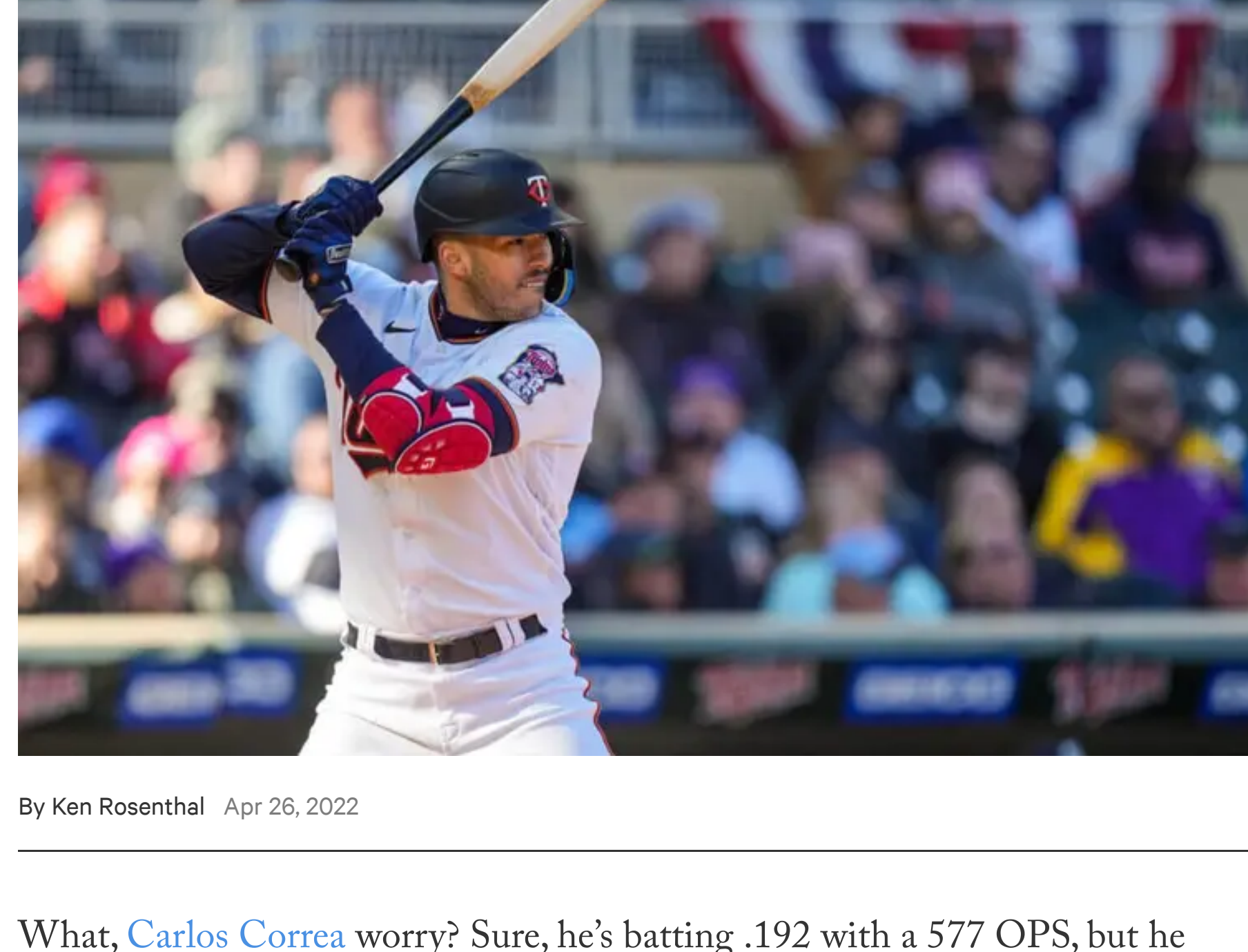




Rosenthal: Carlos Correa open to long-term with Twins, but short-term focus is finding his swing



By Ken Rosenthal Apr 26, 2022

What, [Carlos Correa](#) worry? Sure, he's batting .192 with a 577 OPS, but he barely had a spring training and rarely is at his best in April. He's healthy. He and his wife, Daniella, are enjoying their son, Kyo, who turns 5 months old on Friday. Correa's \$35.1 million salary is the highest for an infielder in major-league history, and guess what? He can opt out of his three-year contract with the [Twins](#) after this season and try free agency again.

Not that Correa is necessarily thinking along those lines, at least not yet. He loves his new club, the Minnesota Twins, loves being teammates with center fielder [Byron Buxton](#), whom he calls the "best player in the game." The season is less than one-tenth complete, but Correa said Saturday he already has spoken with Twins president of baseball operations Derek Falvey, general manager Thad Levine and Rocco Baldelli, expressing his willingness to sign for a longer term.

"I told 'em, 'Hey guys, I know I have the opt-outs in the contract. But I really like it here,'" Correa said. "I love the people here. I love the way I'm treated here. If you guys see the value I bring to this organization and what I do for other people around me and the game that I bring, I would love to have a long-term relationship here if that's what you guys would like."

"My wife feels right at home in Minnesota. My son is growing up. We feel right at home already and it's only been two or three weeks of the season. That's where I'm at mentally."

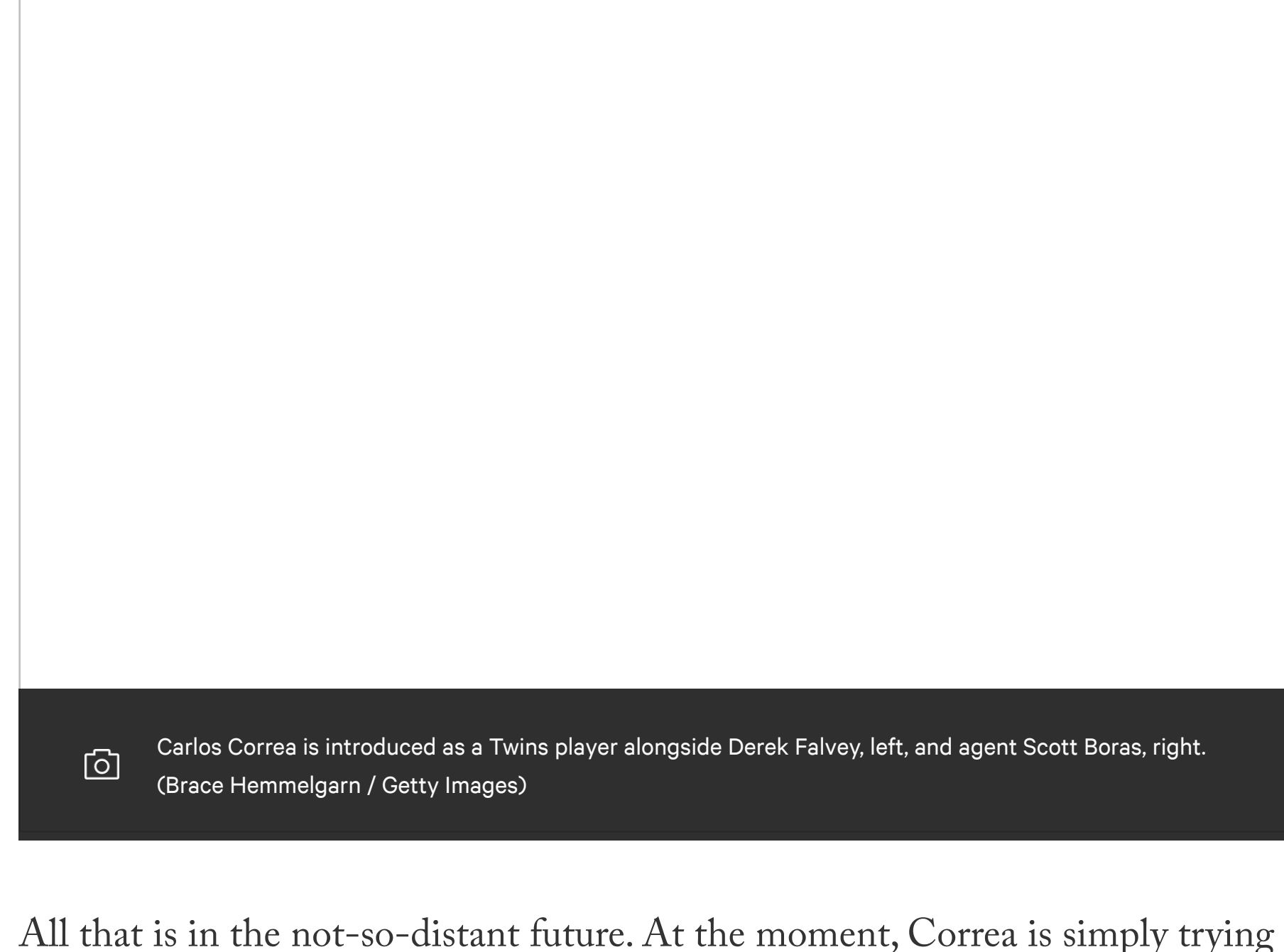
Informed of Correa's remarks, Falvey said the Twins were excited when Correa viewed them as a fit in March, and are encouraged that his early impressions of the team's environment are positive. He also said the team plans to continue a dialogue with Correa and his agent, Scott Boras.

"This offseason was obviously a unique one and the creativity that led to the ultimate contract structure made sense all around," Falvey said. "It was our hope then that he'd want to be here for the long-term and nothing about that sentiment has changed. Now out of respect for Carlos and for our team's focus on the field, we don't comment publicly on contracts in-season, but I certainly expect we'll maintain open lines of communication with both Carlos and Scott."

The best bet, of course, is that Correa will opt out. The Twins then would be forced to compete for him in a normal free-agent market as opposed to an unprecedented post-lockout frenzy in which no team offered him the long-term deal he wanted. Such were the conditions that led to his three-year, \$105.3 million contract with Minnesota that includes opt outs after the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

Correa, 27, is the youngest of the potential free-agent shortstops. The Braves' Dansby Swanson is nine months older, the Dodgers' Trea Turner 15 months older, the Red Sox's Xander Bogaerts two years older. Another potential advantage for Correa in the market would be that no player can receive a qualifying offer twice, and he rejected one from the [Astros](#) last offseason.

If the players and owners reach an agreement on an international draft by July 25, the qualifying-offer system and associated draft-pick compensation will be eliminated; Turner and Bogaerts, two players who likely would receive qualifying offers, would be among the potential beneficiaries. If no deal is struck, the system will remain intact, as will the current international amateur free agency structure.



Carlos Correa is introduced as a Twins player alongside Derek Falvey, left, and agent Scott Boras, right. (Grace Hermelgarn / Getty Images)

All that is in the not-so-distant future. At the moment, Correa is simply trying to get untracked. [Jeremy Peña](#), the rookie shortstop who succeeded him with the Astros, is outperforming Correa offensively and, according to the publicly available advanced metrics, defensively as well. But Correa, after signing with the Twins on March 21, did not appear in a Grapefruit League game until March 27. He made only 20 plate appearances in spring training, down from an average of 45 his previous seven seasons.

Baldelli rested him on Sunday, pointing out to reporters that Correa has been "playing a lot for a guy that had a short camp." Red Sox second baseman [Trevor Story](#), another free-agent position player who signed in late March and made even fewer plate appearances than Correa in spring training, also is off to a slow offensive start, batting .234 with a .592 OPS.

"All my Aprils are searching," said Correa, whose best months historically have been May, June and July. "I'm searching for that one click that makes me go, 'There it is. That's your swing.' When your body is just going to react to everything you're working on in the cage."

"The last couple of days, I've been feeling better. But this is my eighth year in the league. April is always a tough month for me. That's why you see me so calm. You'll never see me slamming a helmet or anything like that, showing frustration. April is just one month. And then we've got five more months of the season."

Correa said the moment he finds his swing, he can feel it in the batting cage. On Friday against the White Sox, he thought he was making progress, hitting three balls at least 97.6 mph, all with expected batting averages of .400 or better. But on Saturday, he lacked the same feel, and went 0-for-2 with two walks — "better," he said, "than going 0-for-4."

For the Twins to compete for the AL Central title, they probably need both Correa and Buxton to perform at elite levels, and for their largely unheralded rotation to sustain its early-season success. Baldelli, rather than dwell on Correa's early offensive struggles, mentions the intangibles he brings.

"The hunger to be great and to win, that's pronounced and it's very, very apparent to everyone when you're around Carlos Correa," Baldelli said. "I've said this: Normally on Day One (of spring training) when a (new) guy comes in, he kind of feels things out, says hello to a few people, puts his bags down, might get a little workout in."

"Day One, he was in there, huddled up with players, wanting to go look at all of the specifics of the complex, talk about Target Field, talk about the way we approach our meetings. He dove right in head-first. He has a deep desire to compete at the absolute highest level every day. He's not taking one second of the day and wasting it."

Correa acknowledges he was not always that way. He has grown increasingly particular about his preparation in recent seasons, saying he learned to better condition himself after missing a combined 139 games in 2018 and 2019 because of two trips to the injured list for back trouble and another for a fractured rib. He now follows a set plan before each game, performing a variety of exercises designed to strengthen his core and help with his mobility.

His warmup takes 25 to 30 minutes, sometimes longer if he works out more extensively. He will run on a treadmill for about five minutes at an incline. He also will do a core workout, saying with a smile, "I do it for stability, but also because I like my abs. I like to have abs. It's a 2-for-1 special right there." He also works on his legs, and after games will sometimes put on electronically stimulated leg compression boots.

"I am staying on the field now because I have a routine," said Correa, who appeared in all but two games in the 60-game 2020 season and all but 14 last season, three because he was on the COVID-19 injured list. "Back when I was young. I would show up at 1:30 for a 7 o'clock game. I would eat, go straight to the cage, no prep, no warmup, no mobility, no nothing, and just take G-hacks (hard swings) from the moment I got there."

"I would hit four or five times a day. In 2018, that happened with my back, I was stupid. I was just doing sh— without prepping my body, warming up my body to get ready. Now I prep my body."

Yet, as sometimes happens in free agency, whispers surfaced last offseason that Correa was not fully healthy, that his back was still an issue. After Correa left Jon Rosen of WME for Boras in January, Boras had him visit Dr. Robert Watkins, whose [website describes him](#) as the "top spine surgeon for professional athletes in the world." Both Correa and Boras said Watkins gave him a clean bill of health, and Boras conveyed that information to clubs.

"We did a detailed medical review of Carlos' past and present medical records and arranged a battery of physician exams," Boras said. "The findings confirmed a very elite and healthy player and dismissed any rumored concerns."

Added Correa, "(Watkins) said, 'This dude is as stable, as healthy as he can be.' Hearing that from the best back doctor in the world, it was reassuring. I knew that already because I've been feeling great. But to get that expert opinion, after an MRI and the work I've been putting in ..."

"This is what I tell people. There's no way you can go out and win a Platinum Glove if your back is not right. There's no way you can put up an .850 OPS if your back is not right against the elite pitching we're facing nowadays. There's no way you play 148 games — and I could have played more, but the COVID IL got me — if your back's not right. There's no way you sign a \$105 million deal for three years, go through physicals for insurance and for the team if it's not right."

Still, Correa said he grew "kind of anxious" when his market did not materialize in the way he envisioned at the start of the offseason. He enjoyed spending extra time with his son, who was born three days before the start of owners' lockout. But the uncertainty of not knowing where he would land and the lack of time to negotiate the long-term deal he wanted left him unsettled.

"In my mind, it was relax, just wait, if you have to wait until after the lockout, wait," Correa said. "You had a great season. You're only 27. You're healthy. Just wait for a long-term deal. But after the lockout everyone was trying to figure out what was going to happen. Everyone was trying to sign pitchers, figure out their rosters. There was not enough time. So, Plan B."

Plan B was the Twins, who swept the White Sox over the weekend to improve their record to 8-8, good enough for first place in the AL Central. The initial part of the Twins' schedule — three games against the [Mariners](#) and two against the [Dodgers](#) at home, four against the Red Sox on the road — was