



# ***Press Clips***

**(September 13, 2018)**

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**FROM THE OC REGISTER****Felix Peña, Francisco Arcia lead Angels to victory over Rangers**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — While Felix Peña has been a consistent pleasant surprise for the Angels throughout the second half, Francisco Arcia's introduction to the big leagues has been marked by highs and lows.

They both had significant roles in the Angels' 8-1 victory over the Texas Rangers on Wednesday, with Peña tossing six scoreless innings and Arcia hitting a pair of homers and driving in four.

The Angels have won nine of their last 13 games to even their record at 73-73. Other than the performances of Peña and Arcia, the Angels also got another homer from José Fernández, two more hits from Shohei Ohtani and strong defense from Mike Trout.

A 28-year-old right-hander, Peña had been a reliever for the previous few seasons with the Chicago Cubs. The Angels got him to be a multi-inning reliever, but in late April at Triple-A they made him a starter.

He has now started 15 games in the majors, with a 3.53 ERA. Over his past six starts, he has a 2.37 ERA.

This one was not his best effort, although he got through it effectively. The Angels helped him out with a double play, and Trout threw out a runner at the plate.

"It wasn't the best day but I kept competing and that's what got me through," Peña said through an interpreter.

Manager Mike Scioscia, who pulled him after 77 pitches, also said Peña was battling to get through the game.

"I didn't think Felix was quite as crisp as when we saw him pitch last week on the road trip," Scioscia said. "He finished six innings. It was a good six innings, but he was grinding a little. He wasn't quite as crisp. ... I think, how he was throwing, he could probably have gone out and tried to grind one more inning, but it wasn't worth it."

They had a comfortable lead in this one thanks mostly to Arcia and Fernández.

With two outs in the second, Arcia yanked a two-run double down the right-field line. In the third, Shohei Ohtani doubled and scored on a Justin Upton triple, as his line drive got past diving left fielder Shin-Soo Choo. Upton scored on Andrelton Simmons' infield hit, and then Fernández hit a two-run homer. His second big-league homer came a night after his first.

Arcia padded the lead with solo homers in the sixth and eighth. Arcia now has five homers in his first two months in the big leagues. He had five hits, including two homers, and 10 RBIs in his first two games, but since then he had hit .159 with one homer.

“He’s had spurts,” Scioscia said. “He came on like gangbusters when he first came up. That was incredible. He just hasn’t continued to find the stroke. It was good too see him get it back tonight.”

While the rookies provided the offense, Trout had the defensive play of the night.

With the Angels holding a 2-0 lead in the third, Trout threw out Robinson Chirinos at the plate to end the inning. He had tried to score from second on a single, and Trout fired a low, two-hopper right on the money.

Trout also made a nice catch in the gap in the fifth inning.

They were the latest defensive highlights for Trout as he puts the final touches on his bid for a Gold Glove, one of the few individual honors that has eluded him.

Trout has improved across the board in defensive metrics this season. Most notably, he leads American League center fielders with four Defensive Runs Saved (DRS) in center field, up from negative-six a year ago.

“You can always get better,” he said. “I take pride in defense, catching balls I don’t think I can catch. Arm strength and accuracy you can always improve on. I think it’s come a long way.”

He said winning the Gold Glove is “every outfielder’s dream.”

Further bolstering his chances, the recent winners seem to be off the board. Last year’s winner, Minnesota’s Byron Buxton, has been in the minors for much of the season. Tampa Bay’s Kevin Kiermaier, who won the two previous years, has missed half the season with injury.

Otherwise, the top candidates are probably Boston’s Jackie Bradley Jr. and Chicago’s Adam Engel, who are both ahead of Trout in the composite metric from the Society of American Baseball Research that goes directly into the selection process.

Scioscia was clear on how Trout’s defense should be recognized: “Gold Glove, no doubt. He’s playing tremendous center field.”

## **After difficult season, Parker Bridwell remains positive upon his return to Angels**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Parker Bridwell is clearly a *glass-half-full* kind of guy.

Upon returning to the Angels on Tuesday, after five months spent in the minors and dealing with injuries, he did not lament the missed opportunity to follow-up last year’s breakout.

“It’s just one of those things,” Bridwell said. “It’s life. It’s not going to be fun every day. I’m alive. I’ll come back and see how it goes.”

Bridwell added that he's "happy with where I'm at right now. I couldn't be happier to be back this season."

When last we saw Bridwell in the majors, he was giving up six runs in 1-2/3 innings of a start against the Oakland A's on April 6. He was returned to the minors, and then he developed some discomfort in his elbow.

It wasn't so much pain, but swelling that robbed him of his range of motion. He went on the disabled list twice, and the second time, in July, he had arthroscopic surgery to have bone chips removed.

Bridwell then rehabbed in Arizona and threw four simulated games. The Angels haven't said when Bridwell will pitch, but it's possible that he'll work in Thursday's bullpen game.

When asked if he sees this month as the chance to get himself back on the map – reclaiming the spot he held when he was a surprising 10-3 with a 3.64 ERA in 2017 – he said he's just happy to be back pitching.

"I can't do anything but go out and do what I know how to do, fill up the strike zone," he said. "I feel like I don't have anything to lose. That's the way I go about it every day. It's worked out for me in the past. I'll see how it goes again."

### **SCIOSCIA'S BOBBLEHEAD**

The Angels announced an addition to the promotional schedule: Mike Scioscia bobbleheads, given to the first 30,000 fans on Sept. 29.

The news certainly feeds the notion that this will be the end of Scioscia's tenure as Angels manager, although there's still no official word.

Speaking about his bobblehead on Wednesday to reporters, including those representing Spanish and Japanese outlets, Scioscia quipped: "I'm going to try to say 'ugly' in three languages."

The bobblehead includes Scioscia holding a lineup card filled with players he managed in his 19 years with the Angels. It has Mike Trout hitting leadoff, followed by Vladimir Guerrero (the DH), Garret Anderson, Tim Salmon, Troy Glaus, Bengie Molina, Andrelton Simmons and Howie Kendrick.

There is no pitcher, however. Pressed for his opinion of the best pitcher from his tenure, Scioscia waffled and then said: "We're not doing any retrospectives."

### **ALSO**

The Angels are having a bullpen game on Thursday, which allows them to give an extra day of rest to Matt Shoemaker and Andrew Heaney, who will pitch on Friday and Saturday, respectively. ...

When the Angels came five outs away from a no-hitter in a bullpen game on Tuesday night, it brought back memories of their only combined no-hitter, pitched by Mark Langston and Mike Witt in 1990. Langston, who threw the first seven innings, said "it was a bizarre scenario" and it felt "almost like a

glorified spring training game.” The game was in April, just after a spring training that was shortened because of the lockout, so Langston wasn’t stretched out enough to go nine innings.

## UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Odrisamer Despaigne, 2-2, 6.40 ERA) vs. Mariners (RHP Mike Leake, 9-9, 4.11), Thursday, 7 p.m., Thursday, Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

## Baseball’s unwritten mercy rule represents a human quirk of the information age

By J.P. Hoornstra

A Vulcan and an American walked into a baseball game, bought a hot dog and a beer, and sat down side by side in the outfield bleachers. As the game got underway, the American dutifully explained the game’s basic rules. It all seemed fairly straightforward to the Vulcan – logical, even – until the first balls and strikes were called.

“Why is the strike zone changing?” the Vulcan asked.

“What do you mean?” the American replied.

“Well, that pitch was a strike the first time the pitcher threw it. It crossed home plate in the same location just now, but was called a ball,” the Vulcan said.

“Human error,” the American said, a satisfactory explanation for as long as baseball has existed.

The longer the game went, however, a clear pattern emerged. To the Vulcan, random human error could not explain what he was seeing. The more strikes a hitter accrued, the smaller the strike zone became, reaching its smallest size when the count was 0-and-2. At 3-and-0, the strike zone was at its largest. The phenomenon was the same from batter to batter, inning to inning, pitcher to pitcher. This was more than human error. It was an expression of human compassion as each plate appearance reached its brink – something that would seem alien to, well, an alien.

Data has observed the presence of baseball’s unwritten mercy rule for years. A 2010 study published on *The Hardball Times* (with the appropriate title “The Compassionate Umpire”) used Pitch F/X data to quantify the changing size of the strike zone. By plotting the location of 200,000 pitches thrown to right-handed batters, the study determined that the strike zone can differ by more than a full square foot depending on the count.

Then as now, Major League Baseball has used computer-generated data points to privately audit each umpire’s strike zone for accuracy. You wouldn’t need to bring a Vulcan to a game to observe the effect: Strike zones are more uniform now than a generation ago. Strikes don’t always fall within the floating white box superimposed over home plate for television viewers, but there are generally fewer errant calls now than ever.

And yet, the mercy rule persists. If MLB's electronic audits were intended to completely remove the human element from the strike zone, it has failed – and not because catcher framing has improved, or because random error is unavoidable. The compassionate strike zone remains alive and well in baseball's information age.

Whether this is an intentional oversight on the league's part, or an immutable facet of human psychology, it seems the mercy rule will exist as long as humans call balls and strikes. The pitch-tracking technology offered by Statcast, a more sophisticated successor to Pitch F/X, demonstrates how much power the count has over the strike zone in 2018.

Since umpires tend to enforce different strike zones for right-handed hitters and left-handed hitters, it's useful to separate the two data sets. The exact probability for whether a strike is called differs slightly from count to count depending on a hitter's handedness, but the trends are the same. There are more right-handed hitters than left-handed hitters, so the following data was culled from the larger of the two sample sizes, using Statcast's definition of the "edge" of the strike zone.

The 0-and-0 count favors neither the pitcher nor the hitter. The at-bat is inherently closer to the beginning than the end, but the mercy rule goes into effect as soon as the second pitch is thrown. On 0-and-1, pitches thrown on the edge to right-handers that were either called a strike or a ball favored the hitter 60.8 percent of the time. On 1-and-0, the call favored the pitcher 55.1 percent of the time.

Not surprisingly, umpires became particularly empathetic on 3-and-0. Pitches taken on the edge were deemed a strike 65.4 percent of the time. On 0-and-2, umpires were even more compassionate, giving the ball on the edge to a hitter 73.8 percent of the time.

The data reveals another phenomenon more easily missed. The 1-and-1 and 2-and-2 counts are just as neutral as 0-and-0. Yet here too we see the strike zone shrinking as the count deepens. Pitches taken by right-handers on 1-and-1 favored the hitter 57.1 percent of the time, and 65.7 percent of the time on 2-and-2.

If this is truly a fixed phenomenon, we would expect hitters to respond in turn. Why not extend an at-bat whenever possible, knowing the strike zone will generally trend smaller? If analytics had a perfect grip over hitting theory, pitches per plate appearance should be trending upward.

Indeed, this appears to be the case. According to Baseball Reference, the average plate appearance hovered between 3.81 and 3.82 pitches each season from 2011-15, then spiked to 3.87 in 2016. Last year, that number rose to 3.90. With a couple weeks left in the 2018 regular season, the average plate appearance was lasting 3.91 pitches through Tuesday.

Some of baseball's more analytically inclined teams seem to be pushing the trend. The Philadelphia Phillies hired a new general manager prior to the 2016 season, Matt Klentak, and quickly shot up the pitches-per-plate appearance leaderboard. They rank second in MLB this season at 4.03.

The Dodgers hardly seemed intent on driving up the pitch count before Andrew Friedman was hired in 2015. Now, they are on pace to see more pitches per plate appearance (4.06) than any team this decade.

Two-tenths of a pitch might not seem like a lot, but even in a game featuring the minimum 27 plate appearances, that little bit of patience adds an extra five pitches to the length of a perfect game. Umpire compassion probably isn't the most significant factor affecting the time of a baseball game, but it can't be ignored.

Correlation does not equate to causation, so we should be careful not to overstate the effects of the Mercy Rule. Before trying to explain it to your Vulcan friends, it's a good idea to buy another beer.

## **FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**

### **Angels' Mike Trout makes a push toward his first Gold Glove award**

By Mike Digiovanna

For all of Mike Trout's individual honors — two American League most valuable player awards, AL rookie of the year, five Silver Slugger awards, seven All-Star Game selections and two All-Star Game MVPs — there is one noticeable void on his trophy shelf: a Gold Glove award.

"That's every outfielder's dream," the Angels center fielder said after Wednesday night's 8-1 win over the Texas Rangers. "It would be pretty cool. I try to catch everything and throw everybody out. Everyone who plays outfield and infield wants to win a Gold Glove."

This might be the year.

Trout made a strong and accurate two-hop throw to the plate to nail Robinson Chirinos, who was trying to score from second base on a single, in the third inning Wednesday night, and he chased down Shin-Soo Choo's drive to the left-center field gap in the fifth.

Trout prevented Adrian Beltre from tying George Brett for 15th place on baseball's all-time hit list by robbing the Rangers third baseman twice Monday night, racing to the wall and making a lunging grab of Beltre's third-inning drive and racing in to make a diving catch of his eighth-inning flare.

Trout ranks fourth in the league behind Boston's Jackie Bradley Jr., New York's Aaron Hicks and Toronto's Kevin Pillar in Fangraphs' overall defensive rating, but he leads the league with four defensive runs saved, a marked improvement from his minus-six DRS last season.

Only Bradley and Chicago's Adam Engel rank ahead of Trout in the most recent defensive metrics of the Society of American Baseball Research, which accounts for 25% of a Gold Glove voting process that is still heavily weighted toward the opinions of managers and coaches.

While Trout hasn't made as many spectacular, home run-robbing catches this season as he has in past years, his overall play — first step, range, route efficiency, arm strength and accuracy — has improved.



"You can always get better," said Trout, who listed improved defense as one of his top priorities in spring training. "I take pride in my defense, in catching balls I think I can catch, arm strength and accuracy. You can always improve on that, and I've come a long way."

Bradley may rate slightly above Trout defensively this season, but Trout's Gold Glove candidacy should be boosted by the fact that the winners of the previous three center-field awards have either spent much of the season in the minor leagues (Minnesota's Byron Buxton) or been hurt (Tampa Bay's Kevin Kiermaier).

Angels manager Mike Scioscia left no doubt as to who would get his vote. When asked about Trout's improving defense Wednesday night, Scioscia said, "Gold Glove. Gold Glove. No doubt. He's playing a tremendous center field."

**FROM ANGELS.COM**

## **Pena gem, Arcia HRs send Halos to series win**

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- **Felix Pena** wasn't on the Angels' rotation depth chart at the beginning of the season. Acquired from the Cubs in exchange for a player to be named or cash considerations last October, Pena was initially viewed as a potential multi-inning reliever before the Angels decided to try him out as a starter following a series of injuries to their rotation.

Pena made his first career start on June 19, and his performance since then suggests that he will enter 2019 as a legitimate starting option. The 28-year-old right-hander delivered yet again on Wednesday night, firing six scoreless innings to lead the Angels to an 8-1 win and a series victory over the Rangers at Angel Stadium.

The outing lowered Pena's ERA to 3.53 as a starter this season. He has pitched at least six innings in each of his last six starts and has logged a 2.37 ERA over that span.

"I feel really happy because it's been almost three years since I've started," Pena said in Spanish. "I was a reliever and I hadn't thrown that many innings, but I feel good. Thanks to God, I feel strong. I think I can keep doing a good job."

**Francisco Arcia**, who entered Wednesday mired in a 1-for-27 slump, homered twice and drove in four runs to help back Pena's effort, giving the Angels (73-73) their sixth win in their last seven games and lifting them back to .500. **Jose Fernandez** added a solo shot, while **Andrelton Simmons** went 3-for-3 with two runs scored.

Pena scattered six hits while walking one and striking out three to earn his first career home win. He departed after throwing just 77 pitches, as manager Mike Scioscia felt the right-hander "grinding" to get through the outing.

"I didn't think Felix was quite as crisp as we saw him when he pitched last week on our road trip, but he finished a good six innings," Scioscia said.

The Angels chased Rangers right-hander **Yovani Gallardo** after just three innings and roughed him up for six runs. They got on the board in the second after Simmons singled and **Taylor Ward** walked to set up Arcia's two-run double to the right-field corner.

The Angels padded their lead by adding four more runs via a team cycle in the third. **Shohei Ohtani** reached on a two-out double and scored on **Justin Upton's** triple, which snapped an 0-for-15 skid for the Angels left fielder. Simmons followed with an RBI infield single, and Fernandez capped the big inning with a two-run homer to right field. It was Fernandez's second home run in as many days.

"I think what was a good sign for Jose was in the first inning he struck out on a good changeup from Gallardo," Scioscia said. "Next time up, he tried to throw him the same changeup, and he hit it out. It was a good adjustment for Jose."

Arcia extended the Angels' lead to 7-0 with a solo home run off **Matt Moore** in the sixth. He added another solo shot off **Eddie Butler** in the eighth to collect his first multihomer game. The 28-year-old catcher is now batting .448 with three doubles and five home runs with 17 RBIs in 10 games at Angel Stadium this season.

"I felt comfortable at the plate today," Arcia said. "I didn't try to do too much."

#### **SOUND SMART**

Angels starters have a 2.39 ERA since Aug. 28, the second-lowest mark in the Majors over that span.

#### **YOU GOTTA SEE THIS**

Pena got an assist from **Mike Trout** in the third, as the Angels' star center fielder threw out **Robinson Chirinos** at the plate to save a run. After the Rangers put runners on first and second with two outs, **Elvis Andrus** delivered a single to center field. Chirinos attempted to score from second on the play, but Trout nailed him with a two-hop throw to Arcia, ending the inning.

"It's tough with the mound from center field," Trout said. "I kind of just came up and tried to keep it low. I got a good bounce, kept it true and got him out."

#### **UP NEXT**

The Angels will continue their seven-game homestand by hosting the Mariners in a four-game series that begins Thursday night at 7:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. For the opener, the Angels plan to rely entirely on their bullpen, which took a no-hitter into the eighth inning against the Rangers on Tuesday. **Odrisamer Despaigne** (2-2, 6.40 ERA) will get the start opposite Seattle right-hander **Mike Leake** (9-9, 4.11).

## David Fletcher made a glove flip to second base despite multiple bobbles

By Eric Chesterton

Throughout a baseball game, players have to adjust quickly to circumstances that did not go according to plan. A batter who started swinging at a changeup has to adjust when that pitch turns out to be a curveball. An infielder has to change course when a ground ball takes an odd hop on the dirt.

During Wednesday night's 8-1 win over the Rangers, Angels' second baseman David Fletcher had to make an adjustment when a ground ball just didn't want to stick in his glove. With Robinson Chirinos racing from first to second, Fletcher didn't have much time to get to the bottom of the situation, so he simply made the best of it and bobble-glove flipped the ball to Andrelton Simmons anyway:

The bobble proved contagious as Simmons also struggled to control the ball. Though their prolific bobbling eliminated their chance at turning a double play, Fletcher and Simmons proved that they can adjust to unexpected circumstances and make the best of them.

## Trout shows off arm against Rangers

*Center fielder nails Chirinos at plate to end third inning*

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- At the beginning of the year, **Mike Trout** said one of his goals for the 2018 season was to improve his defense in center field. Manager Mike Scioscia certainly feels that he's accomplished that.

"Gold Glove," Scioscia said when asked about Trout's defense following the **Angels' 8-1 win** over the Rangers on Wednesday. "Gold Glove. No doubt. He's playing tremendous center field."

Trout's improved defense was on display against the Rangers, as he saved a run by nailing **Robinson Chirinos** at the plate to end the third inning.

The Rangers had runners on first and second with two outs against right-hander **Felix Pena** when **Elvis Andrus** delivered a single to center field. Chirinos tried to score from second on the play, but Trout's two-hop throw reached catcher **Francisco Arcia** in time to get Chirinos for the final out of the inning, preserving the Angels' 2-0 lead.

"It's tough with the mound from center field," Trout said. "I kind of just came up and tried to keep it low. I got a good bounce, kept it true and got him out."

After recording -6 Defensive Runs Saved in 2017, Trout made a point to work on his defense this season, focusing on getting better jumps and playing more aggressively. He now has 4 DRS this season, according to FanGraphs, which is tied for sixth among American League center fielders.

"You can always get better," Trout said. "I take pride in defense, catching balls that I don't think I can catch. Arm strength and accuracy, you can always improve on that. It's come a long way."

While Trout is a two-time American League Most Valuable Player and a seven-time All-Star, he does not have a Gold Glove Award on his resume, partly because of the glut of defensively gifted center fielders in the AL. He's hoping his defensive strides this season will be enough to change that.

"I think that's every outfielder's dream," Trout said. "I try to go out there and catch everything and try to throw everybody out. It would be pretty cool."

## Buttrey quickly earns elevated role in Halos 'pen

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Rookie reliever **Ty Buttrey** has been in the big leagues for less than a month, but he's already pitched his way into a late-inning role for the Angels.

The latest example of his ascent came on Tuesday night, when he was summoned to protect the Angels' one-run lead after the Rangers put runners on the corners and two outs in the eighth inning. Buttrey worked out of the jam by coaxing a groundout from **Jurickson Profar** and then posted a scoreless ninth to convert his first four-out save and seal the Angels' 1-0 win.

Since debuting with the club on Aug. 16, Buttrey has a 0.77 ERA with 11 strikeouts over 11 2/3 innings and two saves. The 25-year-old right-hander relies primarily on his firm fastball, though he also mixes in a changeup and slider.

"The guy is lights-out," fellow reliever **Blake Parker** said. "You can see what he's got. He's upper-90s with two other wipeout pitches. He's getting some of the game's best hitters out. It's exciting to see what he's going to do in the future, for sure."

Buttrey said his early success with the Angels has helped him brew confidence and not let the high-leverage situations overwhelm him.

"It's very easy to be a rookie and let things speed up on me," Buttrey said. "It's weird. I've been telling everybody that in Triple-A, it's like I was trying to pitch so perfect to get called up that everything was speeding up on me. And now that I'm here in the big leagues, it's almost as if things have slowed down. I think that's just having confidence and going out there and trying to dominate each at-bat."

The Angels acquired Buttrey and left-hander **Williams Jerez** from the Red Sox as part of the **Ian Kinsler** trade on Aug. 30. The deal is already looking like a win for the Angels, as they turned an expiring contract into a pair of promising pitchers who could develop into key bullpen pieces in the years to come.

"Buttrey and Jerez have that back-end-of-the-bullpen-arm potential," manager Mike Scioscia said. "They're going to get an opportunity to pitch. That's their upside. I think that they'll both eventually

going to grow into that. It depends on the rate that they continue to grow and how they maintain their stuff. These guys, nothing's changed from what we thought they would be when they were acquired."

### **Scioscia bobblehead giveaway set for Sept. 29**

The Angels announced Wednesday that they'll be giving out a Scioscia bobblehead on Sept. 29, the penultimate game of the 2018 season. Scioscia is in the final year of his 10-year contract with the club, though he has denied reports that he plans to step down at the end of the season.

Scioscia's bobblehead -- which he called "ugly" -- depicts him with a card that includes an All-Star lineup of players he managed over his 19-year tenure: **Mike Trout** CF, Vladimir Guerrero DH, Garret Anderson LF, **Albert Pujols** 1B, Tim Salmon RF, Troy Glaus 3B, Bengie Molina C, **Andrelton Simmons** SS, **Howie Kendrick** 2B, with Torii Hunter, Chone Figgins and Darin Erstad available off the bench.

"That's a nice lineup," Scioscia said.

No pitcher is listed on the card, and Scioscia said it'd be tough to pick just one.

"There's a lot of guys," Scioscia said. "At times it was Bart [Bartolo Colon], at times it was [John] Lackey, at times it was [Jered] Weaver, at times it was [Ervin] Santana, at times it was [Joe] Saunders."

### **More bullpening**

The Angels will have another bullpen game on Thursday to give their entire rotation an extra day of rest during this weekend's four-game series against the Mariners. They have not announced who will start.

## **FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

### **Rookies Arcia, Fernandez power Angels to win over Texas**

By Jill Painter Lopez

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Francisco Arcia and Jose Fernandez aren't your typical rookies.

They are a combined 58 years old and took long paths toward their major league debuts this season. They've become close friends and, on Wednesday night, both flashed some power.

Arcia homered twice and drove in four runs, Fernandez hit his second career homer and the Los Angeles Angels beat the Texas Rangers 8-1 on Wednesday night.

Arcia had a two-run double in the second inning off Yovani Gallardo and homered in the sixth and again in the eighth. Fernandez, the 30-year-old rookie from Cuba, went deep again after hitting his first major league homer on Tuesday.

"We're always together," said the 28-year-old Arcia, who spent 11 years in the minors. "We're like brothers. We're always talking about how we want to play here like we played in little leagues and minor leagues. Just living the dream. Play hard every day. Take the opportunity they give to us."

Felix Pena (3-4) worked six scoreless innings, striking out three and walking one, as the Angels won for the sixth time in seven games.

Joey Gallo hit his 36th homer of the season for the Rangers, who have lost five of six. He said he was OK after some discomfort during his final at-bat.

"Just a stinger. Last at-bat, the knob dug into my wrist, so it was kind of ringing on me that last at-bat, but it's good," Gallo said. "It will be fine."

A day earlier, the Angels gave Fernandez the customary silent treatment after his homer before Trout splashed him in the face with a cup of water. This time, Trout was waiting on the top step of the dugout to give Fernandez a high-five after his third-inning homer, which made it 6-0.

The 27-year-old Trout has enjoyed watching two rookies who are older than him.

"It's awesome," Trout said. "Obviously, it's not where we want to be from the team standpoint, but guys are getting opportunities to play and they're taking advantage of it. It's fun to be a part of. I see them come in and work hard every day. You can't take that away from them. They're getting an opportunity to play in the big leagues. They're having fun with it."

Arcia, who made his major league debut on the day Martin Maldonado was traded to the Astros, has five homers this season.

Justin Upton tripled to left field to score a run in the third, snapping a skid of 15 hitless at-bats, to put the Angels ahead 3-0.

Gallardo (8-5) allowed six runs on six hits in three innings.

#### TROUT'S CATCH OF THE DAY

Trout had an outfield assist in the third, a two-hop throw to catcher Arcia to cut down Robinson Chirinos at the plate.

Manager Mike Scioscia said there's no doubt his center fielder should win his first Gold Glove.

"It's every outfielder's dream," Trout said. "I try to go out there and catch everything and throw everybody out. It'd be pretty cool."

#### BOBBLEHEAD LIKENESS?

The Angels revealed the Scioscia bobblehead that will be given away on Sept. 29. Asked what he thought of it, Scioscia joked, "I'm going to try to say 'ugly' in three languages."

Scioscia needed it translated in Japanese, but he knew and said “feo,” the Spanish word for ugly.

The bobblehead depicts Scioscia holding a lineup card that features some of the best players he’s managed in 19-year tenure — including leadoff hitter Trout and Hall of Famer Vladimir Guerrero in the No. 2 spot.

#### TRAINER’S ROOM

Angels: RHP Shohei Ohtani (right elbow ligament) is not getting any treatment for his injury, just routine body maintenance. He is expected to decide before the season ends whether he will have the recommended Tommy John surgery and, if so, when. ... DH Albert Pujols (elbow, knee) had surgery on his right elbow Wednesday to remove bone spurs.

#### UP NEXT

Rangers: LHP Yohander Mendez (1-1, 5.27 ERA) will start for the Rangers to open a series Friday in San Diego. Mendez will make his fourth major league start. After allowing a first-inning home run to Khris Davis in his last start, he retired 10 of the final 12 batters he faced.

Angels: RHP Odrisamer Despaigne (2-2, 6.40) will be the opener on a bullpen day. The Angels had a bullpen game on Tuesday and went 7 1/3 innings before allowing a hit.

### FROM THE ATHLETIC

## Why the Angels’ caution with Griffin Canning has paid dividends so far

By Fabian Ardaya

SALT LAKE CITY – When someone comes to take the ball away from Griffin Canning, it’s a challenge

Just ask his new manager, Triple-A Salt Lake’s interim man, Eric Chavez. Chavez temporarily took over the gig on Aug. 5 as Keith Johnson joined the big-league staff. Six days later, Canning was on the mound, tossing 3 ⅔ innings of one-run ball when he hit his pitch count for the day, an abridged 58 instead of his usual mark that hovers around 80.

For the first time as a manager, Chavez – himself an accomplished ex-big leaguer – was intimidated. Maybe he had a reason to be.

“Dude, don’t come out here and ask for the ball,” Canning said as Chavez walked out toward the mound.

“Griff’s the one that wants all those pitches,” pitching coach Erik Bennett said. “There’s no way you’re taking that from him. He’s a competitor.”

The explanation on Canning's part is concise.

"It's tough to come out of the game sometimes, I guess," he said.

There's a swagger, a confidence, that Canning channels once every five days with a baseball in his electric right arm. Each pitch is a moment of compressed rage and controlled mania. Each outing a battle he's determined to see through to its very end. That's how it was in high school, when he tossed a two-hit shutout and struck out 11 at Dodger Stadium to lead Santa Margarita High School to a CIF state title. That's how it was when he was at UCLA, when he tossed four complete games. It continued this year, when he twice was removed from eventual no-hitters and made his displeasure known.

That's part of why the Angels front office, which includes Chavez as a special assistant to general manager Billy Eppler, carried such an affection for Canning even as potential injury concerns caused him to fall down draft boards.

"When you watch Canning pitch, there's a different type of energy that he carries around with him," Chavez said. "It's a competition that, he's not going to let you beat him and he feels that he's better than you. It's not cockiness, but you can tell that he definitely likes to compete. Nobody's going to stop him from where he wants to go ... I've never seen somebody so focused in my life, just knowing that Triple-A is just a stop. 'A-ball is just a train stop for me. There's a bigger picture, and that's where I'm going.' To know that's the type of personality there, you can have all the talent in the world but you need that mind game to go along with it."

It's a wonder the Angels organization managed to do so for an entire minor league season, opting to shut him down from throwing after selecting him in the second round of last year's draft after the right-hander had accumulated 119 innings that spring at UCLA.

He remained in extended spring training in Arizona, working out and acclimating to the everyday life of being a pro without being able to pitch like one. He began a strength program, and kept his range of motion and flexibility without actually throwing. So, when he picked up a baseball again this past winter, he felt normal, only with a couple extra ticks of velocity on his fastball.

Canning was the guinea pig in what might become a trend for the Angels, who have shut down more than half of the 21 pitchers they drafted this year from throwing in a means of managing the workloads of their young arms and building up their bodies to be able to withstand a professional throwing routine.

Perhaps "workload management" is a reason Canning, one of the club's closest major prospects to being big-league ready, was not selected to the Arizona Fall League – usually a last step for prospects on the brink of the majors. He'll end 2018 at 113  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, just shy of his total from a year ago, with a bigger body of work and strength program aimed to help quell some concerns about his shoulder that reportedly triggered some interested clubs in a pre-draft MRI. The club monitored his pitch-count heavily. After having one of the densest pitch volumes in his last season at UCLA, often throwing more than 110 pitches per start, he didn't hit 90 even once in 2018.

He certainly made the most of his time on the bump, starting at High-A Inland Empire to begin his professional career – a rare step, but one taken due in part to his development in college – and quickly bouncing to Double-A Mobile and eventually to Triple-A Salt Lake. In 25 minor league starts across the



three levels, he had a 3.65 ERA. Canning's last start – five shutout innings of one-hit ball – was perhaps his most impressive, given the level of talent and playing conditions in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League.

The stuff – a fastball that now sits 94 to 97 mph after being 90 to 94 a year ago, though still with some inconsistent command, with a sharp slider and a power curveball to pair with a changeup that's still a work in progress – appears to be there, with each pitch coming out of the same tunnel, or line as Bennett calls it, making them all look the same until the last minute.

The demeanor is there, too, and a certain attentiveness that Bennett said stands out from the typical pitcher. An attitude, a flame that drives Canning typically takes some time to dissipate, though he's conceded he's cut down that length, smoothed by the everyday grind of minor league ball.

"Everyone, once they get out there, is going to kind of be different," Canning said. "I'm definitely a lot more fiery out there and off the field I'm a lot more relaxed and chilled out. Once I get out there, the competitiveness gets going and you let that take over."

At 22 years old, the right-hander already has developed a regimented pre-start routine that Bennett likened to Trevor Bauer, another former UCLA pitcher, along with a between-starts routine and analytical view to his own performance. Following a recent start against Reno, Arizona's Triple-A affiliate, Canning spent the night rewatching his entire outing, filing a written report to Bennett by the next morning, detailing his progress on each of his pitches and evaluating his own feel to the results and TrackMan data the Bees and Angels organization collects.

"He craves information," Angels farm director Mike LaCassa said. "He wants to know what kind of information we have on him to develop him as well as our opponent. He's clearly very advanced for a first-year professional pitcher."

His newest obsession is his changeup, which drew praise from one National League scout recently. He's tinkered with the grip over the final weeks of the season, shifting to more of a modified circle-change to provide late-tailing movement off the barrels of fastball-hungry sluggers. He had the right velocity on it before, but after studying TrackMan data he looked for ways to increase his spin rate with the pitch to hopefully generate more consistent location and enhance the characteristics on it.

"The hitters are going to tell you everything you need to know, just based on how they react to certain pitches," Canning said. "But I think every pitcher's always just tinkering and working on new stuff just to see and try to get the most out of themselves."

"It just goes back to executing a gameplan. That's been my biggest goal all year, just kind of finding how I want consistently to go out and get hitters and obviously factor in scouting reports on certain guys. The biggest thing has just been executing a gameplan."

Canning's developed knowledge of his own stuff opens up the next chapter in his post-grad baseball textbook, learning how to use his stuff to attack hitters. For much of his time in the minors, he attacked each hitter the same way. He'd pound fastballs in the zone, then try to get them to swing cheap on the soft stuff that bounced before it even crossed the plate. Against aggressive and inexperienced hitters,

that worked – until Triple-A hitters started taking it. Seeing his entire four-pitch mix in an at-bat left him vulnerable with each turn through the order, getting him blown up.

It's been a balance between the information, and the results.

"Once you get out there, it's just you out there," Canning said. "You can use all the numbers and everything before, but once you get out there, it's a lot easier to react to hitters in certain counts. It's a little bit easier when you get out there, just kind of navigating through them."

He's overcorrected a bit, firing almost too much in the zone, factoring his development over results and learning to live and die in the strike zone. He's also begun diversifying his pitch usage and tinkering more advanced scouting reports to each hitter, learning to keep weapons in his back pocket instead of emptying the tank from pitch one.

"Now it's just a matter of getting the feel of how the game goes and what pitches work best against a certain hitter and not having to throw all four pitches to the same guy," Bennett said. "There might be one guy you match up with a fastball-slider and the other guy you can match up with a curveball and change. It's just refining his toolset now to each hitter.

"If he comes out of spring training, and he gets the feel about mixing his pitches and mixing his pitches to face different guys, he should be ready (for the big leagues) pretty quickly."

Canning's rise has been quick, and much-needed to supplement an Angels organization that is craving young, controllable starting pitching – particularly healthy starting pitching. Each of the six starters who opened the season as part of the rotation – Garrett Richards, Andrew Heaney, Tyler Skaggs, Matt Shoemaker, J.C. Ramirez and Shohei Ohtani – have spent time on the disabled list. Nick Tropeano, Parker Bridwell and John Lamb have also gone down with injury, and Alex Meyer hasn't pitched since 2017 with shoulder trouble. Jaime Barria is the lone regular starter to not go on the disabled list to date. That leaves Canning, as well as fellow Bee, Jose Suarez as promising candidates to possibly debut as soon as next season.

"He's going to be in the big leagues, and my guess is by the end of next year or the following year, for sure," Chavez said. "That's my guess for Suarez, too. The way these guys go about their business, I've seen guys come through the system and there's something different about those two. These guys are knocking on the door and it's going to happen pretty soon. A lot sooner than later."

## **Former first-rounder Jo Adell's first full pro season was an undeniable success in the Angels' eyes**

By Fabian Ardaya

Slowly and steadily since general manager Billy Eppler took over the Angels in the fall of 2015, he's rebuilt a farm system as one of the worst many experts had seen into one that ranks in the upper half of baseball.

Under Eppler's charge, they have taken chances on high-upside talents, stockpiled assets and have ensured they haven't pillaged what they've given up in returns for their major deals. In the draft, they sought out athletic high school talent with the hope that development could find them a star, or in this case, 2017 first-rounder Jo Adell.

Adell, a 6-foot-3 outfielder, doesn't turn 20 until after Opening Day next year, but his tools have drawn rave reviews and he's had the production to back it up. The Kentucky native battled some swing-and-miss issues, but projects to be an athletic center fielder with immense raw strength and power — the TrackMan systems at Double-A Mobile tracked his first home run at the level at a staggering 112 mph off the bat.

"He has one of the most exciting skill sets that I've ever been around in the minor leagues," Angels farm director Mike LaCassa told *The Athletic*. "He has electric, explosive tools. The raw power is a future 80, top of the charts raw power. This is a player in just his first full season, and he's just out of high school. To be able to play at three different levels, Low-A, High-A, and now Double-A, and to excel at all of them as a first-year player out of high school is really putting him in the top tier of minor league seasons among all of minor league baseball. We are very excited about the progress he has made this year, and it's special to watch."

His debut with the Angels could follow suit within a calendar year after that. The former 10th-overall pick put together a scorching first full pro season, slashing .290/.355/.897 with 20 homers in 441 plate appearances across three levels and jumping as high as Double-A. Were it not for a thumb injury aggravated when he forgot a custom thumb guard between call-ups, the numbers might have been even more gaudy. As the Angels' selection for the Futures Game in Washington, D.C., he doubled and scored the winning run despite being one of the game's youngest players.

"These are the makings of a superstar," LaCassa said. "This is what stars do when they're in the minor leagues. At 19 years old, he's playing in Double-A and he just continues to check the boxes.

"He's learned a lot this year. He has faced a pretty wide variety of pitching from Low-A to Double-A and the adjustments he's had to make along the way have been challenging to him and he's conquered a lot of those challenges."

Besides Shohei Ohtani, who signed this past offseason as an international free agent, no prospect has been higher-regarded in the Angels' system than Mike Trout. In the boom-or-bust prospect industry, it's nearly impossible to boom more than Trout has since he debuted in 2011 and got called up for good in 2012, emerging as the game's best player.

According to MLB Pipeline, Adell ranks as the 11th-best prospect in baseball — with its expert Jim Callis projecting him to possibly be the second-best prospect in baseball by season's end next year. Earlier this year, in projecting the potential All-Stars by the 2021 All-Star Game, *The Athletic's* Jim Bowden, himself a former general manager, picked Adell as a starting outfielder.

"Jo Adell will be the talk of baseball as he'll be on pace for 40 home runs and 30 stolen bases, and trail only teammate Mike Trout in the categories of slash line and WAR," Bowden wrote. "Billboards will be all over Orange County and Los Angeles promoting the dynamic duo as the best two offensive

outfielders to play together in the history of the game. OK, maybe I'm going a bit overboard on this one — but that's how much I like Adell's potential."

The game's best player (Trout) and most unique player (Ohtani) are only guaranteed to play together through the 2020 season, when Trout becomes a free agent. Ohtani, a two-way star, wouldn't even be able to pitch again until at least 2020 if he undergoes Tommy John surgery as expected. The Angels are hopeful Adell could be a part of the big-league picture by then. The Angels remain cautiously optimistic. The Trouts, Bryce Harpers and Juan Sotos of the world, who come in and dominate at age 19, are rare for a reason.

The club is bullish on Adell's potential — he's as much a potential star as anyone they've had in years. Part of their caution with him is workload, and body, ensuring he can pack enough muscle on his wiry frame and continue to adjust to the number of plate appearances and the everyday routines of being a pro. At the end of the day though, if Adell keeps raking, he can force his way up sooner rather than later.

"Those are exciting questions to ask, but I think that we do have to step back and realize he's just completing his first full season, which is a lot more baseball on consecutive days than he's ever handled previously in his life," LaCassa said. "As much as people want to know the answer of when he's going to be in the lineup in Anaheim, we do have to take it step by step. ... We couldn't be happier about how this first full season went, and we are just looking at the next steps in the process for him, to have a successful offseason program and how we want him to come into spring training next year.

"But the players will tell us when they're ready to move."

**FROM MLB.COM**

## **MLB's Top 10 prospects 1 year from now will be ...**

By Jim Callis

We're not satisfied with just identifying the game's 10 best prospects as of now, which we've done at **MLB Pipeline's Prospect Watch**, where Blue Jays third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. sits atop our list.

Let's raise the degree of difficulty and look even deeper into the future. What will the Top 10 look like a year from now?

We've tackled this challenge at the end of the past two Minor League seasons, learning a few things in the process. Our research shows that nearly every player who finished one season among the Top 10 did so again 12 months later, provided he didn't graduate to the big leagues or get hurt. Prospects who ended the year ranked in the 11-25 range usually fill most of the Top 10 vacancies, a couple of players in the 26-50 range make a huge jump, and occasionally someone in the bottom half of the **Top 100** or completely off the list will do the same.

**Our prognostications from a year ago** went slightly askew because Nationals outfielder **Victor Robles**, White Sox outfielder **Eloy Jimenez**, Astros outfielder **Kyle Tucker** and Reds infielder Nick Senzel didn't graduate as expected and repeated on the Top 10 list. But we still nailed Guerrero as the No. 1 prospect, predicted that Rockies infielder Brendan Rodgers would remain in the Top 10 and foresaw that Padres shortstop **Fernando Tatis Jr.** and Astros right-hander Forrest Whitley would make moves into that lofty territory. We also just missed on Padres left-hander MacKenzie Gore (No. 11 on the current Top 100) and called a breakout for Nationals outfielder **Juan Soto**, who rocketed to the Majors.

Of the prospects currently in the Top 10 (none of whom should graduate by the end of this season), Guerrero, Tatis, Jimenez, Senzel, Robles, Rodgers, Tucker and Blue Jays infielder Bo Bichette all figure to be full-fledged big leaguers by the end of 2019. In case you are wondering about **Michael Kopech**, who is the highest-ranked prospect right now that you don't see below, he will retain his prospect status since he never reached 50 innings pitched, but it's hard to see him as a Top 10 prospect a year from since he will still be recovering from Tommy John surgery.

#### **1. Royce Lewis, SS, Twins (No. 1)**

The No. 1 overall pick in the 2017 Draft had no problems handling pitching at two Class A levels at age 19, may have more power than expected and looked better at shortstop than anticipated.

#### **2. Jo Adell, OF, Angels (No. 16)**

Adell may have the best all-around tools in the Minors and erased any concerns about his bat by racing to Double-A as a teenager.

#### **3. Alex Kirilloff, OF, Twins (No. 30)**

After missing last season recovering from Tommy John surgery, Kirilloff led the Minors with 44 doubles, 71 extra-base hits and 296 total bases while looking like the successor to Guerrero and Jimenez as the game's best all-around hitting prospect.

#### **4. Forrest Whitley, RHP, Astros (No. 7)**

Whitley can miss bats with four pitches and could graduate in 2019, though the Astros are deep on the mound and he has barely pitched this year because of a 50-game suspension and some minor injuries.

#### **5. MacKenzie Gore, LHP, Padres (No. 11)**

Blister issues plagued Gore throughout his first full pro season, but he too has four bat-missing pitches, plus he pounds the strike zone and he's left-handed.

#### **6. Wander Franco, SS, Rays (No. 40)**

The next international megapropect, Franco is a switch-hitting slugger who broke into pro ball this summer by winning Appalachian League MVP honors and posting a 1.004 OPS as the Rookie circuit's second-youngest regular (age 17).

#### **7. Taylor Trammell, OF, Reds (No. 19)**

Trammell has potential plus tools across the board with the exception of his arm, and his makeup is off the charts as well.

**8. Sixto Sanchez, RHP, Phillies (No. 18)**

Elbow inflammation dogged Sanchez this season, but he's still the same guy that makes hitters look bad with his fastball, curveball and changeup, and he draws some Pedro Martinez comparisons.

**9. Casey Mize, RHP, Tigers (No. 20)**

Mize went No. 1 overall in the 2018 Draft because of his combination of stuff and command, which might already be the best in the Minors.

**10. Dylan Cease, RHP, White Sox (No. 44)**

**MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year**, Cease overmatched Double-A hitters with a devastating fastball/curveball combination.

**FROM BLEACHER REPORT****Re-Ranking All 30 MLB Farm Systems at the End of 2018 MiLB Season\***

By Joel Reuter

The 2018 MiLB regular season is over, and each league's respective postseason is already underway.

With that in mind, it seems like the perfect time for one final look at where all 30 MLB farm systems rank as well as an updated look at each team's top 10 prospects.

The following factors helped determine the rankings of players and teams:

- **Potential (Player):** Potential trumps production a lot of the time, especially in the lower levels of the minors and with recent draft picks. Skill sets and tools are often a better indication of what kind of player someone will be.
- **Talent (Player):** As for guys in the higher levels of the minors who are close to breaking through to the big leagues, production and talent are the determining factors, as these players are viewed as more complete products.
- **Overall Depth (Team):** Having one or two elite prospects is great, but a deep farm system is the way to build a sustainable contender. Depth and talent were the biggest factors in ranking each team.
- **High-End Talent (Team):** That being said, there is a difference between a prospect who has a chance of making an impact at the big league level and a prospect who could be a star. Elite prospects served as a tiebreaker of sorts when two teams were close in the rankings.

A tier system is used to help differentiate the varying levels of individual talent.

- **Tier 1:** Prospects who have an elite skill set and All-Star potential. This is the cream of the prospect crop.

- **Tier 2:** Prospects who have a good chance of becoming impact contributors at the MLB level. These are the prospects who can be found in the second half of leaguewide top-100 lists or just on the periphery.
- **Tier 3:** Prospects who profile as fringe MLB contributors or young players who are still too raw to project any higher. This tier represents the bulk of prospects around baseball, though more than a few are still capable of climbing up to the next tier.

A player must not have passed the rookie-eligibility limits (130 AB, 50 IP, 45 days on an active roster prior to Sept. 1) to be included in these rankings.

#### 14. Los Angeles Angels (Preseason Rank: 19)

##### Top 10 Prospects

Name	Level	Tier
1. OF Jo Adell	AA	1
2. RHP Griffin Canning	AAA	2
3. 2B Jahmai Jones	AA	2
4. OF Brandon Marsh	A+	2
5. 1B Matt Thaiss	AAA	2
6. 3B Taylor Ward	MLB	2
7. LHP Jose Suarez	AAA	3
8. OF Jordyn Adams	ROK	3
9. SS Luis Rengifo	AAA	3
10. RHP Chris Rodriguez	INJ	3

## Farm System Snapshot

The Los Angeles Angels checked in at No. 19 in the preseason rankings due in large part to the temporary inclusion of Shohei Ohtani among their top 10 prospects.

Their rise up to No. 14, even with Ohtani graduating, speaks to a system on the rise.

Jo Adell looks like a bona fide superstar in the making and he's already reached Double-A after going No. 10 overall in the 2017 draft out of high school.

Matt Thaiss and Taylor Ward could be manning the corner infield spots for the big league club by next season, Jahmai Jones could join them in the infield as the answer at second base. Pitchers Griffin Canning and Jose Suarez are ready to audition for rotation spots.

The Angels have Mike Trout under contract for just two more years, and 2018 was another disappointing season at the MLB level, but things are finally looking up down on the farm.

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

## FROM FORBES

### If The Angels Can't Extend Mike Trout, They Need To Trade Him

By Anthony Witrado

This is not the first time the question has been asked, and based on the state of the Los Angeles Angels, it certainly isn't the last time.

Should the organization trade the best player to ever wear its uniform, Mike Trout? And if so, when? And if not, can they get him to sign an extension soon?

In all likelihood a trade won't happen or even be sincerely considered this offseason. Even as the team's outlook for 2019 became distinctly darker after the news of rookie phenom Shohei Ohtani needing Tommy John surgery that will keep him off the mound next season, the Angels are refusing to entertain the idea of trading away the best baseball player on the planet.

"Um, yeah," Angels general manager Billy Eppler said when the idea of trading Trout was again broached last week, those first two words dripping with a combination of frustration and tiredness at the thought. "We are not going to trade Mike Trout."

Part of that thought process comes because the team is refusing to rebuild despite its farm system, which has improved recently, still being a long way from significantly impacting the major league roster. Instead, the team is going to look to make trades and free-agent signings.



“We're going to continue to improve this club and watch the development of some young players emerging into the major leagues, be open-minded in the trade market and in the free-agent market, and put together a contending team next season,” Eppler has said, as reported by ESPN.com. “That's our goal.”

In the words of Epper ... um, yeah. There are some real problems with going down either of those roads.

First, while recent drafts have the Angels' system looking better, their prospects are not going to help the team between now and the time Trout's contract is up after the 2020 season.

And second, the team does not have much financial flexibility, partly because they'll be paying Trout more than \$68 million over the next two years and Albert Pujols \$87 million over the next three. Eppler will be starting next season with a payroll projected to be about \$169 million as of right now, and \$197 million in 2020, according to Baseball-Reference. The room to sign an impactful free agent pitcher or position player – in truth, they need of both – is minimal, and they aren't necessarily a desired free-agent destination given the state of the franchise and Ohtani's injury.

These are the reasons why the Trout question is so pressing.

The Angels could put them to rest this offseason. Not by trading their superstar centerfielder who right now is better than every player ever (except Ty Cobb, for now), through his age-26 season based on Baseball-Reference WAR, but by signing Trout to a contract extension.

This has to happen quickly, though. This winter will see Bryce Harper and Manny Machado sign megadeals, so letting them set the market for a player who is undoubtedly better than they are would be a mistake by the Angels. Instead of having their hand forced to surpass those deals, extending Trout early in November – or before this season ends – could benefit the team.

This seems like the best option, because trading Trout, which is the second-best option, won't bring back market value. Trading a player in his prime and anywhere near as good as Trout almost never does, especially when teams are valuing prospects more than in any other era in the game's history.

That extension could cruise the neighborhood of, let's say eight years and \$300 million – an annual average value of \$37.5 million. And maybe Trout plays along because he likes Southern California, likes the organization and wants to see this Ohtani partnership through. That price could end up being fair if Trout can stay among the elite into his early 30s.

What we know for sure is the Angels cannot do nothing. They can't try to scratch out a trade or a mediocre free-agent signing while continuing to waste Trout's best seasons with more .500-ish seasons. They can't go into Trout's walk year without a solution and then let him take off for a draft pick.

So, bring an extension to Trout now. If he doesn't seem as interested in it as the Angels are hoping, then it's time for Eppler to pick up the phone and put the word out that the Angels are willing to discuss a blockbuster Mike Trout trade.