

Daily Clips



April 15, 2018

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

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Dodgers' No. 3 spot in flux without Turner

By Ken Gurnick

LOS ANGELES -- The Dodgers used their third No. 3 hitter in as many games on Saturday night, illustrating how hard it is to replace Justin Turner.

It was Yasiel Puig, followed by Matt Kemp, then Yasmani Grandal. Meanwhile, Turner continues a steady recovery from a small non-displaced fracture in his left wrist. Monday will be four weeks since he was hit by a Kendall Graveman fastball. He has begun to catch soft toss with a glove and taken dry swings with a bat.

Manager Dave Roberts won't give a timetable for Turner's return because it all depends on an unpredictable recovery. And even when Turner can swing a bat, he'll need more than the traditional one- or two-game rehab assignment. He'll need a quasi-Spring Training.

So, Roberts concedes it hasn't been easy constructing lineups each game when one of the best hitters in the league is unavailable indefinitely.

"It's a challenge," Roberts said. "It's hard to replace Justin, the presence in the lineup, the at-bat quality, whether it's a two-out nobody-on situation or run-scoring opportunity. The professional at-bat, to have him in the middle, it's tough to overcome that. You look at the three-hole, it hasn't been productive. But we're still early."

Dodgers No. 3 hitters rank last in MLB with a .527 OPS. That includes a .226 average, no home runs and four RBIs. By contrast, Turner last year finished third in National League batting average, was an All-Star for the first time and finished eighth in NL MVP voting.

Kemp didn't start on Saturday, but he and Roberts said it had nothing to do with running into the fence chasing Nick Ahmed's home run Friday night. Joc Pederson started in left field, and Roberts said he wanted to keep Pederson "relevant" and protect Kemp's legs for the long haul of the season.

More immediately, Roberts might have felt Arizona's Saturday night starter, Taijuan Walker, was a softer spot for Pederson than Sunday starter Zack Godley. Kemp is 3-for-12 with a homer against Godley, Pederson is 1-for-8 against Godley but 5-for-12 against Walker.

In other news related to left field, Roberts said torrid Andrew Toles was placed on the Minor League disabled list with a hamstring injury from Friday night. Roberts called it a "very benign deal" but estimated Toles to be sidelined at least 10 days.

"I hear social media is blowing up," Roberts said. "#FreeToles. Who started that?"

The Dodgers took the Lemon Face Challenge to fight brain cancer -- and challenged the D-backs next

By Michael Clair and Ken Gurnick

Normally a lemon makes you pucker up, but these may make you tear up. That's because the Dodgers -- led by Enrique Hernandez -- took the Lemon Face Challenge before playing the D-backs on Saturday night.

The challenge was started by 11-year-old Aubreigh Nichols, who suffers from a rare form of brain cancer known as diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG), to help bring awareness to the disease. After Nick Saban started the event for Aubreigh's Army, Dodgers hitting coach Turner Ward challenged the Dodgers to eat a lemon wedge to help fight the disease.

If anything, it looks like Logan Forsythe enjoyed the taste.

"Our hitting coach, Turner Ward, is a family friend of Aubrey -- an 11-year-old girl, diagnosed with DIPG," Hernandez said after the game. "Turner shared her story with me, what they were doing. She came up with the Lemon Face Challenge. He wanted us to do it to spread some awareness. It's a pretty sad story. She's only 11, going through tough days. She's battling. Turner asked and we all said, 'Why not? Let's do it as a group.'"

Hernandez also has close experience with cancer, as his father, Enrique Hernandez II, was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a blood cancer related to leukemia, though he's now in remission.

At the end of the video, the super utility player challenged the D-backs to take part. MLB.com's Steve Gilbert reported that Arizona will be slicing up the lemons before Sunday's game.

"I think it's a really cool idea," D-backs outfielder A.J. Pollock said. "The Dodgers challenged us and I just read the story and what the cause is and it's a great cause, so if we can help raise money for it, I think it's awesome."

Not only are these videos fun and help raise awareness, but they provide a real benefit, too. According to The Washington Post, the Ice Bucket Challenge raised \$115 million for the ALS Association, which helped the organization discover "a new gene linked to the disease."

Baserunning gaffe, replay turn HR into single

By Ken Gurnick and Steve Gilbert

LOS ANGELES -- D-backs first-base coach Dave McKay walked through the visitors' clubhouse following Arizona's 9-1 win over the Dodgers on Saturday night and noticed a crowd around Alex Avila's locker.

"Are they asking about the play?" McKay said.

The play McKay was referring to was in the fourth inning when Deven Marrero hit a home run to left. Avila was on first base and Chris Owings on second.

Not knowing if the ball was going to be caught or go over the fence, Avila went back to tag first base, and he and Marrero briefly passed one another.

The umpires didn't initially see a problem, but the Dodgers challenged the call. Upon replay review, Marrero was credited with a single and ruled out. Both Owings and Avila were allowed to score.

"There was an overhead view that showed he was a little bit ahead of him," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "We knew it was close but wanted to take a look at it. We knew it was reviewable, and it saved us a run."

After the game, McKay heard that Avila was taking the blame for the play and that led him to interrupt the media session.

"On that ball right there, what we do a lot is the guy tags up at second and tags up at first on deep fly balls that have a chance to be a home run," McKay explained. "What I'm supposed to do is I'm supposed to stop the runner. Owings started to tag, [Avila] came back to tag and had no chance to tag. I was talking to [Avila] and left Deven alone and let Deven pass me. I've got to stop the baserunner. That's the way it works."

"[Avila's] probably going to take the blame for it, but that's my fault. My fault. The coach's fault. I've been doing it for over 30 years, I've stopped a thousand of them and just got caught up. Sometimes the coaches get in the way. I got in the way today."

In the end, the biggest frustration for Avila was that Marrero didn't get credit for a home run.

"That's the thing," Avila said. "He should get the homer."

Forsythe awaits MRI results for shoulder injury

By Ken Gurnick

LOS ANGELES -- Third baseman Logan Forsythe left in the sixth inning of the Dodgers' 9-1 loss to the D-backs on Saturday night and underwent an MRI of his right shoulder after the game. Results are expected on Sunday.

"He was in between innings and I was watching him throw, and there was discomfort and the shaking of the arm," said manager Dave Roberts. "There was fatigue there, and it didn't look right. I wanted to get pictures, and that's where we're at."

Forsythe, who made two long throws in the top of the fifth inning, was seen in the Dodgers' dugout rubbing his right shoulder between innings.

A second baseman for most of his career, Forsythe has been pressed into third-base duty because Justin Turner began the season on the disabled list with a fractured left wrist.

"Don't know if it's a DL situation, but to lose two third basemen, it's nice to know we have some guys with versatility," Roberts said. "We don't have that true third baseman. But we'll give [Enrique] Hernandez and Kyle Farmer time over there and, if it's a DL situation, then call up an infielder."

Hernandez replaced Forsythe at third base with the D-backs holding a 7-1 lead.

LA unable to shake slow start, cool D-backs

By Ken Gurnick

LOS ANGELES -- The Dodgers, who came one win shy of winning a World Series in November, are in last place in mid-April, and nobody's happy about it, especially manager Dave Roberts.

"It is frustration. It's definitely not panic, but it's frustration," Roberts said after a 9-1 loss to the first-place D-backs on Saturday night left the Dodgers 6 1/2 games back only 13 games into the season, compounded by a new shoulder injury to substitute third baseman Logan Forsythe. "The way to sum it up is, we've got to play better baseball. We've got to pitch better, we've got to hit better and the defense has been spotty at times. Results notwithstanding, that's what we need."

Arizona slugged four home runs, two by A.J. Pollock, and would have had a fifth if not for a baserunning blunder that turned a three-run shot by Deven Marrero into a two-run single. Even with that, and losing starting pitcher Taijuan Walker after two innings with right forearm stiffness, Arizona continued its best start in franchise history with an 11th consecutive regular-season win over the Dodgers.

"I know the Dodgers are an incredible franchise and they're on a great run," said D-backs manager Torey Lovullo. "This is a powerful organization. The fact that we're doing that means we're doing something very special. I'm very proud of that."

Rich Hill allowed seven runs in five innings, the third consecutive Dodgers starter to allow at least five runs. Five of them scored with two outs, three after a two-out walk to David Peralta in the third inning.

"You can see things -- I don't like the terms that things are falling their way or the ball is bouncing in their direction -- but you can definitely relate the way they're playing right now to the way we were playing last year," Hill said. "It is disappointing to go out there and pitch the way I did today."

The Dodgers' only run came in the second inning, a Yasiel Puig double followed by a single from Joc Pederson, who started in left field.

"I've said a hundred times, swing at strikes and take balls, but right now we're not doing a great job of it, to be quite honest," Roberts said. "There are times when we have opportunity to take the walk, but we expand. And there are pitches we can handle and we're not doing that. Collectively, we're just not doing it."

Why?

"You don't want to say it's a focus thing. It's the same guys and these games are very important. But, winning the pitches I've seen us win that we're not winning, could be attributed to focus. Again, it's early, but you still want to play good baseball. It's a little bit of passing the baton. Let the next guys do it. When offenses typically struggle, it's when they're overly aggressive. It's not a lack of effort or ability."

Are the Dodgers so focused on October that they're not focused enough on April?

"That shouldn't be," Roberts said. "And it better not be. We've got a lot of work to get to that point where we were last year. Very important games to everybody. That shouldn't be the case."

Roberts said the effort is there. Cody Bellinger said there might even be more effort now than a year ago.

"From what I've seen last year to this year, everybody is prepping the same, if not a little more just to get out of it," he said. "We had a rough stretch in Arizona where a few balls didn't go our way. Now it's just going downhill a little bit. I think we're going to turn it around."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Walks will do it: Goldschmidt delivered the big blow in a three-run third inning, a two-run homer, that followed Ketel Marte's RBI double. Marte drove in Peralta, whose four-pitch walk with two outs was a backbreaker for Hill, who had retired eight of the first nine batters he faced.

SOUND SMART

The 11 consecutive regular-season losses to Arizona are the most against a single opponent in Los Angeles Dodgers history and fourth longest in franchise history.

HE SAID IT

"It's April 14. We play until November or September or whatever it is. I don't think we're worried at all. We want to play better, but the record doesn't mean anything right now." -- Bellinger

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Marrero was credited with probably the most disappointing and embarrassing two-run single of his life in the fourth inning when his long fly carried over the fence in left-center. Alex Avila, running at first base, stopped to see if the ball would be caught, but Marrero kept running and veered alongside of Avila as the ball went out. First-base umpire Tripp Gibson III immediately ruled Marrero safe, but Roberts challenged the call and it was overturned on review. Marrero was called out and two runs scored on the single.

UP NEXT

One week after his last start, Clayton Kershaw gets the ball for Sunday's 1:10 p.m. PT start against the D-backs on Jackie Robinson Day. This will be a rematch against Zack Godley, who beat Kershaw and the Dodgers 12 days ago in Phoenix. Austin Barnes will likely catch for the Dodgers, and Matt Kemp returns to left field.

LA TIMES

Dodgers outfielder Andrew Toles out at least two weeks because of hamstring injury

By Andy McCullough

Injured on Friday evening while playing for triple-A Oklahoma City, Dodgers outfielder Andrew Toles will require two weeks of rest for his injured hamstring, manager Dave Roberts said before Saturday's game against Arizona.

The injury further delays the big league ascension of Toles, who outplayed fellow outfielder Joc Pederson during spring training but started the season in the minors in order to receive daily at-bats.

Toles was hitting .462 in six triple-A games. He homered Friday before exiting early. Toles told The Oklahoman he pulled his hamstring. Oklahoma City manager Bill Haselman indicated Toles was suffering from cramps.

"Very benign deal," Roberts said. "But I would say it's at least a 10-day deal before we get him on a baseball field."

Roberts indicated he was aware of the growing discontent among fans over Toles' assignment to Oklahoma City.

"Social media is blowing up," Roberts said. "Free Toles. Free Toles. Who started that? My phone blows up on the social media thing, I get Toles emails all night long. He's coming. He's coming."

Matt Kemp gets day off

After ramming his knee into an outfield wall Friday night, outfielder Matt Kemp vowed he would be in the lineup Saturday. He was not.

Roberts insisted this was not because of Kemp's health. Roberts intended to give Kemp some time off as the Dodgers play a seven-game stretch without a day off. He also wanted to keep Pederson "relevant" as Pederson adjusts to being mostly a bench player.

"The knee's fine," Roberts said. "Matt's fine."

Justin Turner is making progress

Third baseman Justin Turner has begun swinging a bat without making contact, which is a step in his progression as he returns from a fractured left wrist. Turner has also been able to catch the baseball.

There is still no timetable for his return, Roberts said.

"Honestly, we don't know," Roberts said. "Once he starts swinging the bat and taking batting practice, how he responds, no one knows. When he goes on a rehab assignment, we don't know how long it's going to be. It could be two days. It could be a week. There's a lot of different factors."

Dodgers' early struggles continue as they fall 9-1 to Diamondbacks

By Andy McCullough

The silence irritated Kenley Jansen. In the hours before thousands of spectators fill a baseball stadium, the ballpark can feel eerie or serene. It depends how your team is playing. On Saturday afternoon, as batting practice unfolded for a collection of Dodgers who had lost twice as many games as they'd won in 2018, Jansen hollered in the general vicinity of the folks running Dodger Stadium's speaker system.

"I promise we'll play better!" Jansen shouted. "I promise! We need some music! I promise we'll go 42-8 today!"

His words would ring hollow, but Jansen could not know that yet, not before a 9-1 defeat to the Arizona Diamondbacks dropped the Dodgers to last place in the National League West. A minute later, as the opening bars of Carnage's "WDYW" clanged over the diamond, Jansen and Justin Turner pointed skyward, in search of more volume. The attendants obliged. At long last, the Dodgers had done something right this season.

Success at actual baseball has proved elusive, a reality clarified by Saturday's thrashing. The heights of 2017 — the blissful stretch of 43-7 baseball during the summer, the tenacity of their run to the World Series — feel like dispatches from eons ago. The name on the front of the jersey is the same, and almost all the names on the back are the same. The product is far different.

Anemic at the plate, imprecise on the mound and indifferent on the field, the Dodgers (4-9) have produced a trifecta of unsightly baseball this year. The calendar still features 24 more weeks of games, enough time for the team to rediscover the ballast that sustained them last season. Yet the calendar also serves as a taunt: Can you imagine watching five more months like this?

"It's definitely not panic, it's frustration," manager Dave Roberts said. "The way to sum it up is we've got to play better baseball. We've got to pitch better. We've got to hit better. And the defense has been spotty at times. To sum it up, we have to play better baseball."

In losing for the third game in a row, the Dodgers could not bother an opponent with a wounded pitching staff. Rich Hill could not pacify his guests. Hill gave up seven runs in five innings — and it would have been worse if Arizona not been docked a run for a bizarre gaffe on the bases. Trying to fit in, Wilmer Font surrendered a pair of home runs in the eighth and ninth inning.

At the plate, the Dodgers remain hapless. The offense mounted little challenge, even after Arizona starter Taijuan Walker left the game after two innings with tightness in his right forearm.

Arizona (11-3) has now defeated the Dodgers in 11 consecutive regular-season games, a statistic that does not account for the Dodgers' three-game sweep in the National League division series. It is the longest string of futility against one opponent in franchise history.

"You can definitely relate to the way they're playing right now," Hill said. "It's the way we were playing last year."

An answer to the 2018 team's woes appears unclear. The problems are widespread, a virus Clayton Kershaw cannot solve on his own when he starts the series finale against Arizona on Sunday. Alex Wood wobbled Wednesday, Kenta Maeda unraveled Friday and Hill imploded Saturday. The team's best hitter, Turner, has yet to take batting practice as he recovers from a fractured wrist. The best hitter in triple-A Oklahoma City, Andrew Toles, injured his hamstring Friday.

"It's early," Roberts said. "But whether it's early, it's in the middle, or it's late, you still want to play good baseball. And right now we're not doing that."

Another ailment Saturday added to the team's issues. Logan Forsythe exited the game after experiencing discomfort in his right shoulder and underwent an MRI. Forsythe has hit .174 this season, but with Turner on the shelf, he was also the team's most reliable defender at third base.

The Dodgers pulled ahead in the second inning on an RBI single by Joc Pederson. The lead did not survive the third inning. Hill had retired eight of the first nine batters he faced before issuing a two-out walk to outfielder David Peralta — "just a bad walk," Roberts said. Arizona shortstop Ketel Marte smoked a curveball into the right-center gap for an RBI double.

Up next, first baseman Paul Goldschmidt hammered a fastball for a two-run homer that curled around the left-field pole and landed in the second deck. "It felt like the ball came out good," Hill said. "But the results were terrible."

The two-out flurry infuriated Hill. He stomped off the mound and grabbed a bat. He smashed the lumber against the dugout seats and disappeared from sight. The outburst did not guarantee better pitching upon his return.

In the fourth, Hill benefited from an obscure and unlikely ruling — the rare instance of a batter passing a teammate after hitting a home run. After a leadoff double by outfielder Chris Owings and a walk by catcher Alex Avila, Hill served up an 88.7-mph fastball for third baseman Deven Marrero, who blasted over the fence in left-center field.

It looked like a three-run homer. Except as the ball hung in the air, Avila waited past first, unable to read the trajectory. Marrero passed his teammate by accident. The Dodgers challenged the call. The umpires ruled out Marrero, who was credited with a two-run single.

The Diamondbacks would not make that mistake again. Arizona outfielder A.J. Pollock demolished a 1-0 fastball in the fifth for a two-run shot. Faced with the deficit, the Dodgers offered little resistance. It has been that sort of season.

"It's April 14, and we play until November or September," first baseman Cody Bellinger said. "Obviously, it's not the start we want. But I don't think we're worried about it at all. We want to play better. But the record doesn't mean anything right now."

OC REGISTER

Sluggish start to season nothing new during Dodgers' run of division dominance

By Bill Plunkett

LOS ANGELES — You don't win a division title in April. The Dodgers certainly haven't.

While ruling over the National League West, slow starts have become a staple for the Dodgers. During their five-year run of division titles, the Dodgers' lowest winning percentages have come in the first two months of the season.

Counting their eight losses in the first 12 games this season, the Dodgers have a .518 winning percentage (71-66) before May 1 over the past five-plus seasons. They reached May with a losing record (12-13) in 2016 and at .500 (13-13) in 2013. During the month of May, they have heated up only slightly — a .539 winning percentage (76-65).

The five-year trend points away from a 'World Series hangover' as the explanation for a slow start. But Dodgers manager Dave Roberts has no theory to offer up as a replacement for the annual sluggish spring months.

"No, I don't," Roberts said. "Every year is different but it's totally fair (to say) that we kind of start slow. It's not that we're doing the same thing over and expect a different result. We've changed some things up. Guys want to start fast and be productive. But it's kind of the way it's played out. The thing I kind of feel good about is the effort has been consistent. When you have good players that prepare and play hard, then I'll bet on that."

He'd be safe to bet on things heating up in July and August. That's when the Dodgers have won the division the past five seasons, playing at a .637 pace during those months including last year's 41-10 run.

Roberts points the finger at no particular area of the team as carrying more blame for this year's slow start.

"It's a combo. And that's typically what happens," he said before Saturday's game. "Whether it's hitting or pitching, starting pitching, 'pen, some defense has cost us. ... We're not synced up right now and to imagine being synced up all year is unrealistic. But we've got a lot of good players and we'll be fine."

The Dodgers have one fewer good player this April with third baseman Justin Turner on the DL. Roberts has been unable to find a productive replacement in Turner's spot in the lineup.

Going into Saturday's game, the Dodgers' No. 3 hitters had combined for the lowest OPS (.527) and slugging percentage (.264) in the majors, the 29th-best on-base percentage (.263), 20th-best batting average (.226) and no home runs.

Yasiel Puig started the first 10 games batting third but has been dropped in the order over the past few days. Corey Seager, Matt Kemp and Yasmani Grandal have each started there once now.

"Trying to find that guy," Roberts said of giving Grandal the start batting third Saturday.

"It's a challenge. It's hard to replace Justin – the presence in the lineup, the at-bat quality whether it's a two-out, nobody-on situation or it's a run-scoring opportunity. The professional at-bat he gives every time, winning pitches – to have him in the middle of the order, yeah, it's tough to overcome that. ... If you look at the 3-hole right now it hasn't been productive. But again, it's still early."

Turner has taken a small but significant step forward in his recovery from a fractured left wrist. Roberts said Turner has begun taking "dry swings" – swinging a bat with no ball involved. Turner has also begun catching soft tosses with his left hand.

Still, Roberts is reluctant to put an estimate on how much longer the Dodgers will have to play without Turner.

"Honestly we don't know," Roberts said again Saturday. "Once he starts swinging the bat and takes batting practice, how he responds – no one knows. Once he goes out on a rehab assignment, we don't know how long it's going to be. I mean, it could be two days. It could be a week. So, there's a lot of different factors."

ALSO

Outfielder Andrew Toles was off to a hot start at Triple-A Oklahoma City, batting .462 with a home run, four doubles and seven RBI in six games. But he left Friday's game with a hamstring injury and was

headed to the DL. Roberts said the injury is not serious but is likely to be “at least a 10-day deal before we get him on the baseball field.”

The Dodgers’ starting rotation will stay on turn for the three-game series in San Diego beginning Monday. Left-hander Hyun-Jin Ryu will start the first game against the Padres followed by left-hander Alex Wood on Tuesday and right-hander Kenta Maeda on Wednesday.

UP NEXT: Diamondbacks RHP Zack Godley (2-0, 0.64 ERA) at Dodgers LHP Clayton Kershaw (0-2, 1.89 ERA), Sunday 1:10 p.m., SportsNet LA (where available)

Diamondbacks clobber the Dodgers again, 9-1

By Bill Plunkett

LOS ANGELES – Tommy and Jo Lasorda celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary Saturday night. He took her to a ballgame. Again.

Some things, however, can’t last forever.

The Dodgers certainly hope not. They lost to the Arizona Diamondbacks again, taking their lumps in a 9-1 loss this time.

“We’re still trying to find our groove,” Dodgers first baseman Cody Bellinger said. “It’s April 14. We play ‘til November or September or whatever it is. I don’t think we’re worried.”

Given that they have a mere 149 games to turn it around, they probably shouldn’t be.

But the loss dropped the Dodgers to 4-9 to start the season, their worst 13-game start since 1994.

The Diamondbacks, off to an 11-3 start, have handed the Dodgers five of those losses. It is part of a streak of 11 consecutive regular-season losses to the Diamondbacks, the longest losing streak to any opponent in Los Angeles history.

Last fall’s three-game Dodgers sweep in the NL Division Series takes the sting out of that. But the contrast between the two NL West rivals right now is stark.

“Yeah, you can see things – I don’t necessarily like the term ‘the ball is bouncing their way’ ... but you can definitely relate to the way they’re playing right now as the way we were playing last year,” Dodgers starter Rich Hill said. “I hate to look back. But those are the comparisons that I do see.”

The Diamondbacks have outscored the Dodgers, 34-16, while beating them five times already this season and have so dominated them that they hit five home runs Saturday, gave one back and still routed the home team.

Deven Marrero’s fourth-inning drive just over the wall in center field went from three-run home run to two-run single when a replay review showed Marrero had passed the runner at first base.

That provided little relief. Hill sandwiched it with two-run home runs to Paul Goldschmidt in the third inning and A.J. Pollock in the fifth. Add in an RBI double by Ketel Marte and it was an all-around bad night for Hill.

Goldschmidt's homer was particularly impressive. It rocketed off the bat at 112.9 mph (the hardest home run he has hit since Statcast began tracking exit velocity in 2015) and curled around the left-field foul pole into the second deck of seats.

"It is frustration. It's definitely not panic," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said of the 4-9 start. "It is frustration and I think the way to sum it up is we've got to play better baseball. We've gotta pitch better. We've gotta hit better. And the defense has been spotty at times. I think to sum it up we've got to play better baseball."

After battling back repeatedly in Friday's loss, the Dodgers' offense seemed to have little left Saturday. Diamondbacks starter Taijuan Walker gave up a run in the second then left the game with right forearm tightness. Not a problem for the Diamondbacks — four relievers followed Walker and held the Dodgers to four hits over seven scoreless innings.

The Dodgers had their own injury issue. Infielder Logan Forsythe left the game after five innings with a sore right shoulder. He was scheduled to undergo an MRI Saturday night.

It might be more difficult to diagnose what ailments plague the Dodgers right now.

"You look at the box score today and we had two walks," Roberts said. "It's not about trying to artificially create a walk. But scaring guys out of the strike zone, that's when we're good.

"I've said it 100 times — swing at strikes and take balls. Right now we're not doing a great job of it, to be quite honest. There are times where we have an opportunity to take the walk but we expand. There are pitches we could handle to end the at-bat and we're not doing that. Collectively, we're just not doing it right now."

Roberts would not fault his team for a lack of effort or preparation. But he acknowledged that something is definitely missing.

"You don't want to say it's a focus thing — because it is the same guys and these games are very important," Roberts said. "But winning the pitches that I've seen us win that we're not winning could be attributed to focus. Again, it's early but whether it's early, it's in the middle or it's late you still want to play good baseball. Right now, we're not doing it."

Convincing a team that went deep in the playoffs each of the past two years and has won its division fairly easily for five straight seasons that games in April are "very important" might be the biggest challenge the Dodgers have yet to meet.

"It shouldn't be and it better not be," Roberts said. "We have a lot of work to do to get to that point where we were last year. They're very important games to everybody. That shouldn't be the case."

TRUE BLUE LA

Late homers from Smith and Joe lead Drillers to victory

By Craig Minami

Rancho Cucamonga — The Quakes fell behind early but like the Oklahoma City Dodgers and Tulsa Drillers, they were able to comeback to win their game on Saturday. The Loons fell victim to more poor

weather so they postponed their scheduled doubleheader (to makeup for Friday's postponement) and will try again today to play two at Great Lakes.

Player of the day

Will Smith is part of one the best catching duos in the minor leagues as he and Keibert Ruiz are playing behind the plate at Tulsa. Smith's 3-for-4 night pushed his average to .300 and his OPS to .882.

Triple-A Oklahoma City

The Dodgers had their second walk-off win this week as they mounted a late comeback to beat the New Orleans Baby Cakes (Marlins) 3-2 on Saturday night. Trailing 2-0, Alex Verdugo hit a two-run homer in the eighth to tie the game. For Oklahoma City, it was their sixth straight win.

The win also gave them a 5-0 start at Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark which they had not done since 2006. And their 7-1 start to the season is the franchise's best since joining the Pacific Coast League in 1998.

Reliever Daniel Hudson worked out a little trouble in the top of ninth to keep the game tied. Baby Cakes reliever Jumbo Diaz, who has pitched in 173 major league games in the last four seasons, entered the game.

With one out, Travis Taijeron walked, Jake Peter singled to put runners on first and third. That brought up Rocky Gale, who proceeded to lay down a squeeze bunt to score Taijeron and win the game.

One other highlight was the relief work by Guillermo Moscoso. Moscoso worked four scoreless innings, giving up two hits and two walks. Moscoso struck out seven.

Double-A Tulsa

The Drillers trailed 3-2 going to the bottom of the sixth inning but then a solo home run by Mike Ahmed tied the game. In the seventh inning, Will Smith and Connor Joe hit back-to-back home runs and went on to edge the Frisco RoughRiders (Rangers) 5-4 to win their third straight game.

Devin Smeltzer started and pitched four strong innings, striking out eight and giving up a run and four hits. Michael Johnson gave up a run in the eighth but he got credit for the win. Josh Sborz pitched the final 1½ innings to get his second save.

Smith and Luke Raley each had three hits, Ahmed also had a sacrifice fly and Angelo Mora doubled and scored for the Drillers.

Class-A Rancho Cucamonga

The Quakes and Inland Empire 66ers (Angels) did not play crisply on Saturday at LoanMart Field as the nine-inning game took 3 hours and 49 minutes to play. But in the end, the Quakes came back to win their second straight on a 7-6 walk-off win. Sven Schueller, who allowed tying runs to score in the eighth and ninth innings, was credited with the win.

The 66ers tied in the top of the ninth when Jared Walsh crushed a home run to right. The Quakes final rally started with a Logan Landon double, his third hit of the game, to left. A fly ball moved Landon to third base.

The 66ers played the five infielders, two outfielders defense and it almost worked as Hamlet Marte grounded to third. But a poor throw allowed Landon to score and Quakes won the game.

An inning earlier, the Quakes had their first late rally when with two out, Connor Wong singled and stole second. Cristian Santana singled, his third hit of the game, to bring Wong home to take a brief lead.

In this back and forth game, the Quakes initially trailed 3-0 but then were able to tie the game in the third inning. The 66ers took a one run lead in the fourth but then the Quakes scored two more runs in the fourth to take the lead for the first time.

Imani Abdullah has not pitched well in his first two starts this season. Abdullah faced 12 batters, he got four outs, gave up three runs, four hits and walked five. It appeared he had good stuff but he had no command. Isaac Anderson and Parker Curry were able to settle things down and keep the Quakes in the game.

Class-A Great Lakes

The scheduled doubleheader between the Loons and Dayton Dragons (Reds) was postponed due to bad weather. The Loons have scheduled a doubleheader for today, weather permitting.

Transactions

Triple-A: Oklahoma City placed outfielder Andrew Toles on the 7-day disabled list and activated catcher Alex Burg from the 7-day disabled list.

Double-A: Los Angeles Dodgers sent right-handed pitcher Dylan Baker outright to Tulsa Drillers.

Saturday's scores

Oklahoma City 3, New Orleans 2

Tulsa 5, Frisco 4

Rancho Cucamonga 7, Inland Empire 6

Sunday's schedule

11:05 a.m. PT: Great Lakes (Jesus Vargas & TBD) vs. Dayton (Hunter Greene & TBD)

12:05 p.m.: Oklahoma City (Zach Neal) vs. New Orleans (Adam Conley)

2:05 p.m.: Tulsa (Yadier Alvarez) vs. Midland [Athletics] (TBD)

2:05 p.m.: Rancho Cucamonga (Dean Kremer) vs. Inland Empire (Erik Manoah)

Dodgers remain in the doldrums

By Eric Stephen

Saturday night at Dodger Stadium provided a glimpse of a series of mirages. There was a stolen base that wasn't, a home run that wasn't, and a good baseball team that is playing nothing like it at the

moment. The Dodgers were on the wrong end of yet another game with the Diamondbacks, falling 9-1 to continue an atrocious start to their 2018 season.

The Dodgers lost their third straight overall and their 11th consecutive regular season defeat at the hands of Arizona. The loss on Saturday also assured that the Dodgers will be without a series win in their first five series of the year.

A bizarre caught stealing of Chris Taylor in the first inning — when Taylor inexplicably pulled up as he approached second base after a tremendous jump, as if he thought the ball was dead. That neutered what could have been another scoring first inning for the Dodgers against Taijuan Walker.

The Dodgers got to Walker in the second, during which the pitcher from Yucaipa was visited by trainers but remained in the game to finish the frame, after allowing a run on a pair of hits.

Walker left after the second inning with right forearm tightness, but the Dodgers were held at bay with four scoreless frames by reliever T.J. McFarland, who picked up the win.

That 1-0 lead for the Dodgers evaporated quickly, with Rich Hill issuing a two-out walk in the third followed by a game-tying double by Ketel Marte then a two-run mammoth shot by Paul Goldschmidt, into the Loge level down the left field line.

Deven Marrero hit what appeared to be a three-run home run in the fourth. It went over the fence and everything, without dispute. But with Alex Avila waiting at first base to make sure, Marrero passed him on the bases and, upon appeal, was ruled out.

Instead of a three-run home run, Marrero by rule got a two-run single. In the end it didn't really matter in the competitive aspect of Saturday's game, with the Dodgers starting rotation throwing up a third consecutive dud.

Hill allowed seven runs on seven hits in his five innings, including two home runs, and given the actual results really allowed eight runs and three home runs. It was not good, just like Kenta Maeda wasn't good on Friday night and Alex Wood wasn't good on Wednesday night.

After posting a 2.03 ERA through the first 10 games of the season, Dodgers starting pitchers have allowed 19 runs (16 earned) on 19 hits in just 11½ innings over the last three games, all losses. That's a 12.71 ERA, in case you were wondering.

To pile on, third baseman Logan Forsythe left the game with right shoulder discomfort in the top of the sixth inning after getting checked on by team trainer Nate Lucero. Forsythe left to get an MRI, per Dave Roberts.

When it rains, it pours.

At 4-9 the Dodgers matched their worst 13-game start since moving to Los Angeles, matching 1964, 1976, 1986 and 1994.

Up next

The Dodgers send Clayton Kershaw to the mound in Sunday's series finale, a 1:10 p.m. PT start. Zack Godley starts for Arizona.

Saturday particulars

Home runs: Paul Goldschmidt (3), A.J. Pollock 2 (3), Alex Avila (1)

WP - T.J. McFarland (1-0): 4 IP, 2 hits, 1 strikeout

LP - Rich Hill (1-1): 5 IP, 7 hits, 7 runs, 2 walks, 5 strikeouts

Andrew Toles suffers hamstring injury in Triple-A

By Eric Stephen

LOS ANGELES — Dodgers outfielder Andrew Toles left Friday night's game with Triple-A Oklahoma City with a hamstring injury, and on Saturday was placed on the seven-day minor league disabled list.

Toles homered and singled twice in Oklahoma City's win over New Orleans on Friday, but left in the fifth inning. Jacob Unruh at The Oklahoman has more:

The 25-year-old slugger felt something grab while running from second to third trying to beat what became a force out on a short fly ball to center field. He was 3 for 3 at the time with a home run, but he did not return.

"It's going to be a couple days, four or five days or something," Toles said. "It's a long season. It's part of it. I've got to hydrate."

OKC manager Bill Haselman classified the injury as possible cramps, but said he would know more Saturday.

Toles is off to a great start in Triple-A, 12-for-26 (.462) with four doubles and a home run in six games, and has nine hits in his last 12 at-bats. The Dodgers major league outfield collectively is hitting .235/.287/.359 through 12 games this season.

Dave Roberts was made aware of Toles' injury during Friday's Dodgers game against Arizona. On Saturday he gave an update to Toles' status.

DODGER INSIDER

Farm Fresh: Minor Leaguers on 40-man roster off to strong starts

By Cary Osborne

A week into the Minor League season, many of the most notable performers in the Dodger farm system are members of the 40-man roster. Those names include Andrew Toles, Walker Buehler, Brock Stewart, Adam Liberatore and Dennis Santana.

Oklahoma City (Triple-A)

Toles' hot start with Triple-A Oklahoma City hit a snag on Friday night. He exited in the sixth inning with a hamstring issue after going 3-for-3 with a home run. Toles is 12-for-26 with a .462/.500/.731 slashline. He is 9 for his last 13 with six RBI.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said on Saturday that Toles is going on the disabled list and could miss 10 days of action.

Buehler has allowed one earned run in each of his first two starts — a four-inning outing on April 5 and a five-inning effort on Wednesday. He has 11 strikeouts and has allowed nine baserunners in nine innings.

Stewart threw 5 2/3 scoreless innings in his season debut on April 7. He followed that up with 5 2/3 innings on Friday, allowing three earned runs, but striking out eight.

Liberatore has three relief appearances this far and hasn't allowed a run, striking out seven.

Outfielder Travis Taijeron is 7-for-14 and is slashing .500/.650/.786 through seven games. The 29-year-old made his Major League debut Aug. 26 last year with the Mets. He hit 25 homers with Triple-A Las Vegas last season.

Tulsa (Double-A)

Outfielder Kyle Garlick, a 2015 28th-rounder, has homered in back-to-back games and has three on the season. He is 12 for his last 23. Garlick hit 19 homers in 2016 and 18 last season.

Justin De Fratus has started the season with 11 1/3 scoreless innings. The 30-year-old right-hander played five big league seasons with the Philadelphia Phillies, last seeing Major League action in 2015. He spent last year in the Seattle organization.

Santana, who was added to the Dodgers' 40-man roster Nov. 20, has had two strong starts to begin the season, having allowed three earned runs in 9 2/3 innings with 12 strikeouts.

Rancho Cucamonga (High-A)

Catcher Connor Wong hit his third homer of the year on Friday night. The 2017 third-rounder has a 1.069 OPS.

Great Lakes (Low-A)

Brayan Morales, a 2016 15th-rounder, has seven stolen bases in seven games, including a three stolen-base game on Tuesday. Morales, who stole 31 bases on 38 attempts last season, is hitting .364/.464/.409.

Right-hander Wills Montgomerie has two consecutive outings where he has pitched four scoreless innings. The 2017 sixth-rounder pitched 6 2/3 innings in his pro debut last season.

April challenges continue for Dodgers

By Cary Osborne

Comparisons and expectations were sure to come for this team.

And based off both, the Dodgers are in an odd position to start the 2018 season.

After losing 9–1 to Arizona on Saturday night, the Dodgers are now 4–9.

Meanwhile, the Diamondbacks are 11–3.

“You definitely relate to the way they’re playing right now is the way we were playing last year,” said Dodger starting pitcher Rich Hill, who lasted five innings on Saturday and allowed seven earned runs. “I hate to look back, but those are the comparisons that I do see.”

The Dodgers took a 1–0 lead after Joc Pederson followed a Yasiel Puig double in the second inning with an RBI single. But the lead wouldn’t hold.

Hill was strong for the first loop around the Diamondbacks’ lineup, but gave up three runs in the third, including a two-run home run by Paul Goldschmidt. He surrendered two more runs on what should have been a three-run home run off the bat of Deven Marrero, but the Dodgers challenged that Marrero passed Arizona catcher Alex Avila at first base. They won the challenge and Marrero was called out for passing Avila.

A.J. Pollock hit his first of two homers in the game when he clubbed a Hill pitch to left field for a two-run homer in the fifth.

The biggest blow, though, could be to Logan Forsythe. With the Dodgers warming up between innings in the sixth, Forsythe grabbed his right shoulder. He was removed from the game and had an MRI. The results were unknown immediately after the game.

The Dodgers turn to Clayton Kershaw on Sunday looking to stop a three-game losing streak.

The Dodgers are 22–7 in Kershaw starts after a loss since 2016.

Pitchers attacking Dodgers differently, but the offense is picking up

By Cary Osborne

The Dodgers have four games where they have scored at least six runs — that’s two less than the first-place Diamondbacks and New York Mets, who have the best record in baseball at 11–1.

The Dodgers have held opponents to two runs or less in six games. The Major League high is eight.

They just haven’t put both sides together consistently yet.

However, what was troubling them in the first week of the season hasn’t been the case in the last three games.

The Dodgers have scored 17 runs in the three games and showed a lot of fight in Friday’s 8–7 loss to Arizona, a game in which they trailed 7–2 in the seventh inning.

“For us to keep fighting and make that a game and get (Archie) Bradley in the game, get (closer Brad) Boxberger in the game are good signs,” said manager Dave Roberts. “But us as an offense, we’re best when we’re consistently grinding pitchers and starting pitchers. There are good signs (for the offense recently).”

Bradley threw 29 pitches Friday night.

Though it's a small sample size, the Dodgers hit .312/.345/.560 the last three games with seven of their 11 home runs on the season.

Where the Dodgers remain especially different from last year's team is walks.

According to FanGraphs, their walk percentage is 7.9 percent — 25th in the big leagues. They led the Majors last year at 10.5 percent in 2017.

"In a vacuum, yes, I'd like to see guys walk more. But that's not something you can create," Roberts said. "But there are times if you look at the at-bats in the first couple of weeks where we've had opportunities to walk and we've swung at balls.

"It kind of works hand in hand. When you're aggressive and scare pitchers out of the strike zone, then the walks are a byproduct. But you never want to tell a guy to go up there and walk."

The Dodgers have also had to adjust to the way pitchers have attacked.

The Dodgers saw a first-pitch strike in 59.1 percent of their plate appearances last year — 25th in the Majors.

Thus far, they lead the Majors in seeing a first-pitch strike in 64.5 percent of their plate appearances.

Tonight's starter for Arizona, Taijuan Walker, threw nearly 67 percent first-pitch strikes against the Dodgers on April 2.

In that game, an 8–7, 15-inning Dodger loss in Arizona, Yasmani Grandal homered off Walker and went 2-for-2 with a walk.

Grandal moves to the №3 spot today for the first time this year. He leads the Dodgers in all slashline categories. He is 5-for-11 with a .600 on-base percentage in his career against Walker.

The Dodgers without Justin Turner, who OPSed .924 in 122 games in the three hole last season, are OPSing an MLB-low .527 from the three spot thus far in 2018.

Kemp not in the lineup

Matt Kemp gets a rest day after starting the last four games. He banged his knee against the fenced scoreboard on the left field wall at Dodger Stadium in the eighth inning on Friday, attempting to steal a home run from Nick Ahmed. Roberts said Kemp is fine.