



Press Clips

(September 6, 2018)

CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **How the Angels 2019 starting rotation looks without Shohei Ohtani**
- **Just a hitter for now, Shohei Ohtani blasts two homers to pace Angels' victory**
- **Angels' Shohei Ohtani likely headed for Tommy John surgery after MRI shows new damage in elbow**
- **Mike Trout out of Angels lineup after getting hit by a pitch**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 9)

- **Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani expected to undergo elbow ligament replacement surgery**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 11)

- **Ohtani notches second 4-hit, 2-HR game**
- **Ohtani homers twice after TJ recommendation**

FROM MLB.COM (PAGE 15)

- **Here's what 2019 'super teams' could look like**

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (PAGE 18)

- **After arm surgery recommended, Ohtani has big night at plate**
- **Angels' Ohtani facing Tommy John surgery after new damage**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 23)

- **Unlocking the hidden potential of Angels rookie Jaime Barria**
- **As physicians recommend season-ending Tommy John surgery for Shohei Ohtani, here's a look at how things got to this point and what it all means**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 29)

- **Will Shohei Ohtani still amaze us after Tommy John?**
- **Shohei Ohtani slams 2 homers after Tommy John surgery recommendation**

FROM NBC SPORTS (PAGE 33)

- **Shohei Ohtani has new damage to UCL, Angels recommend Tommy John surgery**

FROM CBS SPORTS (PAGE 34)

- **Angels' Shohei Ohtani continues to have a compelling, if polarizing case for the Rookie of the Year Award**
- **Shohei Ohtani's likely Tommy John surgery doesn't mean the Angels should trade Mike Trout**

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS (PAGE 37)

- **How Shohei Ohtani can play in 2019 even if he undergoes Tommy John surgery**
- **Shohei Ohtani's best day as a hitter came on his worst day as a pitcher**
- **Jim Abbott reflects on his no-hitter 25 years later: 'I wish everybody in the world could have that feeling'**
- **Daily Dose: Oy, Ohtani**
- **A minor league baseball team just changed its name to the Trash Pandas**

FROM THE DALLAS NEWS (PAGE 45)

- **Why potential Tommy John surgery won't keep Angels' Shohei Ohtani out of the Rangers' nightmares**

FROM THE RINGER (PAGE 46)

- **Shohei Ohtani Likely Won't Pitch Until 2020—and It Could've Been Even Worse**

FROM VICE SPORTS (PAGE 48)

- **Shohei Ohtani and the Cruelty of Baseball**

FROM BLEACHER REPORT (PAGE 50)

- **Angels' Shohei Ohtani MRI Reveals New UCL Injury; Tommy John Surgery Recommended**

FROM USA TODAY (PAGE 51)

- **Shohei Ohtani's Tommy John recommendation stinks for Los Angeles Angels, baseball fans**

FROM UPROXX SPORTS (PAGE 52)

- **The Rocket City Trash Pandas Are Coming To Minor League Baseball In 2020**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**How the Angels 2019 starting rotation looks without Shohei Ohtani**

By Jeff Fletcher

CHICAGO — As if the Baseball Gods were playing a cruel joke on the Angels, they received devastating news about their 2019 rotation just as it was starting to come together.

Shohei Ohtani, their most talented pitcher, is not going to be able to pitch next season, assuming he follows the recommendation to have Tommy John surgery. Their most talented starter came off the 2019 depth chart in a seven-day stretch that was otherwise filled with good news about the rotation's future.

Andrew Heaney pitched six scoreless innings against the Houston Astros and added another six against the Texas Rangers, running his streak to 26 consecutive starts without a missed assignment.

Matt Shoemaker returned from five months on the disabled list to pitch five scoreless innings against the Rangers, further proving to him that the forearm issue that's nagged him for two seasons is now solved.

Jaime Barría pitched five scoreless innings against the Rangers, reaching double figures in victories with a 3.30 ERA over 22 starts as a 22-year-old rookie.

Felix Peña gave up one earned run in seven innings against the Astros, lowering his ERA to 3.95 in his first 13 major league starts.

Even Tyler Skaggs, who is on the disabled list with a groin issue, threw off a mound in Arizona, taking a step closer to his planned return for the final three weeks of the season. Skaggs had a 2.62 ERA through 19 starts before he tried to pitch around the injury in two bad starts.

"I'm loving it," Manager Mike Scioscia said of the rotation's progress. "This is what your team has to do. You need that rotation to be the heartbeat of your club. We pitched terrific baseball in Houston and we came to Texas and pitched great. That has to be the core of your club. We missed it for three years, if you go back to the injuries that started in 2016."

Over the past three years, Garrett Richards, Nick Tropeano, Heaney, Skaggs and Shoemaker all missed significant chunks of multiple seasons.

Ohtani, who has missed more than half of 2018 and now all of 2019, is yet another name to add to that list, although he has yet to officially decide to have surgery.

However, there are still pieces left to build a good starting rotation in 2019, even without Ohtani.

"Hopefully between me, Shoe, Barría, Peña all being healthy, and hopefully Skaggs and Trope should be healthy, we have depth," Heaney said. "I don't think that's ever been the issue. It's just been maintaining it."

If you're looking for reasons to be optimistic that the remaining pitchers in the rotation will be healthier next season, this season provided some. Heaney, Berría and Skaggs have largely gotten through the season without any arm problems. Heaney missed the first two weeks with elbow inflammation, but it was so minor that he stopped throwing for only a few days.

Shoemaker's injury didn't involve his shoulder or elbow. Although the split pronator tendon wasn't diagnosed for nearly a year — until he underwent exploratory surgery — he said the surgery was ultimately an easy fix.

Those four provide the building blocks for the 2019 rotation. Skaggs and Shoemaker are under control for two more years, Heaney for three and Berría for six.

Tropeano is probably a notch below the others in terms of his performance and reliability, because he's had shoulder trouble. Shoulder injuries are typically tougher to overcome than elbow problems.

Peña hasn't quite pitched enough to be counted on as a major part of the 2019 rotation, but he's shown he can certainly contribute. The Angels' top two pitching prospects — Griffin Canning and José Suarez — also finished the season at Triple-A, indicating they figure to reach the majors sometime next year.

Even with all of those names, the Angels would be smart to add, as even Heaney admits.

"I think we've proven there's no such thing as enough depth in our starting rotation," he said.

The Angels figure to go into the winter about \$40 million under the luxury-tax threshold, allowing for room to shop for a free-agent starter. They also now have enough prospects in their improved farm system that they could consider trading for a starter.

The free-agent pitchers at the top of the market would seem to be Dallas Keuchel, Patrick Corbin, Charlie Morton and J.A. Happ. Gio Gonzalez and Lance Lynn are coming off seasons that haven't been up to their standards for performance, but both have been exceptionally durable.

On the trade market, Madison Bumgarner and Zack Wheeler are the top potential one-season rentals. Aaron Sanchez and Marcus Stroman each have two years to go.

If the Angels want to go big and trade for a starter, they could even take a look at Jacob deGrom, Noah Syndergaard or Michael Fulmer. Any of those would obviously cost a large chunk of the Angels' newly rebuilt farm system.

Between the pieces the Angels have left and what's available on the market, there's no reason to think they can't assemble a quality rotation in 2019, even without Ohtani.

And general manager Billy Eppler has said often the Angels aren't going to take a step back to rebuild, a point that he reiterated in the wake of the Ohtani news Wednesday.

"We're going to continue to invest in this club," he said. "We're going to continue to improve this club and watch the development of some young players emerging into the major leagues, be open-minded

into the trade market and free-agent market and put together a contending team for next season. That's our goal."

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Felix Peña, 1-4, 4.19) at White Sox (LHP Carlos Rodon, 6-4, 2.89), Friday, 5 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM).

Just a hitter for now, Shohei Ohtani blasts two homers to pace Angels' victory

By Jeff Fletcher

ARLINGTON, Texas — Hours after the Angels announced that Shohei Ohtani would not be pitching for them anytime soon, he demonstrated that he's still got plenty of value as a hitter.

Ohtani hit his 17th and 18th homers among his four hits, backing five scoreless innings from Jaime Barría in the Angels' 9-3 victory over the Texas Rangers on Wednesday night.

"He just keeps going," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He loves to play. Although there's obviously disappointment in the news today, he wants to play baseball. He had a great game tonight. You couldn't ask for much more."

The Angels played the game without Mike Trout (sore calf) and Justin Upton (concussion), so they had Ohtani and Andrelton Simmons hitting in the 3-4 spots in the lineup.

Simmons hit a two-run homer in the third to put the Angels ahead 4-0. It made him the first Angels shortstop since Jim Fregosi to have back-to-back double-digit homer seasons.

Ohtani homered in the fifth and eighth innings, the latter a two-run shot that tied him with Seattle Mariners catcher Kenji Johjima for the most homers by a rookie from Japan.

Ohtani was playing the game even though he learned earlier in the day that he suffered more damage to his elbow, which will most likely require Tommy John surgery that will prevent him from pitching until 2020. Ohtani is still expected to be able to hit in 2019, even if he has surgery.

As the Angels try to piece together a rotation for 2019, most likely without Ohtani, Barría has proven to be a strong candidate.

The 22-year-old rookie now has a 3.30 ERA after 23 starts and 111-2/3 innings.

On Wednesday night he got in a bases-loaded jam in the first inning, but he escaped by striking out Adrian Beltre and getting Jurrickson Profar on a flyout.

Barría allowed just one hit over his next four innings.

Angels' Shohei Ohtani likely headed for Tommy John surgery after MRI shows new damage in elbow

By Jeff Fletcher

ARLINGTON, Texas — One of the benefits to having Shohei Ohtani pitch now instead of in the spring was for the Angels to find out as soon as possible if his damaged ulnar collateral ligament could withstand the rigors of pitching.

They found out.

Three days after he threw 49 pitches, Ohtani on Wednesday underwent an MRI that showed new damage to his UCL, prompting a recommendation of Tommy John surgery.

"It's obviously disappointing," Manager Mike Scioscia said, "but we'll take everything one step at a time. He's got some decisions to make."

The Angels did not make Ohtani available to talk to the media before or after Wednesday's game, in which he started at designated hitter and blasted two homers among his four hits. A club spokesman said they were giving Ohtani time to process this news, and he'd speak to the media on Friday in Chicago, following Thursday's off day.

Surgery has not yet been scheduled, because ultimately it's Ohtani's decision, but the procedure would keep him from pitching for 14-16 months. He would not be able to pitch until the 2020 season.

Although the general assumption is that Ohtani would be able to hit in 2019, General Manager Billy Eppler said they could not make any projections about when he would be able to do what until after Ohtani has surgery, if he has it. Eppler also said it was too early to talk about whether Ohtani could play a position in addition to designated hitter next season.

Eppler also said the Angels would not ask Ohtani to abandon pitching.

"We do still see him as a two-way player," he said. "Shohei has demonstrated the ability to be impactful on both sides of the baseball and that is something that we, and I don't want to speak for every other team, but I think every team would want impact in the batter's box and on the mound."

Ohtani, 24, has had enough impact as a hitter to have worked his way into the middle of the order. He was hitting .276 with 16 homers and a .903 OPS heading into Wednesday's game.

Ohtani ended up making 10 starts and pitching 51-2/3 innings, with a 3.31 ERA and 11.0 strikeouts per nine innings. He missed three months on the mound after the injury was diagnosed in early June. He underwent platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections, which doctors believed had healed the damage.

Although many inside and outside of the industry criticized the Angels for having Ohtani pitch at all this season, considering they are out of the race, Eppler said he was following the advice of doctors.

Eppler said again on Wednesday that they had performed extensive objective and subjective tests on Ohtani on a daily basis.

“All gave us the confidence the ligament was ready for this next step,” he said.

There was also the belief that the only way to ever know if Ohtani’s elbow was truly healed was for him to pitch. In that case, it was better to find out sooner.

Scioscia reiterated that stance on Wednesday, even after the news.

“I’ll refer you to the medical staff, those guys said it was the best course of action (to have Ohtani pitch),” Scioscia said. “Everything looked fine with the ligament when he had the stem cell and the PRP. At some point, you need to go out there and see where you are. There is never a good time for this injury, but if it happened midway through next year where he missed two years, then it’s more of an impact.”

Eppler said Wednesday that, although Ohtani was pitching with the blessing of doctors, they knew this was a potential outcome.

“Anytime a player has an injury to a particular area and then gets put back out there, you are always mindful that if it doesn’t go well you might be faced with having to address the area again or with an alternative prescription or treatment protocol,” Eppler said. “You are always mindful that’s a possibility or could become a reality.”

Eppler also knew there would be some risk of Ohtani getting hurt, whenever he resumed pitching, because he throws so hard.

“If you are going to throw hard for a number of years and stress ligaments, you are going to be at risk,” Eppler said. “Is throwing hard good? Yes, it helps you get out hitters. Is throwing hard dangerous? Yes, it stresses ligaments.”

Given that, many around baseball were cautiously watching as Ohtani took the mound on Sunday night in Houston. He looked fine in his first two innings, sitting at 95-97 mph with his fastball and touching 99 mph. His velocity dipped to 91-92 mph in the third inning.

After the game, Scioscia said Ohtani told him his elbow was fine. Scioscia said the drop in velocity was because Ohtani had developed a stiff back and also because he’d been hit in the finger when trying to knock down a comebacker with his bare hand.

“His back was stiff when they checked him,” Scioscia said Wednesday. “His finger was sore. According to Shohei, while he was pitching, he didn’t feel the elbow was an issue. He just really couldn’t drive the way he wanted to. After the game, as we talked to him it wasn’t an issue. The last couple days it came up, and we wanted to check into it. Unfortunately, we got this diagnosis.”

Ohtani, who said as recently as Monday he was feeling only normal stiffness, was supposed to throw a bullpen session on Wednesday. When he was unable to do that, he went for the MRI.

In a sense, this news was the seemingly inevitable next chapter in a story that began to unfold when Ohtani was diagnosed last fall with a grade 1 sprain of his UCL – in which the ligament is merely stretched. That information was revealed to all teams on his physical before the bidding process began, and almost every team in the majors still attempted to sign him.

Ohtani was monitored closely throughout the spring and in the early part of the season, and he had no issues. After he reported stiffness following his June 6 start, an MRI showed a grade 2 sprain. A grade 2 sprain means the ligament is partially torn, although there's a wide spectrum of injuries within that classification.

The speed of his recovery indicated he might have been on the less severe end of that spectrum. He was cleared to throw after six weeks and made it back to pitch in a game less than six weeks after that.

If Ohtani undergoes Tommy John surgery, he would be the sixth Angels pitcher to have the procedure this year, following Garrett Richards, JC Ramirez, Keynan Middleton, Blake Wood and John Lamb. Tyler Skaggs had the surgery in 2014 and Andrew Heaney and Nick Tropeano had it in 2016.

"Hopefully we've weathered the worst of the storm and you look down the road at some of these guys coming back and getting healthy next year or the year after, you see the making of a really good pitching staff," Scioscia said. "You just haven't seen it materialize because some of these guys have been hurt, and hurt in a big way."

Mike Trout out of Angels lineup after getting hit by a pitch

By Jeff Fletcher

ARLINGTON, Texas — Mike Trout was out of the Angels lineup on Wednesday, a day after he was hit in the leg by a pitch.

Manager Mike Scioscia said Trout's calf was still "tight." He hoped that after the team's scheduled day off on Thursday, Trout could return to the lineup on Friday in Chicago.

Trout was hit by a Mike Minor pitch in the first inning on Tuesday, but he remained in the game.

UPTON UPDATE

Justin Upton played some catch on Wednesday, as he slowly resumes activity following a few days off in the wake of the concussion he suffered on Saturday.

"I'm just moving around and doing normal stuff," Upton said. "The last few days I just sat around and did nothing. I'm starting to function like a normal person again."

Upton said he's hoping he'll be able to return to the lineup on Friday.

ALSO

The Angels recalled Deck McGuire, bringing their active roster to 33 players. They are expected to recall at least two more, left-hander Williams Jerez and right-hander Luke Farrell. ...

The Angels' Double-A affiliate, which has played in Mobile, Ala., is moving to Madison, Ala., and changing its name to the Rocket City Trash Pandas in 2020.

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Felix Peña, 1-4, 4.19) at White Sox (LHP Carlos Rodon, 6-4, 2.89), Friday, 5 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

FROM THE LA TIMES

Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani expected to undergo elbow ligament replacement surgery

By Bill Shaikin

The news spread within seconds, and so did the instant commentary.

Shohei Ohtani had a shredded elbow. He would not pitch next season, so the Angels would not win, and they ought to get on with the business of trading Mike Trout.

"We are not going to trade Mike Trout," Angels general manager Billy Eppler said on a conference call.

That was about all that was definitive on Wednesday, the latest in a deflating series of days for the Angels. Project 2020 -- the effort to persuade Trout he can win in Anaheim before his contract expires and he can sign with another team -- took a serious hit when the Angels revealed that doctors had recommended Ohtani undergo elbow ligament replacement surgery.

Ohtani was the Angels' most effective starting pitcher this season, and their most effective hitter besides Trout, based on the league-adjusted ERA+ and OPS+ statistics entering play Wednesday. If Ohtani has surgery, he probably would not throw a pitch for the Angels until the 2020 season, the final one in Trout's contract.

This is the eighth season of Trout's career. He has yet to win a postseason game. Trout burns to win, and the Ohtani news makes it that much less likely that Trout would sign an extension this winter.

The Angels plan to contend next year, Eppler said. They tried this year.

They retained outfielder Justin Upton for \$106 million. They signed infielder Zack Cozart in free agency. They traded for infielder Ian Kinsler. And they lured the magical Ohtani, who hit and pitched and sparked interest in the team here and abroad, and from the casual fan curious not about Trout but about the phenom, and the phenomenon.

Ohtani delivered, even in his abbreviated season. No player had hit as many home runs and won as many games as a pitcher since Babe Ruth, 99 years ago.

And he played Wednesday night, even after taking an MRI examination and getting the bad news during the day. The rest of the Angels starters included two players that opened the season in Anaheim, seven that opened in the minor leagues.

Ohtani had four hits, two of them home runs, his 17th and 18th this season. No player in the major leagues has hit as many home runs in as few at-bats.

Eppler said he plans to meet with Ohtani on Monday. At this point, Eppler said, he does not know whether Ohtani will proceed with surgery and, assuming he does, whether he would be able to hit or play the field next season.

If Ohtani remains a designated hitter, and if Albert Pujols cannot return to first base following knee surgery, Pujols could become the most expensive bench player in baseball history.

When the Angels signed Ohtani, they were aware he had some damage to the ligament, but he had pitched effectively with it. The Dodgers signed Kenta Maeda to an eight-year contract knowing his elbow was not in pristine shape, but he had pitched effectively with the injury and has continued to do so.

“Is throwing hard good? Yes, it helps you get out hitters,” Eppler said. “Is throwing hard dangerous? Yes, it stresses ligaments.”

In June, when an examination revealed additional damage to Ohtani’s ligament, he and the team agreed to try injections of stem cells and platelet-rich plasma before considering surgery. The therapy has failed Andrew Heaney, Garrett Richards, JC Ramirez and now Ohtani with the Angels, but Eppler said the treatment has been successful with other pitchers and he would not rule out trying it again.

Ohtani returned to the mound on Sunday, but his velocity dropped precipitously in the third inning, and an examination Wednesday revealed new damage to the ligament. That could have happened next spring just as easily as it did on Sunday, and the waiting would have cost Ohtani much -- if not all -- of the 2021 season.

As word spread of Ohtani’s probable surgery, fans jumped to this conclusion: Why not just have the surgery in June and get on with it? Here’s why: There is no guarantee with elbow ligament replacement surgery.

In about 80% of the cases, pitchers return to their level of performance. But why risk the procedure if there is a nonsurgical alternative to try first, and if there is a one in five chance the surgery does not work? If you turn out to be that one, and if your career is done, those statistics are cold comfort.

The Angels do not plan to dissuade him from his two-way career, Eppler said.

You think he should give up pitching? In spring training, you probably would have said he should give up hitting.

His performance in the Cactus League was so poor the Angels could have defended sending him to the minor leagues for three weeks -- manipulating his service time and assuring them of keeping him at least one more year in Anaheim -- but they did not.

"He made a commitment to us and he trusted us," Eppler said, "and he trusted that we would use him in a two-way role, and we made that commitment.

"And when you commit to someone, it makes it hard to walk away from them or hard to change course with them. Not only are you letting them down, but you're living with the responsibility that comes with committing to somebody."

So, if all goes as planned, Ohtani could be pitching and hitting again for the Angels come 2020. That could be quite the dramatic farewell season for Trout.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Ohtani notches second 4-hit, 2-HR game

By Maria Guardado

ARLINGTON -- Hours after receiving a recommendation to undergo Tommy John surgery, **Shohei Ohtani** showed that his damaged right elbow won't hinder his potent left-handed bat for now.

Ohtani homered twice en route to a four-hit night for the Angels, who cruised to a 9-3 win over the Rangers on Wednesday to earn a series victory at Globe Life Park.

Ohtani's 17th home run of the season -- a solo shot to right field off **Austin Bibens-Dirkx** -- extended the Angels' lead to 6-0 in the fifth inning. He later added a two-run shot off **Eddie Butler** to make it 9-2 in the eighth and secure his second career multi-homer game. The 24-year-old slugger's 18 homers are now tied with Kenji Johjima for the most by a Japanese rookie in a single season.

"He's a professional," shortstop **Andrelton Simmons** said. "People will never understand how seriously he takes his job. He's very professional. He comes in, he works. He does his homework, and he balls. He goes out there and impresses his teammates every day, really. It's nice to see that he's still in good spirits. And he can still hit a ball really, really hard."

Ohtani, who was not made available to the media Wednesday, added a pair of singles, a walk and a stolen base, lifting his batting average to .287 on the season. While an MRI on Wednesday revealed new damage to the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow, general manager Billy Eppler said Ohtani will be medically cleared to continue hitting until a decision is made regarding the surgery.

"He's a tough kid, not only physically, but mentally," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He understands the game, he understands the challenges. He knows he's talented, and tonight, he was a hitter. He didn't

think about what the future is and the decisions he's got to make for his elbow. He was out there playing baseball and hitting the ball, so it's something I think he's done his whole career when he's pitched and he's hit. So now he's going to focus on hitting, and he had a great night."

Simmons also homered, while rookies **David Fletcher**, **Jose Fernandez** and **Taylor Ward** chipped in with multi-hit efforts. Even without **Mike Trout** and **Justin Upton**, the Angels' lineup produced 16 hits and generated enough support for rookie **Jaime Barria**, who allowed only two hits over five scoreless innings to pick up his 10th win of the year.

"He had to work hard to get through five innings," Scioscia said. "We talk about Jaime, what his upside is -- even when he's not as crisp as he was maybe the other night in Houston, he's facing a tough lineup, and he puts up five zeros and gives us a chance to win."

For the second time this season, the 22-year-old Barria bested the 45-year-old **Bartolo Colon**, who was chased after giving up five runs (four earned) over four innings. Barria was less than nine months old when Colon made his MLB debut on April 4, 1997. He is the youngest opposing pitcher Colon has ever faced.

The Angels opened the scoring in the first inning after **Kole Calhoun** singled and scored on a double by Fletcher. After Ohtani walked, Ward drove in Fletcher from second with a two-out single to center field, giving the Angels a 2-0 lead.

Ohtani then beat out an infield single in the third -- which was confirmed following a replay review -- to set up Simmons' two-run shot to left field that made it 4-0. It was Simmons' 10th home run of the season. Calhoun added a sacrifice fly in the fourth, and Simmons drove in his third run of the night with an RBI single in the seventh.

"It's contagious," Simmons said. "After that [first inning], everybody put up good at-bats, made Bartolo work a little bit. I don't know if he had his best stuff, but we still had to go out there and score runs, and the guys did that today."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

The Rangers loaded the bases with one out against Barria in the first inning after **Rougned Odor** reached on a force out and **Elvis Andrus** and **Nomar Mazara** walked. Still, Barria escaped trouble by striking out **Adrian Beltre** swinging on a slider and coaxed a flyout from **Jurickson Profar** to end the inning.

"The first inning was a tough one," Barria said, in Spanish. "I was throwing too many sliders instead of fastballs, but I made the adjustment. I was fortunate to get out of that."

SOUND SMART

Barria is now 3-0 with a 0.86 ERA in four starts against the Rangers this season.

UP NEXT

The Angels will head to Chicago and enjoy an off-day Thursday before kicking off a three-game series against the White Sox on Friday night at 5:10 p.m. PT at Guaranteed Rate Field. Right-hander **Felix Pena** (1-4, 4.19 ERA) will oppose left-hander **Carlos Rodon** (6-4, 2.89) in the series opener. Pena gave up

two runs (one unearned) over a career-high seven innings in his last start Saturday against the Astros. He has logged a 2.14 ERA on the road this season, compared to 6.17 ERA at Angel Stadium.

Ohtani homers twice after TJ recommendation

By Maria Guardado

ARLINGTON -- **Shohei Ohtani's** two-way endeavor will have to be put on hold for a while, even if he keeps hitting home runs.

The Angels announced Wednesday that Ohtani underwent an MRI exam that revealed new damage to his ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow, prompting the team to recommend Tommy John surgery for the 24-year-old rookie. Should he opt for the procedure, Ohtani will likely not return to the mound until 2020. No decision has been made yet on when or if Ohtani will have the ligament replacement surgery.

If there's a silver lining, it's that the diagnosis won't stop Ohtani from swinging the bat for now. A few hours after the news broke, Ohtani went out and homered -- twice -- as part of a four-hit night in **the Angels' 9-3 victory**.

Facing Texas right-hander **Austin Bibens-Dirkx** in the fifth inning, Ohtani hit his 17th home run of the season, a towering shot to right field hit at a 45-degree angle at 107 mph off the bat, traveling 361 feet. In the eighth against **Eddie Butler**, he mimicked the first shot, sending the pitch at a 40-degree angle off the bat at 97.8 mph and a distance of 351 feet, barely clearing the right-field wall and the glove of a leaping **Nomar Mazara**. The second shot was his fourth hit of the game, marking the second time this season the rookie has collected four hits and two homers in a game (also on Aug. 3 at Cleveland).

"Obviously, it's something that we don't wish on anybody," left-hander **Andrew Heaney** said of the Tommy John surgery recommendation. "He's lucky enough that he's pretty [darn] good at hitting, as you saw tonight. He's got the ability, and it seems like he's pretty strong up top to be able to handle that."

General manager Billy Eppler plans to meet with Ohtani on Monday in Southern California to discuss the situation further, but he said Ohtani is cleared to hit for now. Ohtani batted third and started at designated hitter against the Rangers on Wednesday night and is expected to stay with the club during its trip to Chicago this weekend.

"For now, he's cleared to hit," Eppler said during a conference call with reporters. "I think we saw effectiveness even last night [when he homered] with the ligament being in the situation it's currently in. He is cleared to hit still."

The Angels did not make Ohtani available to the media following Wednesday's game, but he is expected to address his situation Friday in Chicago.

Despite the setback with his elbow, Eppler said the Angels still view Ohtani as a two-way player.

"He trusted that we'd use him in a two-way role, and we made that commitment," Eppler said.

While Tommy John surgery would likely cause Ohtani to miss 14-16 months as a pitcher, it likely wouldn't prevent him from returning as a hitter in 2019. Position players typically return to the field in less time following Tommy John surgery, such as Yankees rookie infielder **Gleyber Torres**, who missed about half a season in 2017 after tearing the UCL in his non-throwing elbow. Dodgers star **Corey Seager** underwent Tommy John surgery this past May, and he's expected to be on the team's Opening Day roster in '19. Other notable position players to receive the surgery include former MLB outfielder Carl Crawford, Angels infielder **Zack Cozart**, Twins third baseman **Miguel Sano** and Red Sox catcher **Christian Vazquez** -- all of whom were able to return to the field in a year's time or less.

Still, Eppler said it's too early to put a timeframe on any sort of return for Ohtani. He added that the Angels would consult their medical staff before entertaining the idea of using Ohtani at a defensive position if he's unable to pitch next year.

"Right now, the player is processing the result of the image. Everybody has to respect that time that somebody needs when they're digesting information regarding themselves."

Ohtani dazzled as a two-way phenom for the first two months of the season before his historic campaign was derailed by the discovery of a Grade 2 sprain of the UCL in his right elbow. At the time, no doctor recommended Tommy John surgery for Ohtani, who instead treated his damaged ligament with platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections. He was cleared to resume throwing six weeks later and showed enough progress during his rehab that the Angels felt comfortable re-inserting him into their rotation Sunday against the Astros.

While the Angels have faded from contention, their reasons for having Ohtani pitch in September were manifold. First, they wanted to see if the PRP and stem-cell injections had managed to heal his UCL to the point where he could continue to pitch effectively and comfortably. If Ohtani had been shut down as a pitcher in 2018, the Angels wouldn't have been able to test the soundness of his UCL until Spring Training. Surgery next spring would have kept Ohtani off the mound until late 2020, possibly even 2021.

Even if Ohtani had opted to undergo Tommy John surgery in June -- which, again, no doctor recommended at the time -- he would still be out until 2020, so the Angels didn't have much to lose by giving him a chance to pitch again this season.

"I'll refer you again to the medical staff because those guys said it was the best course of action," manager Mike Scioscia said. "Everything looked fine with the ligament when he had the stem-cell therapy. And at some point, you need to go out there and see where you are. There's never a good time for this injury, but if it happened midway through next year, where he would miss two years, then it's more of an impact. He was cleared to pitch when he started his rehab, the ligament had healed. Unfortunately, it just didn't hold."

Ohtani gave up two runs over 2 1/3 innings against the Astros on Sunday in his first start in nearly three months, but more alarmingly, he showed a notable drop in velocity in his third and final inning of work. Though his fastball topped out at 99.3 mph in the first inning, it did not exceed 92.7 mph in the third.

The Angels and Ohtani initially insisted that the dip was unrelated to his elbow and instead blamed the diminished velocity on a stiff back and a sore finger. Ohtani said he was hopeful that he would be able to make his next scheduled start against the White Sox on Sunday, but he felt some lingering soreness in his elbow Wednesday, leading to the MRI exam that revealed the new damage to his UCL.

"It's disappointing," Eppler said. "It's disappointing, clearly, for the player, and he bears the most disappointment in this. I do feel for him during this time."

Ohtani's season as a right-handed pitcher ends with a 4-2 record and a 3.31 ERA with 63 strikeouts over 51 2/3 innings. He is batting .287 with a .946 OPS, 18 home runs and 47 RBIs as a left-handed hitter.

"He trains, he eats, he sleeps like nothing I've ever seen before," Eppler said. "He's an extremely talented athlete. Is throwing hard good? Yes. It helps you get out hitters. Is throwing hard dangerous? Yes. It stresses ligaments. But Shohei has demonstrated the ability to be impactful on both sides of the baseball, and that is something that we -- and I don't want to speak for every other team -- but I think every team would want impact in the batter's box and on the mound."

While the news is a blow for the Angels, Eppler emphasized that it shouldn't preclude the club from fielding a competitive team in 2019. He did not hesitate to dismiss the notion that he should trade **Mike Trout** and trigger a full-on rebuild.

"We are not going to trade Mike Trout," Eppler said. "We're going to continue to invest in this club."

FROM MLB.COM

Here's what 2019 'super teams' could look like

Imagining what-ifs for Harper, Machado, Kershaw and others

By Will Leitch

Teams have been planning for this offseason for years, and it promises to be among the most fascinating in Major League Baseball history. **Manny Machado**, **Bryce Harper** and **Clayton Kershaw** (if he opts out of his current deal) will be free agents -- the entire landscape of the sport will be altered. But we tend to think of every player's individual decision individually: They are solo actors, independent of every other free agent, going to take their own deal for their own reasons.

This is different than, say, the NBA. When the NBA offseason comes upon us, we immediately look for cliques. We look for the two or three players who bond together, who decide they are the superheroes who want to combine to make the Avengers, the pieces who combine together to create Voltron. LeBron James and Chris Bosh became free agents at the same time and decided to join Dwyane Wade and win multiple championships. Kevin Durant chose to play with the amazing Warriors, who already had a title under their belt. Carmelo Anthony is gathering with the gang in Houston to see if he can be a part of their fun.

This doesn't happen in baseball, and it's kind of a shame. We love the idea of superheroes joining forces, whether it's to win a title, to return to their hometown, just to chill out with some old friends. Thus, we look at this year's impending free-agent class and whimsically speculate on pairings and groupings, NBA-style. These might not be super teams. But it'd be super fun to watch them all travel together.

Some of these combinations could really happen, while others get a little zany, so we'll order them from most to least plausible.

Harper joins Kris Bryant in Chicago

We begin with the most straightforward, even most likely scenario -- the oft-discussed notion that the two Las Vegas natives, who played together on a travel ball team when Bryant was 14 and Harper was 13, would reunite at Wrigley. (That's right: Always remember that Bryant, who won the National League Rookie of the Year Award three years after Harper did, is 10 months older than Harper.) This is the closest we have to a "Durant to the Warriors" parallel, with one of the best players in the sport -- though not this year -- joining a powerhouse that has already won a championship without him. It's still tough to find an outfield spot for Harper, but if he really wants to come to Chicago to be with his old pal, one suspects the Cubs will figure out a way.

Machado to the Indians

This is the closest amalgam to the Durant move. You take a team that's a perpetual postseason contender -- one that might end up winning a championship this year -- and you add one of the biggest stars in the game, making the rich get richer. Sure, the Indians' infield is crowded, but the Warriors weren't exactly light on talent when Durant got there, either. Put Machado at third, move **Jose Ramirez** to second and there's your Death Lineup: Machado, Ramirez and **Francisco Lindor**, right to each other for the next half-decade (at least).

Harper to the Yankees

This is the easiest, and simplest one. This is less "Durant to the Warriors" than "Dominique Wilkins randomly joins the Bulls in the pre-Rodman era" -- a fantastic player who is more electric than he is efficient, a traveling road show that would be unrivaled in professional sports.

Remember how they used to show Mark McGwire's batting practice on closed-circuit TV? MLB Network might have 15 minutes dedicated every day solely to Stanton, Judge and Harper launching baseballs of luxury boxes all across America. The defense would be a problem. Would Harper play center? What would the Yankees do with **Aaron Hicks**? They probably would just have to cut **Jacoby Ellsbury**, yes? But with all those homers, who cares?

Back when he was featured in Sports Illustrated as a teenager, Harper said his dream was to play for the Yanks, so this one is definitely on the table.

Andrew Miller, Craig Kimbrel, Jeurys Familia, Zach Britton, Adam Ottavino and Kelvin Herrera to the Rays

The Rays, other than **Blake Snell**, have mostly deserted the idea of a starting rotation, anyway. So why not go all the way with it? The six best relievers on the market go to a place where they are truly appreciated, a Lord of the Flies-esque island that has done away with those grownups and starting pitchers all together. If Tampa Bay wants to go Full Bullpen, this is the way to do it. All these guys

combined will still probably cost less than, say, one Kershaw. (Fun fact: Miller, who is from Gainesville, Fla., **was originally drafted by the Rays**)

Imagine having to deal with these guys, and only these guys, *every day*. The Rays only have one long-term salary commitment (**Kevin Kiermaier's** contract), they could make this happen.

James Shields, Patrick Corbin, Lance Lynn and Dallas Keuchel to the Orioles

A healthy contrast to the Rays, here is your old-school Innings Gobblers rotation. The Orioles have struggled to get any sort of innings out of their rotation for a decade now, so you go out and get guys who will reclaim the power of the starting pitcher. Shields, Corbin and Keuchel are all among the 11 starters with the most innings pitched this season, and Lynn is a notorious innings-eater. If the O's don't want to spend for Corbin and Keuchel -- probably a good idea, considering how that team is going to look next year -- Shields and Lynn could both be reasonably inexpensive rotation stabilizers while they figure out the rest of the roster, and then they could easily be flipped at the non-waiver Trade Deadline.

Freddy Galvis, Ian Kinsler and Brett Gardner to the Padres

Got a young pitching staff in a big ballpark that you're trying to usher into the Major Leagues? Go out and get the best defensive players on the market: Galvis (who is of course already a Padre), Kinsler and Gardner are all among the 25 top defensive players according to Baseball Reference's version of WAR. The Padres are trying all sorts of different ways to climb back to relevance: Focusing on defense -- and defense that shouldn't be all that expensive, all told -- doesn't seem like the worst idea.

Harper, Machado and Matt Harvey all sign with the Phillies

This is almost a direct parallel to what actually happened with James and Bosh joining Wade. Three top 10 picks from the same Draft -- the 2003 NBA version; the '10 MLB version -- all becoming free agents at the same time and deciding to continue their career track together. Harper, Machado and Harvey were picked first, third and seventh, respectively, in their Draft. We went with the Phillies, because they clearly have long-term payroll flexibility, and bringing in Harvey would have the added bonus of further torturing the Mets. For fun, fellow top 10 pick **Drew Pomeranz** -- No. 5 to Cleveland back then -- could join the party as well. Anybody checked on Barret Loux and Karsten Whitson lately?

Kershaw, Keuchel and Corbin to the Red Sox

The all-time record for starts made by left-handers in one rotation is 127, by the 1983 Yankees. If the Red Sox wanted to put together an all-lefty rotation to go with their devastating offense (and likely exceed the luxury tax, if we're being honest), they would surely obliterate that record.

The Sox could theoretically only get two of these guys and still have an all-lefty rotation, considering they already have **Chris Sale** and **David Price**, if they could get **Eduardo Rodriguez** healthy for a full season. Pity any left-handed hitter in the American League East for the next five years.

Adam Jones, Andrew McCutchen, Daniel Murphy, Miller, Jonathan Lucroy, Kinsler and J.A. Happ to the Padres

This one is pure 2017 World Baseball Classic nostalgia. Let's get the championship band back together!

You get the Captain Americas of that team back to San Diego, the place of their greatest triumph, and with a team that should have some money to spend and that could use some veteran moxie. **Nolan Arenado**, **Christian Yelich** and Stanton will look among their old Classic mates with envy.

Bartolo Colon, Adrian Beltre, Brad Ziegler and -- heck, why not -- Ichiro Suzuki sign with the Marlins or the Rays

Assuming all four of these players come back -- and Ichiro looks like the only unlikely one -- then we have our Old Dogs scenario: The four available free agents in their 40s, the oldest players in the Majors, all retiring to Florida together. Imagine the fun of Colon, Beltre and Ichiro on the same team. (And Ziegler can be goofy, too! Maybe he can tell stories about how movies used to cost a nickel.) The Marlins might be the most fun fit, with the four Old Dogs surrounded by a gaggle of twentysomething whippersnappers. Plus, Derek Jeter will have someone to go to dinner with after games.

Beltre, Nelson Cruz, Kinsler, Mike Napoli, Derek Holland, Craig Gentry, Leonys Martin, Pedro Strop and Neftali Feliz all sign with an NL Central team

The reason here is obvious: They can get revenge, in any way they can figure out, on the St. Louis Cardinals for depriving them of the 2011 World Series championship they so obviously deserved and were so tragically deprived of. None of these men, all late in their careers, have ever won a World Series ring, but they all should have. Which team do they want to choose? Is it better off for them to all pick a different NL Central team so that they may deploy their revenge in specific, targeted strikes? We leave the planning up to them. But that's a lot of 2011 Rangers hitting the market at once. For what it's worth, Josh Hamilton is available, too ... and he's two years younger than Beltre, now that you mention it.

Harper, Machado, Kershaw, Joe Mauer, Beltre and Ichiro sign with ... the Angels?

Which team currently has the most future Hall of Famers on its roster? There are a few options, but the one you can pretty much guarantee is the Angels. They have two sure-fire ones: **Albert Pujols** and **Mike Trout**. So why not be truly historic and get as many future Hall of Famers as you can. The most Hall of Famers that have played on one team in MLB history: Nine. (The 1930-33 Yankees.) Is there any way to reach that this year? Adding these six -- the best Hall of Fame candidates in free agency -- gets you to eight. You could also bet on history and have all these players go to the Astros, who have **Justin Verlander** and **Jose Altuve** and maybe **Alex Bregman** and **Carlos Correa** someday. It would be insanely expensive to get this all these guys together, but hey, that's the price of history.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**After arm surgery recommended, Ohtani has big night at plate**

By Stephen Hawkins

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — The only thing Shohei Ohtani couldn't do Wednesday night was pitch.

Ohtani homered twice during a huge night at the plate after getting bad news about his injured elbow, and the Los Angeles Angels cruised to a 9-3 victory over the Texas Rangers.

Perhaps headed for Tommy John surgery, the two-way rookie sensation went 4 for 4 with three RBIs, four runs and a stolen base to power the Angels. About two hours before the game, the team

announced Ohtani has new damage in his right elbow and ligament-replacement surgery has been recommended.

“Obviously, disappointment in the news today,” manager Mike Scioscia said.

Scioscia wasn’t surprised that Ohtani could keep his composure, though.

“He’s mentally tough in any situation he’s ever in,” the manager added. “Tonight, he was a hitter. He didn’t think about what the future is and what the decision is he’s got to make for his elbow. He was out there playing baseball and hitting the ball.”

Ohtani didn’t speak with reporters after the announcement about his injury — or following the game.

“There’s more questions out there right now than answers. We’ll take it one step at a time,” Scioscia said before the game. “There’s a lot of consulting that Shohei will do with doctors and just see what the best course of action is, and we’ll see where we are.”

The club said the Japanese star had an MRI earlier in the day that revealed the problem in his ulnar collateral ligament.

Angels general manager Billy Eppler said Ohtani hasn’t formally decided to have Tommy John surgery. Eppler and Ohtani plan to have an in-depth conversation about his future Monday after the Angels return from their road trip.

“We committed to each other in this process, and we will get through it together as a team,” Eppler said. “But I do feel disappointment for the people in that clubhouse, and primarily Shohei.”

The latest development has been dreaded by the Angels and Ohtani’s many fans since he was diagnosed with a sprained UCL following a start June 6. After receiving a platelet-rich plasma injection and an injection of stem cells, he was hitting again in early July, and returned to the mound with his start Sunday at Houston.

Ohtani lasted only 2 1/3 innings in that outing against the Astros, and he had a drastic drop in velocity during the game. He had been scheduled to throw a light bullpen Wednesday, but never did after reporting his elbow was sore. The medical staff then decided he should get the new MRI in Texas.

Although Ohtani is enjoying success as the Angels’ designated hitter, Eppler flatly declared that the Angels still see Ohtani as a two-way player, however long they must wait for his pitching career to resume.

Last fall, Ohtani was diagnosed with a sprained elbow ligament while in Japan. Major League Baseball teams were advised of his condition before they could bid on his rights.

The Angels paid the \$20 million posting fee to Ohtani’s previous club, the Nippon Ham Fighters. Ohtani, who is under the Angels’ contractual control for six years, signed a minor league deal and got \$2,315,000 in international bonus money from the Angels.

In 10 starts on the mound, the right-hander was 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA this season. He struck out 63 with 22 walks in 51 2/3 innings.

Ohtani's homers on Wednesday were both towering drives pulled into the right-field seats against right-handed relievers Austin Bibens-Dirkx and Eddie Butler. With his second two-homer game, Ohtani tied Kenji Johjima's 2006 major league record of 18 homers in a season by a Japanese rookie.

Andrelton Simmons also homered for the Angels and drove in three runs.

Los Angeles rookie Jaime Barria (10-8) beat Texas for the third time and 45-year-old Bartolo Colon (7-12) for the second. Barria has not beaten any other team more than once but has a 0.86 ERA against the Rangers in 21 innings over four starts.

Barria allowed two hits and three walks while striking out five in five innings.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: If not for the injury announcement about Ohtani, it would have been bigger news that CF Mike Trout wasn't in the lineup a night after being hit on his right leg by a pitch. "His calf is tight," Scioscia said. "I don't think we need to push it tonight. We'll give him (Wednesday) and (Thursday) to recover, and he'll be ready to play."

Rangers: OF Willie Calhoun was not available because of what manager Jeff Banister called "a little bit of a chest cold."

BELTRE'S BLAST

Adrian Beltre hit a two-run shot for Texas, the 472nd homer of his career, in the sixth inning against Jim Johnson. Three of Beltre's 10 homers this season have come in the last five games.

UP NEXT

Angels: Resume their road trip Friday in Chicago. RHP Felix Pena (1-4, 4.19 ERA) will pitch for Los Angeles, and LHP Carlos Rodon (6-4, 2.89) for the White Sox.

Rangers: Play on Friday at Oakland, with RHP Yovani Gallardo (8-3, 5.97 ERA) opposing RHP Chris Bassitt (2-3, 3.19) of the A's. Sixteen of Texas' final 22 games will be on the road.

Angels' Ohtani facing Tommy John surgery after new damage

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Los Angeles Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani has new damage in his pitching elbow and the team says Tommy John surgery has been recommended.

A couple of hours before Ohtani hit two home runs against Texas on Wednesday, the Angels said he had an MRI earlier in the day that revealed the problem in his right ulnar collateral ligament.

“There’s more questions out there right now than answers. We’ll take it one step at a time,” manager Mike Scioscia said. “There’s a lot of consulting that Shohei will do with doctors and just see what the best course of action is, and we’ll see where we are.”

The 24-year-old rookie was the Angels’ designated hitter for their series finale against the Rangers. He went 4 for 4 with three RBIs, four runs and a stolen base in a 9-3 victory over Texas.

Ohtani didn’t speak with reporters after the announcement about his injury — or following the game.

“He’s mentally tough in any situation he’s ever in,” Scioscia said. “Tonight, he was a hitter. He didn’t think about what the future is and what the decision is he’s got to make for his elbow. He was out there playing baseball and hitting the ball.”

Asked whether Ohtani would stay in the lineup as a DH beyond Wednesday, Scioscia said: “We’ll see. That’s going to be determined from our medical department.”

Angels general manager Billy Eppler said Ohtani hasn’t formally decided to have Tommy John surgery. Eppler and Ohtani plan to have an in-depth conversation about his future Monday after the Angels return from their road trip.

“We committed to each other in this process, and we will get through it together as a team,” Eppler said. “But I do feel disappointment for the people in that clubhouse, and primarily Shohei.”

The latest development has been dreaded by the Angels and Ohtani’s millions of fans since he was diagnosed with a sprained UCL following a start June 6. After receiving a platelet-rich plasma injection and an injection of stem cells, he was hitting again in early July, and he returned to the mound with his start Sunday at Houston.

Ohtani lasted only 2 1/3 innings in that start against the Astros, and he had a drastic drop in velocity during the game. He had been scheduled to throw a light bullpen session Wednesday, but never did after reporting that his elbow was sore. The medical staff then decided that he should get the new MRI in Texas.

The Angels and Ohtani clearly took a well-calculated risk in allowing the right-hander to pitch again this season after the Grade 2 sprain of his elbow ligament was discovered. Mindful of the typical recovery timetable from Tommy John surgery, they elected to see whether Ohtani could pitch again during a time frame when he would still likely miss only one full big league season, allowing him to conceivably return in 2020.

Eppler declined to confirm any such math, but the Angels realized the attempt to treat Ohtani’s elbow with rest and injections might not work.

“It was something that we felt could happen, but we wanted to take a more conservative approach at this moment in time, and did that,” Eppler said.

Although Ohtani is enjoying success as the Angels' designated hitter, Eppler flatly declared that the Angels still see Ohtani as a two-way player, however long they must wait for his pitching career to resume.

Eppler declined to speculate on when Ohtani could return to the lineup as a hitter in 2019 if he had Tommy John surgery soon, noting that Ohtani hasn't even decided whether to get it done. Other position players have returned to hitting after Tommy John surgery within roughly six months of the procedure, but Ohtani's case could be different because of his pitching abilities.

"I'm sure at some point he's going to resume his pitching career," Scioscia said. "When that is depends on whatever the course of action is."

"We'd love to have him a whole season, but I think that taking a little half-step back here and seeing him pitch for a whole career is more important than looking back and saying "what if?" he said.

The injury puts a decided damper on one of the most exciting rookie seasons in big league history.

In 10 starts on the mound, the right-hander was 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA. He struck out 63 with 22 walks in 51 2-3 innings.

Ohtani hit his 16th homer Tuesday night, his first against a left-hander in the big leagues. He had already joined Babe Ruth as the only players ever to hit 15 homers and pitch 50 innings in a season.

Ohtani went into Wednesday night's game hitting .276 with 16 homers and 44 RBIs in 243 at-bats.

Last fall, Ohtani was diagnosed with a sprained elbow ligament while in Japan. Major League Baseball teams were advised of his condition before they could bid on his rights.

The Angels paid the \$20 million posting fee to Ohtani's previous club, the Nippon Ham Fighters. Ohtani, who is under the Angels' contractual control for six years, signed a minor league contract and got \$2,315,000 in international bonus money from the Angels.

On Monday, Scioscia said Ohtani had been evaluated after coming out of his pitching return early and that there was no apprehension about the elbow. The manager said then that Ohtani was dealing with tightness in his back and a sore right ring finger after a ball deflected off of it during that game, but that the elbow felt great.

"When he was getting evaluated, there was obviously a little bit of soreness there," Scioscia said Wednesday. "I don't know if Shohei thought it was normal just from not having pitched for a while."

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Unlocking the hidden potential of Angels rookie Jaime Barria

By Brent Maguire

While the Angels have endured another subpar season, the club has welcomed a new wave of rookie talent that has changed the construction of the club. Shohei Ohtani has excelled at the plate and has tossed a chunk of quality innings as a pitcher. David Fletcher has showed he may be more than just a utility guy.

There's another rookie, however, that has flown a bit under the radar for the Angels.

Twenty-two-year-old Jaime Barria debuted early in April and has posted a sparkling 3.46 ERA in 106 2/3 innings of work. Among pitchers with at least 100 innings, Barria ranks 34th in ERA and he's fifth among rookies in that department. By RA-9 WAR, which looks strictly at run prevention, Barria's 2.4 mark is top-50 among all pitchers.

Barria entered the season as a top-10 prospect in the Angels system. The belief among many prospect outlets was he would settle in as more of a backend starter. Instead, Barria has flourished by posting a well-above average ERA in plenty of innings. His 84 ERA- is 16 percent better than the league average ERA and he's done this in a fairly large sample.

The tricky thing with Barria is his underlying numbers don't look all that satisfying at first glance. His main calling card has always been his ability to throw strikes, and he's done that this year, boasting a 6.8 percent walk rate. However, Barria's subpar strikeout and ground ball rates are rather low. Among all pitchers with at least 100 innings thrown, here's where Barria ranks in some categories.

	Number	Rank
FIP	4.44	89
Strikeout Rate	18.4%	96
Ground Ball Rate	39.1%	97

This looks discouraging at first glance. Throwing strikes can only get you so far and Barria is neither striking out many people or keeping the ball on the ground. It's hard to get by simply by being a strike thrower, and Barria has allowed hitters to put a lot of baseballs in play. His walk rate is low but not low enough where this amount of balls in play isn't an issue.

While Barria's strikeout rate is low, he is actually missing a fair amount of bats. By both contact rate and swinging-strike rate, his ability to miss bats looks a lot stronger and hints at more strikeouts coming in the future.

	Number	Rank
--	--------	------

Contact Rate	76.5%	42
Swinging-Strike Rate	10.8%	46

So Barria has been a top-50 pitcher in terms of missing bats and top-50 in terms of throwing strikes. This helps explain how his ERA might not be that fluke but he still has an issue to work out. Barria should be striking out more hitters and he isn't doing that when he gets to two strikes. After the count goes to 0-2, opponents are hitting .304/.316/.321, which is a fairly respectable line with two strikes.

So why is it that Barria isn't able to finish off hitters? One issue with the lack of strikeouts may be due to the fact that his fastball isn't particularly good. Barria's 91.3-mph average fastball isn't just slow compared to other starters, but the pitch has not been all that effective this year. Also, the pitches that Barria mixes in — a four-seam fastball and a sinker — have not seen great results.

	Slugging Pct. Against	Whiff Rate
Four-Seam Fastball	.495	12.1%
Sinker	.643	8.2%

Barria's fastballs aren't great, but his secondary stuff has been outstanding. Barria's slider has been especially good, generating a 36.8 whiff percentage, while hitters have slugged .259 against the pitch. His changeup has been hit hard at times (.419 slugging percentage). However, the pitch has generated a 36.7 whiff percentage.

A possible solution for Barria may be simply throwing more sliders and change-ups. He is currently throwing fastballs less than half of the time (47.4 percent), but it may benefit him to throw even fewer fastballs. At the very least, less fastballs in two-strike counts may be beneficial for Barria. Pitchers are throwing less and less fastballs nowadays and Barria may benefit from becoming a bit more extreme in his slider and change-up usage.

Barria has been a bright spot for the 2018 Angels, and he appears to be a rotation piece for the foreseeable future. There are some warning signs with his strikeout rate, but a tweak in pitch usage with two strikes may unlock some hidden potential. Regardless, Barria is a fascinating pitcher moving forward, one who could really fill a major hole for the Angels.

As physicians recommend season-ending Tommy John surgery for Shohei Ohtani, here's a look at how things got to this point and what it all means

By Fabian Ardaya

The day the Angels and Shohei Ohtani hoped would never come arrived on Wednesday.

The ulnar collateral ligament in Ohtani's right elbow, which reportedly came with a Grade 1 sprain when he agreed to sign with the Angels this offseason and worsened to a Grade 2 sprain in June, showed

renewed sign of wear. The Angels' team physicians have recommended Tommy John surgery, which would prevent him from pitching potentially through spring training in 2020.

The Angels got to see their two-way star to the peak of his ability for a little more than two months before the elbow temporarily shut him down from pitching. Now, it will likely be an even more extended shutdown, putting baseball's most unique attraction on hold.

Ohtani has not made a formal decision on if or when to have the surgery, according to general manager Billy Eppler. He remained in the Angels' lineup Wednesday, batting third, as he remains cleared to hit and will do so at least until he and Eppler sit down when the club returns to Anaheim on Monday.

"It's disappointing," Eppler said. "It's disappointing, clearly for the player. He bears the most disappointment in this. I do feel for him during this time. I reflect back on all the years I've watched him and been around him and reflect back on time in December and getting the opportunity to sit down and talk to him and understand him and what makes him tick and what his aspirations are, how he saw himself contributing to our organization and helping bring a championship back to LA."

So how did the Angels get to this point? Why did they take the certain precautions or courses of action they did, and what misconceptions are there? Most importantly, where do they go from here? It's important to take it step by step.

How did we get here?

Ohtani, whose two-way excellence for the Nippon Ham Fighters of the NPB in Japan, along with his young age, made him cheap and among the most clamored-for international free agents ever. He chose the Angels after narrowing his choices down to six finalists, in part, due to their promise to allow him to hit and pitch.

The Angels held true to their promise for as long as Ohtani remained healthy. He pitched once a week as part of a six-man rotation, as had been the case when he was in Japan. He would hit every game as the DH, except for the day before and after his starts.

He was quite successful. Entering Wednesday, he had struck out 61 batters over 50 2/3 innings, good for a 3.31 ERA (80 ERA-). Through his first 279 plate appearances, he has 18 home runs — tied for the most for a Japanese-born rookie — and a 157 wRC+. He and Babe Ruth are the only players in history to hit 15 homers and pitch at least 50 innings in a season. Between his hitting and pitching, he entered Wednesday being worth 2.9 Wins Above Replacement, according to FanGraphs' measure.

The two-way excellence lasted with only the occasional hiccup until June 6, when he left a start against the Royals complaining of the recurrence of a blister on the middle finger of his right hand. As the finger was being drained, he complained of stiffness, but not pain, in his elbow. He did not suffer a dip in velocity.

An MRI the next day revealed the sprain had worsened to a Grade 2 sprain. He would receive a platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injection to the elbow, as he had the previous fall, in an attempt to generate regrowth in the ligament. He was held out of baseball activities for three weeks, and not allowed to throw for six after returning as a hitter. Each marker and new image showing regrowth in the ligament.

He began a throwing progression on July 19, but didn't throw in minor-league games before he worked his way back to a major-league mound on Sept. 2 in Houston, hitting 99.3 mph on the radar gun in the first inning. His velocity dipped in the third inning, maxing out at 92.6 mph before he was pulled with what the Angels considered to be a contusion on his pitching hand and stiffness in his back. An MRI on Wednesday revealed the damage to his UCL had gotten worse, and physicians recommended the season-ending surgery.

Eppler said Ohtani's elbow had shown no signs of new damage through each step of his return until Wednesday's imaging. He added that Ohtani's efforts as a hitter, whether it was swinging a bat or running the bases, did not contribute to the damage.

"Our decisions surrounding Shohei are evidence-based," Eppler said. "It's based on data. Some of that data is subjective, and player feedback, but most of it is objective. We rely on medical data and physical data to guide and instruct us. There isn't one answer, but he did have regular images at significant markers or in significant turns during his rehabilitation process.

"All of that medical data, and I take those diagnostic ultrasounds and MRIs as part of that physical data, the real-time data during his throwing session, the TrackMan data, the scouting data, the feedback from the player, which all gave us confidence that the ligament was ready for this next step."

Why didn't he just have the Tommy John surgery in June, when his UCL sprain initially worsened?

Eppler addressed this throughout Ohtani's rehab: No doctor, at any point, had recommended Tommy John surgery or stated that Ohtani would benefit from the procedure as opposed to the non-invasive methods (PRP/stem-cell) the Angels opted for. If he doesn't need the surgery, then why have the surgery?

The Angels had used PRP and stem-cells in the past with UCL tears, including Garrett Richards, Andrew Heaney and J.C. Ramirez. All three have since required Tommy John surgery, though Richards was able to get back on the mound before re-injuring the elbow. Ohtani's initial damage wasn't a full tear, meaning the Angels felt they could regenerate growth and still have a strong, sturdy ligament.

Despite the club's failures in diagnosing the treatment, there are success stories out there. Yankees right-hander Masahiro Tanaka and Phillies right-hander Aaron Nola have damaged their UCLs, but not required surgery. Both have had success in the time since. Eppler said the team's future plans of using the treatment have not been altered by the Ohtani result.

"We're always going to be open-minded to treatment protocols, being aware of the timing of those treatment protocols," Eppler said. "Every player is different. Every person is different. There have been numerous cases where that has been a successful plan of care. We've seen numerous cases of them. I'll leave it at that. It does not push us in one direction or another."

Why did Ohtani even bother coming back to try and pitch this year, especially with the Angels all but out of the postseason hunt?

It all comes down to the timing. September was actually an optimal time to bring Ohtani back, as expanded rosters and bolstered bullpens would provide sufficient length to allow him to throw shorter, less-stressful outings.

There is only so much that the PRP or stem-cell treatment can do to help regrow the ligament, and the wait throughout an entire offseason would not do much, if anything, to help him heal any more. The Angels also sought to try to help themselves and Ohtani have peace of mind, knowing they can plan ahead for their offseason knowing if they will have Ohtani available to pitch in 2019.

If his elbow had gone in spring training, as opposed to now, he likely would be out for all of 2019 and some of 2020. As it stands now, he will be able to potentially pitch again by early 2020 at the latest should he have the surgery and all goes well.

As Ohtani rehabbed, they continued to monitor the status of his elbow, and they required clearance of medical professionals to advance through each step of his program. It reached the extent that Ohtani said he'd anticipated being able to return even sooner than he did. By all accounts, the Angels and Ohtani have stated that he was not rushed back to the mound. The threat of eventual surgery lingered, but was never a guarantee as the Angels took the calculated risk of seeing if he could come back without surgery without costing him significant time in a recovery.

"You're always mindful that that's a possibility or that could become a reality," Eppler said. "Pitching ... is something that comes with some risk. Throwing hard will contribute to that. It was something that we felt could happen, but we saw there was a more conservative approach at the time and we did that."

How much did being a two-way player contribute to his injury? Will he continue to pursue being a two-way player, and will other teams keep trying to find more talent like Ohtani?

It's hard to deny that the responsibilities of being a full-time hitter and full-time pitcher didn't impact Ohtani on an everyday basis. By its very definition, the duties tied to both roles at least was more mentally taxing, even before accounting to the physical tolls.

Eppler has remained consistent that the Angels' recent plight in terms of Tommy John surgeries is strongly correlated with the calculated risk all organizations take in taking on high-velocity arms, particularly those with prior injury red flags. Ohtani, the pitcher, fits into this category, hitting triple-digits on occasion with his fastball while also possessing the power to launch massive home runs.

Ohtani also relies heavily on his splitter, a pitch that some have theorized puts additional strain on the UCL. Eppler, manager Mike Scioscia and a Tommy John surgeon consulted by *The Athletic* have each said they have no evidence to definitively support that claim.

While there is an obvious additional toll that comes with being a two-way player, the Angels have essentially copied the same workout schedule he had in Japan. His routine has remained the same on both sides, a system that has worked well for him in the past to handle the two workloads.

In the time before and since Ohtani's debut on American soil this season, clubs have been increasingly inclined to give two-way players a shot. The Rays are using 2017 first-rounder Brendan McKay as both a pitcher and a hitter, and the Angels selected William English to do the same in the fifth round this past

year. Eppler said he doesn't expect clubs to shy from the prospect of another player like Ohtani, but added there are few players like Ohtani.

"If you're going to hit huge home runs and thrown 100 miles an hour, it's a lot for your body to endure," Eppler said. "He trains, he eats and he sleeps like nothing I've ever seen before. He's an extremely gifted athlete and an extremely talented athlete. Is throwing hard good? Yes, it helps you get out hitters. Is throwing hard dangerous? Yes, it stresses ligaments.

"Shohei has demonstrated the ability to be impactful on both sides of the baseball. That is something that we, and I think every team would want impact in both the batter's box and on the mound. He brings that here. His body does go through more stress than the average player's, but however, his strength, his biological makeup, has shown that he can endure it."

The Angels plan on keeping Ohtani as a two-way player when he is healthy enough to both pitch and hit, Eppler said.

"He made a commitment to us, and he trusts us," Eppler said. "He trusted that we would use him in a two-way role, and we made that commitment. When you commit to someone, first of all, it makes it hard to walk away from them or makes it hard to change course on them. Not only are you letting them down, but you're letting down the responsibility that comes with committing that to somebody. We're a team, and we take responsibility or one another. Together, we'll see how much we achieve. We committed to each other in this process, and we'll stick through it together."

So what's next?

Well, first Ohtani has to decide if he's going to have the surgery.

In the short-term, he can still hit. The act of swinging a bat and throwing a baseball have completely different levels of stress and strain they can inflict on an elbow, and the motion of the two specifically affect the UCL differently. A sprained UCL will not impact his hitting, as he was able to show in hitting three home runs in the last two days with the same level of damage shown in the MRI.

There's no logical reason for Ohtani to not have the surgery unless he wants to be exclusively a hitter going forward. There are some position players who have been recommended Tommy John surgery but never received it.

Either way, one would imagine Ohtani is solely a hitter in 2019. He should be able to hit without limitation post-surgery, as position players typically require a six-month return to play. Hitters are often cleared to hit at around four months, if the Angels decide to make him a full-time designated hitter.

Could Ohtani learn another position? He played the outfield during his time in Japan, but the Angels expect to have Justin Upon, Mike Trout and Kole Calhoun man the outfield and all three are under contract for next season. He could learn first base, a possibility to try to spell Albert Pujols and allow him to not be a full-time first baseman after undergoing season-ending knee surgery this year. These are complicated discussions the Angels will have to make once Ohtani does opt for surgery, and will impact how they view this offseason — had he had this injury next season, they would've have had the offseason to find solutions and explore their options.

If he does learn another position, that determination would come after he would have the surgery and would have to require medical approval.

The club still aims to contend in 2019, Eppler said, even as much scrutiny has indicated they should rebuild. No player would return more or as much value as Trout, a two-time MVP and the game's best player, who has two years left after this year until he's a free agent. If Ohtani can't pitch until 2020, there might be one fully-healthy season in which the Angels can enjoy a two-way Ohtani and Trout at the same time.

"Um, yeah, we're not going to trade Mike Trout," Eppler affirmed.

"We're going to continue to invest in this club. We're going to continue to improve this club and watch the development of some young players emerging into the major leagues, be open-minded in the trade market and the free-agent market and put together a contending team next season. That's our goal."

FROM ESPN.COM

Will Shohei Ohtani still amaze us after Tommy John?

By David Schoenfield

The news we've feared since Shohei Ohtani landed on the disabled list in early June has arrived. The Los Angeles Angels are telling the two-way rookie star that he needs Tommy John surgery:

Shohei Ohtani underwent an MRI on his right elbow earlier today. The imaging revealed new damage to his ulnar collateral ligament (UCL). Based on these findings, UCL reconstruction surgery is the recommended plan of care. Additional information will be provided when appropriate.

The decision is now in Ohtani's hands. For now, he'll continue to hit. He was in the lineup Wednesday in Texas as the DH, batting third and continuing his pursuit of Rookie of the Year honors, and all he did -- talk about a flair for the dramatic -- was go 4-for-4 with a walk, a stolen base and his 17th and 18th home runs, raising his season line to .287/.367/.579. If he had enough playing time to qualify for the leaderboards, he'd rank fifth in the American League in slugging percentage. Amazing.

Ohtani made his first pitching appearance since June on Sunday night against the Astros, when his velocity suddenly dipped into the low 90s in the third inning, and he was removed after 49 pitches.

"One of the things that Shohei does is he throws extremely hard," general manager Billy Eppler told reporters on Wednesday. "If you're going to throw hard for a number of years, and you're going to continue to stress ligaments, you're going to put yourself at risk. If you're going to be a phenom, like Shohei is, and play both ways ... and you're going to hit huge home runs and throw 100 miles an hour, it's a lot for your body to endure."

From the outside, it seems the Angels managed this situation as best they could. When Ohtani landed on the DL on June 8, they were 36-28 and in the thick of the playoff race, just 4.5 games behind the first-

place Mariners. It made sense to rest Ohtani, continue to let him hit (he returned as a hitter on July 3) and hope he'd be able to help on the mound later in the season. It just didn't work out. The Angels fell out of the playoff race, going 32-44 after Ohtani went on the DL, and Ohtani wasn't able to contribute as a pitcher.

It was the right decision to wait before having Tommy John. If Ohtani had undergone surgery in June, he wouldn't have been able to hit the rest of the season. And he'd still likely have missed all of 2019 as a pitcher. Given the standard timetable of pitchers returning to game action 12 to 16 months after Tommy John surgery, Ohtani might have been able to return late in the 2019 season, but assuming the Angels would be cautious, that would hardly be a guarantee, and bringing him back for a few starts in September wouldn't make sense. He likely would not have pitched in the majors in 2019, regardless of whether he underwent surgery in June, now or at the end of the season. (Eppler said he and Ohtani will discuss the options on Monday.)

Even if he does have surgery, Ohtani should be able to hit in 2019. As Stephania Bell wrote back in June:

Notice that the 14-month timeline post-operatively refers to a return to pitching. But what about hitting? For the same reason Ohtani could potentially remain on the roster as a hitter before surgery, he could also return sooner to the roster as a hitter post-surgery. Position players return to their full pre-injury level of participation following Tommy John surgery more quickly than pitchers. Given that their positional demands place less stress on the elbow, they are specifically cleared even sooner to resume hitting, potentially as early as six months.

All that leads to the question: What is Ohtani's future? Eppler said the team still sees him as a two-way player. After all, that guarantee was part of the reason Ohtani elected to sign with the Angels in the first place. Eppler wouldn't forecast the team's plans for Ohtani in 2019, but a six-month timetable following October surgery means Ohtani could be back with the Angels as a hitter in late April or early May.

We know Ohtani can star on both sides of the ball, but we don't know whether his remaining a two-way player maximizes his value. While in the Angels rotation, Ohtani was starting -- at the minimum -- once per week (he had at least six days off between starts and sometimes more) and required days off before and after he started. That meant he was neither a full-time pitcher nor a full-time hitter. As Joe Sheehan tweeted Wednesday, "This is what I wrote in April, at the peak of Ohtanimania. I think it stands. 'I'm pretty sure Shohei Ohtani is a five-win pitcher, and I can be convinced he's a five-win outfielder. I just don't know if we're taking those players and making them into a four-win P/DH.'"

Joe was spot on. Ohtani has been worth about 2.0 WAR as a hitter so far. Double that to a full-time number of plate appearances and put him in the outfield, and you're looking at a 5-WAR player -- higher if he's a plus defender (he has the speed to be a very good outfielder). He's also just 23 years old with big raw power, so his production at the plate doesn't feel like a fluke.

During his 51 2/3 innings as a pitcher, Ohtani was worth 1.2 WAR. Give him 200 innings, and you're close to a 5-WAR pitcher, with obvious upside for even more (given good health, of course). Instead, he'll end up giving the Angels 3 to 4 wins of value this season. That's still an important piece of any roster, but it proves the difficulty of playing both ways and explains why nobody has been able to do it since Babe Ruth 100 years ago.

The other issue for Eppler and Angels owner Arte Moreno: Mike Trout is under contract for two more seasons. Once this season concludes, the Angels will have made the playoffs just once in his seven full seasons. The Angels finished 21 games out of first place in 2016, 21 games out of first place in 2017 and will probably finish more than 21 games out of first place in 2018. And the Astros aren't likely to suddenly fall apart next season.

So ... well, as ESPN's Alden Gonzalez wrote:

Eppler was asked, once again, if he would consider trading arguably the game's best player in order to rebuild the roster.

"Um, yeah," Eppler said, "we're not going to trade Mike Trout."

Eppler added that his goal is to "put together a contending team next season." But he will probably have to do that without Ohtani, at least as a starting pitcher.

Is it possible for the Angels to figure out how to build a winner around Trout? The problem isn't just the pitching, even though everyone cites the injuries in the rotation. The Angels are seventh in the AL in runs scored and seventh in runs allowed. The offense, even with Trout and Ohtani, is just as mediocre as the pitching/defense.

The Angels need a third baseman, a second baseman (maybe Zack Cozart returns to fill one of those slots next year) and, yes, a first baseman. Unfortunately, Albert Pujols with his \$28 million contract likely has to play somewhere. The point here: They need Ohtani as a hitter just as much as they need him as a pitcher.

I wouldn't trade Trout either. Extracting fair value for him -- even with just two years left on his contract -- is pretty much impossible. Eppler will simply have to be creative in finding ways to build a better roster around his superstar. And step No. 1 might be convincing Shohei Ohtani to stick to one side of the ball.

And the answer there might be this: Babe Ruth gave up pitching.

Shohei Ohtani slams 2 homers after Tommy John surgery recommendation

By Alden Gonzalez

Shohei Ohtani has suffered what the Los Angeles Angels described as "new damage" on the ulnar collateral ligament of his right elbow, prompting the organization's physicians to recommend Tommy John surgery, which would keep the 24-year-old two-way sensation off the mound until 2020.

The final decision rests with Ohtani, but the Angels have prepared themselves for what now seems like an inevitability. Angels general manager Billy Eppler called the news "disappointing" during a conference call with the media on Wednesday, hours before Ohtani belted two home runs in a 9-3 win over the Texas Rangers.

Eppler thought back to his scouting trips to Japan, when Ohtani was a high school phenom, and to his conversations with Ohtani in December, when the Angels beat out basically every major league team by becoming his preferred destination.

"He made a commitment to us, and he trusted us," Eppler said. "He trusted that we would use him in a two-way role, and we made that commitment. When you commit to somebody, it makes it hard to walk away from them, or it makes it hard to change course on them. Not only are you letting them down, but you're living with the responsibility that comes with committing to somebody."

The Angels "do still see [Ohtani] as a two-way player," Eppler said.

Ohtani has been cleared to continue to serve as the designated hitter and batted third at Globe Life Park in Arlington, Texas, reaching base all five times and scoring four runs. Asked whether Ohtani would stay in the lineup as a DH beyond Wednesday, Scioscia said, "We'll see. That's going to be determined from our medical department."

Eppler wouldn't entertain hypotheticals about Ohtani's potential 2019 role if he does have surgery, a scenario that could, in theory, include him becoming an outfielder for at least one season.

The two are expected to have more in-depth conversations about the next course of action on Monday, after the team's road trip.

Ohtani didn't speak with reporters after the announcement about his injury or following Wednesday's game.

"He's mentally tough in any situation he's ever in," Scioscia said after the game. "Tonight, he was a hitter. He didn't think about what the future is and what the decision is he's got to make for his elbow. He was out there playing baseball and hitting the ball."

Ohtani underwent stem-cell and platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy upon experiencing stiffness in his pitching elbow after a June 6 start against the Kansas City Royals. He was diagnosed with a Grade 2 sprain in his UCL, but Eppler has said throughout that surgery was, at that moment, not an expected outcome. Ohtani continued to serve as a DH and eventually worked his way back into the Angels' rotation, pitching against the Houston Astros on Sunday.

But Ohtani threw only 49 pitches and saw his velocity dip to the low 90s by the third inning. Ohtani was scheduled to throw a light bullpen session on Wednesday, but he reportedly complained of stiffness, prompting another MRI.

Eppler expressed his belief that the Angels' treatment plan for Ohtani was "thorough and well-reasoned. All imaging and markers and data pointed to him being ready to take the next step."

Despite missing time, Ohtani remains a strong candidate to win the American League Rookie of the Year Award, with a .946 OPS in 279 plate appearances and a 3.31 ERA in 51⅔ innings. He has attempted -- and, in many ways, accomplished -- what hadn't been done since Babe Ruth 100 years ago.

That also took a toll.

"One of the things that Shohei does is he throws extremely hard," Eppler said. "If you're going to throw hard for a number of years, and you're going to continue to stress ligaments, you're going to put yourself at risk. If you're going to be a phenom, like Shohei is, and play both ways ... and you're going to hit huge home runs, and throw 100 miles an hour, it's a lot for your body to endure.

"He trains, he eats, he sleeps like nothing I've ever seen before. And he's an extremely gifted athlete. He's an extremely talented athlete. Is throwing hard good? Yes. It helps you get out hitters. Is throwing hard dangerous? Yes. It stresses ligaments. But Shohei's demonstrated the ability to be impactful on both sides of the baseball. ... I don't want to speak for all the other teams, but I think every team would want impact in both the batter's box and on the mound. He brings that here."

Ohtani could become at least the fourth Angels pitcher to opt for Tommy John despite attempting conservative treatment, after Andrew Heaney, Garrett Richards and J.C. Ramirez. But that has not dimmed Eppler's enthusiasm about stem-cell therapy and PRP.

"We're always going to be open-minded to treatment protocols," Eppler said. "Every player is different."

The Angels were expected to contend this season, but their rotation couldn't stay healthy, their offense sagged and their bullpen had holes. They entered Wednesday with a 67-72 record that had them 19 games out of first place in a highly competitive American League West and are on the verge of missing the playoffs for the eighth time in nine years, in what is expected to be Scioscia's final season as their manager.

Eppler was asked, once again, if he would consider trading arguably the game's best player in order to rebuild the roster.

"Um, yeah," Eppler said. "We're not going to trade Mike Trout."

Eppler added that his goal is to "put together a contending team next season." But he will probably have to do so without Ohtani, at least as a starting pitcher.

"We committed to each other in this process, and we will get through it together, as a team," Eppler said in reference to Ohtani. "But I do feel disappointment for the other guys in that clubhouse, the people in this organization and primarily for Shohei in this. It's tough."

FROM NBC SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani has new damage to UCL, Angels recommend Tommy John surgery

By Bill Baer

Angels P/DH **Shohei Ohtani** recently returned to the mound, starting on Sunday against the Astros. He lasted only 2 1/3 innings, yielding two runs on two hits and two walks with two strikeouts. Ohtani stayed in the mid- to high-90's with his fastball velocity for the first two innings but was down in the low-90's in the third inning before departing.

Ohtani underwent an MRI on Wednesday, which revealed new UCL damage. The Angels have recommended the right-hander undergo Tommy John surgery, as detailed in **the club's announcement**.

Ohtani, 24, didn't pitch between June 6 and September 2, but returned as a hitter on July 3. He was originally diagnosed with a Grade 2 sprain of the UCL in his right elbow. The thought was that he wouldn't pitch again this season, but Ohtani progressed faster than anticipated. Given that the 67-72 Angels haven't been seriously involved in either the AL West or Wild Card races, one has to wonder if the decision to have him return to the mound this season was misguided.

If Ohtani does go under the knife as expected, he will miss the entire 2019 season and almost certainly some of the 2020 season as well.

Ohtani has hit .276/.355/.547 with 16 home runs and 44 RBI in 274 plate appearances. As a pitcher, he went 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA and a 63/22 K/BB ratio in 51 2/3 innings. We truly haven't seen a season like Ohtani's — or a player like Ohtani — in a long time, so his performance this year has been truly remarkable.

Update: Per Jeff Fletcher of the Southern California News Group, Ohtani is in Wednesday's lineup and he is expected to travel with the team to Chicago to close out a road trip against the White Sox this weekend. So he's at least going to continue functioning as a DH until he decides what to do about his elbow.

FROM CBS SPORTS

Angels' Shohei Ohtani continues to have a compelling, if polarizing case for the Rookie of the Year Award

The arguments around Ohtani will pertain to his playing time

By R.J. Anderson

On Wednesday, the Los Angeles Angels announced DH-slash-pitcher Shohei Ohtani had suffered new damage to his ulnar collateral ligament, resulting in a recommendation of Tommy John surgery. Ohtani then had a 4-for-4 night, including his 17th and 18th home runs of the season.

Whatever the Angels decide to do with Ohtani the rest of the season -- shut him down, allow him to continue on as the DH, some combination thereof -- it's obvious that he will have the most compelling and polarizing candidacy for the American League Rookie of the Year Award.

Ohtani entered Thursday batting .287/.367/.579 (155 OPS+) in 279 plate appearances. On the mound, he's delivered 51 innings of 3.31 ERA (128 ERA+) ball. Add his production together, and he's been worth around 3.5 wins above replacement, per Baseball-Reference.

That's a greater amount than what either Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar, the pair of talented young New York Yankees infielders most often named as the other favorites in the running, has produced this season. It's also at least equal to Tampa Bay Rays second baseman Joey Wendle, who leads rookie AL hitters in WAR and has nearly 180 more plate appearances.

How voters weigh playing time versus production, then, will dictate Ohtani's hardware fate. Generally, players are penalized for missing too much time, either due to injury or poor play. Ohtani's discrepancy is rooted in unusual circumstances, however. He lost playing time at DH due to injury, but also because the Angels gave him days off around his pitching schedule.

Voters have literally never encountered this scenario. If they're willing to overlook at least some of the difference in plate appearances, Ohtani will win the award on the basis of being the best rookie performer on a rate basis. Even if voters aren't as forgiving, Ohtani still has a chance to win the award and/or finish highly in voting -- just, perhaps, not as highly as his output demands.

No matter how things play out, keep an eye on the proceedings. One day, we could be having a similar discussion as it pertains to Ohtani and the MVP or Cy Young Awards.

Shohei Ohtani's likely Tommy John surgery doesn't mean the Angels should trade Mike Trout

Trout is due to hit the open market following the 2020 season

By Mike Axisa

Below is a partial list of Los Angeles Angels pitchers to undergo Tommy John surgery within the last four years:

- Garrett Richards (July 2018)
- Keynan Middleton (May 2018)
- JC Ramirez (April 2018)
- Nick Tropeano (August 2016)
- Andrew Heaney (July 2016)
- Tyler Skaggs (August 2014)

Rough. That's an awful lot of pitching talent lost to elbow reconstruction. Unfortunately, it appears Shohei Ohtani will soon join this list as well.

Wednesday afternoon the Angels announced an MRI revealed new damage to Ohtani's right elbow ligament, and Tommy John surgery has been recommended. It is important to note surgery is not set in stone yet. The team can recommend surgery but can't force Ohtani to have surgery any more than your employer can force you to have surgery. Ohtani will presumably go for a second opinion, but, generally speaking, once Tommy John surgery is recommended, it's a matter of "when" and not "if."

Ohtani missed one month as a hitter and nearly three months as a pitcher earlier this season with a Grade 2 elbow sprain. The Angels signed him knowing he had a Grade 1 sprain and was receiving treatment. The sprain progressed to Grade 2 at midseason and now it is apparently even worse, hence the Tommy John surgery recommendation.

When healthy, Ohtani was a star:

- **Hitting:** .276/.355/.547 (144 OPS+) with 16 doubles and 16 homers in 274 plate appearances
- **Pitching:** 3.31 ERA (128 ERA+) with 63 strikeouts and 22 walks in 51 2/3 innings

On a rate basis, Ohtani hit like Nelson Cruz (143 OPS+) and pitched like Charlie Morton (127 ERA+). He and Babe Ruth are the only players in history to hit 15-plus home runs and throw 50-plus innings in a single season in baseball history. The sample sizes are small, obviously, but the production was great and the talent is undeniable.

Ohtani's power to left-center is unreal. How many hitters can do this against Corey Kluber?

Assuming he does undergo Tommy John surgery, Ohtani will miss the entire 2019 season as a pitcher, though it's unknown how the team will handle him as a hitter. The Tommy John surgery rehab timetable is typically 14-16 months for pitchers. There's no getting around that. For hitters though, the timetable is usually 6-8 months.

Would Ohtani be able to hit next season before he's cleared to pitch? That's a No. 1 question right now.

Billy Eppler says Angels would consult with doctors before considering if Shohei Ohtani could play the field if he can hit but not pitch next year.

Even if he can DH next season, the fact remains the Angels will now only get one full season of healthy Ohtani paired with Mike Trout, the game's best player, before he's scheduled to reach free agency. Ohtani's MLB debut was abbreviated this year due to injuries. He won't pitch next year following surgery. So, the best-case scenario is a full season of Ohtani alongside Trout in 2020, which happens to be Trout's contract year. He's currently scheduled to become a free agent during the 2020-21 offseason.

The Angels go into Wednesday's game with a 67-72 record and no real shot at the postseason. They are 19 games back in the AL West and 15 1/2 games back of the second AL wild card spot. For the sixth time in Trout's seven full big-league seasons, the Angels will miss the postseason, and in the one year they did make the playoffs, they were swept in three games in the ALDS. The prime of one of the greatest players ever is being wasted. It's a shame.

Now with Ohtani likely heading to Tommy John surgery, it'll be that much more difficult for the Angels to contend next year, one of the two precious seasons remaining on Trout's contract. A strong case can be made that, when healthy, Ohtani is the team's best pitcher and second-best hitter. He won't pitch next year. He might be able to hit! But, if he does, how often will he be able to hit and will he be compromised at all? Those are unanswerable questions right now.

It seems that, anytime something bad happens with the Angels, there are immediate calls to trade Trout. Trade him to a contender for a godfather package and begin a rebuild. It's happening again in the wake of the Ohtani Tommy John surgery news.

I get it. I totally do. The Angels could trade Trout for maximum value right now -- the longer they wait, the less they get in return (see: Machado, Manny) -- start a rebuild, and move forward with a healthy Ohtani as their organizational centerpiece beginning in 2020. He's not Trout, but you could do a heck of a lot worse than building around Ohtani. Get gobs of young talent for Trout, then rebuild. A viable plan, no doubt.

Personally, I don't think the Angels should trade Trout. It is a heck of a lot easier to rebuild a farm system than it is to have the best player of his generation on your roster in the prime of his career. Angels GM Billy Eppler realizes this as well.

Trade Trout? No way. I say sign him to what amounts to a lifetime contract and build around him and Ohtani going forward. That was the original plan! Ohtani's elbow injury and seemingly inevitable Tommy John surgery doesn't have to derail that.

I can't see the Angels trading Trout, even after another postseason-less season. Never say never, but yeah, it seems very unlikely. The Astros are great and the Athletics are up-and-coming, and now it'll be that much harder for the Angels to contend next season because they won't have Ohtani. He's a great player -- not a good player, a great player -- and maybe they'll have him at DH, but they won't on the mound.

It stinks. It stinks for the Angels, it stinks for Ohtani, it stinks for Trout, and it stinks for baseball fans.

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS

How Shohei Ohtani can play in 2019 even if he undergoes Tommy John surgery

By Jeff Passan

Because Shohei Ohtani is the single most talented baseball player in the world – not the best yet but quite clearly, with his ability to pitch and hit at hyper-elite levels, the most talented – the news Wednesday that the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow needs reconstruction gobsmacked the game. And then, as if to pat the dismayed on the head and tell them every little thing is gonna be all right, Ohtani hit a pair of magnificent, towering home runs in the midst of a 4-for-4 night from the third spot in the Los Angeles Angels' lineup. As he coped with his body's fallibility, his impending Tommy John surgery, his inability to pitch until the 2020 season, he managed to become the 75th player in major league history with a pair of four-hit, two-homer games in a season.

It's fitting that a player unlike any in a century is now primed to embark on a path never taken. Ohtani is almost certain to heed the Angels' recommendation to undergo the elbow surgery that takes at least a year to recover – and, amid that recovery, become the first player to continue participating in games.

However counterintuitive it may sound – play while healing – four doctors who regularly repair torn UCLs told Yahoo Sports that they believe the 24-year-old Ohtani can spend the 2019 season as a regular designated hitter for the Angels provided his Tommy John recovery lacks complications. The doctors, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they did not want to be seen as suggesting treatment for a patient who isn't theirs, discussed in general terms how they would outline Ohtani's rehabilitation and why the biomechanical elements of a swing are unlikely to harm his new ligament.

Calling it a ligament, of course, is not immediately true. If Ohtani does undergo surgery, a tendon – typically taken from his wrist or hamstring, occasionally chosen from a tissue bank's cadaver supply – will be woven to connect and stabilize the ulna and humerus bones. A process called ligamentization will slowly transmogrify the tendon into a ligament, with the first three months especially important in the healing process.

At the three-month mark, one surgeon said, he would expect Ohtani to be ready to start taking batting practice. Batting in and of itself, according to another surgeon, is not considered perilous for a UCL; Major League Baseball's injury-tracking database, according to a source, shows only one case in which a hitter was believed to have blown out his elbow while swinging a bat.

Even better for Ohtani, a third doctor said, is his handedness. The elbow ligament that is stressed most during the swing, he said, is on the trail, or back, arm. Because Ohtani is a right-handed pitcher and left-handed hitter, his trail arm is his left. While this does not inure him from any troubles swinging, the fourth surgeon said, the case for Ohtani to bat next season is well worth whatever risk the Angels would be taking. Particularly, the first surgeon said, because he sees Ohtani being ready to return to full-time batting anywhere between the 4½-to-six-month mark.

The Angels' doctors almost certainly share a similar opinion, which puts Ohtani and the team in an interesting position before he meets with Angels general manager Billy Eppler on Monday. Were Ohtani to shut down his season and schedule the surgery for mid-September, he could be swinging a bat before Christmas and reach the six-month mark with two weeks left in spring training. Play through the end of this season, and those extra two weeks push his first swings into the New Year and his full-time play, should they be cautious and conservative, to the cusp of opening day.

The worst-case scenario, of course, is that Ohtani re-injures the ligament, at which point the conversation about his future as a pitcher would be a reasonable one. For now, any talk of converting Ohtani to a full-time hitter is bunk. An 18-month healing period to pitch is more than enough. If he stays on schedule, Ohtani still will be just 25 years old when he throws his next pitch. "We do still see him as a two-way player," Eppler said Wednesday in a conference call, and he didn't expound on why because he didn't need to.

Only two starting pitchers with at least 50 innings have a better swinging-strike rate than 15.2 percent: Chris Sale and Max Scherzer. Nobody has a lower contact percentage – contact made divided by swings – than Ohtani's 65.6 percent. His 96.7-mph fastball is the fourth-fastest behind Luis Severino, Noah Syndergaard and Nathan Eovaldi.

Only five hitters with at least 275 plate appearances have a better slugging percentage than Ohtani's .579: J.D. Martinez, Mookie Betts, Mike Trout, Jose Ramirez and Max Muncy. Those five and Matt Carpenter, Alex Bregman and Aaron Judge are the only ones with an OPS higher than Ohtani's .946.

As long as Ohtani is physically capable of pitching and hitting, he will pitch and hit, because what he can produce doing both exceeds what he could be focusing primarily on either. He has shown – in limited spurts, yes, but shown nonetheless – that when he pitches he caucuses with the game's best, and when he hits he does the same, and so long as that is true, there's no compelling reason to keep him from endeavoring to do both.

Maybe somewhere down the line it all becomes too much, but then doubting Shohei Ohtani is a road to perdition, and having trod that walk of shame already, a kind suggestion for those thinking of doing the same: don't. Because the uncommon talent Ohtani possesses is matched by a mental acuity that allowed him to seamlessly transition to a country he didn't know with a language he didn't know in an organization he didn't know and somehow balance those personal landmines with a bifurcated professional life in which he retooled his swing after a wretched spring training and began to understand the difficulty of beating major league hitters.

Wednesday night may be the last great performance of a rookie season in which Ohtani has hit .287/.367/.579 with 18 home runs in 248 plate appearances and put up a 3.31 ERA over 51 2/3 innings with 63 strikeouts and a .203/.289/.332 opponents' line. It's a staggering season for anyone and seemingly impossible for the person who arrived with literally a world of hype and managed to exceed it.

Baseball believes Ohtani is capable of anything because he has shown as much, so he now becomes the guinea pig in something that even a year ago would've sounded too novel to try. Not anymore. Not for him, the kid who pitched like a star and hit like a star and proved himself one on both sides of the ball. Even if his right elbow finally gave out, the rehab and biologics and rest not enough to stop it from blowing, the rest of his body need not. Come spring of 2019, the game will be waiting for him and that swing, not happy but ready to bide its time before the swing and the arm and everything that makes Shohei Ohtani one of a kind returns fully healed, rested and raring to go in 2020.

Shohei Ohtani's best day as a hitter came on his worst day as a pitcher

By Jack Baer

The Anaheim Angels announced Wednesday that Shohei Ohtani will likely need Tommy John surgery to repair UCL damage in his right elbow, meaning that Ohtani is unlikely to pitch until the beginning of the 2020 season. It was awful news for the player, team and baseball fans everywhere, but the good news is that Ohtani's bat still remains.

Ohtani gave everyone a reminder of what he can do with a bat in his first game since receiving his diagnosis, going 4-for-4 with two homers, three RBIs, a stolen base and a walk against the Texas Rangers on Wednesday.

Shohei Ohtani's big day after some bad news

After walking and singling in his first two plate appearances, Ohtani crushed a first-pitch fastball into the right-field stands, his second homer since his ill-fated return to the mound on Sunday.

Ohtani singled again and stole second base in the seventh, then hit another high homer to right field to put an exclamation point on a somber day.

The performance was the second multi-homer game of Ohtani's career and the second four-hit game of his career, with the first instance of both parameters coming on Aug. 3 against the Indians. However, Ohtani went 4-for-5 without a walk or stolen base that day, so there's a clear argument that Ohtani's greatest performance as a hitter came the same day as his lowest moment as a pitcher.

Shohei Ohtani still has a bat

That dichotomy today between Ohtani the hitter and Ohtani the pitcher demonstrates both the kind of unprecedented talent we're dealing with here and the unusual situation the Angels will face as Ohtani rehabs from Tommy John surgery.

Ohtani continued to hit this season despite suffering a grade 2 UCL sprain in June that kept him off the mound until Sunday, and he hit well. The 24-year-old entered Sunday hitting .323/.413/.692 with seven homers since Aug. 1 and has demonstrated he can bring big-league value even as a full-time designated hitter.

However, the Angels will certainly want Ohtani the pitcher back eventually and the rehab for Tommy John surgery, while often effective, is infamously grueling. Ohtani figures to undergo the procedure sometime in the near future, then rehab throughout the offseason and into the season.

Once the season rolls around, there might come a time when the Angels have to choose between giving Ohtani as much rest as possible to rehab his elbow or inserting a powerful bat in the middle of the lineup. It won't be an easy decision.

Jim Abbott reflects on his no-hitter 25 years later: 'I wish everybody in the world could have that feeling'

By Mike Oz

Twenty-five years ago this week, Jim Abbott — pitching for the New York Yankees at the time — threw one of the most improbable no-hitters baseball has ever seen. Not just because Abbott famously pitched with one hand, but also because he was in the middle of a subpar season and the Cleveland Indians, the team he was facing that day, had just lit him up just a few days earlier.

But sometimes in baseball, magic happens. And it did that day for Abbott.

He didn't quite overpower the Indians, a team that featured Kenny Lofton, Jim Thome, Carlos Baerga, Manny Ramirez and Albert Belle. Rather, he gracefully induced groundouts and flyballs all day. Abbott talked about his no-hitter in great detail this week with the Yahoo Sports MLB Podcast.

Like, how after the game, he walked through Manhattan with his wife and that's one of his lasting memories.

"All the early edition of the newspapers were out on the corners," Abbott said. "People were buying newspapers and running across the street. Cars are honking and traffic is stopping. I wish everybody in the world could have that feeling for one night. To walk through Manhattan and receive that type of embrace. It's sort of an amazing cherished memory."

There's a lot more where that came from, so check out the full episode. You can find our entire podcast and interview with Abbott by clicking over to Apple Podcasts, Stitcher or Acast.

Elsewhere, Abbott talks about what it's like to see modern athletes overcome disabilities — like linebacker Shaquem Griffin with the Seattle Seahawks, who was announced Wednesday as a Week 1 starter. Abbott says to him, it's not just about disabled athletes participating, but thriving in pro sports, which is what his no-hitter proved.

Abbott actually joined our podcast in studio for the entire show, so he's also around to offer his takes on the following topics:

- The Angels bringing Shohei Ohtani back to the mound and whether it was a smart move
- What happens when a player criticizes a manager — like Wil Myers did
- How baseball could do September roster expansion better
- Whether anyone should dip a chicken finger into Coke

Once again, you can find the show on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Acast and where ever you find podcasts. If you dig what we're doing, we'd appreciate your ratings and reviews to help the show grow.

Daily Dose: Oy, Ohtani

By George Bissell

Shohei Ohtani and the Angels received awful news regarding his long-term outlook when an MRI on Wednesday revealed new damage to the UCL in his right elbow. The 24-year-old righty lasted just 2 1/3 innings in his return to the mound on Sunday and experienced a significant decrease in velocity in his final inning of work against the Astros. It was reported at the time that the drop in velocity was the result of tightness in his back and issues with his finger, not his elbow. Angels general manager Billy Eppler told reporters that Ohtani hasn't decided whether or not he'll undergo Tommy John surgery yet and that the organization still views him as a two-way player. Regardless of what Ohtani ultimately decides, losing one of the most exciting players in baseball for any period of time would be a crushing blow. It certainly feels inevitable that Ohtani will be forced to undergo elbow surgery if he wants to

pitch again in the future, but it's too early in the process to speculate on how much time he would miss before he could potentially return as a hitter.

The biggest question for fantasy owners moving forward is whether the injury will impact Ohtani at the plate? So far, it hasn't. Not in the least. The two-way phenom went 4-for-4 with a pair of home runs, stole his seventh base of the year, and reached base safely in all five of his plate appearances against the Rangers on Wednesday night. He's been one of the hottest hitters in baseball since the All-Star break, hitting .294 (32-for-109) with 11 homers, 25 RBI and five steals in 38 games since July 20. He's expected to continue to serve as the Angels' designated hitter over the remainder of the regular season and remains one of the most valuable long-term assets in fantasy baseball.

Three-Part Story

Move over, Giancarlo Stanton. Rockies slugger Trevor Story connected on a 92-mph heater from Giants starter Andrew Suarez, launching a historic 505-foot homer -- the longest home run of the Statcast Era -- in the fourth inning. He finished 3-for-4 with three homers in a win over San Francisco in Coors Field on Wednesday. It was the 13th three-homer performance in the big leagues this season and the first since Rangers rookie slugger Ronald Guzman back on August 10. Simply put, we're running out of adjectives to describe the 25-year-old shortstop, who has evolved into arguably the most valuable hitter in fantasy baseball this season. He's worked his way into the conversation as a dark horse National League MVP candidate thanks to his unique combination of elite raw power and plus-speed. He's hitting .298/.354/.566 with 77 runs scored, 31 homers, 95 RBI and 25 stolen bases in 582 plate appearances and has a legitimate chance to become the first hitter to record a 30-homer, 30-steal campaign since Mike Trout and Ryan Braun accomplished the feat in 2012.

Bregman Blasts Off

Alex Bregman went 2-for-3 with a two-run homer, his 29th of the year, and five RBI to lead the Astros to a blowout victory over the Twins on Wednesday. He also walked twice in the contest for good measure. The 24-year-old shortstop has morphed into a true four-category fantasy monster -- with the ability to chip in the occasional stolen base -- thanks to his rare blend of elite contact skills, plate discipline, raw power and plus-speed. He's hitting an absurd .298/.399/.557 with 95 runs scored, 29 homers, 96 RBI and 10 stolen bases in 617 plate appearances this year.

Over-the-fence power and batting average, the main surface statistics fantasy owners naturally gravitate towards to form their opinions, only begin scratch the surface when it comes to revealing Bregman's prodigious talent at the plate. He entered Wednesday as one of only five qualified hitters (Mike Trout, Joey Votto, Jose Ramirez, Carlos Santana and Bregman) with more walks than strikeouts this season and now leads the major leagues in extra-base hits (77) and doubles (47) this season. To put all of these impressive numbers in context, Bregman has a realistic shot at becoming the first big-league hitter to hit above .300 with 50-plus doubles, 30-plus homers and 10-plus stolen bases since Matt Holliday in 2007. It's a feat that's only been accomplished three times since 2000. However, we may see two young shortstops reach those lofty statistical benchmarks this year. The other plays his home games in Coors Field. You may have heard of him.

Stroman Shutdown Imminent

Marcus Stroman (blister) will not make his next start against the Indians on Saturday. Blue Jays manager John Gibbons told reporters on Wednesday that they're unsure if Stroman will start again in 2018. He was lit up for four runs on six hits over 1 2/3 innings in a loss to the Rays on Monday. It was his shortest outing of the year and it came after he missed two and a half weeks with a blister on his right middle finger. There's a realistic chance he will not pitch again until next season.

It feels like a lifetime ago, but it was just a few years ago when the "Stro Show" burst onto the scene as one of the most electrifying pitching prospects in the entire game. He posted a 3.65 ERA, 1.17 WHIP and 111/28 K/BB ratio in 28 appearances (20 starts) as a rookie in 2014. Armed with a deadly six-pitch repertoire and extremely strong underlying peripheral numbers, the 5-foot-8 right-hander appeared to be on the precipice of establishing himself as not only the Blue Jays' ace of the future, but a burgeoning young superstar in the game as well. Unfortunately, a torn ACL in his left knee during a fielding drill the following spring training derailed his meteoric rise. Stroman made a miraculous recovery, returning to big-league mound less than six months after undergoing major knee surgery. Yet, he's never come close to recapturing the brilliance and fulfilling the promise he displayed during his dazzling rookie campaign.

To his credit, he's been extremely durable over the last few years. He's one of only only eight starting pitchers to eclipse the 200-inning plateau in each of the last two seasons. He won't reach that mark again in 2018 due to persistent blister issues, but it's worth noting that he's been extremely reliable from a health standpoint. However, his raw surface statistics have devolved into extremely pedestrian territory in recent years. Since the start of the 2016 campaign, he's posted a 26-28 record with a 4.10 ERA, 1.33 WHIP and 407/152 K/BB ratio in 84 starts. He's evolved into pure sinkerballer who relies primarily on weak contact and ground balls to turn over opposing lineups and simply doesn't strike out enough batters to be considered anything more than a back-end rotation starter from a fantasy perspective moving forward. At 27-years-old, it's too soon to write off Stroman completely after a single injury-marred lost season. However, it's nearly impossible to forecast a dramatic metamorphosis or even mild progression without some compelling evidence that he's making significant adjustments heading into 2019.

American League Quick Hits: Edwin Diaz pitched a scoreless inning and struck out two to pick up his 53rd save in the Mariners' win over the Orioles ... Mitch Haniger went 1-for-4 with a homer and extended his major league-leading hit streak to 17 games in that contest ... Corey Kluber struck out 10 batters over 6 2/3 innings of one-run ball in the Indians' 3-1 victory over the Royals ... Brad Hand notched his 32nd save of the year in that one ... Craig Kimbrel nailed down his 38th save of the year in a win over the Braves ... Kevin Kiermaier went 2-for-4 with a pair of solo home runs in a loss to the Blue Jays ... Jeimer Candelario went 3-for-6 with a homer in the Tigers' rout of the White Sox ... Michael Kopech was lit up for seven runs in 3 1/3 innings in that contest ... Gary Sanchez hit a two-run homer in the Yankees' loss to the Athletics ... Charlie Morton (shoulder) will start against the Red Sox on Saturday ... Michael Fulmer (shin) is expected to take his next scheduled turn in the Tigers' rotation ... According to MLB.com's Bryan Hoch, Aroldis Chapman (knee) has been walking on a treadmill and throwing from flat ground ... Yankees manager Aaron Boone told reporters that Didi Gregorius (heel) will likely be activated on Friday ... Miguel Sano (leg) is hopeful to return to the Twins' lineup by Friday ... Brett Anderson (forearm) threw a bullpen session on Wednesday, and will throw a simulated game on Saturday ... Danny Duffy (shoulder) has been shut down for the remainder of the 2018 season ... Clint Frazier (concussion) suffered a setback and is unlikely to play again this season ...

National League Quick Hits: Kenley Jansen will not travel with the Dodgers for their series in Colorado, which starts on Friday ... Yadier Molina exited Wednesday's game against the Nationals with hamstring

tightness ... Ronald Acuna slugged his 24th homer of the year in a loss to the Red Sox ... Felipe Vasquez collected his 30th save of the year against the Reds ... Anthony Rendon went 3-for-5 in the Nationals' loss to the Cardinals ... Carlos Martinez pitched two scoreless innings and notched a save against in that contest ... Marcell Ozuna went 4-for-5 in that one as well ... Daniel Murphy went 3-for-4 with a homer in the Cubs' win over the Brewers ... Max Muncy slugged his 32nd homer of the year in the Dodgers' loss to the Mets ... Zack Wheeler struck out nine batters over seven innings in that contest ... Sean Doolittle (foot) threw a simulated game on Wednesday ... Jason Heyward (hamstring) has yet to resume baseball activities ... Cubs manager Joe Maddon told reporters on Wednesday that there is "barely" enough time for Morrow to return in 2018 ... Kolten Wong may need to undergo offseason surgery on his left knee ...

A minor league baseball team just changed its name to the Trash Pandas

By Jack Baer

The pantheon of wacky minor league baseball team names has a new member.

The Mobile Baybears, the Double-A affiliate of the Los Angeles Angels, are moving from Mobile to Madison, Alabama after the 2019 season. The move came with the opportunity for a name change, and the local community took full advantage of the opportunity to create something unique: The Rocket City Trash Pandas. Madison is part of the Huntsville metropolitan area, and Huntsville's nickname is the "Rocket City."

The name was announced via video during a ceremony:

Here is the big reveal of the baseball team coming to North Alabama. Rocket City Trash Pandas!!!

The Trash Pandas won the naming vote in a landslide

A release from BallCorps, the ownership company of the franchise, said the new name dominated the voting process to pick the team's name. In the final round of voting, the Trash Pandas reportedly received 41.37 percent of the vote against the ThunderSharks, Moon Possums, Space Chimps and Comet Jockeys.

The club's website received 28,560 nominations and votes from the community, which BallCorps says is the largest community participation in a "Name the Team" contest in MiLB history. Matthew Higley, who nominated the name, will be rewarded with the first pitch at a Trash Pandas game and two box seats at the stadium for the first five years of play in Madison.

Time will tell if the new name might lead to a spike in merchandise sales from Marvel fans like the Albuquerque Isotopes received from their Simpsons-inspired name change. Why? The name just happens to have a few too many connections to a certain Marvel character to be a coincidence.

Is the Rocket City Trash Pandas a Marvel reference?

The Trash Pandas name appears to be a reference to Rocket Raccoon, a character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe's "Guardians of the Galaxy" franchise. He's a loud-mouthed talking raccoon voiced by Bradley Cooper. He's obsessed with weapons, but afraid of showing emotional vulnerability.

One character also calls him a trash panda during Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2.

The Trash Pandas' entry on the ballot seemed to allude as much, saying "Our community is known for engineering, and no creature in our **galaxy** is as smart, creative, determined and ingenious a problem solver — dedicated to the challenge at hand — as our local raccoons!"

FROM THE DALLAS NEWS

Why potential Tommy John surgery won't keep Angels' Shohei Ohtani out of the Rangers' nightmares

By Gerry Fraley

ARLINGTON - Rookie Shohei Ohtani, the Los Angeles Angels' two-way standout, was told on Wednesday that he should have Tommy John surgery.

If Ohtani accepts the recommendation, he will not appear as a pitcher again until 2020.

The Rangers will not get off that easy.

The Angels believe if Ohtani has the surgery, they can keep his bat in the lineup. Ohtani showed what a force that can be by hitting two homers in a 9-3 win against the Rangers at Globe Life Park.

"He knows he's talented," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Tonight, he was a hitter. He didn't think about what the future is and the decision he's got to make. He was out there playing baseball and hitting the ball.

"His whole career, he's pitched, and he's hit. Now, he's going to focus on hitting."

Ohtani, a right-handed pitcher and left-handed hitter, is batting .287 with 18 homers and a .579 slugging percentage in 247 at-bats. The Angels envision building a lineup next year around center fielder Mike Trout, the best player in the game, and Ohtani.

The Rangers would face that lineup in as many as 19 games. The Rangers are having a hard-enough time in the American League West this season, at 24-36. The West could be more difficult next season with Ohtani the full-time hitter.

Just another star in a division full of them.

“Pretty impressive when you look at the power numbers and the things that are starting to show up,” Rangers manager Jeff Banister said of Ohtani. “We knew he was a really good athlete with the big arm. What we saw with him swinging the bat, it’s not been surprising what he’s been able to do.”

FROM THE RINGER

Shohei Ohtani Likely Won’t Pitch Until 2020—and It Could’ve Been Even Worse

The Angels and their two-way star are lucky (yes, lucky) that he tore his UCL this season

By Michael Baumann

Shohei Ohtani, the Los Angeles Angels’ two-way wunderkind, left his start against the Astros on Sunday after a third-inning velocity dip and will likely require Tommy John surgery to correct a torn UCL. That means Ohtani is done pitching not just for the rest of 2018 but probably for all of 2019 as well. Ohtani, by virtue of being an international superstar as both a pitcher and a hitter, is one of very few athletes who can accurately be called unique and is one of the most exciting, fussed-over, and important players in the game. The UCL is the most fussed-over body part in baseball. So the most scrutinized piece of connective tissue in baseball, if not all of American sports, has failed.

“The ulnar collateral ligament (UCL), a stretchy, triangular band in the elbow that holds together the upper and lower arms, plays no favorites. If you throw a baseball, it can ruin you,” Yahoo Sports columnist Jeff Passan wrote in his book *The Arm*. That one of baseball’s best and most prominent national writers would devote a monograph to this tiny piece of tissue underscores its importance. The UCL is not designed to withstand the repeated violent overhand motion required to pitch a baseball, doubly so for modern pitchers, who, like thoroughbred racehorses, have outgrown their ligaments. As a result, UCL replacement, known as Tommy John surgery, has become almost routine, and the 12-to-18-month layoff it requires has become part of the pattern of a pitcher’s career.

Ohtani had minor UCL damage when he came to the United States a little less than a year ago, but an MRI of most pitchers’ elbows would reveal some damage to the ligament, and until June Ohtani’s underlying injury was only of minor concern. In June, Ohtani went on the disabled list with a more severe sprain of his UCL, and while he returned to the lineup as a DH in the meantime, he didn’t pitch until this past Saturday, when he lasted just 2 1/3 innings against the Astros.

It’s not a guarantee that Ohtani will get surgery soon — there’s been no announcement yet, and hours after it was revealed that his UCL injury had worsened, Ohtani not only started at DH but went 4-for-4 with two home runs, a walk, and a stolen base. But if he does get surgery, he’ll most likely miss all of next year and head into 2020, the last year of Mike Trout’s contract, having thrown just 51 2/3 innings in the majors. But in a perverse way, the Angels are lucky Ohtani aggravated his elbow injury when he did, because he came very close to missing not just all of 2019 but most or all of 2020 as well.

Tommy John surgery isn't career threatening anymore, but it's an enormous inconvenience, particularly for Ohtani and the Angels, who are trying to put together a competitive team before Trout's contract is up. Because losing a pitcher for a year and a half can cause a team's plans to founder, players and their clubs have tried to find ways to avoid Tommy John and return from a torn UCL in less time. Last year, Royals reliever Seth Maness became the first pitcher to return to the majors with an internal brace on his UCL, a surgical procedure from which he recovered in just nine months. Others have opted to treat moderate sprains and strains with platelet-rich plasma injections, which have been used to promote healing in other connective tissue injuries.

The results of PRP injections as a treatment for a UCL injury are mixed. In 2014, Masahiro Tanaka had a PRP injection, came back in two months, and has held up just fine since. Aaron Nola had a PRP injection in August 2016, came back the following April, and has been one of the best pitchers in baseball since his return. But according to the Tommy John database compiled by *Hardball Times* writer John Roegele, about half of the UCL cases treated with PRP — a list that includes a few position players — ended in Tommy John surgery anyway. Some pitchers cut a year or more off their return time, while others turned one lost season into two by delaying the start of the recovery process.

Sometimes, a PRP treatment is augmented by an injection of stem cells. Roegele's database includes just six such cases out of more than 30 total PRP treatments, but four of those six patients, including Ohtani, were Angels pitchers; in fact, every single Angels pitcher who's had his UCL injury treated with PRP has also gotten a stem cell injection.

Assuming Ohtani goes under the knife, five of those pitchers — Ohtani, Andrew Heaney, Garrett Richards, J.C. Ramírez, and Rubby De La Rosa — will have ended up getting Tommy John surgery anyway. The sixth, former Padres minor leaguer Yimmi Brasoban, had a PRP and stem cell injection after the 2016 season, returned in June 2017, and after 22 appearances and a 4.71 ERA in Double-A last season, is out of organized baseball. He's currently pitching for Napa of the independent Pacific Association.

Richards received a stem cell injection in May 2016 but didn't pitch in the big leagues that year. When he returned at the start of 2017, after an 11-month layoff, he lasted less than five innings before leaving the game with nerve irritation in his biceps and wasn't heard from again until September.

All told, Richards made one start in the 15 months after his stem cell injection and just six within the standard 18-month recovery window. Richards threw 104 innings in 24 big league starts before he got his elbow ligament replaced this July. And he's the lucky one — neither De La Rosa nor Ramírez made it 10 big league innings before his UCL gave out, and Heaney didn't make it back at all. He had Tommy John surgery just two months after his stem cell injection without ever returning to action. Tommy John surgery requires a longer recovery time than PRP injections and sometimes requires revisions, but the replacement UCL usually lasts the better part of a decade before it gives out.

The scarcity of not only these cases but the information about them makes it difficult to draw conclusions. Because teams are cagey about players' medical information, which in any other industry would be entirely confidential, it's hard to know the true extent of any of Ohtani's three elbow injuries. Or, for that matter, what Angels GM Billy Eppler meant when he said Ohtani's MRIs came back "clean" during the rehab process. It's also tough to draw medical inferences of any kind about Richards, who has a Job-like medical history: In addition to elbow and bicep injuries, Richards suffered a season-ending patellar tendon tear in 2014.

However this is what we do know: The Angels are essentially the only team that's used stem cell therapy to treat UCL injuries, and through four cases, it hasn't worked. Luckily for the Angels, and for Ohtani, they lost nothing by pursuing their particular approach to UCL injury treatment. If Ohtani had undergone Tommy John surgery in June, he still probably wouldn't have been ready to pitch in 2019, and even now, he ought to return to the mound by opening day 2020 and to the batter's box well before that.

The worst case scenario wasn't Ohtani's elbow ligament failing after 49 pitches, it was that Ohtani's elbow ligament would last another four or five starts to close the 2018 season, then fail in the spring of 2019, as Ramírez's did, costing him the bulk of two seasons on the mound rather than one. Ohtani's likely surgery isn't catastrophic — rather, it represents the narrow avoidance of catastrophe.

FROM VICE SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani and the Cruelty of Baseball

In only two months of Shohei Ohtani, two-way player, baseball fans got to experience a generational talent in action, but that's been put on hold for now.

By Rachael McDaniel

On Sunday afternoon, Shohei Ohtani pitched himself into the annals of baseball history. He became the only major leaguer since Babe Ruth to record **15 home runs and 50 innings** pitched in a season. It was Ohtani's first start since June, when he was first sidelined with a Grade II UCL sprain; the history-making nature of his return should have punctuated an already great day for baseball, the full-strength reinstatement of one of its must-watch players. The mood was, instead, one of vaguely sickening anticipation, an anxiety that mounted with each pitch, each location and velocity reading. Every small movement Ohtani made on the mound was scrutinized with the exacting eye you can only have when looking for a reason to be concerned.

Ohtani's UCL issues were already a known concern prior to his signing with the Angels—he received a platelet-rich plasma injection in December for a Grade I UCL strain. When the issues resurfaced with greater severity after his start on June 6, Ohtani again received PRP treatment, and the general assumption was that Ohtani would need Tommy John, with the Angels taking the most cautious approach possible when it came to the health and protection of one of baseball's most valuable players. **A report surfaced** that seemed to confirm surgery in Ohtani's imminent future, even as the Angels maintained that they were "**very optimistic**" about his recovery. Eulogies for Ohtani's incredible season of two-way mastery cut far too short were prepared. There was every expectation of not seeing him, or at the very least not seeing him on the mound, until 2020.

When Ohtani was re-evaluated a few weeks after he received the second PRP injection, though, the Angels' medical staff concluded that he would not need surgery after all—that the treatment was progressing well, and that he wouldn't even need to miss the rest of this season, let alone the next. He was cleared to start working toward hitting again; on the pitching side, he would be continually re-evaluated. On July 3rd, less than a month after the initial diagnosis of his elbow injury, Ohtani was cleared to return to the Angels' lineup.

And here he was, on Sunday, September 2nd, pitching again, and pitching far sooner than most had expected. Ohtani's first pitch to George Springer came in at 96.9 mph—a fastball outside for ball one. His second, another fastball at 95.7, was poked into right field for a base hit. Ohtani got out of the inning without allowing a run to score. But the second inning was more concerning. His average fastball velocity fell from 97.4 mph in the first to 95.5 in the second. In the third, it fell all the way to 91.4 mph; he recorded one out, gave up a two-run homer to Springer, and was pulled from the game. Both the Angels and Ohtani insisted that his elbow was fine.

Three days later, another MRI revealed further damage to Ohtani's UCL. The doctors now recommended surgery. The dream of having a full-time two-way star in baseball has been put on hold.

The Angels had a difficult path to tread when it came to handling Ohtani's injury. At the time the UCL sprain was diagnosed, while on a downward trajectory, they were still far from out of it—only four games out of the division lead, three games out of the second Wild Card. A competitive stretch run wasn't yet out of the question, and if there was any chance of having Ohtani available to contribute on both sides of the plate for that possible meaningful stretch, they would certainly want to take it. There was also the fact that Ohtani, as this century's first real two-way player, presented a unique set of concerns when it came to his rehab. Should they try to have him back in the lineup as soon as possible, making sure he continued to progress as a hitter? Would doing so jeopardize his recovery on the pitching side? It was a situation that no team has had to deal with before.

According to Angels GM Billy Eppler, there was no sign of further damage to Ohtani's elbow throughout his months of recovery until Wednesday's MRI, and no doctor had recommended Tommy John before then. The decision to have him pitch in a meaningless game now, as opposed to waiting for spring, makes sense: If the ligament had given out next March, Ohtani's recovery would have been delayed into 2021. But Ohtani is now the latest in an unfortunate pattern of Angels pitching injuries. Per **Jon Roegele's Tommy John Surgery database**, three Angels pitchers other than Ohtani have received PRP injections for UCL injuries over the past three years. All three eventually required surgery on the damaged ligaments. The Angels currently have four major-league pitchers on the DL recovering from Tommy John.

Tommy John surgeries have become more frequent across baseball, but the frequency with which Angels pitchers have been afflicted in recent seasons is exceptional, to the point where neither chronic mismanagement nor extremely bad luck seem like they could fully account for the phenomenon. The pitchers the Angels have had go down have been both young and old, developed in their system and acquired from elsewhere. Ohtani's UCL issues didn't start during his time with the Angels, but it's with them that they've reached their breaking point. And with Ohtani sidelined at least as a pitcher, their chances of a competitive 2019 season have taken another hit, and with them their chances of keeping Mike Trout beyond 2020. A season that began with so much promise has ended about as sadly as it possibly could for the Angels. Baseball can be a cruel sport to love.

Ohtani hasn't yet decided whether he'll go ahead with surgery. If he does, it remains to be seen how he and the Angels will handle his recovery next season and beyond. But mere hours after receiving the news that his elbow had been damaged further, he was in the lineup at DH. He went 4-for-4 with two homers, which is certainly something no other major league pitcher can say they did on the day they found out they needed Tommy John. That he was still out there doing things never seen before, even on a day of crisis, was wonderful to behold. It also made the prospect of losing him for a full year all the more tragic. In only two months of Shohei Ohtani, two-way player, baseball fans got to experience a

dazzling, generational talent in action, the thrill of a crazy experiment gone impossibly right. Now, something has gone wrong. We can only wait, and worry.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Angels' Shohei Ohtani MRI Reveals New UCL Injury; Tommy John Surgery Recommended

By Scott Polacek

The Los Angeles Angels announced Wednesday that an MRI on two-way star Shohei Ohtani's right (throwing) elbow showed new damage to his ulnar collateral ligament. The announcement noted "UCL reconstruction surgery is the recommended plan."

Ohtani suffered a sprained UCL in his right elbow in early June, which caused him to miss nearly a full month of action and raised questions about potential Tommy John surgery at the time.

When healthy, the 24-year-old has been a revelation for the Angels this season. He has slashed .276/.355/.547 with 16 home runs and 44 RBI as a hitter and a 3.31 ERA and 63 strikeouts in 51.2 innings as a pitcher.

Despite this development, Patrick O'Neal of Fox Sports West noted he Ohtani is in Wednesday's lineup against the Texas Rangers. O'Neal pointed out "It's undetermined when or even if he will have elbow reconstructive surgery."

Angels GM Billy Eppler said Ohtani hasn't decided if he wants to have the surgery and added that it's too early to tell if Ohtani will be able to return as a hitter in 2019, per Jon Morosi of MLB Network.

He immediately became one of MLB's most exciting players because of his two-way abilities, and he gave the Angels a formidable pitcher and hitter who provided power and consistency. It's difficult not to be concerned about his long-term health after this latest setback, though.

Though the Angels would assuredly like to end the 2018 season on a high note, it's more important for Ohtani to be fully healthy by the time he enters his prime. Expect the team to exercise caution at least in terms of when he pitches so the rare two-way talent can capitalize on his potential over the course of his major league career.

FROM USA TODAY

Shohei Ohtani's Tommy John recommendation stinks for Los Angeles Angels, baseball fans

By Bob Nightengale

It stinks for Shohei Ohtani.

It stinks for the Los Angeles Angels.

And it sure stinks for the rest of us, every fan of Major League Baseball, too.

Shohei Ohtani, the Angels rookie who stole our hearts, captivating baseball with his arm and bat in a fashion no one has seen since the days of Babe Ruth, was informed Wednesday that he needs Tommy John surgery.

The next time we'll see him on the mound is spring training, 2020.

We were braced for this day, ever since he was shut down in June with a sprained elbow, but our hopes were buoyed when he returned to the mound last week.

But reality slapped us in the face when the latest MRI result revealed that the platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections did not improve the grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament.

The Angels announced that Ohtani has been advised to undergo Tommy John surgery, taking him off the mound, and perhaps away from the plate, too, to avoid further complications.

The public's instant reaction was to ridicule the Angels for even permitting him to pitch again this season, considering the Angels weren't going anywhere in the AL West. Yet, let's take a step back and breathe. The Angels absolutely made the right decision.

You see, if they had waited until spring training to see Ohtani pitch again, and he needed Tommy John surgery, he wouldn't have returned until late in the 2020 season, if not 2021. Now, at least the Angels know the outcome, can rest him for 14 to 16 months, and have him back in the rotation in 2020.

Ohtani still was in the lineup Wednesday against the Texas Rangers — he hit two home runs, one in the fifth inning and one in the eighth — and can remain a DH until he undergoes surgery, but why delay the inevitable? It's possible, of course, that Ohtani can even decline surgery, and stay in the Angels' lineup, but unless he starts hitting 50 homers a year, it makes no sense to turn baseball's greatest two-way talent since Ruth into a DH.

The man can certainly hit — batting .276 with 18 homers in 82 games — but his greatest talent is on the mound, where he can be one of the top five pitchers in the game, if not a multiple Cy Young winner.

This is no one's fault. There's no one to blame. The Angels and everyone else in baseball knew that he had a Grade 1 sprain last year when they signed him out of Japan. Now, he can undergo surgery and again be electrifying on the mound again, where he showed glimpses of his talent going 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA, striking out 63 batters in 52 innings.

You know he's heartbroken today. So are we. He mesmerized us when he stepped on the mound, or even when he walked to the plate.

He's everything that's right about the sport, a 23-year-old kid who wanted to be a major-league ballplayer so badly, he forfeited at least \$200 million simply by pursuing his dreams two years early. He instead earned the minimum salary of \$545,000 this year instead of waiting until he turned 25 when there would be no international spending limits.

Hopefully, he'll get his money one day. Hopefully, we'll get to see him pitch and hit again. And hopefully, these 18 months will fly by.

Ohtani certainly whet our appetite, but by 2020 we'll be more than ready for the main course.

FROM UPROXX SPORTS

The Rocket City Trash Pandas Are Coming To Minor League Baseball In 2020

By Robby Kalland

The Mobile Baybears, the Double-A affiliate of the Los Angeles Angels, are moving north to Madison, Alabama, just outside of Huntsville in 2020.

With the move, they are also getting a new name and left the decision up to the fans, who did not disappoint. The Baybears will now be known as the Rocket City Trash Pandas, which is immediately the best team name in all of sports.

For the uninitiated, trash panda is slang for raccoon, and, well, north Alabama has lots of raccoons. Rocket City is in honor of Huntsville being the home of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. When combined, it's pretty spectacular.

BallCorps, which owns the team, made the announcement on Wednesday night and says Trash Pandas beat out ThunderSharks, Moon Possums, Space Chips, and Comet Jockeys — Moon Possums might be better than Trash Pandas in all honesty — in the fan voting, winning handily with over 44 percent of the vote.

The official logo for the Trash Pandas won't be unveiled until October 27, but we have high hopes for their look. I'm hoping for a raccoon wearing an astronaut's helmet, but they can go a number of directions. Whatever they choose, you can bet their merchandise will be a hot commodity among fans in town and those that just generally love weird MiLB gear.