



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips

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Ervin Santana, Trevor Plouffe lead Twins past A's

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, CALIF. – Manager Paul Molitor had the Twins out on the field early Friday afternoon for a refresher workout following the All-Star break. After four days off, it was time to resume their surprising season.

“They all realize that the time off goes by too fast,” Molitor said. “When they are back here they know what the task is at hand.”

How could they not? The Twins didn’t want an All-Star break after winning six of their previous seven games. They wanted to ride the wave.

Molitor had nothing to worry about Friday night. The Twins picked up where they left off with a 5-0 victory over the Oakland Athletics at O.co Coliseum.

“We talked about putting the first half behind us,” third baseman Trevor Plouffe said. “It doesn’t mean anything now. We put ourselves in a good position, but you have to finish.”

Brian Dozier led off the game with a homer before Plouffe buried the A’s with a grand slam in the sixth, backing a strong start by Ervin Santana.

“To go from one to five with one swing, that’s a big differential,” Molitor said.

Both homers came off All-Star righthander Sonny Gray, who gave up two home runs in a game for the first time in his career and tied a season high with five earned runs allowed.

The Royals split a doubleheader with the White Sox, so the Twins picked up a half-game on Kansas City and trail the Royals by four games in the Central Division.

Santana threw everything he had at Oakland and found himself breezing into the late innings with a shutout in only his third start since serving an 80-game suspension for testing positive for an performance-enhancing drug. In 7⅓ innings, he gave up five hits with one walk and one strikeout. Brian Duensing retired the final four batters in the Twins' eighth shutout of the season.

"He's prideful," Molitor said of Santana, who improved to 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA in his career against the A's. "He knows what has transpired here the first half of the season and he might not say it, but after the first couple of games I think he was anxious to get a win and contribute."

Dozier, who hit three home runs during last week's homestand and another in Tuesday's All-Star Game, hit a 2-2 pitch over the left-field wall for his 20th homer of the season. It also was his fifth leadoff homer of the season and 12th of his career.

Gray and Santana dueled for several innings after that, as Santana was crafty with his offspeed stuff and Gray unhittable at times.

But Gray couldn't keep it up. In the sixth, he walked Dozier to lead off the inning. Torii Hunter, who turns 40 on Saturday, singled to left. Joe Mauer, at the end of an eight-pitch at bat, could not check his swing in time and struck out.

Miguel Sano fell behind Gray 0-2 but battled back to draw a walk and load the bases. That brought up Plouffe, who promptly fell behind 0-2.

Plouffe then fouled off a pitch. On the next pitch, Gray tried to get a high slider past Plouffe, but the third baseman got it, sending a towering drive that barely got over the scoreboard in left-center for his second grand slam of the season and a 5-0 Twins lead.

"To be honest, I thought it was a sac fly, the way [Ben] Zobrist went after it," Plouffe said. "I think it was a little wind-aided over there. I'll take that."

Twins encore: Out of the gate quickly to start the second half

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- This is what the Twins envisioned as spring training wound down.

Ervin Santana pitching deep into games. Someone - in this case, Trevor Plouffe - providing a big hit. And the Twins sustaining momentum as they make an improbable run for the postseason.

Happy endings like the one on Friday, a 5-0 victory over the Athletics, were expected to occur frequently once the season started. And they actually did, just not by Santana because he had to serve a suspension for using a banned substance right as the season started.

Now with the team, Santana worked his way into the eighth inning as he won his first game as a Twin. Plouffe's grand slam put the game out of reach. And the Twins have won seven of their last eight and are four games back of the Royals in the AL Central but remain wild card leaders.

Santana held the A's to five hits with one walk and one strikeout. That strikeout didn't occur until the eighth inning, as Santana threw plenty of off speed pitches at Oakland hitters. After the game, Plouffe presented Santana with the game ball, and Santana proudly said it is going up in his house.

"My first win as a Twin," he said with a grin.

The Twins can now dream again of how Santana can join a rotation that posted a 3.86 starter's ERA before the All-Star break and see if it can lead the Twins into the postseason.

"I think it is big for him," Plouffe said of Santana. "It is big for us. We know what kind of pitcher he is. He's got a track record. He's got everything we want in a pitcher. He works fast, throws strikes, holds runners well. He's going to be a big boost to our rotation."

Twins manager Paul Molitor tabbed Santana to start the first game following the break because he was fresh. He also has good numbers against Oakland and it also put him in line to pitch next week in Anaheim, where he began his career.

Santana had to work his way out of a bases-loaded jam in the third inning, then he enjoyed run of nine straight retired batters. He threw one pitch at 91 miles an hour and threw a bevy of sliders and change ups at Oakland with fairly reliable command.

“He didn't have the velocity that we have seen him have at times,” Molitor said, “but it seemed like he was really focused on location. He was down, slider effective to lefties and righties and he threw enough fastballs to keep them honest. I thought his change up was the best of the first three games we have seen him.”

Santana was lifted in the eighth with two outs and runners on first and third, but Brian Duensing got out of the inning. In 27 career starts against the A's, Santana is 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA. Yeah, a no brainer to fire him out right after the break,

The Twins took a 1-0 lead five pitches into the game when Brian Dozier hit his 20th homer of the season. It was his fifth leadoff home run of the season and 12th of his career. Oakland righthander Sonny Gray was tough after that and dueled with Santana until the sixth inning.

Dozier walked to lead off the sixth inning. Torii Hunter, who turns 40 on Saturday, singled to left. Joe Mauer, at the end of an eight-pitch at bat, could not check his swing in time and struck out.

Miguel Sano fell behind Gray 1-2 but battled back to draw a walk. That brought up Plouffe, who promptly fell behind 0-2 but began fouling off pitches.

Gray tried to pump a high slider by Plouffe but the third baseman got it, sending a towering drive that barely got over the scoreboard in left for his second grad slam of the season and a 5-0 Twins lead. Plouffe's other grand slam came on May 3 off of White Sox lefthander John Danks.

“To be honest I thought it was a sacrifice fly, the way Zobrist went after it,” Plouffe said. “I think it was a little wind-aided over there. I'll take that.”

Nothing wrong with beginning the second half the way you ended the first half.

“We talked about putting the first half behind us,” Plouffe said. “It doesn't mean anything now. We put ourselves in a good position but you have to finish.”

Kyle Cody, Twins' second-round pick, returns to Kentucky

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, CALIF. — One reason the Twins were willing to relinquish their second-round pick in the June draft — for signing free agent Ervin Santana last offseason — was because they received a compensation pick in the competitive balance round. They used that pick, No. 73 overall, to select Kentucky righthander Kyle Cody.

All they had to do was sign the kid and send him to the minors. But negotiations ended up being tougher than anticipated and, on Friday, the 4 p.m. deadline for inking draft picks came and went without Cody's signature.

The 6-7, 240-pound Cody will return to Kentucky for his senior season, frustrating Twins officials. They thought they were close to a deal, but they couldn't wrap it up.

“We worked on it, and it just didn't work out,” General Manager Terry Ryan said. “I'm disappointed that we didn't get our second pick. You never like to go through a draft process without signing your top 10, top 15.”

Cody has a mid-90s fastball along with a good curve, although he struggled at times for the Wildcats last season. Ryan said there were no health concerns that affected negotiations.

The assigned value of the pick was \$839,700, which the Twins will not be allowed to use now. The Twins ended up signing 28 players from this year's draft class.

Because the Twins failed to sign Cody, they will receive the No. 74 overall pick in next year's draft.

“I think he was hoping to go a little higher than where we picked him,” Ryan said. “That's the way it is. The slotting system is a little different than a free-for-all.”

Back to bashing

Brian Dozier received dozens of text messages Thursday after he homered in the eighth inning of Tuesday's All-Star Game in Cincinnati. "I got a ton," he said. "I spent about an hour just replying to everybody the same thing. 'Thank you, thank you.' "

Dozier ended up with a one-day All-Star break — but he didn't really need a break, anyway.

Dozier led off Friday's game with a home run to left off All-Star teammate Sonny Gray, getting the Twins off to a fast start. It was Dozier's fifth leadoff homer of the season and 12th of his career.

It was also Dozier's 20th homer of the season. He hit 23 last season, with No. 20 also coming at Oakland, off Jason Hammel on Aug. 10.

Injury updates

Righthander Ricky Nolasco will be fitted for a walking boot following his surgery Monday to remove a bone fragment from his ankle. Ryan said Nolasco will be in the boot for a while. Nolasco remains out indefinitely, and it should be pointed out that it was not arthroscopic surgery. An incision was made, and that will affect recovery time.

Byron Buxton is doing strengthening exercises for his sprained left thumb and will begin baseball-related activities once it's stronger. Etc.

- Former major leaguer Scott Atchison asked for and received his release from Class AA Chattanooga. Atchison, 39, signed hoping that something would open up at other levels but decided to leave when nothing materialized. "He didn't want to languish in Double-A," Ryan said. "I understood that, and he did too. If we were going to do anything, there would have to be opportunity and there just wasn't an opportunity."

- The Twins released 2011 second-round pick Madison Boer, a 25-year-old righthander, from Chattanooga. The Eden Prairie High School product posted a 4.38 ERA in 13 games.

Souhan: Molitor's approach winning with players

Jim Souhan | Star Tribune | July 17, 2015

On the Sunday morning before the All-Star break, Paul Molitor walked beyond second base at Target Field and threw pop-ups to his children, who sprinted and dived in the sun.

Molitor walked with them to the dugout, turned, looked across the field, and on an idyllic day reflected on what has become an idyllic life.

"I haven't really stopped to measure it all," he said. "But every once in a while, in your humble moments, when you think about the journey you've been able to travel through, from growing up here and having family here and playing and fulfilling dreams and all of that good stuff, it's all gone to another level with this opportunity.

"I'm trying to soak it all in. You know me. Whatever I've been challenged with in terms of opportunities, I've tried to meet them head-on, tried to do my best. The reward in this job comes in watching the development of men, and how their development affects not only their profession, but how they mature, and the responsibilities they're willing to accept, and how they accept accountability.

"Leadership is about that. We all try to make people better at skills, but I think when you see guys figure out how to be good people, everything from how it affects their performance to how they carry themselves here, and with their families and in their communities.

"I've made so many mistakes along the way that I hope, with the things I've gone through, I can communicate those to people to help them just become better."

In his first year as Twins manager, Molitor is enjoying the view. He took over a team that had lost 90 games for four consecutive seasons and guided it to the second-best record in the American League, adding a chapter to a storybook life that seems so perfectly scripted as to be fictional.

He grew up in St. Paul, played at Cretin High, then the University of Minnesota. He became a star in Milwaukee and a champion in Toronto before returning to Minnesota to collect his 3,000th hit and be elected into the Hall of Fame.

After spending years as a scout, instructor and coach for the Twins, he became manager of his hometown team. The result has been a rare thing: A Hall of Famer whose managerial style is defined by humility.

He doesn't criticize players publicly. He second-guesses himself publicly. When rookie Miguel Sano missed a sign recently and was thrown out trying to steal second, Molitor said it was the responsibility of the manager and the coaches to communicate with the player.

After a recent game, he bolted from his office immediately after his news conference to hand the lineup card to Ryan O'Rourke, a 27-year-old reliever who had just made his big-league debut.

Brian Dozier, Trevor Plouffe, Torii Hunter and Glen Perkins rave about Molitor's approach. Sano and top prospect Byron Buxton have called Molitor the person they rely on most in the organization.

"There is no panic with him," Twins vice president Rob Antony said. "He's got the players playing relaxed. If you make a mistake you don't fear that you're going to be benched. And please, this isn't a knock on the previous manager, but I think these are traits that I think are really important.

"You lose a game, he doesn't dwell on it. He's always looking forward. The preparation and attention to detail and the ability to communicate with players while maintaining a mutual respect with them has been very important.

"He's got everybody believing in themselves and each other. It's not easy to do all of those things, especially given our recent history."

Ron Gardenhire, Molitor's predecessor, brought intensity to the job but seemed deflated in his last year or two.

Molitor has a different personality and approach. He has connected with his players on a personal level.

"I had a bad outing the other day, and he came and checked on me, to see if I was OK," Kyle Gibson said. "He does things like that all the time."

"It is a stressful job," Molitor said. "... The stress is that there is responsibility that people are looking to you for leadership and guidance in how you make decisions day to day, whether in game or out of game.

"You want to meet people's expectations the best you can by making sure you do your homework and you're prepared. It's not always going to work out. Some days you're going to fail. But if you're willing to admit that ...

"I think people know that as you're trying to make them better that you're trying to get better at the same time."

Twins blank A's behind Plouffe's grand slam, Santana's pitching

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — So much for those concerns about the all-star break costing the Twins their July mojo.

Brian Dozier opened the game with a home run and Trevor Plouffe added a grand slam in the sixth as the Twins rolled to a 5-0 win over the last-place Oakland A's on Friday night.

In claiming their 50th victory, the Twins won for the seventh time in eight tries and moved 10 games over .500 for the first time since June 7.

Both clouts came off A's right-hander Sonny Gray, who came in leading the American League with a 2.04 earned run average. Gray (10-4) had allowed just five homers all year, including two in his past seven starts combined.

In 61 prior starts, Gray had allowed multiple homers just once. That came last Aug. 22 against the Los Angeles Angels (Mike Trout and Josh Hamilton).

"He's tough," Plouffe said. "We're happy with a win against a really, really good pitcher. We talked about putting the first half behind us. We put ourselves in a good position but you have to finish."

Twins right-hander Ervin Santana (1-0) picked up his first victory in his third start for his new employer, cruising through the first 7 2/3 innings on just five hits (all singles). He improved to 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA in 27 career starts against the A's.

Santana's fastball was down a tick or two as he struck out just one batter, Marcus Semien in the eighth. His location and changeup were much improved, however, as the free-agent addition justified the decision of Twins manager Paul Molitor to have him open the second half instead of Phil Hughes.

Molitor cited "the freshness of Ervin" before the game, a reference to the 80-game steroid suspension that kept him from doing much of significance until a Triple-A rehab assignment began in mid-June.

"I didn't have the velocity today but I was locating the ball where I wanted to and was keeping the hitters off balance," Santana said. "That's the more important thing for me right now."

Asked afterward about the importance of his first win with the Twins, Santana reached into his locker, pulled out his game ball and waved it for the cameras with a big smile. He said he would put it on display at his home in Clearwater, Fla.

"I think it's big for him, big for us," Plouffe said. "We know what kind of pitcher he is. He has a track record. He's got everything that we want in a pitcher. He throws strikes and works fast and holds runners well. He's going to be a big boost for our rotation."

Dozier, coming off the high of his pinch homer in Tuesday's All-Star Game, wasted no time in staking the Twins to a quick lead. He caught up to a 2-2 fastball at 94 mph on Gray's sixth pitch of the game, sending it over the wall in left.

For Dozier, it was his team-leading 20th homer and his 12th career leadoff homer, tying him with Twins radio analyst Dan Gladden for third in club history. Five of Dozier's leadoff homers came this year.

Jacque Jones (21) and Chuck Knoblauch (14) top the Twins career list for leadoff homers.

Plouffe, meanwhile, homered for the 12th time this year and the first time in 64 at-bats (June 26 at Milwaukee). He fell behind in the count 0-2 before lofting a flat slider over the auxiliary scoreboard in left.

"The whole time I was just trying to put something in the air in the outfield to get one run in," Plouffe said. "To be honest with you I thought it was a sac fly. It looked like (left fielder Ben Zobrist) was camped. I think it was a little wind-aided out there. I'll take that."

It was Plouffe's second career grand slam. The other came May 3 at Target Field off Chicago White Sox left-hander John Danks.

Dozier had started the sixth with a team-leading 35th walk and moved up on a single by Torii Hunter, who went 2 for 5 on the eve of his 40th birthday. After Joe Mauer struck out, rookie Miguel Sano came back from 0-2 to work a seven-pitch walk, loading the bases for Plouffe.

The Twins third baseman singled his first time up against Gray, but he was 1 for 6 career against the A's ace before connecting.

"He's not a guy I particularly see the ball well against," Plouffe said. "You just try to battle."

The power surge continued for the Twins, who have homered 27 times in their past 21 games. They have gone 13-8 in that stretch, which started with a 13-3 pounding of Danks on June 26.

In their previous 20 games, the Twins homered just 12 times and went 7-13.

The shutout was the Twins' eighth this year. They had just seven in each of the past two seasons and hadn't exceeded this total in a season since 2010 (13).

Twinsights: Ricky Nolasco to wear walking boot after ankle surgery

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — Twins right-hander Ricky Nolasco will have his right ankle immobilized in a walking boot following invasive (non-arthroscopic) surgery Monday in Charlotte, N.C., to remove a bone fragment.

It's still unknown when Nolasco might be able to return to the mound, but Twins general manager Terry Ryan suggested it won't happen in the short term.

"It's not going to be a couple of weeks," Ryan said. "That's going to be a while down the road."

Nolasco, who last pitched on May 31, is back in the Twin Cities working with rehab coordinator Lanning Tucker.

Briefly

–Double-A right-hander Scott Atchison, 39, was released this week after just 10 days with the organization because the Twins didn't have an opportunity for him at a higher level, Ryan said. Atchison posted a 1.80 ERA in four outings (five innings) and showed no drop-off in his stuff. He was released by mutual agreement, not due to a contractual right. "It's unfortunate," Ryan said, "because he's a tremendous guy and a great influence on anybody he's ever been around."

–Twins manager Paul Molitor put everyone but Friday starter Ervin Santana through a 40-minute early workout at O.Co Coliseum. "I tried to condense it and compact it," Molitor said. "It was more familiarity and maybe to reestablish a couple things about areas we've gotten a little lax in. It was just more to get them back out there and get them in a baseball mindset and mentality."

Twinsights: Brian Dozier's homer caused a stir in Molitor household

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — Twins manager Paul Molitor tried to get away from baseball as much as possible during the all-star break, but he found time to watch Brian Dozier and Glen Perkins in Tuesday's All-Star Game.

"My son (Ben) obviously wanted to see as much as he could," Molitor said Friday. "Him and Brian are best buddies, don't you know? We were kind of waiting for him to get in the game."

When Dozier delivered a pinch homer in the eighth inning of the American League's 6-3 victory, Ben Molitor was pretty excited.

"Dad, you've got to text him! You've got to text him!"

"After the game, son," came the reply from his father, a seven-time all-star in his own right.

Like many Twins fans, Molitor was a bit disappointed to see the Fox TV crew initially ignore Dozier until he connected off Pittsburgh's Mark Melancon.

"I thought it was a little funny and not particularly a complaint," Molitor said, "but as (Dozier) came up to bat, I think they finally mentioned his name after about the second pitch. They were talking about something else. Todd Frazier's family."

Play-by-play man Joe Buck also got off on a tangent about Toronto catcher Russell Martin before Dozier brought everyone back to reality.

"Probably just bad timing for him," Molitor said. "As a Twins person and his manager, you're kind of hoping he gets his due because his moment was short. And he ended up making it a big moment by how he performed."

As for Perkins, he gave up a run following a leadoff triple by Ryan Braun, but he managed to secure the game's final three outs on a total of nine pitches. AL manager Ned Yost had told Molitor he planned to use Perkins in the ninth while the Twins were in Kansas City playing the Royals on Fourth of July weekend.

"I said, 'You can't go wrong there. The guy's been money from Day 1,' " Molitor recalled.

Molitor didn't feel the need to give Yost, his former Milwaukee Brewers teammate, a pitch limit for his closer.

"I think those things don't need to be spoken," Molitor said. "I think everyone knows in those situations you protect people the best you can."

Twinsights: Twins lose rights to Kentucky pitcher Kyle Cody

Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. — Kentucky right-hander Kyle Cody, the 73rd overall pick in this year's draft, failed to sign with the Twins by Friday's 4 p.m. Central deadline.

"I'm disappointed," Twins general manager Terry Ryan said. "It's not that we didn't try and it's not that they didn't try. It just didn't work out."

Cody called the process “a tough journey” on his Twitter account.

The Twins forfeit the \$839,700 slot for failing to sign Cody, a hulking power arm Twins scouting director Deron Johnson had compared to Mike Pelfrey. Cody was taken in the competitive-balance round between Rounds 2 and 3.

Ryan said the two sides were “close” but were unable to finalize a deal. He denied that concerns over Cody’s physical exam tripped up the deal. “That wasn’t the most important thing,” Ryan said. “He’s healthy. It’s not about that. We just couldn’t get it done.”

The Twins, who will receive the No. 74 pick in the 2016 draft as compensation for failing to sign Cody, also lost their 2015 second-rounder as compensation for signing free-agent right-hander Ervin Santana, who rejected a qualifying offer from the Atlanta Braves.

Between Cody and Santana, who lost \$6.64 million in salary after a positive steroid test, the Twins should have an additional \$7.48 million to spend on potential trade acquisitions. The non-waiver trade deadline is July 31.

Cody is the highest Twins draftee to go unsigned since 2000, when they failed to come to agreement with Notre Dame right-hander Aaron Heilman (31st overall) and San Francisco first baseman Tagg Bozied (42nd overall).

They also failed to sign Florida high school right-hander Mark Sauls as a third-round pick (92nd overall) in 2002, but every other Twins pick in the first three rounds since 2000 had signed.

Two other college draftees, sixth-round outfielder Chris Paul (California) and 12th-round first baseman Zander Wiel (Vanderbilt) came to terms with the Twins before Friday’s deadline. Cody was the only player among the Twins’ top 18 draft picks that failed to sign.

University of Minnesota lefty Dalton Sawyer (27th round) also failed to sign.

“That one never really gained any traction from the get-go,” Ryan said. “I think he was hoping to go a little higher when we picked him.”

Plouffe's grand slam lifts Twins over A's

Rhett Bollinger & Jane Lee | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- **Trevor Plouffe** hit a grand slam off **Sonny Gray**, and **Brian Dozier** also homered against his fellow All-Star to help the Twins top the A's, 5-0, in Friday night's series opener at the Coliseum.

Dozier led off the game with his 20th home run of the season, and Gray would go on to retire 15 of his next 17 batters -- including 13 in a row -- before running into trouble in his sixth and final inning. The right-hander issued two of his three walks in the frame, and both resulted in runs when Plouffe sent his second career grand slam into the left-field bleachers.

Twins right-hander **Ervin Santana**, making just his third start of the season after serving an 80-game suspension for the use of performance-enhancing drugs, held the A's to five hits over 7 2/3 shutout innings to earn his first win of 2015. The veteran improved to 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA in 27 career starts against Oakland.

"It was kind of a tall order coming out here on the road and facing Sonny," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "He kind of settled in after Dozier got us off to a great start. His roll continues. But Ervin was sharp. He didn't have the velocity that we've seen him have, but it seemed like he was really focused on his location."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Plouffe is grand: Plouffe's big blast in the sixth came on an 0-2 slider up in the zone from Gray and gave the Twins some breathing room after Dozier's leadoff homer in the first. Plouffe hit his first career grand slam on May 3 against the White Sox.

"I was just trying to put one in the air to get the run in," Plouffe said. "He came back with a slider and to be honest, I thought it was a sac fly with the way Zobrist went after it. I think it was a little wind-aided out there."

Slammed: Gray had not given up a grand slam in 411 career innings before surrendering one to Plouffe, which broke open the game in a 38-pitch sixth inning. It also marked the first time this season Gray allowed more than one home run, having surrendered five total in his 18 previous starts, and just the second time in his career. The only other time he's allowed as many as two long balls in an outing was Aug. 22, 2014, against the Angels.

"I just wasn't very sharp," Gray said. "I even knew during the middle innings I'd have to locate better tonight because I felt my stuff wasn't that good. There in the sixth it just kind of caught up with me."

Santana bounces back: After giving up six runs over four innings against the Tigers in his last start, Santana was much sharper against the A's. The right-hander lowered his ERA to 3.66 in three starts.

QUOTABLE

"I think it was big for him and big for us. We know what kind of pitcher he is. He's got the track record and got everything we want in pitcher. He throws strikes, he works fast, he holds runners well. He's a big boost to our rotation." -- *Plouffe on Santana*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Twins improved to 50-40 with the win, becoming the sixth team to reach the 50-win mark this season. Minnesota didn't get its 50th win until Aug. 3 last year.

WHAT'S NEXT

Twins: Right-hander **Phil Hughes** starts the second game of the series on Saturday at 8:05 p.m. CT. Hughes has been pitching better recently, posting a 3.40 ERA over his last seven outings heading into the All-Star break.

A's: Left-hander **Scott Kazmir**, who is 3-1 with a 1.41 ERA in his last six starts, gets the ball for Saturday's middle matchup of a three-game set with the Twins at the Coliseum.

Santana looks sharp in first win with Twins

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- It was exactly the kind of outing the Twins were looking for from right-hander **Ervin Santana** to open the second half of the season.

Santana, making just his third start of the year after being suspended 80 games for the use of a performance-enhancing drug, was sharp against the A's, scattering five hits over 7 2/3 scoreless innings to get his first win with the Twins in a **5-0 victory**. Santana outdueled A's ace **Sonny Gray**, and improved to 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA in 27 career starts against Oakland.

"I think he's prideful and knows what transpired the first half of the season," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "He might not say it, but I think after the first couple games he was anxious to get a win and contribute. He pitched really well his first start but tonight he was matched up against Gray and stood tall and got his first win as a Twin."

Santana was coming off a rough outing against the Tigers, as he gave up six runs over four innings on July 10. On Friday, he looked more like he did in his first outing, when he limited the Royals to two runs on three hits over eight innings.

Santana's velocity was a bit down and he registered just one strikeout, but he said he was able to command his fastball, slider and changeup to make up for it.

"It feels great," said Santana, who was given a game ball to mark his first win with the Twins. "I didn't have the velocity today but I was able to locate the ball where I wanted to. I was able to keep the hitters off-balance and I think that's more important for me right now."

Santana ran into trouble in the third, loading the bases with two outs but was able to get out of the jam by getting **Ben Zobrist** to pop out to first to end the inning. He exited in the eighth with runners at the corners with two outs, but left-hander **Brian Duensing** got **Jake Smolinski** to fly out to center.

The Twins will be counting on him to deliver more in the second half after his long layoff.

"I think it was big for him and big for us," said third baseman **Trevor Plouffe**, who hit a grand slam in the sixth. "We know what kind of pitcher he is. He's got the track record and got everything we want in pitcher. He throws strikes, he works fast, he holds runners well. He's a big boost to our rotation."

Dozier shows All-Star power in first at-bat

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- It was only fitting that the Twins' unsung duo of **Brian Dozier** and **Trevor Plouffe** powered the Twins to a **5-0 win** over the A's to open the second half of the season Friday night.

Dozier, fresh off his last-minute addition to the All-Star Game that saw him hit a homer for the American League, led off the game with a blast off A's right-hander **Sonny Gray**. Five innings later, Plouffe connected on his second career grand slam to give the Twins and right-hander **Ervin Santana** some breathing room.

"It was kind of a tall order coming out here on the road and facing Sonny," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "He kind of settled in after Dozier got us off to a great start. His roll continues. ... And when you go from one run to five runs in one swing that's a big differential. So that was a huge hit for us."

It was the team-leading 20th homer for Dozier, who also leads the Twins with 51 RBIs. Plouffe became the second Twins player to reach 50 RBIs with his grand slam, which was his 12th blast of the year.

"I was just trying to put one in the air to get the run in," Plouffe said. "He came back with a slider and to be honest, I thought it was a sac fly with the way [left fielder Ben] Zobrist went after it. I think it was a little wind-aided out there."

It was a rare feat for it to come against Gray, who had served up just five homers all year and had allowed more than one homer in a start just once in his career. It was also the first time he'd ever given up a grand slam and it came on an 0-2 slider that ended up high in the zone.

"With the one run you never know if it'll hold up, so you try to add on," Molitor said. "Dozier had the leadoff walk, Torii [Hunter] got the hit and then [Miguel] Sano had another one of those at-bats we've seen multiple times here, where during a rally, he draws a walk and gives the guy behind him a chance. Trevor got a breaking ball there and I didn't know if it had enough to get out but it was enough to get us one run and it ended up carrying into the stands."

Nolasco undergoes ankle surgery over break

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- Right-hander **Ricky Nolasco** underwent successful surgery on his right ankle Monday during the All-Star break, Twins general manager Terry Ryan said Friday.

Nolasco, out since June 1 with a right ankle impingement and moved to the 60-day DL on July 8, had a bone fragment removed from his ankle. The operation was performed by Dr. Robert Anderson in Charlotte, N.C. Nolasco is rehabbing with Twins assistant athletic trainer and rehab coordinator Lanning Tucker and will be fitted with a walking boot soon.

"Everything went well," Ryan said. "I think the doctor was pleased, and I think Ricky was pleased. They got that bone fragment out of there."

Ryan said it's still too early to know whether Nolasco will return this season until he's out of the walking boot, which is still weeks away.

"I can't give you a timetable," Ryan said. "I think we have to wait a little longer. He's going to be in a boot here pretty soon. I think we can gauge his timetable once he's out of that boot, but that's going to be a while here still."

The Twins initially hoped Nolasco would be able to avoid surgery, and tried several alternatives, including a cortisone shot and orthotics. But ultimately it was decided that surgery was necessary, as Nolasco was still feeling discomfort when throwing off a mound.

Nolasco is 5-1 with a 5.51 ERA in seven starts this season. He also missed nearly a month early in the season with right-elbow inflammation. Nolasco, who signed a four-year deal worth \$49 million before last season, has posted a 5.40 ERA in 191 2/3 innings with the Twins over the last two years.

Twins unable to sign Draft pick Cody

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND -- The Twins couldn't come to terms with No. 73 overall pick Kyle Cody before Friday's 4 p.m. CT deadline, and will receive the No. 74 pick in the 2016 Draft as compensation for not being able to sign him.

Cody, a 6-foot-7 right-hander from the University of Kentucky, was taken by the Twins in the Competitive Balance B round. The Twins also lost out on the \$839,700 slot value attached to the pick. But the Twins did sign all of their other picks in the Top 10 rounds.

"We worked on it but it just didn't work out and I'm disappointed we didn't sign our second pick," Twins general manager Terry Ryan said. "It's a disappointment. But it's not like we didn't try or they didn't try. It just didn't work out."

Ryan also said Cody's health wasn't the reason why he went unsigned, as there were reports that the Twins offered Cody less money after evaluating his medical records.

"That wasn't the important thing," Ryan said. "We just couldn't come to a conclusion, is all. He's healthy. It's not a factor. It's just one of those things. We couldn't get it done. Both of us were trying and both us were interested but it just didn't work out."

The 20-year-old posted a 4.91 ERA with 63 strikeouts and 17 walks in 66 innings as a junior, making 12 starts and two relief appearances.

Cody took to Twitter on Friday to announce he was returning for his senior season at the University of Kentucky, calling it a "tough journey."

Well it's has been a tough journey, but after its all over I'm headed back to UK next year! BBN be ready for a great season in the bluegrass
— Kyle Cody (@kylecody10) [July 17, 2015](#)

Hughes looks for continued run support vs. A's

Trevor Hass | MLB.com | July 17, 2015

Scott Kazmir faces Phil Hughes in the second of a three-game set between the A's and Twins at the Coliseum on Saturday.

Kazmir (5-5, 2.49) makes his first start since leaving a July 8 tilt against the Yankees in the third inning with left-triceps tightness. The left-hander is 3-1 with a 1.41 ERA and .173 opponents batting average over his last six starts. His .176 opponents batting average with runners on base is the lowest among qualified American League pitchers.

Right-hander Phil Hughes (8-6, 4.32) will be on the mound for the Twins. Hughes' numbers this season are on par with his career stats. He's 80-66 with a 4.32 ERA in the Majors. Hughes has pitched six or more innings in 15 of his 18 starts this season and is 5-2 with a 4.52 ERA against the A's in his career.

Three things to know about this game

- In his only start against the Twins this season, Kazmir yielded six earned runs in six innings as the A's lost, 13-0. Kazmir is 7-5 with a 3.80 ERA in his career against the Twins.
- Twins right fielder Torii Hunter turns 40 on Saturday.
- Hughes has received 69 runs of support from the Twins, which is by far the most of any Minnesota starter. The Twins have scored an average of 5.32 runs during his starts and are 10-8 when he pitches.

Plouffe grand slam, Dozier homer lead Twins past Athletics

Associated Press | July 17, 2015

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Ervin Santana received the game ball from [Joe Mauer](#) after his first win with Minnesota, and he waited months to finally earn it.

The Twins' power hitters provided him plenty of support, too.

[Trevor Plouffe](#) hit a grand slam against All-Star Sonny Gray in the sixth inning after [Brian Dozier](#) led off the game with his 20th home run, and Minnesota beat the Oakland Athletics 5-0 on Friday night.

Santana worked out of a bases-loaded jam in the third and won in his third start since returning from an 80-game suspension for performance-enhancing drugs.

"It's big for him, it's big for us," Plouffe said of Santana starting strong in the second half. "We know the kind of pitcher he is. He's got a track record."

Plouffe connected for his second career grand slam, both this year, to back 7 2/3 strong innings by Santana (1-0).

It was Dozier's fifth homer leading off a game this season and 12th of his career. Gray surrendered just his sixth and seventh homers of 2015. Dozier also hit No. 20 at Oakland last season.

Minnesota (50-40) holds the second-best record in the AL behind division-leading Kansas City.

Santana allowed five hits to improve to 15-6 with a 2.03 ERA in 27 starts against the A's.

"I don't know (why) but I like it," he said, grinning. "Good numbers."

He was coming off only four innings in his last outing, July 10 against Detroit, his shortest start since 3 1/3 innings on Sept. 4, 2013, while with Kansas City. **Brian Duensing** recorded the final four outs in the five-hit shutout.

Manager Paul Molitor chose to go with Santana starting things off after the All-Star break because he was the team's freshest pitcher -- not to mention that record against Oakland.

"He stood tall and got his first win as a Twin," Molitor said.

Plouffe also singled for Minnesota, which had lost nine of 10 at the Oakland Coliseum and hasn't won a series here since a two-game set May 18-19, 2011. The Twins have lost four straight series in Oakland.

After Aaron Hicks drew a one-out walk in the second, Gray (10-4) retired 11 straight before Dozier walked to get things going in the sixth.

Gray -- who won his only two previous starts against the Twins, both in 2013 -- allowed five runs and five hits in six innings with four strikeouts and two walks. He was done after a 38-pitch sixth.

"It is a surprise when he gives up a home run. It really came down to two pitches where they scored all their runs," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He threw a lot of pitches in the sixth, something he normally doesn't do."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Molitor is pleased RHP **Mike Pelfrey** -- 0-4 in his last six starts -- will have had an extended break with 12 days off by the time he pitches again Wednesday in Anaheim.

Athletics: RHP Jesse Hahn, sidelined since July 6 with a strained forearm in his pitching arm, will receive a platelet-rich plasma injection Tuesday and has been shut down indefinitely. Because he has had a previous Tommy John elbow reconstructive surgery, the A's are being especially cautious. "There's really no timetable at this point," Melvin said. ... Switch-pitcher Pat Venditte (strained right shoulder) threw a bullpen Thursday -- 30 pitches from the right, 20 from the left -- and is set for another Saturday. ... Melvin remains optimistic LHP Sean Doolittle (shoulder) will return sometime this season. ... OF Coco Crisp (neck) took dry swings and could resume baseball activities and batting practice over the coming week.

HUNTER TURNING 40

Twins right fielder Torii Hunter had two singles on the eve of his 40th birthday, and his mother and wife are in town to help him celebrate before the night game.

"My last game in my 30s, I'm sentimental," Hunter quipped postgame.

A's right fielder Josh Reddick reached out with an early birthday greeting when he saw Hunter on Friday.

"That's respect. They call me old goat," Hunter said. "I got drafted at 17 and I'm still playing at 40. I never thought I'd be doing that. ... Thank God for genetics."

UP NEXT

Twins: RHP **Phil Hughes** (8-6) makes his team-leading 19th start and 11th of his career against the A's after he beat Oakland on May 4.

Athletics: LHP Scott Kazmir (5-5), with the lowest opponents' batting average at home in the AL through the All-Star break, seeks his fourth win in seven starts.