



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**How the Angels' Kole Calhoun turned his season around**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — If it's possible to have a "successful" injury, Kole Calhoun had one.

In the seven weeks since Calhoun returned from a stint on the DL to recover from a strained oblique, he has engineered a remarkable turnaround to his season.

By the numbers, he went from being one of baseball's worst hitters to one of the best.

He was hitting .145 with a .374 OPS when he hit the disabled list June 1. His OPS was the worst in the majors, with a minimum of 100 plate appearances, by 78 points.

Since coming back June 18, he's hitting .292 with a .996 OPS. To put that into perspective, Mike Trout won the 2016 MVP award with a .991 OPS.

The sample size for Calhoun 2.0 is now up to 175 plate appearances, which is almost as much as the 185 plate appearances of his slump.

"It's crazy impressive," marveled hitting coach Eric Hinske. "Look at him. He's a fire hydrant. He's strong as an ox. He just needed his body to work the right way for him. For him to make that swing adjustment in the middle of the season is definitely a tough thing to do. He's a stud."

By now you know about the swing adjustment. Calhoun returned from the DL with a new stance, more crouched than before.

Clearly, it's worked.

To understand how it's worked, and how he got into the hole that necessitated this in-season makeover, you have to go back to last season.

Calhoun hit .244 with 19 homers and a .725 OPS in 2017. The numbers were slightly down from his career .266 batting average and .764 OPS coming into the season.

What frustrated Calhoun was the inconsistency within the season. His monthly averages were, starting in April: .255, .158, .324, .169, .300 and .245.

"Last year was so up and down," Calhoun said. "I'd go good. I'd go bad. I'd go good. I'd go bad. I didn't really have a stable base of what I was doing. I kept trying to find something. I'd find it for a minute and then I'd lose it."

So Calhoun spent the winter trying to change his swing. Although Calhoun said it was simply to find more consistency, Hinske said he was also trying to join the launch angle revolution.

“He was trying to hit the bottom half of the baseball and hit the ball in the air and drive the ball out of the yard,” Hinske said. “It turned into an uphill swing on him and he couldn’t find his way out.”

Despite the success of spring training — “To be honest, I kind of got lucky,” Calhoun said — the season began and he was almost immediately a mess.

Essentially, Hinske said, Calhoun was trying to get under the ball with an uppercut swing, but he was doing it from such an upright stance that it required him to bring his head and hands down and then back up. All that motion, which obviously also included his eyes moving, made it difficult to track the baseball and square it up.

Hinske also said Calhoun’s back hip was locked in place by his upright stance. Power comes from the legs turning the hips and then pulling the barrel through the zone.

Calhoun’s problem was his hands were pulling the barrel out front before his hips could catch up, Hinske said. That resulted in weak contact and pulled ground balls.

Calhoun hit the ball on the ground 55.7 percent of the time in the first two months, up from his 42.5 percent previously. All those ground balls, even the hard hit ones, were being gobbled up by the shift.

Calhoun’s average plummeted, dragging his confidence along with it.

“Day in and day out, I was beating myself up, honestly,” Calhoun said.

He was physically punishing himself, too, as it turns out. He took so many extra swings in the cage trying to get right that it was almost inevitable that eventually something would pop.

On a steamy May 31 afternoon in Detroit, Calhoun was grinding away in the cage when he felt his back lock up. He talked to the trainers.

“They said if you keep going, maybe you blow it out for a while,” he said. “Or you can take a step back. When you’re hitting .145, it’s kind of hard to plead your case, honestly.”

The Angels placed Calhoun on the disabled list with a strained oblique. Instead of staying with the team to rehab, he went home to Arizona. For five or six days, he didn’t touch a bat.

“I went home and kind of relaxed, I guess,” he said. “Tried to clear my mind.”

When he was ready to begin swinging again, Calhoun met with Jeremy Reed and Shawn Wooten, the Angels’ Arizona-based minor-league hitting coordinators. They showed him video and helped him understand where his swing had gotten lost.

Concepts that may have been difficult to grasp – amid the noise of daily games, crowds and questioning reporters – suddenly connected in the quiet of Arizona.

“Everything just kind of made sense,” Calhoun said.

Reed and Wooten helped Calhoun develop a new stance, which was actually just a snapshot of a position he'd been trying to achieve all along. Instead of starting off upright and crouching slightly as the pitch approached, he began in the crouch. He eliminated some of the bat-wagging as he waited for the pitch. It was as if he took a video of his good swings and edited out the beginning.

"I tried to really simplify it and get closer to a spot that I feel powerful," Calhoun said. "Instead of all this stuff that helped me get there."

Having more bend helped Calhoun get his hips around before his hands, Hinske said. Starting with his head lower prevented Calhoun from dipping while trying to track the ball, which allows him to see the ball better.

"You are trying to eliminate moving parts," Hinske said. "This is freeing him up to take him to the baseball, which is where we want everything to happen in the first place."

The results showed immediately. On the first at-bat of a rehab assignment at Triple-A, Calhoun hit a home run. He went 6 for 19 in five games at Triple-A, and then returned to the majors.

On June 18, Calhoun stepped to the plate and unveiled his new stance to the major league baseball world. Zack Greinke was on the mound for the Arizona Diamondbacks. The former Cy Young winner threw him a first-pitch fastball, and Calhoun yanked it into right field, through the shift, for a single.

"Hey, I can do this," Calhoun recalled telling himself.

He got another hit that night. The next night, he hit his first homer since opening day. The next night, he hit another one.

"You start rolling and get a little bit of confidence," Calhoun said. "Hopefully you've turned the corner."

Since coming back, Calhoun has cut his ground balls from 55.7 percent to 31.6 percent. His line drive rate went from 16.8 percent to 23.1 percent. His percentage of hard hit balls went from 35.1 percent to 47.0 percent.

After hitting one homer in two months, he's been on one of the best power binges of his career. His 14 homers since returning are the most in the American League over that span. His 10 homers in July were his most in any calendar month of his career.

What's more, Calhoun believes this is not just a hot streak, but a sustainable change to his swing.

"It's something I feel like is easier to repeat, day in and day out," he said. "I have a good understanding of it."

Manager Mike Scioscia agrees that Calhoun has done better than rediscover his old self. He's improved on the hitter he used to be.

"The struggles he had in April and May have ended up putting him in a better place right now with the adjustments he's made," Scioscia said. "There's never been a question he was going to find where he

needed to be. He's done that, plus. He's reworked some things in his swing from even when he was very productive in the last couple years... He's more free. He's looser. There's a confidence level that he's able to handle a wider array of pitching even from the last couple years. His numbers are off the charts since he came back."

THE NEW CALHOUN

Kole Calhoun pulled himself out of a miserable slump when he changed his stance while he was on the disabled list in early June.

Before (185 PAs)

1 HR, .145 BA/.195 OBP/.179 SLG/.374 OPS

After (175 PAs)

14 HR, .292 BA/.360 OBP/.636 SLG/.996 OPS

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Felix Peña, 1-3, 4.97) vs. A's (LHP Brett Anderson, 2-3, 4.74), 7:30 p.m., Friday, Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM).

In praise of Mike Scioscia, the Angels' shark of a modern baseball manager

By J.P. Hoornstra

The text of Mike Scioscia's Hall of Fame plaque might mention his intelligence, his grit, and the fierce loyalty he inspired as manager of the Angels. It will certainly mention the 2002 World Series and Scioscia's 1,628 regular-season wins and counting – fewer than only Walter Alston among men who managed a single team, if indeed Scioscia never manages another team.

Cooperstown does not permit enough characters on each plaque to explain the thing that separated Scioscia from his peers, however. To appreciate that one must step outside the dugout, out of the ballpark and out of Anaheim entirely. You have to step inside a WeWork.

"It's a co-working space where there's lots of entrepreneurs," explained Bill Aulet, a professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management. "If I need help on something, if I have a question – 'by the way, I'm trying to find Java programmers, you know where I can find Java programmers?' – 'oh yeah, there's this group over here. You can do that.' And you get just the amount of resources just in the time that you want and you don't have to own it."

There are 20 WeWorks dotting a map of Southern California, from the 818 to the 714 and points in between. I Googled it. They are some of the most beautiful, open and collaborative office spaces you

have ever seen. Most importantly, Aulet said, they are the future of the economy, already encroaching on the present.

Aulet's point of view is special if not unique. His résumé reveals the antithesis of an ivory-tower elite. As a young man, he was a professional basketball player. He worked at IBM for more than a decade, embodying the late 20th-century ingenuity that spawned the documentary "Silicon Cowboys." He ran three companies and now teaches other inspiring entrepreneurs how to do the same.

From his front-row seat, Aulet has seen MIT's Sloan Sports Analytics Conference grow into the largest student event on campus. He knows that the next general manager of the Boston Red Sox might soon pass through his classroom. If there is an intersection of trends in sports and the American economy at large, Aulet is perched nearby.

Multiple reports Sunday indicated that Scioscia will part ways with the Angels after his contract expires this year – his 19th season, all with one team. A couple of days later, I called Aulet. I needed more context about what this means.

Forget sports for a second. How does Scioscia's career fit into the landscape of the 21st century economy – every job, everywhere in the first world?

"Scioscia," Aulet said, "is a Jurassic being."

You only need one hand to count Scioscia's peers in the other major professional sports. Gregg Popovich has coached the San Antonio Spurs since Dec. 10, 1996. Bill Belichick began his tenure with the New England Patriots in 2000. Critically, Aulet said, each of these men had a star player to help execute his vision. Popovich had Tim Duncan and Tony Parker for the bulk of his run. Belichick has had Tom Brady for nearly his entire time in New England.

Scioscia has worked for two owners and four general managers without the benefit of a star player to match his own longevity. Mike Trout was 8 years old when Scioscia joined the Angels. This is akin to being the lone survivor of a meteor that wiped out each of his kinfolk, or at least forced them to manage a different Major League Baseball team.

"You just get into habits," Aulet said. "Those habits create a lack of innovation. You do the same thing over and over again. Sometimes that can be good, but there's a fatigue factor that usually kicks in. That's why it's so unusual that you see someone like a Mike Scioscia or a Bill Belichick. Change is good."

As more and more Ivy League-educated executives occupy major league front offices, this is the message they are hearing about how to run a baseball team. It isn't confined to sports, of course; Aulet teaches entrepreneurs with ambitions of all stripes. Yet as sports became big business, primarily because of television revenue, some overlap became inevitable.

Philosophies will evolve and general managers will change organizations, but a cross-disciplined, 21st-century approach to sports management is here to stay.

"It's not 'let's go have a drink, let's go sit around and smoke cigars and talk about the players,'" Aulet said. "Moneyball changed everything with the ability to collect data. Billy Beane and Bill Belichick have

changed things by being more data-driven and just ruthless. There's no sentimentality to hold on to people for a long period of time."

It's no coincidence that companies themselves are not as durable as they once were. Aulet pointed to a study by Richard Foster at Yale University, which revealed the average lifespan of a company listed in the S&P 500 has decreased from 67 years in the 1920s to 15 years today.

The result: Now more than ever, workers hop from one role with one company to a different role with a different company. Only recently did professional sports mimic the same practice. Aaron Boone was a player, then a television analyst, then the manager of the New York Yankees. Dave Roberts was a player, then a television analyst, then a coach, and now manages the Dodgers.

The most famous recent example of this phenomenon within baseball is Sig Mejdal. A trained engineer, Mejdal was hired away from NASA by the St. Louis Cardinals. He became the Houston Astros' director of decision sciences in 2012, then a special assistant to the general manager, then a minor league coach.

"This idea of jumping around to get different skills is true; you build up more skills if you jump around," Aulet said. "If you stay at the same job, your learning curve will start flattening out. In other words, you won't learn that much."

It would be inaccurate to say the game simply passed Scioscia by. In 2014, his 15th year on the job, the Angels won 98 games, more than any major league team. This was widely perceived as a triumph of the old school, of the hit-and-run, of the sacrifice bunt. And to some extent, it was.

More than that, it was a triumph of adaptation. It is impossible – in baseball or in any discipline – to last 19 years without the adaptability of a shark. A few modern species of shark roamed the Earth in the Jurassic period beside the dinosaurs. We devote one week a year to their appreciation. The praise for Scioscia should probably be no shorter.

Angels hoping to get Mike Trout, Tyler Skaggs both back for this weekend vs. A's

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — The Angels are hoping that both their best pitcher and best player can return for this weekend's series against the Oakland A's.

Tyler Skaggs, who is on the disabled list with a left groin issue, threw a bullpen session before Wednesday's game and afterward said he's ready to go on Saturday.

Mike Trout, who has been out with a jammed right wrist, did not swing a bat on Wednesday, but he reported improvement, Manager Mike Scioscia said.

Trout will come in during the team's off day on Thursday and throw, and possibly hit, Scioscia said. He'll take batting practice on Friday, after which he could return to the lineup for the first time since Aug. 1, when he was hurt bracing himself on a feet-first slide into third.

The Angels still don't have a starter for Sunday's game, which would have been Nick Tropeano's turn. Tropeano was placed on the disabled list with bursitis in his shoulder.

Andrew Heaney could start that game on normal rest, but Scioscia wasn't ready to pencil him in for that start yet.

"We are still working through some things now," Scioscia said before Wednesday's game. "We'll take a look at things after today and we'll see exactly which way we're going to go."

Heaney said after Wednesday's game that he feels fine, and he's ready to take the ball whenever the Angels give it to him.

It is possible that the Angels simply want to give him an extra day. This is his first full season since returning from Tommy John surgery. He gave up five runs in five innings on Tuesday night.

OHTANI UPDATE

Shohei Ohtani's bullpen session on Saturday – his first time throwing off a mound since he was hurt – will be with the catcher standing up. It's a common practice in Japan, and occasional here, for pitchers to have a workout like that as an initial step before throwing a normal bullpen session.

Ohtani was not in the lineup on Wednesday, with the Angels facing a left-handed pitcher and Scioscia wanting to give Albert Pujols a day at DH and Jefry Marte a chance to hit.

At some point as Ohtani progresses in his rehab as a pitcher, it will infringe on his hitting, as it did when he was in the rotation. Scioscia said they would wait for "direction from the medical staff" to determine at what point his throwing program will require "recovery days" on which he can't hit.

ALSO

Jo Adell, the Angels' top prospect, jammed his right thumb after playing just two games at Double-A last week, General Manager Billy Eppler said. Adell has been out about a week, but he's almost ready to return, Eppler said. Apparently, Adell had a custom thumb guard he wore while hitting, but he forgot to pack it when he was promoted to Double-A. ...

Albert Pujols now has 999 hits with the Angels. He is about to become one of nine players to have 1,000 hits in each league. ...

On Friday night the Angels will hold a pregame ceremony honoring recent Hall of Fame inductee Vladimir Guerrero. The game will start at 7:27 p.m. to accommodate the ceremony.

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Felix Peña, 1-3, 4.97) vs. A's (LHP Brett Anderson, 2-3, 4.74), Friday, 7:30 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

Angels take third straight from Detroit Tigers, finishing first sweep in 2 months

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — If it seems like it's been a long time since the Angels swept a series, that's because it has.

The Angels beat the Detroit Tigers 6-0 on Wednesday afternoon, completing their first series sweep since June 4-6 against the Kansas City Royals.

The last game of that series was the last game Shohei Ohtani pitched, which marked the start of an extended stretch of mediocre to poor baseball that has knocked them to the farthest fringes of the playoff race.

In reality, the Angels need a winning streak of eight or nine games to be able to feel good about their chances.

But every nine-game winning streak was once a three-game winning streak, which is what the Angels now take into Thursday's off day. On Friday they open a three-game series against the Oakland A's, who now hold the second AL wild-card spot. The Angels (58-58) have not seen the A's since June 17.

The Angels are hoping they'll have both Mike Trout and Tyler Skaggs back for this weekend. Trout, who has now missed seven straight games because of a jammed right wrist, is expected to return to the lineup on Friday. Skaggs, on the disabled list with a left groin issue, said he's ready to start on Saturday, the first day he's eligible.

Beyond getting back two of their best players, the Angels finally have some momentum from a winning streak.

"It's always good sweeping a series, my teammates and everyone are upbeat," Jaime Barría said through an interpreter. "It's a way better atmosphere."

Barría pitched 5-2/3 innings on a sweltering afternoon, not allowing multiple baserunners until he got pulled in the sixth. It was Barría's best outing since a June 1 game when he pitched six scoreless innings.

He also clearly made an adjustment from his July 23 start, when the conditions were similar to the 94-degree first pitch temperature on Wednesday. Barría said after that game that he had trouble gripping the baseball because of sweat on his hands. This time, he used the rosin bag more frequently and had no trouble.

He walked just one and scattered five hits.

Kole Calhoun staked him to a lead by leading off the bottom of the first with a home run.

In the fifth, Justin Upton hit a two-run homer and Albert Pujols followed with a homer, the third back-to-back homers of the season for the Angels.

Jefry Marte also had a pair of hits, driving in a run in the first and doubling and scoring a run on a José Briceño hit in the sixth.

The Angels scored 23 runs in three games against the White Sox, all without Trout.

“You never want to play too many games without a guy like Mike, but we’ve been forced to and we’ve been holding our own,” Manager Mike Scioscia said. “In this series, we definitely looked good in the batter’s box.”

Alexander: Readers offer their own baseball solutions

By Jim Alexander

The readers responded to This Space’s multi-point plan for fixing baseball, submitted last week. And the first thing that became evident, if the comments are any indication: I wasn’t as concerned about pace of play and time of game as the fans are.

It’s worth noting that according to numbers compiled by BaseballReference.com, the average time of all games (extra innings included) is actually down four minutes from last year (3:04 from 3:08). The average for a nine-inning game is 2:59 (down from 3:05), the lowest in three years.

I know. It just seems longer.

And I’m glad – I guess – that no one advocated starting each extra inning with a runner on second, as is the case in the minors this year. That brought up an interesting dilemma the other night in the Florida State League: If a pitcher takes a perfect game into extra innings and the next inning starts with a rules-mandated runner on second, is it still a perfect game?

I’m also guessing time-of-game isn’t the statistic MLB’s decision-makers are looking at most closely. Average attendance stood at 28,738 going into Wednesday night, 1,170 below last season’s final average. If that stands at season’s end, in-game average attendance will have declined in five of the last six years.

If there’s a trouble spot, that’s it. And the issue might not be so much how to get young people interested as it is how to make a night at the ballpark affordable again.

Or, maybe, persuading certain teams to be less obvious about throwing away the season before it even begins.

Anyway, the readers get their say today.

Leon Linderwell of Fullerton advocates (a) an automatic strike for a hitter leaving the batter’s box, (b) eliminating batting gloves, thus eliminating the need to step out and adjust the Velcro, and (c) the guy on the mound going to the brim of his cap repeatedly: “A pitcher can only adjust his hat once an inning. Twice is an automatic walk.”

He also suggests managers should wear street clothes, objects to chewing and spitting, and wonders, "Why do pitchers have to bend over to see the catcher's signs? Does their vision improve when they bend over?"

Larry Levine advocates getting rid of the "pitch-cam" on televised games, by which I assume he means the box that supposedly indicates whether a pitch is a strike. He also suggests expanded rosters would be the way to go instead of the universal DH, and says teams should offer a \$1,000 bonus for every player bunting safely against the shift (and \$500 for everyone else on the roster). Anyone who tries to bunt and fails would still get \$500 for the effort.

He also brought up the possibility of a mercy rule. After the Dodgers scored 21 against Milwaukee and gave up 14 to Houston in a span of three nights, I fear I'm close to agreeing with him.

Carl Frankson of Newport Beach advocates eliminating a relief pitcher's warm-up tosses when he reaches the mound. "Name another sport where a substitute is allowed to warm up when entering a game," he said.

John Bates of San Juan Capistrano suggested eliminating ball four: "A full count would be (two) balls and (two) strikes. Now this would definitely speed up the game and would probably add more baserunners, providing more action."

Wayne Evangelista of Beaumont likes the electronic strike zone but isn't on board with eliminating shifts, suggesting hitters simply "learn to bunt." (I wonder if he and Larry Levine should sit down for a bunting summit.) Evangelista does call for more doubleheaders, more off days during the week, designated runners and a permanent split schedule.

And, he adds, "What about taking a page from football ... offensive squad, defensive squad."

See what the DH has spawned? (Yes, I'm the one who suggested the universal DH. But I'm still queasy about it.)

Speaking of which, Pete Morales made this observation: "I believe the Astros should never have been moved to the American League (forcing interleague play on a daily basis) until the DH rule was fixed."

Randy Goeken of San Clemente is against eliminating shifts, too. But he proposes that on a four-pitch walk, the hitter goes to second base, not first. "Nothing worse than seeing (Mike) Trout, et. al., walked intentionally," he wrote.

(He also suggests NBA teams have the option of free throws or taking the ball out of bounds on a foul, and that all conversions in the NFL should be "two-pointers with no kicking." Adam Silver and Roger Goodell, you've been warned.)

Linda Rosenthal agreed with my objection to the drastic reduction of baseball on free TV: "Several friends are baseball fans but do not have cable TV. We used to be able to watch the games on regular stations, what happened? Why did they take them off? It certainly would increase viewership if everyone could see the games, not just those willing to pay more for cable."

Mike Reuben returned to the time-of-game issue, saying he used to stay for seven or eight innings, “but any more it’s only (five) or so innings after 2 (or) 2-1/2 hours. An enforced pitch clock would make a big difference.”

Gary Kain of Brea agrees with my idea to raise the upper limit of the strike zone back to the letters. He dislikes the automatic intentional walk (and I agree). And he has one other suggestion, specifically for the Angels:

“Get rid of the 8-foot home run marker. All it has produced is a bunch of .220 or less hitters who are trying to be home run hitters.”

Unfortunately, that’s not just an Angels problem. That’s a baseball problem, and rule changes might not be enough to solve that issue without some attitude adjustment, too.

Final thought? Feedback is greatly appreciated, whether you agree or not. Thanks, and keep it coming.

FROM LOS ANGELES TIMES

Home runs help Angels beat Tigers 6-0, get back to even

By Jeff Miller

The Angels arrived back at .500 on Wednesday, a perfectly adequate spot for a so-so team that has been unable to avoid being average much of this season.

At 58-58, they are down to 46 games to go in a year that appears destined to be remembered mostly for Shohei Ohtani’s hello and Mike Scioscia’s goodbye.

But at least a 6-0 thumping of the Detroit Tigers sent them into a day off feeling better about their apparent fate than they did just a few days ago.

The Angels returned home this week having lost six of seven games to fall a season-worst three games below .500.

They were without their best hitter (Mike Trout) and best pitcher (Tyler Skaggs) because of injuries.

They had recently traded away two of their top defensive players and also were minus Luis Valbuena, who ran out of time because the Angels ran out of patience.

Reports of Scioscia’s impending departure swirled and the general direction of the franchise appeared to be teetering.

Approaching a possible crash landing, the Angels needed an inviting, soft spot on which to touch down and baseball provided them one: the Tigers, who’ve won once this month and not at all during their just completed trip.

In sweeping this three-game set, the Angels batted .316 and hit seven home runs, winning by a total margin of 23-7.

“It’s always good to win, especially to sweep,” starting pitcher Jaime Barria (7-7) said through an interpreter. “My teammates are more upbeat. It’s a way better atmosphere.”

The Angels trailed for one inning Monday, for half an inning Tuesday and not for a single pitch Wednesday.

Kole Calhoun saw to that by homering to lead off the bottom of the first inning, the ball landing 404 feet from the plate and poking the batter’s eye in center field.

After spending two months being one of the worst hitters in baseball, Calhoun today is one of the game’s most resurgent.

He has 14 home runs since coming off the disabled list June 18 and no one in the American League has more.

Think about this: Calhoun was a .145 hitter with one home run May 31. After Wednesday, he had more home runs for the season than Yasiel Puig, Carlos Correa and Andrew McCutchen.

Given an instant lead, Barria shut out the Tigers into the sixth inning, pitching his finest game in more than eight weeks.

The rookie limited Detroit to four singles and a double while striking out five to win for only the second time since June 1.

“Right now, it’s the normal progression of a young pitcher finding his way,” Scioscia said before the game. “He’s going to be fine.”

Barria was against the Tigers — plus some. On a day when the game-time temperature was 94 degrees, he gave his team 17 outs on 92 pitches before Taylor Cole, Hansel Robles and Noe Ramirez completed the shutout.

During one of his recent starts, Barria admitted to struggling because of excessive sweat, the condition impacting his ability to grip the ball.

He had no such problems this time, holding the Detroit lineup in his grasp. Barria credited more generous use of the rosin bag.

The three pitchers who followed retired all 10 batters they faced, Cole, a 28-year-old rookie, lowering his earned-run average to 1.59 with 1 1/3 innings.

“Taylor’s really an interesting guy,” Scioscia said. “He’s multidimensional.”

The Angels also received a home run from Justin Upton for the second consecutive game.

This came after a stretch during which he had three hits and 12 strikeouts in 26 at-bats, one of which ended with Upton slamming his bat into the ground and breaking the shattered remains in half over his knee.

On Wednesday, the lasting image was Upton finishing his home run trot by touching the plate with his right foot and hugging Calhoun.

Angels pitcher Williams Jerez receives mementos from big league debut

By Jeff Fletcher

Williams Jerez's big league debut was so impressive Tuesday that he walked away with four souvenir baseballs as proof.

One was from his first strikeout. The left-hander isn't quite sure what the other three commemorate.

"I have no idea," Jerez said. "But I'm glad I have them."

Acquired from Boston in the **Ian Kinsler** trade July 30, Jerez retired six of the seven batters he faced in finishing up the Angels' 11-5 victory over Detroit.

He hit 97 mph with his fastball and struck out **Nicholas Castellanos** to open his career. The only hit Jerez gave up was a double by **Victor Martinez**.

"I thought I'd be nervous but I wasn't," said Jerez, 26. "I was ready. I've been waiting for this opportunity. So I prepared myself for it."

He was told of his first big league promotion late Monday night and was so pumped that he didn't fall asleep until close to 5 a.m. His alarm to wake up and head to the airport sounded barely an hour later.

"I was excited to get here and see how everyone was going to treat me," Jerez said. "They've all been great. Everyone has been coming up and introducing themselves."

A second-round pick by Boston in 2011, Jerez originally was an outfielder. He converted to pitcher in 2014.

The Angels also acquired right-handed reliever **Ty Buttrey** in the Kinsler deal.

Tyler Skaggs throws bullpen session

Tyler Skaggs (left adductor strain) threw a bullpen session and reported no problems. Barring any late setbacks, he's expected to start Saturday against Oakland.

The Angels haven't selected a starter for Sunday. **Andrew Heaney** is one possibility since he would be pitching on the traditional four days of rest, though manager **Mike Scioscia** said other options are being considered.

Mike Trout to test wrist

Mike Trout, who received a cortisone injection this week for his ailing right wrist, will throw during a workout Thursday in hopes of returning to the lineup Friday.

A final decision likely will be made after batting practice before the opener against the Athletics. Trout has been sidelined the last seven games.

Nick Tropeano gets cortisone shot

Nick Tropeano received a cortisone injection after his start Monday was cut short because of persistent inflammation in his right shoulder. He was put on the 10-day disabled list Tuesday, his third trip to the DL this season.

"It's frustrating," he said. "You want to be out there. It's tough."

Tests have ruled out any significant structural damage, general manager **Billy Eppler** describing the condition as an impingement. There is no timetable for Tropeano's return.

Prospect Joe Adell is nursing injury

Top prospect **Jo Adell** sat out his fifth consecutive game at double-A Mobile because of a jammed right thumb. Eppler said Adell is close to returning.

Adell, 19, began the season at Class-A Burlington before being promoted twice. He homered in his first double-A game July 31, his 19th of the season.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Angels' nicknames for Players' Weekend

For the second consecutive year, Major Leaguers will put their personalities and passions on the field when Players' Weekend takes center stage during all games from Friday, Aug. 24, through Sunday, Aug. 26.

Here are the nicknames the Angels will wear on their backs while sporting colorful, non-traditional uniforms featuring alternate designs inspired by youth-league uniforms:

Jose Alvarez: "KÍKE"
Justin Anderson: "ANDO"
Francisco Arcia: "FRANKIE"
Jaime Barria: "EL PANÁ"
Cam Bedrosian: "BEDROCK"
Jose Briceno: "ORE"
Kole Calhoun: "KOLEMAN"
Kaleb Cowart: "PAL"
Zack Cozart: "L.A. COZ"
Jose Fernandez: "JOTAVE"
David Fletcher: "FLETCH"
Andrew Heaney: "HEANDOG"
Jake Jewell: "BOB"
Jim Johnson: "J.J."
Jefry Marte: "EL BLEY"
Alex Meyer: "BUBBA"
Keynan Middleton: "MAJOR KEY"
Shohei Ohtani: "SHOWTIME"
Blake Parker: "B-EASY"
Felix Pena: "LA BEFLA"
Albert Pujols: "THE MACHINE"
JC Ramirez: "J.C. TIME"
Noe Ramirez: "OTTO"
Garrett Richards: "G-RICH"
Rene Rivera: "MONCHO"
Hansel Robles: "EL PEÑACO"
Matt Shoemaker: "SHOE"
Andrelton Simmons: "SIMÓN"
Tyler Skaggs: "SWAGGY"
Nick Tropeano: "NITRO"
Mike Trout: "KIIIIID"
Justin Upton: "J - UP"
Blake Wood: "BLOCK-A"
Chris Young: "C Y"
Eric Young Jr.: "EYJ"

Trio of timely HRs helps Angels cruise to sweep

Calhoun hits leadoff shot; Upton, Pujols go back-to-back

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Behind a trio of home runs and a strong start from rookie **Jaime Barria**, the Angels polished off a three-game sweep of the Tigers with a 6-0 win in Wednesday afternoon's series finale at Angel Stadium.

Kole Calhoun led off the game with a solo home run, and **Justin Upton** and **Albert Pujols** added back-to-back shots in the fifth inning to pull the Angels (58-58) back to .500 and saddle the rebuilding Tigers with their sixth consecutive loss.

Barria picked up his seventh win of the season after scattering five hits over 5 2/3 scoreless innings for the Angels. The 22-year-old right-hander walked one and struck out five in the 92-pitch effort.

"I think he used his fastball well," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think he had his fastball in good zones. When Jaime is able to find that command and bring the blend of the secondary pitches in, he's very effective. It was hot out there today and he almost finished six innings."

Taylor Cole, **Hansel Robles** and **Noe Ramirez** combined to pitch 3 1/3 perfect innings to complete the shutout.

Despite being without **Mike Trout**, who hasn't played since last Wednesday **due to a right wrist contusion**, the Angels outscored the Tigers, 23-7, during the series to secure their first sweep since June 4-6 against the Royals.

"Obviously, you never want to play too many games without a guy like Mike in your lineup, but we've been forced to, and I think we've been holding our own," Scioscia said. "In this series, we definitely looked good in the batter's box."

The Angels entered Wednesday just 11-21 against left-handed starters this season, but they didn't have much trouble solving Detroit's **Blaine Hardy**. The left-handed-hitting Calhoun blasted Hardy's second pitch of the game out to center field for his 15th home run of the season, putting the Angels on the board in the first inning. Calhoun now has 14 home runs since June 18, the most in the American League.

The Angels tacked on another run on **Jefry Marte**'s RBI single to left field, extending their lead to 2-0.

In the fifth, Hardy yielded a leadoff single to **Eric Young Jr.**, followed by a two-run shot to Upton. Upton ended a nine-pitch at-bat by launching a 3-2 changeup from Hardy, his former Tigers teammate, to left-center field for his 23rd home run of the season.

"I grinded at-bats, saw some pitches," Upton said. "After seeing that many pitches, you kind of get a little more comfortable."

Pujols subsequently drove an 0-1 curveball from Hardy over the left-center-field wall for his 18th home run of the year, making it 5-0. It was the third time the Angels have hit back-to-back homers this season. The blast was also Pujols' 999th hit since joining the Halos, leaving him one shy of becoming the ninth player to collect 1,000 hits in each league. The first 2,073 hits of Pujols' career came in the National League with the Cardinals.

The Tigers didn't put a runner in scoring position against Barria until the fourth, when **Jeimer Candelario** led off the inning by doubling into the gap in left-center field. Still, Barria coaxed a pop out from **Victor Martinez** and a pair of flyouts from **Niko Goodrum** and **Jim Adduci** to leave Candelario stranded at second.

Detroit generated its best scoring opportunity in the sixth after Barria surrendered a pair of singles to **Jose Iglesias** and Martinez to put runners on the corners with two outs. Scioscia opted to bring in Cole to face Goodrum, who struck out swinging on three straight changeups to end the inning. Cole struck out three over 1 1/3 scoreless frames, lowering his ERA to 1.59 in eight appearances for the Angels.

"Taylor, he's really an interesting guy," Scioscia said. "He's really multidimensional. He can give you multiple innings in the 'pen. He's got a power changeup and slider to go with a really good fastball. He's got some plus out pitches and plus fastball, and he looked good going in there this afternoon."

The Angels added an insurance run in the sixth after Marte doubled and scored on **Jose Briceno's** RBI single.

UP NEXT

The Angels will enjoy an off-day on Thursday before beginning a three-game series against the A's on Friday at 7:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. Right-hander **Felix Pena** (1-3, 4.97 ERA) will battle left-hander **Brett Anderson** (2-3, 4.64 ERA) in the series opener. Pena made his only career appearance against the A's as a reliever on April 8, giving up one run over one inning of work. Prior to the game, the Angels will honor recently inducted Hall of Famer Vladimir Guerrero during an on-field ceremony.

Trout on track for Friday return to lineup

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- The Angels are hoping they won't have to do without **Mike Trout** for much longer.

Trout was out of the lineup for the seventh consecutive game on Wednesday with a right wrist contusion, but the Angels remain optimistic that the superstar center fielder will be able to return on Friday against the A's. Trout has not played since Aug. 1, when he jammed his wrist on an awkward feet-first slide into third base during a game against the Rays.

Trout received a cortisone injection on Monday to help calm the inflammation in his wrist and is expected to come to Angel Stadium on Thursday's off-day to throw and attempt to swing. He'll have another opportunity to test his wrist during batting practice on Friday.

"Mike feels much better," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He'll come in tomorrow and throw a little bit, see how it feels, possibly swing the bat. He'll take batting practice hopefully on Friday and see if he's ready."

The Angels have gone 4-3 in their first seven games without Trout in their lineup. The 27-year-old is batting .309 with an MLB-high 1.083 OPS, 30 home runs and 60 RBIs in 109 games this season.

The Ohtani brief

Shohei Ohtani will throw his light bullpen session on Saturday with the catcher standing up, which Japanese pitchers often do during their first few Spring Training throwing sessions. It'll be Ohtani's first

time throwing off the mound since receiving stem-cell and platelet-rich plasma injections in his injured right elbow on June 7.

"By his comfort level, the catcher will be standing up for his bullpen [session]," Scioscia said. "Just to get used to the slope."

While Ohtani's initial bullpen sessions will not affect his availability as a hitter, Scioscia acknowledged that the Angels will have to eventually insert recovery days into Ohtani's program as he progresses deeper into his rehab.

"That's going to be driven by our medical staff," Scioscia said. "We'll get evaluations on when he's available to hit. These light bullpens that he's starting out with aren't going to affect that, but I know at some point, obviously, when he starts to step things up, there are going to be some recovery days involved."

Once Ohtani is ready to start again, the Angels will likely follow the same schedule they developed earlier in the season for the two-way phenom, which had him out of the lineup the day before, the day after and the day of his outing.

Ohtani was not in the Angels' starting lineup on Wednesday against Tigers left-hander **Blaine Hardy**. The 24-year-old is batting .175 with a .523 OPS in 65 plate appearances against lefties this season.

Worth noting

- **Nick Tropeano** said he received a cortisone injection in his inflamed right shoulder on Monday and is expecting to rest for the next four to five days. Tropeano has dealt with bursitis in the shoulder throughout the season, which led to his third stint on the disabled list on Tuesday.

"This is something I've been battling all year," Tropeano said. "I want to be out there. I want to be helping this team win, but at the same time, it's something I've got to attack head-on. I got another injection into my shoulder just to kind of relieve some of the stress in there. They wanted to give it four to five days to kind of let it do its thing instead of trying to push me back. I'm not sure how long this will be. Hopefully it's just the 10 days, but you never know with this bursitis stuff."

Scioscia said the Angels have not yet decided who will start in Tropeano's place on Sunday against the A's. Left-hander **Andrew Heaney** could come back and pitch on normal rest because of Thursday's off-day, but Scioscia said the Angels could also "mix and match" in a bullpen game.

- The Angels are hoping left-hander **Tyler Skaggs** (left adductor strain) will be able to come off the disabled list on Saturday and start against the A's. Skaggs threw a bullpen on Wednesday and will be evaluated before the Angels decide if he's fit to return.

- **Top prospect** Jo Adell has not played for Double-A Mobile since Aug. 2 because of a jammed right thumb, though he has resumed hitting off high-velocity pitching and is expected to return to action soon.

FROM THE ATHLETIC**Upton, Pujols, Calhoun homer in Halos' 6-0 win over Tigers**

By Greg Beacham

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — After getting three big homers and nine innings of outstanding pitching to complete a series sweep, the Los Angeles Angels are headed into a day off with a rare feeling of contentment in their disappointing season.

The Detroit Tigers are just grateful to be going home after a horrific California road trip ended with nothing but losses.

Justin Upton and Albert Pujols hit back-to-back homers in the fifth inning, and the Angels swept the Tigers with a 6-0 victory Wednesday.

Kole Calhoun hit a leadoff homer and rookie Jaime Barria (7-7) pitched five-hit ball into the sixth inning for the Angels, who were in a 1-6 skid before getting back to .500 with their first series sweep — and their first shutout victory — since early June.

"It's always good to win like this, especially when you sweep a series," Barria said "Everybody is feeling much better. It's a better atmosphere in the clubhouse."

The atmosphere was quiet down the hall as the struggling Tigers packed up for the plane: Detroit scored only eight runs on its 0-6 road trip, getting shut out three times. All but three of Detroit's runs over 58 innings of play out West came in Tuesday night's 11-5 loss to the Angels.

"We've got a lot of guys struggling at the same time, a lot of guys fighting it," Detroit manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We've got a day off, and we know we play better at home. We've got time to maybe work on a few things. We've got to get back on the positive side mentally."

Mike Trout missed his seventh consecutive game with a sore right wrist, but the Angels still scored 23 runs in the three-game series without their best player.

"Obviously you never want to play many games without a guy like Mike in our lineup, but I think we're holding our own," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

The Angels broke it open in the fifth when Upton connected on a full-count changeup from Blaine Hardy (4-4) for a two-run homer. Moments later, Pujols added his 632nd career homer.

Hardy yielded seven hits over five innings for the Tigers, who are headed home without a win on the West Coast. Detroit has lost 21 of its past 26 road games overall.

Starting with three strikeouts in the first inning, Barria had another effective outing for the Angels, who have benefited greatly from his surprising emergence as a dependable starter in their injury-plagued rotation. He struck out five in total and walked one before leaving with two outs in the sixth. The Angels bullpen then got 10 consecutive outs to finish it.

Jefry Marte had an RBI single in the first inning, and he doubled and scored on Jose Briceno's single in the sixth.

KOLE'S SHOT

Calhoun led off for the Angels with his 15th homer. The blast was the ninth leadoff homer by Calhoun, who endured a miserable first half of the season before finding his stride since coming off the disabled list June 18. He has hit 14 homers since that DL stint, tops in the AL during that stretch.

TROUT OUT

The Angels got more good news when Scioscia said he's optimistic Trout could play Friday against the Oakland Athletics. Trout's wrist has kept him out for the second-longest injury absence of his big-league career, but he will come in Thursday on the Angels' day off to throw and perhaps to swing a bat.

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Shohei Ohtani had the day off after homering Tuesday night as the Angels' designated hitter. Ohtani frequently sits against left-handed starting pitchers such as Hardy.

UNHAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH

The Tigers haven't won a series at Angel Stadium since August 2009, and they've lost 24 of their past 31 games in Anaheim. They've also lost 31 of their 43 meetings overall with the Angels since September 2012.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Tigers: Catcher John Hicks went on the 10-day disabled list with a right groin strain. The move was retroactive to Tuesday. Detroit recalled catcher Grayson Greiner from Triple-A Toledo to back up James McCann.

Angels: Manager Mike Scioscia is still hoping Tyler Skaggs can start Saturday against Oakland after coming off the 10-day disabled list. Skaggs went on the DL last weekend with a left adductor strain, but the move was retroactive to his previous start.

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Tigers: After a day off, Jordan Zimmermann (4-4, 4.31 ERA) makes his 16th start of the season in the opener of a home series against Minnesota.

Angels: After a day off, converted reliever Felix Pena (1-3, 4.97 ERA) makes his ninth start of the season Friday at home against Oakland. Pena has been a solid stopgap for the Halos' troubled rotation. He took a no-hitter into the sixth inning in Cleveland last weekend, but still took the loss.

FROM MiLB.COM

Marsh busts out of slump in big way

Angels No. 2 prospect homers on three-hit night to end skid

By Josh Horton

That's the way to bust out of a slump, **Brandon Marsh**.

The **Angels No. 2 prospect** went 3-for-5 with a home run, a double and two RBIs for Class A Advanced Inland Empire on Wednesday, but the 66ers fell to Lancaster in 10 innings, 8-7, at The Hangar. Marsh entered the game on an 0-for-15 skid and hitting .160 in August.

"He's been working really hard in the cage and he's been trying to get back to feeling good and more confident," 66ers hitting coach Brian Betancourth said. "For the most part, he's been trusting what he's been doing in the cage and it showed today."

The 20-year-old outfielder struck out to lead off the game before slugging a solo homer -- his fifth of the season -- to right-center field in the third inning off JetHawks left-hander **Ty Culbreth**. Marsh whiffed in the fifth, but finished the night strong by poking a base hit to center in the seventh and drilling a go-ahead double to right in the 10th.

"After I started the night with a strikeout, I had a better mind-set about it," Marsh said. "Not trying to do too much, worrying about the next at-bat, just trying to move on really helped me."

Bret Boswell pummeled a two-run homer, his second roundtripper of the game, in the bottom of the frame to walk off for Lancaster.

Marsh, a second-round pick in 2016, is hitting .248 with a .721 OPS for the 66ers this season after being promoted from Class A Burlington, where he compiled a slash line of .295/.390/.470 in 34 games. He broke onto the scene by hitting .350/.396/.548 in 2017 with Rookie-level Orem after being sidelined for all of 2016 with a stress fracture in his lower back.

The left-handed hitter has tried not to dwell on his recent struggles too much, but acknowledged it can be difficult to put those aside, especially while playing in the hitter-friendly California League.

"I've been putting a lot of stress on myself as of late. But just trying to move on and forget was the main goal for tonight. And it worked," Marsh said. "It goes through every hitter's, pitcher's head when you don't perform to the standards you're asked to. It's a little frustrating, but nights like these help you recover from all that."

The native of Buford, Georgia, is regarded as a solid hitter with the speed and agility to comfortably fit in center field with a plus-arm that will also function well in right, according to MLB Pipeline.

"Oh, ho, that's a true gift that he has," Betancourth said. "Just to see him every night is special -- running down balls and making big plays, diving catches and stuff like that. When he's out there, he takes control and he wants the ball at all times, so there's no fear in there."

There's still room for Marsh to fill out his 6-foot-4 frame and develop more power as he matures, something he aspires to do further into his career.

"I'm just going to let it happen over time," he said. "I'm not going to force myself or mold myself into something that I'm not right now. I know I have what it takes to be that middle-of-the-lineup power guy. It's just that right now is not that time for me. I'm just working on the bat path just to try and get there."

Boswell plated five runs while **Alan Trejo** and **Vince Fernandez** also went deep to lead the JetHawks offense.

David MacKinnon drove in three runs for the 66ers.

FROM CBS SPORTS

Upton, Pujols, Calhoun homer in Halos' 6-0 win over Tigers

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FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Why Wait? 1 Top Prospect Each MLB Team Must Call Up Now*

By Joel Reuter

With the non-waiver trade deadline passed and August waiver trade activity always unpredictable, the next surefire MLB shake-up will come when rosters expand in September.

That's when we'll get a chance to see some of the game's top prospects make their big league debuts, whether it's a contender looking for a spark or a rebuilding team assessing their in-house talent while looking ahead to next year.

But why wait until September to promote a guy who's ready now?

The obvious answer is that teams don't want to start a player's service time clock any sooner than they need to, especially in the case of those aforementioned rebuilding teams.

However, we've decided to throw caution to the wind and highlight one prospect that each MLB team should promote immediately.

AL West

Houston Astros: RHP Josh James

(AA/AAA: 20 G, 18 GS, 5-4, 3.18 ERA, 1.07 WHIP, 42 BB, 154 K, 99.0 IP)

How overpowering has Josh James been this season?

The former 34th-round pick is currently two strikeouts ahead of White Sox uber-prospect Michael Kopech for the MiLB lead, and he's holding opposing hitters to a .180 average.

MLB.com wrote: "James credits his jump to addressing his sleep apnea two offseasons ago, and he dedicated himself to conditioning last offseason and was the most improved Astros prospect in Spring Training this year. After working with a 92-94 mph fastball in the past, he's now sitting at 95-97 and reaching triple digits."

Spotty command and inconsistent mechanics may ultimately land him in the bullpen, so the Astros could call on him this season in a relief role if a spot opens up.

Los Angeles Angels: 3B Taylor Ward

(AA/AAA: 427 PA, .350/.445/.533, 38 XBH, 14 HR, 59 RBI, 61 R)

It's once again time for the Angels to start looking ahead to next season.

The third base position has been a revolving door for the Halos since the days of Troy Glaus, but it looks like they may finally have a long-term answer at the position in former first-round pick Taylor Ward.

Originally drafted as a catcher, Ward moved to the hot corner at the start of this season, and his offensive game has taken off since moving out of the crouch.

The 24-year-old has always possessed plus on-base skills. With his uptick in power production and an improved hit tool, he now has the makings of an everyday third baseman, and one with little left to prove in the minors.

Oakland Athletics: LHP Jesus Luzardo

(A+/AA/AAA: 20 GS, 10-4, 2.01 ERA, 0.97 WHIP, 23 BB, 117 K, 98.1 IP)

The Athletics were wise to stay the course at the trade deadline rather than mortgaging any significant future assets to chase a postseason berth in 2018.

That said, it's a two-team race for the second AL wild-card spot between Oakland and Seattle, so calling up top prospect Jesus Luzardo can't be ruled out as a possibility.

Still just 20, the precocious lefty started the season at High-A, but he made his Triple-A debut earlier this week. Clearly, he's on the fast track.

With scrapheap veterans Edwin Jackson and Brett Anderson currently holding down rotation spots, it might only be a matter of time before Oakland's hand is forced and Luzardo becomes a central figure in the playoff push.

Seattle Mariners: RHP Wyatt Mills

(A+/AA: 37 G, 11 SV, 2.89 ERA, 1.01 WHIP, 10 BB, 51 K, 43.2 IP)

After a standout run as Gonzaga's closer, Wyatt Mills was taken in the third round of the 2017 draft. A year later, he's already knocking on the door for an MLB promotion.

The 23-year-old has two 60-grade offerings—a mid-90s fastball and a tight slider—and he's used them to fan hitters at a 10.4 K/9 clip so far this season.

MLB.com wrote: "Mills draws comparisons to Steve Cishek because he's a lanky, side-armed right-hander with two above-average pitches."

The Mariners promoted current closer Edwin Diaz straight from Double-A back in 2015, so the fact that Mills has yet to make his Triple-A debut does not necessarily preclude him from being promoted in short order.

Texas Rangers: OF Scott Heineman

(AA/AAA: 431 PA, .310/.381/.449, 31 XBH, 10 HR, 61 RBI, 67 R, 18 SB)

At 25 years old, Scott Heineman stands on the outer edge of the prospect scale, so starting his service clock shouldn't be a factor in whether the Rangers decide to promote him.

An 11th-round pick back in 2015, he carries a .298/.377/.463 career line over parts of three minor league seasons, and he provides a nice mix of power and speed with the added ability to play all three outfield spots.

Heineman best profiles as a fourth outfielder at the MLB level, but he's ready to fill that role now. With the season already lost, the Rangers might as well give him a shot, even if it's just in a part-time role.

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

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS

Angels taking big risk by allowing Shohei Ohtani to pitch again in 2018

By Chris Cwik

A UCL sprain isn't going to keep Shohei Ohtani from getting back on the mound. The Los Angeles Angels are moving forward with their plan to let Ohtani pitch again in 2018. The team announced Tuesday that

he would throw a bullpen session Saturday. It's the biggest step Ohtani will take since the injury forced him to stop pitching in early June.

Despite the obvious risks, the Angels have always left the door open for Ohtani to return to the mound in 2018. Is that the right move?

Bringing back Shohei Ohtani could backfire on the Angels

At 57-58, the Angels are not serious contenders for the postseason. The team sits 10.5 games out of the second wild-card spot, and is stuck in one of baseball's toughest divisions. If Ohtani is 100 percent, he'll help them make up some ground, but he's not good enough to close that gap.

On top of that, the risk of re-injury is pretty large. Ohtani suffered a grade-2 sprain of his UCL in June. He came into the season with a first-degree sprain. An injection before the season helped Ohtani get to this point, but he still managed to injure himself. The Angels say his elbow has shown progress in the time he's been sidelined, but that could all be undone if Ohtani starts throwing again. Another setback could lead to Tommy John surgery, which would sideline Ohtani for at least a full year.

Shohei Ohtani has been hitting well since his elbow injury

Since the injury, Ohtani has been a full-time hitter with Los Angeles. He's performed well, hitting .250/.323/.536 in 28 games. By wRC+, an advanced stat that measures offensive performance, Ohtani has been the team's second-best hitter this season.

While he's been able to play through his current injury, there's no guarantee that will continue if the injury gets worse. If Ohtani's return to the mound leads to a more serious elbow issue, the Angels may lose one of their best hitters too.

Players can pitch through UCL tears

The risk is obvious with Ohtani, but it's worth noting that some pitchers have been able to pitch effectively with tears in their elbow. New York Yankees pitcher Masahiro Tanaka has done it the past couple seasons. Minnesota Twins pitcher Ervin Santana suffered a UCL tear in 2009, and still hasn't had Tommy John surgery. It is possible for Ohtani to continue pitching, and pitching well, even with a UCL injury.

The Angels believe the risk is worth taking with Shohei Ohtani

Ultimately, the Angels know more than we do about Ohtani's injury and recovery. It's possible they believe Ohtani will be just fine the next time he gets on the mound. It's also possible they fully expect surgery to be likely, and that no amount of rest is going to fully fix the issue, so they might as well see if Ohtani can pitch through it.

The only way they'll know for sure is to put Ohtani on the mound and hope for the best.

FROM FAN GRAPHS

The American League's Only Playoff Race

By Jay Jaffe

While the AL East race appears to have **tilted decisively** towards the Red Sox over the past five weeks, an even more dramatic turnaround has taken place in the AL wild card race over an even longer timeline, one involving the Mariners and A's. This one has yet to be decided, which is good news, because it's practically the last race standing in the Junior Circuit.

Through June 15, the Mariners were running neck-and-neck with the Astros despite a massive disparity in the two teams' run differentials, a situation that — as I had illustrated **a few days earlier** — owed a whole lot to their records in one-run games (22-10 for Seattle, 6-12 for Houston). The A's, though solidly competitive to that point, were something of an afterthought, far overshadowed by the **Mike Trout/Shohei Ohtani** show in Anaheim:

American League West Standings Through June 15

Team	W-L	W-L%	GB	RS	RA	Dif	PythW-L%
Astros	46-25	.648	—	366	220	146	.717
Mariners	45-25	.643	0.5	311	284	27	.541
Angels	38-32	.543	7.5	319	286	33	.550
A's	34-36	.486	11.5	304	313	-9	.487
Rangers	27-44	.380	19	297	379	-82	.390

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

On June 16, despite placing **Matt Chapman** on the disabled list with a contusion on his right thumb, the A's, who had lost to the Angels 8-4 the night before, kicked off a five-game winning streak, taking the two remaining games of the series that weekend, then two from the Padres at Petco Park and the first game of a four-game set against the White Sox in Chicago. Though they merely split a four-gamer on the South Side, they swept four from the Tigers in Detroit, sparking a six-game winning streak that also included two victories at home against the Indians. Remarkably, they've strung together two separate six-game winning streaks since then, as well, one against the Giants (a pair of walk-of wins) at home and the Rangers in Arlington from July 21 to 26 and then another from July 30 through August 5 at home against the Blue Jays and Tigers. Alas, that one ended on Tuesday night against the Dodgers.

Though the Mariners had an eight-game winning streak from June 25 to July 3 against the Orioles, Royals, and Angels, it didn't quite offset losing streaks of five and four games that took place in near proximity. They also endured a five-game skid just last week. Here's how the division has played out since the point above:

American League West Standings Since June 16

Tm	W-L	W-L%	GB	RS	RA	Dif	PythW-L%
A's	33-11	.750	—	236	170	66	.646
Astros	27-17	.614	6	203	147	56	.644
Rangers	23-21	.523	10	249	222	27	.552
Mariners	20-24	.455	13	161	213	-52	.375
Angels	19-26	.422	14.5	206	205	1	.502

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

The A's have been the hottest team in baseball in that span, a touch hotter than even the Red Sox (32-11). With their 13-game swing relative to the Mariners, they entered Wednesday at 67-47, five-and-a-half games behind the Astros (73-42) and two ahead of the Mariners (65-49) for the second Wild Card spot; they're also four behind the slumping Yankees (70-42) for the top spot. Their total playoff odds, just 3.1% as of June 15, are up to 63.7%, while the Mariners' odds have dropped from 75.1% to 35.8% in that same timeframe. Note how far in the red Seattle's run differential has gotten; they're lucky they haven't been buried even further based upon what ol' Pythagoras says.

The flip-flopping of the A's and Mariners owes to massive gaps in performance between the rivals' offenses and bullpens over the past seven-plus weeks. Yes, we're having some fun with arbitrary endpoints and small sample sizes (just over a quarter of a season) while acknowledging that over the course of the full season, the disparities just aren't that wide. As a team, the A's have had one of the most robust offenses in baseball in this span, scoring 5.36 runs per game (fourth behind the Red Sox, Rangers, and Indians) while hitting for an MLB-high 118 wRC+. Over that same timeframe, the Mariners' 3.65 runs per game is 27th in the majors, while their 90 wRC+ is 26th. Between the two teams, the A's boast nearly all of the hottest hitters, the Mariners nearly all of the frigid ones:

A's and Mariners Hitters Since June 16

Name	Team	PA	AVG	OBP	SLG	wRC+
Matt Chapman	OAK	123	.318	.398	.598	172
Nelson Cruz	SEA	159	.302	.384	.619	171
Chad Pinder	OAK	90	.300	.371	.537	151
Stephen Piscotty	OAK	181	.262	.331	.543	138
Khris Davis	OAK	186	.267	.344	.540	138
Mark Canha	OAK	144	.280	.361	.504	136
Jed Lowrie	OAK	175	.240	.349	.453	124
Matt Olson	OAK	185	.242	.351	.452	123
Mitch Haniger	SEA	174	.250	.356	.345	103
Denard Span	SEA	135	.279	.319	.426	103
Ben Gamel	SEA	83	.276	.337	.382	99

Marcus Semien	OAK	187	.259	.330	.373	96
Kyle Seager	SEA	159	.238	.289	.415	92
Ryon Healy	SEA	165	.212	.248	.391	74
Dee Gordon	SEA	181	.282	.298	.322	72
Jonathan Lucroy	OAK	124	.229	.290	.312	64
Jean Segura	SEA	165	.234	.279	.312	65
Mike Zunino	SEA	90	.190	.233	.333	55
Dustin Fowler	OAK	94	.220	.234	.330	50
Guillermo Heredia	SEA	115	.194	.243	.278	45
Totals	OAK	1702	.262	.338	.463	120
Totals	SEA	1581	.246	.302	.378	89

All statistics through August 6

Note that the table does not include Tuesday night's games, losses for both teams. Despite missing 16 games with his thumb injury, Chapman has been the A's hottest hitter; his wRC+ is eighth in the majors over this stretch (120 PA minimum), and overall, he entered Tuesday 12th in the AL in wRC+ (136) and seventh in WAR (4.9) thanks in part to outstanding glove work (12.6 UZR, 25 DRS). Piscotty has heated up in the wake of his mother's untimely death due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; he and Davis have both clubbed a team-high 11 homers over the 43 games, with Davis khrushing 10 of those in his last 14 games. (He extended that to 11 in 15 games on Tuesday.) Canha and Pinder have helped stabilize an outfield picture that hasn't got what was expected of Fowler, who made the **center-field installment** of my Replacement-Level Killers series. Lucroy, the team's other real offensive laggard, did so at **catcher**.

As for the Mariners, on a team-wide level, their impatience (6.5% walk rate to the A's 9.2%) and lack of power stand out over this stretch. Cruz has 13 homers since June 16, but Healy (eight) and Seager (six) are the only other hitters with more than three, and it still hasn't been enough to prop up their subpar production. In fact, only two of Cruz's teammates have been even slightly above average with the bat lately. Segura has slumped dreadfully, and while Span and Gamel have been about average, the team's left-field production was bad enough to earn a spot on **my Killers list**. Likewise for Healy at **first base** and Gordon and Heredia in center field, though the irony is that Gordon hasn't hit a lick since moving back to second base. The return of **Robinson Cano** from his PED suspension — as a first baseman — should help shore up the former spot, but so far, the work of July 31 acquisition **Cameron Maybin** on the latter front hasn't helped (.235/.350/.235 in 20 PA).

Since mid-June, the performance of the two teams' rotations has been quite even, at least from a fielding-independent standpoint:

A's and Mariners Starting Pitchers Since June 16

Name	Team	IP	ERA	FIP
Edwin Jackson	OAK	47.0	2.87	4.00

Brett Anderson	OAK	27.1	2.96	4.40
Sean Manaea	OAK	53.2	3.19	3.84
James Paxton	SEA	41.2	3.46	3.27
Marco Gonzales	SEA	53.2	3.52	3.66
Trevor Cahill	OAK	26.1	3.76	3.50
Chris Bassitt	OAK	21.0	3.86	3.68
Mike Leake	SEA	54.0	4.00	3.97
Wade LeBlanc	SEA	59.1	4.55	4.08
Frankie Montas	OAK	30.2	4.70	3.61
Paul Blackburn	OAK	20.1	5.75	3.10
Félix Hernández	SEA	33.2	5.88	4.64
Totals	OAK	234.0	3.88	3.99
Totals	SEA	250.1	4.31	3.98

All statistics through August 6

On a team-wide level, the gap owes something to batting average on balls in play (.282 Oakland, .296 Seattle); the A's have had the better defense of the two teams over the course of the season by 20-ish runs according to both UZR and DRS, and that's a big part of the difference here. Within this span, the Mariners rotation's rate of home runs per fly ball is about 50% higher than that of the A's (14.2% to 9.5%), offsetting their advantages in strikeout and walk rates.

Individually, how about those blasts from the past? Anderson and Cahill are pitching like 2010 just decided to crash the party, but the even more surprising appearance is that of Edwin Jackson, who was toiling for the Nationals' Triple-A Syracuse affiliate until exercising a June 1 opt-out clause and signing with the A's on June 6. When he made his debut for Oakland on June 25, he tied **Octavio Dotel's** record of 13 teams played for — and he's still a young lad of 34 years. His comeback is worth a separate article, but the short version is that he's thrown at least 5.2 innings while allowing three runs or fewer in all but one of his eight starts while relying primarily on a new cutter-sinker-slider mix. His emergence has helped the A's weather the losses of **Kendall Graveman**, **Daniel Gossett** and **Jharel Cotton** — a trio that combined for 61 starts last year, albeit with generally subpar results — to Tommy John surgery. The A's have used 12 starters thus far, tied for second in the majors behind the Rays, who are working with an entirely different paradigm, man.

Not helping matters for the Mariners is that Paxton effectively missed three starts due to lower back stiffness (he left in the first inning of one of those), but the most dismaying row above is the one belonging to Hernández, and those numbers don't even include Tuesday night's six-inning, 11-run (seven earned), three-homer bludgeoning by the Rangers because I simply don't have the heart. The 32-year-old righty has given the Mariners just one quality start in seven via the numbers shown above, and the timing of his next start is in doubt at this writing. Had Hernández managed even a league-average performance in terms of run prevention this year, the race between these two teams would be even.

As for the bullpens, I'll spare you the full table, but in summary, the A's have enjoyed a massive edge, with a 3.03 ERA and 3.17 FIP in 160.1 innings compared to the Mariners' 4.62 ERA and 4.06 FIP in 132.1 innings. Oakland closer **Blake Treinen** and setup man **Lou Trivino** have been particularly stingy of late; the former has been scored upon in just three out of his last 32 outings dating back to mid-May, while the latter, a 26-year-old rookie, has been scored upon in just two of 23 appearances in this span, though he's allowed inherited runners to score in four outings. **Emilio Pagan** and **Yusmeiro Petit** have been solid, while **Ryan Buchter** has been Oakland's only medium- or high-leverage reliever to scuffle substantially.

On the other side, closer **Edwin Diaz** has been brilliant — his FIP during this stretch is -0.07, which, wow — and setup man **Alex Colome** has been good, but **Juan Nicasio** has been dreadful (7.42 ERA, .526 SLG allowed) while pitching through **chronic pain in his right knee**, and **Nick Vincent** hasn't been much better. Not surprisingly, general manager Jerry Dipoto was busy around the July 31 deadline, adding **Zach Duke**, **Sam Tuivailala**, and **Adam Warren** via trades, though none may be as impactful as the A's addition of **Jeurys Familia**.

Obviously, 43 games is not a full season, and the overall gap between the A's and Mariners is hardly as big as what's shown over the nearly two months since the green-and-gold went red hot. These A's, who began the season with **the majors' lowest payroll** (just south of \$66 million), and these Mariners, who are trying to end the longest postseason drought in North American professional sports, are both compelling teams. As both our **projected standings** — which forecast the A's to finish with 92 wins and the Mariners with 91 — and our **playoff odds** suggest, this is hardly a done deal. That's good news, and hopefully this turns out to be one helluva race.

FROM THE RINGER

How MLB's Coldest Hitter Got Hot

Kole Calhoun started this year recording some of baseball's worst-ever value statistics at the plate. Now, after a DL stint and some personalized coaching, the Angels outfielder has a chance to turn an abysmal start into a respectable season.

By Ben Lindbergh

In the seventh inning of a game against the Tigers on May 31, Angels right fielder Kole Calhoun stepped to the plate to face Detroit reliever Louis Coleman with little at stake other than self-esteem. The Angels, trailing 6–1 with one out and no one on, had just a 2.5 percent chance to win the game, and there was little reason for anyone in the Comerica Park crowd to stress over the at-bat. But there was every reason for Calhoun to be antsy, because no big league batter needed a hit — or for that matter, any non-out — more than he did.

Calhoun, who was 0-for-2 to that point in the game, swung through a 90 mph fastball for strike one and fouled off another at 91 mph for strike two. Then he chased a low slider for strike three, succumbing to Coleman despite having the platoon advantage against the righty reliever.

That strikeout sank Calhoun's seasonal line to .145/.195/.179 in 185 plate appearances, including seven double plays. When Calhoun's spot in the order — eighth — came up again in the game, Angels manager Mike Scioscia pinch hit for him. The next day, he didn't start. And the day after that, the Angels placed him on the 10-day DL with a right oblique strain. Injury had been added to insult, seemingly compounding a disastrous start to the season. Yet in Calhoun's case, the timeout marked the beginning of better days.

"No one ever wants to go on the DL," Calhoun said this month via phone. "But looking back now, at least for this season — maybe even for my career — it's probably the best thing that's ever happened to me."

When he hit the DL, Calhoun was weighed down by a .374 OPS that dragged behind him, clanking and chafing like Jacob Marley's chains. Think of another hitter who had a rough start to the season. Maybe you're imagining the Rangers' Rougned Odor: His OPS through May was 179 points higher than Calhoun's. The Orioles' Chris Davis? 109 points higher than Calhoun's. The Astros' Jake Marisnick, who slumped so severely that Houston optioned him to Triple-A in mid-May? 86 points higher than Calhoun's. Of the 291 hitters with at least 100 plate appearances through May 31, Calhoun's OPS was the worst by 78 points.

This was weird. According to FanGraphs WAR, Calhoun had been an above-average player in each of his five seasons as a regular (excepting 2012, when he made his major league debut and appeared in only 21 games). He'd been an above-average batter in four of those seasons, falling short only last year, when he dipped slightly below the league baseline with a 98 wRC+. Even then, he'd finished strong, posting a 111 wRC+ in the second half, and he'd recorded an .873 OPS in spring training this year. At 30, he was likely too young to have suffered a precipitous decline in his physical skills. Yet while he continued to add value in the outfield, where Statcast appraises the former Gold Glover's 2018 fly-catching performance as two outs above average and other systems rate his arm among the most valuable in baseball, he'd completely cratered at the plate.

"This offseason I tried to do some things with my swing and improve," said Calhoun, who explained that he wasn't specifically trying to raise his launch angle but was aiming to get the ball off the ground. "The way I was trying to do it wasn't the correct way," he adds. "I don't know how to explain it. I don't really know that I knew what I was doing."

Calhoun's winter tinkering got him into bad habits that produced the opposite of his intended result. "I was not really getting off my backside and [was] getting stuck behind me, which made my swing path really shallow in the zone and resulted in some weak fly balls to left field and balls on the ground to the right side," he said. Through May, 56 percent of Calhoun's batted balls had been on the ground, which was bad both because it translated to less power and because Calhoun, who's not blessed with the speed to beat out hits and tends to pull his grounders more often than average, is easy to defend against. "Any balls on the ground in the big leagues these days are not really great, honestly, with all the shifts that everybody's putting on," said Calhoun, who's faced an infield shift on 68.7 percent of the pitches he's seen this season, the 15th-highest rate among the more than 300 hitters who've faced at least 500 pitches.

As one might imagine, it's no fun to be in baseball's worst slump. "Being a competitor, you tell yourself, 'Today's the day. Today's the day,'" Calhoun said. "But it was a struggle, for sure. A struggle mentally. A struggle physically — just not being able to feel like myself."

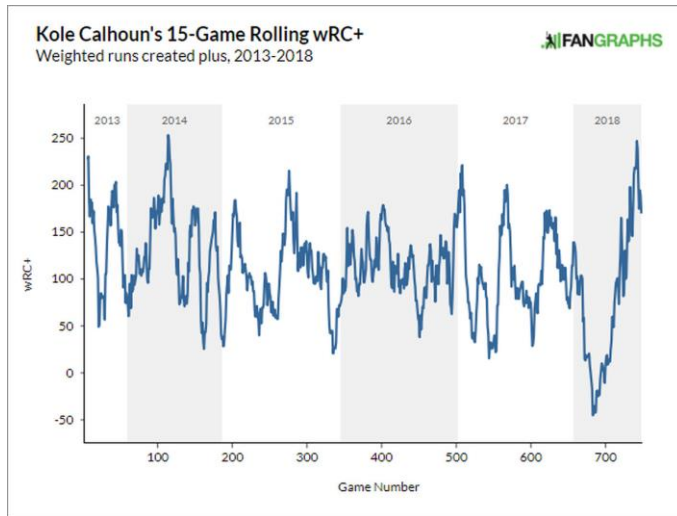
With some statistical perspective, Calhoun's season-starting slump looks even more extreme. *Baseball Prospectus* publishes a metric called RPA+, which measures the runs per plate appearance that a hitter produces, measured against the league average. It's expressed on the same scale as OPS+ or wRC+, where 100 is average and lower is worse. Calhoun's RPA+ through May was -9, which was the worst of any hitter with a minimum of 150 plate appearances through May since at least 1950, the first year for which RPA+ data is available. In other words, no other regular hitter on record has started a season as cold as Calhoun.

Lowest RPA+ Through May (Min. 150 PA)

Year	Name	PA	RPA+
2018	Kole Calhoun	185	-9
1955	Joe Demaestri	153	-3
2008	Tony Pena	160	-2
2006	Rondell White	171	7
2006	Yadier Molina	156	8
1971	Tim Cullen	177	11
1986	Garry Templeton	179	11
2007	Jason Kendall	180	12
2000	Alex Gonzalez	205	12
2005	Cristian Guzman	189	16

Calhoun said the oblique injury was a product of his desperation to escape the slump. "I had been swinging like crazy just because I was trying to find something that would help me get out of the funk that I was in," he said. He felt a twinge in his oblique at the end of May and talked to the Angels' trainers, who told him that short-term time off might save him from aggravating the injury and missing more time later in the season. Had he been hitting, the temptation to try to play through the injury might have been stronger, but given where his stats stood, Calhoun said that he "decided it probably would be best for me, health-wise — and probably even from a mentality standpoint — to go on the DL."

Calhoun returned from the mental/oblique break on June 18 and, batting ninth, went 2-for-3, giving him only his third multihit game since April 11. The next day, he hit a home run — his first homer and second extra-base hit since Opening Day, when he'd batted fifth. The game after that, he homered again. Suddenly, Calhoun was hot. And in July, he got hotter, hitting .322/.378/.759 with a league-leading 10 home runs, which tied him with José Ramírez for the most blistering performance of the month among qualified American Leaguers. Here's what Calhoun's wild ride this season looks like in graphical form:



In the span of a few months, Calhoun went from being colder than he'd ever been to about as hot as he'd ever been. "It's definitely pretty extreme," Calhoun said. "I don't know if I've ever really experienced anything like it." Almost no hitter ever has. *Baseball Prospectus* provided *The Ringer* with RPA+ data for all hitters in all calendar months going back to 1950 in which they recorded at least 80 plate appearances. Only one hitter — the Dodgers' Ron Fairly in 1966 — has ever experienced a more drastic difference between his best and worst offensive months in a single season than Calhoun has in 2018.

Biggest Differences Between Best and Worst Months

Name	Year	Worst Month	Worst-Month RPA+	Best Month	Best-Month RPA+	Difference
Ron Fairly	1966	July	-10	Sep/Oct	264	274
Kole Calhoun	2018	May	-23	July	222	245
Roy Sievers	1960	Sep/Oct	50	July	290	239
Curtis Granderson	2017	Mar/Apr	0	June	231	231
Lee May	1975	May	19	July	246	227
Edwin Encarnacion	2015	April	64	August	291	227
Reggie Jackson	1971	July	22	May	246	224
Brandon Moss	2016	Sep/Oct	3	June	226	223
Ken Henderson	1972	May	47	August	265	218
Adolfo Phillips	1967	July	38	June	254	216

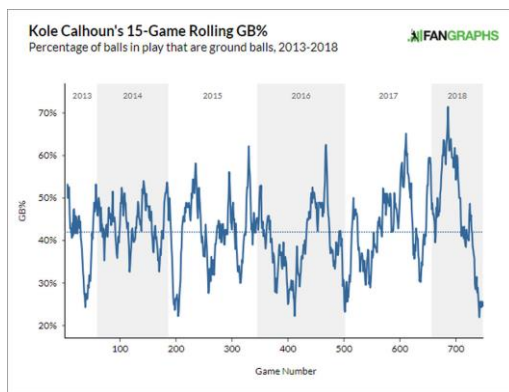
The down-and-up trajectory of Calhoun's season is almost enough to make one believe in the gambler's fallacy, but it's neither a cosmic kindness nor a coincidence that he's found his stroke. In addition to whatever benefits the two-and-a-half-week breather may have had for his brain, Calhoun also reset his stance and his swing, fixing flaws that would have been difficult to diagnose and address without the time away. He didn't do it by himself: While he was rehabbing in Arizona, he worked closely with two former big leaguers who've since become minor league coaches, Angels hitting coordinator Jeremy Reed and assistant hitting coordinator Shawn Wooten, whom Calhoun said "really, really helped me understand what my problems were ... and show[ed] me some video and just ask[ed] me if I was open to hearing what they had to say. Obviously, I said, 'Yeah.'" When a hitter's OPS is under .400, he'll say yes to almost anything.

Calhoun said that Wooten and Reed showed him some postures that he'd had success with in years past at the plate, but that he wasn't using this year. "I was way more straight up and taller earlier in the season," he said. "And now you see my spine's just trying to stay over the ball a little bit more. ... In the past, I was getting to the spot that I'm *starting* at now. It looks like I'm in a crouch, but I'm literally trying to just keep my body in a powerful position." Once Calhoun's side healed enough for him to start swinging, he put the new positioning into practice. The change in his stance is obvious in a side-by-side view of his setups from April (left) and July (right).

"My biggest problem was I was getting stuck on my backside," Calhoun continued, adding, "I wasn't really rotating all the way and had my back hip sucked under me, and now it's actually moving into the ball." The GIFs below show the difference in his swings from the side. Here's an April single...

...and a July double.

Right away, that freedom of movement started yielding much more power — in a five-game rehab assignment in Triple-A, Calhoun slashed .316/.350/.632. It's also led to many more fly balls: As the chart below shows, Calhoun's ground-ball rate in the big leagues has gone from its highest level ever before the DL break to its lowest level ever thereafter.



Prior to breaking down and being built back up again, Calhoun confessed, he "never really had the checkpoints to go back" when something mechanical was amiss. But now, he said, "I feel like I have a better understanding of the things that got me in trouble and the things that I want to try to avoid." In that sense, the deep slump may pay dividends in the long run. By studying himself, he's established benchmarks and baselines that he'll be able to revert to when he hits the next rough patch, theoretically shortening the time that it takes him to come out of it. To that end, Calhoun has made monitoring his setup via video review a more regular part of his routine.

When Calhoun came off the DL, the hill ahead of him was so steep that he resolved not to focus on inflating his full-season stats. "I can't do anything about it," he said. "What happened before is in the past, and the numbers are whatever they are. And once I came back I told myself I'm not even gonna really worry about that. I'm trusting what I'm doing now." When a player reaches mid-June with an OPS under .400, he can be forgiven for saying, as Calhoun does, that he's "taking it day by day." In his case, that isn't so much a cliché as it is a self-preservation strategy.

The silver lining to Calhoun's historically slow start is that he has a chance to record a historic *recovery* from a slow start. The list below shows the largest post-May improvements in RPA+

since 1950, with a minimum of 150 plate appearances both through and after the end of May. For now, Calhoun's recent tear—not even including his 2-for-4 performance with yet another homer on Wednesday—has put him atop the table.

Biggest Post-May Offensive Improvements

Year	Name	Through May PA	Pre-May RPA+	Post-May PA	Post-May RPA+	RPA+ Increase
2018	Kole Calhoun	185	-9	176	176	184
1978	Steve Ontiveros	162	28	154	158	130
1966	Clete Boyer	158	19	400	141	122
2010	Aramis Ramirez	185	31	322	150	119
1984	Harold Baines	192	69	437	187	119
1973	Greg Luzinski	179	44	492	158	114
2012	Ike Davis	171	30	413	144	113
1958	Hank Aaron	181	88	479	200	112
1999	Ben Grieve	154	34	404	145	111
1991	Matt Williams	197	57	438	165	108
1977	Ron Leflore	178	52	520	160	108
2006	Rondell White	171	7	184	114	108

Now that the dark days are behind him, Calhoun is able to laugh about his slump. "I guess you could say I wasn't seeing [the ball] well," he said with a snort. Belatedly contributing to the Angels — who gave him a longer leash than many contending teams would have allowed a sub-star-level player — has, he said, "made it a little easier to sleep at night." Calhoun is now batting at or near the top of the team's order, and his full-season OPS (.669) is nearing respectability. If his hot hitting continues, he could achieve an outcome that would have been almost unimaginable in May: ending the summer with a stat line that, on the surface, won't look like it came from an anomalous season at all.

FROM LARRY BROWN SPORTS

Shohei Ohtani switches at-bat music to Lil Wayne song

By Larry Brown

Shohei Ohtani has changed his at-bat music to a Lil Wayne song, for good reason.

When Ohtani went to the plate on Tuesday night against the Detroit Tigers, he did so to Lil Wayne's "Showtime." The move worked well, as Ohtani clubbed a 3-run home run in the first.

So what's the story behind the song change? Los Angeles Angels teammate Nick Tropeano suggested that Ohtani make the change to that song because it fits with Ohtani's "Showtime" nickname — a play on Shohei's first name.

I have all the facts and details on Shohei Ohtani's new walk-up song.

It's "Showtime" by Lil Wayne, and he only uses it when there's runners in scoring position, otherwise known as "ShoTime."

For now, Ohtani is only using the song when runners are on base, which is when he considers it to be show time.

We'd include the song for you, but it has some bad language in the lyrics.

FROM ESPN.COM

Jayson Werth rails against 'super nerds' that are 'killing the game'

Jayson Werth, who said he was "done" with professional baseball in June, has this advice for front-office types who use sabermetrics to determine the paths of franchises: It doesn't compute.

"They've got all these super nerds, as I call them, in the front office that know nothing about baseball but they like to project numbers and project players," Werth, who wouldn't use the word "retirement" when he left the game on June 27, told the Howard Eskin Podcast for 94 WIP in Philadelphia.

"... I think it's killing the game. It's to the point where just put computers out there. Just put laptops and what have you, just put them out there and let them play. We don't even need to go out there anymore. It's a joke."

Werth, 39, was playing with Triple-A Tacoma -- batting .206 with four homers and 19 RBIs for the Seattle Mariners' affiliate -- when he said he had "no regrets" to stop playing. He finished his 15-year career as a .267 hitter with 229 home runs and 799 RBIs, mostly with the Washington Nationals and Philadelphia Phillies, with whom he won a World Series in 2008 and was an All-Star selection in 2009.

"When they come down, these kids from MIT or Stanford or Harvard, wherever they're from, they've never played baseball in their life," Werth told Eskin. "When they come down to talk about stuff like [shifts] ... should I just bunt it over there? They're like, 'No, don't do that. We don't want you to do that. We want you to hit a homer.' It's just not baseball to me.

"We're creating something that's not fun to watch. It's boring. You're turning players into robots. They've taken the human element out of the game."

Werth, known for his long hair, big beard and aggressive style during his playing career, is not the first to launch a verbal assault at baseball "nerds." Hall of Famer Goose Gossage ranted against the same thing in 2016.

"It is a joke," Gossage said then. "The game is becoming a freaking joke because of the nerds who are running it. I'll tell you what has happened, these guys played rotisserie baseball at Harvard or wherever the f--- they went, and they thought they figured the f---ing game out. They don't know s---."