Just one home run is enough: Eddie Rosario gives Twins 3-1 win over Padres in 10 innings

La Velle E. Neal | Star Tribune | September 14, 2017

A 2-0 fastball? On the middle half of the plate? To Eddie Rosario?

“He swung as hard as he could,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said, “and hit it as far as he could.”

Rosario held nothing back, launching the baseball an estimated 430 feet for a two-run, walkoff home run that gave the Twins a 3-1 victory over San Diego and sent Target Field fans into jubilation.

With one swing against Padres reliever Phil Maton, Rosario made up for Trevor Hildenberger’s pitch to Austin Hedges in the eighth inning that was hit into the flower bed in left-center for a score-tying home run that denied Ervin Santana a chance for his 16th victory.

With one swing, Rosario made up for the Twins’ half of the sixth, when Joe Mauer led off with a single but was eventually stranded at third.

And he made up for the frustrating seventh, in which the Twins loaded the bases with no outs but Robbie Grossman hit into a 6-2-3 double play, and Brian Dozier fanned on a hanging breaking ball to end the inning.

The blast, Rosario’s 23rd of the season, sent his teammates into a frenzy as they gathered to greet him at home plate. Because it looked as if they were letting one slip away in the middle of their bid for a wild-card spot.

“He’s been on a great roll,” reliever Matt Belisle said of Rosario. “He’s such a gamer. It was just elation.”

The Twins held their two-game lead over the Angels for the American League’s second Wild Card spot. Seattle won to stay 3 1/2 games behind while the Royals and Rangers both lost to fall four games behind Minnesota.

Rosario accounted for all the Twins runs. He doubled in the second inning, then advanced to third when Padres righthander Dinelson Lamet threw a wild pitch. Catcher Austin Hedges tried to throw out Rosario at third, but the ball sailed down the left field line and allowed Rosario to
Runs were hard to come by after that, as the hard-throwing Lamet kept the Twins bats quiet. Santana was ... Santana, pitching his eighth scoreless start of the season. He picked up the victory the first seven times.

It was another good-looking line for Santana in a season full of them: six scoreless innings, three hits, one walk, seven strikeouts. He began the night ninth in the American League with a 3.45 ERA and watched it drop to 3.35. The few hits has been a constant, as Santana began the night holding opponents to a .223 batting average.

Molitor said before the game he was watching Santana's innings as he closes in on 200 for the season. Those concerns led to Santana being removed from the game.

He held a 1-0 lead as he walked off the mound, with his 16th victory in his clutches, but the path was met with resistance.

Hildenberger pitched a spotless seventh but left a 1-0 pitch to Hedges over the plate in the eighth. The catcher atoned for his error with his 17th homer.

Then, when the Twins bungled scoring opportunities in the late innings, it appeared as if they were going to give away a game to the 65-81 Padres.

The Twins have been able to shake off bad losses. On Wednesday, they shook off a couple bad innings. Mauer hit a one-out single in the 10th before Rosario ended it.

“A nice way to end the game,” Molitor said. “A good win.”

Santana is not going to be consumed with personal victories with something bigger at stake.

“It’s great for us,” Santana said, “and [got] the momentum going for the team. It was fun, especially the way we won the game, Rosie’s first walkoff.”

**Reusse: Before home-run heroics, Rosario helped by going off script**

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | September 14, 2017

The Twins had scored 16 runs on Tuesday in clobbering the San Diego Padres, and then they came back to score once in nine innings Wednesday night in Target Field.

The sole run came in the second and was delivered in a unique manner that it takes Eddie Rosario to deliver. He led off the inning with a line drive into the right-center gap for a double off Dinelson Lamet, the Padres’ talented rookie.

Byron Buxton followed by a hitting a ball deep toward Manuel Margot, San Diego’s center fielder. The baserunning play here for Rosario was to tag up and get to third with one out, after Margot made the catch.

And if Margot didn’t catch it, if the ball got over his head, Rosario would score anyway — or wind up at third with no outs. Neither of those scenarios came into play, since Rosario ran off second, and then couldn’t get back to tag when Margot made the routine catch.

Except, maybe Eddie had this figured out all along, as his mind does work a bit different from most other ballplayers. He’s aggressive at the plate, on the bases, with his throws, and he is not intimidated about taking his shot in any situation.

American League wild-card standings

So, here he was standing at second, not third, but then Lamet threw a wild pitch that got a few feet away from catcher Austin Hedges, and Rosario took off for third. Hedges threw the ball past third, and Rosario came home with the game’s first run — the Twins only run in nine innings.

And here’s the deal: If Eddie had been at third, as he should have been, he would not have been able to advance home on the wild pitch that wasn’t far from home, but he was able to score on a wild throw as he advanced to third, which meant Rosario — different cat that he is — was right all along.
The Twins managed to nurse that single run all the way to the eighth, although they wouldn’t have been nursing if they hadn’t messed up a beautiful opportunity to put the game away in the bottom of the seventh.

It was a half-inning in which they managed to chase Lamet and load the bases with no outs. Robbie Grossman faced lefthander Buddy Baumann, and committed the mortal sin of bouncing into a short-to-home-to-first double play. Brian Dozier followed with a strikeout and it was still 1-0, and not for long.

Hedges made up for his bad throw trying to get Rosario much earlier by hitting a game-tying home run off Trevor Hildenberger in the eighth. Hey, the fly ball just barely made it to a flower box in left-center, but it was 1-1, and then on to extra innings.

This truly had the odor of one of those losses the Twins would come to regret, if they were to fall short in this improbable bid to go from 59-103 in 2016 to a wild card in 2017.

You don’t score with the bases loaded in the seventh, and the rookie reliever who has been outstanding gives up a game-tying home run, and something bad is going to happen.

Right?

Fortunately for the Twins, Rosario doesn’t recognize such scents of gloom when he goes to the plate. Eddie knows he has the tremendous hands to hit any pitch, as long as he’s not hacking at a ball cap-high or flailing at a breaking ball in the righthanded batter’s box.

There’s no one more certain that Eddie can hit than Eddie himself.

So now it was the 10th, and Matt Belisle had gotten the Twins five outs to get them to the bottom of the inning still tied. Joe Mauer had singled with one out, and Jorge Polanco popped out, and that brought up Rosario against righthander Phil Maton.

Eddie got into a 2-0 count, which he has done more often over the past couple of month, and then Maton came with a fastball on the inner half.

Eddie. Fastball. Where those lightning hands can get to it.

It was high, and it was deep, and it was down the line, and all the baseball had to do was to stay fair and it did.

Twins 3, San Diego 1.

All three runs produced by Rosario — one with base running only Eddie might be able to get away with, and the last two on a pitch where those magic hands were pulled through in a powerful instant to send the baseball into the night.

Mejia back in the rotation; Sano hits, doesn’t run
La Velle E. Neal | Star Tribune | September 13, 2017

Lefty Adalberto Mejia, who has missed over a month because of a muscle strain in his upper arm, will return to the starting rotation Saturday when he faces Toronto.

Mejia, 4-5 with a 4.47 ERA, has been out since Aug. 8 because of a strained brachialis muscle, but his rehabilitation went smoothly, Twins manager Paul Molitor said. Mejia started for Class AA Chattanooga on Saturday in a playoff game, holding Montgomery to one hit over five innings with five strikeouts. He threw 73 pitches.

So the Twins are willing to drop him right into the playoff percolator to face a Blue Jays team that has hit .231 against lefthanded starters and .245 against righthanded starters. Righthander Aaron Slegers, who gave up five runs over four innings in his last start Sept. 6 against Tampa Bay, will shift to the bullpen.

“With Mejia, he has done some good things for us this year,” Molitor said. “His rehab has been efficient. He’s proven that he is ready to come back, and hopefully help us.

“And that’s really the first day I need to slot someone in without Slegers being in the rotation.”
Molitor was warned about Gabriel Moya’s unusual delivery when he was called up from Class AA Chattanooga. But it’s another thing to see it in person.

Moya came on to pitch the final inning of the Twins’ 16-0 victory over the Padres on Tuesday, and his herky-jerky motion — he quickly raises and kicks out his right leg before he gets set, then pumps his hands before he delivers — and the manager got to analyze it firsthand.

“It’s ... busy,” Molitor said. “I don’t know if it adds to his effectiveness. I think, despite everything he does to get set, when he does deliver, that little twist probably helps him hide the baseball.”

Moya’s fastball averaged 90.7 miles per hour Tuesday, and it does look like he benefits from some deception. But he also was called for a balk when he didn’t come totally set. He will have to guard against that, with the kind of delivery that will put umpires on alert.

“He was sent a message,” Molitor said.

League delayed

Staff and players are supposed to start arriving in Florida later this week to begin Instructional League, which is like an extra training camp for minor leaguers at the lower levels. But Hurricane Irma’s rampage through the state has forced a delay.

While prospects are able to work on skills, there normally would be Instructional League games with other teams. But it’s hard to play games when there are power outages, gas shortages and recovery efforts throughout the state.

“Instructional League is currently being delayed,” Twins General Manager Thad Levine said. “We are polling other Florida-based teams. We are discussing means to supplement instructs in the event that it gets meaningfully truncated.”

Etc.
- Miguel Sano (stress reaction in left shin) hit early in the cage Wednesday but did not run. Molitor said the club decided to back him off after having Sano do more Tuesday. Molitor still won’t put a timetable on exactly when Sano could appear in a game. Sano, meanwhile, had a smile on his face as he moved through the clubhouse before the game.

“T’m working,” he said.
- Hitting coach James Rowson returned to the Twin Cities on Tuesday night after riding out Hurricane Irma in Florida with his family. He showed up to the park in time for the game, but missed batting practice. Players gave him some grief for his tardiness — then went out and hit seven home runs and scored 16 runs against the Padres.

Reusse: Playoff hopes will provide drama until season’s final days
La Velle E. Neal | Star Tribune | September 14, 2017

This has been a phenomenal baseball season. The non-stop surprises include the Twins being fully involved in the wild-card competition with 2½ weeks remaining in the schedule.

These unlikely wild-card contenders are surrounded by similarities to the unlikely contenders from Paul Molitor’s first season as manager in 2015. The most-obvious is this:

The Twins entered Wednesday night’s game vs. San Diego at 75-69 with 18 games to play. The 2015 Twins also were 75-69.

This time, the Twins were leading Los Angeles by two games for the second wild card and No. 5 seed in the AL playoffs. Two years ago, they trailed Houston by 1½ games for the second wild card.

The Yankees were holding the first wild card in 2015, and they are holding it again by a solid 3 games. The Twins make the annual visit to Yankee Stadium starting Monday. Those three games don’t figure to be as much about tracking down the Yankees, as a requirement in the quest to get a return trip to the Bronx on Oct. 3 (a Tuesday night) for the one-game AL wild card.

There was little optimism entering the 2015 season, particularly after spring training concluded with new starter Ervin Santana being popped for
steroids, costing the first half of the season.

Torii Hunter had an outstanding one-year return, Trevor Plouffe had his best season, rookie Miguel Sano had a terrific July and August, and Tyler Duffey arrived to be a late-season ace. Add it up, and somehow that club hung around the new, bloated wild-card competition until the last weekend.

It was interesting, but did you ever think the ’15 Twins actually were going to make it to Yankee Stadium for the one-game wild card? I didn’t think so.

There was even less optimism entering the 2017 season. The Twins were a well-earned, all-time worst 59-103 in 2016, and the new brain trust didn’t do much of anything.

OK, they did bring back Torii, but this time as a consultant.

The Twins gave up at the July 31 non-waiver deadline by trading Jaime Garcia (after one start) and closer Brandon Kintzler. A couple of days later, I ridiculed those upset by this, pointing out these Twins were imposters all along as wild-card contenders.

So it goes.

Six weeks later, the Twins are 2 in front of the Angels, 3 ahead of Kansas City and Texas, and 3½ ahead of Seattle. That’s about it now – a five-pack of contenders for the second wild card.

Eighty-six got it done for Houston by a game over the Angels in 2015, and then the Astros went to Yankee Stadium and Dallas Keuchel beat the Yankees 3-0.

Eighty-five gets it done this time, right? There’s a little magic to that number in these parts. That was the Twins’ victory total in 1987 to win the AL West, followed by winning a first World Series title.

That record was deceptive to a degree: The Twins clinched the West on a Monday in Texas and then lost the last six. There was no playoff position to worry about then, just a best-of-7 vs. AL East champion Detroit — and with home-Dome advantage guaranteed based on the alternate-season format of the time.

There will be no final-week relaxation for the 2017 Twins. This one will be played out to the last days. And it’s still too early to guarantee the Twins will be part of it.

Lose five or six in a row and a team will go away, just as has Baltimore. The O’s surged to within one game of the No. 5 seed, and then took a six-game losing streak into Wednesday. Goodbye, Buck Showalter.

There’s been a different feeling with the sporting public here than in 2015. The crowds haven’t been much (although that Wild hat drew 28,000 on Tuesday), but people seem to be managing more smiles than aiming ridicule at the wild-card gimmick that was introduced by baseball in 2012.

You get a 17-0 slaughter on the last homestand. That’s followed by 16-0 on Tuesday night, and becoming the first team in major league history to hit home runs in the first seven innings of a game.

That’s hard to ignore, even if Minnesota is at the outset of the Dalvin Cook Era.

The 2015 Twins scored 696 runs and hit 156 home runs. The 2017 Twins have scored 721 runs and hit 184 home runs, with 18 games to play. Same record, but this team’s well-balanced clout gives the followers a different vibe, from what I’ve been hearing.
Twins win on an Eddie Rosario walk-off home run
Chad Graff | Pioneer Press | September 13, 2017

One night after the Twins crossed home plate 16 times, hungover bats needed three hours and 40 minutes to fully recover before Eddie Rosario awakened the team and helped the Twins secure their 10th series sweep of the season.

In the 10th inning of a sleepy game, Rosario turned on a 93 mph fastball and pulled it beyond the bleachers in right field.

Rosario paused after connecting and watched his home run travel, pointing at his teammates in the dugout when he eventually ran by. They greeted him at home plate with a bubble gum bath as the Twins did just enough to nab a 3-1 win over the San Diego Padres on Wednesday night at Target Field, closing their interleague slate with nine straight wins over the National League.

The Twins had needed a throwing error to score their lone run of the first nine innings but finally capitalized on a pitching performance that kept them in the game even when their at-bats were far cries from the seven home runs they hit in a 16-0 win one night earlier.

Joe Mauer knocked a one-out single in the 10th inning before Rosario’s heroics.

Rosario crushed a 2-0 fastball from right-hander Phil Maton with such force that he fell back toward the plate as the ball cleared the fence, giving the Twins their fourth walk-off win of the season.

“He’s going to do that once in a while,” manager Paul Molitor said of the big swing. “I like that he’s showing control when we need a base hit. But when he gets a hitter’s count, he cheats to a spot, and the barrel got there.”

The Twins needed the extra inning after squandering a seventh-inning lead.

The Twins lost their 1-0 advantage and a 16-inning shutout streak when rookie Trevor Hildenberger, working his second inning of the night, surrendered a solo home run to No. 9 hitter Austin Hedges with one out in the eighth inning.

After that, the Twins needed three pitchers to strand runners on the corners just to get out of the frame with a 1-1 tie.

Behind a resurgent pitching staff that extends to a bullpen that seemed depleted six weeks ago, the Twins continued their march toward a wild-card berth, still two games ahead of the late-playing Los Angeles Angels.

The Twins needed five pitchers to secure the win after offensive struggles stranded eight runners.

In the seventh inning, with a chance to build on their lead, the Twins loaded the bases with no outs.

But Robbie Grossman grounded into a home-to-first double play, and Brian Dozier struck out to end the inning.

But despite that, Twins pitchers put together a strong night to help secure the win and give the team 76 wins with 17 games remaining.

To start the game, Ervin Santana looked like the ace the Twins will need if they reach a one-game playoff series against the Yankees, even if the Padres lineup he faced entered with just one hitter with more than 16 home runs.

Still, with seven strikeouts and only three hits allowed, Santana made quick work of San Diego through six innings.

The Twins got their first run in the second inning, even if the lone hit of the frame was Rosario’s leadoff double.

He opted against tagging to third base on Byron Buxton’s fly-out to center field but made up for it when he took third via a wild pitch, then turned toward home when catcher Austin Hedges’ throw there sailed into the outfield.

“You can almost guarantee that they’re going to come back and score when you miss those opportunities,” Molitor said. “You’d like to say that you’re going to take advantage of every ... bases loaded, but that’s not how the game is.”
Twins: Paul Molitor said Matt Belisle has ‘earned’ closer role

Chad Graff | Pioneer Press | September 13, 2017

As the Twins enter the home stretch of this once improbable run toward a postseason berth, manager Paul Molitor has unofficially selected Matt Belisle to serve as the team’s closer.

“Most days, if Matt is fresh and ready, he’s going to get that opportunity,” Molitor said. “I think he’s earned that over the past month or so.”

After early-season struggles, Belisle, a 37-year-old veteran of 14 seasons, has emerged as arguably the Twins’ top reliever after the team traded closer Brandon Kintzler to the Washington Nationals at the end of July.

Since then, Belisle has seven saves to just one blown save. He has posted a 1.42 earned-run average since June 14, a span of 30 appearances and 31.2 innings.

Part of Belisle’s slow start stemmed from struggles when he pitched two days in a row.

But since June 14, Belisle has worked back-to-back days five times without allowing an earned run in any of those appearances.

“Early on, we saw a little bit of a trend there whether it was coincidental or somewhat fact-based (that) the multiple consecutive outings were not his best,” Molitor said. “I think that was part of the reason we had to be careful pushing him in that ninth inning role too frequently.

“But at this time of the year with his experience and the fact that he’s throwing the ball well, I’m going to give him the chance to do that more times than not. ... I just hope it continues for him.”

Belisle is just one of 14 options Molitor has in the bullpen since rosters expanded Sept. 1.

“I wouldn’t say it’s harder (to make decisions), but it can be a little more complicated,” Molitor said. “Now there are just more names in the mix. You kind of build trust in certain people that you’d like to have in there when you get a chance to win.”

SANO UPDATE

Miguel Sano, out since Aug. 21 due to a stress reaction on his left shin, was scheduled to run on Wednesday after taking batting practice Tuesday.

But that was scrapped after Sano felt sore Wednesday. He did take batting practice again.

“I still can’t predict,” Molitor said of when Sano could return. “We’re just hoping that each day we get a little closer. I don’t think it’s imminent, but he’s making progress.”

Molitor said the Twins ditched Sano’s planned running work because “of ill effects of yesterday’s work.”

ROTATION SET

Starting pitcher Adalberto Mejia is scheduled to make his first start since Aug. 8 on Saturday, returning from an upper-arm injury.

Mejia made two minor-league rehab starts in preparation, allowing one earned run in eight innings with Triple-A Rochester.

By slotting Mejia into the rotation for Saturday against Toronto, Molitor was able to keep Jose Berrios (Thursday’s starter) and Bartolo Colon (Friday’s starter) in their scheduled rotation spots.

“He’s done some good things for us this year,” Molitor said of Mejia. “His rehab has been efficient, and he’s proven that he’s ready to come back and hopefully help us.”
MINNEAPOLIS -- As Twins manager Paul Molitor has often said, Eddie Rosario lives for big moments. Rosario came up huge for Minnesota, crushing a walk-off, two-run homer to right in the 10th inning to lift the Twins to a 3-1 win over the Padres on Wednesday night at Target Field. It helped the Twins maintain their two-game lead for the second AL Wild Card spot over the Angels, who beat the Astros.

It was the fourth walk-off win of the year for the Twins. Joe Mauer sparked the rally with a one-out single off reliever Phil Maton. Rosario came up with two outs and smacked a 2-0 fastball high into the sky that stayed just fair, with Rosario nearly swinging out of his shoes and celebrating as he made it to first base. It left the bat at 106.5 mph at a launch angle of 35 degrees and went a projected 415 feet, per Statcast™. It was the hardest hit homer by Rosario since Statcast™ was introduced in 2015.

"I was waiting for that pitch," said Rosario, who had never hit a walk-off homer at any level. "In the last at-bat, I got a lot of fastballs inside. So I was little surprised he pitched inside, but I was waiting on the pitch and I made good contact. It was awesome. It's the moment every player wants."

Padres rookie right-hander Dinelson Lamet was solid, allowing one run on five hits over six-plus innings. He struck out five and walked two. The lone run he allowed came on an errant throw to third from catcher Austin Hedges, as Rosario advanced on a wild pitch after a leadoff double. It was the 10th straight outing in which Lamet surrendered three runs or fewer.

"I thought he was good, and he's been good pretty much every time out over the last couple months," San Diego manager Andy Green said. "Another step in the right direction. More of the same, good slider and good fastball. [He] navigated the lineup well, minimized damage. I thought, overall, he threw the ball well."

Twins right-hander Ervin Santana, who had posted a 5.40 ERA over his last three outings, bounced back with a strong effort, despite not having his best stuff. The right-hander pitched his way out of several jams, scattering three hits and a walk with seven strikeouts over six scoreless innings.

"We're trying to get these guys not to fall into the trap of, 'We're supposed to win these games,'" Molitor said. "It doesn't work that way. Tonight we had to fight with everything we had to get a win."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Hedges’ throw proves costly: Rosario broke for third on a wild pitch from Lamet in the second inning after a leadoff double and Hedges threw to third to try to get Rosario. But the throw sailed past third baseman Yangervis Solarte and allowed Rosario to trot home to give the Twins an early lead.

"I think Austin grinds as hard as anyone in the cage. He wants to be really good on both sides of the baseball," Green said. "I think he's doing better at the dish. I think in his mind he wants to be better and better."

Belisle escapes jam: Rookie reliever Alan Busenitz exited with two runners on and one out in the ninth, and the Twins turned to closer Matt Belisle to diffuse the situation. Belisle retired Jabari Blash and Hedges to get out of the inning unscathed. He also threw a 1-2-3 10th inning and picked up the win. More >

"It's just like any other situation," Belisle said. "I'm just trying to execute pitches. Nothing really changes. Just look at the signs and trying to simplify things."

QUOTABLE

"Rosie has been incredible a majority of the season. He got a hitters' count and he swung about as hard as he could and he hit it about as far as he could. It was a great way to end the game and a big win." -- Molitor

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Twins swept the two-game set with the Padres to notch their 10th sweep of the season. That is the most sweeps by Minnesota in a single season since recording 10 in 2016.
WHAT'S NEXT

Padres: Following an off-day Thursday, San Diego will travel to Colorado for a three-game weekend set starting on Friday at 5:40 p.m. PT. Left-hander Clayton Richard (7-13, 4.78 ERA) will get the nod in the series opener. Last time out, Richard tossed six shutout frames in a win over St. Louis.

Twins: The Twins host the Blue Jays for a four-game series that begins Thursday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Right-hander Jose Berrios (12-7, 3.94 ERA) is set to start for the Twins; he limited the Royals to two runs over seven innings last time out.

Belisle staking claim to closer role
Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | September 14, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- Twins manager Paul Molitor said he's not one for titles, and hasn't named veteran Matt Belisle as his closer, despite him picking up a team-high seven saves since All-Star Brandon Kintzler was traded to the Nationals on July 31.

But all Belisle has done since then is provide a huge boost to the bullpen, and he did it again Wednesday night, coming up huge for the Twins, getting five key outs in their 3-1, walk-off win in 10 innings that was capped by Eddie Rosario's first career game-winning homer.

Belisle came in with two runners on and one out in the ninth with the game tied, but got Jabari Blash and Austin Hedges to fly out before tossing a 1-2-3 10th to pick up the victory. Belisle, though, the unquestioned veteran leader of the bullpen, would rather talk about anyone else except himself after the game, pointing out Rosario's heroics and Ervin Santana's six scoreless innings while downplaying his impact on the game.

"It's just like any other situation," Belisle said. "I'm just trying to execute pitches. Nothing really changes. Just look at the signs and trying to simplify things."

His role in the win, however, wasn't lost on manager Paul Molitor, who called on him to come into an inning with runners on base for the first time since Aug. 17 and the second time since he became Minnesota's de facto closer.

"Matty got five big outs for us," Molitor said. "I thought about bringing him in there to start that inning, especially if we scored. They got a bloop hit we erased with a stolen base, but they got another hit and a walk on a close 3-2 pitch that could've gone either way. I just thought I'd bring Matty in there because of his experience and he got a couple fly balls and a 1-2-3 inning."

Belisle, 37, has been key to the Twins' postseason push, posting a 2.84 ERA with 16 strikeouts in 12 2/3 innings since Kintzler's departure, but it's been his leadership that has also been on display since the trade.

He's been pivotal in keeping the young club focused without worrying about external influences or the fact the front office chose to sell at the non-waiver Trade Deadline. It's helped the Twins to a surprising two-game lead for the second American League Wild Card spot with 17 games left to play.

"We've thought we've had something special since the All-Star break so our mindset doesn't really change," Belisle said. "Nobody is really concerned about the standings. We're just concerned about [the nine innings] in front of us, and I know it sounds cliché, but the guys have done such a good job of embracing that. That's what is special about this club. We're having fun and we expect good things, but we've had a mindset for this type of a game a long time ago."

Mejia activated, will start Saturday vs. Toronto
Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | September 14, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS -- Bartolo Colon will start on "Big Sexy" night at Target Field on Friday, after all.

The Twins announced left-hander Adalberto Mejia was activated from the 10-day disabled list Wednesday, but won't rejoin the rotation until Saturday, giving him two days of extra rest after his third and final rehab outing, in which he threw five innings of one-hit ball for Double-A Chattanooga in the Southern League playoffs on Saturday. It means Jose Berrios will start on regular rest in the series opener against the Blue Jays on Thursday.

"I wanted to keep Jose and Colon on their regular turn," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It's something I thought made sense, given they're both throwing the ball well."

Mejia has been out since Aug. 8 with a left biceps strain. He had a 3.55 ERA over his last 10 starts before sustaining the injury, and has a 4.47
ERA in 18 outings as a rookie this season. He's replacing Aaron Slegers as the club's fifth starter with Slegers moving to the bullpen. "Mejia has done some good things for us this year," Molitor said. "His rehab was efficient. He's proven that he's ready to come back and help us. It's really the first day I need to slot someone in."

Worth noting
- Third baseman Miguel Sano continues to rehab his left shin stress reaction, but backed off running Wednesday after feeling soreness following Tuesday's work. He took batting practice on the field, but it's clear he's having trouble running.

"I don't think it's imminent," Molitor said of Sano's return. "But he's making progress. I still can't predict a clock with him, but each day we're getting closer."

- Lost in the shuffle of the Twins setting a Major League record by homering in the first seven innings of Tuesday's 16-0 win was rookie Niko Goodrum recording his first career hit as a pinch-hitter in the seventh inning.

"It takes a little pressure off getting that first one, so it feels good," Goodrum said. "With everything going on, scoring a lot of runs and everything, it was cool to hear everyone cheering."

- Left-hander Gabriel Moya also made his Major League debut Tuesday, showing off his unusual delivery while throwing a scoreless ninth inning. Moya walked a batter and committed a balk, but recorded a strikeout to end the game. His fastball averaged 91.3 mph, while his changeup averaged 80.3 mph. He also threw one slider at 82.4 mph, but his changeup remains his best pitch.

"It's busy," Molitor said of Moya's delivery. "I don't know if it adds to his effectiveness, but I think that little twist he does before he throws the baseball helps him hide the ball and makes him tough to pick up. I don't think the young man is lacking confidence. He's got an act he brings out there, but that's who he's comfortable being."

Berrios, Twins aim for more WC breathing room
Gregor Chisholm | MLB.com | September 13, 2017

The Twins will look to gain a little bit of breathing room in the race for the second American League Wild Card spot when they open a four-game series against the Blue Jays on Thursday night at Target Field.

Minnesota has been maintaining its grip on a spot in the postseason throughout the month, and a big series against the Blue Jays could be the final push the club needs. Right-hander Jose Berrios will take the mound in the series opener for the Twins, while Toronto is set to counter with lefty Brett Anderson.

Berrios has been battling consistency issues of late and has been alternating between good and bad outings. In his last start vs. the Royals, Berrios allowed just two runs over seven innings, but in the previous outing he surrendered five runs on seven hits vs. the Rays.

Anderson has been better than anyone could have expected since he joined the Blue Jays in late August. The 29-year-old has yet to walk a batter over 17 2/3 innings and has not allowed more than three runs in any of his three starts. He'll be looking to play the role of spoiler while at the same time auditioning for a contract this offseason.

"Two years ago [the Twins] hung in there until the end, and then last year it kind of blew up on them," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said. "I tip my hat to them over there, what they're doing. [Twins manager Paul] Molitor has done a great job. They have some pop in that lineup and it's a different-looking team. They have some athletes, they all run pretty good for the most part. I've been impressed."

Three things to know about this game
- Over three starts since joining the Blue Jays, Anderson has thrown 17 2/3 innings without a walk, in part by recording 32.7 percent of his outs within the first two pitches of an at-bat. That's the second-highest rate among AL pitchers since Aug. 29 (minimum 30 total outs), with Berrios coming in fourth, at 31.5 percent.
- Blue Jays left fielder Steve Pearce is questionable for this game because of stiffness in his lower back. Pearce hasn't played since Friday because of the injury, while rookie Teoscar Hernandez continues to see the bulk of the playing time in left field during his absence.
- The current Twins roster has not seen a lot of Anderson over the years. Veteran Joe Mauer is the only player on the team with more than five at-bats against the Blue Jays starter. In those 13 at-bats, Mauer has three hits -- including one double -- and an RBI.
After Eddie Rosario’s dramatic walk-off homer, it’s time to start thinking postseason  
Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | September 14, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS – Eddie Rosario electrified whatever portion of the Target Field crowd that hung around to see his dramatic 10th inning walk-off home run Wednesday night, the first of his pro baseball career.

That home run was crucial to Wednesday night’s 3-1 win. And the whole game was a good reminder postseason baseball is right around the corner, if the Twins continue to play this way.

“Feeling awesome,” Rosario said after the game, before adding that he’s never hit one since he signed with the Twins in 2010, not at any stage of the minor leagues, even. “Never in my life,” he said.

Until Wednesday.

Rosario’s smash to the plaza out in right field – a long way from home plate, even more than the 430 feet that Statcast estimated, according to Paul Molitor – capped a good win for the Twins.

Here are 4 quick-hit reasons that Wednesday’s game reminded me that October baseball could be right around the corner for the Twins.

– Ervin Santana pitched 6 shutout innings, and Molitor said that he took him out of the game to keep him ready to roll for his final three starts of the season. Keep the ace as fresh as possible for those final three outings; you may need him again on October 3 in New York, for the one-game Wild Card playoff series.

– The win, coupled with an Angels win against the Astros, put the Twins up 2 ½ games in the hunt for the second A.L. Wild Card spot. The Angels have to make up those 2 ½ games, and there are only 17 games left to play.

The pressure’s about to ramp up, in other words. We’re fully into scoreboard watching season.

– Molitor turned to the bullpen, and treated every out like it was crucial Wednesday. That’s the way October goes. After Santana, he used Trevor Hildenberger, Taylor Rogers, Alan Busenitz and Matt Belisle.

Hildenberger was good in the 7th inning, got a strikeout to start the 8th, then gave up a homer and walked a guy – and then Molitor yanked one of the most trusted Twins relievers to play the matchup game with Taylor Rogers. Rogers faced two lefties, got one out and let on a base runner, so Molitor turned back to the right side and got Busenitz, who got Mil Myers out on a fly ball to end the tense inning with the score tied at 1-1.

Busenitz got into trouble in the 9th inning with the score still tied, so Molitor went to Belisle, who stranded two runners on base by getting a couple fly outs, and then he pitched a clean 10th to set up Rosario’s heroics.

– The Twins offense has morphed into one of the best in baseball, without middle-of-the-order slugger Miguel Sano.

Entering Wednesday, they ranked first in runs scored since the all-star break (318). They ranked second as a team with a .474 slugging percentage since the all-star break (and they’re first in ISO, .205). Their .347 Weighted On-Base Average is second only to the Chicago Cubs in the second half.

Rosario’s been a big part of that, but he’s not alone. We also have to credit Joe Mauer, Brian Dozier, Byron Buxton, Jorge Polanco and a number of other hitters for driving an offense to the top of the league. If they get Sano back to anywhere near the top of his abilities, I don’t think you’d want to face this team in October, at least not if you’re an opposing pitcher.

“Rosie, he’s been incredible the majority of the season,” Molitor said. “A heads-up baserunning play to get our first run, and then, you know, he got a hitter’s count [2-0] and he swung about as hard as he could and he hit it about as hard as you could. It was a good way to end the game. Good win.”

It was noted to Molitor that Rosario seemed to swing out of his shoes to clobber that pitch out in the 10th inning.

“I get it that he’s going to do that once in a while,” Molitor said. “I like that he’s showing control when we need a base hit, but when he gets a
hitter’s count and he cheats to a spot? Barrel got there.

“I don’t know what the measured distance was,” he said.

Somebody told him that the tape read 430 feet.

“Short,” Molitor said.

Rosario powers Twins past Padres with walk-off homer
Associated Press | September 14, 2017

MINNEAPOLIS — Eddie Rosario has emerged down the stretch of his third season as one of Minnesota’s most productive players.

These Twins have sure matured quickly, coming off that club-worst 59-103 record in 2016.

Rosario hit a towering two-run home run with two outs in the 10th inning to send the Twins to a 3-1 victory over the San Diego Padres on Wednesday night to maintain their two-game lead for the second AL wild card spot.

“He’s been on such a great roll, and he’s such a gamer,” reliever Matt Belisle said.

After Joe Mauer hit a one-out single off Phil Maton (3-1), Rosario sent a 2-0 pitch soaring into the right-field seats that sailed just inside the foul pole. He raced around the bases with fists pumped to find a mob of teammates waiting for him at the plate in celebration of the team’s fourth walk-off win this season, dumping a bucket of water on his head after his 23rd homer.

“It’s the moment for every player like that,” Rosario said.

Rosario has 12 home runs and 33 RBIs in his last 35 games, with a .292 batting average and 69 RBIs for the season. The native of Puerto Rico has speed on the bases and range in the field, but he has become more patient at the plate to supplement his natural skills.

Rosario also manufactured Minnesota’s only run against starter Dinelson Lamet with a leadoff double in the second inning, advancing on a wild pitch and scoring when Austin Hedges threw wildly past third base and into left field for an error.

“We’ve thought we’ve had something special since the All-Star break, so our mindset really has not changed,” Belisle said. “Nobody’s really concerned about the standings. We’re just concerned about each nine-inning game that’s in front of us, and I know it sounds cliche, but the guys are doing such a good job of embracing that, and that’s what special about this club.”

Hedges homered for San Diego to tie the game in the eighth inning, but with runners at first and second in the ninth he flied out.

“It’s a big swing that gave us an opportunity to come back and win the baseball game,” Padres manager Andy Green said. “We just couldn’t cash anybody in.”

Ervin Santana gave the Twins six scoreless innings, with only three hits and one walk allowed while striking out seven. Santana has five complete games this season, with 100-plus pitches thrown in 17 of 30 starts, but Molitor decided to pull him after 93 pitches with an eye toward freshness in the final two weeks.

Trevor Hildenberger, the rookie who has deftly filled a need in the bullpen during the second half since his recall from Triple-A, recorded four outs until Hedges took him deep into the flowers behind the left-center field wall.

READY ROOKIE

The Padres have used 13 starting pitchers this year, but Lamet has been a big help. The 25-year-old left-hander from the Dominican Republic, who joined the rotation in late May, has logged 10 straight turns with three or fewer runs allowed and a total of just 16 runs surrendered in that
Lamet has 128 strikeouts in 104 innings for a per-nine innings average that entering the game ranked as the fourth-best by a rookie in major league history and third this season in the NL. Lamet pitched into the seventh, allowing five hits and two walks with one run while striking out five.

“Another step in the right direction,” Green said. “More of the same: good slider and good fastball.”

REJOINING THE ROTATION

The Twins reinstated LHP Adalberto Mejia from the DL, where he’s been for more than a month because of an upper arm strain. He’ll start on Saturday.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Padres: LF Jose Pirela was out of the lineup for a second straight game, due to a sprained pinkie on his left hand from sliding into a base on Sunday. He entered in the ninth inning as a pinch runner.

Twins: 3B Miguel Sano was “a little sore” after his batting practice session on Tuesday, according to Molitor. Sano has missed 24 straight games with a stress reaction in his left shin, with 17 games remaining in the regular season. “I don’t think it’s imminent, but he’s making progress,” Molitor said.

UP NEXT

Padres: After a day off on Thursday, the trip resumes in Colorado on Friday for a three-game series with LHP Clayton Richard (7-13, 4.78 ERA) taking his turn for the Padres and RHP Tyler Chatwood (7-12, 4.70 ERA) taking the mound for the Rockies.

Twins: RHP Jose Berrios (12-7, 3.94 ERA) starts the opener of a four-game series against Toronto. Berrios is 7-0 in his last seven starts at home, with 47 strikeouts and a 2.45 ERA in 47 2/3 innings with just 34 hits and seven walks allowed. LHP Brett Anderson (3-3, 5.90) takes the mound for the Blue Jays.

**Twins pitcher Mejia reinstated, scheduled to start Saturday**

FSN | September 13, 2017

Adalberto Mejia is returning to the Minnesota Twins’ rotation.

The Twins reinstated the lefty Wednesday, while communications director Dustin Morse announced via Twitter that Mejia is on track to start Saturday.

Mejia tossed five innings in a rehab start for Triple-A Rochester last week, allowing six hits and one earned run.

He made his most recent appearance for the Twins on Aug. 8, allowing seven hits in three innings, but was later diagnosed with a bicep strain.

Mejia has a 4.47 ERA and a 1.569 WHIP in 18 starts for the Twins this season.

**Real or not? The Twins are going from 100 losses to the playoffs**

David Schoenfield | ESPN | September 14, 2017

This looked like one of those games that gets away. The Minnesota Twins led the San Diego Padres 1-0 in the eighth behind six scoreless innings from Ervin Santana, but then Austin Hedges homered in the eighth off funky sidearmer Trevor Hildenberger. The Padres left two runners stranded in the eighth and two in the ninth, Jason Castro nailed a runner trying to steal, Matt Belisle escaped one jam and pitched a 1-2-3 10th inning and then Eddie Rosario swung from the heels on a 2-0 fastball from Phil Maton -- falling backward after the swing -- and made Twins fans happier than a 36-degree day in January:

Despite blowing the save in this game, the Minnesota bullpen has been very good since the beginning of August. It had a 4.83 ERA through the end of July, 28th in the majors. Since Aug. 1, it has a 3.73 ERA, eighth best in the majors. The veteran Belisle has seven saves replacing the traded Brandon Kintzler, but three others have picked up one as well. Hildenberger has been a key weapon in Paul Molitor’s no-name group,
appearing in 18 of 42 games since Aug. 1 with a 1.86 ERA. The star of Wednesday's game was Rosario, and he has been one of several Twins hitters tearing it up the past six weeks. He has 23 home runs, but 12 of them have come since Aug. 6 -- he's hitting .308 with 33 RBIs in 36 games since that date. Rosario has always had power potential since coming up in 2015, but he was undone by a poor approach that led to sub-.300 OBPs his first two seasons. While he's still not exactly Joey Votto at the plate, he has cut his chase rate by 4 percent from last season while also cutting down his swing-and-miss rate. Against Maton, he laid off two pitches just off the outside corner to get into a favorable hitter's count. With Miguel Sano out since Aug. 20, Molitor has even entrusted Rosario to bat cleanup at times, as on Wednesday. He's a big reason why the Twins lead the majors with 6.07 runs per game since Aug. 1 and why they have a good chance to become the first team ever to make the playoffs after losing 100 games the previous season. In fact, with seven of their final 17 games against the counting-down-to-the-season's-end Detroit Tigers, I'm calling it: The Twins will win that second American League wild card. Will the Cleveland Indians ever lose again? The Indians beat the Tigers 5-3 in an afternoon affair in Cleveland, moving past the 2002 A’s with their AL-record 21st consecutive victory. I covered that game and the highlights of their magical run in an earlier post. Up next: Four games at home against the Royals, a team the Indians have already shut out six times this season.

Sano Nearing Return, Likely As DH
Steve Adams | MLB Trade Rumors | September 13, 2017

Miguel Sano's return from a stress reaction in his left shin has been slow to progress, though the Twins slugger did some running drills Monday and took batting practice Tuesday, as Chad Graff of the St. Paul Pioneer Press writes. If and when Sano is ready to return — which could come in the next week, per Graff — it's likely that he'll be back in the lineup as the designated hitter. Manager Paul Molitor told reporters that he's more concerned about the absence of Sano's bat from the lineup than he is about his ability to return to the hot corner. The Twins are 11-10 in Sano’s absence, Graff points out, though certainly the Twins must be eager for the return of Sano’s .267/.356/.514 batting line and 28 homers as they look to hang onto the American League's second Wild Card slot.