



Press Clips

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- **Heyman | Dan Jennings recalls mistake of passing on Pujols**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**A WWII vet helped this woman become an Angels fan, and here's how she's honoring him at Sunday's game**

By Keith Sharon

On Sunday, a mom and her 9-year-old daughter will hold up a sign at the Angels game. That's no big deal, right? Just another Mother's Day sign at the ballpark.

On one side, their poster will reveal a message to Shohei Ohtani in Japanese: "I'm Your Biggest Fan." Jennifer Pimentel and her daughter Aneesa love watching Ohtani play.

The other side of the poster will say, "Hi Hal."

Unexpected role

In August of 2016, Jennifer Pimentel, 39, of Ontario, was out of work.

She was a trained chef who spent some time cooking in Marseille, France. Pastries are her specialty. She makes an Irish cheesecake with Guinness in the crust. She makes maple bacon ice cream from scratch.

So she was looking for a cooking job when she heard John Loureiro needed a personal chef.

She went for an interview at his home in Ontario.

"When I went inside, I said hello to the gentleman sitting on the couch," said Jennifer, whose personality is as bubbly as champagne.

The gentleman on the couch was Hal Cardin. He's 92, and he's Loureiro's father-in-law. The job indeed involved cooking, but mostly it involved caring for Hal.

"It was the right hours and good pay, so I said I'm going to give this a try," Jennifer said.

Read all about it

When you take care of Hal Cardin, you start with making breakfast, a big breakfast. Jennifer calls it the "breakfast of doom." Biscuits and gravy. Sausage. Potatoes. Fried eggs. That's the normal fare. Sometimes, Hal requests salted caramel pecan pancakes.

When breakfast is done, Jennifer grabs the newspaper.

When you take care of Hal Cardin, whose eyes don't cooperate like they used to, you read to him. The only topic: Angels baseball. Every single day. Every single word. Jennifer reads the game stories, the feature stories, the standings, the transactions and any note about the Angels.

Hal loves Mike Trout, who, he said, “hits the hell out of the ball.”

Here is how Jennifer Pimentel’s attitude about baseball – before she met Hal – could be described in one word: hatred.

“The only thing worse than baseball was golf and curling,” Jennifer said. “It was boring. I didn’t even know what the announcers were saying.”

She grew up in a family of Dodger fans. So when she started reading the newspaper about the Angels every day, she didn’t want to tell them.

Her father, Jack, is a big baseball fan. But he never talked to his daughter about the sport because she didn’t like or understand it. And then, he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, and it became even more difficult for him to talk.

Lot to learn

Jennifer not only found herself learning about the Angels, but also about Hal.

Hal Cardin was born in Illinois and came to California in 1940. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, Hal joined the Navy.

He self-published a book, “The Road to Deimos and Beyond,” about his experiences aboard the USS Deimos, an ammunition cargo ship.

On June 23, 1943, the Deimos was struck by a Japanese torpedo in the Pacific Ocean. Hal Cardin was lifted off the ground in the blast. He landed on the deck of the ship.

He found his way to a lifeboat, but his commanding officer ordered him to make room for the injured. So he jumped into the oil-slicked water. Hal swam alongside the lifeboat until he found floating debris onto which he could hang.

Hal was saved by a passing destroyer.

Hal had a long career in the accounting departments at McDonnell-Douglas and Kwikset. He has three children, Kelly, Keith and Theresa. His wife, Marylou, died years ago.

Hal lives with his daughter Theresa and her husband John. His days consist of watching Fox News and the Angels.

“I was quite a ballplayer,” he said.

He sits on his couch wrapped in an Angels blanket.

“He asks me to marry him three times a week,” Jennifer said.

Passionate fan

As she got to know Hal and the Angels, Jennifer found herself growing in fondness for both.

"I found myself secretly rooting for the Angels," Jennifer said, hiding her newfound love from her Dodger-loving family.

She loves Ohtani, Trout and Blake Parker. And she finds herself rooting hard, yelling at the TV, "WHY AREN'T THEY REVIEWING THAT PLAY?"

"Now I kind of annoy people because I'm a walking encyclopedia of ridiculous baseball facts," she said.

She really knows her baseball. She can discuss wins against replacement and on-base plus slugging.

And she noticed something else.

"I can talk to my dad," she said. "Baseball is something easy to talk about. We have something to connect on. Baseball has done something good for me and my family."

Request from the heart

Theresa Loureiro thought it would be a nice gesture to give Jennifer a Mother's Day gift.

Angels tickets.

"There is not a better place for a mother to be," Jennifer said.

Sadly, Hal isn't able to get to the ballpark anymore. But Jennifer wasn't satisfied with just accepting the gift. She wanted to pay it forward, she said.

She did a Google search, found an email address for Angels announcer Victor Rojas and wrote to him:

"Is there any way possible, that on the Mother's Day game, that you could give a shout out to Hal? Maybe say 'perhaps one of the oldest Angels fans, a WWII vet of the Navy, and all around great dude. ... thanks for the support Hal Cardin?' Heck I don't know. That's your department.

"But I'll be at that game. With my daughter. There's nowhere I think more appropriate for this mother to spend that day than with her best girl, watching the best team, in the best sport ... Ya see, Hal is wheelchair bound and at his age, spending the 45 minutes in the car to get there and then 3-4 hours in the wheelchair at the stadium.....not feasible. It would wear him out, he'd be uncomfortable, and I don't want to do that to him.

"I don't know if the old guy has too many more ball games left. And I'd like to help create a happy memory for him that getting a shout out on live TV would make, if you're able to help."

She ended her email with this line: "P.S. Hal is on hospice care, which is why I feel the urgent need to bring some smiles to this Vet's face."

The next day, Victor Rojas replied, "I'd love to help out, especially for an Angels fan."

Jennifer wrote him back: "OMG OMG OMG Thank you so Much! Thanks a billion."

"I was shocked," Jennifer said.

This week, she's making the sign.

She asked a friend to help her translate "I'm your biggest fan" in Japanese characters. "Google translate doesn't always work," she said.

The other side will be the easy part.

Slumping Ian Kinsler among the hitters who produce on big night for Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — A couple of the Angels' struggling hitters showed some encouraging signs on Thursday night.

Ian Kinsler had a two-run homer among his three hits and Kole Calhoun hit a line drive that went for a tie-breaking sacrifice fly in the Angels' 7-4 victory over the Minnesota Twins.

Meanwhile, Justin Upton hit a homer and Andrelton Simmons had three hits to remain hot, while Shohei Ohtani came back from a five-day hiatus from the starting lineup to hit another homer.

Calhoun needed something positive more than any of them. He didn't have a hit, but two balls to the warning track, including a clutch RBI will have to suffice for a player who has been in a miserable slump. He has six hits in his last 66 at-bats, a slump long enough that he had sat out four straight games before returning to the lineup on Thursday.

"You build a little confidence," Calhoun said of his long outs. "Put some good swings on it. You don't get the result, but I'll definitely take that. It's a step in the right direction. Just keep moving forward."

While Calhoun had to settle for hitting the ball hard, Kinsler actually got some hits to lift his batting average along with his confidence.

After being moved from the leadoff spot on Wednesday, he opened the scoring with a two-run homer out of the No. 7 spot on Thursday. He added an infield hit in the fourth and a single in the sixth, in the middle of the tie-breaking rally.

Kinsler said he'd gone back and analyzed some video from earlier in his career to get his swing closer to where it should be.

"Just trying to get myself in better position," he said. "It's still an everyday process. You've got to work on it every day. Don't want to take any steps backward. You don't want to develop any bad habits. Just keep going."

Perhaps both Kinsler and Calhoun can take some inspiration from Upton, whose slump ended as quickly as the calendar turned from April to May.

Starting with his game-winning hit on May 1, Upton proceeded to go on a homer binge. His third-inning homer was his fifth of May, including four in the last five games.

“He’s not missing pitches,” Manager Mike Scioscia said before the game. “I think Justin is real comfortable in the box. I think he’s seeing the ball well. All the things you talk about that add up to a good at-bat or squaring the ball up, he’s doing.”

As for Ohtani, he hadn’t even started as a hitter in any of the previous four games, because he pitched on Sunday and then the Angels went to Colorado, where they couldn’t use the DH. Ohtani still drove in a run with a double in the third – hitting the ball at 111.4 mph – and then he blasted a homer to left-center in the seventh. It was his fifth of the year.

The Angels strong offensive night came as starter Garrett Richards was dominant until a rough sixth.

After a scoreless outing in Seattle last week, Richards did not allow a run in the first five innings. He’d given up just two hits. In the sixth, though, it all got away quickly.

Richards gave up two ground-ball singles and then he hung a slider that Brian Dozier drilled for a three-run homer, ending his night.

One batter later, Richards’ chance for a victory was gone when José Álvarez gave up a game-tying homer to Max Kepler.

“I probably couldn’t have thrown the ball any better, to be honest,” Richards said of his first five innings. “I felt pretty good. It (stinks) to have the whole outing tarnished there at the end, but we got a win, and that’s all that’s important. On to the next one.”

Justin Upton has been swinging a hot bat for the Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Although it’s convenient to suggest that Justin Upton’s game-winning hit against the Baltimore Orioles last week shook something loose that sparked his hot streak, Upton said it’s just a coincidence.

“I was already starting to see the ball a little better,” he said on Thursday. “That’s the name of the game. If you can see it, you can hit it.”

When Upton came to the plate in the bottom of the ninth on May 1, he had five hits in his previous 44 at-bats, including three strikeouts earlier in that game.

Starting with that game-winning single, Upton went 11 for 31 with four homers. One of those was a Saturday homer off Seattle closer Felix Diaz, who suffered his first blown save of the season.

“When you are able to time guys up, that means your timing is in a good place,” Upton said. “It’s just a matter of getting a good pitch, and that night I got a good pitch.”

“The game slows down for you, honestly,” Upton said. “It was kind of getting sped up. When things speed up, you don’t see the ball very well and it can cause some issues.”

ALSO

Keynan Middleton (elbow inflammation) was activated from the disabled list. It’s unclear whether he’ll immediately return to the role as Mike Scioscia’s preferred closer. ...

Jabari Blash was optioned back to Triple-A to create a spot for Middleton. That also meant that Kole Calhoun returned to the lineup after missing four straight games. Scioscia said the slumping Calhoun had productive workouts during his break: “He feels good in the cage. He feels good in BP. Just carrying it into the game is the next progression.” ...

Blake Wood (elbow impingement) said he threw his first bullpen session since going on the disabled list on Wednesday, and he’s scheduled for another on Friday. Scioscia said the reports were positive, and Wood could soon be headed for a rehab assignment. ...

The Angels named Class-A outfielder Brandon Marsh, who hit .299 with an .855 OPS in April, as their minor league player of the month. Double-A left-hander Jose Suarez (2.49 ERA, 36 strikeouts in 21-2/3 innings) as the pitcher of the month. Triple-A infielder David Fletcher was the defender of the month.

UP NEXT

Angels (Tyler Skaggs, 3-2, 3.08) vs. Twins (1-3, 7.38), Friday, 7 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM).

Matt Shoemaker’s progress toward return to Angels’ rotation has stalled

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — The forearm injury landed Matt Shoemaker on the disabled list last month has returned, stalling his progress and leaving the Angels to schedule him to see a nerve specialist to help solve the mysterious issue.

“Just extremely frustrated,” Shoemaker said on Thursday. “Everything felt great until Sunday when I ramped up for my bullpen. I felt phenomenal. That’s what’s so frustrating, that it hasn’t gone away yet, that the symptoms came back.”

Shoemaker, who has pitched just once this season, had an Electromyogram test on Monday. General Manager Billy Eppler said it showed some healing, but not enough for his throwing program to proceed. He is now headed to Missouri sometime next week to see a peripheral nerve specialist, Eppler said.

“It’s really hard to put a finger on how you feel emotionally on this, beside disappointed,” Eppler said. “The person shouldering the biggest disappointment is Matt right now. We’re missing a key part of our rotation. This is frustrating for us and frustrating for Matt. Hopefully, we’ll have better news next time.”

Shoemaker threw in the bullpen twice over the weekend, but the symptoms returned during the second session.

Last year Shoemaker went on the disabled list in June with forearm tightness, and his rehab progressed normally all the way until he pitched in a minor league game in July. After increasing his intensity to game speed, though, he had a setback, and he ended up having surgery to have the radial nerve released.

Eppler said the tests so far have shown that the current injury seems to be different, even though it’s still nerve-related. In both cases, Shoemaker was proceeding without difficulty in his rehab, only to have a setback when he increased the intensity.

“Nobody is working harder than Shoe,” Manager Mike Scioscia said. “I know its a very frustrating process. We’ll just let our medical staff evaluate it and see what the next step should be.”

Even without Shoemaker, the rotation has stabilized with the improvement of Andrew Heaney, the emergence of Jaime Barría and the mostly strong work all season from Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs and Shohei Ohtani. Nick Tropeano is expected to come off the disabled list on Saturday.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Shohei Ohtani homers again, Angels beat Twins 7-4

By Mike Digiovanna

It was not a hit. It did not snap a slump that has dragged on for five weeks now. This mattered little to Kole Calhoun, the Angels right fielder who did something with the bat that, for a change, he could feel good about.

Calhoun's sacrifice fly snapped a tie score in the sixth inning and pushed the Angels toward a 7-4 victory over the Minnesota Twins before 30,127 in Angel Stadium on Thursday night.

Ian Kinsler (three hits, including a two-run homer in the second), Andrelton Simmons (three hits, two runs), Justin Upton (solo homer) and Shohei Ohtani (solo homer) did the heavy lifting for the Angels, who have won seven of nine and snapped Minnesota's five-game win streak.

Calhoun, who has a .161 average, a .390 on-base-plus-slugging percentage and two extra-base hits, both coming in the March 29 season opener at Oakland, was at least able to lend a hand.

"Helping this team win is definitely a good feeling," Calhoun said. "It's hard, but it's still early in the season, we're still 100-something at-bats in. It would be nice to have a hot streak in front of that, but you can't change the past. I've got to keep working and get to the future."

With the score tied 4-4 in the sixth, Simmons singled with one out off Twins starter Jose Berrios. Kinsler, dropped from the leadoff spot to seventh, singled to left. Both runners advanced on a wild pitch by reliever Ryan Pressly. Calhoun lined a fly to the wall in right for a sacrifice fly and a 5-4 lead.

Martin Maldonado followed with an RBI double to left to make it 6-4, and Ohtani crushed a 414-foot solo homer to center, his fifth of the season, for a 7-4 lead in the seventh.

Calhoun was essentially benched for the previous four games, limited to one pinch-hit appearance, a strategy manager Mike Scioscia often employs to give struggling hitters a chance to "clear their heads."

Calhoun returned to the lineup Thursday with 10 RBIs, 33 strikeouts and four walks in 115 at-bats. The only number that improved was his RBI total. He was hitless in three at-bats, but he did line out to right in the second and drive a fly to the warning track in center in the eighth.

"It's tough," Scioscia said. "Kole knows he hasn't forgotten how to hit. He's such a gamer, and he wants to contribute, and when you're not, there's a certain frustration level that builds within any hitter."

"He knows he's more talented than what those numbers show every night. "

For half the game, it did not appear Calhoun would have a chance to knock in a winning run. Angels starter Garrett Richards cruised through five scoreless, two-hit innings, and the Angels staked him to a 4-0 lead with two-run rallies in the second and third innings.

But Ehire Adrianzareached on an infield single in the sixth, and Joe Mauer lined a hit-and-run single to left, advancing Adrianza to third. Mauer took second on a wild pitch.

Richards hung an 89-mph slider to Brian Dozier, who hammered it over the wall in left-center for his sixth homer, pulling the Twins to within 4-3.

Scioscia pulled Richards in favor of left-hander Jose Alvarez, who grooved an 89-mph fastball to left-handed-hitting Max Kepler, who sent a 107-mph screamer over the right-field wall for a solo homer and a 4-4 tie.

Kinsler's homer off Berrios gave the Angels a 2-0 lead in the second. Upton continued his torrid eight-game streak with a two-out, 413-foot solo homer to left in the third. Back-to-back doubles by Albert Pujols and Ohtani (111.4 mph off the bat) made it 4-0.

Since his walk-off homer against the Baltimore Orioles on May 2, Upton has hit 12 for 30 with five homers, two doubles, 12 RBIs and 11 runs in eight games. The Angels are 6-2 during the run.

"He's not missing pitches," Scioscia said. "He's real comfortable in the box. He's seeing the ball, squaring the ball up ... all the things that add up to a good at-bat, he's doing."

Shoemaker's rehab shut down after pitcher feels discomfort in surgically repaired nerve

By Mike Digiovanna

Matt Shoemaker's rehabilitation from a forearm strain ground to a halt on Sunday when the right-hander was shut down indefinitely because of discomfort in the nerve that was surgically repaired last August.

"I'm just extremely frustrated, extremely [ticked] off," Shoemaker said before Thursday night's game. "Everything felt great until Sunday, when I ramped up for my bullpen. I felt phenomenal. That's what's so frustrating, that it hasn't gone away yet, that the symptoms came back."

Shoemaker, who made only 14 starts last season because of a radial nerve compression in the forearm, aggravated the injury in his first regular-season start this season and has been sidelined since.

He worked his way from playing catch to long-toss to throwing off a mound, and he completed his first bullpen session late last week before suffering another setback Sunday.

While an electromyogram (EMG) test on Monday "showed some degree of improved healing in the area," according to general manager **Billy Eppler**, the issue is clearly not resolved. Shoemaker will travel to Missouri next week to be examined by a peripheral nerve specialist.

"It's so hard to predict this," Eppler said. "Nerve injuries, they're very fickle, frustrating. They don't provide you with a lot of answers and a timetable, which is what people want, in everyday life and in athletics."

Thursday's news was not good. Nor was it extremely bad. But it extended the state of limbo Shoemaker was in for the first two weeks of April, when he saw numerous medical specialists in an effort to determine the source of his pain.

"Matt is kind of stuck in neutral right now," manager **Mike Scioscia** said. "He's not throwing. We're still trying to evaluate which direction he's going to go. It just hasn't felt the way it should."

Shoemaker returned from last summer's surgery to pitch in instructional league last fall, and he reported no problems through spring training. The symptoms he felt during Sunday's bullpen session were similar to the ones that forced him to the disabled list in early April.

"It's really hard to put a finger on how you feel emotionally about this besides disappointment, and the person shouldering the biggest disappointment is Matt right now," Eppler said.

"We're missing a key part of our rotation, and we've had people come in and perform well and step up, which is what you want, what you need, to have happen. But nonetheless, this is frustrating for us and for Matt. Hopefully we will have better news next time."

On the mend

The Angels were confident the elbow impingement that sent **Blake Wood** to the DL on April 23 would sideline him for the minimum of 10 days.

But the reliever, who had a 2.31 ERA over 11 2/3 innings in his first 13 games, threw off a mound for the first time Wednesday and will repeat that workout Friday. He could begin a rehab assignment next week.

"We're definitely moving forward," Wood said. "I just don't think you can necessarily put a timetable on things and give an exact date [to return], because that just sets up an expectation that may or may not come true. You don't want to rush it and have a setback."

Short hops

Felix Pena, a reliever when he was acquired from the Cubs last October, has been moved to the rotation at triple-A Salt Lake, but not necessarily because the Angels need starting pitching depth in the wake of injuries to **JC Ramirez** and Shoemaker. "We just thought his stuff profiled as a starter," **Billy Eppler** said. Pena, 28, is 0-1 with a 4.50 ERA in six games — five starts — at Salt Lake, with 26 strikeouts and nine walks in 18 innings. ... Closer **Keynan Middleton** (elbow inflammation) was activated off the DL Thursday, and outfielder **Jabari Blash** was optioned to triple-A.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Ohtani's massive solo shot caps Angels' win

By Avery Yang

ANAHEIM -- **Shohei Ohtani** rotated, toe-tapped, then launched another sweeping home run to center field, capping a strong offensive night for the Angels in their 7-4 win in Thursday's series opener against the Twins at Angel Stadium.

Ohtani's homer, which left the bat at 108.7 mph and traveled an estimated 414 feet per **Statcast™**, was his fifth of the season and finished the scoring for the Halos in the seventh. He also had an RBI double in the third, as he has hit safely in 14 of his 16 starts at designated hitter and is slashing .354/.400/.677.

"We know he's dangerous," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "You have to pitch him carefully and make him aware of the inside part of the plate. Obviously, he's skilled offensively, and if he gets pitches, he's going to hit them."

Both of Ohtani's hits were roped on outside pitches, atypical from the standard scouting report -- to pitch him high and inside -- that scouts and pundits have preached in the past.

"Earlier in the year, I feel like they were throwing me inside a lot more than now," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I was still able to hit the ball pretty well, and hit for a good average, so maybe they're trying to test pitching me away.

"I still feel like they don't know how to pitch me, and I still feel the same way [back], so everything is still in progress."

Also still in progress, to Ohtani, is the adjustment he made to his swing before the season -- turning his high leg kick to more of a toe-tap as the pitcher winds up.

"It's not perfect yet, I'm still making adjustments every day, each at-bat," Ohtani said. "Sometimes, it goes bad, so that's why I need to fix it. I don't feel like I've adjusted perfectly."

The Angels' win, also backed by home runs from **Ian Kinsler** and **Justin Upton**, put them in a tie for first with the Astros in the American League West.

Kinsler and **Andrelton Simmons** opened the scoring for the Angels, as the duo combined for a huge offensive night.

Kinsler smacked a two-run homer in the second, his second of the season, one batter after Simmons, who is hitting .351/.410/.511 after a 3-for-4 night, singled to center. In the sixth, Simmons and Kinsler each singled, advanced a base on a wild pitch and came around to score.

Kinsler had been mired in a 2-for-24 slump, before going 3-for-4. His home run was his first while not batting in the leadoff spot since 2015. He hit seventh, while Simmons batted sixth, with **Zack Cozart** in Kinsler's usual spot at the top of the order. Kinsler seemed to be all for it.

"We've got the dynamic guys near the bottom," Kinsler said. "[Simmons], me and Kole [Calhoun]. It's really nice right now, and hopefully, we click on all cylinders.

"Lineups are funny like that, you find a spot, you find a configuration and sometimes it just clicks. It feels good right now, and hopefully we can keep it going."

Upton followed Kinsler's second-inning homer with a solo blast in the third. He has homered in **three straight games and four of the last five**.

"Any time that you're chasing pitches like I was early on [in the season], it means you're not seeing the ball well," Upton said. "It's been a focus of my work, seeing the ball a little better, and it's been working out."

Angels starter **Garrett Richards** gave up three earned runs on five hits with four strikeouts over 5 1/3 innings. His sinker/curveball/slider combination worked well through his first 5 innings, but he faltered with control in the sixth, allowing two runners to reach before hanging a slider to **Brian Dozier**, who hit a three-run homer.

After Richards was pulled, reliever **Jose Alvarez** gave up a homer to the next batter, **Max Kepler**, as the Twins tied the game at 4. However, the Angels took back the lead in the bottom of the sixth on a sacrifice fly by **Kole Calhoun** and an RBI double by **Martin Maldonado**.

"I probably couldn't have thrown the ball any better, to be honest," Richards said. "I felt pretty good. Kind of sucks that I had the whole outing tarnished there at the end, but we got the win, and that's all that's important, so on to the next one."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Calhoun drives in go-ahead run: With the game tied in the sixth, Calhoun was at the plate with runners on second and third with one out, and he hit a liner to right field, only for it to be caught by right fielder Kepler. However, Kinsler easily tagged from third, giving Calhoun his first RBI since April 23, and his first in his last 36 at-bats.

"[I didn't] get the result, but I'll definitely take that," Calhoun said. "It's a step in the right direction. Just keep moving forward."

SOUND SMART

After striking out on a high fastball in his first at-bat, Ohtani swung at an outside changeup in his second plate appearance, lining it into right-center field to score **Albert Pujols** from second. For many players, it would have been a single -- Kepler fielded the ball cleanly in right -- but Ohtani, peaking at 28.9 ft/sec, just below 20 mph, turned the corner at first and raced into second in 8.07 seconds, the fastest Angels double of the year, beating the throw by a fraction of a second.

Ohtani's 8.07 seconds from home-to-second was the second fastest this season by an Angels player, though. The fastest? 7.94 seconds on an Ohtani triple on April 12.

UP NEXT

The Angels will turn to **Tyler Skaggs** (3-2, 3.08 ERA) to take the rubber for the second game of their four-game series against the Twins at 7:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. It will be his first career appearance against Minnesota. He has allowed two or fewer runs in six of his seven starts this season. In his last outing, against the Mariners, he took a no-decision, allowing two runs on six hits with seven strikeouts over 5 1/3 innings. **Lance Lynn** will start for the Twins.

Upton continues to rake, hits 4th HR in 5 games

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Angels left fielder **Justin Upton** continued to stay hot at the plate on Thursday night, homering for the third consecutive game in a **7-4 win** in the series opener against the Twins at Angel Stadium.

Upton launched a 413-foot solo shot, per **Statcast™**, on a hanging curveball from right-hander **Jose Berrios** to extend the Angels' lead to 3-0 in the third inning. It was Upton's fourth homer in his last five games, and it rocketed off the bat at 106 mph and cleared the Angels' bullpen in left field.

"Just trying to slow the game down," Upton said. "See the ball better. Any time that you're chasing pitches like I was early on, it means you're not seeing the ball well. It's been a focus of my work, seeing the ball a little better, and it's been working out."

Upton, who signed a five-year, \$106 million contract extension with the Angels in November, is 12-for-34 (.353) with two doubles, five home runs and 12 RBIs over his last eight games, a tear that has raised his batting average from .228 to .257. His nine home runs are second on the team behind **Mike Trout** (12).

"I think with Justin, he's just feeling comfortable in the batter's box," manager Mike Scioscia said. "There's no huge adjustments. Sometimes it's just a matter of starting to see pitches, feeling comfortable. He's not missing some pitches that he was missing a couple weeks ago. This guy is one of the top hitters in our game. He's going to be big for us this year."

Shoemaker to visit specialist after setback

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- **Matt Shoemaker's** rehab has hit a snag.

Shoemaker, who made only one start for the Angels this season before landing on the disabled list on April 3 with a right forearm strain, was shut down from throwing after experiencing renewed discomfort in his radial nerve following a bullpen session on Sunday. Shoemaker's symptoms were not as severe as the episode that triggered his initial DL stint last month, but the Angels still had him undergo another EMG on Monday in a quest for answers.

"That EMG showed some degree of improved healing in the area, not enough for complete resolution," general manager Billy Eppler said. "We're actually planning on sending him to a peripheral nerve specialist in Missouri at some point next week. Hopefully, he'll either provide an additional opinion, or uncover something else."

The setback is a frustrating development for Shoemaker, who felt he was progressing well prior to his bullpen on Sunday.

"Everything felt great until Sunday, when I ramped up for my bullpen," Shoemaker said. "I felt phenomenal. That's what's so frustrating, that it hasn't gone away yet, that the symptoms came back."

It's a similar pattern to what Shoemaker endured last season, when he was also placed on the DL with a forearm issue in June and progressed to pitching in a rehab game before the injury flared up again and stalled his recovery. He then underwent season-ending surgery to release the compressed radial nerve in his forearm.

"It's so hard to predict this," Eppler said. "Nerve injuries, they're very fickle, frustrating. They don't provide you with a lot of answers and timetable, which is what people want. It's really hard to put a

finger on how you feel emotionally about this, besides disappointment. The person shouldering the biggest disappointment is Matt right now."

The emergence of rookie right-hander **Jaime Barria**, coupled with solid pitching from **Tyler Skaggs**, **Garrett Richards**, **Shohei Ohtani** and **Andrew Heaney**, has allowed the Angels' rotation to absorb Shoemaker's absence thus far. After an uneven April, the unit has finally settled in, posting a 1.87 ERA over the Angels' last nine games entering Thursday. The club's depth should also be bolstered Saturday, when **Nick Tropeano** (right shoulder inflammation) is expected to come off the disabled list.

"The most frustrating part is not being able to go out there and pitch," Shoemaker said. "I want to be out there more than anybody. We have to figure this thing out."

Middleton activated

The Angels activated right-handed reliever **Keynan Middleton** off the disabled list on Thursday and optioned outfielder **Jabari Blash** to Triple-A Salt Lake.

Middleton, who missed nine games with right elbow inflammation, had been the Angels' primary closer before going on the DL. He last pitched April 27 against the Yankees, and he had six saves and a 2.40 ERA in 15 innings over 13 appearances this season.

Manager Mike Scioscia was noncommittal when asked if he would continue to use Middleton in save situations now that he's back.

"There's no doubt that, hopefully, he's going to be back in those back-end situations holding leads, wherever inning that may be," Scioscia said. "We need him. We need that depth."

Calhoun returns

On Thursday, **Kole Calhoun** started in right field for the first time since last Friday after getting time to "clear his head" following a rough start to the season. Calhoun entered Thursday batting .165 with a .402 OPS in 119 plate appearances.

"Every player that's ever played this game has had those 75-100 at-bat stretches where they're not squaring the ball up the way they can, and maybe hits aren't falling in," Scioscia said. "That happens to the best players in the game. When you first start a season, the way you look at Kole and some other guys that maybe aren't quite where you would expect them to be, your numbers are naked. It stands out there. But I think when Kole finds it, it's all going to be absorbed and be a tough stretch for him."

Wood progressing

Reliever **Blake Wood** (right elbow impingement) is scheduled to throw off the mound on Friday, and he is close to beginning a rehab assignment, Scioscia said.

FROM MLB.COM

Hamilton legs out fastest triple of 2018

Plus three other Statcast feats from Thursday's action

By Andrew Simon

Few players in the game can run like **Billy Hamilton**, and the Reds' center fielder provided the latest example on Thursday night at Dodger Stadium.

Hamilton's two-out RBI triple in the top of the seventh inning not only helped Cincinnati to a **4-1 victory**, but it also put him in the MLB lead for the fastest three-bagger of 2018. On a line drive that rolled to the right-field corner, Hamilton flew from home to third in just 10.83 seconds, according to **Statcast™**. That edged out the **10.86 second triple** that Seattle's **Dee Gordon** logged on April 26. Hamilton also ranks third on the list, having recorded a 10.89 second time on April 27.

Since Statcast™ began tracking in 2015, Hamilton is responsible for the fastest run from home to third -- a 10.45-second dash on Aug. 13, 2016, at Milwaukee. In fact, he owns six of the 11 best times, all of 10.70 seconds or less.

Here is a look at some other notable Statcast™ feats from Thursday:

Zack Greinke, D-backs

In other baserunning exploits, Greinke stole the sixth base of his career when he swiped second following his RBI single off Washington's **Tanner Roark** in the fifth inning. Greinke's Sprint Speed of 25.7 ft/sec was hardly blazing -- the MLB average is about 27 ft/sec -- but he got out to a 28.8-foot secondary lead, which is roughly seven feet bigger than the MLB average on successful steals of second. That allowed Greinke to narrowly beat an 82.8 mph throw from Nationals catcher **Pedro Severino**, whose solid 1.88 second pop time was to no avail.

Shohei Ohtani, Angels

The Halos' two-way star once again showed off both the pop in his bat and the speed of his wheels in a single play -- and that was before he clubbed a 108.7 mph, 414-foot home run in the seventh inning. Back in the third, Ohtani ripped a 111.4 mph line drive to right-center field off a **Jose Berrios** changeup and flashed a Sprint Speed of 28.9 ft/sec (above his season average of 28.1) while charging from home to second in 8.07 seconds. The result was an RBI double. It was the fourth hit of at least 110 mph this season for Ohtani, as well as the fastest double of the season for the Angels.

J.D. Martinez, Red Sox

Martinez took advantage of the Yankee Stadium dimensions to lift a go-ahead solo home run in the eighth inning of a **5-4 victory**. With a 100 mph exit velocity and 38 degree launch angle, Martinez's high fly ball to right field had just a 28 percent hit probability, but it snuck over the glove of a leaping **Aaron Judge** and into the short-porch seats. The 38 degree launch angle was the second highest on a Red Sox home run this year, behind Martinez's own 39-degree moonshot on May 4. The 97.4 mph pitch velocity from **Dellin Betances** tied for the fastest on a Sox homer (Mookie Betts vs. Ohtani on April 17).

Meanwhile, Martinez now has 45 opposite-field homers since the beginning of 2017, which is 11 more than the closest hitter (**Joey Votto**) during that span.

Here are your unsung heroes in the AL West*

By Greg Johns

The American League West finds itself stocked with stars, from Mike Trout to Jose Altuve to Robinson Cano to Adrian Beltre and beyond.

Everyone is aware of the aces and the sluggers, but every team has other players fans don't know much about. Here's a look at five key contributors in the AL West who aren't big names, but are stepping up early this season under the radar in their respective roles.

Angels SS Andrelton Simmons

Why you should know about him: Along with supplying Gold Glove-level defense at shortstop, Simmons has continued to develop into a more complete hitter. After Wednesday, he was batting .339 with an .896 OPS and more walks (12) than strikeouts (nine) over 34 games this season. Simmons' success is partly due to improved plate discipline: He's chasing only 20.9 percent of pitches outside the strike zone, and his walk rate is up to 8.5 percent, both of which are the best marks of his career.

Why you don't: Simmons is far from an unknown talent, but he often cedes the spotlight to Trout, Shohei Ohtani and Albert Pujols in Anaheim.

What they're saying: "We played a series in Atlanta a couple years ago when he was there, and you saw the natural flow he had at shortstop. He's special. And at the plate, just statistically looking at him, you knew there was a guy there that was going to be a plus offensive player at that position. He's worked very hard. I don't think you get a feel for just how hard he works in the cage every day. He takes a lot of pride in what he can do in the batter's box." -- *Angels manager Mike Scioscia*

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

FROM MiLB.COM

Toolshed: MiLB teams on the extremes*

Salt Lake offense, Charleston pitching staff standing out early

By Sam Dykstra

Ask any prospect writer, they'll talk to you about individual prospects. Ask any prospect, they'll talk to you about their team.

Let's flip the script.

This edition of Toolshed dives into the clubs that stand atop the Minor League leaderboards in some of the most important categories, like runs per game and strikeout rate, to find which rosters are standing out the most through the first month-plus of the 2018 season. (Note: All stats and leaders are through the games of May 9.)

Runs per game: Triple-A Salt Lake, 6.9 -- The Bees play in one of the most hitter-friendly parks, and in one of the most hitter-friendly leagues in the Minors, so this shouldn't be a complete surprise. They've also played in such batting havens as Albuquerque and El Paso without trips to more balanced parks like Memphis, New Orleans or Tacoma yet. The result: Salt Lake has reached double digits in seven of its 34 games, and its run average at home (7.2) isn't wildly off from its one on the road (6.5). Still, it makes sense that **Michael Hermosillo** -- the only **top-10 Angels prospect** playing for Salt Lake -- is hitting .297/.373/.595 with nine extra-base hits at home compared to .200/.333/.333 with three extra-base hits on the road. *Bottom of the ladder: Class A Advanced Florida, 2.9*

Home runs: Salt Lake, 62 -- Again, this makes sense and won't be the last time a team is repeated in this column. The Bees have been led by veterans in this regard, with **Chris Carter** and the recently promoted Jabari Blash each hitting 10 homers. That puts them in a tie for second behind only **Franmil Reyes'** 13 for El Paso. But there's depth here, too. Eight different Bees have gone deep at least four times so far in 2018. No other PCL team has more than six players to fill that category. Hermosillo (six) and No. 22 prospect **David Fletcher** (four) are the only ranked prospects with as many long balls, so it doesn't say much about the Angels' pipeline. But it does it make fun to think about what **Shohei Ohtani** could have done offensively in the PCL, or what will happen when the likes of **Jo Adell**, **Jahmai Jones** and **Brandon Marsh** reach Salt Lake. *Bottom of the ladder: Class A Advanced Lynchburg/Class A Advanced Dunedin, nine*

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

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shohei Ohtani homers again, surging Angels beat Twins 7-4

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- The Los Angeles Angels' schedule limited Shohei Ohtani's chances to hit over the past four games. When the Angels got back home and put their two-way rookie sensation back in the lineup, Ohtani hadn't missed a beat.

Neither had the rest of the Angels, who are putting big offensive numbers almost every night lately.

Ohtani hit his fifth homer and added an RBI double, and Ian Kinsler had a two-run homer among his three hits in the Angels' seventh win in nine games, 7-4 over the Minnesota Twins on Thursday night.

Justin Upton also homered in his third straight game and Kole Calhoun drove in the tiebreaking run in the sixth inning as the Angels snapped Minnesota's five-game winning streak.

Los Angeles has scored at least five runs in seven of its last eight games, and nearly everybody in a halo cap had a big hit in the opener of an 11-game homestand.

Ohtani was outstanding in his first start at designated hitter since last Friday. His pitching duties and two interleague games had limited him to two at-bats in the past four games.

"I'm still making little adjustments every day, each at-bat," said Ohtani, who has a hit in 14 of his 16 starts as a DH. "I'm still learning."

Ohtani turned Trevor Hildenberger's belt-high outside sinker into his first homer of May, blasting it 413 feet to the fake rock pile beyond left-center field in the seventh inning.

Ohtani also drove in Albert Pujols in the third for his first multi-RBI game since April 12, showing off his incredible speed on the basepaths while taking second.

"We knew he was dangerous," Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. "We've got to pitch him carefully, make him aware of the inside of the plate, but if you make mistakes, he's going to hit them."

Andrelton Simmons had three hits for the Angels, and Garrett Richards pitched five-hit ball into the sixth inning of the opener of the Angels' longest homestand of the season.

Brian Dozier hit a three-run homer off Richards in the sixth inning before Max Kepler followed with a tying solo shot off Jose Alvarez (2-0). But the Angels reclaimed the lead moments later and eventually ended Minnesota's longest streak of the season.

"I probably couldn't have thrown the ball better (in the first five innings), to be honest," said Richards, who yielded only two singles before the sixth. "It's disappointing to have the whole outing kind of tarnished."

After Kinsler hit his first homer since April 12 in the second inning, Upton added a solo shot in the third, giving him four homers in five games. Pujols and Ohtani followed with back-to-back doubles for a 4-0 lead.

Los Angeles answered with a rally that began with Simmons' single off Jose Berrios (3-4), who yielded seven hits and five runs.

BIG AL

Pujols was honored briefly in the first inning for getting his 3,000th hit last Friday in Seattle. His 3,005th career hit in the third inning gave him a seven-game hitting streak. He also flawlessly turned a key 3-6-3 double play at first base to end the seventh.

KOLE CONNECTS

Calhoun is in a 5-for-63 slump over the past month, but he drove in the go-ahead run with a line-drive sacrifice fly to the wall. He hit another fly to the warning track in the eighth.

JJ'S FIRST

Jim Johnson pitched the ninth for his first save since joining the Angels in the offseason. The veteran reliever had two strikeouts.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: CF Byron Buxton was reinstated from the 10-day disabled list, and he went 0 for 2 with a walk while batting ninth. Buxton was out with migraines and a subsequent broken toe after fouling a ball off his foot during a rehab assignment.

Angels: Reliever Keynan Middleton returned from the disabled list after missing 10 days with right elbow inflammation. He yielded two walks and a double while pitching a scoreless eighth. ... RHP Matt Shoemaker isn't making progress in his return from a forearm strain, manager Mike Scioscia said. His throwing program has been shut down. He made only one start this season before his latest injury problem.

UP NEXT

Twins: Lance Lynn (1-3, 7.28 ERA) is coming off his first victory in a rough season. He hasn't faced Los Angeles since July 2013, and he has never beaten an AL West team.

Angels: Tyler Skaggs (3-2, 3.08 ERA) makes his first career appearance against Minnesota. He has allowed more than two runs just once in seven starts this season.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Ohtani's latest blast powers Angels to another big win

By Fabian Ardaya

ANAHEIM, Calif. — As he trotted briskly back toward the Angels dugout, Shohei Ohtani looked and found Mike Trout, who awaited him on the near the top step. Ohtani removed his helmet as the two shook hands, simultaneously bowing at one another.

It was a sign of mutual respect between two of the game's most captivating players through the first month-plus of the season. It's also a newfound tradition between the two sluggers, and one that has become even more common, as Ohtani slugged his fifth home run of the season to all but seal an 8-5 win over the Twins at Angel Stadium on Thursday night, moving the club into a brief tie for first place in the AL West with the Houston Astros.

Ohtani finished 2-for-4 with the homer and a double, flashing an ever-adaptable approach at the plate and once again awing those watching with his brilliant raw power as he took Trevor Hildenberger out to the deepest part of the ballpark. Through his first 70 career plate appearances, he's put together 10 extra-base hits, including five homers, to go with a jarring .354/.400/.677 batting line. His wRC+ sits at

190, indicating he's been 90 percent better than the league-average hitter and would rank just behind Trout for fourth-best in baseball.

Quite simply, since he's scrapped his subpar spring, Ohtani's been, in an increasing sample size, one of the best hitters in baseball. Oh, and you have heard: The 23-year-old pitches, too.

"Shohei's swinging the bat very well," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "It's not easy to do when you're not out there every day, but he's playing enough to where I think he stays with his timing and we keep him in rhythm. He's doing a really good job in the batter's box."

The adjustment to American pitching is still ongoing for Ohtani, who said he's still tinkering to perfect the toe tap he adopted after he ditched his high leg kick in spring training. After expressing dissatisfaction with his pregame batting practice session, which included a pair of blasts well past the center field fence where his home run that night would later fall, Ohtani spent much of the evening in the batting cages behind the dugout suites near home plate, looking to correct the issue.

"I don't feel like the adjustment is perfect yet," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I'm still making little adjustments every day, each at-bat. Sometimes, it goes bad, and that's where I need to fix it. I don't feel like I've adjusted perfectly."

The adjustments are notable in each at-bat.

His first time up Thursday, José Berríos teased him away with soft stuff before blowing a 94 mph fastball past him up and in. The adjustment? In the third inning, Ohtani jumped on Berríos' third pitch, an 85 changeup on the outer half that stayed up as Ohtani scalded it into right center for an RBI double. The ball left his bat at 111.4 mph, the hardest-hit ball of the night.

His speed also flashed, with an average sprint speed of 28.9 feet per second getting him from home plate to second base in 8.07 seconds — the fastest double by an Angel this season.

The so-called book on Ohtani has been the same since the start of spring training. Pitchers have notoriously attempted to attack Ohtani inside or low and away with hard stuff, with suboptimal results.

His third trip against Berríos, the Twins right-hander tried to do the same. Ohtani spat on and swung through a pair of fastballs off the plate, reacting late on the third such fastball but still putting good wood on it to drive it just short of the warning track in left. When Hildenberger tried going off the plate with a fastball to open up his at-bat in the seventh, Ohtani pounced.

The ball carried out well past the wall to center, careening into the rock formation. The ball, which measured at 108.7 mph off the bat, carried a projected 414 feet and left the deepest part of the yard.

"Earlier in the year, I feel like they were throwing me inside a lot more than now, but I was still able to hit the ball pretty well," Ohtani said. "I still had a good average. Maybe they're trying to test pitching me away. I feel like they still don't know how to pitch me, and I feel the same way, like everything's still in process."

“I still feel like they’re pitching me in, depending on the at-bat. Each at-bat’s been different, and that’s probably part of their strategy. I try not to think about that too much and take one at-bat at a time.”

The approach to facing Ohtani, who now has a collection of film against him, will likely shift, a sign of respect for the two-way player’s prodigious start at the plate. Ohtani will have to shift back. Oh, and as for the new way that Trout, arguably the game’s best player, and Ohtani show their mutual respect?

“I don’t remember when exactly that started,” Ohtani said. “It just kind of naturally happened.”

Posnanski: Should average seasons, like Albert Pujols’ Anaheim years, help or hurt a Hall of Fame case?

By Joe Posnanski

Albert Pujols is a two-way Hall of Famer. That is to say, he’s a Hall of Famer for his peak with the Cardinals — one of the greatest 10-year peaks in baseball history — and he’s a Hall of Famer for his extraordinary career. By getting to 3,000 hits last week, he reminded everyone yet again what a marvelous stretch it has been.

Pujols is just the fourth player in baseball history with 3,000 hits and 600 home runs (Willie Mays, Henry Aaron and Alex Rodriguez are the other three). Of the four, Pujols — for the moment, anyway — has the highest on-base percentage, highest slugging percentage and most doubles. What a baseball player.

Because Pujols is such a slam-dunk Hall of Famer from both sides, I thought he would be the right one to ask a question: Which Pujols has the better Hall of Fame case, Peak Pujols or Career Pujols?

And so came a Twitter poll:

Two players ...

Player A: .328/.420/.617, 2,073 hits, 445 homers, 1,291 runs, 1,329 RBIs, 170 OPS+

Player B: .304/.385/.560, 3,002 hits, 620 homers, 1,739 runs, 1,938 RBIs,, 151 OPS+

Which would you be MORE LIKELY to vote into the Hall of Fame?

21%Player A

65%Player B

14%Too close to call

Players A and B, as you probably guessed, are both Pujols, A being Pujols in St. Louis, B being Pujols’ entire career. The vote was decisive: Two-thirds of the people voted that they would be more likely to vote Career Pujols into the Hall of Fame even though his batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage were *significantly* down, and even though his OPS+ (which measures a player’s OPS

against the league, with 100 being average) was down about 20 points. They preferred the full career with the meatier counting numbers.

I'm not saying that's wrong. But I am saying I disagree.

There's a number I did not put in there because I thought it might skew the voting. But it is, to me, an important number when it comes to the Hall of Fame.

Peak Pujols: 64.5 Wins Above Average

Career Pujols: 64.1 Wins Above Average

That's right — Peak Pujols was worth *more*, as compared to the average player, than Career Pujols. The reason is obvious: Pujols has been slightly below average player over his time with the Angels. Over the last three seasons, he has been well below average. He has continued to put up counting numbers. He has hit 30-plus homers three times with Los Angeles, driven in 100-plus RBIs four times, and even in this age of advanced statistics a lot of people find it hard to believe that a player who does those things can be below average.

But there's a lot of other stuff, significant stuff, weighing him down— his .262 average, his .317 on-base percentage, his ever-declining slugging percentage, his inability to play the field, his body wearing out.

Basically, I was using Pujols' unassailable career to ask the question: Should average and sub-average seasons *add* to a player's Hall of Fame case? There are interesting arguments both ways. On the plus side, an average baseball season has quite a bit of value. A baseball team with eight average players on the field and five average starters and five average relievers would be expected to finish .500, but with a few breaks (like being in the American League Central this year) that team might win the World Series.

So let's not downplay average. Major League average is good.

And then there's longevity, an underrated skill. Pujols has played in 2,610 games; only 39 players in baseball history have played more. Just showing up, as the line goes, is half the battle.

On the other side, though, it seems to me that while those arguments have merit, they don't hold water when it comes to the Hall of Fame. Average is exactly what the Baseball Hall of Fame is not. The Hall of Fame is meant to celebrate excellence, virtuosity, greatness. And average by its very definition — a standard regarded as usual or ordinary — is none of those things.

After the Pujols survey came out the way it did, I posted another Twitter poll:

If a player was perfectly average for 20 years — zero All-Star appearances, for instance — and put up Hall of Fame stats (3,000 hits, for instance), how close do you think he is to being a Hall of Famer?

15%100% (he's in)

38%66% (close, maybe)

34%33% (not a close call)

13%0% (you have to be great)

This is another approach to the same question: Does an average player belong in the Hall of Fame if he lasts long enough to put up Hall of Fame career stats?

In this case, many doubted the very premise of the question, believing that no average player could last long enough to get 3,000 hits ... but it absolutely could happen.

Take Bill Buckner. He was a well below average Major Leaguer for his career — 17.1 wins below average, if you are counting on Baseball Reference. This is not to bash Buckner. He had a long and distinguished career in the big leagues. He had one marketable and rare skill: He could hit for average. He was good at it. He almost never struck out. He hit .300 seven times in his career. He won a batting title.

He had other shortcomings — he didn't walk, didn't hit for power, couldn't run for much of his career, and his defense was rather famously lacking — and these are why his Wins Above Average numbers are where they are. He also played in just one All-Star Game, and even that was basically because he was on a terrible Cubs team that, to be blunt, offered no other viable All-Star options. In other words, he was not viewed in his time as a star.

Bill Buckner had 2,715 hits in his career. He was basically a season and a half away from 3,000. With a few more breaks, Buckner absolutely could have gotten 3,000 hits.

Would he have been a deserving Hall of Famer if he did?

I would argue no. Others might say yes.

In the 1980s, there was a similar argument being made about Dave Kingman. He too was a below average Major Leaguer when you took into account his entire game, and his clubhouse presence was such that he was traded twice, sold once and waived once *in the same season*.

Kingman had great power, though, and he hit 448 home runs. He hit 35 his last year, and he tried to keep playing; it's not impossible that he could have caught on somewhere and banged out another 52 homers to get to 500.

And so many people were worried. Back then, before the baseball storm of the 1990s, 500 home runs was a Hall of Fame landmark. "What do we do if Dave Kingman hits 500 home runs?" people asked. "He is not a Hall of Fame caliber player, but how can you leave out a player who hits 500 home runs?"

In the end, some say, baseball settles its own scores, meaning that Buckner did not get 3,000 hits, and Kingman did not hit 500 home runs, as if the sheer awesomeness of those numbers locks out the undeserving. This argument goes that 3,000 hits has been threatened by mere mortals but, so far, not pierced. Johnny Damon came close but fell short. Nick Markakis, having a spectacular season at age 34, might challenge for 3,000 hits. But he too, this theory goes, will fall short because there's some forcefield around that number 3,000.

Maybe. I'm skeptical that there is anything magical about 3,000 hits.

And I'm skeptical that average seasons or below average seasons should add much of anything to a Hall of Fame case. It should be about greatness. How great were you at your best? How many great seasons did you have? What impact did you have on the game?

Don't get me wrong, I think it's cool that Pujols got to 3,000 hits because it put his name back in the headlines again. It's cool that Adrián Beltré got 3,000 hits last year because it opened some eyes to just how wonderful Beltré has been. It's cool that Craig Biggio got to 3,000 hits – even though he coughed and limped his way to the finish line – because it allowed people to realize that until age 33, Biggio was a great player, even as few noticed.

But in my mind, they were Hall of Famers *before* they got to 3,000 hits. And that's the point. You are either a Hall of Famer before you put up those late-career counting numbers, or you shouldn't be a Hall of Famer at all.

My baseball gurus Tom Tango and Bill James have each come up with Hall of Fame systems based solely on excellence, based entirely on how much better than average a player was. I like that. I would love to see excellence celebrated more. This year, we're inducting Trevor Hoffman to the Hall of Fame, largely because of his 600 career saves. That's great, but how about celebrating Johan Santana, who from 2004-2010 – seven years – was the best pitcher in baseball (and had more Wins Above Average than any player not named Albert Pujols or Chase Utley)? Santana got 10 votes and fell off the ballot. It's maddening. Wasn't Johan Santana great?

Hockey has Bobby Orr, who only played seven full seasons.
Football has Gale Sayers, who only played four full seasons.
Basketball has Pistol Pete Maravich, who retired at 32.
Baseball has Sandy Koufax, who retired at 30.

The four of them, to me, represent what the Hall of Fame should be all about. They are all slam dunk, no-doubt, beloved Hall of Famers even though they didn't tack on counting numbers after their greatness had faded. I get that people love those big career numbers, and that's fine. I get that, for the time being, milestone numbers like 3,000 hits and 300 wins (should anyone ever do it again) and the like will guide Hall of Fame thinking.

But for me, Albert Pujols was every bit the Hall of Famer in 2011 as he is right now, certainly no less but also no more. He has added to his numbers. I don't think he's added to his greatness.

Despite his slump, Kole Calhoun is finding solace in the tiny victories

By Steve Dilbeck

Kole Calhoun did not get a hit Thursday night, which much to his chagrin, would make it like most every other night this season.

There are slumps, and then there is the mother of all slumps, which for most players is whatever batting plummet they are currently mired.

But this slump is something else, this one screams with scary, unreal numbers plastered over scoreboards, in newspapers and websites everywhere. Haunting, Salvador Dalí numbers.

Calhoun has a mere five hits in his last 63 at-bats (.079). He hasn't had an extra-base hit since Opening Day.

It's the kind of slump that can wear any player down, maybe crush some.

"It's definitely not easy, but you have to stay positive in this game," Calhoun said. "It'll test you. Can't change anything that's happened already.

"Each time, I get an opportunity to get in there and help this ballclub. Hopefully I'll come out of it soon. Keep swinging and playing the game the right way."

None of which would actually explain why, for the most part, Calhoun was a reasonable happy man after Thursday's game.

Manager Mike Scioscia had sat Calhoun for the past four games – "to clear his head" — before returning him to the lineup against the Twins. Calhoun went 0-for-3 with a sacrifice fly to leave his overall season average at .161.

Only he hit the ball hard three times, his sacrifice driving right fielder Max Kepler crashing into the wall in the sixth inning to score Andrelton Simmons with the go-ahead run. His final at-bat went to the warning track in center, estimated at 104.6 mph off his bat.

The RBI was only his second since April 12, and proving a game-winner, Calhoun was going to take his small victory and hope for better days ahead.

"Absolutely," he said. "Just helping this team win is definitely a good feeling. I put some good swings on the ball. They'll fall in here soon."

Calhoun's numbers are magnified because his struggles have come so early in the season. Most every player goes through a dry spell during the course of a 162-game season, but overall success can help mask their struggles. When you start out the season in a slump, the numbers are raw and unnerving. Listing as a .161 hitter will get anyone's attention.

"That happens to the best players in the game," Scioscia said. "It's usually absorbed in a season. But when you first start the season the way Kole, and maybe some other guys who aren't maybe where you would expect them to be, your numbers are naked and they stand out. When Kole finds it, this is just all going to be absorbed and just a tough stretch."

Calhoun is 30 years old and in little mood for his 2018's start. Three seasons ago he hit 26 home runs. The next season he dipped to 18 home runs, but had 35 doubles. He doesn't have a single double in 118 at-bats this season.

"It's tough," Scioscia said. "Kole knows he hasn't forgotten how to hit, but he's such a gamer he wants to contribute. And when you're not, there's certain frustration level that builds.

“He knows he’s more talented than what those numbers show every night and he’s working hard to get back on track. And he will. We have a lot of confidence in him and we’re going to need him.”

In the season opener, Calhoun hit a triple and a home run in his first two at-bats of the year. He added a single for a three-hit day. Had every right to expect he was off to a terrific start, not headed toward the most challenging stretch of his career.

“It’s hard,” Calhoun said. “It’s still early in the season, a hundred and however many at-bats in. It just looks ... it would be nice to have a hot streak in front of that.

“It kind of is what it is. You can’t change the past. Just keep working and get to the future.”

The past has not been kind in recent weeks, but Thursday offered a much-needed small victory. When his team needed him to deliver and drive in the winning run, he had come through. It had been a while.

Calhoun figures his next game will offer fresh opportunity. What else can he reasonably do? Take solace from Thursday and move forward.

“Build a little confidence,” he said. “Put some good swings on it [tonight]. Don’t get the result, but I’ll definitely take that. It’s a step in the right direction. And just keep moving forward.”

Stark: Useless Inf-O Dept, Emphasis on the O Edition

By Jayson Stark

THE OHTANI WATCH

We have an unusual blockbuster Shohei Ohtani feat this week – since officially, it never actually happened. But luckily, we have witnesses!

Tuesday night, in batting practice at Coors Field, the incredible Ohtani-san hit a baseball where no one has ever hit a baseball. You can watch it here. (It’s the second of two BP homers.)

It roared off into the mile-high ozone, cleared the fence in deep right-center field, soared beyond the bullpen and crashed off the fence beyond the *third*deck, behind Section 303. To give you an idea of how far away from home plate that is, check out this tweet from Rockies broadcaster Ryan Spilborghs.

In his quest to tell this remarkable story (and hopefully win an Emmy for outstanding achievement in hiking), Spilborghs trekked all the way outward and upward to section 303 on TV the next day. He told us he was so far from Planet Earth – I mean, home plate – up there that “I couldn’t read the jersey on any player. I couldn’t tell facial description. And I have good eyesight. But it was beyond my ability to tell what player was who.”

At first, he said, he wasn't sure if he was even in the right place – until he looked at the railing behind the section, “and I saw the ball mark. And I was like, ‘Holy crap.’”

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So how could he be sure this was Ohtani's ball mark? Because Spilborghs has been watching batting practice at Coors Field for over a decade, as a player and broadcaster. And have we mentioned that this was a spot that no previous baseball had ever visited?

Spilborghs rummaged through his memory bank for us. He has seen Matt Holliday take BP. And Carlos González. And Giancarlo Stanton. And hundreds of other guys. And never, he told Useless Info, has he “seen a ball that came off the bat like that.”

He checked with Angels hitting coach Eric Hinske. Hinske told him: “I've never seen a ball hit there.” Then Spilborghs showed Nolan Arenado a photo of where the ball landed. Arenado's response: “No way he did that.”

But Ohtani did that, all right. So *of course* we needed to find out how mammoth a home run it actually was. And fortunately, we knew just where to turn – to Greg Rybarczyk (@hittracker), creator of the ESPN HR Tracker and currently a senior baseball research and development analyst for the Red Sox.

After perusing YouTube videos and consulting his Coors data, Rybarczyk estimated Ohtani's deepest poke of the day at an incomprehensible 517 feet. Which is just a few feet short of a tenth of a mile.

So please. Think about this. Why are we obsessed with Shohei Ohtani? Because he can throw a baseball 101 miles per hour. And he can hit a baseball 517 feet. And he's a real human being.

“This is the equivalent of Sidd Finch (the fictional *Sports Illustrated* cover boy once created by George Plimpton),” Spilborghs said, “but without the worker boots.”

Oh, and also without the fiction. We repeat. This is a real person doing this stuff. So Spilborghs started to ponder the possibilities of Ohtani opening the door for “other players like this” and then it hit him. There are no other players like this.

“Even if there aren't any more guys like Shohei, hitting 517-foot BP homers and throwing 101, who cares?” Spilborghs said, chuckling. “Why don't we just marvel at the one we've got?”

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

FROM NBC SPORTS**And that happened: Thursday's scores and highlights**

By Craig Calcatterra

Here are the scores. Here are the highlights:

Angels 7, Twins 4: Shohei Ohtani homered — his fifth dinger on the year — and hit an RBI double and Justin Upton homered for the third straight game. Ohtani is batting .354/.400/.667 with five homers in 65 at bats. The Angels have won **seven of nine**.

Red Sox 5, Yankees 4: Boston led 4-0, New York stormed back to tie it at 4 in the seventh, but **J.D. Martinez** put an end to the Yankees' hopes of a comeback win by launching a solo homer off of **Dellin Betances** in the eighth to salvage the series for the Red Sox. **Hanley Ramirez** drove in three runs and homered. The Sox pull back even with the Yankees for the AL East lead at 26-11. New York and Boston have split six games this year. The next time they meet: June 29 at Yankee Stadium.

Mariners 9, Blue Jays 3: Because I'm a suburban husband I found myself at a suburban wine tasting club/restaurant kind of place last night with the missus. As she and her friend chatted I noticed another suburban husband next to me watching this game on his phone as *his* wife chatted with *her* friend, just as stuck as me. I asked him if he cared if I watched over his shoulder and he said "nah, gotta do what ya gotta do." I asked him why he chose this game and he said "raining in New York." Anyway, that's the first time I've ever watched a baseball game on someone else's phone over their shoulder at a suburban wine tasting place. I guess there are worse things to do with your Thursday evening. As for the game: the Mariners scored four in the first on a **Kyle Seager** grand slam and one in each of the next four innings, which included a second Seager homer. **Jean Segura** had four hits. The Viognier was not to my liking but I did take home two bottles of the Cab Franc. As any Frenchman knows, all the best Cab Francs come from wine clubs housed in malls.

Orioles 11, Royals 6: **Adam Jones** homered and knocked in three and **Manny Machado** and **Trey Mancini** also went deep as the Orioles came back from a first inning 4-0 deficit to win their second straight. Normally winning two in a row is not a thing I make note of in this feature, but it's only the second time Baltimore has won two in a row all year, so let them have this, OK?

Braves 9, Marlins 2: **Ozzie Albies** hit a grand slam as part of the Braves seven-run sixth inning and knocked in five in all. **Freddie Freeman** went yard too as the Braves win in a laughter. I must say, if the team you root for must go on a two-city road trip, I highly recommend that it be the Tampa-Miami road trip.

Brewers 5, Rockies 2: **Jhoulys Chacin** hasn't pitched for the Rockies since 2014, but in my mind he's always been a Colorado Rocky. Last night, though, he faced the Rockies while wearing a Brewers uniform and he did pretty well, allowing two runs while pitching into the sixth and picking up the W. He was relieved by **Boone Logan**, who was last a Rocky in 2016, but in my mind Boone Logan will always be a Yankee. **Matt Albers** pitched next. He's been on like eight or nine different teams. To me he's a man of the world.

Nationals 2, Diamondbacks 1: **Zack Greinke** deserved a better fate than this. He allowed one run on four hits in seven innings, working the corners and looking great. He even drove in a run with an RBI single in the fifth. The problem was that **Tanner Roark** also allowed one run on four hits in seven innings and this one went to extras, where **Matt Adams** singled the opposite way, foiling the shift, to knock in **Trea Turner** in the 11th and give Washington the win. I realize this game went extra innings, but am I the only one who finds it ridiculous that a 2-1 game in which both starters went seven frames required 12 pitchers in all to finish? That's insane, right? I'm not just taking crazy pills here?

Phillies 6, Giants 3: **Carlos Santana** hit a three-run homer which pulled the Phillies out of a 3-1 deficit as part of their four-run fourth inning and that margin would hold. Vince Velasquez struck out 12 in six innings as the Phillies complete the four-game sweep. The Giants were dominated by Phillies starting pitching this week, folks: Zach Eflin, **Aaron Nola**, **Nick Pivetta** and Velasquez combined to allow four runs in 24.2 innings, striking out 40 strikeouts. In all, the Giants struck out 55 times in the series. Woof.

Reds 4, Dodgers 1: **Tyler Mahle** allowed one run over five and three Reds relievers held the Dodgers scoreless for the final four innings. **Scouter Gennett** homered, doubled and drove in three and **Billy Hamilton** tripled in the Reds' other run as the Dodgers' nightmare season continues.

Cardinals 2, Padres 1: **Miles Mikolas** is easily the second most notable signing from the Japanese league this year. Here he allowed one run over six and two-thirds and picked up his fifth win on the year against no losses. **Tommy Pham** homered in the fifth to give the Cards a 2-1 lead that would hold up.

FROM CBS SPORTS

Twins' Lynn tries to stay on winning track vs. Angels

Lance Lynn came to the Minnesota Twins with a solid resume from his years in the National League, but he was the first to admit he didn't impress during his first full month in the American League.

By STATS

Lance Lynn came to the Minnesota Twins with a solid resume from his years in the National League, but he was the first to admit he didn't impress during his first full month in the American League.

The veteran right-hander seemed to turn things around in his last start, and will try to continue that momentum when he faces the Los Angeles Angels on Friday night at Angel Stadium.

Lynn, who will turn 31 on Saturday, signed a one-year, \$12 million contract with the Twins in March after spending six seasons with the St. Louis Cardinals, compiling a 72-47 mark in that span.

Lynn (1-3, 7.28 ERA) was winless in five starts in April, however, causing concern from the fan base to the front office. They exhaled a bit after his last outing as Lynn limited the Chicago White Sox to two runs and eight hits over six innings in an 8-4 victory.

As for Lynn, he's been around long enough to know his performances will eventually even out.

"I find that you can't control anything except making a pitch. If you try to control other things, things snowball on you," Lynn told the Minneapolis Star Tribune after earning his first win. "Early on, I was trying to control everything, and trying to be perfect and trying to show off on a new team. I think that's a lot of it. ... You go out and keep making pitches instead of worrying about the negative."

Lynn was with the Cardinals when he made his only career appearance against the Angels on July 2, 2013. He allowed five runs and nine hits over six innings of a 5-1 loss in Anaheim, a game more remembered because it was the first time Angels first baseman Albert Pujols played against his former team.

Angels infielder Zack Cozart has plenty of experience against Lynn from his years with the Cincinnati Reds. He's 7-for-39 with three home runs off Lynn. Mike Trout, Justin Upton and Pujols, the 2-3-4 hitters for Los Angeles, are a combined 0-for-14 off Lynn, however.

Minnesota managed to keep that trio fairly quiet in the 7-4 loss in the series opener Thursday night, but got dinged by the 5-6-7 hitters.

Shohei Ohtani went 2-for-4 with a home run and two RBIs, Andrelton Simmons was 3-for-4 with two runs scored and Ian Kinsler was 3-for-4 with two runs and two RBIs.

Kinsler is 4-for-8 since being moved out of the leadoff spot.

Tyler Skaggs (3-2, 3.08) is scheduled to start for the Angels. He'll be up against the only American League opponent he has not faced in his six-year career.

Skaggs has been sharp in six of his seven starts this season, but has been supported by more than three runs only twice.

He pitched well enough to win his last start, allowing two runs and six hits in 5 1/3 innings Saturday at Seattle, but the bullpen couldn't protect the 4-2 lead and the Angels lost 9-8 in extra innings.

FROM THE SPORTING NEWS

Garrett Richards, finally healthy, leads rotation that's put Angels on track for October

By Ryan Fagan

Sitting in front of his locker at Tempe Diablo Stadium on the first official day of spring training, Garrett Richards was enjoying the new buzz around the only franchise he's known in his professional career.

Shohei Ohtani had arrived from Japan, and everyone was watching the Angels' prize offseason acquisition. The daily media contingent was almost silly, and players were watching their new teammate, too. But even in all the newness, Richards felt something familiar.

"I have the same vibe that I did coming to spring in 2014, like, we've got a great team on paper," Richards told Sporting News. "We have some guys that we had at the end of the year that we got to see what we would have going forward, and it's kind of all coming together now. We're just all real excited about it."

In 2014, of course, the Angels made the playoffs. It's the only time they've reached the postseason since Richards — who was a 2009 first-round pick — made his MLB debut late in the 2011 season. But the 2018 Angels have October plans of their own. So far, so good.

They're essentially tied for first place in the AL West with a 23-14 record entering play Friday, a couple of percentage points ahead of the Astros (.622 to .615). Not that the wild-card standings matter much in May, but they're in the second WC spot now, and only the Mariners are within three-and-a-half games of their spot. Richards has made eight starts this year, and the Angels are 6-2 in his eight starts; he has a 4.08 ERA/3.92 FIP and has struck out 49 batters in 38 2/3 innings, an 11.1 K/9 mark that's easily a career high. But those eight starts might just be the biggest number.

Richards was one of baseball's better starting pitchers in 2014-15, rolling up a 3.18 ERA/3.30 FIP in 58 combined starts those two years. But injuries have been a soul-crushing reality the past two years; he started just six games in 2016 and six more in 2017.

So, yeah, the eight games started this year represent a big step in the right direction. Sitting in that clubhouse in Tempe, Richards looked around and saw a lot of his fellow pitchers who had experienced similar setbacks the past few years.

"Trop (Nick Tropeano) had Tommy John, (Andrew) Heaney had Tommy John, J.C. (Ramirez) had his elbow, and Matt (Shoemaker) has his nerve thing. It was kind of like, we would all sit on the bench together and we would watch the game together and, I don't know, evolve together," Richards said this spring. "We had a lot of time to watch baseball, so we had a lot of time to take a step back and learn some things. I think we all benefitted from it. I think we're all better because of it. It's a tight-knit group over here."

He continued:

"It was frustrating when we were all going through it together, but we also had each other to kind of lean on. Going through that whole process, you'll have good days and you'll have bad days, you'll have frustrating days. And going through that whole process with guys who are dealing with the same thing you're dealing with, it was nice to have guys you could bounce your frustration off of and talk to and kind of keep each other going forward. It sucks that we had to go through it, but I think we're grateful that we went through it together.

That was in mid-February. Everyone was healthy.

That's no longer the case for some of those guys. Ramirez made two starts this season, but he's done for the year after Tommy John surgery. Shoemaker made one start, landed on the DL and was set to return when the same nerve issue in his forearm shut him down. There is no timetable for his return. Tropeano has been on the 10-day DL with shoulder inflammation, but he's expected to be activated this weekend.

The news hasn't all been bad, obviously. Heaney missed the first couple of weeks of the season, but he's back and has a 2.12 ERA in his past three starts. Tyler Skaggs, the lefty who made a total of 26 starts in 2015-16, has been brilliant in 2018. He's carved out a 3.08 ERA/2.74 FIP and a career-best 3.55 K/BB ratio. Rookie Jaime Barria has been exceptional: 2.45 ERA in his first four MLB starts.

And, of course, Ohtani has shown why everyone was so excited for his arrival this spring. He's made five starts and showcased a fastball in triple-digits and the nasty breaking balls that scouts in Japan raved about. He's struck out 32 in 26 1/3 innings and has a 4.10 ERA/4.07 FIP.

Some folks around baseball expressed concern that the front office's plan to go with a six-man rotation, to accommodate the schedule Ohtani used in Japan and get him in the lineup regularly as the DH, might cause a bit of friction in the Angels' clubhouse. That concern, Richards told SN in Tempe, only existed outside the Angels' clubhouse, though.

"I don't think there's a person in there who cares if they make 32 starts or they make 27 starts, as long as we're winning games and having a good time," he said. "That's kind of it. Winning games obviously solves a lot, but being a tight-knit group, I think, is the next level. I think you can have all the talent in the world in the locker room, but if you're not meshing well, you're not going to go very far. That's one thing in here that we always try and preach: a loose clubhouse, a nice environment for new guys to come in and join right in with us. There's no awkward stage with us. We're a very welcoming clubhouse. We just want to win. That's our No. 1. Everybody has the same mindset. We just want to win, no matter what."

So far, that's exactly what they've done. Very much like 2014.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

B/R's MLB 20 for '20: Projecting Top 20 First Basemen in 2020*

By Joel Reuter

Baseball is a tough sport to predict day in and day out, and it becomes exponentially more difficult to project when looking years into the future. But that's exactly what we're going to be doing here.

Back in the summer of 2015, I wrote a series dubbed "B/R's MLB 20 for '20" wherein I predicted who the top 20 players would be at each position when the 2020 season rolled around.

Three years later, it's time for an update.

In this edition we look at the first base position, where Anthony Rizzo, Freddie Freeman and Paul Goldschmidt will all still be in the prime of their careers and vying for the top spot, alongside reigning National League Rookie of the Year Cody Bellinger.

Before we dive into the top 20, we'll take a look back at that original list with the benefit of hindsight and also shine a light on a few prospects who could be making waves two years from now.

Enjoy.

The Original List (Published July 10, 2015)

1. Anthony Rizzo, CHC
2. Paul Goldschmidt, ARI
3. Freddie Freeman, ATL
4. Josh Bell, PIT
5. Eric Hosmer, KC
6. Buster Posey, SF
7. Jose Abreu, CWS
8. Matt Olson, OAK
9. AJ Reed, HOU
10. Bobby Bradley, CLE
11. Dominic Smith, NYM
12. Casey Gillaspie, TB
13. Miguel Cabrera, DET
14. Greg Bird, NYY
15. Jon Singleton, HOU
16. Joey Votto, CIN
17. D.J. Peterson, SEA
18. Brandon Belt, SF
19. Dan Vogelbach, CHC
20. Christian Walker, BAL

Hindsight Breakdown

This was a stark improvement over the catcher list.

The top three guys—**Anthony Rizzo**, **Paul Goldschmidt** and **Freddie Freeman**—were no-brainers, and they again reside near the top of the rankings in our updated version.

Josh Bell and **Matt Olson** were still prospects when the original version was written, and they've since ascended into starting roles and shown the offensive tools to be middle-of-the-order producers for the foreseeable future.

Notably absent from the list is **Cody Bellinger**.

He was a fourth-round pick in 2013 and spent his first two seasons in the relative anonymity of rookie ball. If the original article were written at the end of the 2015 season, he certainly would have made the cut.

The biggest whiff has to be **AJ Reed**.

He was a second-round pick in 2014 after winning the Golden Spikes Award during his junior season at Kentucky. When the original article was written, he was in the middle of a monster season in which he posted a .340/.432/.612 line with 34 home runs and 127 RBI in High-A and Double-A combined. Reed looked destined for a spot in the middle of the Houston lineup.

Instead, he struggled in his first taste of MLB action (141 PA, .164 BA, 34.0 K%) in 2016 and only appeared in two games in 2017.

Bobby Bradley still looks like the first baseman of the future in Cleveland, while the door hasn't yet closed on **Dominic Smith's** and **Casey Gillaspie's** chances to carve out MLB roles.

The expectation with including **Buster Posey** was that he'd transition to first base from behind the plate before 2020 rolled around, but that no longer looks like the case.

....

17. Matt Thaiss, Los Angeles Angels

2020 Age: 25

A catcher at the University of Virginia, Matt Thaiss made the move out from behind the plate at the onset of his pro career after going No. 16 overall in the 2016 draft.

Viewed as one of the more advanced hitters in the class, he's backed that up by walking at an 11 percent clip in parts of three minor league seasons.

The biggest question is whether he'll develop enough power for the position.

MLB.com wrote: "There are concerns that Thaiss won't have the power to fit the first base profile, but there is more pop for him to tap into, and he sees value in knocking out 30 doubles annually while trying to get on base at a 40 percent clip."

Thaiss could wind up benefiting from a shift in leaguwide philosophy, as home run production has been watered down in recent years and there's a premium being placed on on-base ability.

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

FROM FANRAG SPORTS

Heyman | Dan Jennings recalls mistake of passing on Pujols

By Jon Heyman

The occasion of **Albert Pujols'** 3,000th hit was another chance for all those many scouting directors who passed on the Maplewood JC shortstop 19 years ago to wonder what might have been.

Most of them quietly suffer “the one that got away.” But Dan Jennings, the Rays’ scouting director at the time, later the Marlins GM and manager and now a special adviser to Nationals GM Mike Rizzo, is secure enough to joke about it, talk about it and analyze the call that went awry.

Jennings also recalled that during Pujols’ magical first year, when he became Rookie of the Year, his highlights played on every TV he saw, in every last hotel room. Jennings’ 1999 draft for the Rays included future MVP Josh Hamilton (first round, No. 1 overall), future Rays star Carl Crawford (second round) and multiple other major leaguers, so perhaps that makes it a bit easier to take.

The other thing is that Jennings is comfortable about his place in the game. Pujols didn’t get picked until the 13th round; “give (the Cardinals) credit,” Jennings says. Now-Cards GM John Mozeliak was the scouting director, Mike Roberts a key scouting exec and Dave Karaff the Cardinals’ area scout for that historic pick, so 29 scouting directors passed on him up to 13 times.

The thing that Jennings recalls is that their area scout Fernando Arango had Pujols first on his board in his five-state responsibility (he had Kansas, Missouri and three other adjacent states), and while no other Rays scout liked Pujols – not even a bit – Jennings admits he learned something from the episode.

That is: *“If a scout has that kind of guts and that kind of conviction ... pull the trigger,”* Jennings said.

Don’t take him ahead of Hamilton, seen as an otherworldly talent back then, or Crawford, or maybe even Doug Waechter or Seth McClung. But take him at some point before 13 picks go by. After Arango made him his No. 1 pick, Jennings sent in three of his very top scouts to look at Pujols, and none of them saw what Arango saw. The three scouts were bright baseball minds who have risen to heights in major league baseball – Stan Meek, R.J. Harrison and Michael Hill – but none of them saw what Arango saw, as was recounted in Jonah Keri’s book “The Extra 2 Percent.”

They all told Jennings virtually the same thing. *“I can’t write him up,”* which in scout parlance means there aren’t enough good things to recommend him as a future major leaguer. But because Arango was so convicted, Jennings invited Pujols to their pre-draft workout at The Trop so everyone with the Rays could see (they had some big-time scouts, such as Meek, Bill Livesey, Chuck LaMar, Bart Braun and others).

They saw a body that seemed a little “spongy,” and they saw a bat that was good but seemed far less than great. They worked Pujols out at shortstop, and it’s no surprise no one saw a major-league shortstop in the making. But in fact, Pujols was so unimpressive at shortstop that they asked him to don the catcher’s gear to see if he could make it there. At first Pujols balked, telling them, *“I’m not a catcher,”* but he did it, anyway, and he did OK behind the plate. But not good enough.

And they had him bat, and he was just OK, hitting one ball out at the Trop, one high fly Jennings can still see in his mind’s eye (just one ball that floated over the fence, as he recalled it – nothing too dramatic). Afterward, all the Rays guys gathered, and they all picked out different players they liked. No one particularly liked Pujols. Except, that is, for the area scout who knew him best.

Had they listened to that lone voice, and picked him seventh or eighth, they would have had an all-time draft. As it was, they still gathered a couple great players (one of whom starred for them), and they learned one valuable lesson.

FROM KYODO NEWS**Baseball: Shohei Ohtani blasts 5th homer in Angels' 7-4 win over Twins**

Shohei Ohtani hit his fifth home run of the season and an RBI double Thursday to drive in two runs in the Los Angeles Angels' series-opening 7-4 win over the Minnesota Twins.

Ohtani, batting as the Angels' designated hitter in the No. 5 spot, blasted the first pitch from reliever Trevor Hildenberger over the center field wall in the seventh inning at Angel Stadium to cap the home team's victory.

"My swing on the home run was how I envisioned it. It was a fat pitch, but I still put a good swing on it and hit it well," Ohtani said.

"I did well in all of my at-bats except for striking out (in the second), so I had a good game," said Ohtani, who has hit in 14 of his 16 starts as a designated hitter.

"Getting hits will improve the chances of the team winning, and the same can be said for getting more runners on base. I'm just thinking about fulfilling my role when I'm at the plate."

Following Ian Kinsler's two-run shot in the second and Justin Upton's solo homer in the third, Ohtani doubled on a line drive to right to bring in Albert Pujols and put the Angels ahead 4-0.

Angels' righty Garrett Richards held the visitors scoreless until the sixth, when he gave up a three-run homer. His replacement, lefty Jose Alvarez (2-0), allowed the Twins to tie it on a solo homer, but the Angels put two runs on the board in the bottom of the inning to retake the lead.

Ohtani struck out swinging and flied out to deep left in his other at-bats.

The two-way phenom, who earned his third win as pitcher when he returned to the mound Sunday after suffering a mild ankle sprain, is scheduled to start against the Twins in Sunday's series finale at Angel Stadium.