikeout night, the Twins' cleanup hitter is 2 for 17 (.118) with six strikeouts against Lester.

Lester was at 105 pitches through eight innings, but A's manager Bob Melvin sent him back out to finish it off. Dozier and Plouffe flied out before Willingham went down looking at yet another cut fastball.

Oakland went 1 for 10 with runners in scoring position to keep the Twins within hailing distance until the end, but Lester never gave them another opening after the sixth.

Saturday could be May Day, but Twins are playing coy

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/7/14

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Triple-A Rochester right-hander Trevor May remains on track to make his big-league debut Saturday night against the Oakland A's, but the Twins weren't handing out any clues Thursday.

"TBA" was the official line for Saturday's starter in the Twins' media notes.

Asked how his Saturday starter was looking, Twins manager Ron Gardenhire grinned.

"He's somewhere," he said. "TBA. You can call it whatever you want. You can ask 18,000 different questions. It's TBA."

May, 24, gave up four earned runs in six-plus innings Monday at Louisville, where he lost to ex-Twins left-hander Scott Diamond. May also tied season highs with four walks and eight hits allowed while striking out just two.

The four walks were surrendered to Steve Selsky, Neftali Soto, Thomas Neal and Hernan Iribarren.

More importantly, May built his pitch count up to 99 as he works back from a June calf injury that kept him away from competition for 28 days. In 17 starts, May has gone 8-6 with a 2.93 earned-run average.

"This guy can really pitch," said a current member of the Twins' big-league staff.

Recently acquired left-hander Tommy Milone started Tuesday for the Red Wings, but the Twins aren't inclined to bring him up to work on short rest.

Fellow lefty Kris Johnson has made three big-league starts this year and hasn't pitched since Aug. 1, but indications were that he would start Sunday or Monday for Rochester.

Right-hander Alex Meyer, the Twins' top pitching prospect, last started Sunday but would have to be added to the Twins' 40-man roster. May and Johnson already have spots on the 40-man.

Others in the current Rochester rotation include lefty Sean Gilmartin, who started Wednesday; right-hander Mark Hamburger, scheduled to start Thursday; and recently demoted lefty Logan Darnell.

Twins reliever Anthony Swarzak tossed five strong innings in beating Cleveland in a July 23 spot start, but there were no indications he would be given the ball Saturday.

Briefly

Twins right-hander Ricky Nolasco, on a rehab assignment with Class A Cedar Rapids, threw a bullpen session on Thursday and remains on track to make his second rehab start Sunday for the Kernels. ... Twins first baseman Joe Mauer was not in Thursday's lineup at Cedar Rapids, as planned. Mauer should resume his rehab assignment Friday. ... Former Twins shortstop Roy Smalley,

now part of the Fox Sports North broadcast team, will be honored Aug. 19 in Williamsport, Pa., with the Bill Shea Distinguished Little League Graduate Award. Smalley continues to advocate for youth baseball and softball as president of Pitch in for Baseball.

Postgame Twinsights: Jon Lester tweaks his cutter, remains nearly unhittable

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Twins fully expected to see plenty of cutters from Oakland lefty Jon Lester.

They just didn't expect to get force-fed so many at a slightly lower velocity.

"He was painting, especially with that cutter," Twins second baseman Brian Dozier said after Thursday's 3-0 loss to the A's. "That was his Number 1 pitch. He threw off that, in and out, in and out with the cutter. He threw a heck of a game."

Lester (12-7) even varied the velocity on his cutter, giving it a different look than it had even back on June 17, when he beat the Twins 2-1 at Fenway Park..

"It has a lot more depth now," Dozier said. "It's usually just straight across at 89-90 (mph). Tonight it was probably 85-87, more like a typical lefty slider. I don't know if he's throwing it softer now, trying to get a little more depth to it, but he threw it a lot — to righties and lefties."

--Twins right-hander Yohan Pino has allowed three earned runs or less five times in his first nine major league starts.

He has been credited with just three quality starts, however, because he has failed to last six innings on two of those occasions.

Thursday, he had to make a mid-game adjustment after the A's started pouncing on his first-pitch fastball shortly after Stephen Vogt gave them a 2-0 lead on a two-run homer in the third.

"You saw them swinging at a lot of first pitches," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "They were very aggressive on him early. Once he got through that part of it where he made some better pitches on the first pitch, spinning the ball a little bit, it worked out for him a little better. Sometimes throwing too many strikes is not good."

Pino's earned run average through nine starts is 4.59. Vogt's homer was the fifth Pino (1-4) has allowed in 51 innings.

—Bob Melvin won his 800th game as a big-league manager.

The A's have a .572 winning percentage since he took over on June 9, 2011, the best mark in majors in that span.

Twinsights: Sam Fuld not in the lineup after slow start for Oakland A's

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/7/14

OAKLAND — Sam Fuld had played in all six games for the Oakland A's since they reacquired him from the Twins for left-hander Tommy Milone.

So, naturally, with the Twins in town today to open a four-game series against the team with baseball's best record — since June 18 and counting — Fuld is sitting.

With Coco Crisp healthy and back in center, the A's have the option of flipping all-star outfielder/first baseman Brandon Moss over to left, which is what they're doing tonight against Twins right-hander Yohan Pino.

In six games with the A's, Fuld has gone 5 for 23 (.217) with a .280 on-base percentage and a .261 slugging percentage. His .541 OPS is a stark drop-off from the production he'd given the Twins in July: .358/.476/.418 for an .894 OPS in 86 plate appearances.

Milone, meanwhile, gave Triple-A Rochester seven strong innings on Tuesday in his Twins debut. Phil Hughes, however, is listed as the Twins Sunday starter for this series, with Saturday's starter still "TBA."

If it's not Trevor May — and May did walk a season-high four in his last start on Monday — then look for Anthony Swarzak to possibly get the ball for his second start of the season.

A's shortstop Jed Lowrie, by the way, is sitting for a third straight game with a bruised right index finger. He was available to pinch hit in Wednesday's home loss to Tampa Bay, but manager Bob Melvin still didn't want to use him in the field.

A handful of A's hitters are scuffling at the plate, including Stephen Vogt (0 for 23), Brandon Moss (career-long 0 for 17) and John Jaso (0 for 17).

On to the lineups:

Twins

Santana 8

Dozier 4

Plouffe 5

Willingham 7

Vargas DH

Arcia 9

Suzuki 2

Colabello 3

Escobar 6

RHP Pino

Athletics

Crisp 8

Jaso DH

Donaldson 5

Moss 7

Norris 2

Reddick 9

Callaspo 4

Vogt 3

Sogard 6

LHP Jon Lester

Twinsights: Jordan Schafer wishes reeling Atlanta Braves no ill will'

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/7/14

OAKLAND, Calif. – When the Atlanta Braves designated outfielder Jordan Schafer for assignment on Aug. 1, they were coming off a three-game series sweep by the Los Angeles Dodgers at Dodger Stadium.

The Braves went on to complete an 0-8 road trip, dropping them four games behind the first-place Washington Nationals in the National League East and caused much hand-wringing among the fan base.

Schafer, however, takes no pleasure in the struggles of his former team.

“No, no, no — 100 percent, I want them to win,” said Schafer, who wasn’t in the Twins starting lineup for the first time on Thursday. “I have way too many friends over there — extremely close friends. I loved being over there. It’s nothing personal. The game is a business.”

Hitting just .163 in 93 plate appearances, Schafer understood when the Braves opted to cut him loose after trading for Cubs utility man Emilio Bonifacio. He isn’t about to take any credit for his former team’s woes since his departure.

“I had nothing really to do with it,” he said. “I wasn’t playing when I was there anyway. I think I had like eight or nine starts the whole year.”

Actually, Schafer made 14 starts for the Braves this year, including 10 in center field. He already has two starts for the Twins, getting the nod in both home games against San Diego.

Drafted by the Braves in the third round in 2005, Schafer still believes his old club can “right the ship” and get back into the playoff mix. He points to a 10-game homestand that starts Friday with three games against the Nationals, followed by four against the Dodgers and three against the A’s, as a huge determinant in how the rest of the year might go.

“This homestand is huge for them,” Schafer said. “It’s a tough homestand. If they have a losing homestand, that’s probably it. But if they can right the ship and have a good homestand, they’re right back in it. They have a really good team over there. They just have to get back on track.”

Twinsights: Saturday could be ‘May Day’ but Twins are playing coy

Mike Berardino / Pioneer Press – 8/7/14

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May, 24, gave up four earned runs in six-plus innings on Monday at Louisville, where he lost to ex-Twins left-hander Scott Diamond. May also tied season-highs with four walks and eight hits allowed while striking out just two.

The four walks were surrendered to Steve Selsky, Neftali Soto, Thomas Neal and Hernan Iribarren.

More importantly, May built his pitch count up to 99 as he works back from a June calf injury that kept him away from competition for 28 days. In 17 starts, May has gone 8-6 with a 2.93 earned run average.

"This guy can really pitch," said a current member of the Twins big-league staff.

Recently acquired left-hander Tommy Milone started Tuesday for the Red Wings, but the Twins aren't inclined to bring him up to work on short rest.

Fellow lefty Kris Johnson has made three big-league starts this year and hasn't pitched since Aug. 1, but indications were that he would start on Sunday or Monday for Rochester.

Right-hander Alex Meyer, the Twins' top pitching prospect, last started on Sunday but would have to be added to the Twins' 40-man roster. May and Johnson already have spots on the 40-man.

Others in the current Rochester rotation include lefty Sean Gilmartin, who started Wednesday; right-hander Mark Hamburger, scheduled to start Thursday; and recently demoted lefty Logan Darnell.

Twins reliever Anthony Swarzak tossed five strong innings in beating Cleveland in a July 23 spot start, but there were no indications he would be given the ball on Saturday.

Briefly

—Twins right-hander Ricky Nolasco, on a rehab assignment with Class A Cedar Rapids, threw a bullpen session on Thursday and remains on track to make his second rehab start Sunday for the Kernels.

— Twins first baseman Joe Mauer was not in Thursday's lineup at Cedar Rapids, as planned. Mauer should resume his rehab assignment on Friday.

—Former Twins shortstop Roy Smalley, now part of the Fox Sports North broadcast team, will be honored Aug. 19 in Williamsport, Pa., with the Bill Shea Distinguished Little League Graduate Award. Smalley continues to advocate for youth baseball and softball as president of Pitch in for Baseball.

Rookie Pino has strong outing, but can't match Lester

Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com – 8/8/14

OAKLAND -- With the way Jon Lester has been pitching recently, the Twins never really had a chance Thursday night.

Rookie right-hander Yohan Pino was mostly solid, but Lester dominated the Twins with a shutout to lead the A's to a 3-0 win in the series opener at O.co Coliseum.

It was the fourth career shutout for Lester, who improved to 6-0 with a 1.21 ERA over his last 10 starts. The Twins missed out on a potential game-tying home run from Brian Dozier in the sixth, but it went foul and spoiled Minnesota's lone scoring opportunity against the left-hander.

"Lester was the story tonight," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He was good. He was moving in and out. He had all his pitches working. We just couldn't score against him."

Lester matched a season-high with 122 pitches and outpitched Pino, who couldn't match him in just his ninth career start. Pino surrendered three runs on six hits and a walk over 5 2/3 innings, and was stuck with his fourth loss.

"I feel I did OK," Pino said. "I feel I can do better. I missed a couple pitches. I left the ball up the in the zone and they hit it."

The A's struck early with a two-run blast in the third inning from first baseman Stephen Vogt. It was the sixth homer of the year for Vogt and came on a 2-2 fastball.

Oakland added another run in the fourth on an RBI double from Derek Norris after Brandon Moss led off the inning with a double. But Pino settled down from there before exiting with two outs in the sixth with a runner on second base after an error from third baseman Trevor Plouffe.

It was plenty of offense for Lester, who was making just his second start with the A's since being traded from Boston for outfielder Yoenis Cespedes before the non-waiver Trade Deadline on July 31. The left-hander flirted with a perfect game, and scattered just three hits and two walks over a complete game with eight strikeouts.

A's manager Bob Melvin decided to keep Lester out for the ninth despite being at 105 pitches, as Lester said he felt fine and wanted to go for the shutout. Melvin said he would've taken Lester out after 120 pitches but he didn't reach that mark until the final at-bat of the game.

"You could see from the onset that he was going to be tough to score on tonight," Melvin said. "He got out of the one jam -- that was really the only trouble he was in. Once he got out of that one, he was smooth sailing to the end."

That one jam came in the sixth inning, as Lester retired the first 15 batters he faced. The Twins didn't get a baserunner until that inning, when Kurt Suzuki led off the frame with a clean single to left field to break up the perfect game. Chris Colabello followed with a single of his own to give the Twins a runner in scoring in position.

But Eduardo Escobar and Danny Santana both struck out before Dozier just missed on a game-tying homer to left that was barely foul down the left-field line. Dozier ended up walking to load the bases, but the Twins stranded all three runners with Plouffe grounding out to third to end the inning.

"To be honest with you, off the bat, I don't want to call it a no-doubter, but I thought it was going to be a home run for sure," Dozier said of his near home run. "I didn't think it was going to get anywhere near the foul line. I guess the wind pushed it pretty hard to the left."

It was the lone scoring chance for the Twins, who didn't get any runners into scoring position outside of the sixth inning. Minnesota went 0-for-3 with runners in scoring position with all three of those chances coming in the sixth against Lester.

"He was really good," Gardenhire said. "We had a couple chances against him and some people out there but he made pitches when he had to and got out of the situations."

Twins still seeking spot starter for Saturday's game

Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com – 8/7/14

OAKLAND -- The Twins have yet to make an announcement about Saturday's starter against the A's, but they're expected to call up a starting pitcher from Triple-A Rochester after Friday's game.

The Twins have an opening in their rotation after left-hander Logan Darnell was optioned to Triple-A Rochester to make room for outfielder Jordan Schafer on Sunday. But Twins manager Ron Gardenhire wouldn't offer any hints on who will replace Darnell.

"He's somewhere," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We'll let you know."

The Twins have several options at Rochester, including top prospects Alex Meyer and Trevor May. Meyer is scheduled to start for the Red Wings on Saturday, while May is slated to start Sunday.

May is considered much more likely than Meyer because Meyer has been on a pitch-count limit this season as a precaution stemming from shoulder issues last season. May, who is on the 40-man roster unlike Meyer, would also be pitching on normal rest, as his last start with Rochester came Monday.

The Twins could also opt to bring up left-hander Kris Johnson, who last started Friday and is scheduled to start Monday for Rochester. Johnson has already made three spot starts with Minnesota this year, going 0-1 with a 4.73 ERA.

Fellow lefty Tommy Milone, who was acquired from the A's in the trade that sent Sam Fuld to Oakland on July 31, last started with Rochester on Tuesday, so he's not expected to be called up to pitch on short rest.

Fuld appreciates hit time in Minnesota

Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com – 8/7/14

OAKLAND -- Sam Fuld was relaxing with his wife, Sarah, in their Kansas City hotel after their three kids went to bed on July 30 when the phone rang.

It was Twins assistant general manager Rob Antony informing him that he had been traded back to the A's for left-hander Tommy Milone.

The timing was tough for Fuld, as it was a family trip with the Twins in their road trip through Kansas City and Chicago. The trade didn't become official until the next morning, but by then Fuld was on his way back to the Twin Cities.

He decided to drive with his wife and three young children back to Minneapolis -- a drive that he expected to take six hours, but which ended up taking closer to nine hours after all the stops.

It was a whirlwind day for Fuld, but ultimately he was happy to be heading back to Oakland, where he began the season before being claimed off waivers by the Twins on April 20. Fuld wasn't in the lineup against his former team Thursday, but figures to see action against the Twins in the four-game series at O.co Coliseum.

"You can't ask for a better situation than to be on a winning team," Fuld said. "It's fun and a great environment. It's a place that I fit in well."

Fuld added that he had a positive experience in Minnesota, and has no hard feelings about being traded.

"I loved the city," Fuld said. "It was a privilege to play in that new ballpark. I really enjoyed my time there."

Kazmir looking for rebound outing vs. Gibson

Will Laws / MLB.com – 8/8/14

Scott Kazmir had a rare bad start his last time out, but the Twins might just be the team to help him fix whatever bothered the A's lefty last time out.

In Kazmir's career against Minnesota -- to whom he hasn't lost since 2009, as a member of the Rays -- he is 6-4 with a 3.12 ERA, his lowest mark against any American League team.

The southpaw lasted six innings against the Royals on Sunday but was doomed by a four-run fifth during which he gave up four consecutive hits and five total, along with a walk.

"One bad inning," said Kazmir. "I don't look too far into it. I know what I did wrong. It was a couple pitches that were up in the zone, and they were in hitters' counts. Something you can't do, especially to hitters like that."

Kazmir scattered 10 hits in all and struck out two in the loss, his first since June 24 to the Mets in New York.

"Just got a couple balls up and missed location on a few pitches, but really not all that bad," said A's manager Bob Melvin. "Balls weren't hit all that hard, found some holes."

Kazmir might have a sneakily tough bounceback attempt against Kyle Gibson, a second-year right-hander who has proved himself a solid rotation piece for Minnesota this year while leading the team in ERA (3.93).

"He feels he belongs now, and I think he has a lot of confidence now," said Twins manager Ron Gardenhire. "It's just about going out and doing it on a day-to-day basis when you get the ball. We think he's going to head our rotation for a few years to come."

Gibson has often dominated when he's on, recording a 0.96 ERA across his 10 wins and a 0.83 ERA when pitching at least seven innings. He's coming off his 12th quality start in 21 tries on Sunday after limiting the White Sox to three runs on six hits over seven innings.

"As a starter, I want to go out there and throw six, seven, eight innings every time," Gibson said.

A's: Lowrie expected to start Friday

Oakland manager Bob Melvin said on Thursday he is "almost certain" shortstop Jed Lowrie will return to the A's lineup on Friday after missing three starts because of a bruised right index finger.

Lowrie did pinch-hit in the seventh inning on Thursday for designated hitter John Jaso, lining out in his only at-bat.

Lowrie can easily swing a bat, but his problem lies in the field, where he still has discomfort in his index finger that affects his throwing accuracy.

"I think he could've played [Thursday], but at shortstop, if you get any number of throws that you have to make off-balance, he's still feeling it a little bit," Melvin said.

"If it's any other finger, it's not an issue," Lowrie said. "But because that's the finger that leaves the ball last, it's hard to control the ball throwing when you don't have good feel for the finger."

Eric Sogard, who has started at shortstop in Lowrie's place, hit his first homer of the season on Wednesday against Tampa before going 2-for-4 on Thursday vs. Minnesota.

Twins: Minnesota still seeking starter for Saturday

The Twins have yet to make an announcement about Saturday's starter against the A's, but they're expected to call up a pitcher from Triple-A Rochester after Friday's game.

The Twins have an opening in their rotation after left-hander Logan Darnell was optioned to Triple-A Rochester to make room for outfielder Jordan Schafer on Sunday. But Twins manager Ron Gardenhire wouldn't offer any hints on who will replace Darnell.

"He's somewhere," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We'll let you know."

Lefty Tommy Milone, who was acquired from the A's in the trade that sent Sam Fuld to Oakland on July 31, last started with Rochester on Tuesday, so he's not expected to be called up to pitch on short rest.

Worth noting

- With the A's win on Thursday, Bob Melvin became the eighth active manager and 76th in MLB history to record 800 wins.
- The Twins have lost 10 in a row to Oakland after Thursday's loss.

An attempt to answer why Kevin Correia still is making starts

Derek Wetmore / 1500 ESPN – 8/7/14

MINNEAPOLIS - Unlike in recent seasons, the Twins actually have pitching depth in their system. The Major League staff doesn't turn heads around baseball, but Minnesota quietly has assembled a group of pitchers that is knocking on the door of the Major

Leagues. Some will be in the rotation next season, while others could bide their time at Triple-A Rochester, waiting to fill in when necessary.

It's that depth that makes one wonder: what purpose does it serve to have Kevin Correia eating innings the rest of the way?

It could have to do with the Twins' reluctance to 'gift' promotions to minor league players.

General manager Terry Ryan's philosophy is that a player should not be promoted simply for the sake of getting time in the big leagues. A player has to earn it, Ryan said.

"Not unless they're ready. I don't ever think that you should just bring a guy up to look. If they're ready we should get them up here. I think that's the route to go," Ryan said. "Guys have to earn this promotion, there's no question that's the fair thing, I think."

When the Twins signed Correia to a two-year, \$10 million deal in December 2012, it seemed like they were looking for an innings eater. And Correia has been that. He's earned that contract and the Twins got what they should reasonably have expected from the veteran. In my opinion the Twins don't owe Correia the professional courtesy of letting him finish his current contract in Minnesota.

Minnesota has 50 starts remaining, and since the Twins are out of contention, it would make sense to get ready for 2015.

Now, each prospect's situation is unique, but I find it hard to believe that at least one of them wouldn't be better served in 2015 for having made a handful of starts in the Majors at the end of 2014. (I'll include an exception for health. If the Twins, for example, plan to shut down a pitcher like Alex Meyer, or deem that Major League innings put more stress on his arm, then fine. Trevor May's now-healed calf, on the other hand, should not prevent a call-up, in my opinion.)

Twins have on their 40-man roster starters such as Trevor May, Alex Meyer, Tommy Milone, Kris Johnson, Logan Darnell, and relievers Michael Tonkin and Edgar Ibarra. Mark Hamburger also has made five starts for the Rochester Red Wings. Yohan Pino is another 'depth' name, but he's already in the Twins' rotation. Anthony Swarzak did well in a spot start and Sam Deduno has had his chances in the rotation.

The Twins have not yet announced a starter for Saturday's game against the Oakland A's. A case could be made for a couple Triple-A pitchers to get their chance to show their stuff in the Majors.

When asked about Trevor May, Ryan downplayed the idea that each start is critical to the decision whether or not to bring him up.

"We've seen [Kris] Johnson, we've seen [Logan] Darnell. There will be a few others that ultimately we'll get a look at as well. Every time guys go out, yeah it's an important outing for them. It's not live-or-die or anything like that. But go out and do the job and get into the discussion so you're part of the equation when we do want to go get somebody. Like we're going to need somebody [Saturday]. You'd like to think all those guys would get themselves into a position [to be called up]," Ryan said.

Here's the question: In the final seven weeks of another losing season, would it make sense to lower that promotion threshold and either trade or give away Correia to free up another spot? Consider the cost, consider the benefits.

New A's ace Lester three-hits Twins in a gem in Oakland

Associated Press – 8/8/14

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Jon Lester got a rousing ovation the first time he pitched in an Oakland uniform. His second start for the Athletics ended with his name being chanted by the crowd at O.Co Coliseum.

Lester pitched a three-hitter for his fourth career shutout, and the A's beat the Minnesota Twins 3-0 on Thursday night.

The All-Star left-hander struck out eight, walked two and only allowed two runners past first base in the 11th complete game of his career. He pitched out of a two-out, bases-loaded jam in the sixth but was otherwise stellar.

Lester (12-7) was making second start since being acquired at the trade deadline as part of the blockbuster deal that sent Cuban slugger Yoenis Cespedes to Boston.

The deal rankled many Oakland fans. Others welcomed the trade and showed their approval with chants of "Lester! Lester!" when the veteran pitcher came out to pitch the ninth inning.

"We all know what Cespedes did for this organization and how well he's liked," Lester said. "Just coming over here, you don't want to (mess) that up. You want to make the trade look like it had a purpose and it was good."

Lester retired the first 15 batters while allowing only three balls out of the infield. Former A's catcher Kurt Suzuki ended the bid for perfection with a leadoff single in the sixth.

The former Boston ace improved to 6-0 with 1.21 ERA over his last 10 starts.

"You could see from the onset that he was going to be tough to score on," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "Not only is he able to pitch that type of game but he's also a guy that gives the bullpen a rest. That's exactly what he did tonight."

Stephen Vogt homered and Derek Norris hit an RBI double to help Oakland become the first team in the majors to reach 70 wins.

Melvin became the eighth active manager in the majors and 76th overall to reach 800 career victories. Two of them have come with Lester on the mound, showing why general manager Billy Beane made the deal with the Red Sox.

Chris Colabello and Oswaldo Arcia had the other hits for Minnesota, which has lost 10 straight to Oakland.

"Lester was the story of the night," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He has all the pitches. He can do all those things."

Vogt snapped an 0-for-23 skid with his sixth home run of the season, a two-run shot off Yohan Pino (1-4) in the third.

Back-to-back doubles by Brandon Moss and Derek Norris in the fourth made it 3-0.

EAGER FULD JUMPS THE GUN

Melvin wanted Jonny Gomes to pinch-hit in the eighth inning and had Sam Fuld ready to run if Gomes got on base. But Fuld got overanxious and ran out to first base to run for Alberto Callaspo before being called back to the dugout.

"He was just a tad eager," Melvin said. "He probably has a games (played) clause in his contract."

DOZIER'S NEAR-MISS

Twins second baseman Brian Dozier just missed hitting a tying three-run home run in the sixth inning when his ball curved just wide of the left-field foul pole.

"Even when it landed I still thought it was fair," Dozier said. "You go from a very high to a very low in a short time."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: First baseman Joe Mauer (strained right oblique) was given the day off after going 1-for-6 in his first two rehab starts with Single-A Cedar Rapids. There still is no timetable for Mauer's return to the big league club.

Athletics: Shortstop Jed Lowrie was held out of the starting lineup with a bruised right index finger. He pinch hit with two on in the sixth and flew out to right. Melvin indicated Lowrie would most likely start Friday. ... First baseman Kyle Blanks (calf) ran the bases for the second time and could begin a rehab assignment this weekend.

UP NEXT

Twins: Right-hander Kyle Gibson (10-8) has pitched extremely well against the AL West, winning four of six starts this season while crafting a 2.50 ERA. He gets the ball Friday night against the A's.

Athletics: Left-hander Scott Kazmir (12-4) has a 1.92 ERA in 10 starts at the Coliseum this season. He beat the Twins in Minnesota on April 7 when he allowed three runs over six innings.