



Press Clips

(April 5, 2018)

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Zack Cozart's walk-off homer lifts Angels to victory, while Shohei Ohtani homers again**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — After Zack Cozart had the first walk-off hit of his career, it was difficult to tell if he was happier for himself or for the guy who had hit the Angels' other homer a couple hours earlier.

Cozart's 13th-inning homer gave the Angels a 3-2 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday afternoon, sealing the club's fifth victory in its first seven games.

As if the Angels' quick start isn't encouraging enough for the team, it's also been sparked by the Shohei Ohtani Show.

Ohtani hit his second homer in as many games, this one a game-tying, two-run shot in the fifth inning against reigning Cy Young winner Corey Kluber.

While Ohtani seems to shrug off his early success, Cozart and the rest of his teammates are reveling in it for him, because they heard and read the skeptical comments about him in March.

"I'm just pumped because he was getting killed in spring training, even though it was spring training," Cozart said. "It's really impressive if you think about it. All the pressure is on him. And he's just thrown that out of the way and he's just playing ball. ... It's awesome for him to ignore the noise. He works hard. He's a special talent. No doubt about it. We're glad to have him."

Ohtani, who also singled, is now 6 for 14 with two homers and five RBIs in three games as the designated hitter. In between, he also picked up a victory as a pitcher, with a six-inning outing on Sunday.

"I don't have anything to say to those (critics)," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "I had bad results, so I guess they have the right to say bad stuff about me. We just got started. I'll just take it day by day and try to help the team."

He certainly gave the Angels a lift in the fifth inning on Wednesday. Kluber had not even allowed a hit through four innings, holding a 2-0 lead before Andrelton Simmons broke up his no-hitter with a bunt single.

With two outs in the inning, Ohtani got a fastball over the outer half of the plate and he drove it out of the ballpark, just to the left of center field.

"You can see the big power he has," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Corey Kluber is a guy that does not give up a lot of home runs. He's as tough as there is. He made him get the ball over the plate and Shohei got a hold of it."

The homer spared Tyler Skaggs from a loss on a day when he pieced together a strong outing despite a rocky start.

Although four of the first five hitters of the game reached base, Skaggs allowed only one run in the first inning, with the help of an inning-ending double play.

"I think I was going too quick," Skaggs said. "My arm wasn't catching up to my body. I realized it halfway through the first inning. It's frustrating. I should realize it five or six pitches into the game, but I made the adjustment and I thought I pitched well from the first inning.

Skaggs retired 11 of the next 12 hitters before allowing a run on back-to-back singles in the fifth, with a stolen base in between.

After that, all eight Angels relievers on the roster collaborated on 8-1/3 scoreless innings.

Noé Ramírez entered with two on in the 13th, and he struck out Erik Gonzalez to strand two runners. That one-batter performance was enough to get Ramírez his first major league victory, thanks to a first from Cozart.

With one out in the bottom of the 13th, Cozart got a 3-and-2 fastball from Zach McAllister and drove it over the left field fence. It was the first walk-off hit of any kind for the eight-year veteran.

"Just as excited as you can be," Cozart said. "Nothing like running the bases and you know the game is over. That was a grinder of a game, and we came out on top."

Angels' Blake Parker looking to rediscover 2017 form

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Blake Parker said his perfect inning Tuesday night was "a step in the right direction."

Literally.

Parker had struggled in spring training and in his first two outings of the regular season. A day after setting the Cleveland Indians down in order Tuesday night, Parker said he looked at some video and realized he needs to focus on driving directly toward the plate.

"I'm trying to get back to simplifying things, throwing strikes and attacking hitters," Parker said Wednesday morning. "That's who I've always been. I've been a strike-thrower. Go after guys and put them away with my stuff. I kind of got away from that."

Parker, who added another perfect inning in the 11th inning of Wednesday's game, said he was "trying to create something" and his mechanics may have gotten out of whack.

He conceded that he's had a different mindset this year. A journeyman reliever for most of his career, last year he had a breakthrough season with the Angels, ascending all the way to the closer role.

"I didn't pitch great in spring training, even though I felt OK and that kind of frustrated me," he said. "Maybe I felt I had to re-prove myself or prove myself in a different way."

Parker gave up 14 runs and 19 hits in 8-2/3 innings in the spring, and then he allowed six of the first 10 hitters he faced in the regular season to reach base.

He was pulled one out into the ninth inning Sunday, before Keynan Middleton bailed him out to get the save. Parker wanted to get back on the mound Tuesday night, even though it was a low leverage spot with an 11-2 lead.

"Blake looked a little more comfortable on the mound," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Hopefully he's getting acclimated back into his rhythm."

Although Scioscia hasn't named a closer, the situations in which he used Parker in his first two games indicate he's the manager's first choice. Scioscia said nothing should be read into the situation in which he pitched Tuesday, because they had several relievers unavailable from pitching Monday.

NEW PITCHER

The Angels acquired right-hander Miguel Almonte from the Kansas City Royals in exchange for cash consideration or a player to be named.

Almonte, who was optioned to Triple-A, will be used out of the bullpen in the Angels system. Almonte, 25, has pitched 10-2/3 innings in the majors in brief appearances in 2015 and 2017. A former top 100 prospect, Almonte has a career 3.77 ERA and 8.7 strikeouts per nine innings in the minors.

General Manager Billy Eppler said Almonte has "a big arm with good secondary stuff," and the Angels will look to him as multi-inning reliever.

In order to create a spot on the 40-man roster, the Angels designated catcher Juan Graterol for assignment.

ALSO

Matt Shoemaker, who was placed on the disabled list with a strained forearm on Tuesday, said he underwent an MRI earlier on Wednesday, but the Angels had not yet released the results. Shoemaker said he expected to undergo additional tests. ...

Ian Kinsler (groin) has been feeling "really good," Scioscia said. He is expected to resume baseball activities over the weekend. Scioscia said the Angels are expecting Kinsler to be able to play when he's eligible to come off the disabled list Tuesday. ...

Andrew Heaney (elbow inflammation) is scheduled to pitch for Inland Empire on Friday. Heaney is expected to throw 80 to 90 pitches. If that goes well, he could rejoin the rotation next week, when the Angels go to six starters.

UP NEXT

Angels (Parker Bridwell, 10-3, 3.91 in 2017) vs. A's (Daniel Gossett, 0-1, 9.00), Friday, 7 p.m., Fox Sports West/KLAA (830 AM).

Indians fan hands Shohei Ohtani's first home-run ball to Angels fan, 9, from Orange

By Tomoya Shimura

ANAHEIM — Shohei Ohtani's first home run as an Angel on Tuesday night shocked baseball fans across the country – and the world.

But some were even more surprised by an act of kindness by a 33-year-old Indians fan who first found that home-run ball.

Chris Incorvaia, a Cleveland resident visiting Orange County to watch his favorite team play against the Angels, picked up the ball that landed next to him in the very first row of the right-field stands and immediately handed it to the kid sitting right behind him.

"We were watching it coming this deep and my friend goes, 'Run over there and try to grab it!'" Incorvaia told the Register during the April 3 game. "I'm like, 'I'm not going to jump into those guys.'

"I waited, ball hit cement, picked it up and, instantaneously, put it in that young man's mitt."

"He's an Angels fan. I'm an Indians fan," Incorvaia said. "I knew he would appreciate it a lot more."

That lucky boy was Matthew Gutierrez, a 9-year-old who lives in Orange.

"I said, 'Thank you,'" Gutierrez, who attends McPherson Magnet School, told the Register. "He was very nice."

Tuesday was Ohtani's debut game at Angel Stadium and the 397-foot homer came during his first at-bat. The Japanese superstar is the first player since Babe Ruth in 1921 to win as a starting pitcher and then hit a home run as a non-pitcher the following game in the same season, according to Washington Post.

Incorvaia said he knew the significance of the home-run ball he had just given away.

"I understood it, but it was more important to make sure that someone who'd really appreciate it could have that ball," he said.

Gutierrez later handed the ball over to an Angel staffer who came to ask if Ohtani could have the milestone ball. Gutierrez and Incorvaia went down to the Angels clubhouse after the game to personally hand the ball to Ohtani.

Ohtani gave Gutierrez an autographed ball and a bat. The boy said his favorite players are Mike Trout, Ohtani and Albert Pujols.

"I want to be a major league baseball player on the Angels," said Gutierrez, a Little Leaguer who plays shortstop, left field, pitcher and first base.

Incorvaia, a die-hard Indians fan, said after the game he ran and bought an Ohtani replica jersey to get the player's autograph.

"This is a big deal," he said.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Shohei Ohtani fever is really heating up in Angel Stadium

By Bill Shaikin

Duncan Harrington sat on the floor of the Angels' team store, spinning a red toy bat, as his father shopped for Shohei Ohtani T-shirts.

Duncan is 6. He had never seen Ohtani play before Wednesday, but he is well aware that Ohtani is a superhero.

"He made 25 home runs in one whole game," Duncan said.

Not as far as we know, at least not yet.

But life is pretty close to a video game when you can get a single on your first swing in the major leagues, pitch your team to victory in your debut on the mound, hit your first major league home run in your next game, and take the reigning Cy Young Award winner in your new league deep the game after that.

His second week in the majors has yet to begin.

Albert Pujols is bound for the Hall of Fame. Andrelton Simmons might be the best defensive player of our generation. Mike Trout might be the best player of our generation, period.

You wouldn't know it, at least for the moment. These distinguished gentlemen are the supporting players in the Southern California premiere of Ohtani Mania.

Mike Scioscia, the Angels' manager, thought back to the buzz surrounding the great Japanese players of recent years: Ichiro Suzuki, Hideki Matsui, Yu Darvish.

Scioscia needed a greater comparison. The anticipation for Ohtani is exponentially greater.

"You'd have to compare it to Ken Griffey Jr. or Mike Trout, with those kinds of expectations," Scioscia said.

"There's another element to Shohei, being a two-way player. There's a lot of intrigue with that. People will see how it's going to work out."

He hits! He pitches! OMG!

In spring training, Ohtani had 32 at-bats. He had four hits, none of them home runs, none even for extra bases.

Then it really did become Sho Time. In the first 14 at-bats that count, he has six hits, two of them home runs. The one Wednesday came against Cleveland Indians ace Corey Kluber, who has won the American League Cy Young Award in two of the last four years and finished in the top 10 in voting four years running.

The Angels scored three runs Wednesday. That home run, to dead center field, accounted for two.

It is early. The sample size is small. And yet, of all the players in the AL, only five had more at-bats and a higher on-base-plus-slugging percentage as of Wednesday evening.

There were two schools of thought about Ohtani in spring training, or so it seemed. He would need a lengthy adjustment period to be able to hit major league pitching, or he would not be able to hit at all.

His retort to those critics Wednesday?

"I don't have anything to say to those guys," he said.

He shrugged. He was not bragging. He did not appear to care. He had "bad results" in the spring, he said, and people had to write something.

"I'm just pumped because he was getting killed in spring training," teammate Zack Cozart said, "even though it was spring training."

"It's really impressive, if you think about it. All the pressure's on him. He's just kind of thrown that out of the way."

On Wednesday, the presence of Ohtani was everywhere at Angel Stadium.

There was the fan waving a Japanese flag in the front row behind home plate. There was the concession stand featuring sushi rolls and pork katsu. There were the \$34.99 men's T-shirts, \$39.99 women's T-shirts and \$49.99 two-tone red and gray T-shirts in the team store.

There was the video ad on the enormous scoreboard above right field, touting that Japan Airlines five times has been designated the "world's most punctual airline."

The Ohtani Show is must-see TV, all the more so in the majority of Southern California homes that have gone five years without seeing Clayton Kershaw on television.

You might hear something new, like this: Ohtani has separate entrance music as a hitter and pitcher.

He hits to "Wrapped Up," by British singer-songwriter Olly Murs and featuring American rapper Travie McCoy. He pitches to "Do or Die," a remix by Dutch producer Afrojack of a song by the Los Angeles band Thirty Seconds to Mars.

This is for real: Ohtani selected a song with the word "angels" in it.

"In the middle of the night, when the angels scream, I don't want to live a lie that I believe," the song starts. "Time to do or die. I will never forget the moment."

That is the song he will hear when he makes his first home start Sunday. He will never forget the moment.

Shohei Ohtani homers again in Angels' 3-2 win over Indians

By Jeff Miller

It's a one-man trot that couldn't be any less lonely, not when you're carrying your teammates around the bases with you.

The sensation is one Zack Cozart never felt in the 749 big-league games he played before Wednesday.

"Nothing like running around the bases knowing the game's over (and) you ended it," he said after his first career walk-off hit, a homer, lifted the Angels past Cleveland 3-2 in 13 innings.

The Angels have two series wins and a 5-2 record in what looks to be a promising season.

Cozart's game winner was the final exclamation point but hardly the day's only punctuated moment.

The Angels reached extra innings after coming back on Corey Kluber, the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner, and doing so behind another sport-halting swing from Shohei Ohtani.

For the second consecutive day, the rookie homered to ignite an Angel Stadium crowd and push the team in the direction of dramatic victory.

"He's a quality pitcher," Ohtani said later through an interpreter. "He rarely makes mistakes. ... I think I was really lucky I was able to hit the ball."

A week ago, there were concerns among outside observers about Ohtani's ability to hit big-league pitching. Pitching doesn't get much bigger league than Kluber.

When the bottom of the fifth began, the Angels trailed 2-0 and had no hits off the right-hander, against whom a 2-0 deficit can feel like 20-0.

After Kole Calhoun struck out, Andrelton Simmons bunted for a single, a move some traditionalists might suggest is a no-no when it comes to acceptable ways of breaking up a no-no.

If he was the least bit rattled, Kluber concealed it well by striking out Luis Valbuena.

That brought up Ohtani, who struck out in his first plate appearance against Cleveland's ace. He fouled off a pitch in that at-bat but otherwise resembled a rookie facing a reigning Cy Young Award winner.

This time, after the count reached 1-1, Ohtani extended his arms and sent a 92-mph fastball on the outside edge an estimated 400 feet to center.

"It's awesome for him to ignore the noise," Cozart said. "The kid works hard. He's a special talent, there's no doubt about it. We're glad we have him."

Although the moment wasn't as theatrical as Ohtani's career-first homer Tuesday, the impact was more significant, instantly pulling the Angels even 2-2 on a day when Kluber appeared in charge.

It was before the game that Mike Scioscia was asked, "Do you have a 'see I told you guys' feeling?" The Angels manager dismissed the suggestion, noting Ohtani's obvious talent and the team's unyielding confidence in him.

Still, this is precisely what several of the Angels predicted during Ohtani's wobbly spring. The idea was repeated enough to have been scripted. When the real games arrive, the narrative went, so, too, will the real Ohtani.

In two home appearances as the designated hitter, he has more hits (five) than he had all of spring training (four). Each of his Angel Stadium hits has left the bat at 100 mph or faster.

The No. 8 hitter also has drilled 797 feet of home-run history the past two days after producing nothing but singles starting with his first exhibition game.

"Phenomenal," said starting pitcher Tyler Skaggs, who helped make Cozart's heroics possible by limiting the Indians to one run in the first inning after four of the first five batters reached base. "He picked me up again today. Nothing but smiles from me."

Shohei Ohtani gets second chance against Athletics, and vice versa

By Jeff Miller

Shohei Ohtani has produced stunning early results, pitching and hitting in a manner that probably has surprised even the most optimistic observers.

So, who knows what he might pull off in his next pitching start, Sunday at Angel Stadium. One thing is certain:

He'll be facing Oakland. Again.

In a situation Mike Scioscia called "not ideal," the Athletics will get their second shot at Ohtani in the span of eight days.

The Angels manager indicated that he believes a lack of familiarity aids the pitcher, that edge eroded with each added plate appearance.

"I think it's very common," Scioscia said, "when you do pitch back-to-back games, there are some things that are neutralized."

Ohtani had one rough stretch in his first start, allowing three consecutive batters to score in the second inning. Otherwise, he smothered Oakland's offense, giving up nothing more than one walk in six innings.

He struck out six batters, retired 14 of the final 15 batters he faced and threw more than a third of his 92 pitches at or above 95 mph.

On Sunday, he might need to be even better.

"There's some more things where maybe the pitcher has to be a little finer with his stuff," Scioscia said, "be a little crisper because hitters are starting to see him more in a shorter amount of time."

Transactions

The Angels acquired Miguel Almonte from Kansas City in exchange for cash or a player to be named. Almonte, 25, appeared in 11 games with the Royals the last two seasons.

The right-hander has been a starter and reliever. Angels general manager Billy Eppler said the club would groom Almonte to be a reliever. Almonte was optioned to triple-A Salt Lake.

To make room on the 40-man roster, catcher Juan Graterol was designated for assignment.

FROM ANGELS.COM

The hype is real: Ohtani has been outstanding

Throws 99.6 mph as a pitcher, hits 112.8 mph as batter

By Mike Petriello

The Angels have an off-day Thursday. That might be the only thing that can stop Shohei Ohtani from doing something spectacular.

Hyperbolic? Well, sure. It's April 5. We can't exactly look at his stat line of .429/.429/.857 this early in the season as anything more than a flashy set of unsustainable numbers, but what we can do is to look at the underlying skills that have brought him to that point -- they're very real -- and to point out that in three games over the last four days, Ohtani has done something spectacular each time.

Sunday: In his Major League pitching debut, Ohtani threw six innings in a 7-4 Angels win, flashing elite-level velocity, averaging 97.8 mph on his fastball, and getting so many swings and misses on his splitter that it was the third-best swing-and-miss splitter game of any pitcher in the past two seasons.

Monday: Ohtani rested. The Angels lost 6-0.

Tuesday: You'll remember the first-inning home run off Josh Tomlin as the first of Ohtani's career, but that's not really all he did, is it? Ohtani had three hits, and as Statcast™ will tell you, they were all *mashed*:

That final one, the 112.8-mph single off of Zach McAllister, is the hardest-hit ball by a pitcher (which we consider Ohtani as, even if he wasn't one at the time) since Statcast™ began tracking in 2015. He's the first pitcher to have three batted balls in a game of at least 100 mph; remember, he's been in the big leagues for a *week*.

Wednesday: Facing reigning American League Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, Ohtani struck out in his first at-bat, as many do. In the fifth inning, though, he got his revenge, 400 feet worth of it. After a groundout against Andrew Miller in the eighth, Ohtani singled with an exit velocity of 104 mph off Cody Allen in the 10th, before grounding out again against Tyler Olson in the 12th. The Angels won, 3-2, on Zack Cozart's walk-off homer in the 13th inning.

Again, it's only a few games, perhaps best illustrated by the fact that he's single-handedly outperformed the Tigers and Royals (and tied the Rays and Marlins), but he hasn't drawn a walk yet. He's only pitched against one team, and that's not going to change soon, since he faces the same A's again on Sunday in Anaheim. There are going to be ups and downs. The 4.50 ERA doesn't matter, just like the .429 batting average doesn't matter.

We know that, so far at least, the excitement has been real -- and we know the skills that have come along with it are real, too.

What that means is that while you might need months to know if a batting average is "real," you don't need all that long to know if *skills* are "real." It takes about two pitches to know that Noah Syndergaard throws hard and R.A. Dickey does not. You know pretty much right away that Aaron Judge can crush a baseball in ways that Billy Hamilton cannot, and that Hamilton can run in ways that Albert Pujols cannot.

So in that sense, let's not look at averages or rates that we know are going to change considerably. Let's look at skills. Let's look at *maximums*. Let's show that Ohtani has proven that the hype in that department is warranted, even if he's got a lot of work to do to prove the performance will follow it.

Exit velocity: 112.8 mph

For all the homers and crushed liners, his hardest-hit ball so far this year was the single up the middle on Tuesday night. That gets rounded up to 113 for leaderboard purposes, so we'll do the same here. Last year, in the Majors, exactly 0.24 percent of batted balls touched 113 mph. Seventy-five players did it once. That may sound like a lot, but "once" is a pretty low bar, and even a stud like Anthony Rizzo did it exactly once in 486 plate appearances.

If we really want to get into it, 658 players had 20 plate appearances last year. Seventy-five of 658 is about 11 percent. So in three games as a designated hitter, Ohtani has shown a skill that 90 percent of hitters last season did not. That's a good start.

Pitch velocity: 99.6 mph

We dug into Ohtani's pitching start in depth the other day, so there's plenty more detail there, but there's one pertinent takeaway for right now, based on Ohtani touching 99 mph a dozen times against the A's on Sunday.

Only six starters hit 99 mph a dozen or more times in all of 2017. Ohtani just did that in six innings. It's not hyperbole to say that he's got velocity unlike nearly any non-Syndergaard starting pitcher.

This actually works out in a similar way. Last year, only 0.51 percent of pitches got up to 99 mph. Only 85 pitchers touched 99 mph at least once, which again includes one-time-only guys like Michael Wacha, who did it once in 2,700 pitches. There were 673 pitchers who threw at least 100 pitches last year, so about 13 percent of pitchers can get to 99. Again, elite.

Sprint Speed: 29.9 ft/sec

Here's the part you either forgot about or didn't know in the first place: Ohtani is really, really fast. It's easy to overlook this with all the pitching and hitting exploits, but when you go back and look at some of last winter's scouting reports, like this one from MLB.com's Jonathan Mayo, it's in there:

The first scouting director said... [Ohtani] also had recorded home-to-first times at 3.9 seconds, which is well above average and a part of his game not often discussed.

Fortunately for us, we've seen Ohtani have to run all-out, giving us a chance to measure his speed. (We use Statcast™'s Sprint Speed, which is measured as "feet per second, in a player's fastest one-second window." The Major League average is 27 ft/sec, and the leaderboards are here.)

It came on Wednesday, when Miller got Ohtani to ground out to second. On the play, Ohtani's Sprint Speed was 29.8 ft/sec, which is just this side of elite. So far in 2018, there have been 46 players who have had at least one baserunning play of 29.8 ft/sec, and the names are mostly who you'd expect. Trea Turner has eight of them. Byron Buxton has five. Jose Altuve has four. Pujols has *never* had one, dating back to 2015.

There have been 290 hitters so far this year with 10 plate appearances. It's a little harder to put this one in context, since it's not as easy to say if they had any opportunities to run their hardest. (No one is going all out on a homer or a strikeout, for example.) And yet ... 45 of 290 is about 16 percent. It fits with the scouting report.

It's still April 5, obviously. So, plenty can go wrong. At some point teams will adjust, on both sides of the ball, and Ohtani will need to adjust back. Maybe he won't. What we know so far, however, is that the skills are real. The excitement is, too. So far, the hype has been justified. A week into the season, after a rough spring, that's about as much as the Angels could have possibly asked for.

Cozart slugs walk-off HR as Angels win in 13

Two-way Japanese star goes deep in 2nd straight game

By Doug Padilla

ANAHEIM -- Zack Cozart's game-ending home run in the 13th inning Wednesday showed exactly how the Los Angeles Angels can be a multi-faceted team, while winning the opening home series against one of the American League's better clubs.

In topping the Cleveland Indians, 3-2 at Angel Stadium, the Halos won one contest in this series in a tight duel of bullpens with two key home runs, and another with an onslaught of offense in Tuesday's 13-2 drubbing.

And Cozart, a free-agent addition from the Cincinnati Reds this winter, was not the only Angels newcomer to make an impact. Rookie sensation Shohei Ohtani hit a home run for the second

consecutive game, with Wednesday's two-run blast off Corey Kluber tying the score 2-2 on a day where offense was at a premium.

"You have to win all kinds of games, and I feel like we have done that overall this year," said Cozart, who was 0-for-4 before connecting on a 3-2 pitch from Indians right-hander Zach McAllister. "It's still early, but each series win is a big series win so we want to keep it going."

Cozart had just one hit in the series before unloading on a 94-mph two-seam fastball. It was the first game-ending home run of his Major League career and the first one for the Angels since Albert Pujols did the same against the A's on Aug. 3, 2016.

"My mind was on trying to get on base for [Mike Trout], once the count got to 3-2," Cozart said. "Maybe that calmed me down a little bit and made me less jumpy. He threw a fastball over the plate and I barreled it up."

Angels starter Tyler Skaggs gave up two runs on five hits over 4 2/3 innings, getting out of a bases-loaded situation with one out in the first inning when he got Yonder Alonso to ground into a 1-6-3 double play.

Two batters came to the plate with the bases loaded in the opening inning, but Skaggs was able to limit the damage to a run.

"It was frustrating because I felt great warming up in the bullpen, then I went out there and [things] definitely escalated quickly," Skaggs said. "I kind of diffused it, though. After that it felt like my mechanics got a lot smoother and I started working ahead [in the count]."

The Angels were without a hit into the fifth inning against Kluber, before Andrelton Simmons ended the early no-hit bid with a bunt single. Two batters later, Ohtani went deep to center field.

In three early opportunities as the Angels' designated hitter, Ohtani is 6-for-14 (.429), with three home runs and an .857 slugging percentage. He also won his first start on the mound Sunday at Oakland.

"On the mound he had a great start, and then at the plate he has started to get comfortable," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Corey Kluber is not a guy that gives up a lot of home runs, and he got a ball out over the plate and Shohei got a hold of it."

The Angels bullpen, down to its last pitcher when Noe Ramirez entered the game in the 13th, delivered 8 1/3 scoreless innings. Keynan Middleton pitched two scoreless innings, while Luke Bard went 1 2/3 scoreless.

"Hopefully they are getting their feet on the ground and settled down a little bit," Scioscia said of his relievers. "That's a real good lineup over there and you have to hit your spots. The last couple of nights we did."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Simmons sets up Ohtani: Desperate for baserunners, Simmons beat out a bunt down the third-base line with one out in the fifth inning. It was the Angels' first hit of the game off Kluber, who held Los Angeles to an 0-for-13 showing up to that point. Two batters later, Ohtani tied the game at 2.

Skaggs escapes trouble: Skaggs started a key double play to wiggle out of a first-inning jam and prevented the Indians from taking a big early lead. Following a Brandon Guyer single that only brought home one run despite the bases being full, Skaggs got Alonso to hit into a comebacker. The pitcher fired to Simmons, who completed the inning-ending double play to Pujols at first.

QUOTABLE

"It was a little chilly, but it's not as chilly as if I was in, like, Cincinnati at this point. It's a little warmer here. It doesn't feel as bad after you hit a walk-off, though. You feel pretty good about it." -- *Cozart, after receiving an icy Gatorade shower following the first game-ending home run of his career*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Ohtani has either recorded a hit or earned the victory in every big league game he has played. The pitching/hitting sensation had a single on Opening Day on Thursday at Oakland, won his first start against the A's on Sunday, then hit home runs in back-to-back games against the Indians on Tuesday and Wednesday.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Angels tried to get Francisco Lindor's stolen base with two outs in the fifth inning overturned, but the play stood. Jason Kipnis then followed with an RBI single, and Skaggs was removed from the game with Cleveland holding a 2-0 lead.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Angels will face off against the A's on Friday with Parker Bridwell taking the ball in his season debut. Bridwell, who finished the 2017 campaign with a 3.64 ERA and a 1.20 WHIP over 20 starts, was recalled from Triple-A on Tuesday to replace the injured Matt Shoemaker (forearm) in the rotation.

Power Sho: Ohtani homers in 2nd straight game

Slugger makes an adjustment, takes Kluber deep

By Avery Yang

ANAHEIM -- Albert Pujols wasn't even shocked when it happened.

"He's got the power to hit the ball out of any ballpark from corner to corner so nothing [about the home run] really impressed me," Pujols said. "It's something that he's been doing his whole time back in Japan."

Shohei Ohtani homered in his second straight game -- this time, off ace Corey Kluber -- aiding in a 3-2 Angels victory, one day after he clobbered a 397-foot bomb in his first career at-bat in Angel Stadium.

Ohtani notched another hit in the 10th on a single up the middle, and has hit safely in five out of nine at-bats at his new park.

Against the two-time Cy Young winner, Ohtani struck out his first time up. Kluber challenged Ohtani repeatedly, high and away, with his deadly sinker, cutter and fastball combination.

The location of the pitch that Ohtani sent flying into left-center field? High and away.

He made the adjustment.

Adjusting. That's one of the main things Ohtani has been tasked with -- one of the things Angels management and the coaching staff have been attempting to facilitate -- since Day 1.

Indeed, he has the raw power, he has the raw stuff, but the ball is different than the one in Japan -- harder, less tightly wound.

He's never pitched on fewer than six days rest -- the standard in MLB is five. Pitchers in the Majors, in Ohtani's own words, all throw "really differently" compared to the ones he's seen in Japan, where they tend to primarily favor fastballs, changeups and splitters. He's had to watch scores of game footage in order to account for that difference.

"Pitchers here -- everyone throws really differently compared to Japan so that's one of the things I can do without playing in a game -- watching videos and watching scouting reports," Ohtani said Tuesday through an interpreter. "That's one of the ways I can prepare myself to improve."

Culturally, the differences are innumerable.

Almost every facet of Ohtani's transition to MLB life has been rooted in adjustment -- like the adjustment he had to make on Kluber's high- and-away barrage.

That specific modification was particularly difficult, according to Zack Cozart. Cozart said that Kluber is a pitcher who likes to cut and sink pitches in to left-handers, so for Ohtani not to be worried about the inside part of the plate as much and go with the fastball high and away the second time around -- after being fooled the first -- was impressive.

To manager Mike Scioscia, Ohtani can certainly handle a learning curve.

"He's well beyond his years as far as experience, as far as being challenged," Scioscia said before Wednesday's game. "He's played a very high level of baseball from when he was very young, and he's met every challenge, so this is another challenge for him."

The two-way phenom now has a wRC+ of 274 -- meaning he has created 174 percent more runs than a league average hitter would have in the same number of plate appearances thus far this season.

He has more home runs than two entire clubs: the Kansas City Royals and Detroit Tigers.

Ohtani has also reached some franchise milestones:

- The first Angels player to homer in his first two career home games
- 12 total bases through his first three career games with a plate appearance ties Bobby Clark (1979) for the franchise record
- Five RBIs through his first three career games with a plate appearance ties a franchise record (Clark in '79)
- Per Elias, the last player with at least 12 total bases over his first three games with a plate appearance was Aaron Judge in '16 (also 12).

These statistics have been notched in a limited sample size, yes, but Scioscia thinks it's an indication of something special.

"You see the bat speed, you see the power, he's making some adjustments, he's understanding the league," Scioscia said.

Ohtani gave credit to a strategy he developed while playing in Japan for how to counter his sporadic at-bats. Going five days between plate appearances did not seem to be an issue Tuesday or Wednesday. And Ohtani actually credited pitching, like he will do Sunday against Oakland, as part of the routine that keeps him sharp on the field.

"So even when I play as a hitter, I still pitch, and that's part of my rhythm, that's something I've been doing the past five years in Japan," Ohtani said Tuesday. "I think each at-bat -- one at-bat at a time, one game at a time and try to create a good rhythm."

Scioscia has long talked about his 23-year-old pitcher/hitter as somebody with a maturity and focus beyond his years. His ability to move from a spring when he struggled, to success when the season started is a major sign of that, according to Scioscia.

There were a number of pundits and scouts who came away from that very spring with their negative takes armed and ready after Ohtani hit .125 overall with zero home runs and 10 strikeouts over 32 plate appearances.

Ohtani was deferential when asked about what he would say to those pundits after Wednesday's game.

"I had bad results [in Spring Training] so I guess they had the right to say bad stuff about me," Ohtani said. "But I mean, we just got started, and there's a chance that I might go into a slump all of a sudden, so I just think I'll take it day by day, at-bat by at-bat, and try to help the team win."

Justin Upton, however, was not nearly as respectful to the critics.

"I ain't got nothing to say to them," Upton said. "They can say what they want to say. We believe in him."

Worth noting

Scioscia said the Angels are hopeful that infielder Ian Kinsler will return to baseball activities by this weekend. The veteran is on the 10-day disabled list after first dealing with groin tightness at the end of the Spring Training schedule, and then having the issue flare up on him on Opening Day.

Halos get prospect Almonte from Royals

By Manny Randhawa

The Angels acquired right-hander Miguel Almonte from the Royals for a player to be named or cash considerations on Wednesday. Kansas City had designated Almonte for assignment, after claiming former Indians outfielder Abraham Almonte (no relation) off waivers on Monday.

Almonte, 25, was ranked as the Royals' No. 12 prospect, per MLB Pipeline, and posted a 1.72 ERA in 16 appearances (nine starts) between Double-A Northwest Arkansas and Triple-A Omaha last season. He was battling posterior right shoulder soreness at the time of his designation.

FROM THE ATHLETIC**Oh, oh: Ohtani does it again and is already living up to the hype.**

By Steve Dilbeck

So the Shohei Ohtani show continued Wednesday, already beginning to feel a tad unstoppable. This time, he hit a two-run homer off no less than reigning AL Cy Young winner Corey Kluber.

Ohtani is playing his own personal game of “Can you top this?” And for the moment, doubters are hard to find. The momentum only builds.

His 400-foot shot to near dead center once again had the home crowd all abuzz. Two games into his Anaheim debut, and he has expectations growing by – forgive us here – Ruthian proportions.

It’s no simple feat to overshadow Mike Trout, the game’s best player, and Albert Pujols, a three-time NL MVP. It might prove temporary. But for now, all eyes are on the 23-year-old protégé from Japan.

Yet Ohtani is not the only new face on these 2018 Angels, and Wednesday offered spectacular introduction to yet another.

Ohtani’s second home run in as many games tied the score in the fifth, and tied it remained for another eight innings.

It was left to Zack Cozart to finally end it in the 13th inning. That would be Zack Cozart the free agent signed by the Angels back in December, a 32-year-old coming off a career year at shortstop, agreeing to switch to third base and now temporarily moving to second while Ian Kinsler recovers from a leg injury.

Cozart cracked a solo homer for his first career walk-off hit. This for a team not all that used to dramatic wins. It was the first walk-off home run for the Angels since Pujols hit one Aug. 3, 2016.

“There’s nothing like running around the bases knowing the game is over,” Cozart said.

Cozart had made his own splashy introduction to the local fans, forcing some of the spotlight to fall on another new addition.

“He can have all the attention,” Cozart said. “He deserves it.

“But as the new guy, you always want to come in and try to let your teammates know you can help them win somehow. So it’s a good feeling.”

There were plenty of other aspects to the victory the Angels could point to Wednesday. Tyler Skaggs loaded the bases on one out in the first and limited the Indians to one run. An uncertain bullpen threw 8 1/3 scoreless innings. Andrelton Simmons bunted for the Angels' first hit prior to Ohtani's home run.

Much as he had after hitting his three-run home on Tuesday, Ohtani nearly sprinted around the bases.

"Like last night, I didn't think it was going to go over the fence," Ohtani said. "I was just trying to get a base hit and keep my swing compact."

The ball just cleared the fence. Later, he added a single up the middle. In three games as a hitter, he has six hits in 14 at-bats. He's the first Angel to ever hit homers in his first two home games. He's 1-0 as starting pitcher and next scheduled to start Sunday against the A's.

"At the plate, he's starting to get comfortable," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia. "You can see the big power he has. Corey Kluber doesn't give up a lot of home runs and is usually as tough as there is. He got a ball over the plate a little bit, and Shohei got a hold of it."

"This guy has tremendous upside."

Another early chapter was in for Ohtani. After a rather dismal spring that had some questioning what all the excitement was about, the two-way player is off to the kind of start that could barely be scripted.

"He was getting killed in spring training," Cozart said. "It's really impressive. All the pressure is on him, and he's just throwing it out and playing ball."

"It's impressive for him to ignore the noise. The kid works hard, and he's a special talent."

It's helped the Angels get off to a 5-2 start for the first time since 2007. And Wednesday, he even shared the spotlight with another new player.

FROM MLB.COM

Ohtani's dynamic week captivates the sport

By Richard Justice

Shohei Ohtani is doing what hasn't been done in baseball in almost a century, and he's making it look ridiculously easy. There you go. *That's* the really amazing thing -- the almost unbelievable thing -- Ohtani has done in his first week in the Major Leagues.

If you showed up to watch the Angels play at Angel Stadium this week, you would have been excited to watch this new kid, the 23-year-old designated hitter with the sweet left-handed swing.

You had read that he's one of baseball's best hitting prospects, that he has superstar written all over him. You would not have been disappointed after watching him launch a couple of balls over the fence.

You would have watched him fly out of the batter's box as well, and at some point, you knew you were seeing something special.

Maybe it was a single on Tuesday night that Statcast™ clocked at 112.8 mph, the hardest-hit ball by an Angels player since August. Overall, Ohtani is hitting .429 with a pair of home runs.

Ohtani hit two against the Indians this week, one off a Josh Tomlin curveball on Tuesday and another on a 93-mph Corey Kluber fastball on Wednesday. As you watched all of this unfold, you might have forgotten that hitting a baseball isn't even the thing Ohtani does best.

Yes, he pitches, too. In his first start for the Angels on Sunday, he went six innings, allowed three runs and got the win in a 7-4 victory over the A's. He did it with a fastball that averaged 98 mph and with a split-finger pitch that was pretty much untouchable.

That one comes in hard on right-handed hitters, challenging their eyes and guts before dipping wickedly at home plate. That pitch is going to generate consistent swings-and-misses, and when Ohtani gets it up in the strike zone, it's going to shatter bats and buckle knees.

Ohtani the pitcher was labeled a can't-miss prospect and was the No. 1 reason almost every team sought to sign him in the offseason. They were less certain about the hitting. They were even less certain about any player having the time to hone two completely separate crafts.

And that's what made this first week so impressive. Fans in the ballpark know that they're seeing something baseball fans haven't seen before. MLB Pipeline rates Ohtani the top overall prospect (he's No. 1 among right-handed pitchers and No. 4 among outfielders). Fantasy leagues are listing him as two players, a hitter and a pitcher.

Because of that, his games are about to become can't-miss television. There was an electricity in the park every time he stepped into the batter's box this week.

These players don't come along very often, and this may be about to become what it was when Fernando Valenzuela pitched for the Dodgers or Mark Fidrych for the Tigers. Games suddenly become events, even for casual fans.

Sometimes, a player comes along who is just different, who is capable of doing things even other big leaguers don't dream of doing.

No player in 99 years -- think Babe Ruth in 1919, his final season with the Red Sox -- has done what Ohtani did in his first week: Win a game as a starting pitcher and hit a home run as a hitter.

This is the coolest thing in baseball in a long time. Just when we thought the game simply could not get any better, what with the captivating postseason contests and the tidal wave of young talent, along comes something that almost no one thought possible.

Baseball in recent years has become more and more interested in the possibility of having a true two-way player. With benches shorter and bullpens deeper, every team is looking for a way to save a roster spot.

The Rays are using Brendan McKay, a 2017 first-round pick from the University of Louisville, as both a pitcher and hitter. The Dodgers would like outfielder Brett Eibner, who did both at the University of Arkansas, to try it later this summer when he returns from Tommy John surgery. The Reds, meanwhile, are going to have their own two-way star, Hunter Greene, focus exclusively on pitching -- for now.

But most baseball people see the role as one of super utility player, a sort of Ben Zobrist hybrid who can also throw an inning now and then.

They can't get their minds around someone with two off-the-chart skillsets, a player gifted enough to start 25 games on the mound and maybe also get 300 plate appearances.

To do something like that would require a superman. There simply won't be enough time to put in the work require to do both, so he will have to rely on his raw skills.

In one week, Ohtani has done just that. When he comes to your city, you may be compelled to go out and see for yourself.

So in the very first week of this new season, we are captivated by something we never expected to see again. Don't you love it?

Where Angels' Top 30 prospects are starting the season

By Jonathan Mayo

With the 2018 season getting started, here's a look at where the Angels' Top 30 prospects are projected to start the season:

1. **Shohei Ohtani (MLB No. 1), RHP/OF** -- Los Angeles Angels (MLB)
2. **Jo Adell (MLB No. 62), OF** -- Burlington Bees (A)
3. **Kevin Maitan (MLB No. 87), SS** -- Extended spring training

4. **Jahmai Jones (MLB No. 93), OF** -- Inland Empire 66ers (A Adv)
5. **Brandon Marsh, OF** -- Burlington Bees (A)
6. **Chris Rodriguez, RHP** -- Burlington Bees (A) - DL
7. **Jaime Barria, RHP** -- Salt Lake Bees (AAA)
8. **Griffin Canning, RHP** -- Inland Empire 66ers (A Adv)
9. **Matt Thaiss, 1B** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
10. **Michael Hermsillo, OF** -- Salt Lake Bees (AAA)
11. **Jesus Castillo, RHP** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
12. **Jose Suarez, LHP** -- Inland Empire 66ers (A Adv)
13. **Jose Soriano, RHP** -- Extended spring training
14. **Taylor Ward, C** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
15. **Leonado Rivas, SS** -- Burlington Bees (A)
16. **Livan Soto, SS** -- Extended spring training
17. **Eduardo Paredes, RHP** -- Salt Lake Bees (AAA)
18. **Nonie Williams, SS** -- Extended spring training
19. **Stiward Aquino, RHP** -- Extended spring training
20. **Miguel Almonte, RHP** -- Salt Lake Bees (AAA)
21. **Brennon Lund, OF** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
22. **Luke Bard, RHP** -- Los Angeles Angels (MLB)
23. **Jerryell Rivera, LHP** -- Extended spring training
24. **David Fletcher, SS** -- Salt Lake Bees (AAA)
25. **Trent Deveaux, OF** -- Extended spring training
26. **Luis Pena, RHP** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
27. **Cole Duensing, RHP** -- Extended spring training
28. **Jake Jewell, RHP** -- Mobile BayBears (AA)
29. **Joe Gatto, RHP** -- Inland Empire 66ers (A Adv)
30. **John Swanda, RHP** -- Extended spring training

Team to watch

The Double-A Mobile BayBears have the most Top 30 prospects, with seven, but the Class A Burlington Bees in the Midwest League might be the most fun team in the system to watch. Checking out a pair of incredibly toolsy outfielders in Joe Adell and Brandon Marsh would be worth the price of admission by itself, but if you wait a little bit, you'll get high-upside right-hander Chris Rodriguez once he's healthy. All three are in the team's top six. Add in No. 15 Leonardo Rivas, the infielder who reached Burlington last year at age 19, and that's a fun quartet to check out.

Teams on MiLB.TV

Salt Lake Bees

Mobile BayBears

Inland Empire 66ers

Orem Owlz

New faces

When the Braves were penalized for violations of baseball's rules on signing international free agents by having 12 previously signed players set free, the Angels benefitted. They signed both No. 3 prospect Kevin Maitan for \$2.2 million and No. 16 Livan Soto for \$850K. The middle infielders will both start the year in extended spring training, awaiting assignment.

The Angels had been active on the international market earlier last summer, going to the Bahamas to sign speedster Trent Deveaux. The super-athletic outfielder got \$1.2 million to sign. At age 17, he'll also get work in extended spring training before starting his pro career.

Players taken in the previous Draft typically go out and make their debuts that summer. Griffin Canning, the team's second-round pick last June, didn't pitch as a precaution, but he's ready to go and headed to Inland Empire.

The early part of Luke Bard's career was slowed by injury, but he made it to Triple-A with the Twins in 2017. When he wasn't protected from the Rule 5 Draft, the Angels nabbed him and he stuck, landing a spot in the big league bullpen.

The newest addition to the list is Miguel Almonte, who was designated for assignment by the Royals on Monday and acquired for cash considerations or a player to be named later earlier today. The right-hander has a pair of plus pitches, but has struggled with consistency throughout his career.

On the shelf

The Angels are very excited about Chris Rodriguez's upside, but they'll have to wait a bit to see him take on the Midwest League this year. A stress reaction in his back this spring has landed him on Burlington's DL to start the year.

FROM ESPN.COM

What's next for Shohei Ohtani after homering off Corey Kluber?

By David Schoenfeld

Did you have some doubts? Of course you did. You should have doubts. Baseball is hard. But after winning his debut and now homering in back-to-back games, of course we should overreact. Nobody expected it would turn out this well this fast.

Shohei Ohtani homered for the second straight game, this time off Corey Kluber, and later singled in going 2-for-5 in the Angels' 13-inning, 3-2 victory over the Indians on Wednesday afternoon.

He also joined the exclusive 100-100 club: He joined Noah Syndergaard and Gerrit Cole as the only players since 2015 with multiple 100 mph pitches and multiple home runs with 100 mph exit velocity.

That's cool. That's fun. We're at peak Ohtani hype, but c'mon, I've never seen somebody do this in MLB, and neither have you. Let's take a step back and assess what's going on with this two-way novelty.

Is homering off Kluber even bigger than No. 1? After Ohtani's home run off Josh Tomlin on Tuesday, one response on my Twitter feed was, "My grandma could hit a home run off Tomlin." So at least one person wasn't impressed.

True, Tomlin gives up a lot of home runs. I suppose somebody out there will say, "Sure, he homered off the reigning Cy Young winner, but it was a 91 mph fastball in the zone. Big deal." There are always people who won't enjoy the party. Mike Scioscia isn't one of those people.

"At the plate, he's starting to get comfortable and you can see the big power that he has," the Angels' manager said postgame. "Corey Kluber is a guy that doesn't give up a lot of home runs, and he got one over the plate and Shohei got a big hit.

"He's swung the bat well since he played professionally in Japan. You see the bat speed, you see the power. He's making some adjustments, he's understanding the league. As he goes forward, there's a lot more he has to absorb as far as being a big league hitter."

Anyway, no, it's not bigger than the first one, because that initial home run was such a moment of pure joy that it's almost impossible to top. As one colleague e-mailed me, "I woke up my dog because I screamed so loudly! And then it got reeeal dusty when he was hugging everyone in the dugout."

He's scheduled to start on the mound on Sunday. Can the Angels put him in as the DH as well? The DH is optional, so Scioscia could simply put Ohtani in the lineup and not use a DH. If you do that, however, that means subsequent pitchers enter in Ohtani's spot in the batting order (although you could double-switch, no different than a National League game). You can't enter a DH in the middle of the game. If you don't use it, you lose it.

Would Scioscia actually do it? It seems unlikely, in part because you're putting the team at a disadvantage if Ohtani gets knocked out early. For what it's worth, since the DH rule was instituted in 1973, only five pitchers have started in the lineup:

- 2016: Madison Bumgarner, Giants (he went 1-for-4 and allowed four runs in 6 ⅓ innings)
- 2009: Andy Sonnanstine, Rays (due to a lineup error by Joe Maddon)
- 1976: Ken Brett, White Sox (twice)
- 1975: Ken Holtzman, A's (on the next-to-day last day of the season, so more of a lark than anything)
- 1974: Fergie Jenkins, Rangers (on the last day of the season)

So it's happened six times, with one by mistake and two in meaningless end-of-season games.

Could he end up DH'ing in every game he doesn't pitch? For now, the Angels are sticking to a plan that includes, at the minimum, giving Ohtani time off before he pitches and the day after. So far, his schedule has gone like this:

Day 1: Hit

Day 2: DNP

Day 3: DNP

Day 4: Pitch

Day 5: DNP

Day 6: DH

Day 7 (April 4): DH

Day 8: Off day

Day 9: TBD

Day 10: TBD

Day 11: Pitch

His schedule in Japan was a little more rigorous. In 2016, when he slashed .322/.416/.588 with 22 home runs in 323 at-bats and went 10-4 with a 1.86 ERA in 20 starts, he appeared in 104 of Nippon Ham's 140 games. He sometimes hit when he pitched, with the Fighters foregoing the DH.

It's hard to say Ohtani struggled with that usage. He led the Pacific League in OPS at 1.004. Only one other hitter was above .900. (Three hitters in the Central League had a 1.000 OPS.) He led both leagues in lowest ERA for a starting pitcher and strikeouts per nine.

Bottom line: You have to think the Angels are going to be as conservative as possible, at least at the beginning of the season. You have to plan for the long haul. On the other hand, the more at-bats Ohtani receives, the better chance he has at success at the plate. Still, if he gets 10 plate appearances a week, that's about 260 over the season. Is that enough for his development and learning curve?

Is he really this good of a hitter? That's still the million-dollar question. He had another impressive at-bat leading off the 10th inning against Indians closer Cody Allen. He fouled off a couple of inside fastballs

while laying off a couple of good curveballs below the zone before grounding a 3-2 fastball up the middle for a single.

The early game plan has been to try and bust him inside with fastballs, pitches he struggled with in spring training -- although Kluber was definitely going outside on the home run. He used a big leg kick in Japan but has gone with a shorter, quick stride so far in the majors, which is probably easier for him to get his timing down. He's shown pretty good strike-zone recognition so far as well.

Based on his batting stats in Japan, Ohtani has the ability to perform here. His hitting projections at FanGraphs:

ZiPS: .255/.316/.445, 8.0 percent BB rate, 30.9 percent SO rate

Steamer: .261/.339/.463, 10.0 percent BB, 29.3 percent SO

Both forecasted strikeouts as a significant issue, as a 30 percent strikeout rate is pretty high (only 22 batters with at least 250 PAs reached that level in the majors in 2017). He has three strikeouts in his first 14 PAs.

I guess the bottom line is this: If he keeps hitting, he'll force Scioscia's hand. It's not like Jefry Marte is a big roadblock to playing time (if Ohtani is the DH, that means more Albert Pujols at first base).

Does spring training matter? Since he was 4-for-32 when the games didn't mean anything, it doesn't look like it, does it?

FROM THE RINGER

It's Impossible to Overreact to What Shohei Ohtani Is Doing

The two-way phenom took one of the best pitchers on the planet yard on Wednesday, extending his early-season hot streak.

By Zach Kram

Name him the Rookie of the Year now. Start stenciling his name on the MVP trophy just in case. Hell, maybe begin carving a Cooperstown plaque with 15 exclamation points at the end. After Shohei Ohtani's two-way performance the past four days, there's no overreaction too far.

The Angels rookie just homered off Corey Kluber, one of the four best starting pitchers on the planet, barreling up a 92 mile-per-hour four-seamer and driving it 400 feet just left of dead center. It drifted back and over Bradley Zimmer's head, then up and over the wall, and Ohtani rounded the bases with a

home run for the second time in two days. His MLB batting line at the time of publication is .455/.455/1.000, with two home runs and five total hits in 11 at-bats. He ranks second among all hitters with 10-plus plate appearances in wRC+, at 224 percent better than a league-average hitter.

And he moonlights as a pitcher who induced 18 swinging strikes in his first MLB start on Sunday, striking out six and allowing just four baserunners in six innings.

Throughout spring training and his first regular-season game at the plate, Ohtani's swing and offensive approach were cause for great concern (including from this very author—oops). He hit just 4-for-32 in spring training with no extra-base hits, and despite recording his first official hit on Opening Day, he went just 1-for-5 in that game with four grounders and a strikeout. It doesn't matter how much latent power Ohtani possesses or how hard he can hit the ball if everything goes on the ground.

But as the Angels' DH against Cleveland on Tuesday and Wednesday, Ohtani has hit the ball in the air with a triple-digit exit velocity four times, yielding two exuberant homers and two rocket singles. And after striking out looking against Kluber in his first at-bat on Wednesday, Ohtani adjusted in his second trip to the plate and lofted the Cleveland ace's fastball over the fence.

He throws pitches 100 miles per hour and hits them 110; he's now smashing line drives to the pull side and up the middle; he's the most exciting player in the sport, bar none, and giving absolutely zero reason to doubt that designation. Let your imagination run wild; at this rate, chances are Ohtani will top whatever you can dream.

FROM VICE SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani, the Impossible Ballplayer, is Here to Surprise You

The Angels free agent pickup has spent his entire baseball life surprising himself, and others. No matter how his career shakes out, it's going to be quite a ride.

By Rachael McDaniel

Shohei Ohtani was the biggest story of baseball's offseason. At 23 years old, already a megastar in Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball, Ohtani had decided to make his move to baseball's highest level of competition. And he was going to try to compete not just on one side of baseball's basic confrontation—the battle between pitcher and hitter—he was going to try to do both.

By its very nature, Major League Baseball trades in superlative talent. You have to be a superlative talent to even reach the major league level, let alone succeed. As a baseball fan, you know what an exceptional hitter looks like—you can tune in on any given Wednesday and watch Bryce Harper or Mike Trout. You

could flip to a different game and see exceptional pitching in Clayton Kershaw or Noah Syndergaard. Superlative talent is the norm.

But to excel at both pitching *and* hitting at the major league level—being both an ace and a slugger — is something that’s completely unprecedented for fans who weren’t around to see Babe Ruth circa 1920. Apart from two seasons of Brooks Kieschnick, who was hardly an ace and only hit well in one of those two seasons, and a few experiments here and there, no one in recent memory has even come close to succeeding as a two-way player. It’s hard to visualize what such a player would look like, just how valuable they could be to a team, or how anyone could possibly sustain that level of mastery.

But in NPB, Ohtani was that player—playing baseball on the hardest mode possible, and playing it extraordinarily well. Through five full seasons, starting from the time he was 18 years old, Ohtani excelled on both sides of the ball. His NPB career batting line is .286/.358/.500; as a pitcher, he accrued a 2.52 ERA with a 1.076 WHIP, averaging over 10 strikeouts per nine innings. In 2016, when his Nippon-Ham Fighters won the Japan Series and he earned MVP honors, Ohtani batted .342/.416/.588 and pitched to a 1.86 ERA. That season was when international eyes began to turn to Ohtani in earnest: Here, live and in the flesh, was that impossible player, doing things on a baseball field that no one had ever seen done before.

Scouting reports gushed over the raw power, the movement on his pitches, the eye, the speed. Everyone began to speculate on when he would make his inevitable move to the major leagues. His injury during the 2017 World Baseball Classic, preventing North American audiences from getting an extended look at him, made his promise all the more tantalizing for its distance. When he made his intentions of signing with a major league team over the 2017-18 offseason clear, the frenzy of speculation began to swirl out of control.

Because it wasn’t only the unparalleled physical reality of what Ohtani could do on a baseball diamond that made him so fascinating. In an era where we seem closer than ever to understanding baseball, to having it systematized and fully comprehended, Ohtani represented the promise of the unknown. A kind of baseball player for whom there is no real reference point, whose potential exists entirely in the realm of imagination.

But Ohtani has always been full of surprises. He surprised even himself—playing as a kid, he didn’t see baseball success in his future, assuming with his lack of tournament experience that there were many others better than him. When it became clear that wasn’t the case, when he could hit 99 mph at the age of 16, everyone—including him—assumed that he would be off to North America as soon as he was out of high school. But the Nippon-Ham Fighters picked him first overall, won him over with their organizational philosophy and their commitment to his development as a pitcher and a hitter, and convinced him to stay in Japan.

And for five seasons with the Fighters, Ohtani continued to surprise at every turn—with just how amazing he was. He disappeared baseballs into stadium roofs, and he pitched more aggressively and

with greater skill than anyone could have anticipated. The whole time, he never acted like a superstar, never even used his money. He lived in the team dorm, said he liked his team's trip to Honolulu simply because no one looked at him and no one knew who he was. He doesn't own a car, because he doesn't even know how to drive.

If Ohtani had waited only two more seasons to make his move to the major leagues, he would have been looking at a nine-figure payday. Instead, he's earning less than Jordan Lyles. But it was Ohtani's time. He'd decided this was what he wanted, and he was going to stick to his plan. He was going to do exactly what he wanted to do, just like he always had, no matter how unexpected it might seem. That uncertainty is why Ohtani is so thrilling. I can't think of any other player who represents such an extreme polarity of outcomes. Whose lack of success would be such a stunning disappointment, and whose full potential is so wonderfully hard to imagine.

As spring training began, and as all eyes turned to him, Ohtani struggled mightily on both sides of the ball. He allowed eight runs in two and a third innings pitched; he had four hits and 10 strikeouts in 36 plate appearances. The new scouting consensus was that his bat was far from major league ready. The tools were there, yes, but they were all too raw.

Fans began to worry. The extraordinary hype that had surrounded him to this point flipped on its head. Perhaps he was being rushed; perhaps he should start in Triple A; perhaps he would never be able to hit at all. Maybe the dream of a two-way player was foolhardy. Maybe a mistake had been made.

Ohtani recorded a hit on his first swing in the major leagues. He won his first start, allowing three earned runs in six innings, striking out six, his fastball averaging 97.8 mph—once again, turning expectations on their heads.

And on Tuesday, he stood at the plate for the first time at his new home field, facing Josh Tomlin, the Angels home crowd rumbling eagerly behind him. Bases loaded, two out, tie game, bottom of the first. He fouled off a cutter for strike one; he swung through another for strike two. A wild pitch in the dirt brought home a run. He fouled off one last cutter. Then he turned on a curveball, down and in, and launched it into the right-field seats.

It was a moment so shockingly perfect that anticipating it would have seemed foolish. It was exactly what you wanted to see and exactly what you could never have let yourself expect. He went and hit another home run the very next day, this time off reigning AL Cy Young winner Corey Kluber.

No matter what Shohei Ohtani ends up achieving in his major league career—whether he's a bust, or focuses on pitching, or does something else entirely—I am looking forward to being surprised.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT**B/R's Top 50 MLB Prospects at the Start of the 2018 Season**

By Joel Reuter

Established stars drive a team's success at the [MLB](#) level and put fans in the seats, but we're always looking to the future.

Who's next?

Ahead is a look at the top 50 prospects in baseball at the start of the 2018 season.

The following factors helped determine where each player fell in these rankings:

- **Potential:** Potential trumps production a lot of the time, especially in the lower levels of the minors and with recent draft picks. Skill set and overall tools are often a better indication of what kind of player a guy will be in the future.
- **Talent:** As for guys in the higher levels of the minors who are close to breaking through at the big league level, production and current talent level are the determining factors, as these players are viewed as more complete products.
- **Eligibility:** A player must still maintain rookie-eligibility status to be considered for inclusion. That means 130 at-bats for position players, 50 innings pitched for pitchers or 45 days on the active roster prior to roster expansion in September.

When it comes to who's next, the 50 guys to follow fit the bill.

33. OF Jo Adell, Los Angeles Angels (Age: 18)

This is admittedly an optimistic ranking for a teenager with 49 professional games under his belt.

However, there are not many players in any organization or at any level with the raw physical tools that Adell possesses.

The No. 10 overall pick last June hit .325/.376/.532 with 24 extra-base hits in 222 plate appearances, giving a glimpse into his considerable upside and sparking no shortage of excitement in prospect circles.

It's going to take him some time to arrive in Los Angeles, but it could prove to be well worth the wait.

3. RHP/DH Shohei Ohtani, Los Angeles Angels (Age: 23)

Ohtani is a baseball unicorn with electric stuff on the mound and 70-grade power at the plate.

The Angels were the surprise winners of his highly anticipated posting this offseason, and he immediately slotted into the middle of the big league rotation and in a part-time DH role.

There hasn't been a prospect quite like him since the days of Babe Ruth, and his rookie season will be watched as closely as anyone ever to debut in the big leagues.

At the very least, he has the stuff to make a serious impact in the Angels rotation, even if he struggles to find consistency at the plate with sporadic playing time.

FROM SPORTING NEWS

Shohei Ohtani looking very comfortable with hitting part of dual role

By Joseph D'Hippolito

ANAHEIM, Calif. — After just three games and 14 at-bats as a designated hitter, Shohei Ohtani leads the Angels in batting average and is tied with Mike Trout for the team lead in home runs and RBIs.

The 23-year-old two-way rookie from Japan put himself in that position Wednesday by going 2 for 5 with a two-run home run against reigning American League Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, in the Angels' 3-2, 13-inning win over the Indians at Angel Stadium.

Ohtani is hitting .429 with two homers and five RBIs.

"At the plate, he's starting to get comfortable," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "You can see the big power he has. You can see the bat speed. Corey Kluber is a guy who does not give up a lot of home runs. He's as tough as there is." Kluber, in fact, was third-best in the AL last year with 0.93 homers allowed per nine innings.

Last year for the Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan's Pacific League, Ohtani hit a career-best .332 in 65 games. The previous season, he amassed career highs of 22 homers and 67 RBIs.

"He has the power to hit the ball out of any ballpark, from corner to corner," Angels first baseman/DH Albert Pujols said. "He's been doing that for his whole career. It's about finding a good balance and a good routine for him. He struggled in spring training, but who cares? Everybody struggles in spring training."

Those struggles, at the plate and on the mound, caused many to wonder whether Ohtani could succeed in the major leagues. Does he believe he has proven his critics wrong?

"I don't have anything to say to those guys," Ohtani said through his translator, Ippei Mizuhara. "I had bad results so I guess they have the right to say bad stuff about me. The season just started and there will be bad days. I just take it day by day, at-bat by at-bat, and try to help the team win."

Ohtani performed his latest heroics in the fifth inning of Wednesday's game. The Indians led 2-0, with Kluber having allowed only a walk in 4 1/3 innings, when Andrelton Simmons bunted down the third-base line for the Angels' first hit.

One out later, Ohtani faced Kluber for the second time. The rookie took an 88 mph cutter inside, fouled off a second cutter at 89 mph, then propelled a 92 mph fastball toward center field. Bradley Zimmer tried to make a one-handed catch but collided with the padded wall, and the ball just cleared the fence.

"I didn't think it was going to go over the fence, just like last night," Ohtani said through Mizuhara, referencing his first major-league home run. "There was a runner at second base and I was just trying to get a base hit. I was trying to keep my swing compact, but it ended up clearing the fence."

Unlike after his first homer Tuesday night, there was no silent treatment for Ohtani as he returned to the dugout. His teammates enthusiastically welcomed him, with Trout taking off Ohtani's batting helmet.

The at-bat was much different than Ohtani's first against Kluber, who struck out the rookie looking on four pitches, the last a 92 mph fastball on the outside corner.

"With Shohei, it's a matter of just seeing some pitchers and growing with it," Scioscia said. "I don't think there were a lot of adjustments. He didn't make any mechanical adjustments between the first and second (at-bats), no."

After grounding out in the eighth against left-hander Andrew Miller, Ohtani demonstrated in the 10th why Scioscia has confidence in his hitting ability. The rookie worked the count from 1-2 to 3-2 against closer Cody Allen, and then chopped a 93 mph fastball up the middle for his second hit.

"As he goes on, there's a lot more he has to absorb as far as being a hitter in the major leagues, but he has tremendous upside," Scioscia said. "He's ready for the challenge and, hopefully, he'll continue to move forward."

Shohei Ohtani inspires awe as he steps toward greatness

By Nick Stellini

It's a hell of a thing to be compared to Babe Ruth.

Ruth has become such a cultural touchstone that we've lost an appreciation for just how ridiculously talented the man was. "They're the Babe Ruth of ____" is a relatively common phrase used to describe someone at the pinnacle of their field. Ruth has become synonymous with the general concept of being the best at something, which in and of itself is a relatively simple concept.

But what Ruth did — reaching wild levels of success as both a hitter and pitcher — is possibly the greatest performance-based achievement in the history of sports. He did it in a time when the game was simpler, when there wasn't as deep an understanding of the sciences of hitting and pitching, and when the competition wasn't as fierce as it could have been because of the exclusion of players of color. But putting Ruthian expectations onto a player's shoulders is both a compliment of the highest order and a terrible curse.

Because of his success as both a hitter and pitcher in Japan, it's natural to immediately draw a line between Ruth and Shohei Ohtani. Ohtani is now trying to do it at the sport's highest level, in a country with a different culture and a different language. He's only 23 years old.

He's trying to do it under one hell of a microscope. Every success and failure will be dissected and used as a referendum on his worth as a player and whether the Angels were foolish to try to make this work.

Given the circumstances, it almost feels impossible for Ohtani to succeed and be a true star on both sides of the ball.

But what if he did it?

What if, after settling in to the mayhem that is Major League Baseball, Ohtani found his stroke and mowed down hitters while being one of the Angels' best hitters? What if Ohtani really did become the closest thing possible to a modern Babe Ruth? Do we dare hope that Ohtani will become the brightest star in the sport?

It's far too early to determine whether he will. That's not the point. The point is that Ohtani is trying to do something that hasn't really been attempted since Ruth completely redefined baseball. That he has enough talent to even attempt it feels like a fact that's been underappreciated, as does the fact that he has the courage to do it here at such a young age. Don't forget that Ohtani came here earlier than expected, and in doing so he forfeited an incredible amount of money.

Ohtani is attempting the impossible, and by God, so far he's doing the damn thing. He hit his first big league home run last night.

That came two days after he earned his first win, and it was one of three hits on the night. Slowly but surely, Ohtani is settling in. The big leg kick he displayed in his swing during spring training is gone, replaced with a much subtler and compact toe-point. It's a major adjustment, and one that almost

certainly allows him to get to the ball with much more ease. It's a massive shift for someone who just last year hit .332/.403/.540 with that leg kick.

Ohtani is a player committed to greatness. Achieving success as both a hitter and pitcher would be a sign of greatness, and would give Ohtani an argument to hold the distinction of being the best player in the game. If we combine, say, a season's worth of even just Jeff Samardzija-level pitching production with 400 plate appearances' worth of league average hitting, that's at least a five- or six-win player. That's an MVP candidate.

The ominous scouting reports coming out of spring training feel like they surfaced a lifetime ago.

What Ohtani represents is more than just an improbable attempt at immortality. He is unquestionably the most interesting man in the game right now. He is must-see television, if for no other reason than to see whether he can pull it off. His teammates seemed genuinely thrilled for him when he hit his home run, and it's hard not to root for him.

We naturally gravitate toward the extraordinary, toward the unprecedented and the unlikely. Ohtani is unlike anyone we've seen in our lifetimes. He's the sort of player who dares us to dream and extend the mental boundaries of what we consider to be possible. There was never going to be another Babe Ruth. And indeed, that may yet hold true, in the sense that there may never be a player who so thoroughly dominates in both facets of the game. Ohtani has the chance to give him a run for his money.

That alone is one of the most exciting things to happen in baseball in years. Even if Ohtani is merely good and not great as both a hitter and a pitcher, he'll have solidified himself as one of the most gifted athletes ever.

It's just April 4. Ohtani still has much to prove, and still has all the time in the world to fail. Tuesday night was the latest step toward greatness, and another reason to hope that another superstar has arrived in the game.

FROM SB NATION

You can't prove Shohei Ohtani isn't the greatest player of all-time

Thursday's Say Hey, Baseball looks at Ohtani's exciting first week at the plate.

By Marc Normandin

Sure, I can't prove Shohei Ohtani *is* the greatest baseball player of all-time. But the burden of proof is on y'all. I'm the one with the platform and if I want to use it irresponsibly, I will, and you can't stop me.*

**There are various ways in which you could stop me, but please, I need this job.*

Ohtani hit a homer on Wednesday off of Corey Kluber after going deep for his first career MLB dinger on Tuesday, and we're officially enthralled by him. Yes, it's just two homers, and yes, he's played in all of three games as a designated hitter and started another on the mound. However, let's extrapolate over the course of a season: Ohtani is going to strike out 162 batters over 27 starts while going 27-0, and he's going to hit at least 54 home runs if he's a batter in half of the Angels games. More if he plays more!

Please, don't argue with this math. Baseball Reference was already kind enough to project his line over 162 games for us: 108 homers, 324 hits, and a 254 OPS+ that would even make teammate Mike Trout blush.

OK, OK, fine he's not going to do all that. Still, if Ohtani is a good pitcher, and Ohtani's bat actually is an asset for the Angels when he's in the lineup, then oh man, this dude is going to create arguments about the Most Valuable Player award that I'm actually going to be invested in, because they're going to be philosophical and annoying as hell. There was no MVP award back when Babe Ruth was pitching and hitting. Uncharted territory in baseball? That we can fight about? Oh man oh man oh man keep playing well, Shohei, I can't wait to yell on the internet.

FROM FANSIDED

Shohei Ohtani continues to live up to the hype with another home run

By Brad Berreman

The season is only a week old, but thus far Shohei Ohtani has been pretty much as advertised.

It's not uncommon for players to struggle in spring training, but the microscope on Shohei Ohtani as he makes an attempt to be a legit two-way player made his poor spring a dual concern. But he collected a hit in his first major league at-bat last Thursday, then followed up with a good first outing as a starting pitcher on Easter Sunday and a home run on Tuesday night as part of a 3-for-4 day at the plate in his first home game for the Angels.

Ohtani got another turn in the lineup as the Angels' DH on Wednesday afternoon, against Cleveland Indians' starter and reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber.

In the bottom of the fifth inning, with a man on and two out, Ohtani powered up again to tie the game for the Angels.

Ohtani's second home run in as many days had an exit velocity of 100 MPH, traveled an even 400 feet, had a peak crest of 78 feet and took 5.1 seconds to leave one of the deepest parts of Angels Stadium.

Ohtani looks sure to be a player whose metrics Statcast will love to track wherever he is on the diamond. On two simple groundouts during Wednesday's contest, he showed difference-making "sprint speed" down the first base line.

Sprint speed can be chalked up partially to simply hustling down the line, which is surely ingrained in Ohtani from playing in his native country, and being a left-handed hitter helps too. But if he can run as fast as Statcast has tracked him on a consistent basis, he will be a factor on the bases despite a build (listed a 6-foot-4 and 203 pounds) that might suggest otherwise.

Through his first week playing meaningful baseball stateside, Ohtani has been all of the two-way player he was advertised to be.

FROM USA TODAY

Angels' Shohei Ohtani homers in second straight game – this time off Indians' Corey Kluber

Even as he's gotten off to a good start in his Major League Baseball career, Shohei Ohtani remains largely a mystery, his true projections hard to peg as he aims to become the first two-way player since Babe Ruth.

One swing on Wednesday afternoon, however, certainly did wonders for his credibility.

Ohtani hit a game-tying, two-run home run off two-time Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber — his second home run in as many games.

The shot just left of straightaway center field at Angel Stadium tied Wednesday's game at 2-2 and was the Angels' first extra-base hit off Kluber, who struck out six in seven innings.

"There was a runner on second base, so I was just trying to get a base hit and keep my swing compact, and it ended up clearing the fence," Ohtani said through a translator. "I think everything is going really well right now. I'm off to a good start."

The Angels wound up outlasting the Indians in 13 innings, 3-2, on a walk-off homer by Zack Cozart.

Ohtani's homer came the afternoon following his first major-league longball, a three-run shot off Indians starter Josh Tomlin. That kick-started a three-hit night for Ohtani, who's now 6 for 14 (.429) in his first week in the big leagues.

“At the plate, he’s starting to get comfortable,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. “You can see the big power he has. Corey Kluber is a guy that does not give up a lot of home runs. He’s as tough as there is. (Ohtani) made him get a ball over the plate, and Shohei got a hold of it. That’s obviously a big hit in the game.”

Ohtani, 23, will make his second start on the mound Sunday against Oakland; he won his first career start against the Athletics by striking out six in six innings.

Reminder: Shohei Ohtani may end up the greatest bargain in MLB history

By Gabe Lacques

The Cincinnati Reds made a promotional video for him. Clayton Kershaw put off his wedding anniversary to meet with him. Almost every franchise jockeyed to free up every available dollar for him.

And now we're starting to see why Major League Baseball thirsted for Shohei Ohtani, and how he may end up one of its biggest steals ever.

Ohtani's rookie season remains a long, daunting road - with double the mileage when you consider that this two-way phenom, health willing, has roughly 25 more starts on the mound and about 250 more plate appearances coming his way.

Yet, his startling performance Tuesday night in just his second game as a hitter - a three-run homer in his first at-bat, and three hits overall - paired with a dominant mound debut Sunday indicates that the baseball world was not wrong in dreaming about all that is possible with Ohtani.

And given the pittance the Angels committed for his services - a \$20 million posting fee, \$2.3 million signing bonus and the rookie minimum \$545,000 for 2018 - Ohtani can pay for himself in production quite soon.

Sounds crazy?

Well, consider that on the free agent market, the cost for one Win Above Replacement is estimated at somewhere between \$7.5 million and \$10 million.

Now, Ohtani has generated nowhere near 2 Wins Above Replacement as measured by Fangraphs or Baseball-Reference. But in more traditional, consumable terms, he's pretty much won two games for the Angels already.

Sunday, he struck out six Oakland Athletics in six innings and handed a 7-3 lead over to his bullpen. Tuesday, his three-run home run in the bottom of the first inning gave the Angels a 6-2 lead and, in the arena of Win Probability Added, enhanced their chances of victory by a whopping 19%.

Now, his sample size is merely one start as a pitcher, and two games at designated hitter. Yet, Ohtani's rough start to the spring generated far more angst on the hitting end of the spectrum; after all, his 99-mph fastball will play anywhere.

That he has already shown he won't always be overmatched at the plate despite splitting his prep time between his two vocations is not insignificant.

What's more, the Angels can pick their spots. While Ohtani's DH days will in many ways hinge on his scheduled pitching starts and side sessions, they do have some flexibility to give him the best chance to succeed.

He ambushed the Cleveland Indians' No. 5 starter, Josh Tomlin, on Tuesday night, and will also face Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber on Wednesday afternoon. Yet, the Angels aren't fools; Ohtani, at 23, is taking on a task unprecedented in the modern game. Over time, they'll certainly put him in position to succeed, be it going with a six-man rotation or taking an extra step to ensure he's not overwhelmed early. It's wise for both his development and their investment.

Ah, yes, that investment: Because Ohtani opted to change leagues before he turned 25, he did not go to the open market. Instead, he was classified as an international amateur and clubs could only pay him from their international signing pool.

So the Angels only had to pay a \$20 million posting fee to the Nippon-Ham Fighters and, to Ohtani, that \$2.3 million bonus.

GM Billy Eppler enhanced the Angels' pot with last-minute trades for other teams' available signing pool money in the days before Ohtani's decision. Those deals now look genius, given the high-cost, high-risk gambit of drafting and developing U.S.-born amateurs or foreign-born teenagers.

Even in this era of fixed pricing, the top five picks in the 2017 draft received signing bonuses that averaged around \$7 million. The Angels' own choice, 10th overall pick Jo Adell, received a \$4.4 million bonus.

Adell will start the season in low Class A, still years away from contributing at the major league level. Ohtani's relatively modest bonus means that even if he wins a Cy Young Award and averages 20 homers a season, he won't match Adell's earnings until he's completed three years of major league service.

That may say as much about the unfair nature of the deal MLB and its players' union struck with Japan's premier league than anything else, or Ohtani's decision to join MLB now rather than wait two more seasons and be a true free agent.

Regardless, he is here, and producing, and as many imagined last winter, the possibilities do seem limitless.

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani already has more homers than two MLB teams

By Mark Townsend

On the eve of opening day there were serious concerns about Shohei Ohtani's readiness to compete in Major League Baseball as both a pitcher and hitter.

One week later, the Los Angeles Angels rookie has not merely silenced those concerns, he's squashed them with authority.

After winning his pitching debut in impressive fashion Sunday in Oakland, the two-way superstar has started flexing his muscles at the plate too after homering in each of his first games at Angel Stadium. That included a fifth-inning, two-run blast against Indians ace Corey Kluber on Wednesday that tied the game. The Angels would go on to win 3-2 in 13 innings on Zack Cozart's walk-off homer.

If you're a fan of the Detroit Tigers and Kansas City Royals, you might be especially jealous of Ohtani's early and unexpected offensive success. That's because his two homers are more than either team has hit through the first week of the season. Ohtani's two homers also put him even with the Miami Marlins and Tampa Bay Rays, and one behind the Philadelphia Phillies, New York Mets and Los Angeles Dodgers first week output.

Honestly, we didn't even know if Ohtani would get two starts at designated hitter during opening week, let alone hit two homers. He's now had three, and he's hitting an impressive .429/.429/.857. It goes to show that it's often the moments we don't see coming that provide the most thrills.

Ohtani's moments have definitely been thrilling. He wasted no time electrifying fans at Angel Stadium by homering in his first home at-bat in Tuesday's 13-2 win against the Cleveland Indians. That was the beginning of a three-hit night that included a pair of hard hit singles.

Less than 24 hours later, manager Mike Scioscia had Ohtani back in the No. 8 spot in the Angels' order against Kluber, Cleveland's and a two-time American League Cy Young Award winner. That decision paid dividends when Ohtani slugged a two-run home run in the fifth inning.

If there's a signature moment in Ohtani's impressive first week, the homer against Kluber has to be it. We've gone from some scouts feeling Ohtani needed a full season concentrating on just hitting in the minor leagues to develop his offensive game, to Ohtani hitting a 400-foot homer to straight away center field against one of MLB's elite pitchers.

While onlookers may have started wavering on Ohtani based on his spring training results, the Angels never did. Scioscia and general manger Billy Eppler continually expressed confidence that Ohtani would contribute right off the bat, both as a pitcher and a hitter. So far that confidence has been rewarded, perhaps even more than they imagined.

Some big tests for Ohtani still lie ahead. Now that teams have seen him in action in games that count, they'll start formulating gameplans to beat him. He'll have to make some adjustments as he goes, but based on the early results and the talent that became apparent during his time in Japan, he's already one step ahead.

Andrelton Simmons shows why it's OK to break up a no-hitter with a bunt

By Chris Cwik

The scars have yet to heal from baseball's first unwritten rule controversy in 2018, but we might already have another on our hands. In the fifth inning of Wednesday's game, Los Angeles Angels shortstop Andrelton Simmons bunted to break up a no-hitter against Cleveland Indians ace Corey Kluber.

With one out in the inning, Simmons noticed third baseman José Ramírez was playing deeper than usual. On the first pitch, Simmons bunted the ball down the third base line. Simmons was fast enough to beat out Ramírez's throw. Just like that, Kluber's no-hitter was over.

The hit seemed to throw Kluber off his game for the rest of the inning. After striking out Luis Valbuena, Kluber allowed a game-tying two-run home run to Shohei Ohtani. The next batter, Martin Maldonado, drove a ball deep off the wall in center, but was thrown out at second after Bradley Zimmer played the ball perfectly. After not hitting Kluber all game, the Angels managed to make hard contract against him twice after Simmons' bunt.

Simmons' tactic is considered a no-no among baseball purists. They believe it's cheap to try and bunt for a hit during a no-hitter. If someone is going to play spoiler, they should do it while swinging the bat.

But Simmons proved why that line of thinking is foolish. Simmons' job as a hitter is to get on base. His larger job, as a member of the Angels, is to win the game. His bunt hit put the Angels in a better position to do that. Without it, they would not have tied things up in the fifth inning.

It also wasn't a cheap play. Simmons wisely realized Ramírez was playing too far back at third. He saw an opportunity to take advantage of Cleveland's defensive set-up and it worked. Simmons should be applauded for his smarts.

The Minnesota Twins were involved in a somewhat similar situation Sunday. With pitcher Jose Berrios working on a one-hitter in the ninth, Baltimore Orioles catcher Chance Sisco dropped down a bunt to beat the shift with his team trailing by seven runs. The Twins were not happy, saying it was "not a good play" and "not good for baseball."

The public opinion in that instance was that the Twins were in the wrong. If the team was still employing a shift up by seven runs, Sisco was allowed to try and take advantage of that. Also, people recognized that bunting during a one-hitter when your team is trailing is a dumb unwritten rule that the Twins made up so they could justify their anger.

Simmons' bunt is likely to be more controversial. Bunting to break up a no-hitter is one of the most well-known unwritten rules in the game. There are already split opinions from people on Twitter.

While some fans — and maybe some Cleveland players — will be mad, Simmons gave his team a much better chance to win the game with his quick-thinking. Is he really going to care that people think his hit was cheap if it gets the Angels a small step closer to the postseason?

FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohtani homers again, Cozart lifts Angels over Indians in 13

By Greg Beacham

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Shohei Ohtani really didn't think his long drive to center field at Angel Stadium would get out of the park, so he sprinted around first base while it soared over the fence for his second homer in two days.

Ohtani made the same sprint with the same thoughts one day earlier, when his first big league homer also surprised him by flying over the wall.

The Los Angeles Angels' two-way sensation is doing things even he can't believe during his dynamite first week in the majors.

Ohtani homered again at home in the fifth inning and Zack Cozart hit a game-ending shot in the 13th to give the Angels a 3-2 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday.

One day after Ohtani hit an electrifying three-run homer in his first home plate appearance, the Japanese rookie connected for a tying two-run homer off AL Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber in his second game at the Big A.

“There was a runner on second base, so I was just trying to get a base hit and keep my swing compact, and it ended up clearing the fence,” Ohtani said through a translator. “I think everything is going really well right now. I’m off to a good start.”

Neither team scored again after Ohtani’s drive until Cozart, the Angels’ new infielder, connected for his first career walk-off homer against Zach McAllister (0-1).

Ohtani also singled leading off the 10th to go 2 for 5, giving him six hits this season and five in his only two home games. He will make his first home pitching start Sunday against Oakland, one week after beating the Athletics on the road in his big league pitching debut.

“At the plate, he’s starting to get comfortable,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. “You can see the big power he has. Corey Kluber is a guy that does not give up a lot of home runs. He’s as tough as there is. (Ohtani) made him get a ball over the plate, and Shohei got a hold of it. That’s obviously a big hit in the game.”

Noe Ramirez (1-1), the Angels’ eighth reliever, came on with two outs in the 13th and struck out Erik Gonzalez with two Indians on base. Los Angeles’ bullpen pitched 8 1/3 innings of scoreless, two-hit ball.

Brandon Guyer and Jason Kipnis drove in early runs as the Indians finished a season-opening West Coast road trip at 2-4. Cleveland had no extra-base hits, and no hits at all in extra innings.

“As a club right now, we don’t have anybody hot,” manager Terry Francona said. “We certainly had chances. We had runners on base. We just couldn’t get a hit. ... The last couple of hours was tough sledding for us.”

Tyler Skaggs retired 12 of 13 Indians after a rough first inning, but couldn’t get out of the fifth.

The Angels didn’t get a hit off Kluber until a one-out single in the fifth by Andrelton Simmons, who has a hit in each of Los Angeles’ first seven games for the second consecutive season.

One out later, Ohtani connected.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Indians: Cleveland intends to activate All-Star LF Michael Brantley before Friday's home opener against Kansas City, Francona confirmed. Brantley participated in extended spring training games this week before heading to Ohio ahead of the team. He had right ankle surgery in October and didn't play much in spring training.

Angels: LHP Andrew Heaney will pitch in the minors Friday and could rejoin the rotation next week. He went on the disabled list last month with elbow inflammation. ... 2B Ian Kinsler is recovering well from his groin injury. He expects to be activated from the disabled list on schedule Tuesday.

RARE AIR

Cozart's walk-off homer was the Angels' first in extra innings since Aug. 9, 2014, when Albert Pujols did it.

KLUBER DENIED

Kluber pitched seven innings of three-hit ball with six strikeouts, but remained winless despite two strong starts to open the season. He credited Ohtani for capitalizing on a misplaced fastball: "I was trying to force him away, and I ended up in the high third (of the strike zone)," Kluber said.

HALO PICKUP

Before the game, Los Angeles acquired right-hander Miguel Almonte from Kansas City for cash or a player to be named. The Angels optioned Almonte to Triple-A Salt Lake and designated catcher Juan Graterol for assignment to make room on the 40-man roster. The Royals designated Almonte for assignment Monday even though he posted a combined 1.72 ERA with a 95 mph fastball while pitching in Double-A and Triple-A last season.

UP NEXT

Indians: Weather permitting, Carlos Carrasco (1-0, 7.94 ERA) will return from a rough season opener when the Indians host the Royals in their home opener Friday.

Angels: After a day off, the homestand continues with Parker Bridwell making his 2018 debut against Oakland. Bridwell went 10-3 during a promising rookie season in 2017. He was called up to take the rotation spot of Matt Shoemaker, who went on the disabled list Tuesday with soreness in his troublesome right forearm.

FROM SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

A's to face Shohei Ohtani again this weekend

By John Shea

The A's knew little about **Shohei Ohtani** before the season-opening series. They know an awful lot more now about the Angels' pitcher-hitter.

"He's kind of living up to the billing at this point, which is tough to live up to," A's manager **Bob Melvin** said. "It seems he's the real deal on both sides of it."

Ohtani will take the mound Sunday in Anaheim against the A's, exactly a week after he won his pitching debut in Oakland. He threw six innings in that one and made just one big mistake, the slider **Matt Chapman** hit for a three-run homer.

What do the A's know of Ohtani now that they didn't know then?

"He throws pretty hard. He's got a good split. He throws one more pitch, maybe, than we expected," Melvin said. "I think we were thinking more fastball-split, and he threw some sliders — and some slower ones — and curveballs, too. So it's a full arsenal that he has."

"My understanding," Melvin added, "is he's been swinging the bat pretty well."

Indeed. Ohtani left Oakland 1-for-5 and now is 6-for-14 (.429) after collecting five hits (including two homers) the past two days, Wednesday's coming off Cleveland's **Corey Kluber**, who won the AL Cy Young Award last year.

Ohtani doesn't bat in games before and after he pitches, so he'd be available to be the designated hitter in Friday's opener. The A's hope for better results when Ohtani pitches Sunday.

"You have more understanding," Melvin said. "It doesn't mean you're going to have more success, but you do feel a little bit more comfortable with how he's going to attack you."

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

FROM CLEVELAND.COM

Angels rally past Cleveland Indians, 3-2 in 13 innings, as Shohei Ohtani strikes again

By Paul Hoynes

ANAHEIM, Calif. - So maybe this Shohei Ohtani has a chance.

Hitting a three-run homer off Josh Tomlin, who throws below hitting speed, is one thing. Hitting a game-tying, two-run homer off the defending Cy Young winner, well, that will open some eyes.

Ohtani, after hitting his first big-league homer off Tomlin on Tuesday night, drove Corey Kluber's 91 mph fastball over the fence in center field in the fifth inning Wednesday to help spark the Angels to a 3-2 come-from-behind victory in 13 innings over the Indians.

The Angels won it in the 13th when Zack Cozart hit a walk-off homer off Zach McAllister with one out. McAllister, who allowed a two-run homer to Rene Rivera in Tuesday's 13-2 loss, was making his third straight appearance and fourth in the last five games.

He was the last man standing among Tribe relievers. The next Indians' pitcher would have been Carlos Carrasco, who will start Friday's home opener against Kansas City. Matt Belisle and Dan Otero were not available after pitching two innings each on Tuesday night.

Ohtani saw the best the Tribe had to offer. Kluber made him look like a statue in the third by striking him out on four pitches. Ohtani retaliated in the fifth, but then lefty Andrew Miller retired him on a ground ball in the eighth.

He opened the 10th with a single through the middle off closer Cody Allen. Lefty Tyler Olson retired him in the 12th.

Kluber took a no-hitter into the fifth. He faced just one batter over the limit through the first 5 1/3 innings. Justin Upton, courtesy of a first-inning walk, was the Angels only base runner to that point of the game.

Andrelton Simmons disrupted Kluber's flow when he bunted for a one-out hit in the fifth after Kole Calhoun struck out to start the inning. The bunt seemed to momentarily disrupt Kluber's timing. In the process of striking out Luis Valbuena, he wild pitched Simmons to second. Then of course came the 1-1 fastball to Ohtani that tied the game.

"I was trying to do what I did in the first at-bat against him," said Kluber. "I tried to throw a four-seamer away and it came back and ended up on the outer third instead of the corner (of the plate)."

Asked if it was a "big deal" to face a player as hyped as Ohtani, who is trying to prove he can pitch and hit at the same time in the big leagues, Kluber said, "I think Mike Trout has a lot of hype to him. Albert Pujols has a lot of hype to him. Justin Upton has a lot of hype to him. It's a good lineup."

The Indians led 2-0 through 4 1/2 innings, but it could have been more. They let left-hander Tyler Skaggs escape from a first-inning jam by scoring just one run.

Francisco Lindor opened the game with a single and stole second. After Jason Kipnis walked, Jose Ramirez advanced the runners with a fly ball to deep left. Skaggs walked Edwin Encarnacion to load the bases and Brandon Guyer singled to center to make it 1-0.

At that point it was looking good for the Tribe. Guyer, by the way, came into the game hitting .800 (4-for-5) against Skaggs. But Yonder Alonso bounced back to the mound as Skaggs started a 1-6-3 double play.

That's how the score stayed until the fifth when Lindor singled off Skaggs again, this time with two out. He stole second - the steal withstood a 2:09 replay challenge -- and scored on a single by Kipnis for a 2-0 lead.

That was it for the offense. The Tribe went scoreless over the last eight innings. After being held to one hit on Tuesday, they finished with seven hits Wednesday, but only two came after the fifth inning.

"We weren't able to put much on the board," said manager Terry Francona. "Early on I thought we swung the bat pretty good. We had a lot of firm outs. But, boy, over the last couple hours of that game it was tough sledding for us.

"As a club right now we don't have anyone who is hot."

Kluber, in his first two starts of the season, is 0-1 with a 2.40 ERA. He's struck out 14, walked three and allowed four earned runs in 15 innings. The Indians have scored three runs while he's been on the mound.

Skaggs allowed two runs on five hits in 4 2/3 innings. He struck out five and walked two

The Indians went 2-4 on this six-game trip to start the season.

What it means

Last year Kluber was 6-0 with a 1.50 ERA in series-deciding games.

The pitches

Skaggs threw 103 pitches, 57 (55 percent for strikes). Kluber threw 96 pitches, 64 (67 percent).

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Angels drew 32,412 fans to Angel Stadium on Wednesday afternoon. First pitch was at 4:08 with a temperature of 65 degrees.

Francisco Lindor gives thumbs up to Shohei Ohtani; says Cleveland Indians will be just fine

By Paul Hoynes

ANAHEIM, Calif. - The most popular U.S. export to Japan these days might just be the Indians. Japan has to love how they've welcomed Shohei Ohtani to the big leagues the last two days.

Japan's version of Babe Ruth went 3-for-4 with his first big-league homer Tuesday night in the Angels' 13-2 win. On Wednesday, he hit a game-tying homer against two-time Cy Young winner Corey Kluber on the way to a 3-2 victory in 13 innings.

Asked his thoughts on Ohtani, All-Star shortstop Francisco Lindor said, "Good hitter. Good swing. He was successful. I'm happy for him. It stinks that he did it against us, but I'm happy for him. I think it's cool for the game."

The Indians are heading home after going 2-4 on a season-opening six-game West Coast trip. The home opener is Friday against Kansas City.

"I'm looking forward to playing in front of the home crowd," said Lindor. "I'm looking forward to being in my locker room and a familiar dugout and all that stuff. I'm not looking forward to the weather, but I'm looking forward to everything else."

Regarding the trip, the Indians went 1-2 in Seattle and 1-2 in Anaheim. Four games were decided by one run with the Tribe dropping three of them.

"It was all right," said Lindor. "Last year we were 3-3 going home. This year we're 2-4. And we won 101 games."

Make that 102, but who's counting.

"It's OK," said Lindor. "We definitely can improve. We can play ball a lot better. I can definitely be a better offensive hitter. But overall, I think it's early in the season. There's no panicking. As long as we stay together and continue to compete and have fun, we'll be fine."

Lindor had two of his team's seven hits. He stole two bases and scored the Indians only two runs for a 2-0 lead that did not stand.

"I want to get on base and score. Get on base and score," said Lindor. "That's what I want to do so I can help my team win."

Lindor stole his second base of the game in the fifth inning. When he was called safe, he stared into home plate, trying to lock eyes with his foil - Angel catcher Martin Maldonado. The two have been chirping at each other for the last few years.

"He didn't respond," said Lindor. "It's just playing the game. I'm a kid. I'm a kid and I enjoy the game. I'm not trying to disrespect nobody."

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

FROM MLB TRADE RUMORS

Angels Agree to Minor League Deal With Dustin Ackley

By Steve Adams

The Angels are in agreement with free-agent infielder/outfielder Dustin Ackley on a minor league contract, reports MLB.com's Mark Feinsand (via Twitter). It'll be the second go-around with the Halos for Ackley, who is represented by the Boras Corporation.

Once the No. 2 overall pick in the MLB draft (2009), Ackley's career cratered after a promising debut with the 2011 Mariners. The UNC product hit .273/.348/.417 with six homers, 16 doubles, seven triples and six steals in 376 plate appearances as a rookie, but he'd go on to bat just .235/.296/.358 over his next 1971 PAs in the Majors from 2012-16.

Ackley spent the 2017 season with the Angels' Triple-A affiliate in Salt Lake, where he batted .261/.340/.376 in 505 plate appearances. Now 30 years of age, Ackley has experience at all three outfield positions as well as at second base and first base, so he'll give the Halos some depth across the board and an experienced bat to plug into the lineup in Triple-A.

Angels Acquire Miguel Almonte, Designate Juan Graterol

By Jeff Todd

The Angels have acquired righty Miguel Almonte from the Royals, per a club announcement. Cash or a player to be named later will head back in return for Almonte, who has been optioned to Triple-A by the Halos. To create an opening on the 40-man roster, the Los Angeles organization designated catcher Juan Graterol for assignment.

Almonte, who was removed from the 40-man recently to create space for a player of the same last name, will celebrate his 25th birthday today by joining a new organization after seven years in the Kansas City system. While he was once viewed as a quality prospect, Almonte has had trouble earning MLB opportunities and has in recent years been shifted mostly into a relief role.

Still, Almonte's arm obviously caught the attention of the Angels front office. He threw 47 innings of 1.72 ERA ball last year in the upper minors, over which he recorded 52 strikeouts against just 13 walks. But injuries again limited him in 2017 and Almonte is slated for some further time off after dealing with shoulder problems this spring.

As for the 29-year-old Graterol, he has seen limited MLB chances with the Halos over the past two seasons. He does have plenty of experience in the upper minors over a dozen-year professional career. Graterol carries a .652 OPS in his 353 Triple-A plate appearances and a .690 mark over 477 turns with the bat at the penultimate level of the minors.

FROM KYODO NEWS

Baseball: Ohtani refuses to call out his spring critics

After following his first pitching win in the big leagues by homering in back-to-back games, the Los Angeles Angels' Shohei Ohtani said Wednesday it was "too good to be true."

Having arrived in America with more fanfare than any Japanese import to date, the 23-year-old Ohtani performed poorly in spring exhibition games and his performance was roasted in the U.S. media. But after his stellar start to the season, Ohtani was asked if he had anything to say to his critics.

"Nothing in particular," he said after the Angels' 3-2 extra-inning victory on Wednesday. "The season has just begun and it could easily be the case that from my next game I stop hitting. People evaluate your results and that's the way it is."

"Right now, I'm really in good form. It's kind of too good to be true."

Former superstar Alex Rodriguez speaking on Fox Sports heaped on the praise Wednesday.

"He (Ohtani) is making a mockery of the greatest league in the world," A-Rod said. "Someone has to tell him he's not in Newport High School. He's making the league look like high school."

Having hit a three-run homer in his first at-bat at Angels Stadium on Tuesday and finished that game 3-for-4, Ohtani struck out in his first at-bat on Wednesday against 2017 American League Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber. During that at-bat he looked at a fat first-pitch fastball and was rung up on a pitch outside the zone.

In the fifth inning with two outs, a runner on second, Kluber got to a 1-1 count with two of his trademark cutters and Ohtani was looking for another one.

"I had studied his data and saw he rarely misses. As I expected, he is an elite pitcher, and I did not go to the plate full of conviction," Ohtani said of his game-tying home run. "A single would be a good (to get in a run), so I just tried to keep my swing compact."

"Actually I thought the previous pitch was also a mistake but I fouled it off and I thought that was my best chance, but I got lucky and the next one was perfect for me."

Although no one expects Ohtani to keep up his current levels of performance -- he is 6-for-14 -- mlb.com's analytics rate Ohtani among the majors' elite in three categories: fastball velocity, batted-ball velocity off his bat and foot speed to first base.

And that comes despite trained observers dismissing his credentials based on poor swings and pitches in his first spring training.

"He's basically like a high school hitter because he's never seen a good curveball," one major league scout told Yahoo Sports' Jeff Passan, who told Kyodo News he would not have published those words if that had not been the consensus of a number of scouts he'd spoken to.

Critics, including mlb.com's Ron Darling, said prior to Opening Day that Ohtani did not yet belong in the majors and suggested the Angels may have quietly promised him a big league roster spot in order to sign the slugging pitcher.

Yet, in one way, Ohtani has proved he is ready, and that has nothing to do with how well he plays.

Although Ohtani is labeled a rookie by Major League Baseball's rules, he spent five years as a pro in Nippon Professional Baseball. His attempts to both hit and pitch were criticized in Japan as well, and he learned that like pitching and hitting, criticism comes with the game.

Baseball: Ohtani launches Japanese baseball community onto Cloud 9

The world of Japanese baseball was celebrating on Wednesday after former Pacific League MVP Shohei Ohtani followed up his first pitching win in the majors with a stellar batting effort in his home debut.

His first pro skipper, Hideki Kuriyama, who six years ago lured Ohtani away from a major league deal by concocting a plan to have him both hit and pitch, said his protegee's three-hit, three-run homer effort on Tuesday in Anaheim, California, was to be expected.

"It's normal for him," Kuriyama said from Sendai, where the Fighters were playing the PL's Rakuten Eagles. "That's because I have no concerns about his hitting. I've been saying he'd absolutely be able to hit."

Former teammates, too, joined in. Kensuke Kondo, who has taken over Ohtani's role as the Fighters' principle designated hitter, told Ohtani by text that everyone had been watching his game.

Kondo followed Ohtani's lead by having two hits and two RBIs in the Fighters' 5-2 win, while starting pitcher Hirotohi Takanashi credited Nippon Ham's former ace for inspiration.

"He's made me feel that I too can pitch well," said Takanashi, who allowed two hits over six scoreless innings against Rakuten.

Former Fighters closer Hirotohi Masui, who is now with the Orix Buffaloes, said what many were thinking after Ohtani's rough spring training was followed by an impressive first week in the majors.

"Watching him in the preseason, I thought it must have been really trying for him, but then the season started, he wins as a pitcher, homers as a hitter," Masui said. "Just as we thought, he's a monster."

Former Boston Red Sox closer Koji Uehara, who returned to Japan this spring with his first pro club, the Central League's Yomiuri Giants, said injuries -- which had slowed Ohtani in Japan -- were the biggest danger to his development in the majors.

"This is really something amazing," Uehara said. "He does everything at an elite level. I just hope he can avoid injury."

Lotte Marines manager Tadahito Iguchi, a key member of the Chicago White Sox's 2005 World Series championship team agreed with Kuriyama about Ohtani's hitting potential.

"I've thought that if he spent an entire season as a hitter, he would be good enough to win a Triple Crown, so I believe, this reflects his true ability."

Baseball: Puttin' on a Sho – Ohtani homers in 2nd straight game

Shohei Ohtani's stellar start to his major league career continued on Wednesday, when he blasted his second homer in as many days, this time taking American League Cy Young winner Corey Kluber deep as the Los Angeles Angels edged the Cleveland Indians 3-2 in 13 innings.

Batting eighth, Ohtani homered off Kluber to left-center at Angel Stadium with the count 1-1 and the Angels down two in the fifth inning, bringing home Andrelton Simmons who had bunted to reach first.

Ohtani also singled up the middle in the 10th before the Angels won their second straight thanks to Zack Cozart's walk-off homer three innings later.

Just a day after opening his major league account in only his sixth at-bat -- and first in Anaheim -- Ohtani's shot versus the Indians just cleared the fence as Bradley Zimmer crashed into the wall trying to deny the Japanese his moment.

"The runner was in scoring position so I wanted to at least drive him home somehow," said Ohtani, who finished the day 2-for-5 with two RBIs and a strikeout. "I thought it might clear the fence but I wasn't completely sure. I'm glad it went over."

Ohtani will make his second start Sunday, his first at home, against the Oakland Athletics, whom he beat last weekend to win his first game in the majors.

"I think I've managed to get off to a good start, all things considered, and I'm happy that we won this series going into our next one," he said.

"Obviously we look at lineups from a whole series' perspective but also a day to day," mlb.com reported Angels manager Mike Scioscia saying when asked ahead of the game about playing Ohtani. "We planned on playing him these two games for sure and then we'll see moving forward."

Noe Ramirez (1-1) got one out in the 13th to earn the win. Zach McCallister (0-1) allowed the game-winning blast to Cozart to eat the loss.

FACTFILE: Everything you need to know about Shohei Ohtani

Shohei Ohtani, the most talked about player of the major league offseason, has found his new home, deciding to sign with the Los Angeles Angels. But the flamethrowing slugger remains baseball's international man of mystery, having kept his lips tight about what makes him tick as he prepares to make the jump to The Show.

While there are still a lot of unknowns surrounding the two-way Japanese phenom, here's what we do know about Ohtani from his formative years and five-season career with Nippon Professional Baseball's Nippon Ham Fighters:

Beginnings

Ohtani's parents were athletes, his father a corporate league baseball player, his mother a badminton player. He went to the same high school as hard-throwing lefty Yusei Kikuchi attended, Hanamaki Higashi in Iwate Prefecture. Kikuchi wanted to go to the majors straight out of school, but was drafted by six teams in the first round and signed with the Pacific League's Seibu Lions.

One of Ohtani's goals as a freshman, when he began as an outfielder before transitioning to the mound, was to be drafted by eight teams. Among the numerous goals spelled out on an 81-square grid included throwing a fastball 160 kph (99.4 mph).

The chart divided his goals into eight categories: physical strength, mental strength, character, fortune, breaking pitches, speed, late movement and control -- all four of the skill categories devoted to pitching. In August 2011 despite being hurt, Ohtani tied current New York Yankee Masahiro Tanaka's speed record for a sophomore at the summer national high school championships by throwing 150 kph; as a senior, he became the first Japanese amateur to hit 160 kph.

Like Kikuchi, Ohtani intended to sign with a major league team out of high school, announcing it two days before the NPB draft. Because of that, only the Fighters nominated him in the first round -- and managed to persuade him to stay in Japan, promising him "a short cut to the majors."

OHTANI BY THE NUMBERS

Age: 23... **Birthdate:** July 5, 1994... **Height:** 193cm... **Weight:** 92kg... **Throws:** Right... **Bats:** Left... **Hometown:** Oshu, Iwate Prefecture... **High School:** Hanamaki Higashi (Iwate)... **Favorite school subject:** History... **Walk-up songs:** Do or Die (Afrojack)/Wrapped Up (Olly Murs Feat. Travie Macoy)... **Titles:** 2015 - Wins, ERA, Winning Percentage, Best Nine (Pitcher); 2016 - Pacific League MVP, Best Nine (Pitcher, DH)

This included working to develop him as both a hitter and a pitcher, and giving him the No. 11 formerly worn by Yu Darvish. The team also laid out the dismal success rates of Japanese players who bolted stateside without establishing themselves in NPB first.

Rookie ball

In his first spring training in 2013, Ohtani took ground balls in the infield with his right arm behind his back to prevent it from injury. On March 29, he made his first team debut, starting in right field and had two hits and an RBI. Ohtani struck out in his first at-bat, but was so impressed by the quality of Lions ace

Takayuki Kishi's pitches that in his last press conference in Japan on Nov. 11, 2017, he recalled it as his most memorable at-bat.

On May 23 at Sapporo Dome, Ohtani allowed two runs in five innings in his mound debut, an interleague game against that year's Central League champions, the Yakult Swallows. His walk-up music that year was "The Power of Love" by Huey Lewis & The News.

On July 10, Ohtani hit his first home run as a professional. That season, Tanaka went 24-0 for the Pacific League champion Rakuten Eagles. Against Tanaka, who would sign with the Yankees that winter, Ohtani went 0-11 with six strikeouts, walked once and was hit by a pitch.

Ohtani played 54 games in the outfield as a rookie. His seven assists tied him for third in the PL, although none of the other outfielders with seven or more assists played fewer than 101 games.

He batted .238 with three home runs in 189 at-bats, but was the sixth 18-year-old in NPB history with 15 doubles in a season. On the mound, Ohtani went 3-0 with a 4.23 ERA in 61-2/3 innings and started 11 games.

2014-15

Ohtani went 11-4 in 24 games on the mound with 11 home runs in 212 at-bats in his sophomore season, becoming the first player in a top-flight league to win 10 games and hit 10 homers since Babe Ruth in 1918.

Although Ohtani went 15-5 in 2015 with a PL-best 2.24 ERA, winning his first Best Nine award, small physical setbacks -- mostly leg cramps -- often prevented him from batting between starts. He batted just .202 in 109 at-bats with five home runs.

That winter, during several weeks of strength workouts with former Fighters ace Yu Darvish, Ohtani added 8 kg of muscle to his frame.

The Breakthrough

In 2016, Ohtani recorded his second "Ruth season," going 10-4 and hitting 22 home runs in 323 at-bats.

On May 29, with Ohtani batting .342, his team abandoned the designated hitter so he could pitch and hit. He allowed a run in seven innings, while going 3-for-5 with two runs and an RBI. On July 3, Ohtani started on the road against the league-leading SoftBank Hawks; he led off the game with a home run, threw eight shutout innings and scored both runs in a 2-0 victory.

Blisters prevented him from pitching between July 24 and Sept. 7 but not hitting. During the All-Star Games, Ohtani won the home run derby before Game 1 and was the Game 2 MVP.

As the Fighters' most productive hitter, Ohtani's pitching return was pushed back, but set a Japan speed record on Sept. 13 of 164 kph (101.9 mph). He started the playoff-clincher as designated hitter and after his team came from behind, Ohtani took the mound to earn the only save of his career, while touching 165 kph (102.5 mph) on the gun.

That summer, the Tokyo Baseball Writers Club changed its rules for voting on the annual Best Nine Awards to allow a voter to vote for the same player in two positions, provided one was pitcher. Ohtani was named PL MVP and the first player to win two Best Nine Awards, at pitcher and DH.

Ohtani rolled his right ankle during the Japan Series while running the bases. This started a chain of events that would wipe out much of his 2017 season after he reinjured it playing for the national team against Mexico and the Netherlands in November, when he raised eyebrows by hitting into the ceiling at Tokyo Dome.

Ohtani's ankle prevented him from pitching that winter and spring. When the season started, he was ordered not to run all out or step on a base with the injured ankle. On April 8, however, Ohtani tore his left hamstring while trying to beat out an infield single and was sidelined for 2-1/2 months.

Ohtani pitched in just five games in 2017, but the last was a 10-strikeout, complete game shutout.

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FROM THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Bees outfielder and Angels prospect Michael Hermosillo hoping to pave his way to the majors

Former football standout has made a name for himself in baseball.

By Lynn Worthy

Michael Hermosillo will get that momentary itch again at times on a weekend in the fall when a football game comes across a television screen. After all, the Los Angeles Angels prospect signed to play college football at Illinois before deciding to try his hand in the professional baseball ranks.

Hermosillo now finds himself tapping on the door to the major leagues five years after the Angels drafted him in the 28th round out of high school and he decided to bet on his own upside in a sport he'd put "on the back burner." The 23-year-old outfielder begins this season with the Salt Lake Bees, who open their season against Albuquerque at 6:35 p.m. Thursday at Smith's Ballpark.

“Baseball was always kind of the first love,” said Hermosillo, a former all-state running back in Illinois who rushed for more than 2,000 yards and 29 touchdowns as a senior in high school. “I grew up in Arizona, and I played baseball all the time. Baseball has always kind of been in the family with my dad, my cousins, etc. Then once I moved to Illinois, because baseball isn’t really an option year-round, I started to focus on football.”

Rated the 10th-best prospect in the Angels’ farm system by Baseball America, Hermosillo’s tapping at the door to the big leagues could progress to full-fledged pounding or outright bursting through by the end of this summer. It’s not just him. He’s one of eight players 25 or younger on the Bees’ opening-day roster released earlier this week.

“He’s very athletic, kind of a highlight-reel type player,” Bees seventh-year manager Keith Johnson said about Hermosillo. “It’s like finally we’ve got a guy who has come up through our system as opposed to a sixth-year free agent or someone that we picked up off waivers.

“There’s still a little bit of a development aspect to go there, but I’ll tell you what — he’s opened some eyes. He’s done some really good things defensively. He’s still working his way offensively. We’re looking for him to take that last step, just to show consistency at this level just so that way he can kick that door down, if he gets the opportunity, and get up there and hopefully stay.”

Hermosillo often didn’t play more than 30 baseball games in a season as a high school player because of his focus on football. When he made the decision to sign with the Angels, he counted on the increased repetitions, training, focus and coaching to aid in his transition from all-around athlete and part-time baseball player to a full-time polished baseball player.

The 5-foot-11, 190-pound Hermosillo started last season at High-A and finished the year having jumped to Double-A (77 games) and Triple-A (30 games). He batted .287 with 12 extra-base hits (five home runs), 16 RBIs, nine stolen bases, a .341 on-base percentage and a .487 slugging percentage in 30 games with the Bees last season.

After barely getting his feet wet in professional baseball in 2013 after being drafted, Hermosillo needed the better part of the next two seasons to acclimate to playing every day. He played in Rookie ball in Orem in 2014, but his batting average dropped each month. He received a promotion to Low-A the next season, but his production again trailed off as the season went along until he got demoted back to Orem.

Things began to fall into place for him in 2016, and he enjoyed the best season of his career. He carried that over into 2017.

“There’s definitely a lot of mechanical stuff that went along with [getting used to playing more games] this past five years,” Hermosillo said. “I added a leg kick. I’ve gotten just my rhythm and my patterns and

my sequences right with my swing and things like that. That obviously was a huge factor, too, and I think that also took a big change in that 2016 year.”

Hermosillo has reached the point now where he’s able to make the day-to-day tweaks and adjustments instead of wholesale changes. He’s aiming to show consistency this season and demonstrate the ability to be “that player” who plays a significant part in the team’s success offensively and defensively, earns a reputation for playing hard every day, proves himself reliable in clutch situations and grows into a leadership role.

The Bees outfield includes four other players who all have played in the majors: Jabari Blash, Rymer Liriano, Ben Revere and Eric Young Jr. Hermosillo said over the past two years he’s leaned on those guys, particularly Young, with questions about handling things on and off the field.

Hermosillo admits he can’t help thinking about a day when he puts on an Angels uniform and takes the outfield alongside two-time American League MVP Mike Trout in a lineup that includes likely future Hall of Fame slugger Albert Pujols. However, he tries to not to let it alter his daily focus on giving his best effort for the Bees.

“I mean, it’s definitely there, you know what I mean?” Hermosillo said. “You know you’re so close. The motivation is there every day just to get there. It’s definitely a dream of mine to get there, but the thing I can control is play as best as I can here. If I play what I’m capable of here, hopefully at some point this year that’ll be the case.”

FROM DESERT NEWS

Salt Lake Bees enter season with a wealth of old and young talent, and a newfound long ball

By Trent Wood

SALT LAKE CITY — Five years ago, the Salt Lake Bees were one of the best teams in minor league baseball, let alone the Pacific Coast League.

Since then, success, particularly in the postseason, has been practically nonexistent and there are numberless reasons why.

Chief among them has to be the abysmal state of the Los Angeles Angels farm system. Two years ago, ESPN’s Keith Law considered the Angels farm system the worst he had ever seen and while it certainly improved last season, said improvement was minuscule (Los Angeles’ farm system was ranked 27th out of 30 teams in Law’s 2017 rankings).

Injuries have also played a significant role in the Bees' struggles, injuries to the Angels that is.

Thirty-two players donned both a Bees and Angels uniform at some point last season, which was due to nine Major League injury rehab assignments. Perhaps more telling, the Bees made a franchise record 240 transactions last year, sending a player up to the Angels 61 times.

While the '17 season was a bounce-back year of sorts, Salt Lake barely missed the playoffs, finishing one game shy of the division title, the postseason drought continued.

There is significant hope for the '18 season, however, due to one specific reason — power.

“We have the three-run homer in our lineup this year,” Bees manager Keith Johnson said. “It is something that has been missing for a little while.”

To his point, the Bees hit 136 home runs in '13, the second-most in the PCL, driving in 756 runs. In the four subsequent seasons, the best Salt Lake could muster was 102 homers, in '17, which was the second-worst total in the league.

Salt Lake appears primed to obliterate that mark this season.

Leading the way will be infielder Chris Carter, formerly of the Milwaukee Brewers, who had 41 dingers in the majors two years ago.

The Bees added additional power bats in Jabari Blash and Ryan Schimpf.

“We had to hit-and-run, steal and take the extra base all the time to create some offense (the past few years),” said Johnson. “Now we have some batters box offense.

“We have guys that can drive the ball into the gap and out of the ballpark. It is going to be fun to watch.”

Further aiding the Bees cause is the amount of major league experience on the roster. Salt Lake has 2,936 MLB games played on its roster, including 2,574 games in the field.

Former Minnesota Twin and Philadelphia Phillies outfielder Ben Revere stands as the most experienced Bee, with 857 games under his belt.

As far as prospects go, there is, at long last, hope. The Angels' farm system is significantly improved and the preeminent hope on the Bees, as far as position players go, is outfielder Michael Hermosillo, the Angels' 10th best overall prospect.

“He is very athletic, kind of a highlight reel type of player,” said Johnson. “We finally have a guy that has come up through our system.

“There is still a little bit of development aspect to go in there, but he is opening some eyes. We’re looking for him to take that last step, to show consistency at this level, so he can kick that door down.”

“I just want to give my all every day,” said Hermosillo. “There is so much that I want to achieve and accomplish this year. I’m excited.”

In addition to Hermosillo, infielder David Fletcher, the Angels' 18th best prospect per MinorLeagueBall, figures to have a sizable role on the team.

“Our roster right now is very talented and we will see how that plays out,” Salt Lake general manager Marc Amicone said. “We are seeing the best baseball players; the very best baseball talent that isn't in major league baseball. That is pretty cool.”

FROM PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Alexander: Angels prospect Jahmai Jones starts a new adventure in IE

By Jim Alexander

SAN BERNARDINO — There is stress, and then there is *stress*. Changing positions, and picking up a second baseman’s glove after you’ve started to make your mark as an outfielder? Comparatively, that’s nothing.

“I mean, I grew up in a family of six kids and I was the youngest boy,” Jahmai Jones said, laughing. “There were five plates of food left out at dinner, and if you didn’t make it that night you weren’t eating.”

He was exaggerating slightly. Maybe. Given that this family had a football mentality — his late father, Andre Jones, played in the NFL, two of his brothers play professionally (T.J. with the Detroit Lions, Malachi in the Arena League) and Jahmai himself dabbled in it in high school — dinnertime may well have been a combination of Survivor and musical chairs.

But there’s a message here: When you’ve grown up in a competitive environment, adapting shouldn’t be that hard.

Jones, last year’s Angels minor league player of the year, is the No. 4 prospect in the organization according to MLB.com (93rd overall) and No. 3 according to Baseball America (89th overall). It should be noted, of course, that the Angels’ No. 1 on both lists was Shohei Ohtani.

And while No.1 already has begun to make his mark in Anaheim, No. 4/3 continues his journey in the California League. When the Inland Empire 66ers' season begins Thursday night at San Manuel Stadium, Jones will start at second base against the San Jose Giants.

The middle infield is not completely foreign territory for Jones, who turns 21 in August. He played two years at shortstop at Wesleyan School in Norcross, Ga., before shifting to the outfield for his senior high school season in 2015.

"Cam Shepherd, who is now the shortstop at the University of Georgia, came in and was our primary shortstop, with the second baseman (being) Cobie Vance, who's at Alabama," he said. "So for that summer, my senior fall and then my senior high school season, I was in the outfield. The draft came around and I was drafted (in the second round) kind of as both, but primarily the outfield."

Jones acknowledged that Angels general manager Billy Eppler made the call on the position switch, amid talk that Jones was an in-between outfielder: not gifted enough defensively for center, not enough of a power hitter to play a corner outfield spot.

The player sees it as an opportunity to add to his versatility. When Jones drops the names of the Cubs' Ben Zobrist and the Dodgers' Chris Taylor into the conversation, you can tell he understands: In 21st century baseball, the more versatile you are, the better your shot at getting to the big leagues and staying there.

His biggest adjustment?

"Just getting used to the speed of the game," he said. "People hit the ball harder. Catchers throw the ball harder. Getting used to that, getting used to where I need to be on (cutoffs) and relays and making sure that I'm in the right positioning going forward ... making sure that I'm in the best place possible for the highest amount of success all the time."

There are subtle differences between shortstop and second base, beyond the obvious requirement that the shortstop have more range and a stronger arm. Inland Empire manager Ryan Barba, who played five seasons in the minors and spent the vast majority of that time at shortstop, noted that the ball comes off the bat differently. The double-play pivot is different, of course, and responsibilities on bunt plays are different as well.

Barba, making his debut as a manager after six years as a hitting coach in the Angels' organization, got a good look at Jones' transition during spring training, much of which was in big league camp.

"I've seen an athletic baseball player just kind of evolve," he said. "To see him take on the information from (minor league infield coordinator) David Newhan and (director of baseball development) Mike Gallego, and (66ers coach) Brian Betancourth ... it's been eye-opening to see what he can do.

"He took all the knowledge that we've given him, all the information, and he's applied it pretty well."

Jones, who played 86 games at low A Burlington (with a .272/.338/.425 slash line) and 41 at Inland Empire (.302/.368/.488, with 32 runs scored and 52 hits) in 2017, had his first taste of big league camp this spring. He hit .111, though one of his two hits was a triple.

But he learned a lot. And he came to the realization that, as he put it, "I'm right there. There's a chance for me to make this, and if I keep doing what I'm doing I think I'll be OK."

And he got that second baseman's glove out of it. That'll be important, too.