



Press Clips

(May 12, 2018)

CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **Angels bullpen falters in ninth inning of loss to Twins**
- **After a slow start, Angels' Blake Parker is back to his comfort zone: proving himself**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 6)

- **Angels rookie Justin Anderson can't hold lead in ninth inning of 5-4 loss to Twins**
- **Angels star Shohei Ohtani sees pitchers making adjustments against him**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 9)

- **Upton keeps mashing, but Angels stung in 9th**
- **Ohtani gets second try in cleanup spot**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 12)

- **In need of relief: Angels bullpen can't hold lead in the ninth, gives the Twins a 5-4 victory**
- **Andrelton Simmons continues his offensive revolution at the plate**

FROM MLB.COM (PAGE 16)

- **Trout hits 118 mph line drive ... for the game-ending out***

FROM MiLB.COM (PAGE 17)

- **Rojas completes cycle in grand fashion**

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (PAGE 19)

- **Rosario homers twice, Twins rally in ninth, beat Angels 5-4**

FROM SB NATION (PAGE 20)

- **In case you hadn't noticed, Shohei Ohtani still rules**

FROM DEADSPIN (PAGE 21)

- **Here Are Two More Dope Baseball Things Shohei Ohtani Can Do**

FROM BASEBALL ESSENTIAL (PAGE 22)

- **Ohtani's Greatness, Versatility is Something to Behold**

FROM KYODO NEWS (PAGE 23)

- **Baseball: Ohtani takes 2nd swing at cleanup in Angels' 5-4 loss to Twins**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Angels bullpen falters in ninth inning of loss to Twins**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Mike Scioscia first gave rookie Justin Anderson a shot at a save, weeks into his big league career.

When that didn't work, he turned to veteran closer Jim Johnson to bail him out.

And that didn't work either.

Anderson and Johnson both allowed runs in the ninth inning of the Angels' 5-4 loss to the Minnesota Twins on Friday.

The Angels took a 4-2 lead into the ninth, built upon Justin Upton's fourth homer in as many games and the strong pitching of starter Tyler Skaggs and perfect relief from Noé Ramírez in the seventh and Anderson in the eighth.

But Scioscia stuck with Anderson, who has three weeks on his big league resume, to pitch the ninth.

"He had a real clean eighth," Scioscia said. "We definitely felt Justin had enough to get through that ninth, but unfortunately it didn't work."

With two lefties and a switch-hitter due, the obvious choice for the ninth would have been lefty José Álvarez. However, Scioscia said Álvarez was not available, having pitched on Wednesday and Thursday, including 22 pitches over two innings in his most recent game.

Johnson and Keynan Middleton, the two right-handers with closing experience, had also thrown 17 and 22 pitches the night before, which no doubt contributed to Scioscia's desire to give them the night off.

The Angels bullpen was worked hard in April, with two of the more effective pitchers – Middleton and Blake Wood – already hitting the disabled list. Johnson said it's to be expected for Scioscia to err on the side of caution in managing the bullpen workload as much as possible.

"If you save a guy a day in May, then he can abuse us in August and September," Johnson said with a smile. "I was told that by another manager. He's playing for the long haul."

In the short haul, it didn't work.

Anderson returned to the mound and immediately gave up a homer to Eddie Rosario, his second of the game. After a strikeout, Anderson allowed a double to Logan Morrison.

"I felt fine going out there," Anderson said. "Just didn't get the job done."

Scioscia then summoned Johnson, who had picked up the save on Thursday night. The Angels intentionally walked pinch-hitter Max Kepler, putting the go-ahead run on base.

Scioscia said he liked the matchup with the right-handed hitting Garver and Bobby Wilson against Johnson instead of the left-handed Kepler, whose .864 OPS is evidence that he's clearly a more dangerous hitter.

Also, Johnson is a ground ball specialist, and Scioscia was setting up a potential double play.

Johnson, though, hung a breaking ball to Garver, who hit a ground ball just inside the first base line, driving in the tying run and sending Kepler to third. Wilson followed with a fly ball to left, driving in the go-ahead run.

After the Angels gave up the lead, they still had a chance against Fernando Rodney in the bottom of the ninth. With a runner at first and two out, Mike Trout blistered a line drive 118 mph right at shortstop Gregorio Petit. It was the hardest any Angel had hit a ball in the four seasons that Statcast has been tracking exit velocity.

So ended a night that should have been better for the Angels.

Skaggs had continued the Angels' strong starting pitching this month. Skaggs gave up two runs in six innings. Angels starters have a 2.14 ERA this month, the best in the league. In 10 games, only one of them has allowed as many as three runs.

The offense has also been clicking, especially Upton. His two-run shot in the third inning put the Angels ahead 3-1.

Slumping Kole Calhoun even had two hits, his first multi-hit game since April 11. His third-inning single led to a run that put the Angels on the board, just before Upton put them ahead with a two-run homer.

Upton had the Angels' 15th streak of at least four straight games with a homer, which includes Bobby Bonds' club record five-game streak in 1977. Mike Trout was the last to homer in four straight games, achieving the feat last year.

The blast was Upton's fifth homer in the past six games. He now has 10 homers for the season. Over the past five years, the Angels had averaged 11.4 homers per season out of all their left fielders.

After a slow start, Angels' Blake Parker is back to his comfort zone: proving himself

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Turns out that Blake Parker's slow start this year might have been indirectly related to his outstanding season last year.

Parker had never come into a spring training with a guaranteed job and expectations. He'd always been the guy trying to win a spot, trying to make a name for himself.

For as much as he insisted that he was keeping the same mindset this spring, he now concedes that it might not have worked.

"Maybe I wasn't completely ready like I should be," he said on Friday. "I'm going to take it like a lesson."

Veteran players often discount the results in spring training, because they are simply getting ready for opening day. For Parker, this was the first spring that he had the luxury of doing that.

He thinks maybe that position didn't suit him.

"I just need to come in and go with what got me here, instead of just trying to get ready for opening day," he said. "That's not a routine that I'm used to. ... I hate to call it my comfort zone, but that's where I've been my whole career. I've never been a big name guy. I've always prided myself on proving myself."

Parker, a 32-year-old who had never spent an entire season in the majors before posting a 2.54 ERA in 2017, was careful to say he didn't blame his poor start on the way he approached spring training, just that it was something different.

There have also been mechanical issues that he's been working to iron out throughout the first month of the season, he said.

In his first eight games, he gave up nine hits and four walks in seven innings, with an ERA of 6.43. In the next nine games, he gave up 10 hits and two walks in 11 innings, with an ERA of 1.64.

"I think it just took me just working on one thing every day and finally putting it all together and having a few good outings in a row and using that to build off," Parker said. "And having a couple zeroes helps your mentality."

Parker's underdog mentality was perhaps best demonstrated last year by the fact that he lived all season in a recreational vehicle, which he bought so it would be easy to go between the minors and majors. This year, with a new baby, he arranged for more traditional housing.

If the poor start had gone on too long, Parker quipped, he might have had to go back to the RV: "That would have been the next step."

TROPEANO'S TURN

Nick Tropeano passed the tests of his two bullpen sessions this week, so he is expected to come off the disabled list to start on Saturday.

He will have missed the minimum 10 days with what the team described as shoulder inflammation. Tropeano never stopped throwing while he was on the disabled list, which gives the impression that the Angels were using the short DL stint for roster management.

The Angels will need to make another roster move to create a spot for Tropeano. Given how well Jaime Barría has pitched, it seems unlikely he'd go back down for the third time. The Angels could then finally have six starters on the active roster at once, a configuration they've had for just one day all season.

ALSO

Blake Wood (elbow impingement) had his second bullpen session on Friday. Manager Mike Scioscia said he'll be evaluated, but it's possible his next step could be a rehab assignment. ...

Albert Pujols got the day off on Friday, so Shohei Ohtani hit cleanup for the second time.

UP NEXT

Angels (Nick Tropeano, 1-2, 3.42) vs. Twins (Kyle Gibson, 1-1, 3.49), Saturday, 6 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels rookie Justin Anderson can't hold lead in ninth inning of 5-4 loss to Twins

By Jeff Miller

They gave away dolls featuring the likeness of Andrelton Simmons with a bobbling head on Friday at Angel Stadium.

Maybe they should have distributed dolls featuring the likeness of an Angels fan, with a shaking head.

Because what looked like a victory over Minnesota dissolved into a stinging 5-4 loss when manager Mike Scioscia's decision to allow rookie reliever Justin Anderson to return for the ninth inning backfired.

"Justin's definitely a multi-inning guy," Scioscia said. "...We definitely felt Justin had enough to get through that ninth. Unfortunately, it didn't work."

Anderson had retired the top of the Twins' order 1-2-3 in the eighth, striking out two. In the ninth, however, he gave up a leadoff homer to Eddie Rosario and was charged with two more runs as Minnesota rallied to take the lead after Jim Johnson relieved Anderson.

The rookie hadn't pitched two innings yet but had worked more than one inning on three occasions.

Another ninth-inning decision by Scioscia also backfired when he opted to intentionally walk Max Kepler, who represented the potential go-ahead run. That potential was realized when Kepler scored on a sacrifice fly by former Angel Bobby Wilson.

Scioscia could only explain that he preferred the matchups made possible by the intentional walk.

The defeat ruined what had been excellent nights for Justin Upton and Tyler Skaggs. Upton homered for the fourth consecutive game — a career first — and Skaggs pitched well enough to win.

Upton's two-run shot off Lance Lynn in the third inning put the Angels up 3-1. He has home runs in five of six games and six of nine, all after Upton had slumped to a .228 average and .368 slugging percentage on May 1.

The last time an Angel hit more than 10 homers as the left fielder came in 2012. Upton has 10 now, with 124 games to go.

His latest blast completed a three-run rally that began with something that must have felt like a one-man revival to Kole Calhoun.

Struggling mightily and moved to the bench this week, Calhoun dropped a single into shallow left field for his first hit since May 3. Following a single by Martin Maldonado, Calhoun came home on Zack Cozart's fielder's choice for his first run since April 12. Later, Calhoun added another single for his first multi-hit game since April 11.

For Skaggs, the game marked another step forward. His ninth pitch of the night ended up as a souvenir, Brian Dozier hammering it over the fence in left.

In the first two games of this series, Dozier is six for seven with a walk, the Angels spitting the first two with the Twins while being thoroughly beaten by one of them.

Skaggs responded to that potentially deflating moment by striking out four of the next five Minnesota batters, and he was on his way to another quality start, his third of the season.

He briefly lost his command in the third inning, giving up a two-out single and consecutive walks, but left the bases loaded by inducing a fly out.

The only other damaging swing the Twins managed off Skaggs was Rosario's solo homer in the sixth.

Other than that, he held Minnesota in check, giving the Angels' offense the time and space it would need.

Unfortunately for the home team and its fans, everything eventually went to pieces following one decision that turned sour.

Maldonado singled in the ninth, but Cozart and Mike Trout hit lasers off Fernando Rodney to center and short for the final outs.

Angels star Shohei Ohtani sees pitchers making adjustments against him

By Jeff Miller

Saying his acclimation is "still in progress," Shohei Ohtani acknowledged he isn't entirely sure yet how to hit big-league pitching.

Makes you wonder what he might be capable of doing when he has a better grasp of the situation.

Ohtani, who batted fourth as the Angels' designated hitter Friday, entered the game with a .354 average, 1.077 on-base-plus-slugging percentage and five home runs. He was 10th on the team with 65 at-bats but tied for fourth in homers and fifth with 16 RBIs.

"It's just a matter of going out there and seeing pitchers, gaining the experience," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's doing a good job."

Ohtani, with a single Friday, has hit safely in 15 of his first 17 starts as a batter. He has only two 0-for-4s. He also had his first successful pinch-hitting appearance this week, singling at Colorado on Wednesday.

The matter of his adjustments and his progress came up after he homered and doubled Thursday in the Angels' 7-4 victory over Minnesota, the hits coming on pitches that moved to the outside edge of the plate.

"Earlier in the year, I feel like they were throwing me inside a lot more than now," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I was still able to hit the ball pretty well ... so maybe they're trying to test pitching me away."

Ohtani's next pitching start is scheduled for Sunday in the finale of this four-game series. It will be Ohtani's third home start, following seven, one-hit innings against Oakland on April 8 and two, blister-impacted innings against Boston on April 17.

Middleton has 'bad night' in return

Keynan Middleton's return was a bit choppy Thursday as he walked two and gave up a double.

"I just didn't make the pitches I wanted to make," the Angels' save leader said Friday. "I think it was just a bad night. There will be better nights."

Middleton (elbow inflammation) made one rehab appearance at triple-A Salt Lake before rejoining the Angels from the 10-day disabled list.

Short hops

Nick Tropeano (shoulder inflammation) is expected to come off the disabled list Saturday to start against Minnesota. ...The next step for reliever Blake Wood (elbow impingement) could be a rehab assignment, Scioscia said. Wood has been on the DL since April 23. ... Albert Pujols didn't start Friday as the Angels are early in a stretch of 29 games in 30 days.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Upton keeps mashing, but Angels stung in 9th

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Rookie Justin Anderson has made a stunning rise over the last month, ascending from Double-A to the Majors and quickly entrenching himself as a reliable arm in the back end of the Angels' bullpen.

Anderson found himself thrust into yet another high-leverage spot Friday night, entering the game in the eighth inning to face the Twins with the Angels leading by two runs. The 25-year-old right-hander promptly struck out two over a perfect inning, giving manager Mike Scioscia the confidence to send him back out for the ninth for the first save opportunity of his young career.

But the move backfired. Anderson and veteran Jim Johnson ultimately faltered, allowing the Twins to score three runs in the ninth to emerge with a 5-4 win over the Angels, evening their four-game series at Angel Stadium.

"We definitely felt like Justin had enough to get through that ninth," Scioscia said. "But unfortunately it didn't work."

The Angels took a 4-2 lead into the ninth on the strength of Justin Upton's fourth home run in as many games and strong pitching from left-hander Tyler Skaggs, but Eddie Rosario brought the Twins within one by crushing a misplaced slider from Anderson to right-center field for his second home run of the night.

Anderson then struck out Robbie Grossman swinging before yielding a double to Logan Morrison. Scioscia decided to intentionally walk Max Kepler to put the go-ahead run on base and then brought in Johnson to face pinch-hitter Mitch Garver.

"Matchup situation," Scioscia said. "Think we have J.J. who can come into the game, much better matchup against [Garver and] Bobby Wilson to try to hold that lead and possibly get that ground-ball double play."

Garver promptly shot a hanging breaking ball from Johnson down the right-field line to tie the game, and Wilson followed with a sacrifice fly to left field to bring in the go-ahead run from third, giving the Twins a 5-4 lead.

"Three more outs, we would have won that game," Anderson said. "We've been playing really good baseball right now. Everybody is just clicking right now as a team. I felt fine going back out there. I just didn't get the job done."

Twins closer Fernando Rodney surrendered a one-out single to Martin Maldonado to put the tying run on first in the bottom of the ninth, but Zack Cozart and Mike Trout both lined out to end the game. The ball that Trout hit rocketed off his bat at 118 mph -- the Angels' hardest-hit ball since Statcast™'s introduction in 2015 -- but it was snagged by shortstop Gregorio Petit.

The Angels squandered a strong effort from Skaggs, who yielded two runs on six hits while walking two and striking out seven over six innings. Skaggs continued an impressive run for the Angels' rotation, which has posted a 2.14 ERA (14 runs over 59 innings) over the club's 10 games this month.

"I thought Tyler had a good game, good command of the fastball," Scioscia said. "Though his changeup wasn't as effective tonight, he still pitched with all his pitches and gave us a chance to win, no doubt."

The Twins jumped out to a 1-0 lead after Brian Dozier homered in the first inning, but the Angels erased the deficit by scoring three runs in the third. Kole Calhoun led off the inning with a single to left field -- his first hit since May 3 -- and advanced to third on Maldonado's ensuing single before scoring on Cozart's forceout to tie the game. Upton then crushed a high fastball from Twins starter Lance Lynn to the bleachers in right field for a two-run homer that gave the Angels a 3-1 lead.

The 30-year-old left fielder has homered in five of his last six games and six of his last nine, giving him 10 home runs on the season. He's batting .351 (13-for-37) with six home runs and 14 RBIs over his last nine games.

The Angels threatened again in the fifth after Maldonado singled and Upton walked to put runners on first and second with two outs. Twins manager Paul Molitor had left-handed reliever Taylor Rogers warming in the bullpen with lefty slugger Shohei Ohtani on deck, but he decided to come out to the mound to talk to Lynn, who convinced Molitor to leave him in the game.

Ohtani, who batted cleanup in place of Albert Pujols for only the second time this season Friday, followed by lining a low fastball on the outside corner for an opposite-field single that loaded the bases. Lynn then walked Andrelton Simmons to force in a run and extend the Angels' lead to 4-1. Molitor subsequently replaced Lynn with Rogers, who induced an inning-ending groundout from Luis Valbuena.

Rosario launched a solo home run off Skaggs to make it 4-2 with two outs in the sixth.

"I didn't think my fastball command was that good tonight, but I battled," Skaggs said. "Just some timely pitches, defense really helped me out today. Got a little tired towards the end, but overall I thought it was really good."

SOUND SMART

Calhoun finished 2-for-4 Friday to record his first multi-hit game since April 11.

UP NEXT

Angels right-hander Nick Tropeano (1-2, 3.42 ERA) is expected to be activated off the disabled list and start opposite Twins righty Kyle Gibson (1-1, 3.49 ERA) on Saturday night at 6:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. Tropeano, who missed one turn in the rotation due to right shoulder inflammation, last pitched May 1, when he fired 6 1/3 scoreless innings against the Orioles.

Ohtani gets second try in cleanup spot

By Avery Yang

ANAHEIM -- Shohei Ohtani batted in the cleanup position for just the second time in his young Major League career Friday against the Twins. The last time he did so, on April 22 against Johnny Cueto and the Giants, he went 1-for-4 with two strikeouts.

He took Albert Pujols' spot in the lineup, as Pujols sat out for rest.

Ohtani entered Friday with a slashline of .354/.400/.677. He has hit safely in 14 out of his 16 starts at designated hitter and went 2-for-4 with a towering homer and RBI double Thursday against the Twins.

Tropeano likely starting Saturday

Though not quite yet official, manager Mike Scioscia all but stated that Nick Tropeano will be coming off his short stint on the disabled list -- where he's been since May 2 with shoulder inflammation -- to start Saturday against the Twins.

"Everything came well out of the bullpen," Tropeano said Friday. "I'm ready to go for tomorrow if the big man calls upon me."

The big man?

"That's Scios, you know that."

Tropeano last pitched May 1, when he threw a one-hitter against the Orioles over 6 1/3 innings. He has a 3.42 ERA, 4.39 FIP and 1.14 WHIP over four starts this season.

"Nick has a variety of pitches and he uses them," Scioscia said. "When he's going well, you'll see that balance. He did a good job with it [in his last start]."

Cozart leads off, Kinsler seventh again

Zack Cozart led off, with Ian Kinsler dropping to the seventh spot, again Friday, a formula that worked to a tee -- for Kinsler, at least -- in the series opener Thursday, the first iteration of that combination so far this season. Kinsler finished the game 3-for-4 with a homer, two runs and two RBIs after having previously been mired in a 3-for-31 slump. It was his first home run outside of the leadoff position since 2015.

"Those guys bring an important part to the structure of our offense," Scioscia said. "Obviously, Ian's a guy that's hit in a lot of spots -- he's hit in RBI spots, he's led off. Same as Zack. Wherever they're going to fit in to make our lineup effective and as deep as it can be, we'll look at."

Kinsler hit behind Andrelton Simmons, who entered Friday second in batting average and seventh in on-base percentage in the AL with a slashline of .351/.410/.511. He hit safely in 13 out of his last 14 games, averaging .429 over that stretch, with two home runs and 14 RBIs.

A big factor of his success so far has been his eye at the plate, which has been at the highest level in his career -- his chase rate is more than 9 percentage points lower than any previous year. Overall, he is on pace to shatter almost all of his previous career highs offensively.

"I'm happy with the plate discipline I've shown this year," Simmons said. "I'm trying to put up numbers offensively. Can't complain with what's going on right now."

The skipper seems to agree.

"Andrelton works very hard on his offense, and I think he's getting the results," Scioscia said. "You're seeing him use the whole field, you're seeing him drive the ball. He's done everything from get bunts down for us to knock in big runs to hitting home runs. He's made some big strides on the offensive side the last couple years."

That duo of Kinsler and Simmons worked together from the six- and seven-holes to score four of the seven runs -- and produce two of the seven -- scored Thursday against the Twins. One of the other run producers Thursday, Kole Calhoun, notched his first RBI since April 23, something he had not done in 36 at-bats. Calhoun's slashline was at .161/.187/.203 entered Friday, when he again batted eighth.

"It's tough to put some things together when you know that some guys who you know are much better than they have been haven't been on their game -- Kole, Ian -- these guys are great offensive players that aren't quite there yet," Scioscia said. "When they are, it's going to give us more options to look at as we move forward."

FROM THE ATHLETIC

In need of relief: Angels bullpen can't hold lead in the ninth, gives the Twins a 5-4 victory

By Steve Dilbeck

It is not defined. It is not overrun with significant names. There is no particular history of great success.

Still, the Angels' bullpen has been surprisingly successful early into the 2018 season, and that success has been much needed since the team's starting rotation has struggled to pitch deep into games, barely averaging five innings per start.

The heavy workload, however, may have finally caught up to the Angels on Friday night, with the bullpen unable to hold a two-run lead in the ninth and the Twins scoring three runs for a stunning 5-4 victory.

This time, relief options were hardly in abundance for manager Mike Scioscia.

"We're a little thin down there," he said.

The Angels' unofficial closer is 24-year-old Keynan Middleton, but he was just back from the disabled list due to a sore right elbow, and had already pitched the previous night. Blake Wood remains on the DL with a sore right elbow, and left-hander José Álvarez had already pitched the previous two nights.

So Scioscia rolled the dice with right-hander Justin Anderson, a 25-year-old rookie who has been an unexpected success for LA since being called up at the end of April. Anderson throws in the upper 90s and had been scored upon in only one of his eight previous games.

Anderson retired the Twins in order in the eighth, and after speaking with Scioscia, was sent back out in the ninth to preserve the 4-2 lead. Anderson, who had not thrown two full innings this season, would have been the fifth different reliever to save a game for the Angels.

Only it never happened.

"It was just another inning, three more outs for that game," Anderson said. "I felt fine going out there, just didn't get the job done."

Twins left fielder Eddie Rosario led off the ninth with his second solo home run of the game.

"Just a bad pitch right there," Anderson said. "He got me. Just learn from that right there and move forward."

Anderson came back to strike out Robbie Grossman, but then Logan Morrison doubled and Max Kepler was intentionally walked, despite being the winning run. Scioscia said it was a matter of matchups, and called on veteran right-hander Jim Johnson to try and finish it.

Facing a defensive shift, right-handed pinch-hitter Mitch Garver bounced a single just down the right-field line to score Morrison with the tying run. Things were slipping away for the Angels.

"I hung it," Johnson said. "He's not supposed to hit it. It's supposed to be a strikeout or a weak ground ball or a lazy fly ball. It was just poorly executed, and I paid the price for it."

When catcher Bobby Wilson lifted a fly to left, it was deep enough to score Kepler with the winning run.

Wilson celebrates with center fielder Max Kepler after hitting the go-ahead sacrifice fly in Minnesota's 5-4 win. (Credit: Kelvin Kuo-USA TODAY Sports)

Neither the rookie nor veteran could bring it home. Scioscia had attempted to be cautious with his bullpen, but that idea had blown up. Angels relievers have thrown more innings than any bullpen in the American League. Its ERA is a respectable 3.60 (10th), but all this juggling and heavy usage seems to have taken a toll.

"We were getting a heavy workload early on," Johnson said. "It was kind of hidden because we were winning ballgames. With Blake getting banged up and (Middleton), I think they're just trying to spread the load a little bit more, asking a couple other guys."

“Sometimes you play it a little bit cautious just trying to get guys ample rest. If you save a guy a day here in May, early in the year, and save a day here and there, then he can abuse us in August and September. I was told that by another manager. He’s playing for the long haul.”

Johnson said he was not concerned about how Anderson, up in the majors for all of three weeks, would respond to his poor outing.

“He’ll be fine,” Johnson said. “He’s got incredible stuff, and this is his first time in the big leagues. They’re throwing him right into the fire, and he’s doing a great job.”

With the Angels, everyone in the bullpen gets a turn. Roles can shift daily. And Scioscia has never been shy of going to his hot hand.

The bullpen was one of the Angels’ greatest concerns entering the season, but up until this point has performed better than most expected. On this night, Scioscia tried to push a young arm and it failed.

“Justin is definitely a multi-inning guy,” he said. “He was still throwing the ball well. We definitely felt Justin had enough to get through that ninth. Unfortunately, it didn’t work.”

Andrelton Simmons continues his offensive revolution at the plate

By Fabian Ardaya

“Do you know how good you’ve been on offense?”

The question left Andrelton Simmons laughing. Too often he’s been asked more about the tan glove that sits in his corner locker, not his bat. After a series of question about the extended breakout that’s vaulted him among the best all-around shortstops in the game, Simmons was still shaking his head.

“I don’t know if you noticed, but Trout snuck in there behind you,” Simmons said, referring to the two-time AL MVP a few lockers over. “He’s probably the guy you actually want to talk to. ... I’m not sure why I’ve been all booked up lately (with interviews).”

Mike Trout sat in a rolling chair a few feet away, chirping his way through a competitive makeshift game of “HORSE” by trying to make a shot into the trash bin a few feet away. He wasn’t the subject in mind. Plus, he was clearly occupied.

Sure, Trout has continued to be great. Probably the best in baseball. But he wasn’t the only Angels player to finish in the top 10 in the AL MVP voting last season. That honor also belongs to Simmons, who finished eighth while adding a third Gold Glove and another assortment of defensive highlights.

But at the plate? Simmons blossomed last season, producing a .278/.331/.421 line with a 102 OPS+ and 103 wRC+. By putting together his best offensive season to date, still a league-average offensive season overall, he logged a career-best 7.1 bWAR. Simple competency at the offensive side of the game turned

his defense — he's been responsible for a major-league-best 45.4 defensive runs saved since the Angels acquired him in a November 2015 trade from Atlanta — into one of the game's most valuable assets.

This year to date, he's been even better. Competency has been replaced by borderline stardom through the season's first month, posting a 153 OPS+ and 155 wRC+ through his first 35 games entering Friday. That's 53 and 55 percent *better than the average player* and approaching the likes of a Trout or Shohei Ohtani. He's cut his strikeout rate (from 10.4 percent to 6.2) and is even walking more than he's punching out for the first time in his career. That's all with more slug (.511), unlocking some power potential the club saw from Simmons' rookie season in Atlanta, when he hit 17 homers.

"He showed a lot of power in his first year in the big leagues with Atlanta, so we knew that was in there," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "But he's become an efficient hitter. He's tough to strike out. He's walked more times than he's struck out this year, and that's an exclamation point. You don't see that very often. He's done a good job."

In a game that's seeing batters taking more pitches and seeing more pitches per plate appearance than ever, Simmons has zigged where others have zagged. His 3.24 average pitches seen per plate appearance entering Friday ranked second-lowest in baseball. It an aggressive approach, Simmons said, that's fostered his development. He's always been one to jump on early pitches, but now he's just doing a better job of picking the right early pitches to swing on.

"I think I'm just squaring up those balls better now," Simmons said. "To me, it doesn't matter when you swing. You've just got to square up the ball. I mean, if you swing at the first pitch and square it up 90 percent of the time, you're going to be sitting pretty good. If they don't give you pitches early and you see it later and you square it up then, that works, too. Whenever you swing, just square it up and you're good."

Quite simply, Simmons has been hard to get out. He's chasing at the lowest rate of his career (20.8 percent). And when he does swing, his contact rate ranks 11th in baseball (88.4 percent). But Simmons dismissed that it's simply a matter of putting the bat on the ball.

"It's good, but you want to make good contact," he said. "You don't want to make weak contact all the time. What I try to do now is, whenever I go up there, I make sure I hit the ball hard somewhere."

He's right, and he's done just that, hitting more line drives (24.2 percent) and pulling the ball (50.4 percent) more than at any point in his career, tapping back into that power in the process. His contact is quality contact, with his average exit velocity jumping from 85.9 mph to 89.4 entering Friday.

"I think I just have a better approach," Simmons said. "I lost a bit of my aggressiveness (when I first came here) for a couple years, but I've been finding it again. Feeling comfortable, feeling strong. I mean, just squaring up the baseball, and it's carrying a little longer, going further away."

Part of feeling comfortable has begun in how Simmons has loaded up in the box. Upon arriving with the Angels in early 2016, he began experimenting with an abbreviated leg kick, looking to generate more pop and build off his early offensive success in Atlanta.

It didn't work. He quickly scrapped the leg kick, returning to a toe tap he'd employed for much of his career, with much better results. He's still tinkered with the idea of a leg kick, even incorporating it into some of his batting practice sessions to keep things fresh.

"It just feels right," Simmons said. "I'm assuming it's a timing thing, but I mean sometimes I question like, 'If I did a leg kick, I'd be better.' But the toe tap, it works. I think about mechanics a lot. I'll leg kick in (batting) practice, in the cage every once in a while, just so if one day I have to try that, I have a backup option. But I mean, so far, the toe tap's been working, so I'm sticking with it as long as I can."

He's right again; it is a timing thing. Take a look at this April 2016 at-bat when Simmons is facing Jake Arrieta. The former Cubs and current Phillies right-hander's off-speed stuff can be devastating on any right-handed hitter. But here, he's just late, unable to get his foot down in time before weakly grounding out. A couple years later, facing Twins right-hander José Berríos on Thursday, he's able to use the toe tap to easily cover the outer half of the plate and punch a single the other way.

Whether his elite hitting is sustainable or not, the Angels netted great value in plucking Simmons from Atlanta. His acquisition opened the door to shift free-agent signee Zack Cozart to third base this offseason. That, combined with the acquisition of Ian Kinsler, has helped the Angels to top baseball with 77.8 defensive runs saved so far this season. His glove has always preceded him, but his bat is what he hopes will propel him from defensive savant to genuine star.

"I think the last couple years have shown that I'm capable of putting up offensive numbers also," he said. "Defense has always come first, and for myself that's always been a big thing — my defense. But as soon as I'm off the field, I'm trying to put up numbers."

"I still think I'm capable of doing more."

FROM MLB.COM

Trout hits 118 mph line drive ... for game-ending out

By David Adler

Hit 'em where they ain't -- it's a saying nearly as old as Major League Baseball itself, and a lesson Mike Trout and the Angels learned in the hardest of ways Friday night in Anaheim.

The superstar center fielder came to bat as the potential winning run with a man on first and two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, facing Twins closer Fernando Rodney with the Halos trailing, 5-4. Trout absolutely scorched a 118.0 mph line drive -- the third-hardest batted ball in MLB this season. It should have been a hit. If Trout had hit it nearly anywhere else, it would have been. But he hit it directly at Minnesota shortstop Gregorio Petit for a game-ending lineout.

Just how unlucky was Trout? First of all, the hit probability on his line drive was 80 percent, based on its 118 mph exit velocity and eight-degree launch angle. But not only that, it was the Angels' *hardest batted ball of any kind* since Statcast™ started tracking in 2015. Trout's liner was also just the 18th ball hit in the

air with an exit velocity of 118-plus mph since Statcast™ debuted. It was the first one that went for an out.

***Article edited to include only Angels-related material.

FROM MiLB.COM

Rojas completes cycle in grand fashion

Angels prospect drives in career-best seven runs on historic night

By Andrew Battifarano

Double-A Mobile has already had its share of historic moments early this season, and when Jose Rojas got the opportunity to make some history of his own on Friday night, the Angels prospect came through in grand fashion.

Rojas crushed a grand slam in the eighth inning to complete the cycle and power the BayBears to a 14-3 victory over Mississippi at Trustmark Park. He set a career high with seven RBIs and matched a personal best with four hits, going 4-for-6.

It was the franchise's first cycle since Zach Borenstein accomplished the feat on May 16, 2015.

It didn't take Rojas any extra effort to complete a career night, as building off a strong foundation he set early this season proved to be the key.

"I felt good. It was the same approach as usual," he said. "I was just trying to get a good pitch and hit the ball hard. ... It was one of those days where you're not really thinking about it until that third or fourth hit. Like I said, it was the same the approach as usual, going up the plate and hitting it hard. It worked out."

The first six weeks of the season have been filled with notable accomplishments for Mobile, as ninth-ranked Angels prospect Matt Thaiss and Connor Justus turned a triple play on April 17. Eleven days later, No. 8 prospect Griffin Canning combined with relievers Matt Custred and Ryan Clark on a no-hitter.

Raised within a few miles of Angel Stadium in Anaheim, Rojas felt carving out his own milestone with the organization he rooted for as a child made this night extra special.

"Having the opportunity to not only play baseball professionally but for your hometown team, who I grew up watching, going to the stadium with my dad," he said, "now having the opportunity to be a part of it and work my way up, it's just inexplicable."

Penciled in as the designated hitter, Rojas began his night by flying out to left field in the first. But with two runners on in the third, he pulled a 2-2 pitch from Enderson Franco into right for a two-run double.

After falling behind Franco, 0-2, in the fifth, the Vanguard University product slugged the third pitch of the at-bat into right and legged out his first triple of the season.

"[I was] battling, obviously, with two strikes," Rojas said. "If I can put the ball in play, good things will happen. It was nice -- I was going for that extra bag. It was hit into the gap where they had to have a good run to go get the ball. And I just went for it and, luckily, I was able to slide in safely."

Rojas led off the seventh with a single against reliever Elian Leyva.

With the bases full and one out an inning later, he put an exclamation point on the evening. Rojas ambushed the first offering from Josh Graham and sent it over the center field wall to complete the Southern League's second cycle of the season -- D-backs prospect Galli Cribbs made history for Jackson on April 18.

While the cycle might have been on his mind, Rojas wasn't swinging for a home run in his fifth at-bat of the night.

"It's something a little obvious not to think about," he said of the cycle. "It's a [situational] opportunity to score another run. A pop fly would have scored another run with a sac fly. The approach was to get something up and drive it to at least get a run in with a sacrifice fly. Luckily, I squared it up in enough for it to carry out of the park."

As he circled the bases with his third home run of the season, the weight of the moment finally hit Rojas.

"It was a very overwhelming feeling in a good way. I was super-excited," he said. "I was just in awe that it actually happened. I never thought I'd actually do that. Obviously, those things just happen, but it's not like you go out there and try to hit a cycle every day. ... All my teammates and coaches congratulated me for it. It was a super-awesome feeling."

The lefty-swinging Rojas had one more at-bat in the ninth but popped out to second.

After a promotion from the Class A Advanced California League to the Southern League last July, the 2016 36th-round pick hit .227/.259/.360 in 44 games. Rojas has seen his numbers climb through 16 games this season, with a .346 average and 1.084 OPS. The 25-year-old corner infielder has hit safely in seven of his last eight games and is 9-for-17 with three homers and 11 RBIs over the last four contests.

Rojas said his experience on the circuit last year provided him with some lessons.

"You understand the level of play and you know what it's like," he said. "Now that you have that taste of it, you know what you need to do to give yourself the best opportunity to succeed day in and day out. So that really helped me."

Having achieved this milestone, he doesn't intend on letting it get to his head.

"Just going to stay humble and keep working hard," Rojas said. "Tomorrow is a new day and you've got to do it all over again. So it's just keeping that mindset of working hard and staying humble, is really what my focus is."

Thaiss went 3-for-5 with a homer and four RBIs, while 14th-ranked Taylor Ward collected three hits, scored three runs and drove in one as the BayBears racked up 17 hits.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rosario homers twice, Twins rally in ninth, beat Angels 5-4

By Dan Greenspan

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — The Minnesota Twins finally got the comeback win they had been close to staging so many times this season.

Eddie Rosario homered twice, Bobby Wilson hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly in the ninth inning, and the Twins rallied for a 5-4 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Friday night.

“If you keep that mindset of trying to play the 27 outs the best you can, sometimes it’s going to turn, and tonight we got one back,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

Rosario’s solo shot to right pulled Minnesota to 4-2 in the sixth and his drive in the ninth cut the deficit to 4-3. Logan Morrison then doubled to left, and pinch-hitter Mitch Garver drove him in on a single down the first base line to tie it at 4. Wilson’s sac fly scored pinch-runner Max Kepler to cap the three-run ninth.

The Twins had been 0-13 when trailing after eight innings.

“It was a good team win. Bullpen shut the door, didn’t give up any runs, and the offense came back and won it for us. Everybody did good but me pretty much, but that’s how it goes sometimes,” said Twins starter Lance Lynn, who gave up four runs and eight hits in 4 2/3 innings.

Fernando Rodney got Mike Trout to line out to short with a runner on first for his sixth save. The ball came off Trout’s bat with an exit velocity of 118 mph, the hardest-hit ball by an Angel since Statcast was introduced in 2015, but the low trajectory sent it right to Gregorio Petit.

“You can check Petit’s hand, see how he’s feeling,” Molitor said. “We all know that if he elevates the ball there with that type of exit speed, it’s a different outcome. Some of the misfortune tonight maybe turned around for us.”

That wasn’t the case early on, as the Angels capitalized on a second chance in the third inning to take the lead. Justin Upton hit a two-run homer to left to put the Angels ahead 3-1 two pitches after Joe Mauer misplayed a pop-up in foul territory down the first base line that would have been the third out. The ball landed past the outstretched arms of a diving Mauer, allowing Upton to hit his fifth home run in six games.

The Angels only got one run across with the bases loaded in the fifth, with Andrelton Simmons drawing a full-count walk to make it 4-1, and the Twins punished the home team for their wastefulness.

Matt Magill (1-0) picked up the win for his scoreless eighth inning in relief. Justin Anderson (0-1) gave up three runs in 1 1/3 innings.

Brian Dozier homered for the second consecutive game to give the Twins a 1-0 lead in the first. It was his seventh home run of the season.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Kepler (left hand) was held out of the starting lineup as a precaution after being hit by a pitch Thursday.

Angels: 1B Albert Pujols got the day off to rest, with Luis Valbuena taking his place in the infield. ... RHP Blake Wood (elbow) could receive a rehab assignment after throwing two bullpen sessions this week.

OHTANI CLEANS UP

With Pujols sitting, Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani batted fourth, going 1 for 4. Ohtani has a hit in 15 of the 17 games he has started as the designated hitter and is batting .471 (8 for 17) in his last six games.

SKAGGS DOES HIS PART

Angels starter Tyler Skaggs gave up two runs, six hits and two walks while striking out seven. It was his third straight start giving up two or fewer runs, which highlights the continued struggles of the Angels bullpen. Excluding closer Keynan Middleton, the other seven available relievers have converted three saves from nine chances.

"We definitely felt that Justin had enough to get through the ninth, but, unfortunately, it didn't work," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

UP NEXT

Twins: RHP Kyle Gibson (1-1, 3.49) gave up three runs in 6 2/3 innings in a no-decision at the White Sox on Sunday. Gibson has won his last two decisions against the Angels.

Angels: RHP Nick Tropeano (1-2, 3.42) will make his first start since May 1 against Baltimore. Tropeano did not give up a run in 6 1/3 innings in a no-decision against the Orioles, but went on the disabled list the next day because of inflammation in his right shoulder.

FROM SB NATION

In case you hadn't noticed, Shohei Ohtani still rules

Friday's Say Hey, Baseball would like to remind you Ohtani is pretty good at his chosen sport.

By Marc Normandin

It was expected Shohei Ohtani would be pretty good at this whole baseball thing in his move to MLB. Sure, there were some concerns it might take some time to get there after a slow spring, but, nah, Ohtani hit the ground running once the games counted, and now here we are.

Ohtani hit his fifth homer of the season Thursday, a solo shot, along with an RBI double. Those two hits brought his season line to .354/.400/.677, which under normal circumstances would be leading his team: Ohtani shares a lineup with Mike Trout, though, so his OPS+ of 189 is, regrettably, only good enough for second on the Angels.

That's regrettable, of course, only for this made-up version of Ohtani I created to complete that sentence and begin this next one. The Angels have to be pleased that he's mashing and still can't match Trout, and they even have the bonus of Andrelton Simmons' 153 OPS+ behind them. There's a reason the Angels are 23-14 and in first place in the American League West, and it's the lineup those three have helped power.

Ohtani has, of course, helped out with the pitching staff, too. The Angels' have a 109 ERA+, which, if it holds up, would be the best the organization has managed since 2008 when they posted a 112 mark during a 100-win campaign. There's a lot of season left for the Angels and Ohtani to have to maintain this level of success, of course, but the possibility exists that he'll only get better on the mound with more experience facing MLB's hitters, too.

And if Ohtani doesn't, and he's just an average-ish rotation arm in 2018? Then the Angels will have to settle for one of their best bats being "just" average, I guess.

FROM DEADSPIN

Here Are Two More Dope Baseball Things Shohei Ohtani Can Do

By Tom Ley

One of the most fun things about watching a fresh new baseball darling rack up regular major-league at-bats is all the opportunities to see how the skills you've been hearing so much about, all those precious tools, actually manifest themselves on the field. You know a guy has power, but does he have big-boy, opposite-field power? You know a guy has speed, but does he have "I dare you to throw me out" speed?

Friends, I am happy to report that Shohei Ohtani, already the coolest player in baseball, has both of those things:

I'm always here to praise a mighty dinger, but I think Ohtani's third-inning double may actually be the more impressive highlight. He hit that ball *hard*, and didn't leave himself any reasonable amount of time to get to second base. And yet there he was, churning up base path with those long-ass legs, gliding into second.

So now the guy who is one of the Angels' best hitters and pitchers is also one of the fastest guys on the team. All very normal.

Ohtani pitched six solid innings and allowed two runs while striking out six in his last start. He went 2-for-4 and drove in two runs last night. He's struck out 32 batters in 26.1 innings. He's hitting .354/.400/.677 to go along with five homers in 65 at-bats. Again, just extremely normal stuff going on in Los Angeles this year.

FROM BASEBALL ESSENTIAL

Ohtani's Greatness, Versatility is Something to Behold

By Tom Dorsa

Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani, famous for being a revolutionary two-way talent, was the talk of the offseason. It was Ohtani who, Ohtani what, Ohtani when, Ohtani where, and Ohtani why as the next Babe Ruth came stateside, chose his team, and readied to wreak havoc on Major League Baseball.

Through his struggles in spring training and his frustrations with manager Mike Scioscia, to his first career hit and his win as a pitcher in his first start, the cameras and microphones flooded the Los Angeles Angels phenom ranked by many as the number-one prospect in baseball.

And, it all was deserved. There's something even underappreciated in being a 23-year-old rookie lighting up MLB pitching as a batter, and destroying hitters on the mound, even through all the fanfare and media commotion. It feels like we're already taking this guy, this innovative, eccentric, one-of-a-kind talent, for granted.

Our world — especially in sports — is becoming increasingly specialized by the day. This is true in baseball as much as in any other facet of life; you've got relievers tasked with facing just one batter in a game, or pinch runners who can't hit a ball to save their lives but can scamper from first to third pretty easily.

Everyone plays their own specific position, seldom wavering from their daily assignment, hitting mostly in the same lineup spot and trying to achieve the same goal every game. Maybe your job is to draw a walk and get on base, or perhaps it's to hit a weak ground ball and advance a runner — at any rate, every person in the dugout has their own, individual, distinct job. Very scarcely can they adjust to an assignment that isn't their own.

Like when Alex Rodriguez joined the Yankees, and moved from shortstop to third base to play alongside Derek Jeter. His fielding percentage in his final season as a Texas Ranger was .989 in 1,369.2 innings at short, and as soon as he moved over to the hot corner, it plummeted to .965 in 2004. A-Rod was doing basically the same work: field and throw the ball, but was measurably worse after moving 40 feet to the right.

Rodriguez, like all other athletes, took a long time to fine-tune his play at third because he became so accustomed to working at the shortstop position. He was specialized, and I think it goes to show that someone who can effortlessly do a variety of things — and do it at an elite level — should be commended for their work. Baseball has long been without a two-way force like that.

On a related note, Shohei Ohtani is slashing .354/.400/.677 with five home runs, a 1.077 OPS, 16 RBIs, and a 189 OPS+ in 19 games and 70 plate appearances. In addition, he's got a 3-1 record with a respectable 4.10 ERA, 1.177 WHIP, 32 strikeouts, and 10.9 strikeouts per nine in 26.1 innings on the hill.

Ohtani, whose next pitching start will be on Sunday afternoon against the Minnesota Twins, smacked his fifth home run of the season last night to deep center field off Twins reliever Trevor Hildenberger, traveling 414 feet and leaving his bat at 108.7 miles per hour, according to Statcast. His power is insane, and this home run is maybe the second-most outrageous thing the rookie has done this season.

We can't forget his second career pitching start, in which the top-ten offense of the Oakland Athletics bowed down to Ohtani's pitching ability. The righty thrower struck out 12 A's and gave up only one hit in seven innings of work, generating 24 swinging strikes in 91 pitches. He was perfect through six and ended with an 86 game score.

I watch MLB Tonight religiously, and I didn't see as much Ohtani coverage as I wished. I scroll through Twitter frequently, and the hottest topic on the timeline is if Mookie Betts or Charlie Blackmon is actually somehow better than Mike Trout (quick note, no, they are not). We are standing around waiting for Ohtani to, you know, straight up transform the modern the MLB player, and he's doing it, but nobody is paying attention.

I grew up in the era of Barry Bonds and Ichiro Suzuki, and now that they're gone, I feel like I didn't appreciate them enough. Bonds was the most disciplined and powerful hitter ever, and Suzuki was a Gold Glove winning slap-hitter with unparalleled speed. They were unbelievable, and Ohtani is next, and then some.

He's currently worth 1.2 Baseball-Reference WAR, 0.8 as a hitter and 0.4 as a pitcher, only five starts on the hill and 16 as a DH into his career. He is Swiss Army Knife in a sport of boring forks and spoons, so to speak. A 23-year-old Japanese man who had never even sniffed an MLB ballpark before 2018 has triumphantly become, at least early on in the still young season, one of its premier hitters and up-and-coming pitchers.

The American League Rookie of the Month for April should not pass us by. Let's not let that happen.

FROM KYODO NEWS

Baseball: Ohtani takes 2nd swing at cleanup in Angels' 5-4 loss to Twins

Shohei Ohtani ended three innings and went 1-for-4 Friday in his second stint batting cleanup as the Los Angeles Angels suffered a late 5-4 defeat to the Minnesota Twins.

Ohtani, batting as the Angels' designated hitter in the No. 4 spot, singled and struck out once for the American League West leaders, who now stand at a game apiece with the Twins in the four-game series at Angel Stadium.

"There were places where I could have done a little better had I devised a different approach, but overall it wasn't bad," Ohtani said. "I wasn't thinking too much (about batting No. 4)."

The Japanese two-way phenom, who blasted his fifth major league homer Thursday and was presented with April's AL Rookie of the Month trophy before Friday's game, replaced Albert Pujols who sat out for rest.

It was his second time batting in the cleanup position, after going 1-for-4 with two strikeouts in his first outing against Johnny Cueto and the San Francisco Giants last month.

Ohtani ended the innings in his first two at-bats Friday night against righty Lance Lynn, grounding out in the first and coming up short on a deep fly to left in the third after Justin Upton notched his 10th homer for a 3-1 Angels' lead.

He helped drive in the Angels' sole run in the fifth when he loaded the bases on a single to left. A walk to Andrelton Simmons scored Martin Maldonado, but Ohtani was left on base when Luis Valbuena grounded out. The Twins closed the gap to 4-2 in the sixth on a solo homer.

On two outs and a full count in the seventh, the 23-year-old rookie struck out swinging on a fastball from Minnesota reliever Zach Duke.

The visitors added three runs in the ninth to steal the game, and Twins' closer Fernando Rodney earned his sixth save after retiring three of four Los Angeles batters and denying Ohtani a fifth at-bat.

Ohtani, who is 3-1 with a no-decision in five pitching starts, will sit out Saturday's game to rest before taking the mound in Sunday's series finale.