

'Pen falters in 8th as Tribe can't contain Ohtani

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Indians manager Terry Francona emerged from the home dugout and motioned with his left hand, summoning veteran Oliver Perez from the bullpen. In a game already dominated by Angels star Shohei Ohtani, Cleveland had things aligned well for a critical eighth inning.

Maybe on paper it was the ideal matchup, but Ohtani defied the splits and continued to torment the Tribe, igniting one last rally that sent the Indians to a 7-4 defeat at Progressive Field on Friday night. After Cleveland starter Mike Clevinger allowed two Ohtani blasts, the bullpen was unable to stop him in a decisive four-run eighth.

"We had kind of got what we wanted," Francona said of his team's matchups in the eighth.

The turning point arrived after righty Neil Ramirez struck out Justin Upton to open the frame. At that juncture, Francona called upon Perez, who had limited left-handed batters to a .162 average (.428 OPS) this season. Ohtani has overpowered righties, but his production against left-handers included a .170 average and .500 OPS, entering Friday.

Perez fired a 1-0 sinker high and tight, and Ohtani slashed it into left field for a single. Francona -- playing the matchup game with his bullpen -- then handed the ball to right-handed sidearmer Adam Cimber. On Cimber's first pitch to Albert Pujols, Ohtani was off and running for second base. Catcher Roberto Perez lost his grip on the ball on the transfer and the Angels' designated hitter had a stolen base.

"With Shohei being aggressive, that's a big run at the time," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Obviously it set the table for a bigger inning, which we needed. Every little bit in that inning was big. ... You don't get to their bullpen often, but we did tonight."

The inning spiraled from there on for the Indians.

With two outs and runners on the corners, David Fletcher flared a pitch from Cimber down the right-field line for a fluky ground-rule double that put the Indians behind, 4-3. After an intentional walk to load the bases, Jose Briceno sent a dribbler up the third-base line for an infield single, scoring another run. Eric Young Jr. then crushed a pitch off the wall in center for a two-run double, helping the Angels pull away.

"Cimber, I thought he deserved better," Francona said. "The ball hits the right-field chalk line, swinging bunt, mixed in a couple intentional walks to get the right matchups and it ended up being a big inning. That obviously hurt our chances."

Angels starter Jaime Barria picked up a no-decision after allowing three runs on six hits in five innings. The right-hander struggled the first time through Cleveland's lineup, which struck for two quick runs in the first inning.

Francisco Lindor led off with a walk and then sprinted home when Michael Brantley followed with a double that dropped beyond the reach of Young in deep center field. One batter later, Jose Ramirez pulled a pitch into right to plate Brantley and pull the game even, 2-2. Leonys Martin, playing in his first home game with the Indians after being acquired via trade from the Tigers on Tuesday, added an RBI single in the second and a solo homer in the ninth.

"He's going to help us a bunch," Francona said.

That was all the offense managed by the Tribe, which was not enough in light of the first four-hit game of Ohtani's career.

Ohtani began his onslaught in the first inning with an opposite-field, two-run homer off Clevinger. In the third, Ohtani went yard again -- this time to right-center -- for his 11th home run of the season and fourth against Cleveland. With his four hits, Ohtani is now batting .643 (9-for-14) against the Tribe this year.

"Both pitches were pretty poorly executed," Clevinger said. "I mean, he's got tremendous power -- don't get me wrong. I still think if I executed like my third at-bat against him [when Ohtani grounded out], he's not peppering the ball like he did in his first two."

"The first one was inside and he still put it the other way, so that's pretty impressive on his part."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Miller Time: With the score tied in a 3-3 deadlock, Andrew Miller (activated from the disabled list prior to the game) took the mound in the seventh for his first outing for the Tribe since May 25. As Miller entered, flames shot out from behind the center-field wall and the Cleveland crowd offered a standing ovation. The lefty worked around a walk and a wild pitch, logging a scoreless inning that featured one strikeout.

"It was nice to get out there and get one under my belt," Miller said. "I wasn't nearly as crisp as I was the last couple of outings [at Triple-A]. It's probably expected. It's a process. It will come. But, it was nice to have a scoreless inning and be back with these guys and hopefully contribute."

Ohtani owns Tribe: The Angels' Japanese superstar has collected a lot of Major League firsts against the Indians. Ohtani's first career homer was on April 3 against the Tribe. His first shot off Clevinger on Friday marked his first career home run on the road. Then, when the designated hitter crushed a Clevinger pitch to deep right-center, he notched his first career multihomer game. Per Statcast™, the second long ball had a 110.7-mph exit velocity and traveled a projected 443 feet.

GOMES EXITS EARLY

All-Star catcher Yan Gomes doubled and scored in the second inning, but he was wincing around the bases and grabbed at his right knee at one point. After initially remaining in the game, Gomes was lifted in favor of Roberto Perez in the bottom of the fourth. The Indians announced that Gomes was pulled as a precaution due to posterior right knee discomfort.

"He just had discomfort behind his right knee," Francona said after the loss. "So, we're [sending him to get an MRI exam] right now, just to see exactly what's going on there. We should know more [soon]."

SOUND SMART

Ramirez struck out swinging three times against the Angels on Friday. The All-Star third baseman has only fanned thrice in a game six times in his 591 career MLB games. This marked only the third time all three were swinging. The other instances were on April 28, 2017, and Sept. 1, 2014. Ramirez has never struck out four times in a game.

HE SAID IT

"Yeah, obviously, it's frustrating. I've got to stay on it, though. I've got to make a little bit better pitch to Eric Young Jr. And then you've got to try to minimize in situations like that. I'll just try to do a better job my next time out." -- Cimber, on the eighth inning

UP NEXT

Corey Kluber (13-6, 2.79 ERA) is scheduled to take the mound for the Tribe on Saturday when the Indians play host to the Angels in a 7:10 p.m. ET tilt at Progressive Field. Kluber currently has the third-lowest home ERA (2.24) in the American League this season. Los Angeles will counter with righty Felix Pena (1-2, 5.23 ERA).

Miller posts scoreless return; McAllister DFA'd

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The Indians' bullpen got the reinforcements it needed last month when the team acquired All-Star Brad Hand and sidearmer Adam Cimber in a trade with the Padres. Now, manager Terry Francona has his favorite leverage weapon back in the fold.

Prior to Friday's 7-4 loss to the Angels at Progressive Field, Cleveland activated relief ace Andrew Miller from the 60-day disabled list. Combined with Hand and Tribe closer Cody Allen, Francona now has a formidable late-innings trio, provided that Miller is back at full strength and over the right knee issue that has ailed him for parts of the past two seasons.

"It gets exciting," Francona said. "Just having Andrew back is exciting. And we know it might not be midseason form yet, but he'll get there. You start thinking about shortening games, and some of those guys back at the end there can do that."

On Friday, Miller took the mound in the seventh for his first outing with the Tribe since May 25. The lefty received a standing ovation when he entered, and then tossed a scoreless inning with one strikeout and one walk.

"There are nerves every time you pitch in a Major League game," said Miller, who threw 16 pitches (10 strikes). "I don't think that's going to go away. I think you do a better job of controlling them. Part of that is just getting back into a rhythm in everything. Ideally, the game will go slower for me next time and I'll have better command and it will come a little smoother."

The good news of Miller's return necessitated a tough conversation between Francona and right-hander Zach McAllister, who has been with the Indians for parts of the past eight seasons. In order to clear room on both the 25-man and 40-man rosters for Miller, Cleveland designated McAllister for assignment.

When a player's contract is designated for assignment -- often abbreviated "DFA" -- that player is immediately removed from his club's 40-man roster, and 25-man roster if he was on that as well. Within seven days of the transaction (it was previously 10 days), the player must either be traded, released or placed on irrevocable outright waivers.

Miller, who has had two DL stints this year due to a left hamstring problem and the right knee discomfort, completed back-to-back outings on Monday and Tuesday with Triple-A Columbus to conclude his Minor League rehab assignment. In 18 appearances this year for the Tribe, the lefty has a 4.11 ERA with 24 strikeouts against 11 walks in 15 1/3 innings.

The Indians hope that the time lost in the regular season will lead to strong production down the stretch and throughout the postseason for Miller, who was the Most Valuable Player Award winner of the 2016 American League Championship Series during the team's run to the World Series. Cleveland headed into Friday with a 10-game lead on Minnesota atop the AL Central, putting it on target for a third straight division crown.

"[The bullpen has] a chance to be the strength of a really good team," Miller said. "Maybe we weren't as strong as we wanted to be at the start of the year. I don't think it was for lack of ability or effort or intention or anything. Things maybe didn't go our way, and everybody kind of kept grinding it out. But between the new guys and the way guys have been throwing the ball lately, hopefully I come back and jump in and add to it."

Miller, Hand and Allen will divvy up the bulk of the late-inning matchups, with lefty Oliver Perez and right-handers Dan Otero, Neil Ramirez and Cimber filling out the rest of the bullpen. Since the July 19 deal that netted Hand and Cimber in exchange for catching prospect Francisco Mejia, the Indians' relief corps has ranked second in the AL in ERA (2.78), WHIP (1.18) and opponents' on-base percentage (.296) before Friday night's game.

McAllister, 30, has turned in a 3.99 ERA in 277 career games with Cleveland, and the big right-hander enjoyed a breakout showing as a reliever a year ago (2.61 ERA in 50 games). This year, McAllister has posted a 4.97 ERA with 34 strikeouts against 10 walks in 41 2/3 innings. Right-handed batters were hitting .253 (.775 OPS) off McAllister, who is earning \$2.45 million this year. He will be a free agent after the season.

"We didn't really want to lose anybody, but we just felt like it was the right baseball decision to make," Francona said. "As excited as you are to get Andrew back, you have to talk to a kid that you care about, it's hard. So, that's not the funnest way to start your day."

Worth noting

- The Indians announced on Friday that outfielder Tyler Naquin (10-day DL) underwent surgery on his right hip on Thursday to stabilize a stress reaction. Dr. James Rosneck performed the procedure on Naquin's right femur, using three screws in the operation. Naquin is expected to be able to return to full baseball activities within six to 10 weeks.

"Whether he had surgery or not, the timetable was going to be just about identical," Francona said. "That was I think why they elected to have surgery. So when he does come back, he's not going to have to worry about this happening again. It actually made a lot of sense. And we could see him back this year."

- Now that the Indians are beyond the non-waiver Trade Deadline and Miller is back in the fold, Francona met with his team prior to Friday's game against Los Angeles. The manager said his message for the season's home stretch was straightforward.

"It's the first time where everybody's in the same room and that's going to be our team," Francona said. "I just wanted to tell them that this group, our goal is not to be good, it's to be special. That's really basically what it is. We have the ability to be special. We just have to go do it."

- Right-hander Josh Tomlin (10-day DL, right hamstring) began a Minor League rehab assignment with Columbus on Friday. Cleveland plans on having Tomlin log two- or three-inning outings over the next few weeks in the Minors prior to being activated.

- MLB and the Indians will unveil the official logo of the 2019 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard on Tuesday at 2 p.m. ET at Progressive Field. Next year's 90th Midsummer Classic will be the sixth hosted by Cleveland in the event's history.

Tough nights for the Indians bullpen have been a theme, so why does this one feel different?

By T.J. Zuppe 1h ago 4

At times this year, the Indians' bullpen has felt like a flaming, runaway dumpster, a chaotic disaster rolling downhill.

Meltdowns were a matter of when, not if.

With the dominant Andrew Miller on the disabled list with right knee inflammation for much of the season and Joe Smith and Bryan Shaw departed, the hopeless feeling of no answers somehow outweighed the steady amount of gut punches and knockout blows the stream of relief-fueled defeats provided.

Those were the good old days.

Good and terrible.

So, here's where we're probably supposed to throw the four-run eighth inning Friday night onto the list of forgettable disasters, making the late-game calamity just the latest instance of a bullpen gone wrong.

But we're not going to do that.

You see, a once unfortunate outlook has changed.

Of course, that's not going to erase the runs charged to Oliver Pérez and Adam Cimber. And by itself, it won't increase the Indians' win total, nor will the outcome Friday get them any close to clinching a division that has felt wrapped up since Memorial Day.

But we're also no longer looking at a group capable of starring in Hollywood's latest disaster flick.

For several reasons, things have improved at the back end of close games. The most glaring factor is the addition of left-hander Brad Hand from the Padres, a deal which brought one of the best relievers on the market to Cleveland.

Hand has allowed just one run on four hits in seven innings since joining the Tribe. Three of his six appearances have been for more than one inning. He's come as advertised.

His presence has given Cody Allen an opportunity to work through some mechanical issues in his delivery. Allen's been better of late, and the group's willingness to pitch in any spot continues to pay dividends.

The other major development came Friday with the activation of Miller.

The slider-slinging lefty clearly lacked the look of a reliever in midseason form, and that's to be expected — he's been out since the end of May and just recently completed a spring training-like rehab assignment at various levels of the Tribe minors.

Miller's fastball averaged just a bit below 92 mph on Friday night, a few notches below his typical level. His slider didn't consistently have the same bite. His command was a bit shaky, handing out a walk and firing a wild pitch to put the go-ahead run in scoring position. Yet, the lefty still managed to emerge unscathed in his scoreless inning, inducing two swinging-strikes with his slider, a called strikeout on a heater and collecting some weak contact on a fly out (75.9 mph) and ground out (86.4 mph).

"It's a process," Miller said. "It will come."

And that will take time. The bad habits formed while fighting the bothersome right knee aren't broken overnight.

What Miller needs more than anything are repetitions.

"Repetitions at this level," Miller clarified. "This is a different animal."

Said Terry Francona: "The more we pitch him, the better he's going to get."

But the hope of him settling into a groove, even if it's not quite to the level of dominance he displayed in the 2016 postseason, adds to the potential of what lies ahead.

This is how a glaring weakness might soon become an unquestioned strength.

Before Friday night, the arrival of Hand and Cimber helped their new club post the second-best relief ERA in the majors. They've allowed Francona the opportunity to mix and match his relievers more frequently, pushing Pérez and Neil Ramírez into some earlier outings against advantageous competition.

We've seen it help establish a better blueprint for October. Even in the midst of the loss Friday to the Angels, Francona was able to deploy his bullpen in favorable matchups.

- Miller shortened the game by working a scoreless seventh.
- Ramírez, a righty, was utilized for a strikeout of Justin Upton, a right-handed hitter, to lead off the eighth.
- Pérez was brought on to face the left-handed hitting Shohei Ohtani. Ohtani, who had connected on two homers earlier in the game, was able to bloop a ball at 84.3 mph in front of Michael Brantley, a connection that held a hit probability of just 29 percent.
- Cimber, who had held right-handed hitters to a .495 OPS entering the day, came in to face multiple right-handed batters. After a walk to Albert Pujols, the sinker-featuring submariner induced a grounder for the inning's second out. But before Cimber could retire the side, David Fletcher dumped a well-placed looper (82.7 mph exit velocity) just inside the right-field line for an RBI double. After an intentional walk to Luis Valbuena, Jose Briceno delivered an RBI swinging-bunt, a ball struck so softly that Statcast failed to successfully read it. Eric Young Jr.'s two-run double later became the only legitimately tagged ball of the inning.

"I thought he deserved better," Francona said of Cimber. "The ball hits the right-field chalk line, swinging bunt, mixed in a couple intentional walks to get the right matchups. It ended up being a big inning."

While the outcomes weren't all desirable, the process to set them up were sound. Almost all of those plate appearances — at least the ones that came before Young's at-bat — led to the matchup the Indians sought. That hasn't always been the case with all 22 of the relievers they've utilized this season.

As a result, the hopelessness that once accompanied a struggling group has faded, even in defeat. The activation of Miller has reduced that feeling more, even if his true self is still a work in progress.

With the pieces working their way into place, there's a genuine feeling that a game like Friday can be chalked up to a bad night full of unfortunate bounces, not a precursor to more treacherous waters on the horizon.

Of course, from there, it's on those relief pitchers to reward that faith. But there's little doubt that the situation has been drastically improved — enough to believe their late-game tragedies should become rarer in the weeks ahead.

"I think we've got a lot of potential," Cimber said. "I think that we're looking like the next couple months should be fun. I feel good about who we have down there."

Pregame minutiae: Tito & Miller by Jordan Bastian

Prior to Friday's game against the Angels, both Indians manager Terry Francona and reliever Andrew Miller (activated from the disabled list) met with media. Here are the highlights of their Q&As.

Indians manager Terry Francona

Q: Can you walk us through the decision to designate Zach McAllister for assignment?

Francona: "Andrew's active, so we had to do something. It was a hard decision and we didn't really want to lose anybody, but we just felt like it was the right baseball decision to make. So, we talked to Mac today. He was really professional and my guess is somebody's going to claim him. And the only time we'll ever root against him is when we face him, because he's a great kid and he's a hard worker. As excited as you are to get Andrew back, you have that where you talk to a kid that you care about, it's hard. So, that's not the funnest way to start your day."

Q: What's the plan with Miller out of the chute?

Francona: "The first week to 10 days especially... He doesn't want to be on a schedule, because that's kind of what he was doing in the Minor Leagues. But, it's more important to pitch him now, so you might see him come in a game if we're losing, because we want to pitch him to get him built up and get him on a roll. So, you might see him pitch in some situations that may not typically be what he would pitch in."

Q: Did you talk to Miller about any frustrating aspects of his rehab assignment?

Francona: "I didn't really ask him about the frustrating part. I mean, I think we knew he needed to pitch and we kind of almost gave him a regular Spring Training. He had eight appearances. So, he should have a chance to come into a game and not feel naked. Now, we know he's not in mid-season form, but he'll get there and that'll be exciting when he does."

Q: Did you have to fight the temptation to bring Miller back faster than this?

Francona: "Well, that's why we waited as long as we did. And we still know we have some work to do, but we didn't rush him back by any means."

Q: Are you looking forward to being able to use your relievers the way you want to use them in terms of matching up?

Francona: "Yeah, it gets exciting. It gets exciting. Just having Andrew back is exciting and we know it might not be mid-season form yet, but he'll get there. You start thinking about shortening games, and some of those guys back at the end there can do that."

Q: You had a meeting with the players today. What was the message to the team?

Francona: "I had taken some notes over the trading deadline and now it's the first time where everybody's in the same room and that's going to be our team. I just wanted to tell them that this group, our goal is not to be good, it's to be special. That's really basically what it is. We have the ability to be special, we just have to go do it. ... It just seemed like a good day to do it."

Q: Jose Ramirez won the AL Player of the Month for July. It seems like more and more people are realizing just how good he is...

Francona: "I think every player knows for sure. He started the All-Star Game, so I don't think it's a surprise to anybody. And I don't think it'll be his last. I hope he gets August. He's a pretty special player and when you're that special, you start to get awards. He's going to accumulate a lot of them."

Q: We saw the update on Tyler Naquin (out 6–10 weeks after right hip surgery), but how tough of a blow is this after all the other injuries?

Francona: "But we knew, whether he had surgery or not, the timetable was going to be just about identical. So, that was I think why they elected to have surgery. So, when he does come back, he's not going to have to worry about this happening again. It actually made a lot of sense. And we could see him back this year. I don't think that's out of the question. And he seems to be in real good spirits."

Q: What changed in your recent Minor League rehab outings compared to some of the earlier ones?

Miller: "Just time. I think you've just kind of got to make every step. We had a nice plan in place. I feel like I've checked a lot of boxes. The next box is to go out there and have success in a big league game. Physically, I feel great. I feel like the time off was almost like a Spring Training coming back and things got progressively better, which is what you look for. The last couple outings were good. Back-to-back was a good test. I came out of it feeling good and throwing the ball well. I'm excited. I feel good. I'm going to try to slow everything down and go out and pitch well tonight."

Q: Were you focused on something specific rather than just the results?

Miller: "Part of it is a feel. But, just command. The last couple of times out I threw the ball where I needed to. I threw a lot of strikes. I was ahead of hitters and that's when I know I'm having success. Part of it's a feel thing. There's times when you go out and maybe don't feel very good, but everything kind of goes where it's supposed to. I think I'm past that. The results were kind of mirroring the way I felt. I felt I had checked those boxes and had success and had something positive to leave down there. And I'm excited to pitch in these games."

Q: The bullpen looks a little different than last time you were active. What's your mind-set now that you're joining a group that now has Brad Hand and Adam Cimber?

Miller: "I've watched every game. I've been around them when they're at home. I think we have a chance to be a strength of a really good team. Maybe we weren't as strong as we wanted to be at the start of the year. I don't think it was for lack of ability or effort or intention or anything. Things maybe didn't go our way, and everybody kind of kept grinding it out. But, between the new guys and the way guys have been throwing the ball lately, hopefully I come back and jump in and add to it. I think we have a chance to be a really important part of this team."

Q: How tough was it to sit back and watch the games?

Miller: "There's two sides to that coin. It's tough, especially when the bullpen's struggling. I want to do everything I can to be a part of that and help turn things around. But, at the same time, for the most part, we're winning a lot of games. So it's fun to watch that. It's fun to watch guys come in and have success. You mentioned the new guys. They've fit in pretty seamlessly. It hasn't been that horrible to watch. Personally, on any level it's not fun to sit out and not be able to contribute, but we have a good team. I think we're building in the right direction."

Q: Did you ever fight the urge to want to speed up the comeback?

Miller: "We put a plan in place between talking to Carl [Willis] and Atch [Scott Atchison] to Tito and the training staff and front office. I think everybody kind of put their heads together. Fortunately, we all had the same thoughts. There wasn't a lot of back-and-forth other than make sure we do it the right way and check a bunch of different boxes to make sure we feel like I'm ready to come back. And I feel like we did that."

Q: Was it better to take the long-view in this situation?

Miller: "Yeah, I don't want to miss any time, but I feel like the team has done pretty well and it's important for me to get back and pitch the way I'm capable of. I've pitched when I'm not 100 percent, and it was getting pretty hard. So, we wanted to make sure I came back strong, crisp and ready to go. Ideally, we have a lot more business to take care of. But, you want to be sharp at the end of the year, because this team has very high aspirations, and the goal is to win more than just the division in the regular season."

Q: Is there enough season left for you to get on a roll?

Miller: "I think as a reliever, things are a roller coaster some times. I'd love to come out and pitch great right out of the gate, and carry that all the way through to the last game of the season. I think there's certainly enough time to keep working. I told that to [Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti] and Tito, that I feel both physically and mechanically that I'm in a spot I really like, and I think both of those will get better."

Q: What'd you think of the Browns-themed jersey you had to wear with Lake County?

Miller: (laughs) "They were interesting. They're actually pretty comfortable. I sent a picture to Tony Amato, the clubhouse manager here, and he got a kick out of them. I won't respond with what I responded back to him, but certainly locals appreciated them."

Q: What are some of the challenges a player faces when on a Minor League rehab? The hitters at Class A are going to be taking a much different approach when they see Andrew Miller on the mound, compared to those in Triple-A...

Miller: "Yeah, part of it is the same game. You don't want to make excuses. I think the first five games, I threw to five different catchers. You get spoiled up here knowing Yan and Berto so well. Fortunately for me, I pitched one game in Akron and one in Lake County, but I was comfortable in Columbus. I think that level is pretty close to here, those guys are pretty good. I think I threw to [Eric] Haase maybe four times, and he's really good. That was kind of a treat for me. That helped me kind of settle in the last few innings and really accomplish what I was looking to accomplish, which was just pitching well."

"But, the lighting is different. You go in... I don't like being scripted and knowing when I'm going to pitch, and those games tend to be, 'Go out the sixth inning,' or, 'As soon as the starter's done, you got this.' Or even, 'You're pitching on Tuesday.' As a reliever, you like to be caught off guard, so I think there's a challenge to it and some guys are better than others. It's not something I don't hope to have to experience much more in my career."

"But, I think at the end of the day, I accomplished what I needed to and I'm thankful for all of those guys taking time and doing what they can to make me comfortable. But, it seemed like Columbus was the best place for me."

Indians activate Miller from DL, designate McAllister

The Associated Press The Associated Press Aug 3, 2018, 6:52 PM

CLEVELAND (AP) -- Andrew Miller has watched every game for two months. He's now ready to help the Cleveland Indians accomplish something special.

Miller was activated Friday after being out because of inflammation in his right knee. The left-hander, who was on the 60-day disabled list, has been sidelined since May 26. Miller also missed time earlier in the season with a strained left hamstring.

The Indians hold a comfortable lead in the AL Central, but the team has much bigger plans than reaching the postseason and needs Miller to be a dominant force again to get there.

"Ideally, we have a lot more business to take care of," he said before Friday's game against the Los Angeles Angels. "You want to be sharp at the end of the year because this team has very high aspirations, and the goal is to win more than just the division in the regular season."

Miller, a key part of Cleveland's bullpen since being acquired in 2016, is 1-3 with one save and a 4.40 ERA in 14 appearances. He pitched 10 scoreless innings to begin the season, but was on the DL from April 26-May 11 with the hamstring injury and struggled after returning.

"I don't want to miss any time but I feel like the team has done pretty well and it's important for me to get back and pitch the way I'm capable of," he said. "I've pitched when I'm not 100 percent, and it was getting pretty hard. So we wanted to make sure I came back strong, crisp and ready to go."

Cleveland's bullpen is 14th in the AL with a 4.98 ERA, but relievers Brad Hand and Adam Cimber were acquired from San Diego during the All-Star break. Miller's return will give manager Terry Francona another option along with Cody Allen.

"Just having Andrew back is exciting and we know it might not be midseason form yet, but he'll get there," Francona said. "You start thinking about shortening games and some of those guys back at the end there can do that."

Right-hander Zach McAllister, who was 1-2 with a 4.97 ERA in 41 appearances, was designated for assignment. He has spent parts of the last eight years with the Indians and is a free agent after the season.

Outfielder Tyler Naquin underwent right hip surgery on Thursday and is expected to resume baseball activities in 6 to 10 weeks. He batted .264 with three home runs and 23 RBIs in 61 games.

Angels 7, Indians 4: Four-run eighth carries Angels over Indians in series opener

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: A couple of perfectly placed hits blew open a late tie game and the Indians fell to the Los Angeles Angels 7-4 Friday night at Progressive Field.

The Indians (59-49) and Angels (55-56) entered the eighth in a 3-3 deadlock. Shohei Ohtani, who homered twice earlier in the game, singled to left off Indians reliever Oliver Perez and then stole second base to put the go-ahead run in scoring position.

Adam Cimber entered and intentionally walked Albert Pujols to put two runners on with one out. After Andrelton Simmons grounded out, David Fletcher hit a ball that sailed down the right-field line and landed in fair territory by a few feet before bouncing into the stands for a ground-rule double to give the Angels a 4-3 lead.

Jose Briceno then singled on a dribbler to third baseman Jose Ramirez, who had to charge in for the softly hit grounder but couldn't convert the out, allowing another run to score.

Eric Young Jr. followed with the haymaker, driving a double off the center-field wall to score two more and put the Angels up 7-3.

The flare down the line, the dribbler to third and the liner off the wall in center were enough to down the Indians, who failed to answer the Angels' four-run rally.

The Angels held a 2-0 lead three batters into the first inning, and the Indians matched that in the bottom half of the inning.

Kole Calhoun opened the game with a dribbler of a single down the third-base line to beat the shift. Two batters later, Ohtani drilled a two-run home run to left field off Indians starter Mike Clevinger.

But the Indians quickly erased that lead against Angels starter Jaime Barria. Francisco Lindor opened the first with a walk and scored on a double to center field by Michael Brantley. Ramirez followed with a single to right field to score Brantley and tie it 2-2.

In the second, Yan Gomes doubled and scored on a single to right by Leonys Martin, playing in his first home game as a member of the Indians after a pre-deadline trade with the Detroit Tigers.

Martin later ripped a solo home run down the right-field line with two outs in the ninth.

Ohtani — perhaps the game's most talked-about player this past offseason — wasn't done putting on a show. In the third, Clevinger mislocated a fastball and Ohtani belted it for a 443-foot solo home run to right field for the first multi-homer game of his MLB career. He also recorded his first four-hit game, acting as the offensive catalyst for the Angels all night.

Gomes exited the game before the bottom of the fourth inning. According to the club, Gomes left the game as a precautionary reason because of posterior right knee discomfort.

Friday night marked the return of ace reliever Andrew Miller, who was activated off the 60-day disabled list before the game. Miller relieved Clevinger in the seventh inning and worked a scoreless inning, allowing only a walk to Jose Briceno to go with a strikeout. It was Miller's first time on a major-league mound in a game since May 25.

Clevinger gave up three runs — all on Ohtani home runs — on five hits to go with six strikeouts. After the second Ohtani blast, Clevinger settled down and retired 11 of the last 12 batters he faced.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 08.04.2018

Indians notebook: Manager Terry Francona delivers message to team about lofty goals; Andrew Miller returns, Zach McAllister designated; Tyler Naquin undergoes surgery

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: The Indians were one play, or hit, or pitch, or lucky break away from winning the 2016 World Series before it ended in heart-crushing fashion.

Since that night — when the Indians walked into a quiet, disappointed clubhouse and Cody Allen was so fired up he wanted to fly straight to Arizona and start spring training that very morning — the goals relating to anything Indians baseball have been nothing short of securing that final piece to the puzzle and winning a World Series.

Anything less is a disappointment.

As the nonwaiver trade deadline passed, and with Andrew Miller returning to the club on Friday, manager Terry Francona collected some thoughts and wanted to address the team now that there should be an added measure of roster stability. So, before Friday's game against the Los Angeles Angels, he called a brief team meeting.

"I just wanted to tell them that [with] this group, our goal is not to be good — it's to be special," Francona said. "That's really basically what it is. We have the ability to be special. We just have to go do it. I was just thinking about it over the deadline and then we had a noon game and things were kind of fast and then Andrew's back today. It just seemed like a good day to do it."

Miller returned Friday from the 60-day disabled list. He had been sidelined since May 26 with right knee inflammation, and his return marked the end of an extended rehab in which he and the team took a cautious approach with his recovery.

"We had a nice plan in place. I feel like I've checked a lot of boxes," Miller said. "Next box is to go out there and have success in a big-league game. Physically, I feel great. I feel like the time off was almost like a spring training coming back and things got progressively better, which is what you look for."

With Miller's return, the back end of the Indians' bullpen is at full strength for the first time since the pre-deadline acquisitions of All-Star reliever Brad Hand and right-handed reliever Adam Cimber from the San Diego Padres.

"I think we have a chance to be a strength of a really good team," Miller said. "Maybe we weren't as strong as we wanted to be at the start of the year. I don't think it was for lack of ability or effort or intention or anything. Things maybe didn't go our way, and everybody kept grinding it out.

"But between the new guys and the way guys have been throwing the ball lately, hopefully I come back and jump in and add to it."

For the next seven to 10 days, Miller could be used in a wide variety of situations in order to get him some regular work.

"He doesn't want to be on a schedule because that's kind of what he was doing in the minor leagues," Francona said. "But it's more important to pitch him now, so you might see him come in a game if we're losing because we want to pitch him to get him built up and get him on a roll. So you might see him pitch in some situations that may not typically be what he would pitch in."

To make room for Miller on the active roster, the Indians designated Zach McAllister for assignment on Friday. McAllister struggled with a 4.97 ERA and 4.52 FIP in 41⅓ innings this season. In eight seasons with the Indians, he compiled a 3.99 ERA with an 8.2 K/9.

With the Indians' bullpen stabilized by newcomers Neil Ramirez and Oliver Perez, combined with the trade of Hand and Cimber and now the return of Miller, McAllister was pushed out.

"It was a hard decision, and we didn't really want to lose anybody, but we just felt like it was the right baseball decision to make," Francona said. "So, we talked to Mac today. He was really professional and my guess is somebody's going to claim him and the only time we'll ever root against him is when we face him, because he's a great kid and he's a hard worker."

Tyler Naquin surgery

Outfielder Tyler Naquin underwent surgery on Thursday at the Cleveland Clinic to stabilize a stress reaction in his right hip area. Three screws were inserted into the neck of Naquin's right femur during the surgery performed by Dr. James Rosneck.

Naquin's timetable to return to full baseball activity is six to 10 weeks.

"Whether he had surgery or not, the timetable was going to be just about identical, so that was I think why they elected to have surgery," Francona said. "So, when he does come back, he's not going to have to worry about this happening again. So it actually made a lot of sense.

"And we could see him back this year. I don't think that's out of the question."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 08.04.2018

Cleveland Indians activate Andrew Miller from DL, designate RHP Zach McAllister for assignment

By Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Manager Terry Francona finally has a full complement of bullpen pieces at his disposal for the Cleveland Indians.

Lefty relief pitcher Andrew Miller was activated from the 60-day disabled list Friday ahead of the Tribe's series opener against the Los Angeles Angels at Progressive Field.

With the additions of Brad Hand and Adam Cimber to the bullpen via trade, and the emergence of Oliver Perez and Neil Ramirez to go along with Cody Allen, Francona now has the ability to attack opposing lineups late in games and maximize his starting rotation.

"Yeah, it gets exciting," Francona said. "You start thinking about shortening games and some of those guys back at the end there can do that."

In a corresponding move, reliever Zach McAllister was designated for assignment by the club. McAllister, who joined the organization in 2010 from the New York Yankees in a trade for Austin Kearns, was one of the longest-tenured players on the roster.

"It was a hard decision and we didn't really want to lose anybody, but we just felt like it was the right baseball decision to make," Francona said.

The club has seven days to trade, release or place McAllister on waivers. Francona said he believes another team will claim the 30-year-old righty.

"The only time we'll ever root against him is when we face him, because he's a great kid and he's a hard worker," Francona said.

Miller began his second stint on the DL on May 26 after experiencing right knee inflammation. He's missed 72 games this season, also spending time on the DL in late April with a left hamstring issue.

"We wanted to make sure I came back strong, crisp and ready to go," Miller said. "Ideally, we have a lot more business to take care of, but you want to be sharp at the end of the year because this team has very high aspirations, and the goal is to win more than just the division in the regular season."

Francona said during the first week to 10 days of his return Miller could pitch in a variety of game situations where he normally would not appear.

"It's more important to pitch him now, so you might see him come in a game if we're losing because we want to pitch him to get him built up and get him on a roll," Francona said. "He had (seven) appearances. So, he should have a chance to come into a game and not feel naked. Now, we know he's not in midseason form, but he'll get there and that'll be exciting when he does."

Miller appeared in rehab games beginning on July 17 at Single-A Lake County, AA Akron and AAA Columbus, posting an ERA of 1.93 in 5 outings with the Columbus Clippers (1ER/4.2IP). For the year with Cleveland he is 1-3 with a 4.40 ERA in 17 relief appearances (14.1IP, 13H, 7ER, 23K).

"We had a nice plan in place," Miller said. "I feel like I've checked a lot of boxes. Next box is to go out there and have success in a big league game."

McAllister was 1-2 with a 4.97 earned run average in 41 appearances with the Indians this season. In 41 2/3 innings, he struck out 34 batters and walked 10. He allowed seven home runs and opposing batters hit .320 against him on batted balls in play. Left-handed hitters did particular damage against him, hitting .329 with a .908 OPS.

In eight major league seasons with the Tribe, McAllister compiled a 29-35 mark with a 3.99 ERA in 277 outings. He ranks 28th all-time in relief appearances for the franchise.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.04.2018

Cleveland Indians fall to Los Angeles Angels, 7-4, as Shohei Ohtani homers twice

By Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- On a night when Cleveland Indians pitchers dominated just about every hitter in the Los Angeles lineup not named Shohei Ohtani, the Angels still managed to leave Progressive Field with a 7-4 victory.

Ohtani homered twice early and scored the go-ahead run in the eighth inning on David Fletcher's ground-rule double against Adam Cimber and Cleveland's revamped bullpen.

Oliver Perez (0-1, 1.62 ERA) suffered his first loss as Tribe relievers failed to keep the game tied at 3. Ohtani greeted Perez with a flare single to left with one out and came around to score on Fletcher's two-out double off Cimber just inside the right field line.

An RBI infield single by Jose Briceno and a two-run double by Eric Young Jr. pushed the Los Angeles advantage to four before Cleveland's Dan Otero got Justin Upton to pop out and end the inning.

"We had kinda what we wanted," Manager Terry Francona said. "With Cimber, I thought he deserved better. The ball hits the right field chalk line. A swinging bunt, mix in a couple intentional walks to get the right matchups and it ended up being a big inning. That obviously hurt our chances."

Leonys Martin, making his home debut after being acquired at Tuesday's trade deadline from Detroit, delivered a two-out solo home run in the ninth against L.A.'s Blake Parker to trim the Angels' lead to three.

Ohtani entered the game batting .556 (5-for-9) with two home runs and five RBI in his first two career games against Cleveland. He doubled his home run output in his first two plate appearances against Indians starter Mike Clevinger, driving an 0-1 pitch to the bleachers in left for a two-run shot in the first and tying the game at 3-3 in the third with a monster 443-foot solo shot to right center.

It was Ohtani's first multi-homer game, and the first two road home runs of his career. He added a base hit in the ninth for his fourth hit of the game, a single-game high.

Clevinger took a no-decision, scattering five L.A. hits and striking out six across six innings. He threw 30 pitches in the first inning, but settled in after Ohtani's second homer, setting down 11 of the last 12 batters he faced.

"I held it together," Clevinger said. "It seems to have become a trend in my last couple starts. One sequence, or a couple sequences in this matter, kind of ruin my day."

It was Clevinger's 13th quality start of the season and second career start without issuing a walk. Francona said Clevinger was solid against every hitter besides Ohtani.

"He made two pitches and mis-located both of them and he paid for it," Francona said. "He was really pretty good."

Francisco Lindor walked and scored on an RBI double by Michael Brantley in the bottom of the first against Angels starter Jaime Barria. It was Lindor's 93rd run of the season, leading all of baseball and putting him on pace to score 140. That would tie Earl Averill's franchise record set in 1931.

Jose Ramirez, who was named American League Player of the Month for July earlier this week, singled to right field, driving in Brantley and tying the score at 2-2.

Cleveland took a brief 3-2 lead in the second when Yan Gomes doubled and scored on an RBI single by Martin. It was Martin's first RBI since joining the club Wednesday in Minnesota.

Gomes would leave the game in the fourth with posterior right knee discomfort, according to the team. He was replaced by Roberto Perez behind the plate.

Welcome back

Reliever Andrew Miller, activated from the 60-day disabled list earlier in the day, pitched a scoreless seventh, making his first appearance since May 26. Miller retired pinch hitter Jefry Marte on a grounder to third before walking pinch hitter Briceno. After striking out Young, Miller got Kole Calhoun to fly out to right field.

"It was nice to get out there and get one under my belt," Miller said. "I wasn't near as crisp as I was the last couple of outings. It's probably expected. It's a process. It will come. But it was nice to have a scoreless inning and be back with these guys and hopefully contribute."

What it means

Los Angeles has won three of four meetings with the Indians this season. The Angels snapped a 10-game losing streak at Progressive Field dating back to August of 2015.

The pitches

Barria threw 92 pitches, 55 (60 percent) for strikes. Clevinger threw 97 pitches, 71 (73 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Angels drew a sellout crowd of 35,242 to Progressive Field. First pitch was at 7:10 p.m. with a temperature of 82 degrees. It marks the sixth sellout this season, the third on a Friday night. The club announced that a few thousand tickets remain available for Saturday and Sunday games.

Next

The series continues Saturday as Corey Kluber (13-6, 2.79 ERA) takes the mound against Angels starter Felix Pena (1-2, 5.23). Kluber is 2-2 with a 3.99 ERA in six career starts against L.A., including a 1-0 mark at Progressive Field.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.04.2018

RubberDucks Tyler Krieger's streak ends, then begins: Indians minor leagues

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The streak has ended, but long live the streak. Utility man Tyler Krieger, a fourth round draft pick in 2015, saw his 24-game hitting streak for the Akron RubberDucks come to an end this past Wednesday with an 0-for-5 night.

But he got another streak started the next night as he went 1-for-4. While Krieger, 24, is only hitting .268 on the season, his last 10 games, including the 0-for-5, he is hitting a blistering .372, going 16-for-43 into the weekend with eight RBI.

Gold glove: For the RubberDucks, that honor likely goes to second-baseman Mark Mathias, 24. Drafted in the third round out of Cal-Poly in 2015, the 6-foot, 200-pound infielder is the No. 1 defensive second-baseman in the Eastern League this season. Mathias has only committed three errors in his 81 games for the Ducks this season, offsetting a tough season at the plate, where he is hitting .218. Still, he does have 18 doubles, three triples, six homers and 34 RBI on his ledger.

Speed to burn: Andrew Calica, 24, has been a pest to the opposition on the base paths this season in Akron. The outfielder out of UC-Santa Barbara, drafted in the 11th round in 2016, went into the weekend No. 3 in the Eastern League in stolen bases with 24. He's been caught stealing only four times while hitting a very solid .282 on the season. He also has five home runs and 48 walks to his credit, but just 16 doubles in 90 games played.

Columbus Clippers: With the Major League trade deadline now past, here are some updated roster moves for the Columbus Clippers. They have added Oscar Mercado (St. Louis), Greg Allen (Cleveland), Dom DeMasi (Akron), Bobby Bradley (Akron) and Henry Martinez (Akron). The most interesting addition in that group is Bradley, a power-hitting first-baseman along the lines of former Clipper Jesus Aguilar, now an All-Star with the Milwaukee Brewers.

Pitching keeps Lake County playoff hopes alive: Indians minor leagues

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Lake County Captains (46-63) are well under .500 for the season, but showing marked signs of improvement as July marked the first month the team has had a winning record in 2018.

No doubt pitching was the key, as hurlers for the Captains combined for an impressive 3.21 ERA and the team finished 14-13, still in the Midwest League second-half playoff hunt.

That team ERA for the Captains pitchers in July was more than one run better than May (4.72 ERA) and June (4.35 ERA) and topped the previous best month of April (3.75 ERA). But Francisco Perez (8-7, 3.85 ERA) is the only pitcher for LCC who has started 20 or more games this season who has a winning record.

Sawdust: While the Captains had a winning record in July, the team heads into the first weekend of August losers in five of their last six games, as the collective bats have gone somewhat silent.

Even as Lake County leads the Midwest League in home runs, and has two players tied for the league lead with 16 each (Nolan Jones, Will Benson) the team is still 13th in the league in runs scored with 437.

Mr. Consistent: LCC outfielder Oscar Gonzalez sits at the top of the team charts in hitting at .281. There is currently no .300 hitter on the roster who has played more than 10 games. Gonzalez has been the most consistent hitter for the team from the beginning. The undrafted free agent, signed in 2014 out of the Dominican Republic, has 112 hits on the season vs. 11 walks and 94 strikeouts.

Lynchburg Hillcats: Shortstop continues to be a strong position for the Indians throughout the minor leagues, and Lynchburg's Ernie Clement is no exception. Since moving up from Lake County 31 games ago, Clement, a fourth round draft choice from Virginia in 2017, is hitting a robust .341 with six doubles, a home run and 12 RBI. He also has an impressive 15 walks vs. six strikeouts.

Shohei Ohtani homers twice as Angels top Indians, 7-4

By Steve Herrick, The Associated Press

Shohei Ohtani, who sometimes wows opponents with his pitching, put on a display with his bat.

Ohtani hit two home runs in a game for the first time in the major leagues, had a career-high four hits and the Angels defeated the Indians, 7-4.

Ohtani, who also hit his first career homer on the road, singled in the eighth, stole second and scored the go-ahead run on David Fletcher's double. The Japanese two-way star was understandably pleased with his performance.

"Not just home run-wise, but hitting-wise in general," Ohtani said through a translator. "I was hitting a lot better at home, so it feels good to get that one out of the way too, obviously."

Ohtani, starting for the first time since Tuesday, took a 5-for-37 slump into the game. He hit a two-run homer in the first and a solo home run in the third off Mike Clevinger.

Clevinger thought both pitches were poorly executed, but gave credit to the left-handed hitter. The first home run carried into the left field bleachers, clearing the 19-foot wall. Ohtani launched a 3-2 pitch an estimated 443 feet to right for his second homer.

"He's got tremendous power," Clevinger said. "The first one was inside and he still put it out the other way. That's pretty impressive on his part. The second one, he obviously got all of it."

"That's what Shohei can do. That's his talent," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "He was running the bases, obviously driving the ball, and that's a great pickup game for us."

The Angels won at Progressive Field for the first time since June 17, 2014, breaking a 10-game skid. Los Angeles also snapped a four-game losing streak overall.

Ohtani has 11 home runs in his rookie season. He's homered four times and is batting .643 (9 for 14) against the Indians in four games. Ohtani was sidelined from June 7-July 2 with a sprained ligament in his right elbow.

"Whether if I'm in a slump or I'm hitting well, I'm constantly making adjustments with my swing," he said.

Angels star Mike Trout missed his second straight game because of a bruised right wrist but hopes to return Saturday.

Justin Anderson (3-2) pitched the seventh and the Angels' bullpen held the Indians to one run over the final four innings.

Andrew Miller, making his first appearance since May 26, struck out one and walked a batter in a scoreless seventh. The left-hander was activated from the disabled list after missing two months with right knee inflammation.

Miller's return was overshadowed by continued problems for Cleveland's bullpen, which allowed four runs in the eighth to break a 3-all tie.

Ohtani started the rally with a one-out single off Oliver Perez (0-1). He stole second and Albert Pujols was intentionally walked with a 3-0 count.

Andrelton Simmons hit into a force play, but Fletcher's flyball landed near the right field line and bounced into the stands for a ground-rule double.

Jose Brienco's infield hit off Adam Cimber scored a run and Eric Young Jr. added a two-run double.

Michael Brantley's RBI double and Jose Ramirez's run-scoring single tied the game in the first. Leonys Martin, playing his first home game since being acquired from Detroit at the trade deadline, homered and had two RBIs.

Angels starter Jaime Barria allowed three runs in five innings. Clevinger, who hasn't won since July 1, gave up three runs in six innings. Yan Gomes doubled with one out in the second and scored on Martin's single. Gomes left the game in the fourth with right knee discomfort. Manager Terry Francona said Gomes was undergoing tests by the medical staff following the game.

Trout, who was injured sliding into third base Wednesday, thinks his wrist is improving.

"It feels a lot better than yesterday with all the treatment and stuff, so that's a positive," he said before Friday's game.

Trout would prefer not to DH if he does play.

"I want to play center," he said. "If I come in tomorrow and it feels good, that's where I'm going to play."

The Indians led Minnesota by 10 games in the AL Central going into the game. Francona held a meeting with his players to reinforce the idea the team has bigger goals.

"I just wanted to tell them that this group, our goal is not to be good, it's to be special," he said. "That's really basically what it is. We have the ability to be special. We just have to go do it."

Indians: OF Tyler Naquin underwent right hip surgery Thursday and is expected to resume baseball activities in 6 to 10 weeks.

RHP Corey Kluber (13-6, 2.79 ERA) will start Saturday after allowing one run in 7 1/3 innings against Detroit in his last start. RHP Felix Pena (1-2, 5.23) retired one batter — the shortest outing of his career — and allowed seven earned runs against Seattle on Sunday.

Miller's return more consequential than loss | Opinion
By Nate Barnes, The News-Herald

Andrew Miller's activation from the 60-day disabled list in the afternoon prior to the Indians' game against the Angels on Aug. 3 signified the completion of the team's rebuilt bullpen.

General Manager Chris Antonetti did his part July 19 when he traded top prospect Francisco Mejia to the Padres in return for All-Star left-hander Brad Hand and side-armor Adam Cimber.

When Miller returned Aug. 3 from right knee inflammation, the Indians' bullpen was whole again.

Hours later, the Indians fell to the Angels, 7-4. Despite the restoration of Manager Terry Francona's bullpen arsenal, the culprit was familiar. Oliver Perez and Cimber combined to record two outs and yield four runs to the Angels. The visitors sent 10 men to the plate in an eighth inning that put a tie game out of the Indians' reach.

Yet as the Indians' lost their 49th game, the significance contained within their 108th contest of the season will pay dividends over the year's final third.

Miller's first major-league action since May 25 delivered a scoreless inning of relief and, more importantly, a beginning to his return to star form by the start of the postseason. Miller walked a man, threw a wild pitch and struck a batter out in the seventh inning Aug. 3.

He threw 16 pitches — nine sliders and seven fastballs. His velocity maxed at 92.9 mph, a shade lower than the 94 mph he averaged on his fastball last season.

Miller isn't back to full form yet, but innings at the major-league level will serve him and the Indians more than any further rehab assignments against minor-league hitters.

"It was nice to get out there and get one under my belt," Miller said. "I didn't think I was near as crisp as I was the last couple outings — I guess that's probably expected. I think it's a process. It was nice having a scoreless inning and to be back for these guys."

Francona employed Miller, whose usage he optimizes by matchups and leverage, against the bottom third of the Angels' lineup. Manager Mike Scioscia pinch-hit for left-handed Francisco Arcia and switch-hitter Kaleb Cowart, so Miller faced right-handed Jefry Marte, right-handed Jose Briceno, switch-hitter Eric Young Jr. and left-handed Kole Calhoun.

Marte bounced out to third, Briceno walked and took second on a wild pitch, Young Jr. struck out and Calhoun popped out to right.

"He got through the inning, which is good," Francona said. "I don't think it was his best stuff, I'm sure he'd say that, but it was nice to get him out there in a major-league game. The more we pitch him, the better he's going to get."

Miller's inning provided a jolt to the sellout crowd of 35,242. His strikeout of Young Jr. drew a roar, and he gained another round of applause when Calhoun flew out.

If all goes according to plan, Miller's return Aug. 3 marks a meaningful addition to a bullpen the Indians hope to employ deep into October and, maybe, November.

Hot Rods rout Captains, sweep series

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

Captains manager Luke Carlin wasn't around at the end of the game Aug. 3 between the Captains and Bowling Green (Ky.) Hot Rods at Classic Park.

Carlin was ejected by home plate umpire Jen Pawol in the top of the fourth inning for arguing a safe call at home plate.

It was probably just as well.

The Hot Rods breezed to an 8-4 victory in front of 5,809 paying customers, putting the cap on a three-game sweep that was as emphatic as you'll see.

In the three games, the visitors from the Bluegrass State had decided advantages in runs (29-9), hits (44-23) and home runs (6-3). They were 16-for-44 (.364) with runners in scoring position, compared to 2-for-15 (.133) for the Captains.

Bowling Green pitchers held up their end of the bargain as well. The three starting pitchers all earned victories.

On Aug. 3, Tobias Myers (10-5, 3.75 ERA) limited the Captains to three runs on five hits. In the three games, Bowling Green starters averaged six innings, six hits and two runs allowed.

The one-sided track of the series represented the Hot Rods' continuing domination of the Captains this season. They've won 13 of 16 games, with four games yet to be played later this month in Bowling Green.

Not that it would have lessened the pain the Captains felt after being swept at home, but the Hot Rods have been in high gear all season. They won the first-half title in the Midwest League's Eastern Division with a 47-22 mark. With the sweep of the Captains, they improved to 25-16 in the second half and 72-38 overall.

The Captains, meanwhile, slipped to 17-23 in the second half and 46-64 overall.

Their best starting pitcher, Francisco Perez (8-8, 4.03 ERA), never found a groove. He surrendered seven runs, four earned, on eight hits in four innings. It certainly didn't help that the Captains committed five errors behind him. Perez hurt his own cause by balking in a run.

The Captains will be in Michigan on Aug. 4 for the opener of a three-game series against the Great lakes Loons.

Captains will host 2021 Midwest League All-Star Game

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

Midwest League president Richard Nussbaum announced Aug. 2 that the Lake County Captains will host the 2021 MWL All-Star Game.

The game, featuring teams from the Eastern and Western divisions, will be played at Classic Park in Eastlake in June 2021 on dates to be determined. In addition to the game, the event includes a home run derby.

"We're excited for our turn to host the All-Star Game," Captains general manager Neil Stein said. "We'll make it a fun and memorable event for the community."

The 2018 MWL All-Star Game was played on June 19 at Cooley Law School Stadium in Michigan, home of the Lansing Lugnuts.

"Having this game at Classic Park will be good for city and good for the Captains," Eastlake Mayor Dennis Morley said.

The City of Eastlake owns Classic Park, which opened in April 2003.

In June 2006, the city and Captains hosted the 2006 South Atlantic League All-Star Game. The Captains left the South Atlantic League in 2010 to join the Midwest League.

Angels outfielder Mike Trout confident he will return to lineup on Saturday

By MIKE DIGIOVANNA

Angels outfielder Mike Trout confident he will return to lineup on Saturday

A sore right wrist kept Mike Trout out of the lineup for a second straight game, but the center fielder is confident he will return Saturday night against the Indians.

"It's a lot better than it was [on Thursday]," Trout said. "I'm pretty sure I can play [Saturday]."

Trout suffered the injury on an awkward feet-first slide into third base in the first inning of Wednesday night's 4-2 loss at Tampa Bay, jamming his right hand into the ground as he tried to avoid a tag on a stolen-base attempt by sliding to the inside of the bag.

An X-ray and MRI test revealed inflammation but no damaged bones or ligaments. Trout, who is batting .309 with a 1.083 on-base-plus-slugging percentage, 30 homers and 60 RBIs, received two days of treatment. He said he did not plan to pick up a bat or try to throw on Friday.

"He's much better than he was [Thursday] but still not at a point where he can go out and start a game," manager Mike Scioscia said. "We'll see if he's available later ... but we want to err on the side of caution. When he feels he can do things with no restrictions, we'll get him in there."

In Trout's absence, Scioscia moved Justin Upton to the second spot for the first time this season. Upton has hit third 82 times and cleanup 25 times.

Scioscia said the reason for the switch was to break up the two left-handed hitters at the top of the order, leadoff man Kole Calhoun and No. 3 hitter Shohei Ohtani, to counter Cleveland's three left-handed relievers, Brad Hand, Andrew Miller and Oliver Perez.

Miller, who was dominant during the Indians' 2016 World Series run, was activated Friday after missing more than two months because of right-knee inflammation. Hand was acquired from the San Diego Padres on July 19.

Scioscia did not rule out the possibility of keeping Upton in the second spot when Trout returns. Entering Friday, Upton had hit .355 (22 for 62) with a 1.049 OPS, four home runs and 13 RBIs in 17 games since July 12, but before that stretch, he hit one homer in 20 games. He was hitting .186 (21 for 113) with runners in scoring position on the season.

"Sometimes inspiration comes from necessity, so we'll see," Scioscia said. "There's no doubt he's getting on base better, squaring balls up better. He's having good at-bats, drawing walks. The only thing in the last month is he hasn't hit the ball out of the park as much."

Ohtani has extended his long-toss program to about 105 feet but still appears several weeks away from returning from a Grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament to pitch, an injury the right-hander suffered in early June.

"There have been no setbacks ... but we'll get an idea of exactly how he's feeling in a couple of weeks, when he gets out to 180-200 feet," Scioscia said. "Then we'll see when the next step might come."

Ohtani, who hit a two-run home run in the first inning and a solo shot in the third Friday night, is also a focal point at the National Sports Collection Convention in Cleveland this weekend. On display is a unique Ohtani rookie card, signed by the slugger, that is expected to fetch about \$100,000 at auction in September.

Outfielder Chris Young, who was placed on the DL because of a left-hamstring strain on July 4, was diagnosed with labrum tears in both hips and is out for the season. He underwent surgery to address his right hip on Friday and will have surgery on his left hip at a later date. Young hit .168 with a .615 OPS, six homers and 13 RBIs in 56 games with the Angels. ... With his next walk, Trout will reach 100 walks, 25 homers and 20 stolen bases for the third time in his career (2013, 2016). Toby Harrah (1977) and Carl Yastrzemski (1970) are the only other American League players to accomplish the feat.

Mike Trout misses 2nd straight Angels game with sore wrist, hopes to play Saturday

By JEFF FLETCHER | jffletcher@scng.com | Orange County Register

CLEVELAND — A jammed right wrist kept Mike Trout out of the Angels lineup for a second straight day on Friday, but he is expecting to be back on Saturday.

"I'm pretty sure I'm going to be able to play tomorrow," Trout said before Friday's game. "It feels a lot better than yesterday."

Trout was hurt when his hand hit the ground on a feet-first slide into third on Wednesday against Tampa Bay. He was the designated hitter that night and remained in the game, but he said he felt some enough discomfort to keep him out of the lineup on Thursday.

Trout said he might be able to pinch-hit later in Friday's game. Thursday's game was the first one all season that he didn't play. He had been bothered by a sore finger in June, but he was still able to DH.

Trout's absence left the Angels with a new look at the top of the lineup. Justin Upton was moved to the No. 2 spot, followed by Shohei Ohtani's debut in the No. 3 spot.

Manager Mike Scioscia said putting Upton in front of Ohtani was done mostly because he wanted to split up the left-handed hitting Kole Calhoun and Ohtani. The Indians have three left-handed relievers – Brad Hand, Andrew Miller and Oliver Pérez – and Scioscia didn't want to have his two best left-handed hitters hitting consecutively.

However, Scioscia allowed for the possibility that moving Upton to No. 2 might be something they consider going forward.

"That's not the reason (for this switch), but you know sometimes inspiration comes from necessity," Scioscia said. "We'll see."

Upton has hit .357 with a 1.018 OPS in his last 15 games. He's had a season-long issue hitting with runners in scoring position, though, batting .186 in those situations.

SURGERY FOR YOUNG

Chris Young, who has been on the disabled list for a month with a hamstring injury, was diagnosed with labral tears in both hips, requiring a pair of surgeries.

Young underwent the repair on his right hip on Friday, and the surgery on his left hip will be scheduled.

Young, 34, hit .168 with a .615 OPS in 56 games with the Angels.

ALSO

Ohtani is still playing catch at a distance of about 90 to 105 feet, Scioscia said. Ohtani could still be a couple weeks away from getting on a mound for a bullpen session. ...

With the National Sports Collectors Convention ongoing in Cleveland this weekend, a representative from Bowman trading came by the ballpark with a unique autographed Ohtani card that will be auctioned in September. The card is expected to sell for about \$100,000.

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Angels' Shohei Ohtani rocks Cleveland with two homers in 7-4 win

By MIKE DIGIOVANNA

Shohei Ohtani spent a chunk of Friday afternoon in the visiting clubhouse at Progressive Field playing Super Smash Bros., the Nintendo crossover fighting video game, with teammate David Fletcher.

The Angels slugger had so much fun he turned Friday night's 7-4 victory over the Cleveland Indians into his own personal video game, smashing two home runs, one of them a prodigious 443-foot blast, and sparking a tie-breaking, four-run eighth-inning rally with a single and a stolen base.

Ohtani's power and speed, along with some clutch hits by Fletcher, Jose Briceno and Eric Young Jr., and some solid pitching, gave the Angels their first win in Progressive Field in almost four years. The Angels had lost 10 straight games here, their last win coming on Sept. 8, 2014.

"That's what Shohei can do, that's his talent," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He was dynamic in a lot of areas — running the bases, driving the ball. That was a great pick-up game for us after a rough series."

The Angels had lost four straight, including a three-game sweep at Tampa Bay, and pitching for the Indians Friday night was Mike Clevinger, the long-haired, hard-throwing right-hander who had a 3-0 record and 2.95 ERA in four career starts against the team that drafted him and traded him to Cleveland in 2014.

The left-handed-hitting Ohtani found Clevinger's fastball to his liking. He drove a low-and-inside 96-mph offering over the 19-foot-high left-field wall for a two-run homer in the first inning, a 374-foot poke that was Ohtani's first road homer and first opposite-field homer of the season.

Then in the third inning, Ohtani, who had a career-high four hits, obliterated a 94-mph, full-count fastball, blasting his 443-foot shot with an exit velocity of 111 mph to deep right-center field to tie the score 3-3.

"You have to watch him, man," shortstop Andrelton Simmons said. "I've played against Giancarlo Stanton. I play with Mike Trout. I played with Evan Gattis.

"I've played with guys who can do some special stuff, and whenever they're hitting, you don't want to miss their at-bats because they can do something special. When he hit that ball to right field, it was loud and far."

Ohtani's second homer made jaws drop in the Angels dugout, and Scioscia said it was "one of the longest we've seen here." But the manager thought Ohtani's first homer was even more impressive because it's so tough for a left-handed hitter to home run to left field here.

"It's tough to get it out to that part of the park," Scioscia said. "It's almost like a Green Monster out there, but it's normal distance, it's not short like Fenway. You have to hit it hard to get it out of that part of the park, and he hit it like a right-handed pull hitter."

Angels starter Jaime Barria gave up two runs in the first three innings but blanked the Indians from the third through fifth innings. Clean innings by relievers Jose Alvarez (sixth) and Justin Anderson (seventh) kept the score tied.

With one out in the eighth, Ohtani, who entered with a .170 average (nine for 53) and 22 strikeouts against left-handers, fought off a 90-mph inside fastball from left-hander Oliver Perez and stroked a single to left.

Submarine-throwing right-hander Adam Cimber replaced Perez. Ohtani got a green light from third-base coach Super Smash Bros and stole second. Albert Pujols was intentionally walked. Simmons grounded into a fielder's choice.

Fletcher fell behind in the count but was able to slice a 1-and-2 slider down the right-field line for an RBI ground-rule double and a 4-3 lead.

"I guess the more pitches you see against a guy like that, the better," Fletcher said. "I got to see quite a bit of him, and he finally left one out over the plate."

Luis Valbuena was intentionally walked to load the bases. Briceno beat out a slow roller to third for an RBI infield single and a 5-3 lead. Young banged a two-run double off the right-center field wall to make it 7-3.

Ohtani's stolen base changed the complexion of the inning. With him at first, the Indians would have pitched to Pujols, who is good in the clutch and a double-play threat.

"Shohei being aggressive ... it set the table for a bigger inning, which we needed," Scioscia said.

Cam Bedrosian retired the side in order in the eighth. Blake Parker gave up a solo homer to Leonys Martin before closing out the ninth.

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