



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Shohei Ohtani, Mike Trout lead Angels to series victory over Mariners**

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE — Fans at Safeco Field greeted Shohei Ohtani with boos when he first stepped on the field on Friday and when he stepped off for the last time on Sunday.

In between, he gave them good reason to lament that he's not wearing their team's uniform.

Ohtani took a shutout into the seventh inning of the Angels' 8-2 victory over the Mariners on Sunday afternoon, after collecting two hits in the series opener on Friday.

With the help of Mike Trout, whose three-run homer was one of nine hits in the weekend, the Angels won for the fifth time in their past six games.

The Mariners, however, are accustomed to watching Trout do amazing things. This weekend was their first chance during the regular season to see Ohtani.

He showed his talent with the bat and on the mound, which is why just about every team in the majors wanted Ohtani. The Mariners were considered one of the favorites before he surprised much of the baseball world by picking the Angels.

"I want to pitch well against not just this team, but every other team that was pursuing me, to show them that they weren't wrong with their scouting," Ohtani said through his interpreter.

Ohtani sliced through the Mariners lineup without much trouble. He gave up just four singles in the first six innings, before a hiccup in the seventh. He gave up Ryon Healy's two-run homer and then a walk, ending his day.

"He was fantastic," catcher René Rivera said. "All his pitches were working, not only his splitter, but the slider was nasty. The curveball was good. He mixed everything up to get those hitters off balance. He did a great job."

Ohtani said he was even pleasantly surprised that he was so sharp, considering he hadn't pitched since April 24. His start was pushed back because of a mild ankle sprain suffered running the bases.

"It was a lot better than I expected," he said. "It felt like a normal day's rest."

Seattle's Kyle Seager, who had two of the hits against Ohtani, was impressed with his first look: "I thought his stuff was real. He definitely throws hard, had the good splitter. He was throwing some slower curves and it seemed like he had his slider working really well today too."

Ohtani said his only frustration that was that he didn't finish well, allowing the two-run homer in the seventh.

“One big difference from Japan to here is everyone can hit home runs, from 1 to 9, so I just need to stay sharp,” he said.

By the time the Mariners got to Ohtani, the Angels had a 6-0 lead, thanks to a pair of second-inning homers by Zack Cozart and Chris Young and a sudden rally in the sixth.

With two outs, Young reached on third strike that got past catcher Mike Zunino. Rivera then doubled home Young. Ian Kinsler walked. Trout followed with a three-run homer, putting the game away.

Trout has been on a hot streak, even by his standard, with 11 hits in his last 19 at-bats, including six extra-base hits.

“I’m getting pitches and not missing them,” Trout said. “Getting my foot down. The timing is good right now. I’m seeing pitches and putting good at-bats together.”

Trout also helped Ohtani out of a potential jam with a brilliant throw in the fifth. Ben Gamel had tried to go from first to third on a single up the middle, but Trout made a strong throw to nail him. Gamel was initially called safe, but the replay showed he slid off the base.

Angels recall Jabari Blash after power surge at Triple-A, give Kole Calhoun a chance to ‘clear his head’

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE — Jabari Blash’s new swing got him back to the majors.

The Angels recalled the 28-year-old outfielder on Sunday and put him in the lineup in right field, a nod to his hot start at Triple-A and Kole Calhoun’s cold start in the majors.

Blash was hitting .350 with 10 homers and a 1.291 OPS at Triple-A Salt Lake City. Manager Mike Scioscia said they will take a look at him, but he will not replace Calhoun as an everyday player.

“He totally reworked what he’s doing in the batter’s box over the winter,” Scioscia said. “It’s been fun to watch what he’s done for a month down there in Triple-A. It’s been incredible. In talking to guys that have seen him, they think he’s swinging the bat the best he has. We’re going to have a look and see what we have.”

Blash is a former top prospect who has never quite reached his potential, with the Seattle Mariners, San Diego Padres or Chicago White Sox. He had hit .200 in 235 major league at-bats.

Over the winter, though, Blash played in Mexico and revamped his swing. A right-handed hitter, Blash now starts with his feet literally touching each other as he stands in the back of the box. As the pitch comes, he goes into a leg kick.

Blash said he started putting his feet closer together as he developed the stance, and the closer they got, the more comfortable it felt.

“It just happened,” he said. “I can’t tell you where it came from.”

Blash, who singled and walked in five trips to the plate on Sunday, will get an opportunity in the majors while Calhoun takes a “couple days to clear his head,” Scioscia said.

Calhoun is hitting .195, with 33 strikeouts and four walks. His 56.8 percent ground ball rate is a career high. He’s also swung at 32.5 percent of pitches outside the strike zone, another career-high.

“I think there are definitely some things that have crept into his approach that are just not what Kole is about,” Scioscia said, adding that he’s been doing extra work with hitting coaches Eric Hinske and Paul Sorrento. “This guy is too good an offensive player to struggle like he did for 120 at-bats. He’ll get it back.”

BACK SOON?

A day after the Angels’ bullpen blew three leads in 9-8, 11-inning loss to the Mariners, Scioscia said two of the team’s more effective relievers are making progress in returning from the disabled list.

Keynan Middleton (elbow inflammation) and Blake Wood (elbow impingement) were both scheduled to throw off a mound on Sunday.

“These guys feel good,” Scioscia said. “We’re very encouraged about where they are, how good they are throwing the ball. Hopefully it’s just a half-step backwards and they’ll be ready to get back in our bullpen sometime this week.”

ALSO

The Angels have won all five of their series against American League West opponents, compiling a 12-4 record...

The Angels got speedy Dee Gordon to hit into three double plays this weekend. In his career, the most he’d ever hit into in a season was seven...

Eduardo Paredes was optioned to Triple-A to create a roster spot for Blash, leaving the Angels with just seven relievers for just the second day all season.

UP NEXT

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

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels' Shohei Ohtani shows Mariners what he's all about with another strong pitching performance in 8-2 win

By Jeff Miller

By this point, it's clear that he possesses the tools, both physically and mentally, to dominate a baseball game.

Now everyone knows what it looks like when Shohei Ohtani has the motivation, too.

Pitching against one of the teams that courted him this past winter — and Seattle, at one time, was considered a frontrunner — the rookie produced six sterling innings Sunday as the Angels beat the Mariners 8-2.

Afterward, Ohtani thanked Seattle for its interest and even dismissed the booing the fans at Safeco Field directed at him in their first face-to-face encounter since the right-hander opted to become an Angel in December.

"I want to pitch well not just against this team but every other team that was pursuing me to show them that they weren't wrong with their scouting," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I wanted to show them a good game."

Through six innings, he showed them something better than good. Ohtani gave up four singles and a walk while striking out six. Seattle had only one at-bat with a runner in scoring position.

He failed to retire any of the three men he faced in the seventh, but by then, thanks to Mike Trout and the rest of the offense, Ohtani was well on his way to improving to 3-1.

The Angels cruised to another series win with Albert Pujols getting the day off, Luis Valbuena batting cleanup and Felix Hernandez starting for Seattle.

True, Hernandez isn't quite "the King" he once was, yet he's still plenty capable, especially in Safeco Field, where each of his starts remains an event.

But it was Ohtani who stood tallest on the mound, showing no issues with the ankle he recently sprained or the 11 days he had off between pitching starts because of the injury.

"Let's focus on those first six innings," manager Mike Scioscia said. "Those were pretty good."

Ohtani struck out Jean Segura with a slider that short-hopped catcher Rene Rivera's glove. He struck out Nelson Cruz with a slider that could have been classified as cruel. He struck out Ben Gamel with a splitter that evaporated.

Perhaps Ohtani's most impressive sequence ended the fourth. He finished Mitch Haniger with a 99-mph fastball and a 85-mph slider that was closer to hitting the plate than Haniger's flailing bat.

But in the seventh, with his pitch count crossing into the 90s, Ohtani's gem faded quickly yet hardly completely. He gave up a single, a two-run homer (to Ryon Healy) and a walk, ending his day.

As much as Ohtani's performance stood out, the effort simply fit in with what the Angels' rotation has done lately.

In seven games since Garrett Richards allowed nine runs (five earned) to the New York Yankees, the starters have a collective ERA of 1.94.

On an even better roll is Trout, who is 12 for 22 with seven extra-base hits (including two home runs), six RBIs and eight walks in May.

His sixth-inning homer Sunday finished a four-run rally that began after three outs. The problem for Seattle was that the third out — a swinging whiff by Chris Young — ended as a wild pitch.

Young reached first and then came home on a Rivera double. After Ian Kinsler walked, Trout hit his three-run drive to make the score 6-0.

"This is what he can do," Scioscia said, "when he's seeing the ball well."

The view is a good one right now for Trout and the Angels, who've won 13 of 16 on the road, with another two-game stop still to come in Colorado.

Outfielder Jabari Blash starts for Angels after being called up

By Jeff Miller

Kole Calhoun's offensive struggles helped Jabari Blash get back in the big leagues.

The outfielder was recalled from triple-A Salt Lake on Sunday and started in right field for the Angels. He singled and walked in five plate appearances against Seattle.

"These guys have been playing great baseball," said Blash, 28, who appeared in 99 games with San Diego the past two seasons. "It's been fun to watch. I was just looking forward to helping this team at some point."

That point arrived sooner than expected. Coming off his poorest offensive season to date, Calhoun has been unable to find his swing, hitting .167 with a .211 slugging percentage.

On opening day, Calhoun, batting fifth, had three hits, including a home run and a triple in his first two at-bats.

He has not had an extra-base ever since; each of his past 17 hits were singles. He recently was dropped to eighth in the order.

"It's just not what Kole's about," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He understands it. This guy's too good of an offensive player. ... He'll get it back."

Through the 2016 season, Calhoun was a .266 career hitter, and from 2014-17 he averaged 20 home runs.

Scioscia said Calhoun has been working on a few mechanical adjustments with the team's hitting coaches.

"We're trying to get Kole right," Scioscia said. "He's going to take a couple days to just kind of clear his head. ... We'll see where everything fits in."

Backup outfielder Chris Young homered Sunday, but he also has had problems at the plate. The veteran is hitting .167 in 36 at-bats.

Blash, meanwhile, was the Pacific Coast League player of the month for April. He was batting .350 for the Bees, with a 1.291 on-base-plus-slugging percentage and 10 home runs.

"It's been fun to watch what he's done for a month down there in triple-A," Scioscia said. "It's been incredible."

Using a batting stance he reworked over the winter, Blash has been emphasizing a high, striding leg kick while making a conscious effort to drive the ball into the air.

During one game in Salt Lake, he hit two homers, both clearing the center-field wall 420 feet away. The second home almost went over a 40-foot backdrop.

Update

Relievers Keynan Middleton (elbow inflammation) and Blake Wood (elbow impingement) were both scheduled to throw off a mound on Sunday. ... Reliever Eduardo Paredes was optioned to triple-A Salt Lake to open a roster spot for Blash.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Ohtani sharp in mound return for win in Seattle

Phenom fans 6, allows 2 runs in 7th; Trout swats 12th HR

By Maria Guardado

SEATTLE -- It had been 12 days since Shohei Ohtani last took the mound, but he showed little rust against the Mariners on Sunday afternoon, allowing two runs over six-plus innings as the Angels rolled to an 8-2 win to secure a series victory against their division rivals at Safeco Field.

Ohtani dominated early and blanked the Mariners through six innings before Ryon Healy spoiled his shutout bid with a two-run home run in the seventh. Ohtani allowed six hits while walking two and striking out six in his first outing since April 24, lowering his ERA to 4.10.

"His stuff looked great," manager Mike Scioscia said. "For not being out there for a while, his command was really sharp. Might have gotten a little bit tired in the seventh leading off, but outside of that, it's a great outing for Shohei."

Ohtani threw 98 pitches and departed with the Angels leading, 6-2, buoyed by a trio of home runs from Zack Cozart, Chris Young and Mike Trout. Trout crushed a three-run shot to break the game open in the sixth and went 3-for-4 to collect his third consecutive three-hit game. The 26-year-old superstar is now batting .545 (12-for-22) with three doubles, two triples, two home runs and six RBIs over six games this month.

With the win, the Angels improved to 21-13 and moved ahead of the Astros for sole possession of first place in the American League West. They are 12-4 against AL West opponents and have won all five of their divisional series this year.

Ohtani had been scheduled to pitch Tuesday against the Orioles, but the Angels decided to push back his start after he suffered a mild left ankle sprain while attempting to beat out a grounder against the Yankees on April 27.

Despite the layoff, Ohtani looked sharp from the outset, needing only 11 pitches to get through a 1-2-3 first inning. He received early run support from Cozart and Young, who each launched solo home runs off Mariners ace Felix Hernandez in the second.

"[I felt] a lot more normal than I expected," Ohtani said through interpreter Ippei Mizuhara. "I felt like I was on normal days' rest."

Ohtani struck out Nelson Cruz swinging on three pitches to begin the second before Kyle Seager singled for the Mariners' first hit of the afternoon. After whiffing Mitch Haniger on a nasty splitter, Ohtani issued a four-pitch walk to Healy to put runners on first and second with two outs.

Still, the Mariners couldn't cash in on the scoring opportunity, as Ohtani got Mike Zunino to ground into a force out to end the inning.

Seattle also threatened in the fifth after Ben Gamel and Dee Gordon hit back-to-back singles with two outs, but Trout threw out Gamel at third to end the inning, allowing Ohtani to emerge unscathed.

"Ohtani threw the ball well," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "He got good results. He was about what I expected. The fastball has velocity. There were certain stretches he was commanding it better than others. The secondary pitches are real -- the curveball and slider and split-finger all have depth and are hard. He's very poised. But he gave us chances. He made a few mistakes that we didn't turn into hits or big hits at all. Credit him. He got the job done today."

Ohtani took the mound in the seventh with a comfortable 6-0 lead, but he surrendered a leadoff single to Haniger and then threw a low slider to Healy, who cranked it out to left field for a two-run homer. Ohtani subsequently walked Zunino, bringing his afternoon to an end.

"I didn't feel fatigued at all, my command was off," Ohtani said. "I left some pitches up in the zone. I was really frustrated with myself, the way I ended the game. It's something I need to work on for my next start."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Angels capitalize on miscue: Hernandez nearly secured a 1-2-3 sixth after striking out Young with two outs, but the ball got away from Zunino, allowing Young to reach on a wild pitch. Rene Rivera followed by lining an RBI double to right-center field to extend the Angels' lead to 3-0.

After Ian Kinsler walked to knock Hernandez from the game, the Mariners brought in Chasen Bradford to face Trout, who crushed an 0-1 slider to left field for a three-run homer that made it 6-0. It was Trout's 12th home run of the season, which tied him with the Rangers' Joey Gallo for second in the American League.

"Just getting pitches and not missing them," Trout said. "Getting my foot down in time. My timing is good right now. Seeing pitches. Putting good at-bats together."

SOUND SMART

Ohtani has 32 strikeouts over 26 1/3 innings in five starts this season. The only other Angels pitchers to reach 30 strikeouts through five career games are Bo Belinsky (35, 1962) and Jered Weaver (31, 2006).

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

With two outs in the fifth, Ohtani leaped to try to snag a comebacker off the bat of Gamel, but the ball deflected off his glove and allowed Gamel to reach on an infield single. Gamel then tried to advance from first to third on Gordon's single to center field, but Trout threw him out with a 91.7-mph strike to Cozart.

Gamel was initially ruled safe, but the Angels successfully challenged the call after replay showed that he came off the bag on his slide, permitting Cozart to tag him out for the final out of the inning.

"Just came out, made a good throw," Trout said. "Obviously he beat the throw, but he came off the bag and Zack did a good job keeping the tag on him."

UP NEXT

The Angels will enjoy an off-day before opening a two-game Interleague set against the Rockies on Tuesday at 5:40 p.m. PT at Coors Field. Left-hander Andrew Heaney will start opposite right-hander Jon Gray in the series opener. Heaney tossed a season-high six innings and allowed one run in his most recent outing against the Orioles on Wednesday. The Angels are 11-2 all-time at Coors Field and have won eight consecutive games there dating to 2001.

Trout swats 12th HR in third straight 3-hit game

Angels star hammers 3-run shot, unleashes 91.7 mph throw

By Maria Guardado

SEATTLE -- Mike Trout has opened May on quite a torrid stretch, even by his own lofty standards.

Trout went 3-for-4 with a three-run home run in the Angels' 8-2 win over the Mariners on Sunday at Safeco Field, finishing the weekend with his third consecutive three-hit game. The 26-year-old star center fielder is now batting .545 (12-for-22) with three doubles, two triples, two home runs, six RBIs and eight walks over six games in May. He is hitting .336 with a 1.178 OPS on the season.

"We made a lot of mistakes against him," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "You can't make mistakes against Mike Trout. He will make you pay. For whatever reason, there were some balls in the middle of the plate and he doesn't miss 'em. It's a credit to him. He was in the middle of everything all series. He's got a little better supporting cast around him this year and we have to certainly do a better job against him going forward this season."

Trout's 12th home run of the season broke the game open in the sixth inning on Sunday. Mariners ace Felix Hernandez struck out Chris Young for what would have been the third out of the inning, but the ball got away from catcher Mike Zunino, allowing Young to reach on a wild pitch. Rene Rivera followed with an RBI double to extend the Angels' lead to 2-0, and Ian Kinsler then worked a walk to knock Hernandez from the game.

Reliever Chasen Bradford was brought in to face Trout, who promptly hammered a slider 389 feet to left field to make it 6-0. Trout's shot had an exit velocity of 108.3 mph and a launch angle of 38 degrees, the Angels' highest on a homer this season, according to Statcast™. He is now tied with the Rangers' Joey Gallo for the second-most homers in the American League.

"Just getting pitches and not missing them," Trout said. "Getting my foot down in time. My timing is good right now. Seeing pitches. Putting good at-bats together."

Trout also picked up an outfield assist in the fifth after firing a 91.7 mph strike to Zack Cozart to nail Ben Gamel, who had tried to advance from first to third on Dee Gordon's single to center field. Gamel was originally called safe, but replay review showed that he came off the bag while Cozart applied the tag, allowing Shohei Ohtani to escape the inning unscathed.

"Obviously, it was a great throw," Ohtani said through interpreter Ippei Mizuhara. "Helped me out in a huge situation right there. Not only his throwing or fielding, [but also] with the bat."

Blash called up as Halos give Calhoun a break

Paredes optioned to Triple-A Salt Lake in corresponding move

By Maria Guardado

SEATTLE -- Seeking to give slumping Kole Calhoun a mental break, the Angels recalled outfielder Jabari Blash from Triple-A Salt Lake ahead of Sunday's series finale against the Mariners at Safeco Field. Right-handed reliever Eduardo Paredes was optioned to clear a roster spot for Blash, who made his Angels debut on Sunday starting in right field against Mariners ace Felix Hernandez.

Blash went 1-for-4 with a walk and a run scored in the Angels' 8-2 victory.

"Right now, we're trying to get Kole right," manager Mike Scioscia said before the game. "He's going to take a couple days just to clear his head. He's working on some mechanical things with [hitting coaches] Eric [Hinske] and Paulie [Sorrento] and we'll see where everything fits in."

Sunday marked Calhoun's second consecutive game out of the Angels' lineup and his first time sitting against a right-handed starting pitcher this season. Calhoun has been mired in a deep offensive rut over the first month of the season, hitting just .167 with a .405 OPS, the lowest mark among qualified hitters in the Majors. The 30-year-old left-handed hitter has one home run with 33 strikeouts and four walks over 118 plate appearances this year.

"There's some definite things that have crept into this approach," Scioscia said. "It's just not what Kole's about. He understands it. I think Eric and Paulie have a great understanding of where he needs to get to, and he will. This guy is too good of an offensive player to struggle like he did for 120 plate appearances. He'll get it back."

Blash, 28, was batting .350 with a 1.291 OPS, 10 home runs, eight doubles, one triple and 25 RBIs in 23 games with Salt Lake. He appeared in 99 games for the Padres from 2016-17, hitting .200 with a .659 OPS and eight home runs. The Angels acquired Blash from the Yankees during Spring Training in exchange for a player to be named.

"Jabari came into Spring Training and just totally reworked what he's doing in the batter's box over the winter," Scioscia said. "It's been fun to watch what he's done for a month down there in Triple-A. It's been incredible. Talking to guys who have seen them, they think he's swinging the bat the best he has. We're going to give him a look here to see what we have."

Blash said he arrived in Seattle around 5 p.m. PT on Saturday and watched the Angels' wild 9-8 loss to the Mariners on TV from the team hotel.

"These guys have been playing great baseball, and it's been fun to watch," Blash said. "I just can't wait to be a part of it. It's exciting for me."

FROM THE ATHLETIC

TA30: The Mets fall, the Mariners climb, the Orioles are trying to move into the Reds' basement

By Levi Weaver

There's an old baseball axiom that says you won't really know what your team is until the first of June. There are certainly a few teams for which that holds true this season, but it feels like there are at least a half-dozen about which you can safely buzz in prematurely, put your lips too close to the microphone and mumble "...a bad team. They're a bad— they're a team that's going to lose a lot of games this season." The judges will confirm, and they will say "We would have also accepted 'they're in rebuild mode', but that is correct!"

For the rest, there's still all the intrigue that comes along with trying to graph out where your team lands on the surprise/disappointment chart. High expectations and low performance? Sorry, Cubs. Low expectations and high performance? Hello, Braves!

Let's dig in and see where our team of writers have your favorite team this week. Welcome to TA30!

5. Los Angeles Angels

Last week: 7

This rotation wasn't supposed to be very good, but thanks to strong starts by Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, and Shohei Ohtani, they've been good enough for first place in the AL West. Meanwhile, Mike Trout is having a great season (even by Mike Trout standards), Albert Pujols got his 3,000th hit, and "defense-first" shortstop Andrelton Simmons is hitting .350. If this keeps up, expect the Angels to be in the market for another starter in July.

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

Gammons: Why a small number of players from a tiny location have yielded big results

By Peter Gammons

More people live in Fayetteville, N.C., than the beautiful ABC islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, combined. Yet in the five weeks of this baseball season, in what has seemed like 40 days and 40 nights of wind and rain and postponements, it has been an ABC spring.

Ozzie Albies came from Triple A to Atlanta at age 21 and went into the weekend leading the majors in doubles and extra-base hits. Didi Gregorius of the Yankees had 10 home runs and was near the American League RBI leaders. The Dodgers' Kenley Jansen had a slow start because of a groin pull suffered in spring training that impacted his delivery, but on Thursday he recorded his third straight save opportunity. The man averaged 42 saves a season from 2014 to '17. Despite being sidelined two weeks with a fractured bone in his ankle, Boston's Xander Bogaerts was looking at a .365/.397/1.048 slash line. Andrelton Simmons' slash was .327/.391/.510, he was leading the majors in the lowest strikeout ratio and, of course, led all shortstops in Defensive Runs Saved and Defensive WAR from 2014-17.

All of those players came from the ABC islands.

"It is amazing how talented the best kids that come out of Curaçao and Aruba are," says Boston senior vice president and assistant GM Eddie Romero, Jr. "Their passion for the game is so much fun to watch. Obviously, they are small islands, so the population base isn't great. They don't have baseball academies and agents who work to develop them. But when you go there, the games are family affairs, almost like Sunday picnics. The families are a major part of the culture of both islands."

They aren't like the Dominican, where *buscones* train and develop players. Or Venezuela, where despite the political unrest there are still development programs run by ex-major leaguers like Carlos Guillen.

Bogaerts is the only prominent current major leaguer from Aruba, whose population is slightly more than 104,000. Simmons, Jansen, Gregorius, Albies, Jonathan Schoop and Jurickson Profar are among those from Curaçao. Not prolific numbers of players, but players with prolific numbers and talent.

One international scouting director says that while his team really liked Albies as an amateur, the difficulty in projecting major league ceilings for players from those islands limits bonuses. "Give Johnny Almaraz credit," says one scout. "They talked in Atlanta about all the talent they got in trades, but look at the top of the Braves order right now and see Albies at 21 and Ronald Acuna at 20 in the one-two holes in the order and remember, Almaraz signed them both." Former Braves General Manager John Coppolella replaced Almaraz, who is now with the Phillies.

"What people have to understand is that a lot of the kids on those islands play very few games when they're growing up," says Giants bench coach Hensley Meulens, who was raised in Curaçao and managed the Dutch team in the last two World Baseball Classic championships. "They're not out there playing games every day at the age of 10 like kids in the States or the Dominican or Venezuela. That's why you see kids develop a little later."

Simmons, Gregorius and Jansen played on the same Little League team, "maybe 25 or 30 games if we made it through the tournament," says Simmons. Yes, Simmons played short, Gregorius, whose parents played baseball and softball in The Netherlands before moving to Curaçao when Didi was 3 1/2, played second base, and Jansen caught.

Bogaerts remembers, "If we reached the tournament in Little League (in Aruba), we played maybe 20 games." The Bogaerts family moved to Bonaire when he was a teenager, so he didn't play baseball — only softball — when he was 14 and 15.

“It definitely takes time to learn,” says Simmons. He took a different path. Rather than signing at 16, Simmons went to Western Oklahoma State College, a junior college in Altus, Okla. Most teams wanted him as a pitcher since he threw in the high 90s. “I wanted to play shortstop,” Simmons says. “Most teams didn’t want to give me that opportunity. But I think the Braves liked me as a pitcher, they agreed to at least allow me to try shortstop.”

They selected him in the second round of the 2010 draft over concerns from some in the front office, and he has gone on to be one of the best defensive shortstops of the last 20 years. But his offensive numbers have progressed, too, and his bat-to-ball skills are among the best in the game today.

One element that goes underappreciated in their scouting is the culture of the ABC islands. Every one of these players speaks four to seven languages. “Education and respect are major parts of our culture,” says Simmons. “It’s the way we’re raised,” says Bogaerts. “We are raised to respect everyone,” says Gregorius.

“That education and culture help them in different ways when they get into professional baseball,” says one international scouting and development official. “They usually go to the camps in the Dominican to begin their professional assimilation, but because they speak English and Spanish they have an advantage on kids who only speak Spanish. They can immediately take coaching from instructors in any language. A lot of times, they become leaders for kids who only speak Spanish because they can help them understand what is being taught. They’re so well educated, so polite that their cultural assimilation isn’t anywhere near as difficult and protracted as it is for teenagers who have to start with the long, difficult process of learning the language.”

Simmons has continually learned to make adjustments at the plate, evidenced by his evolution since he was traded by the Braves to the Angels after the 2015 season. Brian Cashman trusted Kevin Towers, who traded for Gregorius in Arizona, and Tim Naehring, on dealing for Didi to be the shortstop to replace Derek Jeter. “I always liked his energy, his enthusiasm and defense,” says Naehring, the Yankees’ vice president of baseball operations. “He had a little bit of a hitch when he first came up with the Reds, but his swing worked and he continually learned to make it work because he is intelligent.”

It is fascinating that Gregorius has turned his swing adjustments into a player made for the new Yankee Stadium. Statcast recently showed that every one of his major league homers has been pulled. “Yet, you’ll see him go the other way if it means knocking in an important run,” says Naehring.

If anything, player development instructors think the ABC kids are so civilized they aren’t hardened to the dog-eat-dog baseball culture in countries where dozens to hundreds of teenagers fight to get signed and get to the States. Red Sox staffers have learned that while Bogaerts is very intelligent and immensely talented, in many ways he is overly accountable. If he makes an error or has an unproductive game, he is extraordinarily hard on himself. Last season, when he was hit by a pitch, hurt his hand—and his hands are a huge part of his offensive talent—and struggled the second half of the season, he clearly was not himself. It should be noted he still played 148 games, hurt or not.

Do not forget that when healthy Schoop hit 25 and 32 homers in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Or that Profar is still waiting to get healthy, but several teams still are trying to wrest him away from the Rangers.

Meanwhile, Albies, Gregorius, Bogaerts and Simmons have been impactful figures in the first five weeks of a rainy, cold season, all from islands off the Venezuelan coast that combined have a population approximating Fayetteville. "We're proud," says Simmons. "We'll always be respectful, but we're proud."

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani fights off boos, shows Seattle what they lost with strong start

By Chris Cwik

SEATTLE — The chorus of boos cascaded through the stands and onto Safeco Field as Los Angeles Angels two-way man Shohei Ohtani stepped on the mound to begin his warmup pitches. This wasn't a surprise. Seattle Mariners fans booed Ohtani Friday night as well. He called it "awkward."

From the moment he stepped foot in their field wearing red and gray instead of blue and white, Mariners' fans were ready to let loose. Ohtani was supposed to sign with Seattle, as Ichiro Suzuki did 17 seasons ago. He was supposed to be the one to break the team's lengthy playoff drought, which stretches all the way back to 2001 — Ichiro's rookie season — they thought. He was absolutely not supposed to sign with one of the Mariners' biggest rivals.

So they booed loudly when Ohtani's name rang out over the stadium speakers. They let him know he signed with the wrong team.

The boos eventually died down and Ohtani went to work. And over the next six-plus innings, barely a peep was heard from the Mariners' fans in the stands. Ohtani silenced them.

The 23-year-old righty showed electric stuff during his fifth major-league start. Ohtani baffled the Mariners over six innings with a mix of 98 mph fastballs, diving splitters, curves that broke like Wiffle balls and a couple deadly sliders.

It wasn't until the seventh inning that the Mariners' crowd found their voice again. One of Ohtani's sliders caught too much of the plate and Ryon Healy sent it into the left field stands for a two-run home run.

After walking the next hitter, Ohtani's day was done. He allowed two runs on six hits over six innings. Ohtani walked two and struck out six during the outing.

During Ohtani's courtship in the offseason, the Mariners were one of the few teams to be named finalists by Ohtani and his agent. While it's unclear where they finished behind the Angels, the Mariners believed they had a legitimate shot to sign him. General manager Jerry Dipoto freed up international bonus pool money so Seattle could offer Ohtani the most money of any team only to discover that wasn't what he desired.

Seattle's aggressive pursuit of Ohtani had no impact on his motivation for this start.

“I’m very thankful this team was pursuing me,” Ohtani said through a translator after the game. “It’s very humbling to hear that. Of course I want to pitch good, and it’s not just [against] this team, but every other team that was pursuing me to show them that they weren’t wrong.”

The seventh inning was the only time Ohtani looked vulnerable. Prior to that, the Mariners had a tough time with him. Seattle managed a few hard hit balls against him that resulted in deep fly outs, and Kyle Seager tagged him for two hits, but that was about it. Until that seventh inning home run, only one Mariner — Ben Gamel — threatened to reach third base. He even made it there briefly until a review showed he was unable to beat Mike Trout’s throw from center.

As Ohtani walked off the field with a four-run lead, the boos rained down just as hard as before. After six strong innings, they didn’t have the same impact. They felt like the only thing Mariners’ fans could do to comfort themselves after seeing what could have been.

The Mariners did threaten in the seventh, but failed to push any additional runs across the plate. The Angels would go on to extend their lead by two runs in the ninth, winning the contest 8-2. With the win, Ohtani improved to 3-1 to start his major-league career.

As for the boos. This time around, they didn’t have much of an impact on Ohtani.

“The booing, that didn’t faze me at all,” he said. “The way I left the game, I gave up two runs and a walk like that. It’s something I need to work on. I was really frustrated with myself the way I ended the game.”

The few seconds when Ohtani walked off the field in the seventh was one of the few times Mariners’ fans could celebrate Sunday. He was finally disappointed in his performance.

But that was fleeting. Less than an hour later, the Angels sent Seattle fans home dejected, while Ohtani’s manager and catcher complimented his performance from the winning clubhouse.

For Mariners’ fans, the disappointment over this loss will last much longer. Ohtani has already frustrated them for months.

FROM FORBES.COM

Albert Pujols’ Dominance With Cardinals Will Ultimately Define His Magnificent Career

By Wayne G. McDonnell, Jr.

In a career already destined for a bronze plaque in the hallowed halls of Cooperstown, Albert Pujols has just become the 32nd member of the 3,000-hit club. He is the 17th right handed hitter to eclipse this milestone as well as the second to do so wearing a Los Angeles Angels uniform behind Rod Carew in 1985. Pujols’ exceptional career and bountiful achievements have been thrust into the forefront of

baseball fans' consciousness once again. His legacy should be viewed with a keen eye towards iconic comparisons instead of his inability in recent years to replicate the statistical accomplishments he accumulated over the first decade of his career with the St. Louis Cardinals.

Once it was considered taboo or even sacrilegious for a modern-day ball player to be compared to the likes of Hank Aaron and Willie Mays. The exalted duo redefined and eternally changed our perceptions of what it means to be an elite right-handed power hitter. Aaron and Mays were the personification of elegance and strength whose astonishing offensive exploits constantly kept fans in a state of awe. Even to this day, the sheer mention of their names immediately invokes feelings of reverence and adoration. However, Pujols' recent achievement allows us to delve deeply into comparisons and come to an interesting conclusion when it pertains to whether or not he belongs on the Mount Rushmore of right-handed power hitters.

Pujols is the fourth ball player in baseball history to achieve 3,000 hits and 600 home runs. The other members of this exclusive fraternity are Aaron, Mays, and the tainted Alex Rodriguez. He is also only the second Dominican born ball player to achieve 3,000 hits behind Adrian Beltre last season. Pujols is the third member of the 3,000-hit club to have won three Most Valuable Player Awards joining Rodriguez and Stan Musial.

A quick comparison of Pujols and the 17 right-handed hitters who have eclipsed 3,000 career hits will provide several interesting observations. There are only four right handed hitters in this exclusive club with a career On-base Plus Slugging (OPS) of .900 or better: Pujols (.945), Mays (.941), Rodriguez (.930), and Aaron (.928). When looking at the career On-base Plus Slugging Plus (OPS+), five right-handed hitters have eclipsed 150: Mays (156), Aaron (155), Pujols (151), Honus Wagner (151), and Nap Lajoie (150). Presently, Pujols has the highest Slugging Percentage (SLG) at .560 and Isolated Power (ISO) at .256. He has also eclipsed 2,000 in terms of Runs Created (RC): Aaron (2,552), Mays (2,368), Rodriguez (2,274), Rickey Henderson (2,164), and Pujols (2,099).

When analyzing Pujols' career, it seems as if it falls into two distinct categories: pre-age 30 season and age 30 season to the present day. Some might even classify it as the Cardinals years versus the Angels years. Pujols signed a 10-year, \$240 million contract with the Angels in December 2011 prior to turning 32 years old. Two interesting facts regarding the contract are a \$3 million bonus for achieving 3,000 hits and a personal services contract for \$10 million over 10 years at the expiration of the contract.

Either way, there is a stark contrast in terms of production. Prior to age 30 season, Pujols had won the National League's Rookie of the Year Award (2001), three Most Valuable Player Awards (2005, 2008, 2009), five Silver Slugger Awards (2001, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009), an eight-time All Star selection (2001, 2003-2009), and won his first of two World Series championships (2006). A virtuoso with the bat, it appeared as if he was from another galaxy.

After turning 30 years old, Pujols permanently returned to earth and his offensive production was nowhere near what he was amassing for nearly a decade. A constant presence at the Mid-Summer Classic, Pujols was only selected to two All Star Games (2010, 2015) after age 29 season. In 2010, he won his final Gold Glove and Silver Slugger Awards to date and finished second to Joey Votto of the Cincinnati Reds in the National League Most Valuable Player Award voting. His name regularly appeared atop the leader board for grounded into double plays instead of OPS+.

In many ways, Pujols had become an afterthought with the Angels due to the emergence of Mike Trout and eventual dominance. He was the ball player everyone knew was bound for Cooperstown five years after retirement but became a cautionary tale for grossly overpaying ball players for past performance. In truth, he was merely a fraction of the ball player he once was in St. Louis. The Cardinals' version of Pujols never truly appeared for the Angels even though he did achieve varying levels of success.

Albert Pujols' Offensive Production Age 21 Through Age 29 Seasons (2001-2009)

Statistic	Pujols (Rank)	Leader
G	1,399 (5 th)	Ichiro Suzuki(1,426)
AB	5,146 (13 th)	Ichiro Suzuki(6,099)
H	1,717 (3 rd)	Ichiro Suzuki(2,030)
XBH	767 (1 st)	-
HR	366 (2 nd)	Alex Rodriguez(394)
R	1,071 (1 st)	-
RBI	1,112 (1 st)	-
TB	3,230 (1 st)	-
RC	1,364 (1 st)	-
OPS	1.055 (2 nd)	Barry Bonds(1.262)
OPS+	172 (2 nd)	Barry Bonds (227)
*WAR for Position Players	73.8 (1 st)	-

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

*: WAR calculations come from Baseball-Reference.com

There have only been two ball players in major league history to accumulate at least 360 home runs, 1,000 runs, and an OPS+ of 170 in their age 21 through age 29 seasons. The first ball player is Mickey Mantle and the other is Pujols. Also, only six ball players have hit 360 or more home runs in age 21 through age 29 seasons: Rodriguez (424), Ken Griffey, Jr. (382), Jimmie Foxx (376), Eddie Mathews (370), Pujols (366), and Mantle (361).

Albert Pujols' Offensive Production Age 30 Through Age 37 Seasons (2010-2017)

Statistic	Pujols (Rank)	Leader
G	1,176 (9 th)	Robinson Cano(1,264)
AB	4,585 (7 th)	Robinson Cano(4,947)
H	1,251 (13 th)	Robinson Cano(1,501)
XBH	482 (11 th)	Miguel Cabrera(550)
HR	248 (6 th)	Jose Bautista (272)

R	652 (12 th)	Ian Kinsler (785)
RBI	806 (2 nd)	Miguel Cabrera(860)
TB	2,231 (7 th)	Robinson Cano(2,488)
RC	720 (16 th)	Joey Votto (996)
OPS	.824 (42 nd)	Joey Votto (.980)
OPS+	127 (31 st)	Mike Trout (172)
*WAR for Position Players	25.6 (34 th)	Mike Trout (54.2)

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

*: WAR calculations come from Baseball-Reference.com

Comparing Pujols to Aaron and Mays is complicated for a variety of reasons but it can also provide observations that are indeed noteworthy. In fact, Pujols strongly outperforms the two icons in several offensive categories when evaluating performance from age 21 through age 29. However, Pujols' offensive performance declines from age 30 through age 37 while Mays dominated, and Aaron remained a pillar of consistency. It is also worth noting that Pujols suffered from various knee, leg, and foot injuries over the past decade.

Offensive Production Age 21 Through Age 29 Seasons for Pujols, Aaron, and Mays

Statistic	Pujols	Aaron	Mays
G	1,399	1,389	1,097
AB	5,146	5,472	4,205
H	1,717	1,767	1,354
BA	.334	.323	.322
HR	366	329	259
R	1,071	1,019	825
RBI	1,112	1,052	744
TB	3,230	3,190	2,514
RC	1,364	1,182	999
OPS	1.055	.962	.991
OPS+	172	162	162

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

Note: Willie Mays missed the entire 1953 season (Age 22 season) due to military service

Offensive Production Age 30 Through Age 37 Seasons for Pujols, Aaron, and Mays

Statistic	Pujols	Aaron	Mays
G	1,176	1,204	1,228
AB	4,585	4,507	4,461
H	1,251	1,374	1,331
BA	.273	.305	.298
HR	248	297	308
R	652	824	879
RBI	806	839	842
TB	2,231	2,542	2,544
RC	720	963	964
OPS	.824	.943	.948
OPS+	127	161	162

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

Hank Aaron and Willie Mays are without question two of the four faces on baseball's Mount Rushmore of the greatest right-handed power hitters. Albert Pujols has emphatically stated his case as to why he belongs even though recent performances might dictate otherwise. The other spot could easily be contested by the likes of Frank Robinson, Mike Schmidt, and Jimmie Foxx just to name a few. Mike Trout and Miguel Cabrera present outstanding cases from the crop of current ball players. However, the biggest tragedy pertains to Alex Rodriguez and Manny Ramirez. If it weren't for their associations with performance enhancing substances, the conversation would be vastly different.

FROM THE DESERT NEWS

Chris Carter powers Salt Lake Bees to 5-3 victory over Las Vegas 51's with game-winning triple

By Trent Wood

SALT LAKE CITY — Tied at three runs apiece in the bottom of the eighth inning, it seemed likely that the Salt Lake Bees and the Las Vegas 51's would play into extra innings.

Bees slugger Chris Carter had other plans, however.

Carter hit a clutch two-run triple, scoring both David Fletcher and Jose Fernandez. Those runs gave Salt Lake the lead, its third of the day and — after a scoreless ninth inning by Bees reliever Adam Hofacket — a 5-3 victory.

"I had a good approach and put the barrel on the ball," said Carter. "I just tried to hit the ball hard and get the guys in."

INSIDE THE PARK: In addition to scoring the game-winning run, Fletcher had an inside-the-park home run.

The four-baser came in the bottom of the third inning, when Fletcher drilled a fly ball off the left-field fence. The ball ricocheted away from Las Vegas left fielder **Cody Asche**, and by the time the former Chicago White Sox caught up with it, Fletcher was on his way home.

"If anyone was going to do it he was," said Carter. "He been really good for us this year, and that was fun to watch."

THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE: While Fletcher's hit-streak ended at 16 games Saturday night, Fernandez continued his through Sunday, setting a new career-high in the process. Fernandez, whose streak now stands at 17 games, doubled in the first inning of the contest against the 51's, scoring Fletcher.

The two-baser was the sixth double Fernandez has hit during his career-best run, in addition to a triple and three home runs.

BYE BYE BLASH: **Jabari Blash**, the PCL player of the month of April, made his Angels debut Sunday after being recalled by the big league team.

He finished the game against the Seattle Mariners, a bout Los Angeles won 8-2, 1-for-4 with a base hit and a run scored.

While with the Bees, Blash was the premier power hitter in minor league baseball, totaling 10 homers, eight doubles and 25 RBIs in 23 games played.

60 PITCHES: Left hander **John Lamb** got the start for Salt Lake, and like each of his previous outings this season, he threw 60 pitches, give or take a few.

Against Albuquerque in the season opener, Lamb threw 61 pitches. Five days later, against El Paso, he threw 53 pitches in four innings of scoreless baseball.

Lamb followed up those outings by tossing 65, 61, 61, 69 and 69 pitches in five subsequent starts.

He put in his best performance of the season Sunday night, pitching five scoreless innings of one-hit baseball. Once again, his pitch count was in the sixties, at 64.

The reason for the pitch limit is simple — the Angels are grooming Lamb for a long reliever role.

If this season has been any indication, Lamb is ideally suited for the job, as he is 1-0 with an ERA under 4.00.