



Press Clips

(September 11, 2018)

CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **Jaime Barría, Taylor Cole, provide opposite glimpses of the future in Angels' loss**
- **Angels want Shohei Ohtani to play rest of 2018 as DH, despite his uncertain future**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 6)

- **Albert Pujols to have surgery on right elbow; Angels lose 5-2 to Rangers**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 8)

- **Should Ohtani pitch, hit or both in 2020?**
- **Pujols confident he'll be able to play 1st in '19**
- **Ohtani remains hot, but Angels drop opener**
- **Ohtani, Harper snag Player of Week honors**

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (PAGE 16)

- **Guzman, Gallo, Minor lead Rangers past Angels to stop skid**

FROM MLB.COM (PAGE 18)

- **Betts, Carpenter leading latest MVP poll**
- **Remembering 9/11: A look back at impact tragedy had on baseball**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 23)

- **Farm Fresh: The 2018 Minor League Awards***
- **Albert Pujols remains adamant about his ability to play first base, even as his body indicates otherwise**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 27)

- **How the Angels can convince Mike Trout to stay**
- **Albert Pujols aiming to play 'as many games at first base next year as I can'**

FROM BLEACHER REPORT (PAGE 31)

- **Albert Pujols to Undergo Surgery to Repair Elbow Injury**
- **Predicting Each MLB Team's Biggest Controversy of the Offseason***

FROM USA TODAY (PAGE 34)

- **Mike Trout Monday: We've looked away again, but Mike Trout remains unbelievable**

FROM THE JAPAN TIMES (PAGE 35)

- **AL Player of the Week Ohtani continues hit streak**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Jaime Barría, Taylor Cole, provide opposite glimpses of the future in Angels' loss**

By J.P. Hoornstra

ANAHEIM — The Angels are all but mathematically eliminated from the postseason with three weeks to play on the calendar. They must fight for attention, and the empty seats among the announced crowd of 32,891 at Angel Stadium on Monday showed that it won't always be easy.

In the moment, there wasn't much at stake in a 5-2 loss to the Texas Rangers. Angels starter Jaime Barría suffered a rare hiccup in a shortened start before Taylor Cole was masterful out of the bullpen. The Angels created many chances to score but left 10 runners on base.

The final score mattered little. The Angels fell to 71-73, 19 games behind the Houston Astros with 18 games to play.

For Barría and Cole, two pitchers auditioning for roles on the 2019 staff, it was an important game.

Barría allowed four runs over three innings, then was removed after a laborious 60-pitch effort. It was the second-shortest start he's made in 23 games to begin his career.

"He's had some tough starts," Manager Mike Scioscia said of Barría. "Like the first couple innings in New York, he gave up four runs early, then came back and kept us in the game. We've seen that happen, but not the way it happened tonight. It's uncharacteristic for him to be behind in so many counts and walk so many guys. ... It was just a tough start for him."

Facing the same team multiple times is no easy task for a pitcher, let alone a rookie. For Barría (10-9), Monday was his second game against the Texas Rangers in the last five days, and his fifth start against them this year.

The Rangers strike out more frequently than all but one American League club. Against Barría, they seemed unfazed by a two-strike count. More often, they ended each plate appearance with strikes to spare. In three innings Barría walked four batters, struck out two, and allowed three hits – including a home run and a double.

The Rangers had only scored two runs in their first four games against Barría. They doubled that total in the second inning Monday.

A scoreless first inning extended Barría's streak of scoreless innings to 12 – a career high – before his command abandoned him completely. In the second inning, Joey Gallo pounced on a 2-and-2 slider for a double. Adrian Beltre and Jurickson Profar, who walked on nine pitches to begin the inning, scored on the hit and Texas took a 2-0 lead.

Robinson Chirinos hit a fly ball for the first out before the next hitter, Ronald Guzman, sent a 1-and-0 changeup 420 feet to center field for a home run. The Angels trailed 4-0 in the span of five batters.

It was already clear that Barría had lost his command. For good measure, he walked the next batter, Hanser Alberto, on four pitches. That earned a visit from pitching coach Charles Nagy. Barría escaped the inning without allowing another run and pitched a 1-2-3 third, but was replaced by Taylor Cole to begin the fourth inning.

“Three innings, 60 pitches is a lot,” Scioscia said. “Not only that but when you’re out of sync you’re going to be grinding. He just didn’t need to throw anymore tonight.”

Barría’s second-inning hiccup dampened some of the enthusiasm following an outstanding trip for the Angels’ starting rotation. The staff recorded a 1.92 earned-run average over 10 games against the Astros, Rangers and White Sox.

Cole steadied the ship with four perfect innings. The rookie right-hander struck out three of the 12 batters he faced.

“Honestly, I try not to look too far ahead or anything like that,” Cole said. “I just want to put us in a good situation. Whenever my name’s called I go out there and do my best, and let everything fall in its place the way it should.”

The Angels lost Shohei Ohtani’s pitching talents for the remainder of the season, forcing Scioscia to patch together nine innings with a “bullpen game” Tuesday. Barría picked a bad time for an abbreviated start. Cole picked a great time for the longest outing of his career.

Meanwhile, the Angels chipped away at their deficit.

Ohtani led off the fourth inning with a line drive to right-center field against Rangers starter Mike Minor (12-7). Center fielder Delino DeShields Jr. had to slide to cut the ball off in the gap, holding Ohtani to a double.

With one out, Ohtani stole third base after the Angels successfully challenged the original out call by umpire Nic Lentz. Jose Fernandez lined a single into center field, scoring Ohtani with the Angels’ first run. Taylor Ward and Kole Calhoun both walked in the inning, but the Angels left the bases loaded.

A two-out rally in the seventh inning led to the Angels’ second run. Mike Trout reached on an infield single. Guzman couldn’t handle Elvis Andrus’ one-hop throw to first base on a Justin Upton ground ball, and Trout went to third base on the E-5. That brought Ohtani to the plate, and Rangers manager Jeff Banister summoned left-handed reliever Alex Claudio from the bullpen.

Ohtani delivered for the second time against a southpaw, shooting a line-drive single into center field to drive in Trout. The Angels trailed 4-2.

Texas got the run back in the eighth inning against Angels pitcher Williams Jerez. Andrus singled with one out and went to third base on a two-out single by Jurickson Profar. Gallo came through again, this time with a single to right field to drive in Andrus.

In the ninth inning, David Fletcher drew a one-out walk against Jose Leclerc, but Trout grounded out and Upton struck out, stranding the tying run on deck. The Angels’ winning streak ended at four games.

Jim Johnson will start Tuesday's game. It will be his second start in a career that consists of 668 games, and his first since his major league debut on July 29, 2006.

Angels want Shohei Ohtani to play rest of 2018 as DH, despite his uncertain future

By J.P. Hoonstra

ANAHEIM — Shohei Ohtani was healthy enough to appear in five games last week as the Angels' designated hitter. He went 9 for 19 with four home runs and 10 RBIs. Monday, he was named the American League Player of the Week.

For all the attention and analysis his skills have commanded on a baseball field, his decision-making has been scrutinized even more since he first declared his intention to leave Japan.

Ohtani still had not made a decision about whether he will undergo surgery on his right elbow when Angels manager Mike Scioscia made a bold proclamation Monday afternoon: that he would try to play Ohtani at designated hitter for the remainder of the 2018 season.

"We hope so," Scioscia said.

Asked if that was important to him, Ohtani simply said he would try his best as long as his name is in the lineup.

"There's a lot of options laid out there for me," he said through his interpreter. "I plan to think about it. I haven't made any decisions. For now, I'm going to get ready to play tomorrow."

Ohtani said he would make a decision "sometime soon." Eighteen games remain in the Angels' season. Monday against the Texas Rangers, Ohtani went 2 for 4 with an RBI and a run.

An MRI on Ohtani's right elbow last Wednesday revealed new damage to his ulnar collateral ligament. Tommy John surgery was recommended. Ohtani met with General Manager Billy Eppler and the Angels' medical staff to formalize their course of action after batting practice Monday.

Historically, the ligament-replacement procedure carries a recovery period of up to 10 months for a non-pitcher. Since Ohtani is just 24 years old and hasn't played a position besides pitcher or designated hitter as an Angel, precedent isn't as helpful. It isn't clear whether delaying his surgery would delay the start of Ohtani's 2019 season as a hitter.

Ohtani would not be expected to return as a pitcher until some point in the 2020 season if he undergoes the surgery.

His ability to help the Angels this year is not in question. He's 4-2 with a 3.31 earned-run average in 10 starts as a pitcher. He ended the week with a .291 batting average, 19 home runs and 53 RBIs as a hitter.

“If he continues to do what he’s doing, you’re looking at the Rookie of the Year,” Scioscia said. “It’s very clear.”

Ohtani has appeared in 86 games this season as a hitter and 10 as a pitcher. If he plays every game the rest of the way, Ohtani will have appeared in 114 games in some capacity, despite losing nearly a month of the season to recover from an injection of PRP and stem cells.

PUJOLS PROCEDURE

Albert Pujols will have a procedure to remove bone spurs from his right elbow Wednesday. Pujols was placed on the 60-day disabled list after undergoing an arthroscopic debridement of his left knee on Aug. 30, ending his season, so Wednesday’s procedure is not expected to affect his estimated return date. Pujols expects to be ready for spring training next year.

The 38-year-old slugger played 70 games at first base in 2018 despite the nagging injuries.

“If anything, you’re worried about the impact (playing first base) had on his knee,” Scioscia said. “Whatever discomfort he had in his elbow, he was fine throwing the ball. It’s good to get it taken care of.”

ALSO

Tyler Skaggs is scheduled to throw his first simulated game Tuesday or Wednesday, Scioscia said. The left-hander re-injured his left adductor muscle in August and has been limited to throwing off a bullpen mound since then. ... The Angels are expected to recall right-hander Parker Bridwell for Tuesday’s bullpen game. Bridwell last pitched June 5 for Triple-A Salt Lake. He subsequently had arthroscopic surgery to remove loose bodies from his right elbow and received a stem-cell injection to aid his healing. ... Bridwell would become the 36th player on the Angels’ active roster. ... Nick Tropeano (right shoulder inflammation) is running out of time to return to the Angels in 2018, and Scioscia conceded that the right-hander “is not close to returning.” A surgical remedy has neither been recommended nor ruled out, Scioscia said.

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Jim Johnson, 5-3, 3.81 ERA) vs. Rangers (RHP Adrian Sampson, 0-0, 54.00 ERA), Tuesday, 7 p.m., Fox Sports West

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Albert Pujols to have surgery on right elbow; Angels lose 5-2 to Rangers

By Mike Digiovanna

Albert Pujols will undergo surgery Wednesday to remove a bone spur in his right (throwing) elbow, only two weeks after the Angels first baseman had season-ending arthroscopic surgery on his left knee.

The recovery time for both procedures is four to six weeks, which should give the 38-year-old slugger enough time to complete his normal offseason training regimen. Pujols also had an injection Friday for tendinitis in his left elbow.

"I'm not going to play the rest of the season, so I might as well take care of the little things for next year," Pujols said before the Angels' 5-2 loss to the Texas Rangers on Monday night in Angel Stadium. "With physical therapy and a good offseason, everything should be back in the right place."

Pujols, who has three years and \$87 million left on his contract, started 70 games at first base this season after being limited by foot injuries to a combined 34 starts in the field in 2016 and 2017. That allowed the Angels to use two-way star Shohei Ohtani at designated hitter on a regular basis this season.

Ohtani has emerged as an offensive force, batting .294 with a .970 on-base-plus-slugging percentage, 19 home runs and 54 runs batted in, and making a strong push for rookie-of-the-year honors.

Ohtani is expected to undergo elbow surgery that will limit him to hitting in 2019, so Pujols, who hit .245 with a .700 OPS, 19 home runs and 64 RBIs, will need to play first base to maximize his at-bats.

Pujols' knee began bothering him in late May. He received a platelet-rich plasma injection and went on the disabled list for 11 days in mid-July. He had the cleanout procedure Aug. 29.

"I thought going to the DL would calm it down, and it did," Pujols said. "But it started flaring up again, and it was time to shut it down."

Ohtani met with general manager Billy Eppler and the team's medical staff after batting practice Monday to discuss the timing of his anticipated elbow reconstruction surgery. Ohtani could return as a hitter within six months but would have to have the surgery by the end of September to be ready for 2019.

"There's a lot of options laid out for me, so I'm going to think about it," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I haven't made any decisions, but I should sometime soon."

Short start

Angels right-hander Jamie Barria, who was 6-1 with a 2.43 earned-run average in his previous eight starts and 3-0 with an 0.86 ERA in four starts against Texas this season, lasted only three innings Monday night.

After breezing through a one-two-three first inning, the rookie gave up four runs and three hits, including Joey Gallo's two-run double and Ronald Guzman's two-run home run, and walked three batters in the second inning.

Barria was replaced by right-hander Taylor Cole, who threw four perfect innings with three strikeouts. Left-hander Mike Minor (12-7) limited the Angels to one run and six hits in six innings.

Ohtani doubled and scored on Jose Fernandez's single in the fourth inning, and lined a two-out run-scoring single to left-center field against left-hander Alex Claudio in the seventh.

Angels center fielder Mike Trout robbed Adrian Beltre of two hits, racing to the warning track and making a lunging catch of a third-inning drive, and racing in to make a diving catch of an eighth-inning flare.

No long goodbyes

Mike Scioscia, who is expected to step down as manager at the end of this season, has made it clear the focus should remain on the team and not on him.

To underscore that point, Scioscia, in his 19th season, is not expected to make an announcement about his future until after the season, according to a person familiar with his thinking but not authorized to speak publicly about it.

That means there will be no public farewells this month. The Angels close the season with six home games against Texas (Sept. 24-26) and Oakland (Sept. 28-30).

Asked Monday whether he has met with owner Arte Moreno and Eppler to discuss his future, Scioscia said "nothing has changed since last October, but at some point, sure, we will."

Short hops

Ohtani was selected AL player of the week after hitting .474 (nine for 19) with four home runs, 10 RBIs and eight runs in five games. ... Tyler Skaggs (groin strain) is scheduled to throw a simulated game this week and is on course to pitch again this season, but right-hander Nick Tropeano (shoulder inflammation) is not expected to return.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Should Ohtani pitch, hit or both in 2020?

Angels star unlikely to pitch in '19 after Tommy John surgery

By Mike Petriello

On Wednesday, the Angels announced that **Shohei Ohtani's** injured right elbow would likely require **Tommy John surgery**, knocking him off the mound for the remainder of this year and all of 2019. For most players, that would be the end of it. They'd exit the public eye to spend a year-plus rehabbing, and you wouldn't think much about them until they were nearing a return. We're not talking much about **Garrett Richards** or **Johnny Cueto** right now, are we?

But Ohtani, needless to say, is not "most players." Hours after the elbow news surfaced, he went out and **hit two homers as part of a four-hit night** in a 9-3 win over Texas. He hit another on Friday in Chicago, and tripled, singled and walked on Saturday. In six September games, he's got 11 hits. He's

proven without a doubt that he can be a high-quality Major League hitter, and due to that, we'll still see him taking swings for the rest of the year and next season, as well.

He's been so good as a hitter, in fact, that there's at least now a question about what is the best way to utilizing him going forward. Should he hit full-time? Should he stay on the mound, but with his pitching managed differently than it was this year? Let's run through a few of the options -- but first, let's remind you just how good he's been this year.

Ohtani has exceeded any reasonable expectations

Remember when people were **worried if Ohtani could hit** in the big leagues?

Ohtani's line right now is .294/.375/.595, with 19 home runs. While his 297 plate appearances aren't enough to qualify for leaderboards, if they were, **that would be the fifth-best line in the game**, behind four Most Valuable Player candidates. His slugging percentage would be **fourth best**, in part because he has a **Top 10 exit velocity** on fly balls and liners, tied with Aaron Judge. His hitting season, if he'd had enough playing time to qualify, would be the **second-best** year by a rookie Angels batter behind only **Mike Trout's** 2012; it would be **one of the six best** rookie hitting years in the past 50 seasons. Remember: This is all only as a hitter.

On the pitching side, his strikeout rate (29.9 percent) is the same as what **Blake Snell** has put up. If you look at the advanced **Statcast™ quality-of-contact metrics**, Ohtani has basically been **James Paxton** as a **pitcher** combined Anthony Rizzo or Francisco Lindor as a **hitter**. He's been absolutely incredible, aside from health.

If we look at FanGraphs' **Wins Above Replacement**, Ohtani has been worth 2.7 WAR as a hitter and 1.0 more as a pitcher. If he'd stayed healthy the entire year, and maintained this performance level, he might have put up about 6 WAR, or about what All-Stars like **Matt Chapman** and **Manny Machado** have compiled to this point.

That's very, very good. It might also be about the limit to what he can do as a hybrid player. Remember, when he was starting regularly, he required days off before and after his pitching appearances. In May, for example, the Angels played 29 games. Here's how his month broke down:

SP: 4 times
DH: 15 times
PH: 2 times
Did not play: 8 times

Ohtani started four of them on the mound, was the DH 15 times, and pinch-hit twice more. In other words, he missed eight games entirely, didn't bat in four others and took just a single at-bat twice. So in 45 percent of the games the Angels played in May, he wasn't a full-time hitter. For someone who's hitting like a superstar slugger, that's a lot of time to not be hitting.

Plus, because **he often received extra rest between starts**, he wasn't a full-time pitcher, either. Ohtani threw 25 innings in May -- good ones, with a 2.16 ERA -- but **111 pitchers threw more innings** that month.

So, that's where we're starting. Ohtani, even when healthy, was neither a full-time pitcher nor a full-time hitter in 2018, and might have been on a 6 WAR pace. We know he won't be pitching in 2019. What should or could he be in 2020?

He could be a DH in 2019 and return to the rotation in 2020

This is more or less what he did this year, and so it seems like that's what will probably happen again when he's ready to return to the mound in 2020. He'll DH a few times a week and start once a week. It's not all that interesting to ponder how this might look, because we already know what it looks like.

For 2019, however, it's an intriguing question, because his inability to pitch means that he should be available to DH *more*. (No, he won't play the field, not with the need to protect that recovering throwing arm.) We were probably looking at about 400 plate appearances this year, around his pitching, if he'd been healthy. Without the days off around his starts in 2019 -- and assuming he's ready for Opening Day -- we might be seeing north of 600 plate appearances. That's a huge difference.

That's both a benefit to the Angels and a problem: How do they find DH time for both Ohtani and the soon-to-be 39-year-old **Albert Pujols**, once one of the greatest hitters in the game, but who has hit only .243/.287/.397 over the last two years? Pujols just had his season end early **due to knee surgery**, and his ability to play first base in 2019 is very much in question. Any playing time given to Pujols over Ohtani is a big net negative for the Angels' offense.

He could give up pitching and focus on hitting: DH version

This seems unlikely, because he was so good as a pitcher, and because he chose to sign with the Angels in part because they agreed to allow him to be a two-way player. But let's play this out for a minute, anyway, because it's worth asking the question. Across 2017, '18 and '19, Ohtani is going to have thrown all of 77 innings. Durability is a concern. Can the 2020 Angels count on a large number of innings? If not, should he just hit every day? Put another way: Would you rather have the extra 200 or so plate appearances, or the unknown number of innings he'd contribute?

Let's assume that Ohtani was an everyday designated hitter, and that his 2018 batting performance is his true talent level. (That's perhaps not true, but it's what we have to go on right now.) If we look back on the 21st century, finding **other designated hitters with similar batting lines to Ohtani's**, we get an average of about 5 WAR, looking at years like 2000 Frank Thomas, 2005 Travis Hafner, 2005 Jason Giambi, 2014 Victor Martinez, and 2016 David Ortiz.

That's one Hall of Famer and another who belongs there, which is why it's risky to assume Ohtani could hit that well for a full season. But if he did: 6 WAR seems to be near the limit of the value he could provide this way, unless he upped his hitting even more.

He could give up pitching and focus on hitting: OF version

What if he played the outfield in 2020? He's got the arm for it, obviously. He's got the speed; **he's the third-fastest Angel this year**. He's got experience, having played 62 games there in Japan, though admittedly none since '14. The Angels wouldn't have to pick up **Kole Calhoun's** 2020 option, opening up right field.

Depending on his defensive skill, **the range there** with the current version of his bat would be roughly between 5 and 7 WAR, or within the margin of error of roughly what he was going to offer this year anyway. (You'd have to be elite on the bases and in the field, like Trout in 2012, or a disaster at both, like Manny Ramirez in 2006, to over- or under-perform this significantly.) It seems unlikely this would happen, but it should remain as an option.

He could be a DH in 2019, and be an DH/OF/'opener' in '20

OK, let's get weird. There's more than one way to be a pitcher in 2018, as the Rays have proven very well by utilizing the "opener" (along with Snell) to have **one of the year's better pitching staffs**.

What if instead of Ohtani throwing seven innings once a week as a starter, he started two times per week and threw two or three innings apiece? There's so much uncertainty with this; would it be better for his arm (fewer long outings) or worse (more outings)? Might it improve the fortunes of his teammates? For example, if **Nick Tropeano** or **Jaime Barria** entered to face the bottom of a lineup rather than the top, would that benefit them? If he started as an opener, would they maneuver to keep his bat in the lineup afterwards? Could this be handled to allow him to face mostly righty pitching? (Some have suggested he DH and pitch out the bullpen, but the in-game preparation required of relievers might make this more difficult, so we're going with the opener plan instead.)

This would require a great deal of strategy, in terms of when he played, and where, but it might also allow for more plate appearances, if the shorter outings meant he did not require full days off before and after his starts, as he does now. Think of this version of Ohtani as one that is less a "hybrid hitter/pitcher," and more of one that's "a hitter who pitches sometimes," splitting hairs though that might be.

Now: WAR doesn't capture the value of having one roster spot being available for multiple uses. No metric can really account for everything Ohtani can bring, because there really hasn't been a player like Ohtani. We know he's going to hit in 2019, and that he's not going to pitch. Depending on how well he mashes next season, we might have an entirely different take on this question headed into 2020.

Pujols confident he'll be able to play 1st in '19

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- The Machine is in the shop.

Albert Pujols, who underwent season-ending surgery on his left knee less than two weeks ago, is scheduled to undergo a second procedure on Wednesday to remove a bone spur from his left elbow. The 38-year-old slugger also received an injection on Friday to help relieve tendinitis in his right elbow.

While several weeks of physical therapy loom for Pujols, he said he's hoping to be cleared to begin his normal offseason regimen by late November. The desire for a mostly unrestricted winter led Pujols to have the knee surgery on Aug. 29 rather than wait until the end of the season to address the issue.

"I could have easily played the rest of the season, but I felt that it was just getting a little bit worse and worse, and we had to take care of it," Pujols said Monday. "It wasn't too much the pain, it was just uncomfortable. There were several times when I had to get it drained. It was just time to shut it down, and we made that decision. You have to look at the long run. I have to be able to get myself ready for next year. On top of that, I have to take care of my elbow and little things that were bothering me, too."

Pujols has been hampered by lower-body injuries since signing a 10-year, \$240 million contract with the Angels in December 2011. He underwent right knee surgery after the 2012 season and missed the final two months of the 2013 campaign after tearing the plantar fascia in his left foot. Pujols also required surgeries on his right foot after the 2015 and '16 seasons.

He finally enjoyed a rehab-less offseason last year, allowing him to focus on his conditioning and prepare to play more first base to free up at-bats for **Shohei Ohtani** at designated hitter. While Pujols managed to make 70 starts at first base in 2018 -- more than his previous two seasons combined -- he also had to manage discomfort in his knee throughout the season and received a platelet-rich plasma injection after landing on the disabled list in July with left knee inflammation.

"He played first base a lot this year," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think he played well at first base. I think, if anything, you're worried about the impact it had on his knee playing first base."

Despite the physical toll that the heavier workload at first base might have taken on his body, Pujols said his goal is to try to play as many games there as he can next year. The Angels will need him to, as Ohtani is expected to undergo Tommy John surgery and will likely be limited to hitting in 2019. Unless Ohtani learns a defensive position, Pujols will have to play first base for both of their bats to be in the Angels' lineup on a regular basis.

"Nobody expected me to play 70-plus games this year, and I did it," Pujols said. "I could have played more. If I'm healthy, I expect myself to play 162 games. That's who I am. I want to be on the field. I love to be on the field. I think I'm a Gold Glove first baseman. I showed that I can still do it out there, and I love that.

"Whether we got Shohei this year or not, every year I get myself ready to play first base because that's my position."

Pujols, who is owed \$87 million over the final three years of his contract, finished the 2018 season batting .245 with a .700 OPS, 19 home runs and 64 RBIs in 117 games for the Angels.

Worth noting

- **Tyler Skaggs** (left adductor strain) is inching closer to returning to the Angels' rotation. He is scheduled to throw a simulated game in Arizona in the next couple of days and is "feeling much better," according to Scioscia. **Nick Tropeano's** rehab from right shoulder inflammation, meanwhile, has stalled.

"Right now, he's not close to returning," Scioscia said.

- The Angels are expecting to call up right-hander **Parker Bridwell** from Triple-A Salt Lake. Bridwell went 10-3 with a 3.64 ERA for the club last season, but he was limited to only seven starts between the

Majors and the Minors in 2018 due to injury. The 27-year-old underwent arthroscopic surgery to remove loose bodies from his right elbow and received a stem-cell injection earlier this season.

Ohtani remains hot, but Angels drop opener

Barria's scoreless stretch comes to end in loss to Rangers

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- **Jaime Barria's** run of success against the Rangers came to an abrupt end Monday night.

The 22-year-old rookie gave up four runs over three innings to match his second-shortest outing of the season in the Angels' 5-2 loss to the Rangers in their series opener at Angel Stadium. The defeat mathematically eliminated the Angels (71-73) from the American League West race with 18 games left in the season.

Barria, who went 3-0 with a 0.86 ERA in four previous starts against Texas this season, needed only 10 pitches to breeze through a 1-2-3 first inning, but he was forced to labor in the second. **Adrian Beltre** and **Jurickson Profar** led off the inning with back-to-back walks, and Barria then misplaced a 2-2 slider to **Joey Gallo**, who lined it into the right-field corner for a two-run double.

After coaxing a flyout from **Robinson Chirinos**, Barria surrendered a two-run home run to **Ronald Guzman** that put the Angels in a 4-0 hole. The Rangers continued to threaten after **Hanser Albert** walked and **Shin-Soo Choo** singled to put runners on first and second with two outs, but Barria avoided further damage by inducing a groundout from **Elvis Andrus** to end the 32-pitch inning.

"Jaime was just out of sync," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "He made some good pitches in the first inning. Uncharacteristic walks showed up for him. This guy usually makes pitches. He was a little out of sync and was really grinding."

Barria, who came into Monday's outing having thrown 11 consecutive scoreless innings, navigated through a scoreless third before he was removed with his pitch count at 60. He allowed three hits while walking four and striking out two. Right-hander **Taylor Cole** replaced Barria in the fourth and proceeded to retire all 12 batters he faced, but the Rangers added an insurance run in the eighth on Gallo's RBI single off left-hander **Williams Jerez**.

"Any time Taylor comes in, it seems like he's aggressive in the zone," Scioscia said. "Four innings, very pitch-efficient. He threw a lot of strikes, got some soft contact. He did a great job tonight to keep us in it."

Jose Fernandez and **Shohei Ohtani** delivered RBI singles to supply both of the Angels' runs. Ohtani, who earned **American League Player of the Week honors** on Monday, is now batting .448 (13-for-29) with four home runs and 11 RBIs over his career-high eight-game hitting streak. Even more encouraging was the fact that both of Ohtani's hits Monday came against left-handed pitchers, who have held him to a .220 batting average (17-for-77) this season.

"Regardless of the results, whether it's a hit or an out, I do feel comfortable the more times I step up to the plate against lefties," Ohtani said through interpreter Ipei Mizuhara.

Ohtani led off the fourth with a double, stole third and scored on Fernandez's single to center field to put the Angels on the board. **Kole Calhoun** later drew a walk to load the bases with two outs against Rangers left-hander **Mike Minor**, but **David Fletcher** flied out to end the inning.

In the seventh, the Angels put runners on the corners with two outs after **Mike Trout** singled and **Justin Upton** reached on a throwing error by Profar. Rangers manager Jeff Banister summoned **Alex Claudio** to face Ohtani in a lefty-on-lefty matchup, but Ohtani responded by ripping a 109-mph single to the opposite field to drive in Trout and make it 4-2.

"I think Shohei just needs exposure to them," Scioscia said. "Hopefully, he'll get it now and start to square the ball up like he can. He looked very comfortable in there tonight."

SOUND SMART

Ohtani is the first player to log nine steals and 10 pitching appearances in a single season since George Sisler for the 1915 St. Louis Browns.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Beltre opened the third by sending a drive to deep center field, but Trout raced back toward the warning track and made an impressive running catch before slamming into the wall. His effort earned him a tip of the cap from Barria and a thumbs up from Calhoun. Trout robbed Beltre again in the eighth, making a sliding catch to snag a sinking liner in shallow center field.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

After reaching on a leadoff double in the fourth, Ohtani attempted to steal third, but was originally called out by third-base umpire Nic Lentz. The Angels challenged the call after replay showed that Ohtani's foot touched the bag ahead of Profar's tag, and the ruling was eventually overturned. Ohtani, who was credited with his ninth steal of the season, subsequently scored on Fernandez's RBI single.

"He did not get a great jump tonight, but you can see how fast he is," Scioscia said. "He made up for it."

UP NEXT

Veteran right-hander **Jim Johnson** (5-3, 3.81 ERA) will start a bullpen game for the Angels as they continue their three-game series with the Rangers at 7:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. Texas will counter with right-hander **Adrian Sampson** (0-0, 54.00). Johnson's only previous start in the Majors came in his MLB debut with the Orioles on July 29, 2006.

Ohtani, Harper snag Player of Week honors

By Deesha Thosar

A young phenom made so much noise this week that Japanese rookies were forced to listen. On the flip side, a seven-year Major League Baseball veteran put the critics to rest. The Angels' **Shohei Ohtani** and

the Nationals' **Bryce Harper** were recognized on Monday as the American League and National League Players of the Week, respectively, presented by W.B. Mason.

Ohtani received his second career **Player of the Week** honor -- and first since the week of April 8 -- after both setting a rookie record and receiving devastating news. Diagnosed with a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow on Wednesday, doctors recommended that Ohtani undergo Tommy John surgery. Ohtani had returned to the mound on Sept. 2 for the first time since being diagnosed with a Grade 2 sprain of that UCL in early June. The two-way Japanese sensation is yet to make a decision on the procedure, but Ohtani did elect to hold onto his bat for the remainder of the 2018 season.

The 24-year-old slugged a three-run homer to cap a four-run fifth inning and lift the Angels to a 5-2 win over the White Sox on Friday -- days after learning the extent of his injury. It was his fourth home run in three games since sustaining new damage to his UCL, which led to the recommendation for surgery. The three-run jack was his 19th homer of the year, which surpassed Kenji Johjima of the 2006 Mariners for a new Japanese rookie home run record.

"It's well deserved," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think that if he continues to do what he's doing, you're looking at the Rookie of the Year. I think it's very clear."

Ohtani slashed .474/.565/1.263 with four homers, 10 RBIs, four walks, a double, a triple and eight runs scored across five games this past week. The two-way phenom throws right-handed and hits left-handed, and Ohtani repeated on Friday that hitting isn't affecting his injured elbow.

"It's pretty cool that a two-way player, when you get injured doing one thing, you can do another," Angels' teammate **Mike Trout** said of Ohtani. "And it's pretty amazing how he could easily shut the season down, but he wants to finish out strong. And he works hard in the cage and he works hard in general coming to the field. You know it's fun to watch, pretty incredible what he's doing right now."

Meanwhile, on the East Coast, Harper launched a go-ahead two-run homer in the seventh inning of a rain-soaked Nationals Park that put the Cubs to bed on Saturday. The clutch dinger led Washington to a doubleheader sweep of the NL Central-leading Cubs. Harper's 32nd homer of the year earned the Nats their first twin bill sweep since October 2015.

Harper batted .438/.655/.938 with a 1.593 OPS, two homers, seven RBIs, 12 walks and two doubles across six games over the past week. The 2015 NL MVP Award winner reached safely in seven of his eight plate appearances in Saturday's doubleheader. He has now reached safely in 22 of his last 33 plate appearances dating back to Sept. 1 against the Brewers. During this stretch, he has 14 walks, eight hits and seven RBIs. Harper is hitting .251/.385/.508 this year, and he's leading the NL in walks with 110.

"They were big, real big," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said on Saturday of Harper's homer and **Max Scherzer's** NL-leading 17th win. "Proud of the boys, all of them. "They played through some awful weather and they battled for two games and into the wee hours of the morning."

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**Guzman, Gallo, Minor lead Rangers past Angels to stop skid**

By Jill Painter Loepz

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Pitching without his best stuff, Mike Minor was still able to continue his second-half success.

Minor threw six solid innings, allowing just one run on eight hits as the Texas Rangers ended a four-game losing streak with a 5-2 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Monday night.

“The last two outings, I haven’t felt great — mechanically off a little bit. But I felt like they had chances to capitalize and I only gave up the one,” Minor said. “I felt really lucky for that.”

Ronald Guzman homered and Joey Gallo drove in three runs for Texas. Guzman hit a two-run shot, his 15th, in a four-run second to give Minor (12-7) a comfortable lead.

After starter Jaime Barria walked Adrian Beltre and Jurickson Profar, Gallo doubled them in for a 2-0 lead. Barria walked Hanser Alberto and then gave up the home run to Guzman.

Minor (12-7) had shoulder surgery in 2015, and his 12 wins are his most since then. He had a career-high 13 wins with the Atlanta Braves in 2013.

Over his last seven starts, Minor is 6-1 with a 2.59 ERA. He’s won four straight on the road.

“The first half, especially the first couple of months, were really bad,” Minor said. “I don’t know but it started in spring training where I didn’t feel great, mechanically and stuff. I wasn’t attacking hitters the way I knew I could. Now, I’ve made more quality pitches. I feel better, more comfortable out there. Feels like (2014) seems so long ago. I thought I was going to step up there and be an easy transition because I’ve (started) my whole career besides last year. I thought it wasn’t going to be an issue. It was just getting out there every six days and getting some innings underneath me.”

Jose Leclerc pitched a scoreless ninth to earn his 10th save as Texas stopped the Angels’ four-game winning streak.

Barria (10-9) walked four batters in three innings. He gave up four runs and three hits while throwing only 31 of 60 pitches for strikes.

The four-run second snapped his scoreless streak at 12 innings.

“Jaime was out of sync,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

Shohei Ohtani had two hits and an RBI for Los Angeles. Mike Trout added two infield singles and made a couple of fantastic catches in center field. Taylor Cole pitched four scoreless innings of relief, retiring all 12 batters he faced.

Cole had shortstop Andrelton Simmons to thank for retiring Elvis Andrus in the fifth. Simmons fielded a grounder deep in the hole and made a one-hop throw from the outfield grass to get Andrus.

Simmons made another terrific play in the eighth to catch a ball over his head. Trout robbed Beltre of two hits, including a diving grab in the eighth.

CAMPAIGN SEASON

Ohtani was selected the American League player of the week after batting .474 with four homers, eight runs, 10 RBIs and two stolen bases. It was recently recommended that the two-way player have Tommy John surgery, but he'll still hit the remainder of the season. And he could continue to make his case for AL Rookie of the Year.

"I think the whole Rookie of the Year embodies much of what a player does. It's not just one statistic," Scioscia said. "If you look at how dominant he was when he was healthy pitching, to now the way he's swinging the bat in the batter's box and the numbers he's putting up, it's been a performance so far worthy of Rookie of the Year consideration, and in my mind winning Rookie of the Year."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rangers: OF Ryan Rua (muscle spasms in back) was reinstated from the disabled list. He had been on the DL since July 27.

Angels: Ohtani was scheduled to meet with general manager Billy Eppler to discuss whether to have Tommy John surgery on his pitching arm. ... Albert Pujols, who recently had knee surgery, will also undergo surgery on his right elbow Wednesday to remove bone spurs. "It was time to shut it down," Pujols said. "You have to look at the long run to be able to get myself ready for next year. And on top of that take care of my elbow and the little things." ... LHP Tyler Skaggs (left adductor strain) is scheduled to throw a simulated game in the next day or two and then will be re-evaluated.

UP NEXT

Rangers: RHP Adrian Sampson will make his second career start Tuesday night and first for Texas. He made one start with Seattle in 2016 but was injured warming up for what would've been his second start and had surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon.

Angels: Right-handed reliever Jim Johnson (5-3, 3.81 ERA) is scheduled to start a "bullpen game" for Los Angeles.

FROM MLB.COM

Betts, Carpenter leading latest MVP poll

By Richard Justice

We begin with Red Sox outfielder **Mookie Betts** solidifying his hold on the American League Most Valuable Player Award race. **Mike Trout** of the Angels remains a distant, steady second in MLB.com's poll of its Baseball Writers Association of America members.

Now about the National League race. Yes, that. Take a deep breath. **Matt Carpenter** of the Cardinals has a nice lead over **Javier Baez** of the Cubs and **Christian Yelich** of the Brewers.

If it sounds like we know how this thing is going to play out, we don't. Not even close. In our seven MVP Award polls so far, Carpenter is the fourth leader. Previously, **A.J. Pollock**, **Freddie Freeman** and **Nolan Arenado** took turns in the top spot.

There's uncertainty behind Carpenter as well. Baez and Yelich are making their highest appearances on the board, as is D-backs first baseman **Paul Goldschmidt**, who is fourth for the first time.

While Carpenter received 16 of 30 first-place votes, five others, including Mets ace **Jacob deGrom**, got at least one vote. In short, the NL MVP Award race seems to be a reflection of a postseason race in which eight teams are within five games of the five postseason berths, and no team has come close to locking up a spot.

Here's a look at the leaders:

American League

Betts, Red Sox (135 points)

Betts received 24 of 30 first-place votes, and he's on his way to one of the best seasons in Red Sox history. He leads the Majors with a .342 batting average, and he is on track for a 33-home run, 30-stolen base, 47-double year. He leads the Majors with 9.7 **Wins Above Replacement**, and he leads AL outfielders with 18 defensive runs saved. Betts is the first player with at least 40 doubles and 20 stolen bases in four straight seasons.

Trout, Angels (66 points)

Three weeks on the disabled list might cost Trout a third AL MVP Award. If he finishes second, it will be the sixth time in seven seasons in which he has finished first or second. Trout is the first player with three years of 25 home runs, 20 stolen bases and 100 walks by his age 26 season. He and Willie Mays are the only players with three 30-home run, 20-stolen base seasons by age 26. His 62.8 WAR is second only to Ty Cobb through an age 26 season.

J.D. Martinez, Red Sox (40 points)

Martinez is flirting with MLB's first **Triple Crown** since **Miguel Cabrera** did it in 2012. He leads the AL in RBIs, and he is second to Betts in batting average and to Oakland's **Khris Davis** in home runs. Martinez has 23 home runs and 70 RBIs in 67 games at Fenway Park.

Others receiving votes: **Jose Ramirez**, Indians; **Alex Bregman**, Astros; Davis, Athletics

National League

Carpenter, Cardinals (101 points)

Remember when Carpenter was hitting .160 on May 16? That's about the time two things happened: He was moved into the leadoff spot, and the Cardinals analytics staff told him he'd simply been unlucky. In 103 games since then, Carpenter has ignited his own game and the Cards' season, slugging 32 of his 35 home runs, scoring 84 of his 96 runs and hitting 32 of his 40 doubles. He also has 16 intentional walks and a 1.051 OPS in that span.

Baez, Cubs (67 points)

Cubs manager Joe Maddon points to the intangibles like competitive fire and leadership as reasons why Baez should be the NL MVP Award winner. That may be true, but the things that can be measured make a good case for him as well. He's top 10 in the NL in an assortment of offensive categories, including WAR (fifth), slugging (first) and triples (second). He's just the fifth Cubs player to have a 30-homer, 100-RBI year before or in his age 25 season. Ernie Banks, **Kris Bryant**, **Anthony Rizzo** and Ron Santo are the others.

Yelich, Brewers (32 points)

Yelich has been at his best when the games mean the most. Since the All-Star break, he's among the top three in the NL in a long list of offensive categories, including batting average, home runs and slugging. He's also second in WAR, **wOBA** and **wRC+**.

Others receiving votes: Goldschmidt, D-backs; Arenado, Rockies; Freeman, Braves; deGrom, Mets; **Trevor Story**, Rockies; **Lorenzo Cain**, Brewers; **Eugenio Suarez**, Reds

Remembering 9/11: A look back at impact tragedy had on baseball

By Anthony Castrovine

The stories of how Major League Baseball, its players and personnel, reacted to the tragedy of 9/11 drastically pale in comparison to the stories of brave firefighters climbing up the steps of the Twin Towers or emboldened passengers overpowering the hijackers on Flight 93. But they are stories that nonetheless speak to just how much the national pastime was impacted by national tragedy. We share some of them here. (Note: This story first ran in 2016.)

The line drive steamed down the left-field line, a last-chance rocket in a lost season. Maybe this one would fall in. Maybe the two baserunners aboard would scoot home and cut into the 5-1 deficit the Angels faced with two out in the ninth against Arthur Rhodes. Maybe this would be the hit that would spark a satisfying finish to a frustrating year for Tim Salmon.

Nope.

A left fielder named Charles Gipson used his blistering speed to get in position for the diving snag. He made the catch at 10:14 p.m. PT.

Ballgame.

"Are you kidding me?" Salmon thought to himself. "That sums up my year, right there."

Afterward, Salmon returned to his Orange County home. His good friend and financial advisor, Don Christensen, was in town, and the two stayed up late, with the great Angels outfielder bemoaning his .230 batting average in a season that, following shoulder surgery, never found traction. It was the most miserable year of his career, and, as he told Christensen that night, he couldn't wait for it to be over.

So in the wee morning hours of Sept. 11, 2001, a flustered Salmon went to sleep, not knowing he had just made the last out of what felt like the last normal night in America.

The debut that wasn't

"This is getting annoying."

Ballplayers are creatures of the night, as dictated by the season schedule. A morning phone call is a nuisance. A morning phone call on the day of your Major League debut is a disturbance. And *multiple* morning phone calls on the day of your debut -- even if it's friends or family members on the other line, trying to wish you good luck -- is an invitation to agitation.

Jason Middlebrook had worked so hard and waited for so long to get to this day. Years earlier, he was a promising young right-hander who overwhelmed the opposition in high school in Grass Lake, Mich., pitched for Team USA in the World Junior Baseball Championships and had such an inspiring first season at Stanford that Baseball America named him its Freshman Pitcher of the Year.

And then, sophomore year, his elbow began to hurt. Along came the surgery and the mechanical tweaks aimed at recovering what was lost. Middlebrook caught a break in 1996, when the Padres drafted him and gave him a \$755,000 bonus, an unheard-of amount for a ninth-round pick. And for the next five years, he made the long, slow slog toward the Majors, enduring a string of statistical and health setbacks before San Diego finally summoned him in September of 2001. He was, at 26 years old, scheduled to make his debut start on this day, a Tuesday, at Qualcomm Stadium, and all he wanted was some early morning rest.

But that dang phone kept ringing.

Middlebrook finally picked it up. His wife, Wendy, was on the other end in tears.

"Turn on the TV," she told him, and Middlebrook did as instructed and saw what we all saw.

"Forget my debut," he thought to himself. "Our lives have just been altered."

The stalled chase

With the season on hold, so, too, was history.

When Salmon made that final out of Sept. 10, the Mariners -- led by an incredible rookie named Ichiro -- improved to an astonishing 104-40, dropping their magic number in the American League West to two and maintaining their pace for the most wins in baseball history.

But no run at the record books garnered as much attention as Barry Bonds' barrage toward Mark McGwire's three-year-old single-season home run mark.

In the Giants' final game before the attacks and subsequent postponement, on a Sunday afternoon at Colorado's Coors Field, Bonds had one of the signature days of his season. He matched Roger Maris with his 61st homer in the first inning off Scott Elarton, added another solo shot off Elarton in the fifth and then connected on a three-run shot off Todd Belitz to cap the Giants' five-run 11th and, strangely, elicit chants of "Bar-ry! Bar-ry! Bar-ry!" from the Colorado crowd.

"I don't think I've ever seen a visiting player take a curtain call," Giants first baseman J.T. Snow told reporters afterward.

Bonds' march toward McGwire was methodical. One could barely stop to process or appreciate that his 62nd blast had broken Maris' mark for a left-handed hitter, because No. 63 was right around the corner.

"This," said winning pitcher Wayne Gomes, "is fun."

The fun, though, would quickly give way to the agonizing uncertainty and pure heartbreak of a Tuesday morning when terror arrived at our doorstep. And, for a long while, something that once seemed so magnetizing -- a grown man trying to hit baseballs over a wall -- felt utterly frivolous, even to the man himself. When play resumed six days after the attacks, they asked Bonds if he and his bat had the power to heal or otherwise distract America.

"No," he said solemnly, "not unless I have the power to bring life back."

For whatever you thought about Bonds during his career, his perspective on his pursuit in the midst of such devastation was healthy then and remains so.

"I don't ever want to go back to that day," he says now.

The awkward return

Healthy perspective was easily summoned in the immediate aftermath of the attacks.

Under ordinary circumstances, pitcher Steve Sparks, for instance, might have still been bemoaning what transpired a day earlier, when the Tigers' bullpen couldn't hold the lead he left behind. Sparks made just one mistake in his 6 1/3 innings that Monday night in Motown, serving up a triple to Corey Koskie that set up a sacrifice fly from a 25-year-old DH named David Ortiz, and Detroit had a 2-1 edge when he departed in the seventh. But the Twins tied it in the eighth and won it in the ninth on a sac fly.

"A lot of times you don't have good perspective after a baseball game until something really gets in your face," Sparks says now. "And obviously, that got in everybody's face."

Commissioner Bud Selig consulted with the commissioners of other sports and President George W. Bush before making the decision for play to resume on Monday, Sept. 17. That night, Cardinals announcer Jack Buck summed up the emotion of the occasion with the recitation of a poem at Busch Stadium that was punctuated by an emphatic, "Should we be here? Yes!"

But for many of the players on the field, the return to play was an awkward one.

"I remember the first time pitching after that, there was a hollow feeling in your chest," Sparks says. "It felt insignificant. You felt empty out there."

The members of the New York teams were the most emotionally affected. The Yankees were in town at the time of the attacks, and manager Joe Torre led a delegation of players in visits to various sites, comforting emergency workers and relatives of victims. And we all remember the Mets playing the first post-9/11 professional sporting event in New York and Mike Piazza hitting that epic and emotionally uplifting home run.

But the Mets' first actual action after the postponement took place in Pittsburgh's PNC Park. The Mets and Pirates flip-flopped home and road dates of two late-season series so that Shea Stadium could continue to be used as a staging area for rescue supplies. On the 17th, Al Leiter worked seven strong innings in a 4-1 road victory.

"Warming up," Leiter says now, "didn't feel right."

At that moment in time, with remains still being recovered and the United States mulling its military response, nothing did.

A unique beginning

"Good luck, kid."

Dodger Stadium. Sept. 17, 2001. It was the Major League debut Middlebrook had always anticipated, under conditions he never could have imagined.

Bruce Bochy gave the rookie the ball in that first game back, keeping Middlebrook on his turn in the rotation when he could have very easily reshuffled. And so it was Middlebrook vs. Kevin Brown, the Dodgers' \$105 million man, and Middlebrook's teammates smiled at him coyly in the clubhouse because, they knew, the combination of opponent, location and occasion was a lot for a first-timer to take in.

"I'll never forget warming up for that game," Middlebrook says now. "Down in the bullpen, it was me, our bullpen catcher, the late Darrel Akerfelds, and our bullpen coach, Greg Booker. And we were, aside from Kevin Brown and the Dodgers' staff warming up for him, the only folks that weren't in the stadium or on the field holding the American flag. So we paused and we were able to see this magnificent display of patriotism and unity from a perspective only a few of us got to see."

Middlebrook earned his first Major League win that night, allowing a run on two hits in six innings. That would be one of just four victories in parts of three seasons in a career that didn't go to plan and yet still managed to feel fulfilling.

"The game is unforgiving in a lot of ways, but it gave me way more than I could ever give it," says Middlebrook, who now runs a real estate company in Austin, Texas. "Baseball allowed me to go to a good university, where I met my wife. I got a nice signing bonus, and I did get to the Major Leagues. I wish, for our country's sake and for all those people who lost friends and loved ones, that 9/11 didn't occur, but I did have that truly unique experience that I'll never forget."

"The shape of our world"

Fifteen years later, the moments on and immediately surrounding 9/11 are so vivid for so many of us that even Salmon, a man who racked up more than 7,000 plate appearances with the Angels, distinctly remembers that seemingly meaningless final out against Rhodes and the Mariners.

When his wife jarred him from his sleep the following morning with the horrible news, Salmon knew his miserable season was irrelevant. When, from his own backyard in Tustin Ranch, he could see the F-16 military jets from Marine Corps Air Station El Toro patrolling the sky, he knew his country, essentially if not yet officially, was at war.

"We were all kind of wondering," he says now, "what the shape of our world would look like."

For Salmon, a return to baseball normalcy arrived in 2002. His shoulder recovered, and so did his numbers. And as an added bonus, his Angels won the World Series in a thrilling seven-game set with the Giants. A year he wanted desperately to forget paved the way to an unforgettable year.

That's a baseball story. Sometimes we need those. In our country, in our world, putting ugly events in the rearview is not as simple as showing up the following spring. And because our past informs our present, the reverberations from 9/11 are still being felt, 15 years later.

So here's to more baseball stories, more diversions. Kids getting called up, records being chased, pennants being won. Those stories were put on pause on Sept. 11, 2001. And maybe, in some very small way, their resumption a week later helped the healing process and helped us adapt to our new normal.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Farm Fresh: The 2018 Minor League Awards*

By Emily Waldon

In a season when more than one major league front office is working to mend broken fences, fan interest in minor league baseball is soaring. With the spike in attention, major league brass must carefully balance the timing of player's individual development, avoiding a rush up the pipeline that might push prospects too quickly.

As the players progress, the value — or lack thereof — of the investment made by each front office clarifies. With the regular minor league season concluded, we decided to have some fun and spotlight some of the players around the league who impressed this year.

Before you begin composing your argument about how I hate your team and its farm system, a few notes. First, this collection of names isn't a concrete Top [insert-large-number-here] list, so cancel the picket line. There are always legitimate arguments to be had about minor league players, because no one can know for sure what they will become. While many of these categories could certainly have been filled by more than one name, keep in mind that my selections acknowledge the player's overall profile, rather than amount of innings pitched or games played this season. And the defensive awards below are meant to highlight defense alone, ignoring a player's offense.

Differing opinions are a common occurrence on the farm. But at the end of the day, we can all agree that we're on the verge of seeing a legitimate wave of talent cross the threshold onto the major-league scene.

Outfielder of the Year: Jo Adell

2018 Assignment(s): Class A, High A, Double A (Angels)

Ht/Wt: 6-3/208 lbs. **B/T:** R/R **DOB:** April 8, 1999

Season Stats: 441 PA, .290/.355/.543, 115 H, 83 R, 32 2B, 20 HR, 77 RBI

Step into the outfield and you're greeted with another teenage defensive wizard in Jo Adell.

The 19-year-old boasts obscene degrees of athleticism and since surfacing as the Angels' No. 1 pick in 2017, his athletic antics have been on full display.

A plus-plus runner, Adell, a natural human highlight reel, covers a great deal of ground with little issue, backed by a plus arm and advanced reads off the bat. Adell's 6-foot-3, 208-pound frame is well-proportioned enough to let him stay light on his feet, with enough twitch to dart back and forth on his already-impressive routes.

There is some talk of Adell shifting to a corner post in the future, but as his profile has shown early on, don't be surprised if he wills his way into staying in a center-field role.

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

Albert Pujols remains adamant about his ability to play first base, even as his body indicates otherwise

By Fabian Ardaya

ANAHEIM, Calif. — As his body continues to betray him, the surgeries keep piling up. And yet, Albert Pujols is optimistic.

When healthy again, Pujols said he hopes to be a first baseman, one capable of playing everyday and withstanding the wear and tear. He underwent a season-ending operation to clean out his left knee, similar to the procedure he had in 2012, just over a week ago, but he is already walking with a sleeve on his left leg. On Friday, he received an injection in his left elbow to stem off some of the tendinitis he was feeling from swinging a bat. On Wednesday, he will undergo surgery for the second time to clean out bone spurs in his right elbow.

“Just getting things taken care of,” Pujols said, opting to use his time away from the diamond to treat some of his other ills.

To do so now, instead of after the season, should allow him to have a full offseason treatment program in place — something that hasn’t been a common thing as lower-body issues have ruined many an offseason since he first put on an Angels uniform in 2012.

Pujols will need it. If Shohei Ohtani undergoes Tommy John surgery as expected, he will likely spend the entirety of 2019 as a designated hitter and not have the built-in off-days that were warranted when Ohtani was also pitching once a week. Pujols, owed \$87 million over the next three seasons, would likely have to play even more first base in 2019, even after playing 70 games at first in 2018, his most since 2015.

“I think I’m a Gold Glove first baseman,” Pujols said. “I’ve showed that I can still do it out there, and I love it.

“I didn’t get myself ready to be a DH. I got myself ready this offseason to play first base. Whether we’ve got Shohei or not, it’s every year. I get myself ready to play first base, because that’s my position. ... My goal is to play as many games at first base next year as I can. I think I can do that.”

Pujols entered 2018 after an injury-free offseason for the first time in years, and he actually graded out positively at first base despite playing the position more than he has in years. His wRC+, despite improvement from a year ago, was below average for the second time ever in his career. Since joining the Angels in 2012, he’s been worth 6.7 Wins Above Replacement according to Fangraphs, including a -1.4 fWAR since 2016.

He has remained a consistent element in the Angels’ lineup, with the club valuing Pujols’ contribution with runners on base and hoping to squeeze out as much offensive value as they can from the future first-ballot Hall of Famer. At the same time, Pujols has looked to extract as much as he can from his body, even getting to the point where he’s literally knocking on wood when discussing how thankful he is for the parts of his body that feel healthy.

The knee has been a lingering issue since last year, when a bad late-season slide in Texas triggered some irritation. It faded during the offseason, only to crop up in June. He missed time around the All-Star break to rest the knee, which manager Mike Scioscia said at the time was at around 30 percent. Pujols would receive a platelet-rich plasma injection into the knee, hoping to promote healing, and he said it helped at first.

Eventually, with the Angels out of it and the club focusing on timelines, general manager Billy Eppler and Scioscia pushed Pujols toward season-ending surgery.

“I think it was something I easily could have played with the rest of the season, but I felt that it was just getting a little bit worse and worse and we had to take care of it,” Pujols said. “Playing through the season and now talking about having surgery and having to do it in November, probably mid-November, I wouldn’t be able to work out the way that I’d want to. We just came to the agreement. They decided and they pretty much talked me into it because I wanted to keep going. It was just to that point.”

Pujols’ right elbow has been a chronic issue dating back to his earliest days as a player, and that in part forced him to first base in the first place after breaking into the bigs as a left fielder and third baseman. He underwent a procedure in 2009 for what was considered an “arthroscopic debridement” to remove bone spurs. At the time, Dr. James Andrews, who performed the procedure, indicated that Pujols likely would need another one in five to six years. Now, he’s finally getting it done, though he and Scioscia didn’t indicate Pujols had any issues with throwing.

The matter of Pujols’ left elbow is believed to be minor. The simple repetition of constant hitting has led to tendinitis in his lead elbow, but no further measures of treatment have been planned beyond just the injection.

The knee and elbow each will take between four and six weeks to heal, meaning Pujols would be able to maintain his typical offseason routine. When he doesn’t play in the postseason, he typically takes off the entire month of October to allow his body to recuperate before beginning a full program in November.

Pujols and Ohtani remain intertwined, both in the short- and long-term. The current roster construction means a crowded lineup, particularly when it comes to finding at-bats at DH. As Ohtani recovered from pitching before Pujols went down, Pujols typically DH’ed against lefties, allowing Ohtani to get in the lineup against righties. Given Ohtani’s ability, that shouldn’t happen again next year.

“There’s no doubt, when our lineup was really put together and you had Kole (Calhoun) starting to swing the bat better and you had Mike (Trout) and you had Justin (Upton) and you had Albert and you had Shohei with Andrelton (Simmons), your lineup got deep in a hurry,” Scioscia said. “That’s what we were hoping to see.

“We weren’t able to keep it out there as much as we wanted. Shohei missed really a month swinging the bat. You never know what the future’s going to hold, but that was a deep lineup we were excited to put out there when we had the opportunity to do it.”

Either Pujols really will have to stay healthy at first base, or he’ll have to take on a smaller chunk of playing time in order to keep his body fresh. Ohtani figures to be a full-time DH — Eppler said the team has no plans of teaching him another position, such as first base, as he rehabs, and such a clearance would have to come post-surgery.

Ohtani has benefitted from the everyday at-bats. He earned his second AL Player of the Week honors this past week, slashing .474/.565/1.263 with four home runs, all while playing with a damaged ulnar collateral ligament. He has also seen more at-bats against left-handers, his biggest flaw at the plate to

date, knocking three extra-base hits off them in the past week after having just four extra-base hits against lefties all season.

Even when unable to pitch, Ohtani has made a firm case for AL Rookie of the Year.

"It's well-deserved," Scioscia said. "If he continues to do what he's doing, you're looking at the Rookie of the Year. It's very clear."

FROM ESPN.COM

How the Angels can convince Mike Trout to stay

By Alden Gonzalez

Billy Eppler answered the question like a man who had grown tired of hearing it.

"Um, yeah," the Los Angeles Angels' general manager said pointedly. "We're not going to trade Mike Trout."

Eppler, in his third season as the Angels' GM, is asked about that possibility basically every September. The subject of trading Trout came up again last week, moments after the Angels announced that Shohei Ohtani, their exceeding talented two-way player, needs Tommy John surgery.

The Angels sit two games below .500 and 19 games out of first place heading into the season's final three weeks. They will miss the playoffs for the eighth time in the past nine years, while burdened with a top-heavy payroll, an underwhelming farm system and one major source of anxiety: Trout's expiring contract.

The six-year, \$144.5 million extension that Trout signed in the spring of 2014 will come to an end in the fall of 2020, which basically gives Eppler two offseasons.

Two offseasons to turn the Angels into a team that can consistently contend.

Two offseasons to convince the greatest player of his generation that he should not leave.

Trout has produced 63.2 wins above replacement since 2012 -- nearly double the output of anyone else in baseball -- but the Angels have zero postseason victories in that seven-year span. By all accounts, Trout enjoys living in Southern California and likes playing for the Angels. But he also yearns to win, and he probably won't stay if he doesn't believe he can.

Eppler's plan is to "continue to invest" in the Angels.

A complete rebuild is not an option.

"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 in the free-agent market, and put together a contending team next season," Eppler said. "That's our goal."

The big-picture goal is to hang on to Trout, a homegrown superstar on a path toward becoming an inner-circle Hall of Famer.

Here's a closer look at the complicated steps involved in that.

Settle on the right manager

Mike Scioscia's 10-year contract is in its final month. Reports say he is set on retiring, but Scioscia, who turns 60 this offseason, has stressed that he has not made a final decision.

Regardless, it might finally be time for both sides to move on.

Scioscia has built what could be a Hall of Fame resume in 19 years as the Angels' manager. He has won more than 1,600 games, claiming six division titles, capturing the franchise's only World Series championship and outlasting three GMs along the way. But things have gone stale in recent years. And Eppler, the fourth of those GMs, has a chance to inject new life with his own guy.

He has some intriguing in-house candidates (bench coach Josh Paul, third-base coach Dino Ebel and special assistants Brad Ausmus and Eric Chavez). But Joe Girardi, who worked alongside Eppler with the New York Yankees, also is available.

Maximize Ohtani

Ohtani is the type of talent who would make Trout want to stick around for a little while. Despite being a 24-year-old rookie from a different country, Ohtani thrived in a two-way role that hadn't been seen since the early days of Babe Ruth. He posted a 3.31 ERA in 51⅓ innings and has a .970 OPS in 296 plate appearances, with 19 home runs in only 86 games.

Eppler said he still sees Ohtani as a two-way player, and he should. If all goes well, Ohtani will be able to resume his two-way role by 2020, four years before he would be eligible for free agency. That's a lot of value when you consider that Ohtani has contributed 2.5 WAR despite spending so much of his season rehabbing.

Ohtani probably won't pitch in 2019, but he might hit. And based on what he has done this month -- 11-for-23 with 4 home runs and 11 RBIs -- it'll be fun to watch him focus on only one skill for a little while. The news is grim, yes, but not as bad as it seems. The Angels are in good shape here.

It's hard to say the same elsewhere in the lineup.

Get realistic about Pujols

Albert Pujols has produced an 84 park-adjusted OPS over the past two years -- league average is 100 -- and is coming off another knee surgery. He will turn 39 in January, with three years and \$87 million

remaining on his contract. He has a hard time playing first base consistently enough for Ohtani to get everyday at-bats as the designated hitter, and he hasn't produced enough to warrant a permanent spot in the middle of the lineup.

So, now what?

Pujols said Monday that he will "try to play as many games at first base next year as I can," and he sounded confident that a normal offseason would help him do that.

This probably won't be the offseason when the Angels broach the subject of retirement with Pujols. But it might be the offseason when they begin the process of transitioning him into more of a limited role, one that would allow them to get the most out of both Pujols and Ohtani. Yes, it's an exorbitant amount of money for a part-time player. But it's a sunk cost nonetheless.

Pujols can still help, as long as he is used based on his ability instead of on his contract.

Stay opportunistic

Eppler sent the Angels' top prospect, Sean Newcomb, to the Atlanta Braves for shortstop Andrelton Simmons in November 2015, then acquired outfielder Justin Upton from the Detroit Tigers for a player to be named later in August 2017.

These are the types of opportunities Eppler needs to continue to capitalize on -- using prospects to acquire young, established players who can help immediately.

The Angels have a clear hole at catcher and could use another corner infielder, but their biggest needs are on the pitching side. Ohtani could become the sixth Angels pitcher to undergo Tommy John surgery this year, after Garrett Richards, J.C. Ramirez, Keynan Middleton, Blake Wood and John Lamb.

They need quality starting-pitching depth, they need legitimate back-end relievers and they need most of the guys they bring in to be young and controllable. If the Angels pick up their 2020 option for Kole Calhoun, they'll have \$242 million tied to six players over the next two years. Some wiggle room exists, but not much. Eppler needs to continue to work the trade market.

Hit on key prospects

Remember the name: Jo Adell.

Adell was the 10th overall pick last year and is now No. 10 overall on Keith Law's midseason top 50 list and baseball's 16th-rated prospect, according to MLB.com. He's only 19, but he's already in Double-A. He boasts elite power and tremendous athleticism, and he could form a tantalizing outfield pairing with Trout as early as 2020.

That would be ideal. The Angels' last seven draft classes so far have produced only two players -- Middleton and infielder David Fletcher -- who have contributed at least one WAR. Their farm system

was considered the industry's worst, by a lot, for about a half-decade. But Eppler has taken steps toward improving it by targeting more high-ceiling prospects in the early rounds of the draft.

Corner outfielder Brandon Marsh, starting pitcher Griffin Canning, second baseman Jahmai Jones and first baseman Matt Thaiss might contribute soon, but none is necessarily a can't-miss guy. The margin for error with prospects shrinks significantly when one is attempting to rebuild on the fly like the Angels are. Eppler must hit on what little he has.

If not, it could cost him baseball's best player.

Albert Pujols aiming to play 'as many games at first base next year as I can'

By Alden Gonzalez

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- Albert Pujols said he will "try to play as many games at first base next year as I can" after undergoing season-ending surgery on his left knee two weeks ago.

Shohei Ohtani, who needs Tommy John surgery, is expected to be available only as a designated hitter in 2019, which means the only way he and Pujols can be in the lineup together is if Pujols plays first base.

"Whether we've got Shohei or not, every year I get myself ready to play first base because that's my position," Pujols said Monday, which marked the beginning of the Los Angeles Angels' seven-game homestand. "I wasn't able to do it in '15 or '16 because of injuries, but I get myself ready every year."

Pujols turns 39 in January and still has three years remaining on his contract, valued at \$87 million. The two-time Gold Glove Award winner was able to play first base in 70 of the Angels' first 134 games, more than twice as many as the prior two seasons combined.

But that number might still have to increase for Pujols to get a regular amount of at-bats. Ohtani, who was just named American League Player of the Week, has been on a tear of late, batting .363/.457/.813 in 94 plate appearances since the start of August. Ohtani homered four times in his first five September games and has shown an ability to hit lefties, a skill that could make him an everyday presence in the Angels' lineup, even if he opts to surgically repair his pitching elbow.

"If he continues to do what he's doing, you're looking at the Rookie of the Year," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think it's very clear."

Ohtani, who sustained new damage to his UCL last week, was expected to meet with Angels general manager Billy Eppler after batting practice on Monday, at which point Ohtani could decide whether to undergo Tommy John surgery, a procedure that would keep him away from pitching until 2020.

Pujols finished his seventh season with the Angels with a .245/.289/.411 slash line -- an improvement over last year -- while adding 19 home runs and 64 RBIs in 117 games.

Pujols said he originally injured his left knee while sliding in Arlington, Texas, late in the 2017 season. He was able to have a normal offseason, but the knee would occasionally flare up this summer. The 10-time All-Star hoped a short stint on the disabled list in the middle of July would make things better, but the pain eventually returned.

With the Angels out of the postseason race, the team talked Pujols into getting surgery sooner so that it wouldn't affect his offseason training.

"I could've easily played the rest of the season, but I felt that it was just getting a little bit worse and worse and we had to take care of it," said Pujols, who had an injection to relieve tendinitis in his left elbow last week and will have bone chips removed from his right elbow this week.

Pujols expects to begin working out again around the middle of November.

The question is whether his body can sustain regular appearances at first base.

"I mean, nobody was expecting me to play 70-plus games [at first base] this year and I did it," Pujols said. "I could've played more. If I'm healthy, I'm expecting myself to play 162 games. That's who I am. I love to be on the field, I want to be on the field. I'm a Gold Glove first baseman. I showed that, that I still could do it out there. And I love that."

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Albert Pujols to Undergo Surgery to Repair Elbow Injury

By Joseph Zucker

Los Angeles Angels star Albert Pujols has already been ruled out for the rest of the 2018 MLB season, and he's going to go under the knife once again.

Pujols is set to have surgery on his right elbow to remove a bone spur, the *Los Angeles Times*' Mike DiGiovanna reported Monday.

Pujols had surgery on his left knee in August, which ruled him out for the rest of the year. DiGiovanna noted the elbow procedure is likely to require a recovery time of four to six weeks, which is equal to the time the knee surgery would keep Pujols on the shelf.

The 10-time All-Star first baseman said his focus is firmly on getting ready for the 2019 campaign.

"I'm not going to play the rest of the season, so I might as well take care of the little things for next year," Pujols said, per DiGiovanna. "With physical therapy and a good offseason, everything should be back in the right place next year."

Pujols finished this season batting .245 with a paltry .289 on-base percentage, which was the second-worst of his career.

He's still signed through 2021 and will collect \$87 million from the Angels over the remainder of his deal. Because of that, Los Angeles is basically stuck for the most part. Trading him is a nonstarter because nobody will want to absorb his contract, and his massive salary makes it difficult to put him on the bench.

The Angels' best hope is that the multiple surgeries can help get Pujols healthy and back to being a more productive presence at the plate

Predicting Each MLB Team's Biggest Controversy of the Offseason*

By Jacob Shafer

Like the first chilly autumn breeze, the MLB playoffs are nigh.

That's where the focus of the baseball world will be in the near-term as various contenders jostle for postseason position and then clash on the October stage.

At the same time, we can gaze ahead to the approaching winter and ask a few interesting questions. Such as: What will be each team's biggest offseason controversy?

It could be a decision on a high-caliber free agent, the fate of a manager on the hot seat or simply a choice of organizational philosophy (to sell or buy, for example). In all cases, it's something that will divide fanbases and spark inevitable chatter.

While we enjoy the 2018 stretch run, here are 30 storylines that may set teeth to gnashing in the cold months ahead.

American League West

Houston Astros: The Dallas Keuchel question

For now, the Houston Astros are focused on repeating as champions. It's a lofty, difficult goal.

This offseason, the 'Stros will be faced with a tough challenge of a different variety. They'll have to decide whether they want left-hander Dallas Keuchel to re-join Gerrit Cole and Justin Verlander atop their rotation.

Keuchel is in his seventh and final contractually obligated season with Houston, the only franchise he's ever known. He's made two All-Star teams and won the AL Cy Young Award in 2015. This year, he's posted a 3.59 ERA with a more impressive 3.27 ERA after the All-Star break.

Neck and foot injuries limited him in 2017, and he'll turn 31 in January. A lucrative long-term deal would carry risk. Then again, so would letting the hirsute hurler walk away via free agency.

Los Angeles Angels: The future of Mike Trout

The Los Angeles Angels are at a crossroads. Manager Mike Scioscia may step down at the end of the season. Shohei Ohtani is possibly headed for Tommy John surgery.

And, once again, the Halos are on track to miss the playoffs while employing Mike Trout, the best baseball player on the planet.

The Angels have Trout through 2020. They are under no obligation to trade him before then and apparently don't want to. That said, Trout could be forgiven for not signing an extension with a team that hasn't won a playoff game with him on the roster. And the trade return at this point would be ludicrous.

Might Los Angeles at least entertain offers for Trout? Soon enough, and perhaps this offseason, it needs to consider the once unthinkable notion.

Oakland Athletics: Should they act like contenders?

Improbably, the Oakland Athletics are in the thick of the AL playoff race. Hats off, once again, to executive vice president of baseball operations Billy Beane and Co.

Whether the A's make the playoffs and/or go on a deep run, they'll be confronted with a difficult quandary: Sell high and restock the farm system, or act like honest-to-goodness contenders?

If they opt for the former, it'll mean dangling pieces such as closer Blake Treinen, who would surely net a treasure trove of prospects. If it's the latter, they'll keep their pieces and spend some of their perennially limited coin on the free-agent market.

Seattle Mariners: Jerry Dipoto's do-or-die winter

The Seattle Mariners haven't made the playoffs in 16 years and counting. When your postseason drought is old enough to drive, it's safe to say things aren't going well.

The M's are hanging around the AL playoff chase but appear likely to fall short yet again. There's blame to go around, but plenty belongs at the feet of general manager Jerry Dipoto.

Dipoto has made his share of moves since taking over, but he's yet to assemble a roster capable of making it past Game 162.

Dipoto probably won't be on the chopping block this offseason, but the team he assembles for 2019 could decide his fate. Fans and management will be watching closely.

Texas Rangers: Jeff Banister's status

Fair or not, managers bear the blame for their teams' performances.

So it is with Texas Rangers skipper Jeff Banister. The Rangers are mired in last place in the American League West. It would be simple to scapegoat Banister.

Keep in mind, though, this is a guy who won AL Manager of the Year honors in 2015 and guided the Rangers to a 95-win finish in 2016.

The last couple of seasons have been rough in Arlington, but Banister ought to get a bit more leeway before calls for his ouster grow louder.

**Article cut to only include AL West-related material.*

FROM USA TODAY

Mike Trout Monday: We've looked away again, but Mike Trout remains unbelievable

By Ted Berg

Are you ready for some football?

You are not! This post is about Mike Trout.

In a weekend set between two teams going nowhere fast, Mike Trout got on base 11 times in 14 plate appearances and hit two homers, improving his season OPS to a league leading 1.087 mark. Here are the dingers:

The last few days in Major League Baseball saw multiple wild and tense series between postseason hopefuls — the Astros and Red Sox in Boston, the Dodgers and Rockies in Colorado, the Braves and Diamondbacks in Arizona. Every day offers new grim realities in national news. You're fretting over your fantasy football lineup. If you missed Mike Trout's performance this weekend, you're absolutely not alone.

Baseball sort of hums along in the background all summer for a lot of people, and now, as the sport prepares for its turn on the national radar, Trout keeps smashing baseballs and loping around the basepaths and chasing down liners in the gap in contests likely to be witnessed only by die-hards in Orange County. Mike Trout's main thing is being the best at baseball, but this has sort of become the main thing about Mike Trout: His otherworldly greatness is pleasant ambient noise for even many of the game's most hardcore fans. It's there, you know it's there, you're happy it's there, but it mostly only comes into your consciousness when everything else is quiet.

Usually I use the second person in place of the first, but by "you" I don't really mean "me," here. I write a weekly post about stuff Mike Trout did. This feature represents my best effort to keep Mike Trout on people's minds, and it doesn't seem to be working terribly well. My bad! Trying to do my part, at least.

Anyway, Trout's big weekend upped his season WAR to 8.7, putting him on pace to (just barely) reach the 10-WAR threshold by baseball-reference.com's version of the stat. If he gets there, he will become only the eighth position player in MLB history to do it at least three times, following — get this — Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, Rogers Hornsby, Barry Bonds, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams and Ty Cobb. Trout is 27 years old.

But attaching his name to lists of the sport's all-time greats at a very young age is just another part of Trout's thing at this point, something we already know him to do with some frequency. The time he missed last month likely cost Trout any real shot at another AL MVP award, given Mookie Betts' deserving season for the runaway Red Sox. Not winning the MVP award despite being Mike Trout is also one of Mike Trout's things.

Which is to say: Status quo, I guess. We power forward.

FROM THE JAPAN TIMES

AL Player of the Week Ohtani continues hit streak

By Mark Polishuk

ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA — Shohei Ohtani extended his hitting streak to eight games with a fourth-inning double but the Los Angeles Angels were defeated 5-2 by the Texas Rangers on Monday.

Ohtani, who was named Player of the Week for the Sept. 3-9 period, proved himself worthy of his second career weekly honor by going 2-for-4 with an RBI, a run scored and a stolen base — his ninth of the season.

It was the Rangers who took a 4-0 lead in the top of the second inning at Angel Stadium on a two-run double by Joey Gallo and a two-run homer by Ronald Guzman, both off Los Angeles starter Jaime Barria (10-9). Barria lasted only three innings.

Ohtani started the action for the home team by doubling off lefty Mike Minor (12-7), stealing third, then coming around to score the Angels' first run on an RBI single by Jose Fernandez.

In the seventh, he hit a run-scoring single to cut the Angels' deficit to 4-2, but it was not enough to prevent them from losing their first game in five.

Junichi Tazawa got three outs in the ninth for the Angels after Gallo added an insurance run on an RBI single in the eighth.

Neither Ohtani nor Angels manager Mike Scioscia spoke to reporters before the game about the potential reconstructive elbow surgery that the two-way star has been recommended to undertake by doctors.

Astros 3, Tigers 2

In Detroit, Justin Verlander drew several big cheers and pitched seven sharp innings in his return to Comerica Park while leading the Houston over Detroit.

Verlander struck out 10 in his first game in Detroit since being traded to Houston in August 2017. The World Series champion Astros opened a three-game lead over Oakland atop the AL West.

The 35-year-old righty, who made his major league debut with Detroit in 2005, received a long standing ovation after a video tribute was played as he walked in from the bullpen, and another when he came out to warm up for the first inning. Both times, he tipped his cap and waved to the crowd.

Verlander allowed two runs on six hits and one walk, improving to 98-50 at Comerica Park. Max Scherzer is second in career wins at the stadium with 46, while Jordan Zimmermann leads current Tigers with 14.

Brewers 3, Cubs 2

In Chicago, Lorenzo Cain had four hits, Mike Moustakas scored on Carl Edwards Jr.'s wild pitch in the sixth inning and Milwaukee edged the Cubs to pull within one game of the NL Central leaders.

Orlando Arcia and Jonathan Schoop each drove in a run as the Brewers (83-62) won for the seventh time in eight games. It's the closest Milwaukee has been to the division lead since they trailed the Cubs by a game on Aug. 5.

In Other Games

Reds 10, Dodgers 6

Rays 6, Indians 5

Yankees 7, Twins 2

Royals 4, White Sox 3 (10)

Cardinals 8, Pirates 7

Rockies 13, Diamondbacks 2

Braves 4, Giants 1

Nationals at Phillies — ppd.

Marlins at Mets — ppd.