



Press Clips

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CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **How Justin Anderson came out of nowhere to be one of Angels' better relievers**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 5)

- **Mike Trout still hasn't reached his ceiling**
- **Sports on TV is no longer the only game in town**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 9)

- **Inbox: How will Ohtani be used in NL parks?**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 11)

- **Garrett Richard's promising starts have been a huge part of the Angels' promising start**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 13)

- **MLB stock watch: Is your team a buyer or a seller?***
- **The Shohei Ohtani Experience: Keep track of the Angels phenom's two-way quest**

FROM CBS SPORTS (PAGE 15)

- **Rockies hope to continue streaking vs. Angels**

FROM USA TODAY (PAGE 17)

- **Mike Trout Monday: We probably don't deserve Mike Trout**
- **In his career, Albert Pujols' hitting dominates Milwaukee Brewers pitching**

FROM THE DENVER POST (PAGE 21)

- **Rockies' hot pitchers face big challenge at home vs. Angels and Mike Trout**

FROM FANGRAPHS (PAGE 22)

- **What Shohei Ohtani Just Figured Out**

FROM THE HAWK EYE (PAGE 25)

- **The Monday Hive: Bees' defense always seems to be in the right spot**

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS (PAGE 28)

- **Mike Trout, Mookie Betts both say runs scored is their favorite stat**

FROM BLEACHER REPORT (PAGE 29)

- **Mookie Betts Has Become Mike Trout's clone in race for MLB's Best Player**

FROM ASAHI SHUMBUN (PAGE 31)

- **MLB/Japanese fans cross Pacific to see Ohtani's Angels**

FROM ND INSIDER (PAGE 32)

- **Former Notre Dame WR Torii Hunter Jr. catching on to minor league life**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**How Justin Anderson came out of nowhere to be one of Angels' better relievers**

By Jeff Fletcher

DENVER — When the Angels were trying to hang on to a two-run lead in the eighth inning against the team generally considered the best in the majors, and Mike Scioscia went to the mound and summoned Justin Anderson, many Angels fans no doubt had the same thought.

Who the heck is Justin Anderson?

The right-hander with the generic name had managed to spend a few years in the team's farm system in relative anonymity, barely mentioned, if at all, by the prospect analysts.

But, there he was, jogging in to the mound at Houston's Minute Maid Park, near where he'd grown up, about to deal with some of the best hitters in the majors.

When he was done, after striking out Carlos Correa to strand two runners and protect a game the Angels would win, he had opened the eyes not just of the fans, but of Scioscia.

Two weeks later, Scioscia admitted that Anderson really was picked for that game by default, because so many of the other best options were down for the day.

"It was really by need that he was put into that spot," Scioscia said this weekend. "And he responded so well that we were excited we can add to the depth of our high-leverage guys toward the back end of the game."

Anderson, 25, has pitched in seven games, and he didn't allow a run in the first six. With a 99 mph fastball and a sharp slider, he's struck out nine in 6-2/3 innings.

He has done it all while being tossed into the deep end, so to speak. He entered one game trailing by two. In all the others, he's come in the seventh or eighth inning, with a lead of three runs or fewer. He's faced the likes of José Altuve, George Springer, Giancarlo Stanton, Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez and Correa.

Although it's very unusual for Scioscia to put a rookie in such high leverage spots immediately upon his entrance to the majors, Anderson shrugs it off.

"I am just looking at the catcher," he said. "I'm not focusing on who is up at the plate. Just stick to the game plan and pitch to my strengths."

It's worked, with the exception of a three-batter hiccup on Saturday, when he didn't retire anyone and gave up a go-ahead two-run homer to Mike Zunino.

So how did he come out of nowhere to gain such an important role in the bullpen so fast?

The Angels picked Anderson in the 14th round of the 2014 draft out of the University of Texas-San Antonio. He was a starter initially, but his numbers were hardly impressive.

In his first half-season as a professional, he gave up 26 earned runs and 40 hits in 29 innings, an 8.07 ERA. The next year, at Class-A Burlington, Iowa, he had a 3.41 ERA, but then in 2016 and 2017, he had ERAs of 5.70 and 5.06, respectively.

Two critical changes turned his career around, though.

First, the Angels sent him to the bullpen in 2017, and that helped his velocity tick up from the low-to-mid 90s to the upper 90s. It was similar to the transition Keynan Middleton had made. In fact, Anderson was Middleton's teammate, and he recalled charting Middleton's pitches when his eye-opening transformation began in 2016.

Despite improved velocity, Anderson was still getting hit, though. He also walked 31 hitters in 64 innings last year.

That's when Anderson's agent, Jay Franklin, intervened.

"You can't keep pitching like this," Franklin recalls telling Anderson. "You're going to find yourself out of the game."

Franklin, a veteran of 10 seasons pitching in the minors, felt like he knew what was missing.

"This guy's stuff is really good, but he gets hit," Franklin said. "The stuff is really good, but there was no angle. The fastball would be flat. The breaking ball would be flat. You have to have tilt and deception to keep those guys at the major league level off it."

So over the winter, Franklin invited Anderson to his home in Oklahoma, and they spent three hours a day, for three days, tweaking his delivery.

"He broke me down," Anderson said. "We didn't change much mechanically. It was just one small little fix, but when we did that, we had to start from the ground up."

Anderson had given hitters too good of a look at the ball in his delivery before, which negated the fact that he was throwing 99 mph. He also couldn't control it, hence the walks.

With Franklin's help, Anderson kept his shoulders closed to the plate a little longer in his delivery, which helped keep the ball behind him, hiding it from the hitters. A little deeper dip with the ball as he brought his arm back also created a little more movement in his pitches at the other end.

The new delivery was also more repeatable, Franklin said, which helped him throw strikes.

To the naked eye, the tweaks are small. The results – better deception, movement and control – have been significant.

In spring training, the Angels noticed.

Every day, a few pitchers from minor league camp are called up to big league camp to be available to fill out the last couple innings of exhibition games. Anderson got called up.

Again and again and again.

He came up six times, an unusually high number for a player from minor league camp, and he did not allow a run in seven innings.

Anderson then began the minor league season with three scoreless outings at Double-A, earning a promotion to Triple-A, where he had three more scoreless outings. That earned him a call to the majors where, coincidentally, the Angels were playing in his hometown.

After he got through his debut without allowing a run, he got the call again the next night, and he again put up a zero.

He did it again and again and again, which has made Scioscia a believer.

“He’s prepared long and hard for this opportunity,” Scioscia said. “Through trial and error, he’s figured out some things that will make him a more dynamic pitcher. ... His stuff is real. He’s going to go out there and make his pitches and live with the results. It’s been impressive to watch.”

UP NEXT

Angels (Andrew Heaney, 1-1, 5.31) at Rockies (Jon Gray, 3-4, 4.99), Tuesday, 5:40 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM).

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Mike Trout still hasn't reached his ceiling

By Jeff Miller

He started with a 111-mph line drive for a single.

Four innings later, he cut down a baserunner with a throw measured at 91.7 mph.

An inning after that, he added a three-run homer that, for him at least, wasn't hit hard enough or long enough to be expressed in crazy numbers.

No, all it did was, essentially, seal victory for his team.

For some players, this might be a good week. For Mike Trout, it was a typical Sunday.

"What do you want me to say about him?" teammate Ian Kinsler asked. "He's built to play this game, man."

Remember Trout's awesome offseason? How he got married? How the Angels improved their roster? How the team he roots for — the Philadelphia Eagles — won the Super Bowl?

Well, he might now be having an even better *onseason*.

Trout began Monday leading the big leagues in WAR and on-base percentage and ranked among the top three in runs, homers, walks, slugging percentage, extra-base hits and OPS.

So, if you're the opposition, how do you slow him down? That's a tough question, one that requires detailed, multidimensional thinking.

It's highly unlikely, however, that the answer involves placing Trout in an environment where the atmospheric conditions are less conducive to slowing him down.

Folks, welcome to Denver, where the air is as thin as the margin of error for pitchers.

Two interleague games against the Colorado Rockies await the Angels starting Tuesday, and who knows what craziness a locked-in Trout might produce?

"Of course, always," he said when asked if he was looking forward to playing in Denver. "The ball goes pretty good."

In five games at Coors Field, Trout is 12 for 21 with three homers and seven RBIs. The Angels are 5-0 in those games. He also has walked twice, stolen four bases and his mile-high OPS is, in fact, a mile high: 1.688.

Sure, five games is hardly enough to make emphatic statements. But Trout, especially of late, has been overwhelmingly emphatic.

"You combine a dude who's super talented and wants to be great and puts it all together ... that's Mike Trout," Angels hitting coach Eric Hinske said. "He's just elite."

Trout is regularly called the best player in baseball. There is evidence the best is getting better.

So far this season, Trout is swinging at fewer pitches out of the strike zone and, when he does swing, making contact more frequently.

He's accomplishing this at a time when baseball players are striking out at a historic rate, a rate so alarming that some observers have taken to calling it a sport-wide epidemic.

"He just doesn't chase a lot of pitches," Hinske said. "He's probably the best in the league at it."

The key, the hitting coach explained, is that Trout keeps his weight back long enough that his eyes don't move much.

This allows him to more accurately identify pitches and, when he coordinates the landing of his front foot with the ball entering the heart of his hitting zone, the results can be loud and impressive.

"There were holes in his swing that the pitchers would try to exploit," Kinsler said, recalling Trout's early seasons. "Every year, the holes get smaller and smaller. He's chasing less. He just continues to get better."

Asked how he'd stop Trout, Kinsler laughed and said, "Walk him." That's what the Baltimore Orioles tried in a game last week. Four times they walked Trout, three times intentionally.

The Angels won anyway, Trout going hitless on a night during which he was on base at least twice as many times as any player on either team.

"He's able to recognize pitches early," Hinske said, "and spit on them if they're not strikes."

Defensively, Trout never has been a darling of those who favor advanced metrics. At best, he typically has been an average center fielder when it comes to measuring defenders to the decimal point.

But, even in the field, there has been noticeable improvement. One of the overall defensive components from Fangraphs currently ranks Trout fifth among center fielders.

"I don't know where those statistics come from, what the mathematic formula is," Kinsler said. "I just know he makes a lot of plays other guys don't."

Although all of this would be enough to celebrate the season Trout is putting together, there's one more thing: He has six stolen bases, and has yet to be caught.

This year, for the first time in his career, Trout is baseball's highest-paid player. Rather incredibly, given the number of zeroes in \$34 million, the Angels are getting their money's worth.

"He's a special player, a special talent, no question," Hinske said. "It's an honor to just be around him."

Sports on TV is no longer the only game in town

By Randy Harvey

Considering the Dodgers' record, a person might think their fans wouldn't mind that one game on an afternoon during the first week of May wasn't televised.

But if calls to The Times' sports department are any indication, they were outraged that the Dodgers' game at Arizona last Thursday was exclusive to Facebook.

"Just when you thought it couldn't get worse, the Dodgers surprise us once again," one reader wrote in a letter to the editor. "The management team has teamed up with Facebook to bring live games on line. ... Fans are unhappy but who cares? Apparently, the Dodgers don't."

Another wrote: "OK, what's the deal with the Dodgers on Facebook? Most of us old-timers [some of the biggest supporters of the Dodgers] don't even know what Facebook is. Congress didn't know."

For "old-timers" and others who might have missed it, the sports media revolution is here.

It is not on television.

It is on Facebook, Twitter, Twitch, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Hulu, Yahoo, Fox Sports Go, ESPN3, WatchESPN, ESPN+ and on and on.

ESPN began pursuing the online market in 2002, and five years later created an iPhone app. The network has worked since to deliver sports to consumers however they want it delivered, whether on television, a desktop computer, laptop, a tablet or a phone.

Network executives named the strategy Best Available Screen. BAS.

As other companies have followed, viewers have discovered that the experience can be BAD.

Many baseball fans have complained about the partnership between Major League Baseball and Facebook. Although the quality has improved since the first Facebook Watch game this season, on April 4, it is not the same for many viewers as watching on a high-definition television screen. Some fans also have been caught by surprise that the games are only on Facebook. Even if they paid for SportsNet LA in order to see the Dodgers, they couldn't watch last Thursday's game on television.

MLB was fortunate in one regard. Imagine the outcry if that had been the game that occurred Friday night when four Dodgers pitchers combined for a no-hitter. Or if it had been the Angels game that same night in which Albert Pujols notched his 3,000th hit.

Among games that have been scheduled are two involving the Angels — at Toronto on Thursday, May 24, at 9:30 a.m. and at Seattle on Wednesday, June 13, at 1:10 p.m. Don't say you weren't told.

Most of the 25 Facebook games have yet to be announced, but Matt Gould, vice president of communications for MLB.com, said they will continue to be weekday games that normally don't have large television audiences.

According to MLB data, Facebook Watch had more than 1 million views during the Dodgers' game. However, it counted as a view even if a viewer remained on the site for only three seconds. There are no reliable figures of how many people watched the game, but it appeared to have peaked at around 43,000.

"It's an experiment," Gould said. "The context here is that that are literally hundreds of millions of people who say they are sports fans. We're trying to find ways to tap into that audience."

So is everyone else in the online sports business.

On the day before the Dodgers played on Facebook, ESPN announced a Twitter package that will include live SportsCenter updates, fantasy football podcasts and the capability of fans to interact with the hosts of a new college football show. ESPN already has original SportsCenter content on Snapchat.

One interpretation of ESPN's social media deals and its recent creation of the subscription based ESPN+ (available for \$4.99 per month through the network's app) is that companies are attempting to lure cord cutters, mostly millennials who have divorced themselves from cable and satellite television.

No doubt that is one motive. ESPN has dropped from 100 million television subscribers in 2011 to about 87 million today. But the network also is attempting to attract other sports fans with programming not available on television or any of its growing family of SportsCenters.

ESPN+ exclusively has "Detail" in which Kobe Bryant analyzes an NBA playoff game from the night before and "In the Crease" for those following the NHL playoffs. "Draft Academy" was a series of programs following players, including Sam Darnold, in weeks leading to the NFL draft. A fantasy football show debuted Monday. It also has about 300 live events per month, some involving MLB, golf and boxing but most for fans of sports such as college baseball and softball, soccer, rugby and cricket who are underserved by television networks.

"It's a response to the changing times, the changing sports landscape," said Jeff Fellenzer, who teaches media classes at USC. One, "Sports and Media Technology," is about this subject.

"If I go to a sports bar with friends to watch a Cleveland-Toronto game, we're not going to sit around one of our laptops," he said. "We're going to watch on television. But, at home, there's a certain demographic that's going to use the most convenient screen. It's all about providing content you want to wherever you want it."

The vote here for the most creative recent approach goes to the NBA for allowing fans during certain games to buy the fourth quarter on its League Pass app for 99 cents. If you believe the cliché about NBA games, you're probably asking if the price would increase for only the last two minutes.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Inbox: How will Ohtani be used in NL parks?

Angels beat reporter Maria Guardado fields questions from fans

By Ted Berg

How do you expect Ohtani to be used in NL ballparks? Will Angels avoid having him pitch so he won't have to hit and pitch in the same game? Obviously he won't be in the outfield, but will he pitch, or only pinch hit?

I don't think the Angels are opposed to having **Shohei Ohtani** hit and pitch in the same game if his turn in the rotation happens when they're scheduled to play at a National League ballpark. It's something Ohtani did a handful of times in Japan, so it wouldn't be completely new to him.

If Ohtani hadn't sprained his left ankle and had his start pushed back to Sunday, we probably would have seen him hit and pitch in the same game against the Rockies at Coors Field this week. The possibility could present itself again, as the Angels still have Interleague series scheduled at Los Angeles, Arizona and San Diego this season.

For now, Ohtani will be limited to pinch-hitting duties during the Angels' two-game set at Colorado with the designated hitter unavailable.

Does the team have plans to platoon Kole in RF or play him as usual and let him get out of his slump?

Kole Calhoun hasn't started the Angels' past three games against left-handers, so he could see less playing time against lefties if his struggles continue. I think the Angels will still play him regularly against righties to give him a chance to work his way out of his offensive downturn, though.

Who do the Angels view as their depth options past the main guys like Richards, Skaggs, Ohtani, Heaney, Tropeano, Barria, and the guys injured currently? Lamb? Canning? Castillo? Morales?

Someone to keep an eye on at Triple-A Salt Lake is **Felix Pena**, who has pitched exclusively in relief in the Majors but now appears to be in the process of stretching out as a starter. Pena's last four outings for Salt Lake have been starts, and he's allowed five runs over 12 innings (3.75 ERA) with six walks and 17 strikeouts over that span.

Pena has not thrown more than 76 pitches in an outing, so he still needs to build up his pitch count, but the 28-year-old right-hander is on the Angels' **40-man roster**, so he could be an intriguing rotation option if a need arises at some point.

Left-hander **John Lamb** is also on the depth chart, as he's logged a 3.25 ERA over 27 2/3 innings in seven starts for Salt Lake. Lamb isn't on the 40-man roster, though, so that could be a potential impediment for him. **Jesus Castillo** and Griffin Canning have been pitching well, but they're still at Double-A Mobile, so they're not as close to impacting the big league club.

If In another couple of months, Marte (.950 OPS) and Pujols (.729 OPS) are still hitting the way they are currently hitting, might we see Marte starting to eat into some of Pujols' at bats?

I think **Jefry Marte** is more likely to cut into the playing time of **Luis Valbuena** than of **Albert Pujols**, if Marte continues to play well and the rest of the team stays healthy.

Valbuena had been projected to draw most of the starts at first base on days when Pujols served as the DH, but the Angels could be inclined to give Marte more of those opportunities, given his productive start to the season. Pujols is earning \$27 million this year and is entrenched as the Angels' cleanup hitter, so if he's healthy, he's going to be in the lineup.

How is Alex Meyer coming along? And will we see him in an Angels uniform this year?
 -- Ryan P., Greensburg, Ind.

Meyer resumed throwing last month, so that was a notable milestone in his rehab from right shoulder surgery. When Meyer underwent surgery in September to repair the torn labrum in his shoulder, the Angels estimated that he would miss 12 months, so it's unlikely he will pitch in 2018.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Garrett Richard's promising starts have been a huge part of the Angels' promising start

By Brent Maguire

Garrett Richards is on the mound and healthy in 2018. That in itself is a positive sign for Richards, who has been oft-injured during his career.

Richards had a myriad of injuries that have sapped much of his development time as a MLB starter. A torn patellar tendon cut his 2014 season short. A torn UCL (with no Tommy John surgery) ended his 2016 season in April. A biceps issue plagued him most of last year. Through the early going of 2018, Richards is healthy and has tossed 34¹/₂ innings, more than he threw all of last year (27¹/₂).

On a results-basis, 2018 has been a bit inconsistent for Richards. But there are many positive signs he's shown. Notably, his last start was his best one yet, a gem in which he tossed 6¹/₂ scoreless innings while striking out eight hitters. More importantly, Richards' stuff looks even better than usual, which is a tell-tale sign for someone who has always featured electric stuff.

A dive through Fangraphs and Baseball Savant leaderboards reveals that Richards' stuff is not only great but in the elite class of pitchers. Below is Richards' average velocity and spin rate for all of his pitches and each pitch's rank among starters with at least 10 or more innings.

	Average Velocity	Spin Rate
Fastball	95.7 mph (8)	2,606 RPM (2)
Slider	89.2 mph (6)	2,907 RPM (2)
Curveball	81.4 mph (18)	3,428 RPM (1)

Richards not only has premium velocity on all three of his pitches, but he spins it with the best of them. There are some pitchers (see: Gerrit Cole, Shohei Ohtani) who feature high-octane stuff but have low

spin rates, which can make the pitch play down. Richards doesn't fit in that category; he pumps in heat and spins everything among the best of them.

The fastball is especially fascinating because the combination of both velocity and spin on the pitch is very rare. The only other starter in the same neighborhood is Justin Verlander, whose average fastball is 94.8 mph and has an elite spin rate of 2,627 rpm. Richards' fastball is unique and is multi-purpose with both cutting action and sinking action at times.

Fastball:

While this pitch is one of the better fastballs in baseball, the results for it have been ugly so far due to poor command. Hitters have tagged his four-seam fastball to a .288/.448/.500 clip and have made contact on 88.3 percent of them. If he can start throwing more strikes with the fastball (51.8 zone percent), it's likely he'll start seeing better results.

The slider is Richards' best pitch, and it's clearly the one he feels most comfortable with. His 37.7 percent slider usage is the highest of his career and ranks seventh among starters this season. The pitch has some of the best spin of any breaking ball in baseball and has the high-end velocity to make it brutal to face. Hitters have just a .515 OPS against the pitch this year and are making contact on 55.7 percent of those sliders.

Slider:

A forgotten pitch in Richards' arsenal is the curveball, a pitch that he's throwing more than ever this year (10.1 percent). Prior to this year, his curveball usage hovered around 5-8 percent. That's insane given how good the pitch is. The 3,428 rpm on the curveball makes it the highest spin rate pitch in all of baseball.

Curveball:

The stuff has been top-shelf. We know Richards can match up with anybody in baseball just based on pure stuff. The area in which he has struggled a bit is command, which has plagued him for several starts this season. He's actually throwing strikes right in line with his career norms, but there are two areas in which he's struggling mightily.

	2011-17	2018
Swing percent	45.3 %	40.6 %
First-strike pitch percent	57.5 %	51.3 %

Richards' zone rate is fine, and he's running a career-low contact rate (71 percent). But hitters are simply offering at fewer pitches this year. He's never been great at throwing first-pitch strikes, but he's been even worse this year, ranking sixth worst among starters. More notably, his 40.6 swing percentage is the fifth worst among starters, which isn't ideal for someone with the stuff Richards possesses.

Simply falling behind hitters has been a huge issue for Richards and is a big reason why he has the fourth-highest walk percentage among starting pitchers (13.3 percent). After going down 1-0 in the count this year, hitters are tagging Richards to a .316/.473/.491 line. When he goes ahead 0-1, hitters have a rather ugly .113/.167/.242 line.

In principle, it sounds easy. Throw first-pitch strikes, and the results will be there. If Richards can find a way to start throwing more first-pitch strikes, there's a good chance everything else will fall into place and he'll position himself to not put as many hitters on base.

Richards, who will turn 30 later on May 27, is in a pivotal year; he'll become a free agent at the end of the year. His success is also crucial for the Angels, who have a real shot at making the playoffs this year and could roll out a dynamic duo of Richards and Ohtani in the playoffs.

The stuff has been there for Richards. If he can start throwing more first strikes, he might be a force to be reckoned with this year.

FROM ESPN.COM

MLB stock watch: Is your team a buyer or a seller?*

By Bradford Doolittle

Between the weather, the strikeouts, the injuries, the underachieving teams, the teams not built to achieve this season in the first place, the pitchless intentional walks (still can't get used to that) and the sudden fixation on mound visits, April 2018 was ... interesting. Did I mention the weather? With the calendar turning to May and the weather in most regions finally reaching into the 70s, let's assume better days lie ahead.

While we have only a month and change in the books, we are only two full months of play away from baseball's annual non-waiver trade deadline. Before the season, we speculated about what teams would end up selling, buying or holding, while recognizing that few teams would actually settle into one bucket or another before any games had even been determined. Now, though, in this hyper-stratified environment, there already are a few teams that should pretty much know where they will be at the end of July, even if they aren't publicly willing to admit it.

With today's stock watch, for the first time this season we're using early results in conjunction with preseason expectations to group teams into those familiar buy, sell or hold buckets. Each team's current playoff odds from MLBPET -- my projection and tracking system -- are used to make these determinations. If you're currently at 60 percent or better, you're in the buy group. If your playoff chances have dipped under 10 percent, it's time to think about selling. The rest -- the hold group -- are teams still trying to figure out who they are. As are we all.

Within each group, the teams are ordered by their current chances to earn a spot in the postseason, based on season-to-date results and simulations of the remaining schedule. The simulations are based on MLBPET's internal power ranking system, which factors in each team's current roster strength, preseason forecast, schedule-adjusted run differential and recent trends.

Holders

Los Angeles Angels

Opening Day win forecast: 84.8

Current win forecast: 89.7

Change: 4.9

Current playoff probability: 51.5%

Current championship probability: 3.6%

Albert Pujols. Shohei Ohtani. No team has been richer in compelling storylines this season than the Angels. Most of them have been positive stories, which is always nice.

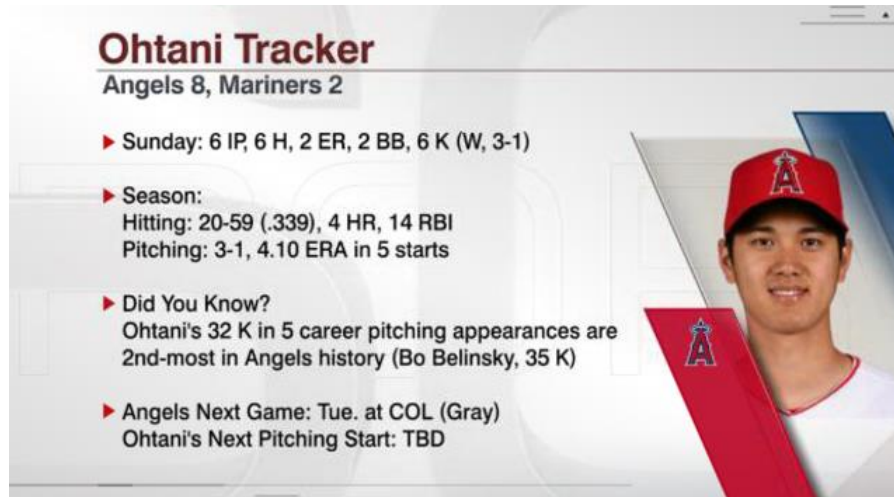
Still, zeroing in on the headline-makers obscures the fact that the Angels are off to a terrific start overall and currently have a better-than-even shot at the playoffs. Mike Trout is on pace for a ridiculous 14.3 WAR, which would rank second all time to Babe Ruth's 1923 campaign. Second. All. Time. The usual caveat after observing such an extreme pace this early in the schedule is something like, "Of course, he won't maintain those numbers." I'm not adding the qualifier for Trout. I have no idea what he's going to do, but I can't wait to find out.

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

The Shohei Ohtani Experience: Keep track of the Angels phenom's two-way quest

As a starting pitcher and a designated hitter, Los Angeles Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani is embarking on a two-way journey that no major leaguer has successfully pulled off since Babe Ruth himself. Will Ohtani dominate on the mound and crush at the plate?

What did Ohtani do last?



Ohtani Tracker
Angels 8, Mariners 2

- ▶ Sunday: 6 IP, 6 H, 2 ER, 2 BB, 6 K (W, 3-1)
- ▶ Season:
Hitting: 20-59 (.339), 4 HR, 14 RBI
Pitching: 3-1, 4.10 ERA in 5 starts
- ▶ Did You Know?
Ohtani's 32 K in 5 career pitching appearances are 2nd-most in Angels history (Bo Belinsky, 35 K)
- ▶ Angels Next Game: Tue. at COL (Gray)
Ohtani's Next Pitching Start: TBD

On the mound -- In his first start since April 24, Ohtani picked up his third win of the season with a strong six-inning effort against the Mariners on Sunday. Ohtani showed no ill effects from the sprained ankle that had sidelined him, taking a shutout into the seventh inning. But he gave up a leadoff single, a two-run homer to Ryon Healy and a four-pitch walk to start the seventh, which led Mike Scioscia to remove him. Ohtani gave up six hits, walked two and struck out six.

At the plate -- On Friday in Seattle, Ohtani went 2-for-4 with an RBI. His season slash line now stands at .339/.391/.627

When can I see Ohtani next?

At the plate -- Ohtani's next appearance in the starting lineup likely won't come until Thursday against Minnesota. With the Angels visiting the Rockies on Tuesday and Wednesday, Ohtani will likely be limited to pinch-hitting duties in the NL park since he won't be used in the field.

On the mound -- If the Angels stick to the six-man rotation they have used primarily, Ohtani's next start would be Sunday at home against the Twins.

FROM CBS SPORTS

Rockies hope to continue streaking vs. Angels

By STATS

DENVER -- Superb starting pitching has carried the Colorado Rockies to a season-high five-game winning streak and eight victories in their past 11 games.

They will try to continue that success and establish some traction at Coors Field on Tuesday, when they begin a two-game series with the Los Angeles Angels, the start of a six-game homestand that also includes four games with the Milwaukee Brewers.

In their past 11 games, the Rockies starters have a 1.71 ERA, allowing 13 earned runs in 68 1/3 innings. The starters are 7-3 in that span and have thrown 10 quality starts, the exception coming April 27 at Miami, when Tyler Anderson experienced difficulty breathing and was forced to leave in the second inning. Entering the Angels series, the Rockies starters have thrown eight consecutive quality starts, tying the franchise record. Rockies starters also threw eight consecutive quality starts from June 4-11, 2009, and from July 29-Aug. 6, 2006.

"We are seeing growth in a lot of our pitchers," Rockies manager Bud Black told reporters Sunday after Kyle Freeman allowed two runs in the first and none in his final six innings in a 3-2 win at Citi Field over the New York Mets. "It's great to see. You look at the stretch of games, and every starter has pitched to a level of quality. "The type of games we have been in -- some low-scoring games -- we had to make some pitches to keep it right there. I talk about it all the time. For us to contend, the starting pitching has to be there, and it's been there the last couple of weeks."

The Rockies are coming off a 6-3 road trip against the Marlins (1-2), Chicago Cubs (2-1) and Mets (3-0) that boosted their road record to 15-8. At Coors Field, the Rockies are 5-7.

The Rockies and Angels last played in 2015. The Angels lead the all-time series 24-8 and are 11-2 at Coors Field where they have won eight straight games dating to 2001. Winners of five of their past six games, the Angels have a major league best 13-3 record on the road this season.

Jon Gray, who is 3-4 with a 4.99 ERA will start Tuesday for the Rockies against Angels left-hander Andrew Heaney, who is 1-1 with a 5.31 ERA. Gray is 2-0, 0.69 in his past two starts -- April 25 against San Diego and May 1 at Chicago -- yielding six hits and one run in 13 innings in that span. He has never faced the Angels. Gray is 1-2, 7.63 in three starts this season at Coors Field, where he is 13-6, 4.76 in 30 career starts.

Heaney began the season on the disabled list with left elbow inflammation and made his 2018 debut April 13. He has yielded one earned run in each of past two starts and pitched a season-high six innings Wednesday against Baltimore, allowing one run on five hits and one walk with seven strikeouts for his first victory since Aug. 28, 2017 against Oakland.

Heaney is 1-0, 2.45 in one start against the Rockies. It came at Coors Field on July 7, 2015, when Heaney pitched a career-high 7 1/3 innings and gave up two runs on eight hits with no walks and five strikeouts.

In five games at Coors Field, Angels center fielder Mike Trout is hitting .571/.640/1.048 with three homers, seven RBIs and 12 runs scored. This season, Trout is hitting .336 with a 1.178 OPS, 12 homers and 24 RBIs.

He has been particularly hot lately with four straight multi-hit games, including three hits in each of his past three games. During this stretch, Trout is 11-for-19 in with three doubles, two triples, one homer and five RBIs.

"I'm getting pitches and not missing them," Trout told reporters Sunday after going 3-for-4 with a three-run homer in an 8-2 win at Seattle. "Getting my foot down. The timing is good right now. I'm seeing pitches and putting good at-bats together."

FROM USA TODAY

Mike Trout Monday: We probably don't deserve Mike Trout

By Ted Berg

Let's start with the important stuff before this post veers odd in a different direction: In six games over the past week, Mike Trout went 12-for-22 with eight walks, good for a .545 batting average and a .667 on-base percentage. Of his 12 hits, seven went for extra bases — three doubles, two triples, and two homers. With his best stretch of the early season, Trout improved his 2018 hitting line to a stunning .336/.458/.720 and strengthened his eternal hold upon the Major League WAR leaderboard.

Trout's Angels won five of the six games and moved back in front of the Astros in the American League West.

Here's a triple.

Here's a homer.

Here's a perfect 91.7-mph throw to third base to cut down (after replay review) a Mariners baserunner.

After I graduated college, I moved back home with my parents and got a job as a teacher's assistant and JV football coach at my old high school. While a student in that high school, I had been at least a mild nuisance to some teachers — not the worst-behaved kid by any stretch, but a wiseass and a class-cutter and sort of an unmotivated know-it-all. As an employee there, I worked in the special-ed department's inclusion program, and my role was to accompany students to their classes, take notes, and later reinforce the material.

It seemed like penance. More than four years after graduating high school, at a time when most of my friends were setting out into the real world, I was essentially attending high school all over again, except this time I actually had to go to all my classes, sit quietly, and pay attention.

One day, I was charged with keeping a close eye on a student who would habitually flee classrooms by waiting until teachers' backs were turned and bolting. I was hot on his tail, sprinting down the school's science wing in my khaki pants and Doc Martens, when I passed my old chemistry teacher — the guy I tortured the most in my teenage years. He grinned at me.

"I deserve this," I said.

It was such a neat and digestible instance of karmic retribution that I still think about it sometimes: Pain-in-the-butt student come butt-pained teacher.

No one can say whether desserts so just are served by some greater force or sheer happenstance. It feels like practically all of the world's religions and philosophies grapple with the notion of payments and punishments for our actions, and the questions of if, how, and when they are to be collected or distributed. But I feel fairly confident that if there is any form of cosmic justice to this existence, then we almost certainly do not deserve Mike Trout.

I can't say that it has ever been different, but in 2018 we live in a world that too often conflates success with the ability to garner attention. And while the internet almost undoubtedly represents the most important technological and societal advancement any of us will live to see, this medium in general and social-media specifically do seem responsible for amplifying humanity's base and desperate need for recognition and validation. In an intimate conversation in a half-empty bar, it may be possible to impress others with measured wisdom or patient optimism. But when there are two billion people in the bar, the surest way to be heard is to shout the loudest and declare the most audacious opinion.

Why this matters on Mike Trout Monday is multifaceted.

Because of our tendency to operate exclusively in the boldest superlatives now, there is already discussion in some corners about how Mike Trout is having "the best season in MLB history." This is, quite obviously, an absurd thing to conclude in early May. By WAR, yes, Trout is on pace for a historically great season, and because it is Mike Trout, it's not impossible to dream on it continuing.

But Trout, though unspeakably awesome, has not actually been an appreciably better hitter this year than he was in the early part of last season: His .336/.458/.720 hitting line now is almost identical to the .337/.461/.741 marks he had when he hit the disabled list with a thumb injury in late May of 2017, and any uptick in his WAR can largely be attributed to fluky defensive metrics over tiny samples. Again, it's possible Trout really is getting better and really will go on to one of the great single-season performances in baseball history. But to say that it's currently happening is just as silly as saying the Reds are having the worst season of any team ever or Mookie Betts is homering as often as anyone since Sosa, McGwire and Bonds.

Trout justifies more superlatives than any other MLB player, and this author is in no position to criticize anyone for sharing them. But if enough people hear or read or otherwise engage with any observation about Trout's excellence, some of them, invariably, will feel the need to up the stakes with a resolutely stated opinion. And the most popular Mike Trout Take, by far, is a tired one. It goes like this: "Trout might be the best player ever, and no one knows who he is because MLB can't market its stars."

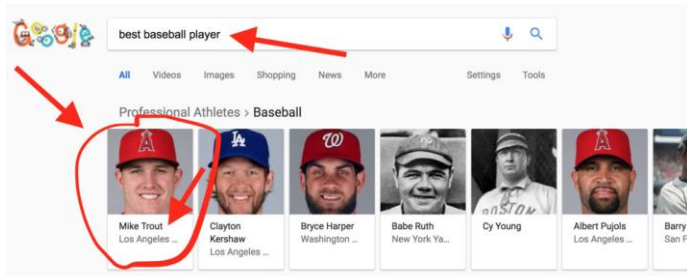
It's an idea I've examined at length in the past, and I'm not here to tell you it's untrue. But now that this sentiment has essentially been playing on repeat across the internet for five straight years, I'm starting to wonder something.

Who cares? Who really cares?

To be able to make such a statement, you must be familiar with Mike Trout's excellence, and so you cannot accuse the Angels or Major League Baseball or Trout himself from preventing you the opportunity to appreciate Trout. You're not personally affronted here.

Your gripe, then, is what? Mike Trout should be more famous? More people know the name Derek Jeter because he once dated a steady stream of celebrities, and more people know the name Alex Rodriguez because he courted a host of controversy, and more people know the name Bryce Harper because he has a big beard and sometimes a big mouth that generates headlines. But the main thing anyone associates with the name Mike Trout is utter and complete baseball greatness. That's bad? You'd rather it come with more appearances in *US Weekly*?

Trout, in 2018, is the highest salaried player in baseball and one of the best-paid guys in all of professional sports. Among those at all interested in his chosen pursuit, he is almost universally recognized as the best on the planet. Even for those who nothing at all about baseball and set out to learn the name of the best baseball player, Google has it covered:



At an All-Star media day a few years ago, I told Trout that some stats showed he was off to the best start of any young player in MLB history and asked what he thought about them. He cracked a half-smile and said, "That's a good guy to be."

If your only measure for success, in baseball or anywhere else, is Q-Rating, then complain all you want about how people talk about LaVar Ball more often than they do Mike Trout. But if you consider success in baseball to be the mastery thereof, then maybe cool down the rhetoric for just one moment and recognize that Trout, who is himself presumably more invested in being the best at baseball than in being the most famous sports guy, is pretty much maxing out.

I'm not pretending I'm above issuing a good Mike Trout-related hot take now and then, I'm saying that I think sometimes our urgency to find an angle prevents us from seeing what's directly in front of our eyes. Sometimes we just need to let greatness breathe.

And when we can't, and we feel the need to spin Trout's absurd baseball dominance into an indictment of the sport or the league or the team or the player for not better reaching some nebulous threshold of fame more befitting such a gifted athlete, then it's some perfectly tailored comeuppance: Time spent getting angry that people aren't appreciating Mike Trout is time not spent appreciating Mike Trout.

In his career, Albert Pujols' hitting dominates Milwaukee Brewers pitching

By Jeff Maillet

Albert Pujols of the Los Angeles Angels became the 32nd player to reach 3,000 hits when he singled against Mike Leake of the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field on Friday night.

It's no secret that Pujols enjoys hitting against the Milwaukee Brewers, where he feasted on their pitching while with the St. Louis Cardinals from 2001-'11.

In 647 at-bats in 177 games vs. the Brewers, Pujols has 213 hits - the fourth most against an opponent - with an overall batting average of .329 and 110 walks. The Astros lead all major-league clubs by allowing 282 hits to him.

Pujols is effective at Miller Park, too, getting 101 hits (the third-highest total on the road) and batting .332 at the ballpark since it opened in 2001.

Against pitchers with ties to the Brewers, Pujols has 26 hits (third most against a pitcher) vs. Ben Sheets in 72 at-bats (.361). Here's a look at some others:

- 21 hits vs. Chris Capuano in 40 at-bats (.525)
- 19 hits vs. Zach Duke in 45 at-bats (.422)
- 16 hits vs. Jeff Suppan in 44 at-bats (.364)
- 16 hits vs. Yovani Gallardo in 37 at-bats (.432)
- 14 hits vs. Randy Wolf in 49 at-bats (.286)
- 13 hits vs. Doug Davis in 37 at-bats (.351)
- 12 hits vs. Zack Greinke in 35 at-bats (.343)
- 10 hits vs. Carlos Villanueva in 29 at-bats (.345)

CC Sabathia, who had a short stint with the Brewers in 2008, is one of the few pitchers to have success. Pujols collected just five hits in 23 at-bats (.217).

Roy Oswalt ranks No. 1 in hits (32) allowed.

Pujols, who is in his 18th season and now has 3,002 hits, also joins a more exclusive group: players with 3,000 hits and 600 or more home runs (Pujols has 620). Only three other players can say that — Hank Aaron (who played for the Milwaukee Braves for 12 seasons), Willie Mays and Alex Rodriguez.

A 13th-round draft selection of the Cardinals in 1999, Pujols became one of the most feared right-handed sluggers. In 11 seasons in St. Louis, Pujols produced 2,073 hits, captured three National League MVP awards and helped lead the Cardinals to two World Series titles.

In 2011, the first baseman/designated hitter signed a 10-year, \$240 million contract with the Angels, and 929 of his hits have come with the American League West team.

And that's a good thing for the Brewers.

FROM THE DENVER POST

Rockies' hot pitchers face big challenge at home vs. Angels and Mike Trout

The Angels lead the American League West with a 21-13 record and are a sizzling 13-3 on the road

By Patrick Saunders

NEW YORK — Now comes the tough part for the Rockies. After an impressive 6-3 road trip, and riding a five-game winning streak, they return to Coors Field.

That's meant to be facetious, of course, but the truth is, if the Rockies want to keep rolling, they must play better at 20th and Blake. Which is odd to say based on their history of playing well at home and awful on the road.

The challenge begins Tuesday night when the Rockies host the Angels, who lead the American League West with a 21-13 record and are a sizzling 13-3 on the road.

Angels' center fielder Mike Trout arrives in Denver looking even more dangerous than his normal MVP self. Trout went 3-for-4 with a three-run homer in the Angels' 8-2 win over the Mariners on Sunday at Safeco Field, finishing the weekend with his third consecutive three-hit game. He's hitting .545 (12-for-22) with three doubles, two triples, two home runs, six RBIs and eight walks over six games in May. For the season he's hitting .336 with a 1.178 OPS.

The good news for the Rockies is their young starting pitchers have been on a terrific ride, with an ERA of 1.71 over their past 11 starts, more than making up for an inconsistent offense.

"We are seeing growth in a lot of our pitchers," manager Bud Black said. "It's great to see. You look at the (recent) stretch of games, and every starter has pitched to a level of quality. We have been in some low-scoring games, and we had to make some pitches to keep it right there. I talk about it all the time. For us to contend, the starting pitching has to be there, and it's been there the last couple of weeks."

But most of that success has come on the road, where Colorado is 15-8. Its pitchers, including the bullpen, own a 3.35 ERA road, fourth-best in the National League.

At Coors, it's been a different story: a 5.78 ERA, worst in the National League. It's a small sample size, however. The Rockies have played only 12 games at home, going 5-7. In fact, the first two months of the season is lopsided with road games. After the upcoming six-game homestand, the Rockies face another nine-game road trip, this time to the West Coast vs. division foes San Diego, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Right-hander Jon Gray is scheduled to start Tuesday against the Angels. He's been solid on the road (2-2, 3.42 ERA) and shaky at home (1-2, 7.31). But, he's coming off an excellent performance at Chicago

where he shut down the Cubs with the wind blowing out at Wrigley Field, allowing one run on three hits over seven innings.

Colorado's offense, like its pitching, has yet to find its groove at home, with a .255 average. History says the offense is about to heat up, right along with the temperatures. In three of the past four seasons the Rockies have hit above .300 at Coors.

On the road, the Rockies' .215 average is the worst in the National League, but they've been saved by the long ball, slugging 33 homers, led by Charlie Blackmon, who's hit 10 of his 11 home runs on the road.

Angels LHP Andrew Heaney (1-1, 5.31 ERA) at **Rockies RHP Jon Gray** (3-4, 4.99), 6:40 p.m., ATTRM

Heaney turned in his best outing of the season last week against Baltimore, yielding one run on five hits in six innings of work. The southpaw has only started once against the Rockies, in 2015, while Gray has also seen little of the Los Angeles hitters with only 15 career at-bats by Angels against him. With a lack of familiarity on both sides, Gray looks for his third straight win following confidence-building showings against the Padres and the Cubs, while fellow Oklahoma native Heaney keeps searching for his groove following Tommy John surgery in 2016 and elbow inflammation that forced him to begin the season on the disabled list. — *Kyle Newman, The Denver Post*

Wednesday: Angels RHP Jaime Barria (2-1, 3.46) at Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson (2-0, 3.78), 1:10 p.m., ATTRM

FROM FANGRAPHS

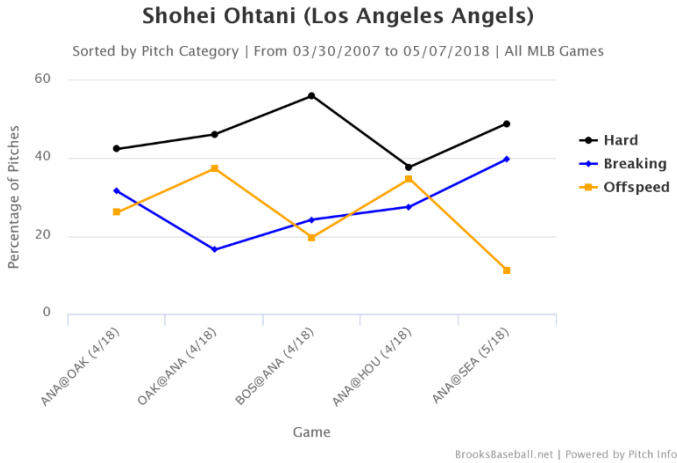
What Shohei Ohtani Just Figured Out

By Jeff Sullivan

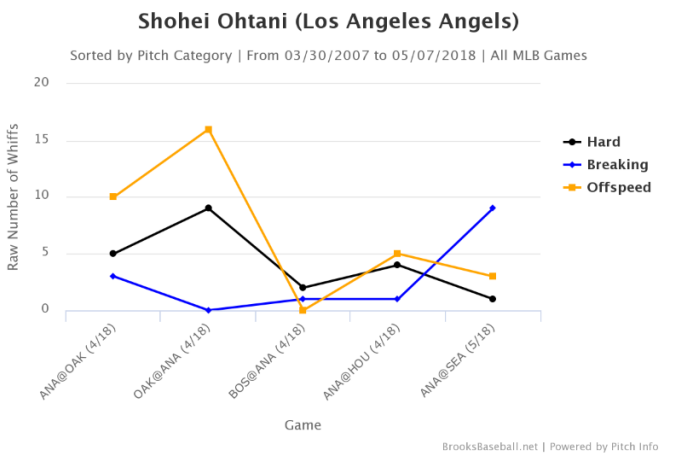
Sunday afternoon, Shohei Ohtani returned to the mound for the first time in nearly two weeks. He was very good against the Mariners until the bottom of the seventh, when he failed to retire any of three batters. Still, that partial inning couldn't spoil the appearance, and Ohtani's ankle seemed like it must've been perfectly fine. To fast-forward here, I'll note that Ohtani made very quick work of Mitch Haniger in the bottom of the second.

I'm not sure Haniger ever stood a chance. And if you watch all that quickly, maybe nothing new stands out. Yeah, Ohtani's fastball has plenty of zip. And he might also throw the best splitter in the world. The fastball there is good, and the splitter there is good. Pay special attention to the second pitch, though. That's a slider. That's not a new pitch for Ohtani — people have drooled over that pitch since before he ever crossed the ocean. But Ohtani, on Sunday, leaned more heavily on his breaking balls. For the first time, he succeeded without using the splitter as a crutch.

Brooks Baseball classifies the splitter as an offspeed pitch. Meanwhile, sliders and curves are breaking balls. So, here is Ohtani's pitch mix by start:



Ohtani just used the most breaking balls, *especially* against opposing lefties. Lefties had seen mostly fastballs and splitters. Why might Ohtani have gone this way? Because it was working for him. Here's a plot that's similar to the one above, except this time showing whiffs:

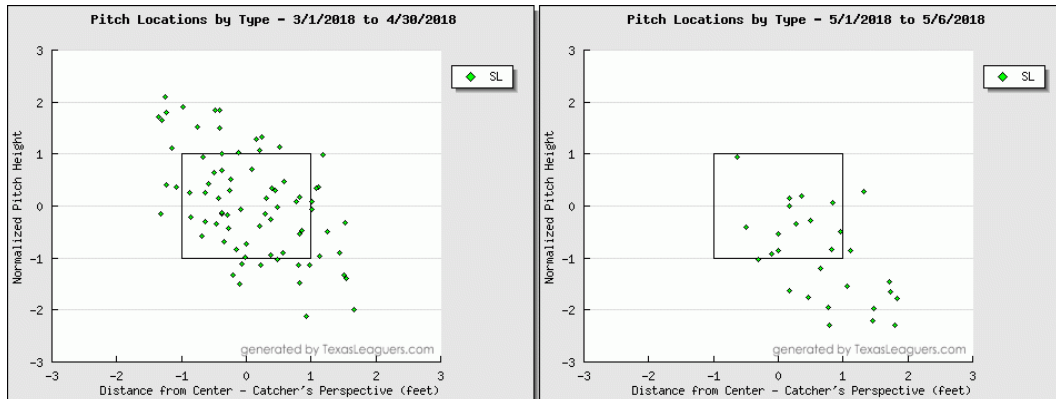


Through Ohtani's first four starts combined, his breaking balls registered five swinging strikes. Sunday alone, they registered nine.

Ohtani showed the Mariners 11 curveballs, after he'd previously thrown a total of 10. It's definitely a functional fourth pitch, that expands Ohtani's velocity range. It's good to see Ohtani believing in the curve more, but I want to get to the slider, because I think that's the real story. For the first time in five starts, Ohtani threw his slider with command. Before, he had a slider. Sunday, he had a *quality* slider. The difference, I think, is dramatic.

Most right-handed pitchers want to throw their sliders low. Many of them want to throw their sliders low and to the glove side. Through the end of April, among righties, Ohtani had the very lowest rate of low sliders thrown. He had the very lowest rate of low and glove-side sliders thrown. He had the highest average slider location, and, even worse, he had the highest average two-strike slider location. Not every single Ohtani slider was intended to be down and off the plate, but far too many Ohtani sliders were backing up on him. Ohtani had been leaving sliders up, often by mistake. Sunday, that problem almost disappeared.

I think this is best understood visually, so I grabbed a couple plots from Texas Leaguers. On the left, Ohtani sliders from his first four starts. On the right, Ohtani sliders from Sunday:



The change there is impossible to miss. Against the Mariners, Shohei Ohtani figured out his slider, shifting them down and to the glove side. Ohtani could throw the slider for a called strike. But he could also bury it. And he could make it work against lefties.

We already knew that, by movement, Ohtani could have a quality slider. Now he's started throwing them well, or at least, he did in one game. It could be that has something to do with the fact that Ohtani pitched to Rene Rivera for the first time, instead of Martin Maldonado. It could be that has something to do with the idea that Ohtani's blister might be healed. Or it could be that Ohtani is just getting increasingly comfortable with the different seams, as opposed to those he worked with in Japan. I mean, by this point, it's been months, so maybe that's unlikely. I'm not sure. But all I care about are the end results, and we just saw a good slider and a consistent slider. For Ohtani, that's going to be important.

While his fastball is obviously fast, it doesn't have that much of a swing-and-miss profile. Ohtani's fastball doesn't rise all that much, so it probably won't pile up the whiffs. The splitter is very clearly fantastic, but hitters might also try to eliminate it, figuring it generally ends up below the zone. As a fastball/splitter pitcher, Ohtani could be very good, but he'd be in trouble in games where the splitter is getting away from him. If the slider is going to be there — and, for that matter, the curveball, too — that makes hitting all the more complicated. Ohtani would have more options, and hitters would be more on the defensive. Ohtani, in short, would have a full, complete repertoire. Like he did at his best in the NPB. This isn't a difficult thing to understand; Ohtani's better when he has another quality pitch.

Maybe the breaking balls were always going to come along eventually, but now we've finally seen them. That's a meaningful step. Perhaps part of the reason Ohtani was successful against the Mariners was because the hitters kept on expecting to see more splits, but that's exactly the function of a bigger arsenal. You get to be less predictable, and you give hitters more to think about. A pitcher with three or four pitches has more ways to get guys out than a pitcher with two pitches. It can make a pitcher more effective within a start, and it can make a pitcher more effective in subsequent starts against the same lineups. This is all fundamental, so I'll stop typing. You all understand the point.

Shohei Ohtani was billed as an ace-level starter with four good pitches. To say nothing of the hitting, of course. That's the other half of it. In Ohtani's fifth major-league start, he threw four good pitches for the

first time. One start isn't exactly a pattern. It's too early to call this a trend. But if Ohtani now has it all working, well, I shouldn't need to tell you what's going to happen.

FROM THE HAWK EYE

The Monday Hive: Bees' defense always seems to be in the right spot

By John Bohenkamp

It was a masterpiece. Everything had to go right, and it did.

The Burlington Bees were down two runs in the third inning of Sunday's Class A Midwest League game against the Bowling Green Hot Rods at Community Field.

Bowling Green's Taylor Walls singled to open the inning against Bees starter Jeremy Beasley. Brendan McKay, the two-way player who was the Tampa Bay Rays' No. 1 pick in last summer's Major League Baseball draft, slapped a ground ball that appeared to be headed to center field.

But just before the ball got to the grass, Bees shortstop Leonardo Rivas grabbed it and did a backhand flip toward second base as second baseman Julio Garcia raced to catch it.

Garcia snagged the flip, then after stepping on the base spun and threw to first base as his momentum carried him toward the outfield and he was trying to avoid the sliding Walls. First baseman David MacKinnon, a big target, stretched to catch the throw, keeping his foot on the base just long enough to get McKay to complete the double play.

A couple of hours later, after the Bees fell, 2-1, to the Hot Rods, Bees manager Jack Howell continued to marvel about the play.

"That one," Howell said, "was a highlight video."

It's been that way all season for the Bees. Their infield is a puzzle, guys that can snap into any spot. It's the same way in the outfield.

It's working.

The numbers may not show it — the Bees came into Sunday's game with a .965 fielding percentage and they have committed 34 errors in 27 games.

But it always seems that the Bees are in the right spot to make plays, and that's something Howell appreciates.

"That's just being athletic, and having instinct," Howell said.

The six-game homestand that was just completed had its own highlight reel:

- Left fielder Torii Hunter raced into foul territory to make a sliding catch of McKay's slicing fly ball in Saturday's game.
- That play came an inning after Garcia, playing shortstop and shaded toward the middle as part of a shift on Bowling Green's Vidal Brujan, grabbed a hard grounder in front of second baseman Franklin Torres that, had Torres fielded it, would have taken him away from the play and made a more difficult throw to first. Garcia, his momentum taking him toward first base, made the easier throw to get Brujan.
- MacKinnon started a rare 3-4-3 double play in Wednesday's game against Dayton.
- Center fielder Brandon Marsh tracked down and made two catches near the fence in the ninth inning in Tuesday's game against Dayton, saving at least two runs.

Howell, who became the manager of the Bees after serving as the Los Angeles Angels' minor-league field coordinator for the last two seasons, has enjoyed having a daily view of what the Bees can do.

"I would see this when I would visit teams, but then I was only seeing bits and pieces of it — once a month, I come in to see a four-game series," Howell said. "But to watch it every day, to see the moves they're making and the communication they're having, that's important."

What has impressed Howell even more is how his players, especially his infielders, have handled playing different positions.

- The four outfielders on the roster — Marsh, Hunter, Jo Adell and Spencer Griffin — have played all three position.
- Garcia, Rivas, Torres and Gleyvin Pineda have played second base.
- Rivas, Pineda and Garcia have played shortstop.
- Garcia, Pineda, Jeyson Sanchez and Torres have played third base.
- MacKinnon, Sanchez and Torres have played first base.
- Pineda has had to fill in as the fourth outfielder since Adell went on the disabled list April 23.

"These guys are developing and playing multiple positions," Howell said. "That's a quick adjustment you have to make, from being the shortstop, the leader out there, where you have a longer throw across, to all of the sudden tomorrow you're playing second and you have to come across (the base on a double play) and the guy is sliding and you have to make the turn. And then third base, where you have to watch for the bunt or make the long throw deep in the hole.

"Their requirements and their skill set changes daily, game-to-game."

Howell gives credit to the fielders for understanding the positioning that comes from the information the Bees get from the Angels' analytics department before every series. But he is also impressed with the feedback he gets during the game.

“And that’s the cool part,” Howell said. “We set it up. But sometimes they’ll look at me, or they’ll question about moving over. I’m like, ‘Fine, if you see something, let me know.’ Our guy doesn’t quite have the velocity or the hitter is making a late swing, they’ll make the adjustment.”

THE ANNIVERSARY OF 3 STRIKEOUTS

The replay of Kerry Wood’s 20-strikeout game against the Houston Astros in 1998 was showing on the televisions in the Bees’ clubhouse when Howell got there on Friday.

There were more than a few players who didn’t know Howell was the Houston cleanup hitter, and a three-strikeout victim of the Chicago Cubs’ pitcher, in that May 6 game at Wrigley Field.

“I had to tell them to take a look at the No. 4 hitter,” Howell said.

Howell struck out against Wood in the second, fourth and seventh innings. He remembers the last strikeout, which came on a 3-2 pitch.

“I think I was 3-0, and then swung at a questionable pitch, 3-1,” he said. “And there might have been a questionable call that could have been ball four. Those two things are what you think back to that you could have done differently. At this point, you’re trying to find any reason on what you could do better.”

Wood was a rookie that season.

“He was a brand-new kid,” Howell said. “But he was electric. There were some pretty good players (in the Astros’ lineup). He was young, we didn’t know much about him.”

THE NUMBERS GAME

- Hunter had the day off on Sunday, but he had been hot going into the rest day.

Hunter was 14-for-27 (.519) in the last six games. He had two doubles, two triples, and scored eight runs in that stretch.

- Marsh is 11-of-33 (.333) in the last seven games.
- MacKinnon has reached base in 16 consecutive games. MacKinnon has a .480 on-base percentage, third-best in the Midwest League.
- Catcher Keinner Pina extended his hitting streak to 13 games with a sixth-inning single on Sunday.
- Garcia has a five-game hitting streak, as does Pineda.
- Beasley, who has been working as a piggyback with Sam Pastrone, has had five strong outings. Beasley has allowed 16 hits and six earned runs in 19 innings, and has struck out 16 while walking only four.

ALUMNI REPORT

- **Michael Hermosillo (2015)** hit for the cycle in Triple-A Salt Lake's 13-9 win over Fresno on Tuesday.

Hermosillo went 4-for-5 and drove in six runs. Hermosillo struck out in the first inning, singled in the third, tripled in the fifth, hit a grand slam in the sixth and doubled in the eighth.

- **Zac Ryan (2017) and Sean Isaac (2018)** were part of a combined no-hitter at High-A Inland Empire in a 4-0 win over Lake Elsinore on Wednesday night. Ryan walked two and struck out two in the eighth inning, then Isaac walked one and struck out two in the ninth.

Jason Alexander pitched seven innings, walking three while striking out eight.

- **Joe Gatto (2016-17)** struck out eight in five innings in High-A Inland Empire's 3-0 win over Stockton on Friday night. **Marc Brakeman (2018)** allowed one hit and struck out three in two innings of relief.

- **David Fletcher (2015)** had an inside-the-park home run in Salt Lake's 5-3 win over Las Vegas on Sunday.

Fletcher's home run came in the third inning. Fletcher leads the Pacific Coast League with 45 hits.

Starting pitcher **John Lamb (2009)** allowed one hit while striking out six in five shutout innings.

THE WEEK AHEAD

- **At South Bend (6:05 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, 9:35 a.m. Wednesday).** The Eastern-Western divisional crossover continues, as the Bees travel to play the Chicago Cubs' affiliate. Pitcher Jose Albertos (0-3, 24.50 ERA) is the Cubs' No. 2 prospect, according to MLB.com. Pitcher Brendon Little (1-2, 6.50 ERA) is the No. 5 prospect.

- **At West Michigan (6:05 p.m. Thursday-Saturday).** The Whitecaps are only one game out of first place in the Western Division. Pitcher Matt Manning (0-1, 8.38) is the Detroit Tigers' No. 2 prospect.

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS

Mike Trout, Mookie Betts both say runs scored is their favorite stat

By Steve DelVecchio

Mookie Betts and Mike Trout currently rank at or near the top of the majors in most significant hitting categories, but both star outfielders agree that one statistic is more important than the rest.

MLB.com conducted a poll of several players to determine which stat they believe holds the most weight when they evaluate themselves in a given season. Of 35 position players who voted, 10 players considered on-base plus slugging percentage (OPS) to be the best measure of how they are performing.

Next was on-base percentage (six votes) followed by RBI (five votes) and then runs scored (four votes). Of the four players who voted for runs, Trout and Betts were two of them.

“That’s big from an offensive side,” Trout said.

Betts, who currently ranks first in MLB with 36 runs scored, agrees.

“You score runs to win games,” he said. “That’s how you do it.”

Again, Trout and Betts are at or near the top of almost every category. You could argue that there was some bias involved if a player who belts 40 home runs a year but has a .240 career average said homers are the most important stat, but that is not the case with Trout and Betts.

If you saw the impressive feat Betts recently accomplished at the plate, you might think the long ball is what he focuses the most on. But let that be a lesson to you youngsters — crossing the plate is a good thing no matter how you do it.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Mookie Betts Has Become Mike Trout’s clone in race for MLB’s Best Player

By Zachary D. Rymer

Major League Baseball only has one Mike Trout, and he's hard to miss. Hint: He's the 6'2", 235-pound athletic marvel with two MVPs and a reputation as the game's best player.

Mookie Betts, however, is doing a surprisingly convincing job of trying to replicate Trout's formula for greatness.

The right fielder has had a bigger hand than anyone in the Boston Red Sox's hot start to 2018. Through 30 games, Betts leads MLB with a 1.252 OPS and 13 home runs. He already has two three-homer games on his ledger, one on April 17 and the other on May 2.

Betts is also giving the Red Sox his usual excellent defense and strong baserunning. The overall package has been worth 2.6 wins above replacement, according to Baseball Reference, which puts Betts here in the early rankings among position players:

- **1. Mike Trout: 3.1**
- **2. Mookie Betts: 2.6**

Yup. Right there. Closer than anyone to the Los Angeles Angels' mightiest hero.

Now, we've seen something like this before. Trout (10.5) and Betts (9.7) ranked first and second in WAR in 2016, which ended with them finishing in the same order in the American League MVP voting.

But even that wasn't enough to entertain a conversation about whether Betts was on Trout's level. That was mainly because Betts couldn't match Trout's offense, as the latter outpaced the former in OPS by 94 points, .991 to .897.

Things are different this time. Trout is among the many players Betts is beating in both OPS and homers. Since Betts at least rivals Trout in defense and baserunning, the only real advantage that Trout has at this point is that he plays center field, a premium position.

This isn't happening because Betts has literally transformed, Willow-style, into a Trout clone. He's only 5'9", 180 pounds, and his hitting still thrives on quick wrists rather than overpowered muscles.

But when you look closely at how Betts and Trout ply their trade, the similarities are striking.

If somebody like, say, Javier Baez is an extreme example of a hitter who prefers to swing at everything regardless of whether contact is assured, then Betts and Trout are extreme examples of hitters who prefer not to swing unless contact is assured.

Both are swinging at less than 40 percent of the pitches they see (36.2 for Betts and 38.9 for Trout) and making contact on better than 85 percent (87.7 for Betts and 86.3 for Trout) of their swings.

This puts Betts and Trout in an extremely exclusive patience-and-contact club that has only seven other members—namely: Jesse Winker, Jose Ramirez, Alex Bregman, DJ LeMahieu, Denard Span, Brett Gardner and Joe Mauer. And it's granting them entry to another exclusive club for hitters with a walk-to-strikeout ratio in the neighborhood of 1-1. Betts is at 14-13. Trout is at 28-29.

Then there's what separates Betts and Trout from the rest of the pack: power.

Trout has nothing to prove to anybody in this department. His 213 career homers have come courtesy of a swing that's both powerful and efficient. To wit, he's producing elite marks in average launch angle (19.9 degrees) and exit velocity (92.7 mph) so far this season.

Betts, on the other hand, has tended to float only slightly above the MLB average with his slugging percentage. So, perhaps it's suspicious that he's suddenly the best power hitter in baseball.

However, this is not a case of a hitter who's doing the same ol' thing and ending up with different results. It's a case of a thinking man's hitter who's using his mind to get the most out of his body.

"My at-bats are a little bit different. I don't really care about striking out that much," Betts told Evan Drellich of NBC Sports Boston. "I still want to [be] able to drive the ball with two strikes, the same way I do if it's 2-0. So I think I'm just keeping that same, aggressive, drive-the-ball mindset throughout the whole at-bat."

Betts' career-low 55.4 percent swing rate in two-strike counts underscores how he's not automatically going into protect mode in such counts. His career-high .685 SLUG% in two-strike counts underscores how well this risk/reward gambit is paying off.

Beyond that, Betts' actual application of what power he has is about as efficient as it could possibly be.

He isn't chasing outside pitches (i.e., on the outer third of the strike zone and beyond) as often as he did between 2015 and 2017. He's keeping the majority of his swings on the inner part of the plate. That's helping him take more frequent advantage of his pull side, which, like with most hitters, is his most powerful side.

To boot, Betts is also taking pointers from J.D. Martinez, who's notoriously all about hitting the ball high and hard with every swing.

"You guys know that I'm real big on [launch angle] and stuff like that, so I feel like he's kind of gravitated towards me in that direction," Martinez told Drellich.

Martinez's expertise is clearly rubbing off on Betts. His average launch angle is up to 21.4 degrees, and his average exit velocity is up to 93.2 mph.

That's a combination of loft and speed that's comparable to Trout and, well, really just one other hitter:

The plot doesn't lie. Betts is right there in between Joey Gallo, who's hit more home runs than singles, and Trout, ostensibly the best player in the game, in terms of pure power output.

Because Betts has only been doing this for a few weeks, it's only fair to have some skepticism about how long he can keep it up. It's also only fair to note that he has been known to run hot and cold.

And yet, it says a lot about where Betts is at right now that he's not relying on Lady Luck or sabermetric technicalities to push Trout around on the best-player-in-baseball battlefield.

He's doing it because he really is that good.

FROM ASAHI SHIMBUN

MLB/Japanese fans cross Pacific to see Ohtani's Angels

Japanese baseball fans have been following every hit and pitch of Shohei Ohtani's sensational rookie season and increasing numbers of them are making the trip across the Pacific to see the 23-year-old live in action.

Ohtani's ability to have an impact as both pitcher and hitter--a "two-way" player in the baseball lexicon--has seen him compared to Hall of Famer Babe Ruth and crowds at the Los Angeles Angels games have boomed in his first year at the team.

Attendances at Angels games have risen 10 percent this year to nearly 40,000 per game, the best in the American League and third behind city rivals the Dodgers and the St. Louis Cardinals in all of Major League Baseball.

It is a remarkable upsurge for a team that has only been to the post-season once since 2009, and Japanese fans drawn to California by the early success of Ohtani are responsible for at least part of it.

Online ticket reseller Vivid Seats has seen Angels ticket prices increase 21 percent year-on-year this season, with the Angels ticket page the most frequently visited by customers in Japan.

This reflects a big hike in demand for Angels tickets that has taken the resale market by surprise.

"We noticed indications in spring training that Shohei Ohtani was generating significant buzz," the company told Reuters via email.

"But looking at Vivid Seats regular season data, the uptick in appetite for Angels tickets from fans in Japan was not something we expected."

Ohtani's first home start in April was watched by 44,742 fans--the biggest crowd for an Angels regular season day game in two decades--but it is not only in ticket sales that he is having a commercial impact on the league.

Jersey sales from the first month of the season predictably made Ohtani the most popular player in Japan but MLB figures also show shirts bearing his name were the third biggest seller in the United States.

Jim Small, the league's Asia chief, said earlier this month that Ohtani's success was also having a wider impact on the MLB's popularity right across Asia.

"Television ratings right now are triple what they were last year across all of our games," he said.

"So clearly this story is resonating with fans throughout Japan and really throughout Asia.

"We have seen increases in social media, ratings in China, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) and in Korea," Small added. "I think Asia has rallied behind Shohei Ohtani."

With TV ratings for Angels games also booming stateside and the team sitting atop their division with a 21-13 record, the Angels' commercial department is sure to be contemplating the remaining six years of Ohtani's contract with some pleasure.

FROM ND INSIDER

Former Notre Dame WR Torii Hunter Jr. catching on to minor league life

By Eric Hansen

SOUTH BEND —There are moments when Torii Hunter Jr., allows himself to envision what life will look like when baseball ends.

Not in vivid detail. Not with one foot out the door. Not yet.

“The minor league lifestyle is definitely rough,” said the former Notre Dame football wide receiver, back in town Monday as a member of the Burlington (Iowa) Bees Class A baseball team.

“You learn to be frugal. You learn to trim fat where you can. Once you see that \$300 check — or whatever — come in, it’s like, ‘All right, some stuff has to change.’ ”

At least he has a choice whether to persevere. and there have been days, since he pushed a possible pro football future off the front burner and into the “what-if” pile roughly 18 months ago, that it felt like baseball was never going to love him back as much as he loved it.

Monday at Four Winds Field was not one of those days.

Hunter started in right field, batted third for the L.A. Angels’ affiliate and went 1-for-4 with a walk and a run scored in the first of a three-game series against the host South Bend Cubs. Along the way he got roughly the same tepid reception from the crowd as any of the other Bees, and seemed to love every minute of it.

He came in sporting a season-high .283 batting average, thanks in part to a .409 hot streak to start May and an even more torrid late April.

It was reminiscent of his 52 games last summer with the Orem (Utah) Owlz at the rookie League level. There, Hunter ranked in the top five in the Pioneer League in batting average (.352) and on-base percentage (.432), 11th in runs scored (48) and seventh in stolen bases (13).

But on April 21 of this year, he was scuffling, with a .125 batting average and .150 slugging percentage, a slump he credits to the end of to eliminating a leg kick as part of his swing.

And last year about this time he was initially assigned to the equivalent of baseball purgatory, extended spring training, rather than an affiliate. Hunter was grateful those stats aren’t published, as he was able to labor mightily in relative anonymity.

“There were definitely doubts in my head, because I was struggling,” he said about his career path. “I didn’t feel like I was out there competing. Then, I don’t know, something clicked. Maybe it was the competitor in me.”

From that point on, Hunter became committed to seeing wherever the baseball journey would take him for the long term.

So is Torii’s wife, Selina Hunter Bell, a world-class model taking a career hiatus after giving birth to the couple’s first child (Torii “Tres” Hunter III) on Christmas Day and currently living in a Southeastern Iowa town of roughly 25,000.

“They like it, because I’m there, because they get to see me every day,” Torri said of Selina and Tres. “And that’s the most important thing —being with your family. They don’t care where it is, but they enjoy being around me.”

Even when the dream turns dark at times.

Maybe Hunter's intermittent growing pains were largely the product of inactivity.

The oldest son of former Major League All-Star outfielder Torii Hunter Sr. doubled up in baseball and football for two of his four years in South Bend, but he garnered just 12 official at-bats between his junior year at Prosper (Texas) High in 2012 and his first professional spring training game at-bat roughly five years later.

A broken leg suffered in January of 2013 in a football high school all-star game practice wiped out his senior high school baseball season, after which he was drafted in the 36th round by the Detroit Tigers.

The injury also deferred his football debut by a year and was followed by more injuries, including a head injury in 2016 that ultimately coaxed him toward baseball.

Hunter passed on baseball his freshman season at ND, but went out in both 2015 and 2016, working practices and games around his spring football commitment both seasons.

His college career stats totaled seven strikeouts in his 12 at-bats, spread over 23 games played and one start. The pinch runner and defensive replacement batted .167 and scored nine runs, with one RBI and two stolen bases.

Still, the Angels drafted him in the 23rd round in June of 2016, and he signed later in the month, fully intending to keep his football options open.

A helmet-to-helmet hit from Texas safety DeShon Elliott in ND's 2016 season opener that rendered Hunter unconscious and left him with a lingering concussion shifted his thinking.

"It wasn't that I didn't like (football) anymore," he said, "but I still have memory loss from that moment. Like right before the play I don't remember much besides watching it on video.

"It was definitely a scary moment for me. It was definitely a life-changing moment.

"I thought I wanted to continue football. I thought if I had a pretty good senior year, I'd try to do the whole deal with that, the whole draft process. But after that injury and missing (three) games at the end of the season, that kind of changed my mind. I just wanted to remain healthy when I got older."

Hunter, who turns 23 next month, still has aches and pains left over from football. He also has a warm spot in his heart from the sport.

His plan Tuesday morning was to go visit Irish head football coach Brian Kelly and some of his former Irish football teammates. He hopes to run into Cole Kmet, ND's latest football/baseball two-timer.

And he's counting on former Irish QB DeShone Kizer, now with the Green Bay Packers, to come watch him in person when the Bees visit the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers later this summer.

“I pay attention to football, especially Notre Dame football,” Hunter said. “I mean, I was getting draft updates during the first round during one of my games.

“And I do wonder what life would have been like had I come back for a fifth year for football and continued to play. But right now I’m trying to keep looking forward and have my eyes on the goal that’s in front of me right now.”