



Press Clips

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CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **Matt Shoemaker struggles in Angels' loss to Cubs**
- **Shohei Ohtani roughed up for 6 runs by Tijuana Toros**
- **Angels SS Andrelton Simmons says he's OK to play again**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 6)

- **Jon Lester, Cubs stymie Angels 6-1**
- **Shohei Ohtani fails to bring 'A' game to Angels' 'B' game**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 9)

- **Simmons 'ready to go' after shoulder scare**
- **Ohtani takes positives from tough 'B' game**

FROM USA TODAY (PAGE 11)

- **Shohei Ohtani explains why he's 'a little delayed' after allowing six runs to Mexican League team**

FROM THE NEW YORK POST (PAGE 13)

- **Shohei Ohtani struggling: Is it growing pains or more serious?**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 14)

- **Harper vs. Stanton. Ichiro vs. MadBum? Picking the perfect Aaron Judge-less Home Run Derby field**
- **Shohei Ohtani falls short of huge expectations**

FROM FANGRAPHS (PAGE 18)

- **Albert Pujols Is Here for Your Jerseys**

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS (PAGE 19)

- **Shohei Ohtani says he needs to adjust to ball, mound after rough outing**

FROM FANSIDED (PAGE 20)

- **Shohei Ohtani is going to give us the Angels-Dodgers rivalry we all deserve**

FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE (PAGE 21)

- **Progress report: Los Angeles Angels**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Matt Shoemaker struggles in Angels' loss to Cubs**

By Jeff Fletcher

THE GAME: With most of their everyday players getting the day off, the Angels lost 6-1 to the Chicago Cubs on Friday afternoon in Mesa, Ariz. It was the Angels' fourth straight loss.

PITCHING REPORT: Matt Shoemaker gave up six runs on eight hits in 3-2/3 innings in his third start of the spring. "If you look at the results it wasn't a good day, but I took a lot of positives out of it," Shoemaker said on the Angels broadcast. "In the second inning, I made some good pitches and got some ground balls. A lot of them were hits." Shoemaker added that his slider and his splitter are behind, as they usually are this time of spring, but they "are coming along." ... Right-hander Blake Parker pitched a perfect inning, with two strikeouts. Parker, who had struggled in his first two outings of the spring, has now posted scoreless innings in each of his last two. ... Right-hander Cam Bedrosian worked around two hits in a scoreless inning. He has not allowed a run in three innings.

HITTING REPORT: The Angels managed just four hits, one apiece from Eric Young Jr., Zack Gibbons, Kaleb Cowart and Michael Hermosillo.

DEFENSE REPORT: Hermosillo, playing center field, threw out a runner at the plate.

UP NEXT: Angels (Andrew Heaney) vs. Giants (Tyler Beede), Saturday, noon PT, Tempe Diablo Stadium, Fox Sports West/KLAA (830 AM). Angels (Parker Bridwell) vs. Giants (Andrew Suarez), Saturday, noon PT, Scottsdale Stadium. No TV or radio in Southern California.

Shohei Ohtani roughed up for 6 runs by Tijuana Toros

By Jeff Fletcher

TEMPE, Ariz. — From Billy Eppler to Mike Scioscia, Angels management has insisted ever since the day they signed Shohei Ohtani that he should not be viewed as a finished product.

That point was on full display in front a few hundred fans and a few dozen media members Friday afternoon, when Ohtani gave up six runs in a sometimes sloppy three-inning performance against the Mexican League's Tijuana Toros.

"I felt like I made a lot of good pitches and quite a few bad ones," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "The good thing I got out of this outing was pitching with runners on base, out of the stretch."

Ohtani was scheduled to throw 60 pitches in four innings, and he needed 64 pitches to get through three. His fastballs, mostly registering around 92-95 mph, were spotty, including one that a 33-year-old journeyman named Dustin Martin blasted over the right-field fence.

While many of his pitches were off the mark, Ohtani threw some sliders and splitters that befuddled the Tijuana hitters — only one of which, Jorge Cantu, had seen any significant major league time.

Ohtani struck out six, hit two and walked one. He allowed five hits, two of them well struck. His defense made an error behind him.

It was Ohtani's third start, and he's now allowed 10 runs in parts of six innings. One inning was ended short of three outs to preserve his pitch count in a "B" game against the Milwaukee Brewers last week.

He has struck out 16, which is the number that best illustrates the potential that led the Angels — and just about every other club — to view him as a possible ace pitcher. He's also trying to learn to hit in the major leagues, an unprecedented feat in modern baseball. So far that's going about as well as pitching, with him collecting just one hit in his first 11 at-bats.

Ohtani, 23, said he expects to adjust more quickly to hitting, because that doesn't involve the added factors of the ball and mound, which are both slightly different in the majors than Japan.

"Adjustments need to be made with the ball and the mound and everything," he said. "That may be some of the reasons I'm getting hit."

On Friday, Ohtani actually looked better in his first two innings, with good control and the hits coming on soft contact. In the third, though, he had just waited while his team scored three runs, and he came out shaky. He walked the first hitter and hit the second.

"He got a little lost," catcher René Rivera said.

Another issue, suggested Rivera, is that so far Ohtani has pitched twice in minor-league settings, with few fans in the stands and minor-league competition in the batter's box.

"I'll tell you something," Rivera said, "once the lights come on, it's a different ballgame. It's tough to pitch here. There are no fans. (Tijuana), don't get me wrong, they're a good team, but they're not a big league team. The adrenaline is not there. Once the lights come on and they say 'Play ball,' you'll see something different. More velocity, sharper pitches. It's going to be Ohtani. You have to give it time."

Of course, the adrenaline of facing a major league team could be offset by the difficulty in facing major league hitters. Ohtani has barely seen any big leaguers in three games so far.

The Angels aren't necessarily trying to shield him, but trying to fit him into the schedule. He is pitching on five or six days' rest, while the other starters are working on four days' rest. That means Ohtani has to pitch the same day as another starter, and he takes a back seat to established major leaguers. Matt

Shoemaker started the Angels' regular exhibition against the Chicago Cubs on Friday, leaving Ohtani to pitch the "B" game.

The Angels haven't said when Ohtani's next start will be, but if he works on five days' rest, his turn would come Thursday, a day the Angels have split squads playing two major league exhibitions. He could start at home against the Chicago White Sox or against the Colorado Rockies in Scottsdale.

Facing major league hitters is only a part of the evaluation process. The Angels mostly look at the objective data — like velocity and spin rate — to gauge their pitchers.

For his part, Ohtani doesn't seem to have any doubts he's going to get where he needs to be by the start of the season, less than three weeks away.

"At this point, I feel like I'm taking the right steps forward," he said. "Over the last few years, I've gotten where I need to be. I think I'll be ready."

Angels SS Andrelton Simmons says he's OK to play again

By Jeff Fletcher

TEMPE, Ariz. — The Angels seem to have survived their first injury scare of the spring.

A day after Andrelton Simmons left a game with an injured left shoulder suffered on a dive, the Gold Glove shortstop said he was fine.

"I'm ready to go today if they let me," Simmons said Friday morning.

Simmons, however, was not in the lineup and not even on the field for the normal workouts. Instead, they limited him to treatment in the trainers room, as they are taking the safe route with one of their most valuable players.

Manager Mike Scioscia said he was relieved when Simmons' MRI exam Thursday night showed only a left shoulder strain. When Scioscia first came out to the field to check on Simmons after the fifth-inning play on Thursday, he was concerned.

"When it first happened, you don't know what you're going to find," Scioscia said. "He dove for a ball a couple years ago and you knew his thumb was messed up."

In contrast to the sprained thumb Simmons suffered in 2016, this injury appears to be minor. He could be back in a couple days.

"I want to get back out there with my teammates, just play together, get that feel, get my at-bats and my timing and rhythm down," he said. "I'm excited for the season so I want to be out there and be a part of what everybody is doing."

Impressive reliever

Felix Peña has not allowed a run in five innings this spring, striking out seven.

"I think he's a young arm that's developing," Scioscia said. "He's finding his command. He's made some little changes to his tempo. There's no doubt he has a big arm."

The Angels acquired Peña from the Chicago Cubs in the fall, just after the end of the season. The 28-year-old right-hander has a 4.98 ERA and 10.4 strikeouts per nine innings in 36 major league games over the past two years.

Peña is a candidate to become a multi-inning reliever, filling the void left by the loss of Yusmeiro Petit.

Roster moves

The Angels sent four players to minor league camp: outfielder Jahmai Jones and pitchers Jesus Castillo, Dayan Diaz and Troy Scribner. Diaz, who is from Colombia, never arrived in camp because of visa issues.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Jon Lester, Cubs stymie Angels 6-1

By Jeff Miller

The Chicago Cubs defeated the Angels 6-1 Friday in a Cactus League game at Sloan Park in Mesa, Ariz.

AT THE PLATE: The Angels had only three hits against Jon Lester in five innings. After Lester departed, they did even less, finishing the game with four hits. Zach Gibbons had a triple and Eric Young Jr., Kaleb Cowart and Michael Hermosillo had singles. Luis Valbuena drove in the only run (with a sacrifice fly) as the Angels were shut out over the final four innings by four different Chicago relievers.

ON THE MOUND: Starter Matt Shoemaker pitched into the fourth inning, but the results weren't great. He gave up six runs and eight hits, striking out four and walking two. Shoemaker gave up home runs to Kyle Schwarber and David Bote and doubles to Jason Heyward and Albert Almora Jr. Relievers Blake Parker and Cam Bedrosian pitched scoreless innings, although Bedrosian gave up two hits. Jaime Barria, a top-10 prospect, retired all six batters he faced.

EXTRA BASES: Reserve outfielder Chris Young, who has an injured calf, took batting practice. ... After several regulars played three games in a row, most of them did not play Friday.

UP NEXT: Split-squad games: Angels vs. San Francisco, 12:10 p.m. Saturday at Tempe Diablo Stadium. TV: Prime Ticket; Radio: 830. Angels vs. San Francisco, 12:05 p.m. Saturday at Scottsdale Stadium. No TV/radio.

Shohei Ohtani fails to bring 'A' game to Angels' 'B' game

By Jeff Miller

It was a "B" game by definition and pretty much every measure Friday — Shohei Ohtani was not at his best.

This certainly wasn't the rookie's "A" game, not these three uneven innings against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League.

"I feel like I made a lot of good pitches," the former Japanese star said through an interpreter, "and quite a few bad ones."

Though spring training results are impossible to trust, there were plenty of numbers to ponder. Ohtani surrendered six runs and six hits, including a home run to Dustin Martin, a 33-year-old who has spent parts of five seasons at triple-A.

He struck out six, walked one, threw two wild pitches and hit two batters. Of his 64 pitches, 42 were strikes.

"It's going to be a process," catcher Rene Rivera said. "It's going in a good direction."

Ohtani again fought with command, though he did manage a few sharp sliders and split-finger pitches. His velocity topped out at 95 mph but was slightly down from the mid-90s he reached consistently in his first two starts.

The Angels had hoped for him to replicate throwing four innings but, because of his mounting pitch count, Ohtani was finished after three against a Tijuana lineup that featured Jorge Cantu as the only obvious former big-league name.

Later, he talked about his ongoing battle to get comfortable with the mounds and baseballs here.

Rivera suggested that another long inning by the Angels offense left Ohtani struggling to stay warm on a day temperatures reached the 80s. An extended stretch on the bench hindered Ohtani in his first spring training start.

"He got a little lost," Rivera said of a third inning, in which Ohtani gave up three runs. "But he picked it up, and he finished the inning."

Ohtani has made three starts, two in "B" games. This one was attended by general manager Billy Eppler, pitching coach Charles Nagy and an estimated 300 fans.

In those three games — covering roughly seven innings — he has given up 10 runs and struck out 16, the numbers representing both his trials and potential.

Ohtani's next appearance on the mound could come Thursday when the Angels, in Cactus League split-squad games, face Colorado and the Chicago White Sox.

Rivera said he thinks Ohtani will be just fine, and that everything will change, and dramatically so, when the situation becomes more real.

"Once the lights come on, they call 'play ball,' you're going to see a different [pitcher]," he said. "We'll see a lot more velocity, sharper pitches. He's going to be Ohtani. You have to give it time."

Because of the fascination surrounding him (and that Ohtani is attempting to play regularly as both a pitcher and hitter), the scrutiny — regardless of how much or little the results matter — will not subside.

"I feel like I'm taking the right steps forward," Ohtani said before exiting his news conference.

Simmons 'ready to go'

It looked potentially bad, but Andrelton Simmons said he felt fine. Just as importantly, it didn't sound like anything unusual.

"I didn't hear any crazy noises," the Angels shortstop said. "My arm got stuck a little bit. It took a quick second to release it."

On the morning after an MRI revealed a strain of his left shoulder, Simmons reported to work and reported that he actually could work, saying, "I'm ready to go today, if they let me."

The Angels weren't about to let him, not with so much spring training still to go. His status officially was characterized as day to day, and Simmons was given a day to focus on treatment.

He was injured Thursday attempting to make a lunging stop against Oakland. Simmons said he could have remained in the game, and would have "fought my hardest to" had the incident occurred during the regular season.

"For a quick second it was just hard to get my shoulder to come back," he said. "But, after I was, 'OK, my shoulder's OK.' I felt that I was going to be fine."

The Angels have seen their dynamic shortstop injured on a similar play. In May of 2016, Simmons sustained a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his left thumb making a diving play and missed nearly six weeks.

They dodged such a significant setback this time, manager Mike Scioscia calling this situation "a little bump in the road."

Short hops

The Angels optioned pitchers Troy Scribner and Dayan Diaz to triple-A Salt Lake and pitcher Jesus Castillo to double-A Mobile. They also reassigned outfielder Jahmai Jones to minor league camp.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Simmons 'ready to go' after shoulder scare

Shoemaker allows six runs vs. Cubs; Pena impressing in relief bid

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- **Andrelton Simmons** gave the Angels a brief scare after he rolled awkwardly on his left shoulder while diving for a ball Thursday, but the club can now breathe a sigh of relief.

Simmons, who was diagnosed with a shoulder strain and is considered day to day, said Friday that he feels fine and doesn't expect to be sidelined for long.

"I'm ready to go today if they let me," Simmons said.

The Angels, for their part, decided to play it safe with their Gold Glove Award-winning shortstop, who was out of Friday's lineup and did not join his teammates on the field for stretching and drills. Manager Mike Scioscia said Simmons received treatment and would not swing a bat on Friday.

"It's just a little bump in the road right now," Scioscia said. "We'll take it day by day and see when he's back out there."

Simmons tweaked his shoulder after attempting to field **Jed Lowrie's** single to left field in the fifth inning of the Angels' 7-3 loss to the A's at Hohokam Stadium. He admitted that there was a moment when he feared the injury might be serious.

"For a quick second, it was hard to get my shoulder to come back," Simmons said. "But after I was like, 'OK, my shoulder is OK,' I felt that I was going to be fine. I didn't hear any crazy noises or feel anything weird. My arm got stuck a little bit, so it took a quick second to release it. I knew it wasn't going to be anything bad."

In other injury news, outfielder **Chris Young** took live batting practice Friday as he continues to recover from a strained calf that has kept him out of action for most of camp.

Shoemaker struggles

Right-hander **Matt Shoemaker** endured a rough start in the Angels' 6-1 loss to the Cubs at Sloan Park on Friday, giving up six runs on eight hits over 3 2/3 innings. The bulk of the damage came on a pair of two-run homers, by **Kyle Schwarber** in the third and **David Bote** in the fourth.

"I think Shoe felt good and really had a good split today," Scioscia said in a postgame interview with Fox Sports West. "Didn't quite locate the fastball like he wanted to. He lost some counts and then they got on some fastballs, hung a split and a slider. But he got to his pitch count, got into the fourth inning. It's a step forward for him, for sure."

Camp battle

Right-hander **Felix Pena**, who has struck out seven over five scoreless innings this spring, has been among the relievers who have impressed so far in camp.

"I think he's a young arm that's developing," Scioscia said. "I think he's finding his command. He's made some little changes to his tempo, and there's no doubt he's got a big arm."

Acquired from the Cubs over the offseason, Pena could be a candidate to replace **Yusmeiro Petit** as the Angels' multi-inning reliever in 2018.

Second round of cuts

The Angels sent four players to Minor League camp on Friday: outfielder **Jahmai Jones** and pitchers **Troy Scribner**, **Dayan Diaz** and **Jesus Castillo**. Diaz, a Colombian right-hander, never arrived at big league camp due to visa issues.

Up next

The Angels will play a pair of split-squad games against the Giants on Saturday. Left-hander **Andrew Heaney** will make his third Cactus League start at Tempe Diablo Stadium, while right-hander **Parker Bridwell** will make his fourth appearance of the spring in Scottsdale. The home game will begin at 12:10 p.m. PT and can be viewed on MLB.TV.

Ohtani takes positives from tough 'B' game

Righty says he feels good following outing vs. Mexican League's Tijuana Toros

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- Given the hype that has trailed him from Japan to the United States, it would be easy to succumb to Spring Training alarmism after looking at the line score of **Shohei Ohtani's** start against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League in a "B" game at Tempe Diablo Stadium on Friday.

Taking the mound for the third time this spring, Ohtani surrendered six runs over three innings and at times looked a bit erratic. The rough outing served as a reminder that Ohtani's adjustment to the Majors

remains an ongoing process despite the high expectations that have been thrust upon the 23-year-old two-way phenom.

"Body-wise, I feel the same," Ohtani said via interpreter Ipei Mizuhara. "The adjustments I have to make are with the new ball and new mound and everything. That might be one of the reasons why I'm getting a little delayed, but other than that, my body feels good."

The Angels had hoped Ohtani would be able to get through four innings, but he needed 64 pitches to get through three. He gave up six hits, including a first-inning solo home run to **Dustin Martin**, while walking one and striking out six. Ohtani's fastball primarily ranged from 92-95 mph, though he had trouble locating it.

"I felt like I made a lot of good pitches and quite a few bad ones," Ohtani said. "The good thing I got out of this outing was pitching with runners on base, out of the stretch."

Ohtani has now allowed 10 runs over seven innings in his three appearances as a pitcher this spring, though he has also racked up 16 strikeouts over that span. His results as a hitter have also been mixed so far, as he has gone 1-for-11 with three walks.

Ohtani said he feels more adjustments will be required on the pitching side given the slicker balls and slightly steeper mounds that are used in the United States.

"At this point, I feel like I'm taking the right steps forward," Ohtani said. "Over the last few years, I've gotten to where I need to be. I think I'll be ready."

The Angels have not yet announced when Ohtani will make his next start on the mound, though he will likely return to Cactus League action after making two consecutive outings in sparsely attended "B" games. Catcher **Rene Rivera** suggested that Ohtani could benefit from pitching on a larger stage, particularly once the regular season begins.

"I'll tell you something, once the lights come on, it's a different ballgame," Rivera said. "I think it's tough to pitch here. There are no fans. Don't get me wrong, [the Toros], they're a good team, but they're not a big league team, so the adrenaline is not there. Once the lights come on, you're going to see a lot more velocity, sharper pitches. It's going to be Ohtani."

FROM USA TODAY

Shohei Ohtani explains why he's 'a little delayed' after allowing six runs to Mexican League team

By Ted Berg

TEMPE, Ariz. — Pitching in an exhibition game against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League, Shohei Ohtani allowed six runs in three innings while hitting two batters, walking one, and striking out six.

Outside of Toros DH Dustin Martin's gargantuan homer off Ohtani in the first, few of the hits off the coveted 23-year-old two-way player were especially hard. But following the erratic performance, Ohtani allowed that he is still in the process of adjusting to certain particulars of Major League Baseball.

"Body-wise, I feel the same," Ohtani said through an interpreter, when asked to compare his readiness this season against the five he spent with the Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan. "The adjustments I have to make are with the new ball and new mound and everything. That might be one of the reasons why I'm getting a little delayed, but other than that, my body feels good."

The balls used in Nippon Professional Baseball are slightly smaller and feature higher seams than those used in Major League Baseball. Pitcher's mounds stateside are composed of harder dirt than those in Japan. Ohtani is hardly the first Japanese pitcher to encounter such issues when transitioning to Major League Baseball.

Spring training stats are something close to meaningless, as the quality of competition can vary greatly across even a single game, and veteran players unconcerned with winning roster spots may use Cactus or Grapefruit League contests as opportunities to hone specific aspects of their craft.

But for Ohtani, a 23-year-old phenomenon coveted by all 30 teams this winter, the results are nonetheless underwhelming on both sides of the ball: He is 1-for-11 with three walks to date as a hitter in Cactus League games, and he has allowed 10 runs in 7 1/3 combined innings across three starts — one in a proper Cactus League game against the Brewers in Tempe, one in a "B" game against the Brewers in Maryvale, and Friday's outing against the Toros. On a promising note — and perhaps the most important one — he has struck out 16 opposing batters while walking only three.

Asked to compare his progress at the plate with his progress at the mound, Ohtani said they felt about the same, then noted that the differences in the mound and ball might make the pitching side take a bit longer.

"Hitting-wise, I don't think the adjustment is going to be as big as pitching-wise," he said. "I just need to face live pitchers and get more at-bats in. Pitching-wise, the mound, and the ball — the difference in those things — it might be a little tougher to make the adjustment."

"Compared to the beginning of camp, I'm getting adjusted better and better. But I have noticed, in live games, it feels a little different from the practice mounds, so I just need to keep on throwing out there. Just keep on going."

Ohtani, who passed up a shot at a nine-figure contract by entering MLB before the age of 25 — when he would qualify as a Major League free agent, under the league's rules — is not yet on the Angels' 40-man roster but is expected to break camp with the big-league club. He said Friday that expects to be ready by Opening Day.

FROM THE NEW YORK POST**Shohei Ohtani struggling: Is it growing pains or more serious?**

By Joel Sherman

TEMPE, Ariz. — Billy Eppler refused to participate in the exercise. The Angels general manager saw no value in hypotheticals. He considered it “a waste of time and energy” to imagine a scenario in which Shohei Ohtani either failed to hit or to pitch at a quality level in the regular season and what would be done in reaction.

“I am not allowing my mind to go there,” Eppler said. “It is out of your control. You are spending energy on something that has not happened. It could. If it does, we’ll deal with it.”

Ninety minutes later, on a hot sunny Friday afternoon at Tempe Diablo Stadium, Ohtani started against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League and continued a spring training that only is going to foster more such questions and thoughts.

Ohtani not only lacked high-end velocity during three innings, hitting 95 mph a few times, but mainly settling in at 91-94 with command issues. He showed his terrific slider, but also plenty of hangers. In his third underwhelming Angels start, he induced an impressive 17 swings-and-misses, but also threw three wild pitches as former Mets catcher Rene Rivera had difficulty corraling balls in the dirt, in particular.

In all there were six runs in six innings on six hits against a lineup on which the most famous name was Jorge Cantu, who last played in the majors in 2011. Lefty Dustin Martin, batting third for the Toros, ambushed a first-pitch fastball for a homer in the first inning. If you remember that name, he was part of the package the Mets surrendered in July 2007 for Luis Castillo. Martin, a 26th-round pick in 2006, has never played in the majors.

For just about any other pitcher this all would have melted into the monotony of this time of year — and very well still might for Ohtani. But Ohtani, of course, is no ordinary pitcher, in part because he also is a hitter, a combination that makes him currently the most interesting man in baseball.

He spoke afterward about “taking the right steps forward,” but also adjusting to a spring training without days off, and with different mounds and a larger baseball than used in Japan. It is a reminder just how difficult what he is trying to do is. No player has regularly hit and pitched in the majors since Babe Ruth in 1919.

Ohtani is trying to do it at age 23. In a new league and new culture, surrounded by new teammates and large expectations. I assume 30 teams can’t be wrong, that his talent on both sides of the ball is exceptional and worth the rabid pursuit and willingness to change to a six-man rotation to better accommodate him.

But the hurdles also are exceptional. It is why I asked Eppler about the organization's tolerance level should Ohtani struggle at one or both of these disciplines. Do they ask him to concentrate on one or the other, or even contemplate a minor league demotion?

For the Angels are not, say, the Reds or Tigers, a rebuilding squad that could have a long leash on failure in exchange for a player getting experience. Already, brilliant seasons of Mike Trout have been wasted without the Angels winning even a single playoff game in his tenure. Eppler has done a good job of surrounding Trout with a stronger roster in 2018. Part of that includes projecting Ohtani as a top-of-the-rotation difference-maker and impact lefty bat as a few-times-a-week DH.

To date, though, his starts have lacked dominance and he is 1-for-11 without an extra-base hit at the plate. It also is just the midpoint of spring training. For Ohtani's latest game, there might have been 300 people in attendance — a good deal of them reporters. The Angels seem more pleased at how well Ohtani has integrated into the culture of the team than anything that has occurred yet on the field.

"He's fit right in," Trout said.

Ohtani has played H-O-R-S-E and golf with teammates, gone to hockey games and dinners. Shortly after signing with the Angels, Ohtani asked Eppler to supply him with the offseason workouts of Trout and starter Garrett Richards despite having one of his own because, he said, "I'm coming to play their game."

In those games, teammates have seen the raw talent, and Eppler said, "I stay as far away from results as possible," judging instead player decision-making and execution with the belief that if those are handled well "results will follow." And Eppler insists Ohtani is making good choices on the mound and at the plate and that those will be rewarded.

So far, the rewards have not come in spring. Three weeks until the season. Are these normal growing pains and standard progression for the most interesting man in baseball — or something else?

FROM ESPN.COM

Harper vs. Stanton. Ichiro vs. MadBum? Picking the perfect Aaron Judge-less Home Run Derby field

By Buster Olney

The day after Aaron Judge won the Home Run Derby in July, the world's best hitter stood near the batting cage and explained why he had found himself awed by Judge's power. "People don't understand how hard it is to do what he did," Joey Votto said, motioning toward that distant area in right-center field where so many of Judge's home runs had landed.

Judge was the perfect Home Run Derby champion: He's the biggest player in baseball history, he wrecked the competition and he had fun, with grace -- he would not start the trophy ceremony until Danilo Valiente, his batting practice pitcher, was located and placed by his side to share credit. So yes, it's disappointing that we won't see the Judge fireworks again, assuming he doesn't change his mind (and I'd pin the odds of that somewhere below the chances of the Marlins winning the World Series this year).

But it's his prerogative to do what he wants, maybe to protect his surgically repaired shoulder, and the show must go on. Here is the Judge-less Home Run Derby field we'd love to see this July:

Bryce Harper

The All-Star Game is in Washington during the final season before Harper reaches free agency, and he has indicated he will be ready to go, if asked (and if healthy).

Spoiler alert: He will be asked.

Giancarlo Stanton

Extroverts draw energy from those around them, and introverts expend energy when around others. In a smaller parallel world, the same can be said for Home Run Derby participants: Some find it to be a grind, and some really seem to love it -- and Stanton seems to be a Derby extrovert. He has seemed to love it in the past, and a final between Stanton and Harper might provide the best possible showdown.

Joey Gallo

What the Rangers first baseman hits can't be classified as merely home runs. They are epic; they are moonshots. He hits them higher -- and usually farther -- than anybody else, and at 6-foot-5, 230 pounds, Gallo would be a legit threat to win the Derby.

Gary Sanchez

The Yankees catcher took down Stanton last year and is fully capable of winning this event. After a few months of living in the shadow of Judge and Stanton, maybe he'd like another shot at center stage. (And if he gets the trophy, maybe he could help coax Judge out of Derby retirement in some future year for a showdown.)

Mike Trout

The best player on the planet already has 201 career homers at age 26, and if he ever wanted to participate, you know Major League Baseball would love to have him. And he should be asked.

But presumably, he'll say no. Which leads us to...

Todd Frazier

Trout's fellow New Jersey native put on arguably the greatest Derby show ever in Cincinnati in the first year the event went to an improvised timed format, and the infectious enthusiasm of Frazier and his pitcher -- his brother Charlie -- helped breathe more life into the event. Frazier, the ultimate extrovert, would only make this more fun.

Jose Altuve or George Springer or Carlos Correa

Altuve would be the mouse among elephants, but he has legitimate pop and hit 24 homers each of the past two seasons -- but he'd probably say no. Springer has said no in the past. Correa may well say no. But it's never a bad thing to try to get a World Series champion into the mix.

Manny Machado

This is a big platform season for Machado, who will hit the free-agent market with Harper next fall and will get an enormous deal. As one of the most-discussed players in baseball this summer, he'd be a good get for MLB for this event.

Shohei Ohtani

When he took his first rounds of batting practice in Arizona this year, his Angels teammates texted each other about Ohtani's big power -- and no one can dispute his star power. Ohtani's participation would pump up worldwide ratings, and hopefully someone asks him. But as teams prepared to bid on him, they learned that he is mostly a private person and all about baseball, so it seems a stretch that he would do this.

Ichiro Suzuki

The first time I ever saw the 5-11, 175-pound Ichiro take batting practice, future Hall of Famer Pat Gillick -- then the general manager of the Mariners -- walked over and warned me: "Pay attention to his last round of batting practice -- he's got a lot of power." Sure enough, Ichiro slammed ball after ball after ball into the right-field stands, making perfect contact with his precise eye-hand coordination.

Ichiro wouldn't hit them nearly as far as Stanton or Gallo or Harper, but he is so disciplined and so specific that he might find a way to put up a fight. That would be a lot of fun to watch, and the 44-year-old would be the crowd favorite, behind Harper.

Madison Bumgarner

When we first mentioned Bumgarner's desire to be in the Derby a couple of years ago, another player asked me derisively, "Do you really think he would have a chance against the greatest home run hitters in the world?" The player argued vehemently that there are position players more deserving than the Giants pitcher.

Which sort of misses the point. The Home Run Derby, at its best, is supposed to be a spectacle. It's supposed to be fun. It's supposed to be interesting. It's not an SAT test of hitting acumen.

Last year, the 6-5, 250-pound Bumgarner had home runs with an exit velocity of over 115 mph, higher than most hitters. His participation would be interesting, and he would try to launch balls to the distant Capitol.

But Aaron Judge, always know that if you change your mind, the baseball world would love to have you back in the Derby.

Shohei Ohtani falls short of huge expectations

By Keith Law

TEMPE, Ariz. -- This was not the Shohei Ohtani we were promised.

Ohtani's third start of spring training failed to live up to expectations -- although the expectations for him have been set so high that it would be hard for any mortal to meet them. But it wasn't the version of the guy I expected to see in my first live look at the Los Angeles Angels right-hander on the mound, as his stuff Friday was a little less than I anticipated and he had trouble with his delivery and command throughout his three-inning stint against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League.

Ohtani hit 95 mph a bunch of times, but that was his top velocity of the day. He was 91 to 95 mph into the fifth, with some two-seam life at the lower end of the range and some visible spin on the four-seamers at 94 to 95 mph, with the latter fooling a number of right-handed hitters. I've talked to scouts who have seen him throwing up to 99 mph in Japan, so topping out at 95 is a little odd, particularly while pitching with a week of rest. His slider is an absolute wipeout pitch, at least a grade 70, with good tilt and a late break that looks like it shouldn't even be physically possible, mostly thrown in the 76 to 81 mph range.

He threw a handful of splitters at 86 to 87 mph, but the majority of them ended up in the dirt; Rene Rivera was behind the dish, and he did not look like a big league catcher Friday. While the pitch itself is very sharp and looks like a fastball out of his hand, I think big league hitters will learn to lay off it if Ohtani never throws it for a strike. He also mixed in a show-me curveball at 68 to 70 mph that has tight rotation but seems superfluous given his slider -- as there's too much risk he'll hang one and get punished for it.

His bigger problem Friday was his delivery, though, not his stuff. Ohtani comes from a high three-quarters arm slot that gives him good downhill plane on his fastball and depth on both breaking pitches. But in Friday's start, he struggled to get to a consistent release point, losing it completely at the start of the third inning, when he fell behind the first batter 3-0 and eventually walked him, then hit the next

batter with a fastball that rode way in to Ohtani's arm side. That in and of itself is not that unusual or concerning, but if it turns out he regularly has this issue in starts, that would be a significant problem for him, as it would mean he has ceded the inside corner to right-handers and seen his breaking balls both start to back up or hang on him.

This might all sound alarmist, particularly to Angels fans, but it's not. It's one bad start, and one where he showed a slider that many big league starters would kill to have on their best days. If I didn't tell you who the pitcher was, but instead said, "Hey, I saw a 6-foot-4 right-hander throw up to 95 mph with a 70-grade slider and some feel for a true splitter," you'd say that sounds like a pretty good big league starter. Ohtani did show he's mortal, though, and I think this tuneup gave him and the Angels some very specific points on which to work going forward.

- The Angels played a few of their hitting prospects in the game, notably Jahmai Jones, who singled and grounded out in his first two at-bats (before I left to write this post). Jones showed slightly above-average speed, as well as and that very direct swing that has produced strong contact rates for a teenager in pro ball over the past two years. I'm still very bullish on his offensive upside, although ultimately his ceiling will be determined by how much power he develops as he gets into his early 20s.

FROM FANGRAPHS

Albert Pujols Is Here for Your Jerseys

By Rian Watt

One of the fun things about baseball, I think, is that players on opposing teams spend quite a lot of time standing next to each other and not moving very much. You don't get this in basketball. If Dikembe Mutombo spent too much time standing still next to Michael Jordan, he was liable to find his face on a poster somewhere. Not so in football, either — the possibility for interaction is limited mostly to comings and goings on and off the field, and there's a martial quality to the whole affair that inhibits relaxed conversation of the type you and I might have were we standing together quietly on a baseball field and not doing very much at all.

Anyway, last night I was mucking around on YouTube and found this video called "MLB Friend Joke". This is a video title apparently conceived with a search engine, and not a human being, primarily in mind, and this is also what my friends fervently hope I am leading up to when I start sentences with phrases like "so I heard this great story about the 1940s Cincinnati Reds last night." I watched this video because I was tired and didn't have anything else to do.

And then I saw something happen twice — and happen twice in a way that made me *certain* that it had happened before and would happen again. I saw **Albert Pujols** messing with an opposing player's jersey. Here's what I saw, specifically: (gif of video in article)

That's Albert Pujols, Los Angeles Angel, standing on second base at Minute Maid Park and looking at **Carlos Correa**, 15 years his junior. Pujols raises his hands skyward, just above the level of his shoulder. He's relaxed! He's casual! He's definitely not going to do anything to your jersey!

But then, just after the umpire has walked out of the shot, he does. A swing of the left hand gently up to belt level follows (with hindsight, we can see this was a nervous tic, a preparation for the heinous act that was to come), and then, the act itself: a swift tug on the soft white cloth in front of him, first up and then down, with the massive head looking away at first just to maintain, for a moment, the illusion that he is in fact disinterested in the outcome. But of course he isn't. Not at all. Albert Pujols is here to mess with your jersey.

This action shocked me, to my core. But then, moments later, it happened again. Same video. Same action. This one was a drive-by, a brutal act made more brutal by the fact that it happened to the most aged among us: **Bartolo Colon**. A fly out to center field. A glance at the culprit. And then, before you can even say, "I had *no* memory whatsoever of **Seth Smith** as an Oakland Athletic," it's over. The Machine has struck again, and the victim can only laugh. My favorite thing about this second clip is that Colon doesn't even really look at Pujols after the deed is done. He knows who did it. He's not surprised. His only concern is with looking down, near his belly, to see how much damage was done.

Readers, I'm going to level with you: I don't know much. There are *so many things* I have yet to learn all that much about. But I know this for sure: if a YouTube video called "MLB Friend Joke" contains not one but two clips of Albert Pujols messing with someone else's jersey, then this kind of thing isn't an isolated incident. Far from it, in fact. I am sure that our first-base friend has struck many, many times. So I leave it to you, the baseball-watching public — and I am thinking in particular, here, of Angels fans — to send me any clips you have, of any length at all, of this behavior happening out there in the wild. There is a typology of these things out there in the ether, and we're going to create it together. Godspeed.

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani says he needs to adjust to ball, mound after rough outing

By Larry Brown

Shohei Ohtani has shown flashes of brilliance so far this spring, but the Los Angeles Angels rookie has also been hit hard and not looked completely sharp.

After his latest outing, in which Ohtani was roughed up by the Tijuana Toros on Friday, the Japanese two-way player said he needs to adjust to the ball and mound.

"Adjustments need to be made with the ball and the mound and everything," Ohtani said, via the OC Register's Jeff Fletcher. "That may be some of the reasons I'm getting hit."

According to Fletcher, Ohtani allowed six runs on five hits, with two walks, two hit batters and six strikeouts in three innings. There were mixed reports about his velocity, with nobody clocking him above 95 mph, and most reporters saying he was in the 90-94 mph range.

Ohtani has now allowed 10 runs over six inning in three outings this spring. But it's his 16 strikeouts in six innings that shows the kind of stuff and potential he has.

It's very early in spring, and there will no doubt be an adjustment period for Ohtani. But once he gets settled in, fans should expect much better results.

FROM FANSIDED

Shohei Ohtani is going to give us the Angels-Dodgers rivalry we all deserve

By Sarabeth Pollock

The Dodgers-Angels rivalry is going to be on point in 2018 after Japanese ace Shohei Ohtani snubbed the Los Angeles Dodgers in favor of the Los Angeles Angels.

Los Angeles is known these days for having things in duplicate when it comes to sports. Two NFL franchises. Two NBA franchises. Two MLB franchises. It's the latter that will surely yield one heck of a rivalry in the City of Angels after the Los Angeles Angels landed Japan's standout double threat pitcher-hitter Shohei Ohtani. While the Dodgers enjoy multiple rivalries across the NL West and beyond, the LA-LA Land Rivalry is going to be particularly intense in 2018.

When Shohei Ohtani was shopping for a MLB team, franchises across the nation rolled out the red carpet to land him. It wasn't long before he zeroed in on seven clubs, all of which are based on the West Coast – with the exception of the Chicago Cubs and the Texas Rangers. A West Coast team made sense for Ohtani, as it places him closer to Japan.

The Dodgers had been courting Ohtani for quite a while, dating back seven or so year to when the now 23-year-old was starting high school. With the team's success in 2017, the Dodgers believed they had a very good chance landing the double threat phenom, so they rolled out the red carpet for him during their meeting in December. To improve their odds, the Dodgers' front office brought Clayton Kershaw, Justin Turner and Chris Taylor to meet with him in hopes that they could sway him in their favor.

Later, Turner described the meeting thusly: "I felt like it was a waste of my time."

Kershaw agreed: "Just a gigantic waste of time."

It wasn't long after that meeting that Ohtani decided to sign with Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Angels.

Despite the fact that Ohtani was looking at both National League and American League teams, Ohtani's insistence to be both a hitter and a pitcher gave a discernible advantage to the AL teams that could give him a shot as the designated hitter.

Southern California is where Ohtani wanted to be, but he wanted to be with the Angels, not the Dodgers.

At first pass this might not seem like a big deal. After all, the Dodgers have an incredibly talented squad and a proven starting rotation backed by a solid bullpen. They don't need Shohei Ohtani. But they *wanted* him. And having him choose the Angels stings more than just a little bit.

Meanwhile, the Angels are bending over backwards to make sure Ohtani has what he needs to be successful, something the Dodgers only do for Clayton Kershaw. The Angels are planning on a six-man rotation with Albert Pujols starting at first base just so that the DH will be open and available for Ohtani, who will benefit from the extra day of rest. It's a lot of work for one player, but the Angels believe that it will pay off in dividends later.

The LA-LA Rivalry will be intense because Dodgers fans won't forget that they were left jilted at the altar while the Angels ran away with the bride. They won't like that the Angels got the shiniest new toy in all of Major League Baseball. They will want to beat the Angels to prove how much they didn't really need him anyway. He's the one who missed out.

City rivalries are always fun, but keep your eyes on Los Angeles in 2018. There's a good chance we could see a World Series featuring cross-town rivals soon enough, and that would be something to see.

FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE

Progress report: Los Angeles Angels

By Jeff Sanders

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

2017 finish: 80-82 (2nd in AL West)

Manager: Mike Scioscia (1570-1346, 19th season)

Top baseball ops executive: Billy Eppler, general manager (third season)

DOLLARS AND SENSE

Highest-paid player: OF Mike Trout (\$34.1 million in 2018)

Top returning position player: SS Andrelton Simmons (7.1 WAR in 2017, baseball-reference.com)

Top returning pitcher: RHP Parker Bridwell (2.0 WAR in 2017)

THE MOVES

Key addition(s): RHP/OF Shohei Ohtana, SS Zack Cozart (free agent), 2B Ian Kinsler (trade), RHP Jim Johnson (trade), OF Chris Young (free agent), C Rene Rivera (free agent), 1B Chris Carter (minor league free agent), OF Jabari Blash (trade), OF Rymer Liriano (minor league free agent), SS Kevin Maitan (minor league free agent).

Key subtraction(s): 1B C.J. Cron (trade), 2B Brandon Phillips (free agent), 3B Yunel Escobar (free agent), RHP Bud Norris (free agent), 2B Cliff Pennington (free agent), RHP Jesse Chavez (free agent), OF Ben Revere (free agent), RHP Huston Street (free agent), RHP Ricky Nolasco (free agent).

Baseball America top-100 prospect(s): RHP Shohei Ohtani (No. 2), OF Jo Adell (No. 46), OF Jahmai Jones (No. 89).

STORYLINES TO WATCH

Shohei Ohtani is among the youngest-ever imports from Nippon Professional Baseball and easily the most intriguing after his exploits earned him a weighty nickname: "Japan's Babe Ruth." As such, the Angels plan to use a six-man rotation in a schedule that will allow the 23-year-old Ohtana to pitch and serve as a designated hitter. All eyes will be on Ohtani all year to see if his 100 mph fastball and left-handed swing live up to expectations after averaging 10.3 strikeouts per nine innings and slugging .500 in his five-year tenure in Japan.

Ohtani's arrival means the Angels will have to use Albert Pujols more frequently at first base, where he has played a grand total of 34 games the last two seasons. The Angels traded C.J. Cron to help clear the way for the 38-year-old Pujols, who is owed \$114 million through 2021 and is coming off a career-worst .672 OPS.

Mike Trout missed a large chunk of the season to injury and still managed to finish fourth in MVP voting (he'd never finished anywhere but first or second the previous five seasons.). The 26-year-old Trout hit 33 homers and swiped 22 bases in 114 games and led the majors with a 1.071 OPS.

PECOTA PROJECTION

80 wins