



Press Clips

(March 8, 2018)

CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 4)

- **Garrett Richards impresses in Angels' loss to Dodgers**
- **Angels' Shohei Ohtani calls first meeting with Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw a 'special' moment, despite strikeout**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 7)

- **Dodgers beat the Angels**
- **Angels pitcher Richard adds to arsenal with effective curve**
- **Inside the Dodgers' failed, frustrating bid for two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 12)

- **Kershaw freezes Ohtani, talks some smack**
- **Richards remains on dominant spring track**
- **Revamped Angels eye return to prominence**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 17)

- **Moura: Garrett Richards has long had more talent than luck, but the Angels need him to be their ace**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 18)

- **Clayton Kershaw strikes out Shohei Ohtani, wishes him well**

FROM SPORTING NEWS (PAGE 19)

- **Clayton Kershaw couldn't 'care less' about facing Shohei Ohtani**
- **A chat with Godzilla: Hideki Matsui on Yankees job, Shohei Ohtani, and adjusting to America**
- **Ichiro 'can't wait' to hit against Shohei Ohtani**

FROM NBCSPORTS (PAGE 24)

- **Clayton Kershaw, Justin Turner think Shohei Ohtani wasted the Dodgers time**

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS (PAGE 25)

- **Shohei Ohtani struck out against Clayton Kershaw and all he could do was laugh**

FROM BLEACHER REPORT (PAGE 26)

- **Ichiro Suzuki Wants to Play Until 50, Lauds Shohei Ohtani at Mariners Presser**
- **Jim Abbott Sends Message to Shaquem Griffin After Epic NFL Combine Performance**

FROM FANRAG SPORTS (PAGE 27)

- **Inside Baseball | MLB's winter winners and losers****

FROM BASEBALL ESSENTIAL (PAGE 28)

- **The Potentially Elite Angels Infield Defense**

FROM DEADSPIN (PAGE 30)

- **The Dodgers Still Sound Pretty Annoyed with Shohei Ohtani**

FROM THE NEW YORK POST (PAGE 31)

- **Why Dodgers stars are holding a big Shohei Ohtani grudge**

FROM FORBES.COM (PAGE 32)

- **NFL Prospect Shaquem Griffin Has An Enthusiastic Supporter, Kindred Spirit in MLB Alum Jim Abbott**

FROM THE COMEBACK (PAGE 34)

- **The Comeback presents: Baseball's 50 most important players**

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS (PAGE 35)

- **Ichiro cracks Shohei Ohtani joke during Mariners return**
- **Clayton Kershaw seems salty that Ohtani did not choose Dodgers**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Garrett Richards impresses in Angels' loss to Dodgers**

By Jeff Fletcher

THE GAME: The Angels lost 4-2 on Wednesday afternoon in their first meeting of the spring against the Dodgers, a matchup of aces Garrett Richards and Clayton Kershaw. The Angels are 6-7 this spring.

PITCHING REPORT: Richards gave up one run in four innings, striking out seven. He retired 12 of the 14 batters he faced, with only a Joc Pederson single and a Logan Forsythe RBI double in between. He liberally threw his curveball, a pitch he's trying to incorporate more this spring. A scout at the game said Richards, who also throws a fastball and slider, was throwing "three double-plus pitches at times most of the day. Very impressive." ... Right-hander Jim Johnson pitched a scoreless inning, with two strikeouts. ... Left-hander John Lamb gave up three runs in his two innings. Lamb had not allowed a run in his previous two outings. ... Blake Wood and Ian Krol also had multiple strikeouts in their one-inning appearances, as the Angels combined for 16 strikeouts.

HITTING REPORT: Ian Kinsler singled and walked. He has a .500 on-base percentage through his first five games. ... Mike Trout had his first hit of the spring, a run-scoring line drive single to left. Trout is now 1 for 12. ... Colin Walsh hit his third homer of the spring, tops on the team. A non-roster invite, Walsh is making a strong case for the final spot on the Angels' bench. He is 8 for 19 this spring. "Colin is swinging the bat well from both sides of the plate," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He can play middle infield and third base. He's having a good spring." ... Backup catcher René Rivera had two hits, improving to 8 for 17 this spring.

DEFENSE REPORT: Right fielder Zack Gibbons made a diving catch going toward the line, robbing Pederson of an extra-base hit.

UP NEXT: Angels (Tyler Skaggs) vs. A's (Kendall Graveman), Thursday, noon PT, Hohokam Stadium, Fox Sports West/KLAA (830 AM)

Angels' Shohei Ohtani calls first meeting with Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw a 'special' moment, despite strikeout

By Jeff Fletcher

TEMPE, Ariz. — Shohei Ohtani on Wednesday faced a significant challenge in what figures to be a year full of them.

He could take some solace in the fact that he fared just as poorly as most major league hitters with this one.

Ohtani faced the best pitcher in the majors, striking out in his only meeting with Clayton Kershaw in the Angels' Cactus League game against the Dodgers.

"I have been watching Kershaw pitch on TV a lot and it felt a lot different standing in at the plate against him," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "It's just a spring training game but it was somewhat of a special moment to be able to face Kershaw."

A left-handed hitter, Ohtani got ahead of the Dodgers lefty ace, 2-and-0. Then he fouled off two pitches. Kershaw then dropped a curveball in for a called third strike.

"I don't know if I'm going to be hit it the next time he throws it to me," Ohtani said. "I was kind of expecting it with two strikes. It was a pretty borderline pitch. I thought it was low, so I decided to take it. I guess it was too close to take so next time I'll try to at least foul it off."

For his part, Kershaw was unimpressed with the Ohtani meeting.

"I could care less now," Kershaw said. "He didn't pick us, so, you know, good luck to him."

The Dodgers were one of the seven finalists selected by Ohtani before he picked the Angels. Ohtani was asked on Wednesday how close he had come to picking the Dodgers, but his interpreter said he's not answering questions about the selection process. They have taken that stance consistently since spring training began.

Kershaw and Ohtani faced off just once, with Kershaw departing after three innings. Ohtani stuck around for one more plate appearance, a groundout against Brian Schmitter.

Ohtani is now 1 for 11 with three walks and four strikeouts, his only hit coming in his first game.

"It looked like he was seeing the ball well," Manager Mike Scioscia said after Wednesday's game. "The one pitch was borderline. Shohei looks like he's starting to see the ball. As he gets more at-bats, he'll get more comfortable."

This game marked another minor milestone for him, as he hit in a game on the same day that he had thrown a bullpen session. Scioscia had said earlier in the spring that Ohtani could do that during the season, but not likely in spring training. So it appears the Angels might be loosening the reins somewhat.

"It doesn't affect my bullpen sessions if I'm DH-ing that day," Ohtani said. "I have done the same thing in Japan, so it's not much different than my Japanese days."

Ohtani is not going to hit on Thursday, in preparation for his start on Friday. He isn't likely to hit again until Sunday, at the earliest.

As Ohtani attempts the difficult trick of succeeding in the majors as a pitcher and hitter, a Japanese legend quipped that he'd like to try it too.

Ichiro Suzuki, who signed on Wednesday with the Seattle Mariners, said during his press conference at the Mariners complex that he was looking forward to hitting against Ohtani.

And he joked he'd even like to pitch to him.

Ohtani respectfully expressed little doubt: "I think he would be able to pitch well."

CHANGE FOR MIDDLETON

Keynan Middleton, who got to the big leagues on the strength of a mid-90s fastball and a slider, is trying to incorporate more changeups this spring.

Middleton threw his changeup when he was a starter in the minors, but he mostly abandoned the pitch when he went to the bullpen. Last season, his first in the majors, he threw a few changeups, but almost exclusively to lefties. This year, the plan is for him to also use it against righties.

"It's a third pitch when his slider is not working," pitching coach Charlie Nagy said. "It's a solid pitch. It's going to make a big difference. It made a big difference last year."

Middleton, 24, was at times dominant last year. Other times, when he lost command of his fastball, he was burned by homers. He posted a 3.86 ERA, with 9.7 strikeouts per nine innings. He also gave up 11 homers in 58-1/3 innings.

ALSO

The Angels' exhibition game against the Tijuana Toros on Friday will be televised live ... in Japan. NHK, which is picking up the Angels broadcasts of most games that Ohtani plays, will be producing its own telecast of the Tijuana game, which is not broadcast in the United States. ...

Nick Tropeano gave up five earned runs in three innings in a "B" game on Wednesday morning against the Colorado Rockies. He gave up six hits and two walks, with three strikeouts. "Nick looked really good the first two innings," Scioscia said. "The third inning was a little rough, but he spun the ball well and changed speeds." The Angels are trying to prepare at least seven starting pitchers, which means that many days they need to find a second exhibition game to get work for a second starter."

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**Dodgers beat the Angels**

By Jeff Miller

The Dodgers beat the Angels 4-2 on Wednesday at Tempe Diablo Stadium. The Dodgers are 7-6 and Angels are 6-6 in Cactus League play.

AT THE PLATE: Logan Forsythe had two hits, including a home run, and three RBIs for the Dodgers. Forsythe is 7 for 14 with six RBIs this spring. Teammate Andrew Toles also homered. Both Forsythe and Toles have homered twice. Mike Trout had his first hit and RBI, driving home Rene Rivera with a fifth-inning single. Rivera finished with two hits.

ON THE MOUND: Clayton Kershaw pitched three scoreless innings, giving up three hits and two walks and striking out two. After falling behind in the count 3-0, he retired Justin Upton on a pop-out with the bases loaded to end the third inning. Brock Stewart gave up one run in two innings. For the Angels, Garrett Richards struck out seven in his four-inning start. He gave up only two hits, back to back in the second. Other than that, he retired all 12 Dodgers he faced. Reliever Jim Johnson pitched a 1-2-3 inning for the Angels against his former team. John Lamb gave up three runs and two homers in his two innings.

EXTRA BASES: In the closest thing yet to what could be the Angels' opening-day lineup, Shohei Ohtani batted seventh. ... The Angels played their regulars other than catcher Martin Maldonado and shortstop Andrelton Simmons.

UP NEXT: Angels vs. Oakland at 12:05 p.m. Thursday at Hohokam Stadium. TV: FS West; Radio: 830. Dodgers vs. Cleveland at 5:05 p.m. Thursday at Goodyear Ballpark. TV/Radio: None.

Angels pitcher Richards adds to arsenal with effective curve

By Jeff Miller

Garrett Richards threw the Dodgers a curve Wednesday.

In fact, he threw them a bunch of curves, and nearly all the pitches were effective.

Seven strikeouts later, the Angels right-hander was feeling confident in the expanded repertoire he's building for the regular season.

"Throwing that pitch for strikes kind of sets up an entire at-bat for me," Richards said. "I think today showed what the capabilities are if I can get that curveball over."

Along with his strikeouts, Richards permitted the Dodgers only two hits in his four-inning start. He gave up a single to **Joc Pederson** and a double to **Logan Forsythe** in back-to-back at-bats.

Other than that, he dominated the Dodgers, largely because of his ability to locate his rediscovered curveball in and around the strike zone.

"I just know that's a pitch that's going to help me out a whole lot," Richards said, "not only starting guys off with it, but it's a put-away pitch, too."

He has always had the curve. It's just that, Richards explained, he tended to abandon it when the pitch wasn't working. More and more, he drifted away from using it.

This spring, he has focused on throwing the curveball more regularly, a few slight adjustments to his delivery allowing him to become more consistent with it.

"Really, it's just about opening up my possibilities about what I can do," Richards said. "I don't have to be fastball-, slider-reliable anymore."

Not only did he start and finish off a few Dodgers with his curveball, he also doubled-up on a couple of hitters.

"If I get two curveballs over for strikes, I still have three pitches they haven't seen in that at-bat," he said. "I'll take that any day."

Kershaw wins first round vs. Ohtani

There was no language barrier this time. **Shohei Ohtani's** look spoke fluent baseball after he watched **Clayton Kershaw's** curveball masterfully end his third-inning at-bat.

In what had to be one of the most-anticipated plate appearances in Tempe Diablo Stadium history, Ohtani struck out looking against the Dodgers ace.

As he exited the batter's box, Ohtani looked back at umpire **Bill Miller**, clearly still not convinced the ball was a strike.

"It was a pretty borderline pitch," Ohtani explained later, this time speaking through his interpreter. "I thought it was kind of low, so I decided to take it. But it was too close to take. Next time, I'll at least try to foul it off."

That was the only matchup between the two, Ohtani later grounding into a double play against Brian Schmitter before being lifted. He is now 1-for-11 and hitless in his past 10 at-bats this spring.

Ohtani began Wednesday by throwing a bullpen session, the Angels then allowing him to bat in three consecutive games for the first time. He said such a workload was not unusual when he played in Japan.

Ohtani's next appearance will come Friday when he returns to the mound to start a "B" game against the Mexican League Tijuana Toros at noon (Arizona time) at Tempe Diablo Stadium.

Despite striking out, he spoke highly of the chance Wednesday to face one of baseball's best pitchers.

"I've been watching Kershaw pitch on TV a lot," Ohtani said. "Of course, it felt a lot different actually standing at the plate against him. It is a spring training game, but it was somewhat of a special moment."

Calhoun happy for Cron

What could have been a typically sleepy start to spring training instead was a jolt for **Kole Calhoun**.

Even before the Angels' first official full-squad workout, he was being forced to adjust to the sudden absence of **C.J. Cron** after his good buddy was traded to Tampa Bay.

"It was tough," Calhoun said. "But it's going to be the best thing for him, from a friend standpoint. He can go there and get a full season's worth of at-bats. It's going to be good for him. I'm happy for him."

Calhoun and Cron both attended high school in the Phoenix area. They spent much of the offseason working out together.

During those training sessions, they occasionally discussed the Angels' roster situation, particularly as it related to Cron.

"We kind of had a jam there at first base," Calhoun said. "There were some veteran guys there ahead of him. It (the trade) made a lot of sense."

The Angels dealt Cron to the Rays for a player to be named Feb. 17. With **Albert Pujols** and **Luis Valbuena** expected to play first base, there was no clear spot for Cron.

In his first 14 spring at-bats for Tampa Bay, Cron had five hits, including a home run.

Tropeano has good outing

Nick Tropeano pitched the equivalent of three innings in a "B" game Wednesday morning and reported no issues physically.

He gave up five runs and two walks against Colorado. The right-hander is coming back from elbow ligament replacement surgery.

Inside the Dodgers' failed, frustrating bid for two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani

By Andy McCullough

One day in early December, as the years-long pursuit of a baseball enigma approached its conclusion, a trio of Dodgers converged on the offices of the Creative Artists Agency in Century City.

Clayton Kershaw took a flight in from Dallas on the day of his wedding anniversary. Justin Turner escaped the frenzy of planning his own wedding to join. Chris Taylor hopped an early-morning jet from

Virginia Beach. The players huddled with members of their front office for a singular purpose: to convince Shohei Ohtani to become a Dodger.

The Dodgers had scouted Ohtani since his first year in high school in a rugged prefecture in northern Japan. Ohtani came to Los Angeles this winter as a 23-year-old phenom. He aimed to replicate a feat unseen since the days of Babe Ruth: He planned to hit and to pitch at baseball's highest level. And he sought in-person interviews with the seven clubs he deemed worthy of his services.

For about three hours, according to people who attended the meeting, Dodgers representatives tried to persuade Ohtani. They hyped the organization's past and future. They vouched for the comfort of Los Angeles. They searched for hints about his intentions, but the players found his answers inscrutable. It seemed like Ohtani had already made up his mind.

"I felt like it was a waste of my time," Turner said.

A few days later, Ohtani made his decision. He was coming to Southern California.

To be an Angel.

"Just a gigantic waste of time," Kershaw said.

It would have been a lot of work, for one particular player, and a lot of sacrifices for other guys

The announcement did not surprise Kershaw. Ohtani had not played the field regularly since 2014. The Angels provided Ohtani a chance to be a designated hitter, a perk no National League team like the Dodgers could offer. Ohtani manned that position during a spring training game on Wednesday at Tempe Diablo Stadium, when he crossed paths with Kershaw for the first time since December.

Kershaw harbored no malice toward Ohtani, whom he called "a very respectful guy." He directed his antipathy toward Ohtani's agent, Nez Balelo, for the secretive process. Balelo insisted the suggestion Ohtani had made a decision before meeting with the Dodgers was "unfounded."

On the mound, Kershaw demonstrated the enormity of the task facing Ohtani. In the third inning, Kershaw snapped a gorgeous curveball in a two-strike count. Ohtani stared as it landed in the catcher's glove. The umpire pumped a fist and Ohtani could only grin in awe as he returned to his dugout.

Inside a suite in the stadium's second level, Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman watched the at-bat. He lacked interest in rehashing his zeal for Ohtani. He maintained a diplomatic stance about the failed recruiting pitch. "The burden was on us to try to sell the National League," Friedman said. "We appreciated that it was an uphill battle, but it was well worth the effort."

For Ohtani, the learning curve this spring has been steep. He has one hit in 11 at-bats. He surrendered a home run in his first game as a pitcher and could not complete the second inning. His ability remains immense, if thus far unproven at the major league level.

The Angels made a slew of adjustments to accommodate Ohtani. They will experiment with a six-man rotation to give him more time to rest between pitching appearances. They asked 38-year-old veteran

Albert Pujols — who had been the club's DH — to start at first base on a regular basis for the first time since 2015. When Ohtani pitches, manager Mike Scioscia operates with fewer players on his bench.

Those compromises fly in the face of the Dodgers' governing principles. The organization rarely caters to individuals outside of Kershaw — who mostly asks to be left alone. Manager Dave Roberts juggles his batting order on a daily basis, shortens the outings of his starting pitchers and asks his bullpen to operate without concrete roles.

The Dodgers preach collectivism above all. Yet team officials felt Ohtani merited the adjustments.

"It would have been a lot of work, for one particular player, and a lot of sacrifices for other guys," Roberts said. "But when you look at the caliber of player — you don't do that for everyone. He's a special type of player."

The value of Ohtani sprung from more than his ability. Eager to test himself in the majors, Ohtani chose to leave Nippon Professional Baseball before he turned 25. Under Major League Baseball's collective bargaining agreement, Ohtani could sign only a rookie-level contract with a small signing bonus. The financial risk was minimal; the reward appeared uncapped.

Friedman pondered how to utilize Ohtani for several years, and in August traveled to Japan with a scouting contingent. The front office poured hundreds of hours into the pursuit and developing a plan to integrate Ohtani into their roster and their clubhouse. Team officials pondered his preferences and his habits. He was willing to forgo a potential nine-figure contract. If money wasn't a factor, what drove him?

On Dec. 1, Ohtani became available. A whirlwind ensued, as teams jockeyed for his services. Ohtani winnowed his suitors to seven teams: the Dodgers, Angels, Chicago Cubs, San Francisco Giants, San Diego Padres, Texas Rangers and Seattle Mariners. Outside of the Cubs, all six were West Coast teams. Only three were in the American League.

Given a short window to assemble a personalized presentation for Ohtani, the Dodgers scrambled to convene Kershaw, Turner and Taylor. Friedman denied the suggestion that the team invited Taylor so he could speak critically about the Mariners, another finalist. "Of course that's not what it is," Friedman said.

The burden was on us to try to sell the National League. We appreciated that it was an uphill battle, but it was well worth the effort.

The players joined a group that included Friedman, Roberts, general manager Farhan Zaidi, team president Stan Kasten and strength and conditioning coach Brandon McDaniel. Each man offered a different element of the pitch. Turner outlined his passion for the team's culture, but felt he could not forge a bond with Ohtani.

"He might as well have not been sitting there," Turner said, using an expletive for emphasis. "We might as well have been speaking to a window."

At one point, Turner recalled, Ohtani was asked for his true preference: Would he rather hit or pitch? "And he said, 'Whatever the manager says.' I was like 'Come on,'" Turner said.

Kershaw sensed a similar disconnect. He felt it was obvious Ohtani had no interest in returning to the outfield, the position he played in his teens. Kershaw blamed Balelo for not communicating this.

"It really just seemed like it was pre-determined that he wanted to DH," Kershaw said. "I'm kind of mad at his agent for making us waste all that time and effort. Fifteen teams should have been out of it, from the beginning. I know it's probably frustrating for everybody in the National League. A lot of guys spent a lot of time trying to figure out what makes him tick, and try to get him over here."

Ohtani declined to reveal how he felt about the Dodgers' presentation. Ohtani "can't talk about that process," according to his interpreter, Ippei Mizuhara. Balelo defended his client in a statement emailed to The Times.

"From the beginning, Shohei was fully committed to a fair process," Balelo said. "He asked teams for honest information and was honest with the teams. To suggest he would ask any club to meet with him without being open to playing for that club is unfounded and an insult to his personal ethics. In fact, the majority of the teams invited to make in-person presentations were National League clubs."

Roberts exited the meeting with a different impression than his players. He described Ohtani as "very engaged" in the presentation. But he had a similar conclusion. "I think it was already predetermined: He wanted to go to the American League," Roberts said.

Roberts shrugged. When it came to Ohtani, he felt, there was little the Dodgers could do.

"I still think we're the best team in baseball," Roberts said. "That's his decision. We wish him well. We've turned the page on him."

FROM ANGELS.COM

Kershaw freezes Ohtani, talks some smack

By Alyson Footer

TEMPE, Ariz. -- If Shohei Ohtani succeeds as a Major League hitter, he'll mostly face pitchers who don't come with a resume that includes three Cy Young Awards, a Most Valuable Player Award and seven All-Star selections.

But Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw did give the two-way player another gentle reminder in Wednesday's 4-2 win over the Angels that hitting big league pitching isn't going to be easy.

Wednesday's Cactus League matchup likely would have drawn a healthy crowd even if it didn't feature two of the most hyped players in baseball, so maybe the Kershaw-Ohtani faceoff in the third inning could be considered a mere bonus for the 5,650 in attendance at Tempe Diablo Stadium.

The Dodgers were among the finalists to acquire Ohtani, who became the most coveted free agent this offseason after being posted by Japan's Nippon-Ham Fighters.

"I could care less now," Kershaw said when asked if he was excited to face Ohtani. "He didn't pick us. Good luck to him."

The result of that Ohtani-Kershaw confrontation could be construed two ways, depending on allegiance. Dodgers fans may argue Ohtani was completely overmatched by Kershaw's signature devastating curveball. Angels fans may say Ohtani wisely didn't swing at a pitch most hitters wouldn't be able to do anything with anyway.

Either perspective leads to the same conclusion -- after working a 2-2 count, Ohtani struck out looking at a called strike three, marking the first out of the inning.

"I don't know if I'll be able to hit it the next time he throws to me, but I was kind of expecting it with two strikes," Ohtani said. "I thought it was kind of low so I decided to take it. Next time I'll try to at least foul it off."

Kershaw said he went to the curveball for a counterbalance effect.

"I fell behind him, 2-0, had to throw two fastballs that he fouled off," Kershaw said. "So, I had to throw four straight fastballs and felt I had to throw something a little slower."

Ohtani, fielding several questions about that one pitch, had a balanced perspective -- he understood the attention that comes with facing one of the game's premier pitchers, while also mindful that this was not the regular season.

"I've been watching Kershaw pitch on TV a lot, but of course, if felt a lot different actually, standing at the plate against him," Ohtani said. "It is still Spring Training games, but it was somewhat of a special moment to be able to face Kershaw."

Ohtani began his day by throwing a scheduled bullpen in advance of his anticipated Friday start against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League. He served as the designated hitter against the Dodgers, seeking to pick up the pace on what has been a slow offensive start to the spring season.

In addition to the strikeout, Ohtani grounded into a double play in the fourth. So far, Ohtani has one hit in Cactus League play.

"It looked like he was seeing the ball well," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "The one [Kershaw] pitch was borderline. Shohei looks like he's starting to see the ball. As he gets more at-bats, he'll get more comfortable."

Richards remains on dominant spring track

Angels right-hander notches 7 strikeouts against Dodgers

By Alyson Footer

TEMPE, Ariz. -- **Garrett Richards'** main goals this spring are to simply stay healthy and be fully prepared when the regular season begins at the end of the month. So far, three starts in, he's on track.

Staying true to his commitment to make his curveball a regular part of the repertoire this season, Richards seemed to have few issues during his four innings in the Angels' **4-2 loss** to the Dodgers on Wednesday. He yielded two hits, one run and struck out seven, exiting the game having faced 14 batters and feeling good about where he is in his preparation for the 2018 campaign.

"I was happy with how I controlled counts," Richards said. "I was ahead in the count a lot. When you're ahead in the count, everything kind of opens up a little bit."

Richards is on the comeback trail, seeking to erase lost seasons in 2016 and '17, when he was sidelined for all but six starts in each.

After a trio of spring appearances, the Angels have reason to be optimistic. Richards has yielded a total of two runs, spanning nine innings. Wednesday's outing was his longest and most dominant of the three.

"Garrett was electric," manager Mike Scioscia said. "Just a couple pitches he missed with some fastballs and those guys hit them. But his stuff was alive. It was good to see him maintain it through four innings."

Richards' pending re-emergence into the Angels' rotation will unite him with fellow starters **Shohei Ohtani, Andrew Heaney, Tyler Skaggs, Matt Shoemaker** and a handful of pitchers competing for the final spot.

"I'm just excited to be back playing baseball," Richards said. "For me it's the small things, just taking it one day at a time. Just concentrating on listening to my body. Staying healthy is my No. 1 objective this season. I know what I'm capable of doing if I stay healthy; I'm just really being mindful of how I'm feeling and making sure I get with the training staff on a daily basis to shore things up."

Camp battle

Nick Tropeano is one of three candidates aiming for a final spot in the rotation, but so far, the right-hander has yet to find a definitive groove. Pitching a "B" game against the Rockies in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Wednesday, Tropeano allowed five earned runs and walked two while striking out three over three innings.

"Nick looked really good for the first two innings," said Scioscia, who traveled to Scottsdale to watch the outing and returned in time for the game against the Dodgers. "The third inning was a little bit rough, but he spun the ball well and changed speeds."

Tropeano missed the entire 2017 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery toward the end of the season in '16. Though he pitched well over 13 starts that year and reported to Spring Training seemingly healthy, he'll have to earn his way into the rotation, which will require outperforming **Parker Bridwell** (7.50 ERA) and **JC Ramirez** (5.06) for that unconventional sixth starting spot.

Up next

Watch live on **MLB.TV** as Skaggs will look to improve upon a spring showing that has so far produced a 10.38 ERA over two outings when he starts against the A's at 12:05 p.m. PT on Thursday at Hohokam Stadium. He's allowed five earned runs -- including three homers -- over 4 1/3 innings. The A's will counter with right-hander **Kendall Graveman**.

Revamped Angels eye return to prominence

Offseason acquisitions have club upbeat with postseason aspirations

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- Angels camp has been at the epicenter of media attention this spring, and it's not because of the presence of superstar **Mike Trout** or future Hall of Famer **Albert Pujols**.

The main draw this year has been **Shohei Ohtani**, the 23-year-old pitcher/hitter who is attempting to translate his two-way play to the Majors after five groundbreaking seasons in Japan.

Ohtani has sparked plenty of curiosity because of the novelty of his endeavor in the Majors, but he is expected to be a key member of the Angels' roster in 2018, forming part of their six-man rotation and serving as a part-time designated hitter in their lineup.

The arrival of Ohtani and several other new pieces have created heightened expectations for the Angels, who were forced to watch the postseason unfold without them for the third consecutive season after falling just short of an American League Wild Card berth in 2017.

"With all the new additions, we're just going to go out and try to win ballgames," Trout said. "People are going to think the expectations are higher, for sure. We're trying to get to the playoffs and make a push."

What's the goal?

The Angels haven't won a postseason game since 2009. They've reached the playoffs only once since Trout debuted in 2011, when they were swept by the Royals in the '14 AL Division Series. With Trout

under contract for only three more seasons, the urgency to win is building for the club, which was active this offseason in building a competitive roster for '18.

The World Series champion Astros will enter the season as the heavy favorites in the AL West, but the Angels' offseason additions should, at the very least, put them in contention for an AL Wild Card spot.

What's the plan?

In addition to landing Ohtani, general manager Billy Eppler and his staff largely focused on beefing up their offense this offseason, re-signing left fielder **Justin Upton**, acquiring second baseman **Ian Kinsler** from the Tigers and convincing free-agent infielder **Zack Cozart** to come onboard to play third base. The Angels are hoping the newcomers will help deepen their lineup, which ranked 11th in the AL in on-base percentage and last in slugging percentage in 2017.

After being burned by rotation injuries in each of the past two seasons, the Angels are also entering '18 with enough depth to make a six-man rotation both feasible and sensible. Their pitching staff should receive plenty of support from the club's defense, which has Gold Glove Award winners all over the diamond, including **Andrelton Simmons**, **Martin Maldonado**, **Kole Calhoun**, Kinsler and Pujols.

What could go wrong?

The Angels' projected rotation features five pitchers -- **Garrett Richards**, **Tyler Skaggs**, **Andrew Heaney**, **Matt Shoemaker** and **JC Ramirez** -- who missed substantial chunks of last season due to injury, so their success this season will likely hinge on their starters' ability to stay healthy.

There are also questions surrounding the Angels' bullpen, which lost two of its best relievers, **Yusmeiro Petit** and **Bud Norris**, to free agency. **Blake Parker**, who enjoyed a breakout 2017 campaign, and **Keynan Middleton**, who showed promise as a rookie, will be back, but the club will be counting on bounce-back seasons from **Cam Bedrosian** and veteran **Jim Johnson** to help fill the gaps at the back end of their bullpen.

Who could surprise?

Everyone will be watching Ohtani, who could become the Majors' first two-way star since Babe Ruth. The Angels will give Ohtani a chance to hit and pitch, but managing his workload while keeping him sharp in both disciplines will be a challenge for both sides.

Still, Ohtani clearly possesses the talent, discipline and skill to make this unique undertaking work. He has the potential to be a top-of-the-rotation starter, with an upper-90s fastball and an impressive array of secondary pitches, including a splitter, slider and curveball. A left-handed hitter, Ohtani is also gifted with elite raw power and was known to launch 500-foot home runs in Japan.

Ohtani will face a myriad of adjustments this year, from the higher level of competition, to the grueling 162-game schedule to living alone in the United States for the first time. It's a tall task for any rookie, let alone one who will be subject to intense media scrutiny as he navigates his first season in the Majors.

FROM THE ATHLETIC**Moura: Garrett Richards has long had more talent than luck, but the Angels need him to be their ace**

By Pedro Moura

TEMPE, Ariz. — Clayton Kershaw stood across the way, and Garrett Richards pumped fastballs across the plate. They came in at 97, 98, and 99 mph. The four-seamers cut ever so slightly, while the two-seamers bit in the opposite direction. The pitches proved nearly unhittable. In four brisk innings Wednesday at Tempe Diablo Stadium, Richards struck out seven Dodgers, again demonstrating the heights he is capable of climbing.

Over the last two seasons, four hundred and fifty-six major leaguers have thrown more innings than Richards. Yet he exudes more potential than most of them. Three weeks from opening day, the Angels stand as wild-card contenders in the estimation of most of the industry, and they are counting on him to be their staff ace.

He has filled the role once before, in 2014, when he dominated the American League to a 2.61 ERA until an August accident at Fenway Park left him with a torn patellar tendon. He spent the following fall and winter rehabilitating his left knee and the spring and summer building back his confidence. In total, he turned in a solid, unspectacular campaign. It would be his last full season.

In May 2016, Richards tore the UCL in his elbow and missed the rest of the season. In April 2017, Richards felt his biceps cramp in his season debut. A related blood clot caused nerve irritation in the area and forced him to miss five months. But, when he returned, he did so throwing as hard as ever, and he still does.

“The stuff’s still the same,” Angels pitching coach Charles Nagy said. “It’s electrifying, dominant stuff, the same stuff we saw when he came back at the end of last year. Him being healthy and pitching a full season for us, if he does that, we’re gonna have a huge success.”

Richards would, too, when he becomes a free agent in eight months, barring an extension. If he registers a season on par with his 2014, rival talent evaluators believe he could attract something approaching an eight-figure contract. If he manages a season only matching 2016 or 2017, when he made six starts apiece, those some evaluators suggest he will struggle to obtain a multi-year pact.

So Richards has a lot on the line, and this winter’s cool free-agent market has complicated matters. Around Christmas, he said, the confusion started to set in, as he realized so many of his fellow starting pitchers had not signed and the same fate could await him.

“Obviously, it’s a little scary,” he said. “But, at the end of the day, this is the only team I’ve ever been on. In my view, I’d like to stay here, especially with what we’ve got building around, a lot of guys who are going to be here multiple years.” He said he is open to discussing an extension at any time.

Asked if he could envision negotiating mid-season, Angels general manager Billy Eppler noted that would represent unfamiliar territory for him. For 11 seasons, he worked for the New York Yankees, who

are well known for avoiding extensions; there have been a select few exceptions, but never in-season. Yet Eppler expressed a sense of security that the situation would resolve itself.

“All of those things will take care of themselves as the season goes on,” Eppler said. “He’s obviously an extremely talented pitcher, one that we feel can pitch at the front end of a championship-caliber rotation. Right now, our focus is so 2018-based. Everything else we will take care of at the proper time.”

Entering his 10th season with the organization, Richards is one of the longest-tenured Angels. He and Mike Trout effectively grew up together. They shared houses in several cities across America, at times alongside their now-wives. Through three regimes in Anaheim, Richards and the Angels have never discussed an extension. Now, the most logical way he can remain an Angel into 2019 would be a post-season, pre-free agency deal, similar to what the Angels arranged with Justin Upton in November.

While the Angels plan to start Shohei Ohtani on a six-day schedule, they will attempt to start Richards on the normal starter’s schedule often. Eppler said he hoped Richards could make “29 to 33” starts in 2018, which would render the team’s six-man rotation more of a guideline than a precept.

“There’s no reason for us to believe that Garrett carries excessive risk with him, [compared to] other pitchers,” Eppler said. “He’s been a guy that’s endured one more common injury and one more rare injury. They’re both isolated, from the information that we’ve gathered.”

On they will move, the future uncertain, and even the near-future unsettled. Three weeks from Thursday, the Angels will open their season in Oakland. They won’t confirm the assignment for weeks, per manager Mike Scioscia’s longstanding preference, but Richards is likely to be their starter. That lines up with his starts so far in spring training.

When he takes the mound, Richards plans to use his high-spin curveball more than ever before. He has tinkered with his pitch mix often during the downtime, both adding and removing a changeup from his repertoire, but he’s convinced this latest decision is beneficial.

And he plans to recapture his 2014. He and the Angels have strived to reach that bar since he set it.

“I’m just excited about being able to take everything I’ve put together over the last couple years and being able to apply it,” Richards said. “I know that, if I stay healthy, everything will take care of itself.

“So, I’m not worried about it. I’m going to enjoy this year, you know what I’m saying?”

FROM ESPN.COM

Clayton Kershaw strikes out Shohei Ohtani, wishes him well

Clayton Kershaw wasn't fazed by facing Japanese two-way star Shohei Ohtani for the first time Wednesday.

In fact, count the ace left-hander as among the few not feeling the hype for Ohtani after he chose to sign with the Los Angeles Angels instead of the Los Angeles Dodgers and others this offseason.

"I could care less now," Kershaw told reporters Wednesday when asked if he was excited to face Ohtani. "He didn't pick us. Good luck to him."

Ohtani served as the Angels' designated hitter in Wednesday's spring game in Tempe, Arizona, and he learned a lesson many other big leaguers have had to digest in the past -- how good Kershaw is.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner struck out Ohtani looking on a curveball after the Japanese product had worked a 2-2 count.

"I fell behind him, 2-0, had to throw two fastballs that he fouled off," Kershaw told reporters on why he went to the curve. "So, I had to throw four straight fastballs and felt I had to throw something a little slower."

Added Ohtani, who has one hit this spring: "I don't know if I'll be able to hit it the next time he throws to me, but I was kind of expecting it with two strikes. I thought it was kind of low so I decided to take it. Next time I'll try to at least foul it off."

"It is still spring training, but it was somewhat of a special moment to be able to face Kershaw."

The Dodgers won the game, 4-2. Kershaw allowed no runs and three hits in three innings.

FROM SPORTING NEWS

Clayton Kershaw couldn't 'care less' about facing Shohei Ohtani

By Joe Rodgers

Clayton Kershaw isn't drinking the Shohei Ohtani Kool-Aid.

The Dodgers ace said he couldn't care less about Ohtani after the Japanese two-way player spurned the Dodgers this winter and signed a contract with their cross-town rivals, the Angels.

"I [couldn't] care less now," Kershaw told reporters Wednesday when asked about facing Ohtani. "He didn't pick us. Good luck to him."

Kershaw faced Ohtani in Wednesday's spring game in Arizona and showed him no mercy, striking him out looking on his patented curveball.

"I fell behind him 2-0, had to throw two fastballs that he fouled off," Kershaw said, via ESPN.com. "So, I had to throw four straight fastballs and felt I had to throw something a little slower."

Ohtani said he was expecting Kershaw's 12–6 curveball but thought the called Strike 3 was low.

"I don't know if I'll be able to hit it the next time he throws to me, but I was kind of expecting it with two strikes," Ohtani said. "I thought it was kind of low, so I decided to take it. Next time, I'll try to at least foul it off."

"It is still spring training, but it was somewhat of a special moment to be able to face Kershaw."

A chat with Godzilla: Hideki Matsui on Yankees job, Shohei Ohtani, and adjusting to America

By Gary Phillips

NEW YORK — Hideki Matsui last played in the majors in 2012, but the international star still finds himself connected to the game.

Known as Godzilla during a 20-year career that spanned Japan, New York, California and Tampa Bay, Matsui is now doing what he can to give back to baseball at multiple levels. Speaking with Sporting News, he talked about retirement, working for the Yankees, transitioning to America and more.

The conversation has been edited for clarity and length. Answers were relayed by Roger Kahlon, Matsui's interpreter.

Sporting News: First off, congratulations on recently breaking Hideo Nomo's record and becoming the youngest player inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame. How did you find out and what was your reaction?

Hideki Matsui: Thank you very much. I actually received a phone from the Japanese Hall of Fame directly and they notified me of induction.

SN: Was this something you expected? Is there a lot of debate when it comes to the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame like there is in America?

HM: I had no expectations at all. I had heard through the media that I was eligible for the Hall of Fame. That was the extent. I really had no expectations. As far as the debate, it's something that's really beyond my understanding.

SN: You were obviously born and grew up in Japan, you played there for 10 years, you're a star there. But you've been living in New York City and Connecticut with your wife and son. Why did you decide to live here and not back home in Japan?

HM: I ended my career here, I was here. We were expecting a baby at the time, so it was kind of the natural flow of events. We wanted to focus on our family once the baby was born. Before we knew, all the years had gone by and we're still here.

SN: You've been retired for six years. Do you miss playing at all and how are you occupying your free time these days?

HM: I don't really miss playing at the highest level, competing in the major leagues. That's not something I really miss. I still enjoy playing baseball on a leisurely, casual basis. The love for the game is still there. As far as how I spend my time, I work as a special advisor for the Yankees, so I go around to minor league teams and share my knowledge and expertise. Aside from that, I just spend time with my family.

SN: I wanted to ask you about the special adviser role. What does that entail and what have you learned from it being on the front-office side of things?

HM: My focus has been Double-A and Triple-A. So I go to the games, I work with the coaches, I observe the players and offer whatever feedback I can provide with hopes of helping the players. I also watch the games and how the players approach the game. Anything I can pick up and then provide feedback that I feel will help players is what I focus on. I also report back to Brian Cashman with the progress of those players. As far as being in the front office, I don't think my perspective of baseball has really changed much. Even though I'm on the front-office side, I think that mindset of wanting to do whatever is necessary to help the ball club is still the same. The context and my responsibilities may be different, but that mindset hasn't really changed.

SN: What's it like working with Brian Cashman?

HM: My primary duty is to report back to him on the progress and status [of players], and it's only on a periodic basis. There's not a whole lot to it. It's interesting because as a player, I always interacted with him on a regular basis... Having known him since my playing days, he's very easy to work with.

SN: When you talk about the progress and feedback regarding these players, are you talking about off the field? Are you giving them pointers on their swings? What does that look like?

HM: It's primarily two things: hitting mechanics and their approach to the game. So those are the things I watch and provide feedback to the player and the coach.

SN: Over the years we've seen more and more Japanese players make the transition to America. You were one of, if not the, first former Japanese players to hold a front-office position. With that in mind, do you feel there is enough Japanese representation in MLB front offices as more players make the switch?

HM: It's hard to say. I could see that as players come here and sort of relay their experience back to Japan, I could see a lot of value there that could help Japanese baseball. As far as more players coming here and then staying here and eventually representing the ball clubs, it's hard for me to say because that's really up to the individual whether they decide to stay or if that opportunity is even there.

SN: On that note, let's talk about Shohei Ohtani. Have you had a chance to see him play at all? What are your expectations for him on the mound and at the plate?

HM: I've watched him a little bit on TV. I've watched clips of him, so I really don't have much knowledge about him, but he's played five years in Japan and he's come over here. There's definitely a lot of expectations from fans around what he can do, what he's gonna do, what he's able to do, how he's gonna be able to perform here. There seems to be enormous expectations for him, but no one really knows how well he's going to perform here. That's something to be seen.

SN: Now you do know a little bit about Mike Scioscia and the Angels. You spent some time with them at the end of your career. What can Ohtani expect from his new team and manager?

HM: As far as I know, the people that were there with the Angels at the time when I played, a lot of them are still there. So he's with a good ball club, he's surrounded by a great support environment, the Angels have a great fan base. So from my experience, I think he made a really great choice in signing with the Angels.

SN: Take me back to when you first came over from Japan. Is there anything you wish you knew back then or advice you would give to Ohtani and other Japanese players making the same transition?

HM: I can look back at myself when I first came to the majors and, based on experiences that I had, give advice that would apply to me. But I don't know if that advice would apply to him. It's hard to say because he's a different type of player. He's not just a hitter, he's also a pitcher. There are things I learned looking back that I wish I had known, but I don't know if that sort of advice would apply to him. There are things that even though people tell you about it, you really won't understand and have a feel for it until you experience it.

SN: What were those things that you wish you had known or been better prepared for?

HM: My advice would really be about baseball because that's the primary focus. Everything that would lead to better results.

SN: When you came over, you weren't just on a new team, but in a new city and country. The people around you didn't speak the same language. How difficult of an adjustment was that for you and how did you overcome some of the cultural challenges?

HM: Personally, I don't think I really struggled that much with the adjustment. I was single at the time, so there weren't many things I needed to be concerned about. As long as I eat and get some sleep, that was pretty much the extent of my concerns. I may have been fortunate with the city I played in, New York.

SN: Why do you say that?

HM: Just New York offers a lot options in terms of Japanese food, there's a Japanese community here, people who speak Japanese. So it wasn't an isolated environment. There was a lot of options, so I was able to express myself in that sense, which made the transition a lot easier.

SN: Now you also had your own press contingent following you around, too. Other Japanese stars like Ichiro, Yu Darvish and Masahiro Tanaka are in the same boat. Ohtani is as well now. How did you handle that constant media attention?

HM: For me it was a normal thing to have a following like that. The amount of media was much larger when I was in Japan. The difference was that that media following focused not just on me, but the team when I was in Japan.

SN: You said being in New York City offered you an abundance of Japanese culture. What about when it came to communicating with your teammates and coaches. Did you have any trouble there?

HM: Obviously, I couldn't directly communicate with my teammates, but it wasn't something that was entirely necessary. Once you get on the field, it's baseball. We all play baseball and that's a universal language. It's not like we need to be talking to each other, per say. Fortunately, I was surrounded by great teammates and great coaching staffs. Communication wasn't really an issue.

SN: There's been so much talk lately about ways to improve baseball, both on and off the field. Is there anything MLB could borrow from Nippon Professional Baseball that you think would work?

HM: My focus has been on working with children, because the baseball population has been dwindling in Japan. So that's something I've been really focused on. I haven't actually thought much about how Major League Baseball can be improved.

SN: Why do you think that is regarding the Japanese baseball population?

HM: Well the actual population has been dwindling in recent years, so I think that's contributing to it. And compared to my time, when I was young, almost everyone was playing baseball. Nowadays, there are a lot more different sports that are available in Japan. So I think it's those two reasons.

SN: It seems like you've made it a point to stay involved in the game since retiring. Do you see yourself continuing to work within baseball and why is that something you want to do?

HM: I don't really have a specific vision or plan going forward. I enjoy what I do. Baseball is something I have a lot of appreciation of what it's given me, so I feel like I want to give back in some capacity.

Ichiro 'can't wait' to hit against Shohei Ohtani

By Travis Durkee

Ichiro Suzuki, the 44-year-old baseball legend, is back with the Seattle Mariners and in the same division with 23-year-old Japanese phenom P/DH Shohei Ohtani of the Angels.

"I can't wait to hit off him when he pitches," Ichiro said during his introductory press conference Wednesday. "And when he hits, I'd like to pitch against him."

Apparently, Ohtani is up for the challenge.

Ohtani said he thinks Ichiro could pitch well.

Ichiro said Ohtani sent him a text message when he signed with the Angels and that the two have met several times during the offseason.

Ichiro has 3,080 career hits in MLB and should have plenty of opportunities to get a few off Ohtani this season. However, he likely won't have the same success if he deals to Ohtani from the mound. Ichiro did pitch one inning for the Marlins in 2015, giving up one earned run on two hits.

The Mariners and Angels play their first series of the season May 4-6 in Seattle.

FROM NBCSPORTS

Clayton Kershaw, Justin Turner think Shohei Ohtani wasted the Dodgers time

By Craig Calcaterra

Yesterday the Dodgers faced the Angels for the first time in spring training. **Shohei Ohtani** was in the lineup. Given that the Dodgers were one of the teams which courted Ohtani in free agency — and given that the front office had scouted him for years prior to that — the matchup drew considerable interest.

Andy McCullough of the Los Angeles Times wrote a story yesterday about the Dodgers' unsuccessful pursuit of Ohtani and, suffice it to say, the players involved in the pitch were not particularly impressed with the guy.

Justin Turner and **Clayton Kershaw** were each called to Los Angeles for the Dodgers' face-to-face meeting with Ohtani and each were displeased with the experience. Turner called it "a waste of time," and Kershaw raised by calling it "a gigantic waste of time." Their beef? In their view, Ohtani seemed to already have decided that he did not want to play for a National League team because he wanted to DH, not play the field. They said he seemed to be on another planet during the meeting, not engaging with them. "He might as well have not been sitting there," Turner said. "We might as well have been speaking to a window."

Kershaw made it clear that his real displeasure was not with Ohtani, but rather with his agent, Nez Balelo. Dave Roberts and Andrew Friedman said that they didn't have a problem with it and Roberts countered Turner's impression about Ohtani being disengaged, but it's possible they were being more diplomatic.

Not that Kershaw is losing much sleep over any of it. Yesterday he was on the mound and faced Ohtani. As he has done to so many other hitters over the years, he made Ohtani look bad:

After the game Kershaw was asked about Ohtani and that at bat. His response: "it's a curveball, you know . . . I could care less now. He didn't pick us, so, you know, good luck to him."

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani struck out against Clayton Kershaw and all he could do was laugh

By Chris Cwik

Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani is still transitioning to the majors as a member of the Los Angeles Angels. On the pitching side, things look promising. On the hitting side, Ohtani has had some tough luck early on. That took a turn for the worse Wednesday, as he had to face Los Angeles Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw.

Ohtani's first at-bat against Kershaw actually started out pretty well. He managed to work a 2-2 count against the lefty, which is no small feat. It was at that point that Kershaw decided to unleash the pitch Vin Scully once dubbed as "public enemy No. 1."

Kershaw dropped a beautiful curve low and outside to Ohtani, who stared at it until the ump rang him up on strikes.

Upon getting back to the dugout, all Ohtani could do was laugh about what just happened.

Can you blame him? Kershaw is known for having a knee-buckling curve, and if you're not used to seeing it, you can forget about hitting it.

As for the laughing, it appears this may have been a "welcome to the majors" moment for Ohtani. He just saw what the best of the best had to offer, and he came up short this time.

It also appears the rest of the Angels were laughing along with him. As Ohtani approached the dugout, outfielder Justin Upton could be seen smiling, as if to say, "Now you see how much of a pain it is to hit this guy, rook."

Kershaw didn't find much humor in the interaction. Following the game, he said there was no extra excitement when facing Ohtani.

The result of one at-bat is not meant to be an indictment of Ohtani's skills. Few major-league hitters can touch Kershaw, especially when he drops a hammer curve into a tough spot.

It's more a reminder that Clayton Kershaw is still amazing. No matter how good you are, seeing that majestic curveball for the first time will stop you in your tracks.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT**Ichiro Suzuki Wants to Play Until 50, Lauds Shohei Ohtani at Mariners Presser**

By Adam Wells

The Seattle Mariners announced a one-year deal Wednesday to bring back outfielder Ichiro Suzuki, and the 10-time All-Star addressed his future in Major League Baseball in a press conference.

Last year, Suzuki told reporters he wanted to keep playing into his 50s. When the subject of his age and future prospects in MLB came up, Suzuki pointed out that playing until his age-50 season isn't the goal.

"I want to make sure that everyone understands when I say I want to play until I am 50, I mean I want to play until I am at least 50," he said.

Just as Suzuki first arrived in Seattle from Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball league 17 years ago, Los Angeles Angels pitcher and designated hitter Shohei Ohtani is joining MLB this season. The 2001 American League MVP had high praise for his countryman's mental makeup.

"Obviously the age difference, I'm like a father and he's like the son," Suzuki said of the 23-year-old Ohtani. "But mentally, he's like the father and I'm like the son."

Age was a frequent topic of discussion for Suzuki during his press conference, particularly relative to how old some of his Mariners teammates are.

"I'm a little worried some of those guys in there [the clubhouse] will be my children's ages, but once I get on the field and they see me play, I hope I can get right in there with the kids and perform with them," he said.

Going back to the start of his Japanese career in 1992, Suzuki has been playing professional baseball longer than Mariners closer Edwin Diaz (23 years old) has been alive.

Suzuki is set to become the first MLB position player since Omar Vizquel in 2012 aged 44 or older to appear in a regular-season game.

In his first stint with the Mariners, Suzuki was named to 10 straight All-Star teams and won 10 straight Gold Glove awards from 2001 to 2010. His first season in 2001 was also the last time Seattle made the postseason, losing to the New York Yankees in the ALCS after winning 116 games in the regular season.

Jim Abbott Sends Message to Shaquem Griffin After Epic NFL Combine Performance

By Adam Wells

Following Shaquem Griffin's star-making turn at the 2018 NFL Scouting Combine, former Major League Baseball pitcher Jim Abbott praised the linebacker's performance and talent.

"I just love him," Abbott told TMZ Sports about Griffin. "His determination is fierce. I just feel like you can see the burning desire within him with every step, so I'm a big fan. I'm really rooting for him."

Abbott pitched for 10 MLB seasons between 1989-99 despite being born without a right hand. He has served as a motivational speaker since his baseball career came to an end.

Griffin had his left hand amputated at the age of four after being diagnosed with amniotic band syndrome, which prevented his fingers from fully developing.

At the NFL combine, Griffin used a prosthetic hand to do 20 reps on the bench press, and his 4.38 40-yard dash was the fastest by a linebacker since 2003.

The MMQB's Albert Breer noted one college scouting director believes Griffin will be a fourth-round pick in the 2018 NFL draft. He was named a second-team All-American in 2017 with 13.5 tackles for loss and seven sacks to help Central Florida go 13-0.

FROM FANRAG SPORTS

Inside Baseball | MLB's winter winners and losers

By Jon Heyman

In this weird and wild winter, believe it or not, there were some winners.

There are a few teams that are trying hard, and even doing well (though I'd agree with Dodgers star Kenley Jansen that a few more should be trying).

And yes, there were players that beat free-agency expectations – though they were mostly the new fair-haired boys of the sport, the middle relievers, who used to be seen as a dime-a-dozen (but now go for considerably more than that, as we saw).

But there were some surprise losers, too. And there are many incompletes.

There are still at least a half-dozen players out there who were expecting a big multiyear deal. Some of them will still get that deal, but in some cases, perhaps not quite for what they were looking for. As nutty as it still seems, those middle-inning guys were all the rage, while sluggers – and some stars – got left behind.

This column usually comes a lot earlier, but the winter continues even today, with several very good players among 40 or so free agents still jobless. But we've waited long enough. Without further ado, this year's winter winners and losers ...

Winners

1. Angels

One competing GM who made the final round of seven for Shohei Ohtani and thought they were the perfect spot for him (many others did, as well) called the Ohtani decision a “gift from God” for the Angels. In retrospect, it makes sense that it’s an AL team (so he can DH), that he knew Arizona from his Japanese team training and that his marketing guy and agent are both in L.A., which is (sort of) where the Angels are.

It didn’t hurt that GM Billy Eppler had long ago established a rapport with him, starting in Eppler’s Yankees days, but the other factors were key, too. The Angels are the place to be. They were also selected by second baseman Ian Kinsler, who somehow had all three teams that wanted him on his smartly-constructed no-trade list of 10 teams – the Brewers, Mets and Angels – and decided he liked what was going on in L.A./Anaheim best.

The Angels also decided to take All-Star shortstop Zack Cozart to play third base, and he should work well there. And for good measure, Albert Pujols had his first healthy winter in three years and seems to ready to be the main first baseman again.

The one question remains: who will close?

****Article cut to contain only Angels-related material*

FROM BASEBALL ESSENTIAL

The Potentially Elite Angels Infield Defense

By Brent Maguire

Much of the attention surrounding the Los Angeles Angels has been centered around **Shohei Ohtani**, along with **Mike Trout**, and for good reason. The Angels, however, made a few other moves during the offseason that significantly improved the roster for 2018.

Shortly after the Angels signed Shohei Ohtani, Angels General Manager Billy Eppler traded for second baseman **Ian Kinsler** and signed shortstop **Zack Cozart**, who will play third base for the Angels, to a three-year deal. The Angels also brought **Justin Upton** back on a five-year deal earlier in the offseason and shored up their catching depth by bringing veteran **Rene Rivera** on board.

As a result, the Angels have not only improved their whole roster but they turned their already very-good defense into an elite defense. After finishing as the second best defensive team in baseball last year, the Angels are now projected to be the best defensive team this season, as Jeff Sullivan wrote about at Fangraphs.

Justin Upton, Mike Trout and **Kole Calhoun** is a solid defensive outfield but much of the Angels defensive value will come from an absurdly talented infield. Led by **Andrelton Simmons** and **Martin Maldonado**, both 2017 American League Gold Glove Award winners, the unit has now introduced Ian Kinsler and Zack Cozart into the fold, who are both extremely good defenders in their own right.

To illustrate just how good this infield will be, we'll resort back to Fangraphs and use one of their main defensive tools, Defensive Runs Saved (DRS), which calculates how many runs a defender saves. While it's an imperfect measure for evaluating single season performances, it does a good job over bigger samples. To take this a step further, I'll introduce DRS/162, which is simply a player's DRS total over the average 162-game season.

Here are the career DRS/162 rates for the projected Angels starting infielders for 2018. Zero is considered average, with anything above zero rating as above-average and anything below zero as below-average. +10 is considered good while +20 puts you in elite company.

C, Martin Maldonado: 21.03 DRS/162

1B, Albert Pujols/Luis Valbuena: 12.8 DRS/162

2B, Ian Kinsler: 10.74 DRS/162

SS, Andrelton Simmons: 33.85 DRS/162

3B, Zack Cozart: 12.2 DRS/162

It's a fair bet to assume this group will not play every game in 2018. With Shohei Ohtani slated for some DH duties, Albert Pujols is expected to play more games at first base, a tall task for a 38-year-old who played just six games at the position in 2017. Luis Valbuena has missed time the last two years with a hamstring issue. Martin Maldonado, who played 138 games last year, might see less time to preserve his body throughout the season.

The depth options for the Angels, however, own some real defensive skills, which keep the overall defensive quality high. By the same measure, newcomer Rene Rivera has a strong career 8.76 DRS/162 and has always rated as a strong pitch-framer. Potential utility infielder **Kaleb Cowart**, who was rated as a strong defensive infielder in the minors, has dazzled with a few defensive plays in limited MLB time.

The Angels have also been a strong proponent of shifting in recent years, which gives Angels Manager **Mike Scioscia** another tool for enhancing defensive value. With positional flexibility from several Angels (Cozart can handle backup shortstop duties, Valbuena can handle backup third base duties), Scioscia also has several infielders he can shift around from game-to-game.

Add this all together and you have the makings of a very special defensive team but more specifically, a very good defensive infield. The Angels are aspiring contenders who may be plagued by pitching issues, issues that could be mitigated by a strong defense behind those pitchers. 2018 looks to be a very

exciting year for the Angels and much of the excitement will stem from the potentially great Angels' infield defense.

FROM DEADSPIN

The Dodgers Still Sound Pretty Annoyed with Shohei Ohtani

By Barry Petchesky

Before signing with the Angels, Japanese two-way star Shohei Ohtani narrowed his list to seven teams, and heard in-person presentations from each. Players from one of those teams, at least, say the whole thing was a farce and Ohtani shouldn't have wasted their time.

The *Los Angeles Times* speaks with Clayton Kershaw and Justin Turner, who interrupted their offseason (in Kershaw's case, on his anniversary, and for Turner, in the middle of planning his wedding) to spend three hours trying to sell Ohtani on the Dodgers. And despite four of the Ohtani finalists being in the National League, Kershaw and Turner sound convinced that Ohtani never had any intentions of going to a team without the designated hitter.

"It really just seemed like it was pre-determined that he wanted to DH," Kershaw said. "I'm kind of mad at his agent for making us waste all that time and effort. Fifteen teams should have been out of it, from the beginning. I know it's probably frustrating for everybody in the National League. A lot of guys spent a lot of time trying to figure out what makes him tick, and try to get him over here."

Ohtani will indeed DH in Anaheim (he hasn't played the outfield since high school), and the Angels will go to a six-man rotation to accommodate him. The Dodgers say they promised to be equally accommodating, but simply couldn't offer the same opportunity as an AL team. Turner says it was clear from the start that Ohtani wasn't interested.

"He might as well have not been sitting there," Turner said, using an expletive for emphasis. "We might as well have been speaking to a window."

At one point, Turner recalled, Ohtani was asked for his true preference: Would he rather hit or pitch? "And he said, 'Whatever the manager says.' I was like 'Come on,'" Turner said.

Turner said the whole thing was a "waste of my time." Kershaw agreed: "Just a gigantic waste of time."

Kershaw got some tiny measure of revenge on Wednesday, freezing Ohtani with a nose-to-toes curveball for the strikeout:

Ohtani's scuffled a bit in spring training, but he'll be fine. And hey, maybe any lingering bad blood about his choice, combined with an active offseason for Anaheim, means we'll get a nice little Dodgers-Angels feud going this year.

FROM THE NEW YORK POST

Why Dodgers stars are holding a big Shohei Ohtani grudge

By Kyle Schnitzer

The Dodgers are still crying foul after Japanese two-way stud Shohei Ohtani spurned them for the Angels in the offseason.

Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw and infielder Justin Turner told the *Los Angeles Times* that they are still annoyed with Ohtani bolting to the other Los Angeles team. The pair broke away from their busy offseason schedules to try to convince Ohtani to join the Dodgers, which in their eyes was never a legitimate possibility.

“It really just seemed like it was pre-determined that he wanted to DH,” said Kershaw, who spent three hours with Ohtani on his wedding anniversary. “I’m kind of mad at his agent for making us waste all that time and effort. Fifteen teams should have been out of it, from the beginning. I know it’s probably frustrating for everybody in the National League. A lot of guys spent a lot of time trying to figure out what makes him tick, and try to get him over here.”

Turner, who broke away from wedding planning, also cried foul saying things seemed off from the start of their conversation.

“He might as well have not been sitting there,” Turner said. “We might as well have been speaking to a window.”

Things got dicier when Turner posed Ohtani a question on whether he’d prefer to hit or pitch, which he responded with: “Whatever the manager say.”

That didn’t sit well with the former Mets utility man.

“I felt like it was a waste of my time,” Turner said.

Ohtani, 23, will be used both as the Angels’ designated hitter and in their six-man rotation, put together to accommodate the Japanese import.

The Angels beat a slew of contenders, including the Yankees, for Ohtani’s signature in the offseason.

FROM FORBES.COM

NFL Prospect Shaquem Griffin Has An Enthusiastic Supporter, Kindred Spirit In MLB Alum Jim Abbott

By David Ching

Thirty years ago, Jim Abbott taught a generation of sports fans that a disability did not have to be a disqualifier. Abbott believes Shaquem Griffin can communicate a similar lesson about willpower with his push to become an NFL football player.

The two men are joined by a similar life circumstance – both proved to the world that they could excel at their respective sports despite playing with only one hand – and Abbott says they share a similar ability to inspire, even if 22-year-old Griffin might not fully appreciate that yet.

“That’s why I’m such a big fan of Shaquem,” said Abbott, who was born without a right hand but still became one of the most decorated college baseball players in history and spent 10 seasons pitching in Major League Baseball. “When I was going through it, I wanted to be a baseball player. I don’t know that I ever completely embraced the idea of being a role model or was doing it for any of those reasons other than pursuing my passion and what I loved to do.

“I’m sure he probably feels a little bit of the same now, but as a little bit of time comes into it, you start to appreciate the impact you can have. It really spreads, and people are inspired. Who would have thought that so many people connect with it in such an important way?”

But connect with it they do.

Abbott must experience feelings of *déjà vu* when he sees the way the public has responded to Griffin’s NFL quest. Griffin might have first garnered attention because he was a one-handed college linebacker – he was born with a prenatal condition called amniotic band syndrome that forced his left hand to be amputated at age 4 – but his relentless style of play is what turned intrigued observers into fans.

He won the AAC’s Defensive Player of the Year Award as a junior and followed that by helping his Central Florida team post an undefeated record in 2017. When the Knights clinched that perfect season by upsetting Auburn in the Peach Bowl, Griffin earned game defensive MVP honors by dominating against an Auburn offensive line that ranked among the SEC’s best.

Griffin soon earned a late invitation to the Senior Bowl all-star game and promptly blew everyone away, earning recognition as the top prospect of the week in practice. The Houston Texans’ coaches, who led Griffin’s team for the week, showcased his versatility by using Griffin at linebacker, at defensive back and as a situational pass rusher.

“As the week went on, it became evident that they were just trying to show just how good of a football player he is, how versatile he is,” said Rob Rang, senior analyst at NFLDraftScout.com. “Because regardless of the position they put him in – safety, linebacker, defensive end, on kick and punt coverage – it was almost impossible to take your eyes off of him, and not because of his lack of a left hand but because he was the player usually making the big play.”

As with Griffin, the uniqueness of Abbott’s story is what initially made it national news. However, it was Abbott’s ability that filled his trophy case.

Abbott, 50, rose to prominence in the 1980s by winning a boatload of college baseball awards for the Michigan Wolverines and then he helped the United States win a gold medal in the 1988 Summer Olympics. The California Angels selected him eighth overall in the 1988 MLB draft, and he made the club out of spring training the next year without having pitched a single game in the minor leagues.

He went 12-12 that season, finishing fifth in the American League Rookie of the Year voting, and then posted an 18-11 record with a 2.89 ERA to finish third in AL Cy Young Award balloting in 1991. In 1993, he pitched a no-hitter as a member of the New York Yankees.

Rather than view his limb difference as an obstacle that easily could have prevented him from playing baseball at the highest level, Abbott has a different viewpoint. He believes it instilled a competitive drive that was fundamental to his success.

So don’t ask Abbott if Griffin’s football success surprises him. It doesn’t.

“That’s what I found in my life, that being a little bit different and having to do things differently provides a determination that may not have been there otherwise,” Abbott said. “So I’m not surprised, really. I think it opens a lot of doors and a lot of eyes about what can be done on a football field.”

Griffin seems to share that perspective. He tells reporters that he appreciates the attention he receives these days – for whatever reason that attention comes – because it wasn’t long ago that nobody was interested. He understands that pro scouts might be skeptical about his ability to hold down an NFL roster spot but wants the deciding factor to be ability, not that he is attempting to become the first one-handed player in the NFL’s modern era.

“I remember there was a time where I had a Little League coach who was telling me that this game’s for two-handed players. I’ve read plenty of rule books, and I’ve never seen that rule,” Griffin told reporters at a Senior Bowl press conference. “Hearing things like that, I had to take it upon myself to make sure that I showed them no matter if I have one hand, two hands or 30 hands, I can play football.”

One seems to be enough. Griffin proved that he is a legitimately draftable prospect at the Senior Bowl, earning an invitation to March’s NFL Scouting Combine as a result. But Rang doesn’t simply view him as a prospect whose name will get called somewhere in the draft’s seven rounds.

“I’ll say this: I think there’s going to be a lot of teams that don’t draft him — obviously, 31 of them — that are going to wish they did when it’s all said and done,” Rang said. “If he is undrafted, he’s going to make a team. And I believe that he will get drafted and that team is going to be very happy with him because I think he’s a legitimate NFL player on defense as well as special teams.”

Griffin’s accomplishments to date already make for a happy tale, but if he actually makes it in the NFL, that will turn into one of the year’s leading feel-good stories in sports.

Riding in the front seat of his fan bandwagon will be a retired pitcher and current motivational speaker who, although he has not met Griffin, understands his challenges all too well.

“I saw him on TV and was like, ‘Holy cow, this is great,’ and then I started following different people who are rooting for him,” Abbott said. “Then this year they had such an incredible year, so it was really fun. I’ve read about him and heard his story, and I’m just really inspired by him and proud of him.”

In that regard, Abbott joins a club whose membership seems to grow by the day.

FROM THE COMEBACK

The Comeback presents: Baseball’s 50 most important players

Which players will define baseball in 2018? That’s what our list seeks to determine

By Alex Putterman

You have probably seen lists of baseball’s best players. You have also probably seen lists of baseball’s most valuable players. Maybe you have even seen lists of baseball’s most popular or most marketable players. Here at The Comeback, we wanted to try something different. With that in mind, we present to you, a list of baseball’s most important players.

Of course, “most important” could mean different things to different people. Here’s what it means to us: the players who matter most to baseball in 2018. They’re the ones who dominate the headlines. The ones who will define baseball in the coming season.

For example, Joey Votto is a better player than J.D. Martinez, but given their circumstances, including the teams they play for, Martinez is likely to make a bigger impact on the 2018 season, and you’re likely to hear his name much more often than Votto’s. Thus, for our purposes he is considered “more important.”

Putting together this list wasn’t easy. The criteria are admittedly murky, and a player who feels important to one person might seem less so to another. After much deliberation, we wound up excluding undoubtedly important players such as Yasiel Puig, Zack Greinke, Carlos Carrasco, David Price,

Rhys Hoskins, Yoan Moncada, Mike Moustakas and Jose Ramirez because we felt there were 50 better choices. Consider those guys honorable mentions.

Now, without further ado...

47. Albert Pujols, Los Angeles Angels

Pujols was [*one of the worst players in baseball*](#) last season, which helps make him one of the game's most interesting players entering this season. Whether he enjoys a bounce-back or gums up the Angels' lineup, you'll hear about him.

36. Andrelton Simmons, Los Angeles Angels

The premier defensive infielder on the planet enjoyed a career-best season at the plate last year. Maybe 2018 will be the year he finally makes an All-Star Game.

3. Shohei Ohtani, Los Angeles Angels

Baseball's mystery man will have a sport's attention on him with every swing and every pitch. Whether or not Ohtani can pull off the two-way-player might be the season's most enticing storyline.

2. Mike Trout, Los Angeles Angels

For the first time in four years, the best player in baseball is surrounded by teammates worthy of him. With assistance from Ohtani, Simmons, Justin Upton and others, this could be the year that Trout jumps from baseball-nerd hero to crossover star.

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS

Ichiro cracks Shohei Ohtani joke during Mariners return

By Darryn Albert

Now that he is back in Seattle, Ichiro wants to prove (albeit jokingly) who the real two-way Japanese star is in the MLB.

During his return press conference on Wednesday, the former AL MVP, who just signed a one-year deal to return to the Mariners, cracked a joke about newly-minted Los Angeles Angels star Shohei Ohtani. Ichiro said that he was looking forward to hitting (and also hopefully pitching) against his fellow countryman, according to Jeff Passan of Yahoo! Sports.

At his press conference, Ichiro was his classic self. Said he's looking forward to hitting against Shohei Ohtani — and is hoping Scott Servais will let him pitch when Ohtani is hitting.

The 44-year-old also dropped this funny line about the maturity level of the 23-year-old Ohtani, per Greg Johns of MLB.com.

Ichiro on Shohei Ohtani's maturity: "Obviously the age difference, I'm like a father and he's like the son. But mentally, he's like the father and I'm like the son."

Ichiro should get plenty of opportunity to face off against Ohtani this season since the Mariners and the Angels are both in the AL West. But if you think that the former is out of his element on the pitching front, well think again.

Clayton Kershaw seems salty that Ohtani did not choose Dodgers

By Larry Brown

Clayton Kershaw and Shohei Ohtani squared off against each other in a spring training game in Tempe on Wednesday, and that led to an interesting quote.

In the bottom of the third inning, Kershaw faced Ohtani and struck out the Angels rookie looking on a 2-2 curveball on the corner.

After his appearance, Kershaw was asked about striking out the Japanese phenom. Based on his dismissive response, Kershaw seems chapped that Ohtani chose the Angels over the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Clayton Kershaw on his curveball to strike out Ohtani: "it's a curveball, you know."

Nothing exciting about it? "I could care less now. He didn't pick us, so, you know, good luck to him."

Things may be extra personal between them because Kershaw tried to sway Ohtani to choose the Dodgers when he was making his decision.

There is more to the story too as Ohtani had previously mentioned Kershaw as a player he was excited to face in MLB.

"Just thinking about facing [Kershaw] makes me really happy and excited. I could just tell he's such a great pitcher through the TV screen," Ohtani said to CBS.

Maybe the dream of facing Kershaw is a lot different from the reality, as he learned on Wednesday.