



**Minnesota Twins Daily Clips
Sunday, September 30, 2018**

- Gibson brilliant to end career-best season. MLB.com (Bollinger) p.1
- Molitor hopes to keep entire coaching staff in '19. MLB.com (Bollinger) p.2
- Twins coaching staff shuffle isn't out of the question. Star Tribune (Neal) p.3
- Roster roulette: Twins head into offseason with question marks at nearly every position. Star Tribune (Miller) p.3
- Kyle Gibson finishes season strong in 8-3 Twins victory over White Sox. Star Tribune (Neal) p.5
- Max Kepler's regression is greatest Twins mystery of all. Star Tribune (Reusse) p.6
- Royals could teach Twins a lesson in patience. Star Tribune (Souhan) p.7
- Saturday's Twins-White Sox game recap. Star Tribune (Neal) p.8
- Twins take a wide look after step back in 2018 season. Star Tribune (Neal) p.8
- Roster report: A look at the status of Twins players for 2019. Star Tribune (Staff) p.9
- Kyle Gibson finishes season strong as Twins win fifth straight. Pioneer Press (Cook) p.10
- Twins' 'opener' debate obscures who closer will be in 2019. Pioneer Press (Cook) p.11
- John Shipley: We've been too hard on Joe Mauer. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p.12
- Gibson, Mauer lead Twins to fifth straight win. Fox Sports North (AP) p.12
- Twins, White Sox close out lackluster seasons. Fox Sports North (Sports Xchange) p.14
- Disappointing Twins should have another busy offseason ahead as they look to regain contender status. CBS Sports (Anderson) p.14
- Ladies and gentlemen, Joe Mauer: The hidden comedic side of the Twins star. The Athletic (Hayes) p.15
- Joe Mauer is every sports-loving Minnesota kid's dream, in real life. The Athletic (Pierce) p.19
- Jorge Polanco will move on quickly after learning difficult lessons in 2018. The Athletic (Hayes) p.20

Gibson brilliant to end career-best season

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | September 29, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- After posting identical 5.07 ERAs in 2016 and '17, right-hander Kyle Gibson built on his strong finish to last year, turning in the best season of his career in 2018.

Gibson ended it with a strong showing against the White Sox, allowing one run over six innings in an 8-3 win over the White Sox on Saturday at Target Field. Gibson concludes his campaign with a career-best and rotation-best 3.62 ERA in 32 starts. He also set personal highs in innings with 196 2/3 and strikeouts with 179, while reaching the 10-win mark for the fourth time in his career.

"It's kind of like going into the All-Star break or something like that, you want to end on a good one," Gibson said. "Toward the end of last year and this year I think I was able to do a little better job of using my fastball to get ahead, use off-speed pitches to get ahead and really execute pitches with two strikes."

He gave up a run in the first, keyed by a walk and a wild pitch before a two-out RBI single from Omar Narvaez, but settled down from there. He surrendered just three hits while striking out seven and walking three, and impressed his manager Paul Molitor all season as the club's most consistent starter.

"Just maturity, more confidence and stuff, aggressive mindset," Molitor said. "I think he realizes his stuff is playing as well as it ever has just in terms of the quality of pitches that he can make and it's translating into him being a lot more consistent as a pitcher."

Gibson was backed by plenty of early runs, as the Twins scored twice in the first and six more times in the second, as lefty Carlos Rodon struggled in his last start of the year. Joe Mauer, playing in possibly his second-to-last game with the Twins as he contemplates retirement, was a part of both rallies and went 2-for-4 with a walk, two runs scored and an RBI. Mauer has an eight-game hitting streak and has reached base safely in each of his last 15 starts, hitting .371 over that span.

"We're all pulling for him to have a good finish to this year," Molitor said. "He's putting together a nice homestand. I think he's really relishing just the response and the fans. You soak it in. Even if you're contemplating what lies ahead. Just to kind of pause and take pictures of each day you're playing the game."

Mauer walked to lead off the first, while Jorge Polanco singled and Robbie Grossman walked to load the bases with one out. Jake Cave plated two runs with a double down the right-field line to give Minnesota the lead.

The first seven Twins all reached safely in the second with Mauer bringing home a run with a single to center. Polanco followed with an RBI single before Willians Astudillo ripped a two-run double off the left-field wall. The Twins kept it going with a bases-loaded walk from Tyler Austin, a sacrifice fly from Cave and an RBI single from Johnny Field.

"Offense made tonight a whole lot more fun," Gibson said. "They made it really easy to get into a groove and attack guys and not have to worry about solo homers or even two-run homers. They did a really good job."

SOUND SMART

The Twins improved to 48-32 at Target Field this year, which is their most home wins since winning 53 in the first year of Target Field in 2010. The club record is 57 home wins in 1969. Minnesota also improved to 28-27 since the Trade Deadline.

HE SAID IT

"Overall, it was just the mentality I was able to keep. Kind of the beauty of having your priorities straight and having a good, confident mentality is one start, whether it's good or bad, isn't going to take you too high or too low. I could have had another year like last year and hopefully my mentality would have stayed the same and you try to stay focused on the things outside of baseball that really matter and understand that one outing or one pitch or one inning doesn't change who your identity should be on the mound or off the mound. Overall, stuff like that is what allowed me to keep a consistent mindset." -- Gibson, on his bounceback season

UP NEXT

It could be the final game of Mauer's storied 15-year career with the Twins when they host the White Sox in the season finale at Target Field on Sunday at 2:10 p.m. CT. Mauer, a six-time All-Star, three-time batting champion and the 2009 American League MVP, said he'll wait until after the season to decide whether he'll return with Minnesota in 2019. Rookie right-hander Zack Littell (0-2, 6.61 ERA) gets the start but isn't expected to go more than a few innings after pitching in relief on Thursday. Right-hander Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.06 ERA) starts for Chicago.

Molitor hopes to keep entire coaching staff in '19 **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | September 29, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- Twins manager Paul Molitor said he'll meet with the front office on Monday to discuss the 2018 season, and that he hopes to retain his entire coaching staff despite the disappointing year.

Molitor, who signed a three-year deal before the season after winning the American League Manager of the Year Award last year, said he hasn't talked with either chief baseball officer Derek Falvey or general manager Thad Levine about his coaches, but that he expects it to come up on Monday.

"In my mind, when I have my exit meetings with our front-office people this week, I'm sure we'll discuss all those things," Molitor said. "I don't even know the status for who is locked in next year. I think they're on different schedules. I'm optimistic about us being able to stay together."

Third-base coach Gene Glynn, bullpen coach Eddie Guardado and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez have been with the club since the 2015 season, hitting coach James Rowson, first-base coach Jeff Smith and Major League coach Jeff Pickler started in 2017, while this was the first year for pitching coach Garvin Alston and bench coach Derek Shelton.

Molitor said he's not sure whether he'll have to convince the front office that his coaches deserve to stay or how the meetings will go on that front.

"I haven't thought about it in those terms," Molitor said. "Until the questions are on the table, we'll let it go where it needs to go."

Molitor, though, has been individually meeting with his players throughout the week to talk about the season and give input for next year. The players also had end-of-the-season physicals to make sure they're healthy heading into the offseason.

"I don't know if I'd call them interviews," Molitor said. "But we did the physical aspect of it in the training room, and I've been getting pretty much everybody in here throughout the course of the week."

Twins coaching staff shuffle isn't out of the question
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

It might not take long for the Twins to start making moves with 2019 in mind.

Early next week, the front office is expected to meet with manager Paul Molitor about the soon-to-be completed season and discuss the future of his coaching staff. Given that the club failed to build on last year's run to an AL wild-card berth, changes are not out of the question.

"Typically, in the first week of the offseason you get everything, generally, cleaned up relative to what you think you are going to do moving forward," Twins Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey said in an interview Wednesday. "Those are conversations that are going to happen internally with our group, with Paul and we will go from there."

And will those meetings also might focus on Molitor's status for next season. During an interview Wednesday, Twins owner Jim Pohlad would not give Molitor a vote of confidence, preferring to wait until he meets with Falvey and General Manager Thad Levine once the season ends.

"I have no idea what they are going to come with," Pohlad said. "No matter if we win the World Series or have a disappointing season like this, they are going to come with recommendations. Some of those recommendations could be personnel changes, some could be methodology changes. I don't know but I look forward to that."

Molitor, who is under contract for next season, has said that he wants to return. Saturday, he expressed optimism that he will have the same staff to work with next season.

"I haven't talked about it much," Molitor said when asked if he thought all his coaches would return next season. "In my mind, when I have my exit meetings with our front office people this week, I'm sure we'll discuss all those things. I don't even know the status for who is locked in [contractually]- next year. I think they're on different schedules."

"I'm optimistic about us being able to stay together."

The Twins entered Saturday having scored 725 runs, a drop offensively from the 815 runs they scored a season ago — which was the most since 2009. Their team OPS (on base-plus-slugging percentage) last season was ninth overall in baseball, at .768. This year the Twins were 20th at .722. Injuries to Miguel Sano and Byron Buxton and the 80-suspension handed to Jorge Polanco for performance-enhancing drugs definitely hurt run production. And the enigma that is Buxton's hitting will be at the top of list of challenges for hitting coach James Rowson if he returns next season.

The pitching staff posted a 4.59 ERA in 2017, and the group entered Saturday with a 4.52 ERA. But the group showed some encouraging signs in Garvin Alston's first season as pitching coach. Twins pitchers entered Saturday with 1,353 strikeouts, a jump from 1,166 last season, and the 198 home runs were 26 fewer than a year ago.

Defensively, the Twins were middle of the pack in defensive runs saved. They were among the better AL teams in defense at first base and right field, a tip of the cap to Joe Mauer and Max Kepler, respectively. But Twins shortstops ranked near the bottom.

Ultimately, the front office will have to decide if they need more from their coaching staff to get the most out of their players next season — and if they need to change things up to achieve that. In addition to Alston and Rowson, Jeff Pickler, coordinator of major league development, and bench coach Derek Shelton have been brought in by Falvey and Levine. Third base coach Gene Glynn, assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez and bullpen coach Eddie Guardado were appointed by Molitor before the 2015 season. First base coach Jeff Smith was brought up from the minors before the 2017 season.

Will Falvey and Levine decide that more new blood is needed? Falvey would not drop any hints about what his plans are — although the Twins have made changes to their coaching staff in three of their past four offseasons.

"At this point, I'm not going to speculate on it," Falvey said. "Until we have those conversations, I don't think it is fair to put anyone in that position right now, and we have not had those conversations yet."

Roster roulette: Twins head into offseason with question marks at nearly every position
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

So certain of the answer, Paul Molitor interrupted the question. Can next year's Twins con- ... ?

"Sure. Absolutely," the manager blurted, eager to contemplate future playoff contention as a way to bulldoze the rubble of a disappointing year. "There are things players can do to get back into a more competitive situation, hurriedly. The opportunity is there."

Maybe Molitor is right. Maybe the foundation of a contender has survived a cyclone of a losing season and a stock exchange's worth of trades. But his optimism leaves a critical question unanswered: Which players?

A year ago, the Twins walked into the winter, disappointed by their one-game cameo in the playoffs but confident a longer stay was inevitable, with one of the most settled, secure lineups in baseball. Indeed, if not for the abrupt 80-game suspension imposed on shortstop Jorge Polanco, the position players who took the field on Opening Day in Baltimore last March would have been the same eight projected to hold each of those jobs six months earlier.

But if forecasting the 2018 lineup was tic-tac-toe, projecting the 2019 batting order is three-dimensional chess. Questions, doubts, options and outright vacancies exist at seven of the Twins' eight defensive positions — let's go ahead and pencil in 2018's chief standout, Eddie Rosario, as next season's left fielder — and the pitching staff appears as muddled as ever. Heck, there's no certainty at the moment that the position of starting pitcher will even exist.

Welcome, then, to the Winter of Decision for this genre of Twins. While Joe Mauer agonizes over whether he will be in a Minnesota uniform next March, Derek Falvey and Thad Levine have dozens of similar calls to make about a roster still afloat on potential but adrift on results.

Is Max Kepler guaranteed a job? Will Miguel Sano move to first base? Is Nick Gordon ready for the major leagues? And who can be trusted in the bullpen?

So many questions, even after the Twins spent a summer gathering evidence.

"Some people have shown that they have a place on a good team, and other guys, maybe the jury's still out or maybe they're not quite there yet. That's all part of the mix," Molitor said. "Sometimes you have the information you need to move forward, with or without that player. Sometimes it takes a few seasons — more often than not, it does. So you just have to trust the particular process you've put in place."

Money matters

One factor the Twins won't have to consider, at least relative to most seasons: money. Mauer's eight-year contract is about to expire, as is Ervin Santana's four-year deal — that's \$37 million a year off the books.

The Twins are committed to only \$24.5 million (to Addison Reed, Jason Castro and Michael Pineda, the latter two coming off major surgery) in contracts for 2019, plus \$1 million buyouts to Santana and Logan Morrison and about \$6 million of Phil Hughes' salary. That's just over \$32 million in obligations before they start assembling next year's team, less than every team but the Rays, Athletics and White Sox.

And talk about good timing: It just so happens that money, lots of it, is all it would take to add a middle-of-the-order superstar or a top-of-the-rotation starter. One of the strongest free-agent classes in years is about to go shopping for new contracts, such superstars as Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, Clayton Kershaw and Craig Kimbrel. Would the Twins, with payroll room available, shock the world with a franchise-altering, franchise-defining signing?

Eh, don't count on it.

"We certainly have the payroll flexibility, but I don't know if you can ever go out in the offseason and sign a face-of-the-franchise player," said Twins owner Jim Pohlad, who authorized a \$129 million Opening Day payroll last spring, a record for the Twins, albeit just the 16th highest in baseball. "Everybody knows my aversion to long commitments. Most often, they do not turn out to be successful, in terms of getting your return on them."

That said, Pohlad added, "a commitment to a player or a few players, we're totally open to. You can figure out how you define that commitment, but in our view, we're willing to make a significant commitment."

Who's out there?

Shop smart, in other words. Then again, the Twins thought they did that last season, and their one-year investments in Logan Morrison, Lance Lynn, Fernando Rodney and Zach Duke produced mixed results, at best.

But with a vacancy looming at second base, perhaps the Twins would have short-term interest in DJ LeMahieu or Daniel Murphy — or even a former All-Star named Brian Dozier or a utility man named Eduardo Escobar. With no everyday designated hitter, perhaps 38-year-old Nelson Cruz, who hit 37 homers in Seattle this season, might be worth a look. And pitching? Patrick Corbin, Hyun-Jin Ryu or one of a half-dozen established starters could supplement the rotation; relievers looking for contracts will include Andrew Miller, David Robertson and Tony Sipp, among many others.

Then again, Falvey and Levine believe the best use of free-agent money is to supplement a core that's ready to contend. Addressing a Baseball Prospectus event last month, Levine said the Twins had intended, if the 2018 season had been more successful, to "pursue the hell" out of a few targeted veterans on the free-agent market. Now?

"We may actually shift our attention to the trade market," said Levine, the Twins general manager. "This might not be the perfect time for us to invest in a guy who's 30 years old and would need to perform today in order for us to realize his true potential."

Molitor said this week he intends to return, although Pohlrad said he would leave that evaluation up to Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey.

Questions remain

The Twins have one of the stronger farm systems in baseball, and added to it with six deadline trades that brought back prospects. But while a few pitchers may be ready to graduate to the majors in 2019, most of the best position players are in the lower minors, at least a couple of seasons from Target Field. Gordon, the 2014 first-round pick, is the exception, and the shortstop reached Class AAA in 2018, but he batted only .212 in 99 games and probably needs more time.

And while the infield is full of question marks, the starting rotation is a mystery behind Jose Berrios, Kyle Gibson and Jake Odorizzi, and the bullpen figures to undergo yet another overhaul, 2019 might well hinge upon the same players that 2018 did: Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano.

For five years, they have been considered the heart of a future champion. A year ago, that destiny seemed within reach.

But now, after Buxton hit .156, Sano .199, and they combined to play only 99 games?

"We have to have faith in their innate ability, and the promise they showed at every level on the way up," Molitor said. "How we can help them realize that up here, to make the [positive] results that they've already shown more standard, it's about as important an objective as we can have."

Kyle Gibson finishes season strong in 8-3 Twins victory over White Sox
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 30, 2018

Strikeouts. ERA. Innings pitched. WAR. The numbers all reveal the same thing, that Kyle Gibson has gone from being shaky to a being a stalwart of the Twins rotation.

Gibson on Saturday churned through the White Sox lineup with ease, limiting them to one run over six innings, while the Twins buried Chicago 8-3 in their penultimate game of the season.

In six innings, Gibson held the White Sox to three hits and three walks while striking out seven. Gibson gave up a run in the first inning on a RBI single by Omar Narvaez before locking in and retiring 11 of 12 White Sox batters.

Gibson has had several stretches like this during his turnaround season.

After posting a 5.07 ERA in each of this previous two seasons, Gibson's mark of 3.62 is the lowest of his career. He entered the game with a career-high strikeout rate of 8.1 per nine innings. His 196⅔ innings are a career high.

His WAR (wins above replacement) last season was 0.3. He entered Saturday with it at 3.5.

Gibson (10-13) has succeeded through solid command of four pitches and the ability to throw them to all quadrants of the strike zone. And something else.

"Overall it was just the mentality I was able to keep," Gibson said. "Kind of the beauty of having your priorities straight and having a good, confident mentality is one start, whether it's good or bad, isn't going to take you too high or too low."

Twins manager Paul Molitor admired the work.

"As a manager, you want as many guys in the rotation you feel will give you a chance each and every time they take the ball," he said, "and Kyle certainly has done that this year."

Farewell for No. 7?

Sunday could be the final game of Joe Mauer's career, as he will ponder retirement during the offseason. Just in case he does hang them up, he

has played in every game during this homestand — including both games of a doubleheader Friday.

Molitor confirmed after Saturday's game that Mauer will start at first base on Sunday.

When asked if there was any chance Mauer would catch — for old time's sake — one more time, Molitor said: "I don't think you have to worry about that."

Mauer is surging during the final week of the season, batting .429 during his eight-game hitting streak.

Etc.

- The Twins have grounded into 88 double plays this season. Not only is that the fewest in baseball, it will be a club record for fewest in a season. The record is 93, achieved in 1965.
- Now pitcher Ervin Santana has injured his other middle finger. The righthander was moving a box recently when he banged his left hand. Santana, whose 2018 season was limited to 24 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings because of surgery to remove calcium deposits from his right middle finger, now has a large bandage on his left middle finger. "When it's very bad, it's very bad," Santana said.

Max Kepler's regression is greatest Twins mystery of all

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

Max Kepler will lead the 2018 Twins in games played, plate appearances and walks. Entering the final two games, he had 56 RBI and a .400 slugging percentage, compared to 69 and .425 when he ended 2017.

And there's a number that is unfathomable: Kepler's batting average sat at .222 after the doubleheader sweep of the Chicago White Sox on Friday.

Miguel Sano allowed himself to get in horrible physical condition, became injury-prone and will finish a lost, 25-year-old season batting .199. Byron Buxton doesn't have hitter's hands (like Eddie Rosario), compensates by being a guess hitter, has remained injury-prone, and his 24-year-old season was a waste.

Kepler is tremendously well-conditioned, has a swing that should be successful, and he has spent much of his 25-year-old season batting in the .220s. Even with the baseballwide de-emphasis on average, the .220s are preposterous for a corner outfielder with Kepler's abilities.

"He pulls his hands in trying to power the ball to right field and gets tied up inside too often," a former big-leaguer said this weekend.

Manager Paul Molitor was asked how Kepler — injury-free, excellent condition, a swing flaw that should be correctable — can be a .222 hitter?

"I think a lot of this game is momentum and confidence," Molitor said. "I think that the numbers staring at you ... sometimes you're just trying too hard to prevent them from going the wrong way. It's like the more you try to correct your slice, the farther it goes right."

Asked if he "liked Kepler's swing," Molitor said: "You look at the ball he hit [Thursday] for a base hit ... coming off the bat at 104 miles per hour. We like him — like other guys, we're trying to get him to see the bigger picture of a game, and not always about your swing, your swing."

Sano doomed his season by showing up for spring training over 290 pounds. Buxton was in trouble from the time you saw him again confused and flailing at the start of exhibition games.

For me, the unexplainable regression for the 2018 Twins has been Kepler. He has so much going for him in dedication and talent, he should have been outstanding in Year 3, not in the .220s.

Read Reusse's blog at startribune.com/patrick.

PLUS THREE

On the plus side for the Twins:

- Kyle Gibson proved he deserves a multiyear contract. Gibson and Jose Berrios are an excellent start for a rotation for 2019.
- Jake Cave can be written in as a fourth outfielder and lefthanded DH. He's one actual success for the Twins' DFA diving.

- If Joe Mauer retires, Mitch Garver can move to first, and then the Twins can have a 2019 platoon at catcher — Jason Castro and, yes, Williams (The Wonder) Astudillo.

Royals could teach Twins a lesson in patience
Jim Souhan | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

The Twins will conclude another disappointing season Sunday, and any attempts to create an optimistic view in Minnesota feel forced.

So I called someone for perspective on the Twins' plight and future. I called old friend Ryan Lefebvre.

Lefebvre is the son of former big-league player and manager Jim Lefebvre. He grew up in California but chose to play college baseball at Minnesota, where he was the most valuable player of the 1993 Gophers. He worked as a Twins broadcaster before leaving for Kansas City's booth in 1999.

Lefebvre knows the game, the division and droughts. He watched Kansas City General Manager Dayton Moore take a team that hadn't made the playoffs since 1985 to a World Series in 2014 and a World Series title in 2015.

Without the benefit of a new stadium or large payroll, the Royals came within a few pitches of winning two straight titles.

"I know my friends who are Twins fans are panicking," Lefebvre said. "Denny Matthews has been broadcasting Royals games for 50 years. He has a theory, and it comes true more times than not.

"When a young team makes a big, unexpected leap forward, like the Twins did in 2017, it's easy for people to fall into the trap of believing that team will be even better the next year. History will tell you there's usually a year of regression, but then the year after that, look out."

Lefebvre believes patience and organizational leadership brought the Royals back from the dead. He made these points:

- Royals ownership gave Moore full authority over baseball operations, and Moore gave manager Ned Yost full authority over the daily running of the team, and Yost empowered his coaches to work without restrictions, and the coaches told young players to think for themselves, creating an atmosphere of trust that accelerated learning. Players were allowed to make aggressive mistakes in big-league games. "I learned so much about leadership watching this franchise," Lefebvre said.
- The Royals emphasized winning in the minor leagues, and built their best teams around a group of young players who took pride in winning and supporting each other, which is why the Royals excelled at small-ball and situational play.
- Moore built a team tailored for Kauffman Stadium — a team of speed and defensive range.
- The Royals were patient in waiting for their best young players to develop, then aggressive on the trade market once they were good enough to win big.

"I read Dayton Moore's book, and the line that stood out to me more than any other was something [Red Sox GM] Dave Dombrowski told him," Lefebvre said. "It was: 'Come up with a plan and stick with your plan and if you run out of time, then you run out of time.' Every GM probably has a great plan, but how many see it all the way through and don't panic when it's not trending upward every year? The Royals' leadership stuck with their plan."

Until their best young players were ready to win. Then Moore made a series of aggressive trades that yielded key contributors to the World Series teams.

"The Royals wouldn't have won it all without those players," Lefebvre said. "And we won't be losing 100-plus games if not for those trades. Dayton didn't want to just be competitive for a long time. He wanted to win it all."

Twins history informs that view. The '87 and '91 champions are celebrated as heroes. Members of the Twins teams of the 2000s, who were relentlessly competitive but never made it to the World Series, still question whether management should have done more to win it all.

"Let's face it — you also have to have some serendipity," Lefebvre said. "We should have lost the wild-card game in 2014, should have lost in the first round the next year. We were down by four in the eighth inning of the wild-card game and four down in the eighth in Houston the next year.

"You can also argue that the chemistry and winning culture got them through those tough games."

Patience might be the last word Twins fans want to hear right now. That doesn't mean it's the wrong word.

Saturday's Twins-White Sox game recap

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Kyle Gibson, Twins

Wrapped up an impressive season by holding the White Sox to one run over six innings for his 10th victory. He gave up three hits and three walks while striking out seven.

BY THE NUMBERS

5 Consecutive Twins victories, tying a season high.

8 Consecutive games with a hit for Joe Mauer, who has gone 2-for-4 in each game of this series.

99 Losses for the White Sox, who last lost 100 games in 1970.

ON DECK

Joe Mauer will decide after the season if he will retire from the game. That means Sunday's game could be the final of his career, and it could be emotional. First pitch is scheduled for 2:10 p.m., as every MLB game Sunday is scheduled to start at the same time.

Twins take a wide look after step back in 2018 season

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

Twins owner Jim Pohlad sat in his suite at Target Field on Wednesday and watched something that didn't occur nearly enough for him in 2018 — a Twins victory.

The Twins beat Detroit on a chilly autumn evening in front of an announced crowd of 21,316 that looked half that number. Even Pohlad's spacious suite was down in attendance — he was there alone.

It's what happens in September when a non-contending team is playing out the string in a season of unmet expectations.

Fresh off a wild-card berth in 2017, the Twins appeared to fortify their roster with a trade for starting pitcher Jake Odorizzi and free-agent signings such as starter Lance Lynn, reliever Fernando Rodney and designated hitter Logan Morrison to bolster a team with young, emerging talents.

Then the Twins ended April with a 9-15 record, and they never recovered.

"There were a lot of un-fun games to watch," Pohlad said.

"Our record went wrong. There's a lot of extenuating circumstances, but none of which were unique to the Twins. They happen in baseball. We didn't compensate. We are very unhappy with the results of this season."

The Twins are not chalking up the season to bad luck.

"There's no way around it that it is a step backward," said Derek Falvey, the team's chief baseball officer. "I don't think you want to sugarcoat it. We clearly had some expectations where the core of our team would be at the end of this year and with the combination of guys, from a health standpoint or a performance standpoint, didn't quite get to where we needed them to get.

"We would have hoped we would have been further along now than where we are."

Staff ace Ervin Santana had finger surgery but was supposed to return by May 1; instead, he missed the entire first half and ended up pitching only 25 innings. Shortstop Jorge Polanco tested positive for a performance-enhancing drug and missed the first 80 games of the season.

The cornerstones of the franchise's revival, third baseman Miguel Sano and center fielder Byron Buxton, basically were invisible. They both got off to terrible starts, came down with injuries and ended up having lost seasons.

"You have to find a way," manager Paul Molitor said, "even when you're facing some things that potentially, at least in short-term situations, will set you back. You have to overcome those."

Falvey and Levine traded Lynn, Rodney, Zach Duke, Eduardo Escobar, Ryan Pressly and Brian Dozier to contenders near the trade deadline, effectively giving up on the season.

And now Pohlads ears are open as he meets with Falvey and Levine to discuss the franchise's immediate future.

"We really encourage our executive team to make recommendations," Pohlads said. "And we don't ever want to constrain them from doing that. And it's my personal goal to always support those recommendations."

The team took an interesting tack with Buxton and Sano. Buxton was allowed to play with a broken left toe, even as he was struggling to find any semblance of offense. Sano willingly went to Florida for several weeks to lose weight but is having problems with his lower left leg that date to a year ago. The Twins have been searching for a director of athletic performance to oversee the medical staff since Falvey was hired, and those efforts are expected to intensify this offseason.

The coaching staff will be examined. After being traded to Houston, Pressly spoke highly of the Astros' ability to help him post an 0.81 ERA, and that touched some nerves with the Twins.

Buxton was miffed when he wasn't called up in September, leaving him 13 service days shy of gaining free agency a year sooner. Falvey said he has had several conversations with Buxton since then and said the 24-year-old is "in a good place."

The club also plans to check in with Sano every seven to 10 days during the offseason to make sure he is working on his conditioning. Falvey said the growth of the franchise is tied to Sano and Buxton as much as to a trade or signing a free agent.

After a season that went haywire early and never got much better, the Twins are looking everywhere for solutions.

"I heard somebody say that you can either lose or you can learn," righthander Kyle Gibson said. "And if you're not learning while you're losing, then you're really losing."

Roster report: A look at the status of Twins players for 2019

Staff Report | Star Tribune | September 29, 2018

TATUS REPORT: Players on the Twins' 40-man roster or disabled list, with age at the start of 2019:

Under contract for 2019: RHP Addison Reed, 30, \$8.5 million; RHP Michael Pineda, 30, \$8 million; C Jason Castro, 32, \$8 million.

Team options for 2019: RHP Ervin Santana, 36, \$14 million; DH Logan Morrison, 31, \$8 million.

Pending free agents (with 2018 salary): 1B Joe Mauer, 36, \$23 million; 2B Logan Forsythe, 32, \$9 million; C Chris Gimenez, 36, \$545,000; RHP Matt Belisle, 39, \$545,000.

Arbitration-eligible (with 2018 salary): RHP Jake Odorizzi, 29, \$6.3 million; RHP Kyle Gibson, 31, \$4.2 million; OF Robbie Grossman, 29, \$2 million; IF Ehire Adrianza, 29, \$1 million; RHP Trevor May, 29, \$650,000; OF Eddie Rosario, 27, \$602,500; 3B Miguel Sano, 26, \$602,500; OF Max Kepler, 26, \$587,500; CF Byron Buxton, 25 (Super 2), \$580,000; LHP Taylor Rogers, 28, \$565,000.

Under team control: 1B Tyler Austin, 27; C Willians Austudillo, 27; RHP Jose Berrios, 25; RHP Alan Busenitz, 28; OF Jake Cave, 26; RHP John Curtiss, 26; RHP Chase De Jong, 25; RHP Oliver Drake, 32; RHP Tyler Duffey, 28; OF Johnny Field, 26; C Mitch Garver, 28; LHP Stephen Gonsalves, 24; OF Zack Granite, 26; C Juan Graterol, 30; RHP Trevor Hildenberger, 28; RHP Zack Littell, 22; RHP Matt Magill, 29;

LHP Adalberto Mejia, 26; LHP Gabriel Moya, 24; IF Gregorio Petit, 34; SS Jorge Polanco, 25; RHP Fernando Romero, 24 (pictured); RHP Aaron Slegers, 26; RHP Kohl Stewart, 24; LHP Lewis Thorpe, 23; LHP Andrew Vasquez, 25.

Source: spotrac.com, baseball-reference.com

Kyle Gibson finishes season strong as Twins win fifth straight
Mike Cook | Pioneer Press | September 29, 2018

Kyle Gibson finished a career-best season with his third straight strong start.

Joe Mauer may be finishing his career on a hot streak.

Gibson tossed six innings, Mauer had two hits and Jake Cave three RBI as the Twins beat Chicago 8-3 Saturday night at chilly Target Field.

It was the Twins' fifth straight win, matching a season high.

Mauer is hitting .365 with nine runs batted in in 16 games since Sept. 11, including hits in eight straight games. Since becoming ill last Saturday, he's hitting .406.

"It doesn't surprise me," said manager Paul Molitor. "We're all pulling for him to have a good finish to this year. He's putting together a nice homestand. I think he's really relishing just the response and the fans. You soak it in. Even if you're contemplating what lies ahead. Just to kind of pause and take pictures of each day you're playing the game."

There is much speculation that Sunday's game will be the last of Mauer's 15-year career. The Cretin-Derham Hall grad said he'll decide on his future after the season.

Molitor said Mauer will play first base in the season finale.

Gibson (10-13) scattered three hits and struck out seven. He allowed a first-inning run before retiring 13 of the next 15 White Sox hitters and 16 of 19 for his third straight win.

In five September starts, Gibson is 3-2 with a 2.76 earned-run average. Subtract a five-run outing Sept. 16, and Gibson's ERA this month is 1.73.

The right-hander established career bests for ERA (3.62), innings pitched (196 2/3) and strikeouts (179). His previous highs were all in 2015, when his ERA was 3.84 in 194 2/3 innings with 145 strikeouts.

"Overall it was just the mentality I was able to keep. Kind of the beauty of having your priorities straight and having a good, confident mentality is one start, whether it's good or bad, isn't going to take you too high or too low," Gibson said. "I could have had another year like last year and hopefully my mentality would have stayed the same. ... Overall, stuff like that is what allowed me to keep a consistent mind-set."

In his first five seasons, Gibson started 127 games, going 44-48 with a 4.70 ERA, including a 5.07 ERA each of the past two seasons. His 8.19 strikeouts-per-nine-innings bested a previous high of 6.89 last season.

Gibson was far more aggressive with hitters in 2018.

"I think one thing about strikeouts is you've got to be in 0-2 or 1-2 counts. Overall, I don't know if I did a great job of that in my first couple of years up here. Toward the end of last year and this year I think I was able to do a little better job of using my fastball to get ahead, use off-speed pitches to get ahead and really execute pitches with two strikes."

Gibson went at least six innings in 21 of 32 starts this season, seven or more 11 times, and he allowed two or fewer earned runs 17 times.

Molitor said this has been expected of Gibson, the team's first-round pick in the 2009 draft.

"It's been a nine-month baseball run where he has been as good as you could have hoped. We've always projected Kyle for a long time, he probably got tired of hearing about what he was supposed to be and who he was. And there's been some difference. He's changed his programs in terms of his conditioning and the way he's taking care of his arm. I think it has been reflected in the numbers and the performance."

The success could result in a sizable monetary increase. The 30-year-old is again eligible for salary arbitration. He earned \$4.2 million in 2018 after losing to the team in arbitration.

Gibson, Jose Berrios and Jake Odorizzi are expected to be three Twins' starters in 2019 with Michael Pineda, who missed the season with a torn UCL, likely back. Ervin Santana's contract expires after this season.

The Twins sent 11 men to the plate in a six-run second to open an 8-1 lead.

Mauer and Jorge Polanco, who had three hits, had RBI singles and Willians Astudillo an RBI double before Carlos Rodon (6-8) was replaced. Jeanmar Gomez walked Tyler Austin with the bases loaded, Cave had a sacrifice fly and Johnny Field got into the RBI column with a bloop single.

Twins' 'opener' debate obscures who closer will be in 2019

Mike Cook | Pioneer Press | September 29, 2018

There has been much talk late in the 2018 season about the Twins and other teams using so-called “openers” to start games and some chatter about how that may continue next season.

For example, Gabriel Moya started six September games, including a pair earlier this week, going one inning in five outings and two in the other.

But what about needing three outs from someone at the other end of the game?

Fernando Rodney had 25 saves this season before he was traded to Oakland on Aug. 9. Trevor Hildenberger has seven in nine opportunities since that time, although he has given up 11 earned runs in 4 1/3 innings over his past six outings — including four in one-third of an inning Tuesday against Detroit.

Trevor May earned his first two career saves in the past week. But the question is always whether he'll be a starter or reliever going forward.

Could Hildenberger or May be the ninth-inning guy next year?

“I can't project that,” said manager Paul Molitor. “I don't know who's going to be in camp. If we have the same bunch, we're gonna obviously kind of see which one of those people or maybe a couple other candidates might emerge.”

John Curtiss had 10 saves at Rochester this year; Alan Buesenitz seven. Neither has one this season for the Twins.

WANTING THEM BACK

Among the discussions when Molitor meets with front-office personnel in the coming days will be the status of his coaching staff. The Twins' manager hasn't given the topic much thought but likes what he has.

“I don't even know the status for who is locked in next year,” he said. “I think they're on different schedules. I'm optimistic about us being able to stay together.”

Everyone on Molitor's field staff has been with the team less than four years, including hitting coach James Rowson (second year) and pitching coach Garvin Alston (first year).

MAUER MYSTERY

It what could be his second-to-last career game, Joe Mauer served as the designated hitter.

No hints were offered Saturday on a decision about the Twins great from St. Paul playing beyond this year.

Molitor just wants to relish the moments.

“He knows how much I respect him and have enjoyed to this point managing him and just kind of letting him go. I love the fact that he wanted to get out there and play as much as he could this week.”

Does he want Mauer back?

“That'd be great,” Molitor said. “But I don't think that there's too many people around here who wouldn't be happy with that. We'll just see what he decides to do.”

GIMENEZ DONE?

In all the anticipation about Mauer's decision, another veteran could put on the cleats for the last time Sunday.

Journeyman catcher Chris Gimenez, who spent 2017 with the Twins and rejoined the team Sept. 1, will turn 36 in December. After five years in the minors, he also played for Cleveland, Seattle, Tampa Bay, Oakland, Texas and the Chicago Cubs during the past 10 years. Gimenez is best

known for his defensive and leadership skills, along with being a good clubhouse guy.

“I think he’s thinking about what his next step is going to be, too,” said Molitor. “I think he’d love to coach. I think the first question is whether he can get into major league camp as a player. I don’t know that for sure. I think he thinks a lot from that standpoint of helping players as a coach at some point down the road.”

John Shipley: We’ve been too hard on Joe Mauer
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | September 29, 2018

Here at what might be the end, it’s easy to see. Many of us have been too hard on Joe Mauer.

The Twins will play the final game of their season Sunday against the White Sox at Target Field, and all eyes will be on Mauer, the last in a line of St. Paul baseball royalty to make a major mark in the major leagues.

Whether it’s now or later, we’re going to miss him when he’s gone. More than many realize.

Once in the express lane to Cooperstown, Mauer was sidetracked by concussions that forced him to move from catcher to first base, where he has played the past five seasons. He’s a good first baseman, but he was baseball’s best catcher — the first to win three batting titles and on the way to becoming the best to play the game.

But a lot has to go right for those things to happen, and little has gone Mauer’s way since he won the American League MVP Award after hitting an astonishing .365 with 28 homers and 96 RBIs in the Twins’ last season in the Metrodome. Target Field turned his opposite-field homers to long outs at the warning track in left and, more important, his body began to betray him.

In 2011, Mauer missed 80 games because of a mystery condition the Twins, in an ill-advised decision, called “bilateral leg weakness.” It might have been accurate, but it was an unfortunate diagnosis for a player a year removed from signing an eight-year contract extension paying him \$23 million annually. Two years later, he suffered a serious concussion when he took a foul tip off his facemask and missed 49 games.

That was the end of his catching career and, most assumed, his chance to join St. Paul brethren Dave Winfield, Paul Molitor and Jack Morris in the Hall of Fame. But the past few months have put a dent in that theory.

Since July, Mauer has passed Kirby Puckett for the franchise lead in doubles (427 through Thursday), Harmon Killebrew for most times reaching base safely (3,077) and Rod Carew for second place with 2,120 career hits — behind only Puckett’s 2,304. That’s lofty company, hall of famers all.

Suddenly, you start wondering why the hell everybody has been on Mauer’s ass.

We have a tendency to judge people, particularly those close to us, for what we want them to be rather than what they are, and at this point Mauer, part of the Twin Cities sports scene since he was a three-sport star at Cretin-Derham Hall, feels a little like family.

Mauer set a major league record and won an MVP award. If he plays next season, he could pass Puckett as the Twins’ career hits leader — although it would be difficult — and if he doesn’t he will retire with a solid final season and .306 career batting average. For those who enjoy analytics, his career WAR is 55.0, which isn’t Top 100 but is comparable to Hank Greenberg (57.6) and David Ortiz (55.3).

And while Mauer never won a World Series like Puckett, he was part of four division-winning teams from 2004-2010 and has never been less than gracious and generous with his time and money.

Yes, with the exception of his MVP season, Mauer didn’t really hit for power, his biggest sin for detractors. Yes, he was hampered by injuries for the last half of his career. Yes, he made a lot of money. But when you step back and really take a look at Joe Mauer for who he is — and not who you wanted him to be — it becomes clear that he’s one of the three or four greatest Twins of all time. And the other guys are in the Hall of Fame.

In today’s game, he has earned that contract — and your respect. Today might mark the end of a great career, and your last chance to truly appreciate it.

Gibson, Mauer lead Twins to fifth straight win
Associated Press | Fox Sports North | September 29, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — If Joe Mauer is ready to retire, he’s going out on a high note.

Mauer reached base three times and Kyle Gibson capped a season of improvement with six quality innings in the Minnesota Twins’ 8-3 victory

over the Chicago White Sox on Saturday night.

A free agent after the season, Mauer has said he'll contemplate retirement after 15 years in Minnesota. But the former MVP and seven-time All-Star is showing he can still swing the bat with a strong September.

He had two hits and scored twice Saturday. Mauer, who entered the day with a major league-leading .410 average with runners in scoring position, drove in a run with a single as part of a six-run second inning. He is hitting .365 with eight RBIs in his last 16 games.

"It doesn't surprise me," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We're all pulling for him to have a good finish to this year. He's putting together a nice homestand. I think he's really relishing just the response and the fans. You soak it in, even if you're contemplating what lies ahead, just to kind of pause and take pictures of each day you're playing the game."

Jorge Polanco added three hits and Jake Cave drove in three runs for Minnesota, which tied a season high with its fifth straight win.

Gibson (10-13) allowed one run on three hits and three walks to lower his ERA to 3.62. He had a 5.07 ERA each of the past two seasons, but continued the growth he showed at the end of last season after returning from the minors.

"Overall, it was just the mentality I was able to keep," Gibson said. "Kind of the beauty of having your priorities straight and having a good, confident mentality is one start, whether it's good or bad, isn't going to take you too high or too low."

Chicago starter Carlos Rodon (6-8) was knocked out six batters into the second inning without retiring an out. He surrendered eight runs on six hits and four walks in his 21st start of the season after returning from shoulder surgery.

"You know, I had some clarity coming back this year and pitching," Rodon said. "Ate some innings and had some fun even though this last month hasn't gone the way I'd like, but it was good. It was good to be back."

Rodon gave up 14 runs in 3 1/3 innings in his final two starts.

"It wasn't the way I'm sure he wanted it to finish and we didn't either, but he's given us a nice recovered season," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "He's made progress. He's going to go into the end here healthy and being able to concentrate on getting himself ready for the coming season."

Chicago lost for the 10th time in 13 games and is 62-99. A loss Sunday would be the White Sox's first 100-loss season since losing 106 games in 1970.

AN UNWANTED RECORD

Chicago struck out nine times to set a major league record for a team in a season. White Sox batters have struck out 1,579 times, breaking the mark of 1,571 set by the Milwaukee Brewers last season.

Second baseman Yoan Moncada struck out for the 216th time, the highest total in the majors this season and the fourth-most in a single season in history.

Moncada is three strikeouts behind Chris Davis, who had 219 in 2016. The record is held by Mark Reynolds, who struck out 223 times in 2009.

TRAINER'S ROOM

White Sox: C Omar Narvaez left the game in the third inning with low back stiffness. He was replaced by Kevan Smith. . SS Tim Anderson left the game in the fourth inning. Renteria said he's been dealing with knee soreness and the cold weather caused the knee to stiffen. Renteria said he'll see how Anderson feels before Sunday's game to know whether he'll play in the finale. Jose Rondon took Anderson's place and twisted his ankle on a play at first base in the ninth but stayed in the game.

Twins: Mitch Garver was out of the lineup a day after getting four hits and six RBIs because Molitor wanted to go with Tyler Austin and Mauer at first base and designated hitter, respectively. Garver recently returned from a concussion and won't be used as a catcher again this season.

UP NEXT

Minnesota will end the season with rookie right-hander Zack Littell (0-2, 6.61 ERA) starting Sunday, with Chicago going with right-hander Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.06). It will be Littell's eighth major league appearance and second start. His previous start was against the White Sox in his debut

on June 5 when he gave up six runs in three innings. Covey is 0-6 with a 6.08 ERA over his last eight starts but has 12 scoreless innings over his past two starts.

Twins, White Sox close out lackluster seasons

The Sports Xchange | Fox Sports North | September 30, 2018

Sunday marks the end of what has been a disappointing season for the Minnesota Twins.

A surprise playoff participant a year ago, the Twins will be watching from their couches this October. That includes Joe Mauer, who will retreat to his home in St. Paul after Sunday's finale and contemplate his future.

The three-time American League batting champion and six-time All-Star becomes a free agent this fall when the eight-year, \$184 million contract he signed with his hometown team expires. Sunday could mark his final appearance in a Twins uniform ... or in a baseball uniform in general.

He told reporters last month that retirement was something he'd consider, but not until after the season. He has given no hints since and the Twins did not plan any ceremonies to mark his 15-year career during their final homestand of the season.

Now, though, there is a definite chance that the end is near.

"The end of the season sneaks up on you," Mauer said. "Here we are, in the last weekend. I'm just trying to enjoy it."

Mauer was not in manager Paul Molitor's lineup Saturday night when the Twins beat the Chicago White Sox 8-3, but he will start at first base Sunday afternoon.

If this is the end of his run, he's going out on a high note. He's batting .365 with nine RBIs in his last 16 games and will carry an eight-game hitting streak into the season finale.

"It doesn't surprise me," Molitor said. "We're all pulling for him to have a good finish to this year. He's putting together a nice homestand. I think he's really relishing just the response and the fans. You soak it in — even if you're contemplating what lies ahead. Just to kind of pause and take pictures of each day you're playing the game."

Right-hander Zack Littell (0-2, 6.61 ERA) gets the start for Minnesota. It will be the second career start and seventh career appearance for Littell, who threw two scoreless innings of relief last Saturday against the A's.

He lasted just three innings in his only previous start, allowing six runs, six hits and four walks in a 6-3 loss to the White Sox on June 4.

"Obviously, the results weren't there, but it was one of the more fun nights of my life," Littell said. "I got to live out my dream. And that was awesome. I didn't pitch the way I wanted to, but the experience was incredible."

The White Sox turn to right-hander Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.06) for the series finale. He has not allowed a run in his last two starts, both of them six-inning efforts against American League Central champion Cleveland, while striking out 12 with just four walks.

"That was definitely a big confidence-booster for me," Covey said after dueling Indians' ace Corey Kluber in his last outing. "I've known all year that I have the stuff; it's just trying to find that consistency with it."

Consistency has been an issue for the 27-year-old in his second big league season. He went 4-10 with a 5.87 ERA in 17 starts before White Sox manager Rick Renteria moved him to the bullpen in late August. Covey posted a 2.25 ERA in five relief appearances and was put back in the rotation Sept. 11, when he was tagged for five runs in 4 1/3 innings of a loss to the Royals before looking dominant against the Indians.

"These last couple of starts felt really good," Covey said. "I got one more start to try to finish off the year strong, and we'll see what happens."

Covey is 0-1 with a 4.26 ERA in three games — one start — versus the Twins.

Disappointing Twins should have another busy offseason ahead as they look to regain contender status

RJ Anderson | CBS Sports | September 28, 2018

Here's how far left the 2018 season went for the Minnesota Twins: they can't even claim to be among the top three most disappointing second-place teams in baseball.

The Twins entered the season with postseason aspirations. Following a loss to the New York Yankees in last fall's Wild Card Game, the Twins

spent the offseason making seemingly smart additions. They signed Fernando Rodney and Addison Reed for the bullpen, grabbed Lance Lynn and Lance Morrison when no one else wanted them, and traded for Jake Odorizzi. Adding those helpers to a still-young roster should have enabled the Twins to push for a wild card spot.

Yet the Twins never stood a chance. They held the division lead for all of a day and topped out at three games over .500. They last held a winning record on April 18, and they didn't record a winning month until July -- they won exactly one more game than they lost. Depending on what happens this weekend, it could be their only one of the season.

Where did things go wrong for the 2018 Twins?

You can start with those nifty additions. Odorizzi bounced back, and Rodney did his job well enough to interest a contender. Beyond that? Morrison couldn't match last season's production as he dealt with hip woes, Reed gave up a ton of home runs for a high-leverage reliever, and Lynn didn't pitch like either his St. Louis Cardinals or New York Yankees self.

There were other issues at play, too. The Twins gave at least one start to 16 pitchers, tied for the second-most in the majors. Odorizzi combined with Jose Berrios and Kyle Gibson to give them a solid foundation. But they found it difficult to round out their starting five. Their bullpen also suffered from inconsistency, and is set to finish the year with the majors' seventh-worst ERA.

Minnesota's lineup was also below-average. Byron Buxton had a lost season. Max Kepler improved his underlying measures but not his overall production. And while the Twins had a number of players assert themselves as worth hanging onto -- Jorge Polanco, Eddie Rosario, and Jake Cave; you can throw Tyler Austin and Willians Astudillo in as well, although their work came in smaller samples -- this is a group that needs another impact talent or two.

The bright side for the Twins is they should be able to once again play around on the free-agent market. Three of their highest-four compensated players are free agents, and they stand to free up more than \$35 million from the departures of Joe Mauer and Ervin Santana alone. Arbitration costs and the like will eat into the savings, but there's ample reason for Minnesota to go for it. With the exception of the Cleveland Indians, the rest of the division is rebuilding. Why join the others at the back of the line when there's the makings of another decent team in place?

Squint and the Twins have at least three parts of next year's rotation, in Gibson, Berrios, and Odorizzi. Michael Pineda could be the fourth, should his body allow. The Twins have a number of young, largely unproven options to throw out for the fifth spot, but could decide to add another veteran as a Plan A. They seem likely to add some experienced help in the bullpen, too -- although that applies to most every team, especially those with competitive aspirations.

As for the lineup, the Twins are probably looking at adding at least two or three new starters. Even if they re-sign Mauer for another season, they'll need a second baseman (Nick Gordon struggled in Triple-A, delaying his arrival) and potentially a third baseman, depending on what they do with Miguel Sano. Those are just the obvious holes, too -- it's possible the Twins decide to get creative and aggressive with their roster. Maybe that entails moving a piece or two from the core, or landing a marquee free agent, or maybe it's some combination thereof.

Whatever the Twins do, here's hoping it works out better for them in 2019 than it did in 2018. Otherwise, things are going to get testy in Minnesota as they wait on their new young core -- led by Royce Lewis and Alex Kirilloff -- to save them from their old one.

Ladies and gentlemen, Joe Mauer: The hidden comedic side of the Twins star

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | September 30, 2018

Nobody will know for several weeks, but the Twins also could be searching for a new late-night postgame host if Joe Mauer retires.

Mauer is set to play in the Twins' final game of the 2018 season, against the Chicago White Sox on Sunday afternoon. With his franchise-record, eight-year, \$184-million deal expiring, Mauer has made it apparent he intends to mull retirement over the next few weeks.

If he opts to end his career, the Twins not only would lose one of the greatest players in franchise history, they'd also be without a personality many players have come to regard as a leader for his lively postgame victory shows in which the player of the game is determined.

Yes, that same "aww shucks" Joe Mauer.

Hard as it may seem to believe, for the past few seasons, the mild-mannered and polite Mauer, who often uses "neat" and "cool" to describe achievements, ratchets it up after every Twins victory to host a player-of-the-game award show.

Described by a teammate as more Jimmy Fallon than Jimmy Kimmel, Mauer announces a list of potential candidates to the room by recounting in great detail all the little things done properly to help secure the team's victory. Each accomplishment, from that night's pitcher to a player's extra 90 feet advanced on the bases to the replay team overturning a call, is recalled as Mauer attempts to reward everyone that played a part in the win

in a lively, humorous setting that occasionally includes a smoke machine and always involves players shouting in unison. Following the awarding, the victorious player then must make a brief speech to the entire room.

“He’s the best,” said Twins rookie outfielder Jake Cave, who hosts his own show via the Twins Twitter account. “He’s a pro. He remembers everybody. But at the same time, he’ll mix in some funny stuff and drop in some baseball lines.

“It’s pretty energetic. Everybody gets into it. He says, ‘We’ve got a lot candidates’ and everybody (shouts), ‘A lot of candidates.’ It became a thing he started saying every time. It’s pretty funny. Whenever (a player) gets a ball, everybody’s screaming at them for a speech.”

If you’re thrown off by this revelation, you’re not alone.

Generally considered a private person, which is one reason nobody truly knows how serious he is about retirement, Mauer also has managed to keep under wraps a sneaky sense of humor. He’s always genuinely projected a wholesome image and is known to be kind to teammates, coaches and everyone he encounters in the organization and community. But pitcher Kyle Gibson said Mauer also has a great sense of humor that has developed later in his career and began to emerge via the team’s raucous postgame celebrations.

“He’s more Fallon-like,” Gibson said. “Joe is funny without trying to be funny.

“(Earlier in his career) you had (Justin Morneau), (Ryan Doumit), (Josh Willingham) and (Brian Dozier). Those guys were the funny guys. Joe just sat back and kind of laughed at everybody. Now, whatever it is, I feel like he’s been a little bit more funny these past couple of years. I don’t know if it’s personality change or his daughters are bringing out the comedic side of him or what. But he’s been pretty funny.

“He’s the same guy every day. He never loses that side of him even when he’s being funny or poking jokes at people. He’s one of the most consistent people I’ve ever been around.”

Mauer said it all came about as a way of identifying the right way to play and rewarding his teammates for their achievements. When he looked around the clubhouse and noticed the young makeup of the Twins roster, Mauer decided it was time to provide leadership by example.

Thus was born the Joe Mauer Show.

While other veterans often have been part of the selection committee, Mauer has the final say.

“I just wanted to show them the importance of the little things that contribute to a win,” Mauer said. “It might not be getting four hits that day. It might be going first to third with less than two outs and you end up scoring that run. It’s more just trying to get those guys aware of the little things that make a big difference, and then it kind of evolved from there. We have a lot of fun with it. Some guys if they don’t get mentioned might take exception to that, and the next day they might try to really do something to get mentioned.

“It’s a fun thing that we’ve been doing, and it seems like the boys have a good time doing it too.

“I think I’m more Leno than Letterman, yeah, probably. But you have to ask some of those guys.”

The postgame show and the games, those are the fun parts. Life on the diamond is still a thrill for Mauer, who has set one Twins record after another during the 2018 season.

But preparing for games is a different story. What used to be a brief pregame routine has become somewhat of a chore for Mauer, 35. He said the joke in the clubhouse is that Mauer has a routine to get ready for pregame stretch.

Home or away, Mauer routinely arrives at the ballpark in the early afternoon to begin a rigorous program to prepare for that night’s game.

“I usually allot myself two-and-a-half, maybe three hours before stretch whether it’s home or road,” Mauer said. “The last couple of years I keep adding to the list, I guess. It’s part of putting myself in the best position to have a good night.

“You guys don’t see me for a reason. I’m kind of doing something to try to make (my) body feel better and recover from the night before and get ready for that night. It’s a total body type of thing.

“It’s not the way I would like to compete. I always try to give myself the best chance. There’s things I need to do to give myself the best chance. That’s why I go through that time.”

Pregame stretch for a 7 p.m. home game normally begins at 4 p.m., with batting practice starting 20 minutes later.

For Mauer to be ready, he usually has an even lengthier routine that includes stretching, working out, eye exercises and anything else that has him feeling ready for first pitch.

“I get to the park pretty early at home, on the road, it’s amazing,” outfielder Robbie Grossman said. “He’s always there early. He’s always doing the same thing. Doesn’t matter if it’s rain, sun, sleet, snow, day game, night game, he’s always there. He’s a consummate professional. There’s not a better role model you can aspire to be or try to look up to in this clubhouse and maybe in baseball.”

But all the work preparing for a game has begun to limit how much Mauer enjoys playing it. It’s a rigorous effort the St. Paul native must put himself through from February through September in order to be ready and the list of needed activities has grown over the years.

Throw in a number of other factors — a disappointing Twins season, seeing friends traded in July, the end of his contract, the concussion-scare in May and the birth of his third child, due in November — and it’s no wonder why Mauer would take time to determine his future.

“We’re all still kind of up in the air,” manager Paul Molitor said earlier this week. “We’ve talked some about playing after the years and the toll it takes on your body and the preparation to play becomes more challenging than actual playing once you get out there for the first pitch. You try to balance the enjoyment of the competing with the work you have to put in and combine that with your family situation. I think he’s very open-minded about the challenges of continuing to play as he’s gotten older. But so far, he’s proven that he’s got a pretty good formula to make himself a pretty positive contributor. We’re all going to sit back and watch this week and we’ll let Joe take it from there.”

Each night’s game-ball winners vary widely, and everyone has a chance. The home-run hero and starting pitcher who threw a gem are on equal footing with the hitting coach or the replay crew. Last season, Mauer awarded team interpreter Carlos Font the game ball for helping with the translation of the gameplan to pitcher Adalberto Mejía ahead of a 4-1 victory against the Boston Red Sox on June 28, 2017. Though it was Mejía who shut down Boston with 5 2/3 scoreless innings, Font was the one giving the postgame speech.

On Wednesday night, Mauer awarded video replay coordinator Corey Baker the game ball for playing a key role in jumpstarting a five-run rally that helped the Twins pull away to defeat Detroit, 11-4. Before Molitor even knew he needed to challenge the play on a near-triple play hit into by Willians Astudillo, Baker had determined that second baseman Dawel Lugo’s throw had pulled shortstop Ronny Rodriguez off the bag and was calling the dugout.

A St. Louis Cardinals farmhand until this season and a pitcher at Pitt, Baker couldn’t remember the last time he received a game ball.

“It was inches away on both sides from being a triple play and it turns out to be one out,” Baker said. “Being recognized by Joe and the guys, that’s awesome. They’ve made me feel welcome and part of the team the entire season, and that’s such a rewarding part. I’m not playing anymore, and that’s completely fine. These guys are making me feel a part of the team, and that’s why you stay in sports.”

Same as everyone else interviewed, Baker marveled at Mauer’s recall and the insane details he remembers about each game. It’s the kind of mindset that Molitor suggested is built to potentially manage, though he was unsure if Mauer had ever contemplated that type of future.

And it impresses everyone.

“It’s been enlightening in a couple ways,” reliever Tyler Duffey said. “Just to see him do that and kind of take the reins with it. It also shows how much you may not realize everything going on in the game ... (Plays that are) insignificant in the grand scheme, but that little thing changed the game. It created for all of us an environment where everything that everyone did became valuable. Teams that do well, it’s a community. It’s a true team. Everyone contributes that little thing every day.

“It’s been fun to hear him break down games, the way he sees it.

“You never know what’s going to happen. But it’s fun to see at the end of the game and take that rewind.”

Regardless of who wins, Mauer takes over after he receives the all clear signal from Twins senior communications director Dustin Morse. Morse normally waits until all on-field postgame interviews have been conducted and then Mauer takes it up a notch to his teammates’ delight.

Everyone from the clubhouse crew to the replay crew to the coaching staff crowds into the locker room and gets fired up as Mauer mentions there are “quite a lot of candidates, folks.” Teammates respond in unison by yelling out “a lot of candidates” back at Mauer, a tradition begun by former Twins player Eduardo Escobar.

“He’s not standing on the table screaming at the top of his lungs, but he kind of goes over what happens during the game,” pitcher Addison Reed said. “(Max) Kepler, that a baby, way to do this. Grossman, way to do this ...”

“He doesn’t forget anything. I pay attention to the game. I watch the game. But he brings up stuff that I would have never remembered happened

in that game. It gets everybody excited after a win. We come in here and we're expecting it, we're waiting for it to happen."

The only time Mauer doesn't host is when he's had too big of a game himself. In those instances, outfielder Eddie Rosario jumps in to act as a fill-in host. Rosario doesn't hold back and offers his own interpretation of the veteran host, poking fun at Mauer's oft-repeated phrases.

"He's fantastic," Mauer said of Rosario. "Sometimes they won't even let me get to the speech, if I'm down there giving interviews. I'll come back in, and Eddie does a good job. He's done it a few times."

Unsurprisingly, whenever his own accomplishments are brought up, Mauer's humble, appreciative persona returns. Morse said Molitor is also brought in to celebrate Mauer's biggest accomplishments and serve as a guest host.

But make no mistake, the show is Mauer's — not that it's good enough that it would lend to a post-baseball career.

"If you're asking if he's going to be on TV, he's not," catcher Mitch Garver said. "He's not."

Still, Garver appreciates the ceremony. The Twins were in the midst of a 34-22 run that resulted in their surprise wild-card appearance when Garver joined the club in August 2017. He remembers the wild ceremonies and players celebrating all the little details that added up to a lot of big victories.

"It was really fun," Garver said. "We were aggressive and we were loud. It was a really cool environment to come up to.

"It has been fun watching the last couple of months because he's loosened up. ... The pressure is off."

Regardless of the situation, Mauer commands the room.

He does it with attention to detail and a sharp sense of humor. Earlier this week, Mauer applauded the effort of Tyler Austin, who got back up to run after he tripped over Detroit first baseman Niko Goodrum during a home run trot on Wednesday night, the veteran suggesting that the rookie had been taken out by a sniper.

"The thing people don't realize is he's got a sneaky, really funny sense of humor," bench coach Derek Shelton said. "You see the embodiment of a person who is steady and consistent every day, regardless of how he approaches everything. But when you get him in more of a controlled environment, you see that he really has a lot of humor to him and does a good job in a leadership role in his own way.

"Not everybody leads by outward example in terms of being loud. But when he speaks, his voice is heard.

"When he talks, he has the room's attention."

Veteran reliever Matt Belisle said Mauer has grown more comfortable as a host with time. He appreciates how Mauer uses the ceremony as a team-building exercise and remembers everything that happened in a game — "He's fantastic," Belisle said.

Molitor loves it too.

He's been around Mauer enough to know he's not just an average Joe.

We've seen scant evidence of it over the years. Whether it is his briefly discussed rap career or the Cigar Joe outfit he wore on the team's flight to Puerto Rico in April, Mauer has always hinted that there's more to him than meets the eye.

It's only now in the twilight of his career that Mauer's personality has started to break through. Molitor may not be sure if Mauer will really retire, but he's glad that Mauer has agreed to take time with his decision to gain some separation from the end of an exhausting season.

After all, if he retires, Molitor's clubhouse will have to put on a talent search to find a replacement host for Mauer.

"He's always been comfortable doing it," Molitor said. "People have kind of a perception of a quiet demeanor, but he has no problem being able to hold the room. I think one of the best things for me is the way he doesn't miss anything in the game. He acknowledges what transpires in a win. He has a pretty good sense of where the biggest credit should be. Sometimes, it might be more than one guy.

"And he's funny, so how about that?"

Joe Mauer is every sports-loving Minnesota kid's dream, in real life
Zack Pierce | The Athletic | September 30, 2018

When it comes to Joe Mauer, I'm a liar.

For years I told people about how, one time back in high school, I assisted on a tackle of the former standout quarterback at Cretin-Derham Hall.

Neat little story, right? Well, it's completely false. It never happened. Not even close. The truth is that I was a slow wide receiver (soft hands, though, and kinda tall; tremendous grit) who barely played varsity, never played defense, and my team never even faced his while we were in school. The closest I came to tackling Joe Mauer on the football field was heckling him on the basketball court during the 2001 state tournament semifinals — I was a fan in the stands; he, naturally, was playing.

Still, it was a good lie, as lies go. It hurt no one. I told it only to people on one American coast or the other, people who couldn't know the truth. It was impossible to fact check, high school sports box scores being not so readily available back then. And it was modest enough to be believable — notice the expert use of the word “assisted.”

The only problem with it? It was as useless as it was harmless. You might be surprised to hear that no one in New Jersey or California cared too much that I allegedly once helped wrestle to the ground a former Minnesota high school quarterback who now plays baseball. I made exactly zero new friends on account of the lie, earned exactly zero dates. And yet, I kept repeating it, time after time, as if by reflex. I never understood why.

All these years later, the reason finally seems pretty obvious. I had spent my childhood chasing my own baseball dream, effectively trying to be exactly what Joe Mauer has become — the local kid who grew up to be a star for the Minnesota Twins. That lie was my dumb, futile last gasp to keep up with the chase.

Or, if you're the type that likes labels, I suppose the word is jealousy.

There is a decent chance that Sunday will be Joe Mauer's final game for the Twins, or anyone. His eight-year, \$184 million contract is ending, he's 35 years old and he's had his share of injuries — including concussions, the scary aftereffects of which are increasingly on the public conscience. He's certainly savoring the weekend, just in case.

Between his money and his age and his health and the Twins' disappointing step back in 2018, it's not shocking that he has stated he will consider retirement this offseason. That smooth swing may still have production in it, but the Twins aren't likely to contend in the immediate future, and the reserved Mauer doesn't seem the type to want a distraction-filled, victory-lap season full of cheesy gifts from opposing teams. Leaving Minnesota to join a contender seems unappealing in its own way — it would provide a chance to win, yes, but not a guarantee, and it would come at the expense of leaving the only organization he's ever known in the state he's called home basically his whole life, where his two (and soon to be three) kids are growing up. Plus, he'd have to miss the State Fair.

Still, it's equally shocking to think about this being the end.

“Living the dream” is a phrase tossed around for just about anybody who achieves fame and fortune, but I can think of no more direct way to put it here. For the generation of us that grew up in Minnesota just in time to watch and remember the 1987 or 1991 Twins, this was quite literally the dream — play baseball, get drafted by the Twins, make a bunch of money, follow in Kirby Puckett's footsteps and be the next Minnesota sports icon.

And we were so sure we'd make it. We were sure when we were making parents' jaws drop with our diving catches in T-ball (not to brag). We were sure when we started hitting homers against coaches' sons in our suburban summer leagues (couple real bombs, I might add). And we were sure when we kept getting named to the All-Star teams in those summer leagues. We didn't think about how there are only 1,200 40-man roster spots in all of Major League Baseball, making the odds astronomically bad that even one of us would make it. Our imaginations didn't have time for math.

But then came the newspaper articles and the TV features on this kid from St. Paul. While we were playing three months a year, he was being engineered year-round into a baseball Terminator. While he was getting national media attention for striking out all of one time total in high school, we were struggling to put the ball in play on the JV team. As he went on laying waste to our opinions of ourselves as baseball players, Mauer was also offered a full ride to play quarterback at Florida State — a solid Plan B which also makes the fact that I once assisted on a tackle of him in high school even more amazing.

And in the post-graduation summer of 2001, when the Twins made him the No. 1 overall pick in the MLB Draft — while at the same time we were debating whether or not to try intramural pingpong in college (it wasn't for me) — it became painfully clear that Joe Mauer had never even been on the same level as us. Hasta la vista.

Now the rest of us are working real jobs, our sporting glory limited to softball fields and shuffleboard tables, while he approaches the part of the dream we never really thought much about — the end. In the dream, there was no retirement. You just played forever.

That childhood dream, of course, peaked with us, the little kids, winning the World Series. Probably hitting the game-winning home run, too. We sent the ball flying onto a third-floor patio just off the grass rectangle outside the apartment building we lived in, we threw the foam bat in the air, we ran around the household knickknacks we were using as bases, fans (angry neighbors) stared at us from their windows. We were the cleanup hitter for the Minnesota Twins, and it was our moment (apologies to Kent Hrbek, whose existence we usurped for the purposes of this dream sequence).

It's the one piece missing from the Joe Mauer story. He's top-10 in Twins history in most offensive categories. Six All-Star Games. Three batting titles. An MVP award in 2009. Among active position players league-wide, he ranks 10th in career wins above replacement. He's fifth in on-base percentage, sixth in batting average, ninth in hits, eighth in doubles, and fifth in walks. Yes, those numbers are propped up by his pre-mega-contract stats, but his .290 average since 2011 is still 11th among players with at least as many plate appearances as him in that span, and his .372 OBP is tied for seventh. His strikeout rate is 12th-lowest and his walk rate 13th-best — making him one of just three players in the top 13 in each. And here in the year 2018, his 15th season of big-league baseball, Mauer is the most reliable hitter in all the land with runners in scoring position, leading the league with a .412 average this season.

But no World Series. Not even a sniff. Somehow Mauer hasn't even seen a single playoff victory in his career. Three first-round sweeps and last year's wild-card loss to the Yankees make the Twins 0-10 in the postseason with Mauer in the lineup. That's far from his fault, but maybe it's a reason to play again. Maybe it's worth it to come back on a reduced salary, possibly even just as a DH, to see if all this supposed Twins potential comes together sooner rather than later. Or maybe that World Series push happens on a team more equipped to make a run at it in 2019. Or maybe it's just time to go.

His three-pronged decision, in some ways, mirrors the pulse of the fans. Some of you have been counting down the days until that \$184 million deal is off the books, frustrated by the injuries and the drop in production that came with it. Some of you love him unconditionally for being a true homegrown star and would pay him another \$184 million to stay. Some of you are increasingly indifferent as the Twins' future becomes increasingly less about the guy who was once the cornerstone of it.

Whatever happens next for Mauer and however you feel about it, he's lived somewhere around 95 percent of the dream so many of us had as kids. And now, kids on the grass fields are pretending to be him, starting the cycle anew.

It's a career to celebrate. We should all be so lucky.

Jorge Polanco will move on quickly after learning difficult lessons in 2018

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | September 30, 2018

When it's finally over, Twins shortstop Jorge Polanco said he probably won't look back and reflect upon the 2018 season too often.

He feels good about the takeaways he's received from a difficult campaign that began with him suspended 80 games for the use of performance-enhancing drugs and ended with the Twins missing the playoffs. Polanco also is pleased with how he overcame a slow start after he returned and has put together a nice second half. But given the turmoil both individually and as a team, Polanco is ready to move on from the 2018 season once it concludes Sunday. Polanco went 3-for-5 with two runs and an RBI in an 8-3 Twins victory over the Chicago White Sox on Saturday night.

"The mentality is it's not how you start, but it's how you finish," Polanco said through an interpreter. "I think we're going to finish on a good note. The past is the past. We're here now and that's going to take us into next season.

"But 2018 has been a difficult year overall and for the team as well because we didn't make the playoffs. I'm just looking forward to the future and next year. It's going to be in the past and I'm not going to think about it too much."

Polanco's suspension was the second obstacle to face the Twins before the season even began. Already down a man with Ervin Santana sidelined, the Twins thought they could handle Polanco's suspension in house after he tested positive for Stanazolol. And while Eduardo Escobar and Ehire Adrianza handled the situation admirably, the Twins undoubtedly missed the patience and live bat that led to Polanco batting third down the stretch in 2017.

That point has only been illustrated by the plate appearances Polanco has provided throughout the second half of the season. Following a slow start, Polanco has been a constant threat and a hitter with a plan.

Through Saturday night, Polanco is hitting .291/.347/.431 with six homers and 42 RBI in 329 plate appearances. While manager Paul Molitor thinks Polanco's current 18.5 percent strikeout rate is higher than what he'll do in the long run, the production has been worth 1.2 wins above replacement, according to FanGraphs.com.

“There is a lot of confidence by me just in how he plays,” Molitor said. “I think the at-bats, he’s mindful of his approach, who is pitching, how he’s swinging. I think he fights really well. I think if he’s disappointed in anything, he struck out more than he will down the road. But I think the right-handed side has progressed. His left side still has a bit of an edge. He’s just an impactful player offensively with what he can do. He’s going to increase power. He can hit for average, he can drive in runs, he takes good at-bats with men on base. There’s a lot to like with his offensive game.”

Molitor thinks Polanco tried to do too much when he returned to the team in early July. In an attempt to make up his mistake to his teammates, Polanco wanted to be a superhero and struggled accordingly. But once he realized it and allowed the game to slow down, Polanco took over.

“That’s what has been important and been a key for me, slowing down the game, pitch by pitch, play by play, day by day,” Polanco said. “It has been working for me.

“It’s been hard. The process is in your head. But I come out and play hard every day.”

Molitor has no concerns with Polanco’s work ethic. He can see all the effort Polanco has put in to shore up the defensive side of his game. Much of the focus for Polanco after extended spring training games ended was to work with minor-league infield coordinator Sam Perlozzo on the technical side of shortstop.

Though there have been some bumps along the way, Polanco has played as consistent as he did in 2017, which was a big improvement from the 2016 campaign.

“He can handle a lot of teaching, and he’s open to it,” Molitor said. “He’s a good player, he’s still relatively young, and once he got over trying to prove to everybody that he took accountability for his mistake, and that he was trying to make up for it a little bit too much too fast, he’s settled in pretty well.

“There’s been some inconsistencies (defensively). I think there’s a couple things that have kind of stood out to me as areas of improvement that we have to focus on. I don’t have to worry about the work that. He’s one guy that I have to worry about doing too much work, because he’s out there every day with (Gene Glynn).

“But yeah, the last couple years, his diligence in practicing has paid off in how he’s played the position.”

After half a season away, Polanco has been thrilled to be back in his comfort zone with his teammates. He’s disappointed the Twins season will end Sunday but is pleased with the team’s spirited play in September. The Twins tied their longest winning streak of the season (five games) Saturday and looking to complete their seventh series sweep.

“The most important thing is we’ve been winning games lately and finishing the season on a good note,” Polanco said. “I’m not taking things for granted. Not taking the game for granted. (I know to) take every chance and take every opportunity, that’s the most important thing. I think things will work out that way.”

Gibson ends best season of his career on a high note

With six sharp innings Saturday, Kyle Gibson established career highs in innings pitched (196 2/3), earned-run average (3.62), strikeouts (179) and the fewest earned runs allowed (79). Gibson worked around a first-inning jam and cruised to an easy victory with a run allowed and three hits with three walks and seven strikeouts. It was the perfect way to cap a career resurgence that began in July.

“Overall, it was just the mentality I was able to keep,” Gibson said. “Kind of the beauty of having your priorities straight and having a good, confident mentality is one start, whether it’s good or bad, isn’t going to take you too high or too low. I could have had another year like last year and hopefully my mentality would have stayed the same and you try to stay focused on the things outside of baseball that really matter and understand that one outing or one pitch or one inning doesn’t change who your identity should be on the mound or off the mound. Overall, stuff like that is what allowed me to keep a consistent mindset.”