



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Angels relievers lose no-hit bid in the 8th, but hang on to beat Rangers**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Before the Angels' latest bullpen game on Tuesday night, Mike Scioscia was asked about handling such games and he cut off the question.

"They're not by design," he said. "I wish we had Garrett Richards or Tyler Skaggs or Nick Tropeano or JC Ramírez."

Without those injured starters, the Angels still ended up with something pretty good.

Eight Angels relievers combined on a two-hitter in a 1-0 victory over the Texas Rangers, with the only run coming on José Fernández's first career homer.

For as much as Scioscia would prefer to have one of his true starters, the relievers see a game like this as an opportunity.

"The past couple years we've been kind of under the radar as far as bullpens, but we always had confidence in ourselves," Blake Parker said. "We chomp at the bit when we get a bullpen day. We take pride in that, and going out and putting up zeros."

The first six pitchers did just that, holding the Rangers hitless. While some — including Scioscia — said they had no idea there was a no-hitter in progress, Parker admitted he knew when he entered in the eighth.

"As much as it's something you don't want to be focused on, it's always in the back of your head," Parker said.

One out into the eighth, Parker gave up a single to Isiah Kiner-Falefa.

Before that, the relievers had retired 13 in a row. Jim Johnson, who got the call to start his first game since his major league debut in July 2006, walked two of the six batters he faced. Noé Ramírez then got the next five outs, with a walk.

After that, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian, Justin Anderson and José Álvarez each worked perfect innings.

Parker gave up the one-out single to Kiner-Falefa and then a two-out single to Rougned Odor, putting runners at the corners. Ty Buttrey was summoned, and he retired Jurrickson Profar with the help of a nice backhand from third baseman Kaleb Cowart.

Andrelton Simmons made an outstanding play on a ground ball up the middle to start the ninth, helping Buttrey to get the four outs he needed for his second career save. Buttrey, who came to the Angels in the Ian Kinsler trade, has allowed one run in 11-2/3 innings with the Angels.

Had they held the Rangers hitless, the Angels would have set the record for most pitchers to combine on a no-hitter, surpassing the six used by the Houston Astros (2003, against the Yankees) and Seattle Mariners (2012, against the Dodgers).

The pitching and defense helped the Angels pick up their second 1-0 victory in three games.

The only run was on a second-inning homer by Fernandez, a 30-year-old Cuban whose career stalled after a failed attempt to defect.

"I am very proud of what I accomplished today, helping the team to win," Fernandez said through an interpreter. "I'm very happy to be here. It's a great moment."

Fernandez added that he had had received the ball from his homer, which "is going to be with me for life."

Taylor Ward still has plenty to learn after a month as the Angels' third baseman

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — As the hitter stepped into the box, Andrelton Simmons got the attention of Taylor Ward and began to, for lack of a better description, flap his wings.

The Angels' rookie third baseman looked quizzically at the veteran shortstop, then cast his eyes upward.

"I had no idea," Ward said later, describing his momentary confusion.

Then Chicago White Sox outfielder Adam Engel dropped a bunt down the third base line. Ward charged in, barehanded it and threw too late and too wide to get an out at first.

When they got back to the dugout, Ward found out what Simmons' signal had meant.

Engel can fly.

Although Ward was playing in, ready for the bunt, Simmons wanted him to know he had to be in even more, because of Engel's speed.

"Now I've got the lingo," Ward said. "He's teaching me a lot."

Simmons, a three-time Gold Glove winner at shortstop, said Ward is a good student in his first year as a third baseman.

"Wardy is learning a lot," Simmons said. "His ears are open. He's making adjustments. But he's gotten a lot better really quickly."

A year after he was languishing in the minors as a prospect who seemed to be failing offensively and defensively, Ward has learned a new position and changed his swing, a pair of moves that got him to the big leagues.

Since the 24-year-old former first-round pick made his big league debut on Aug. 14, Ward had started every game at third base until Tuesday, when he got a day off. That allowed him to do a more intense workout on the field hours before the game, as he continues to learn the intricacies of playing third base in the majors.

“It’s like a baby taking that first crawl,” Manager Mike Scioscia said. “He’s certainly not overwhelmed. Experience is the best teacher, and right now he’s on the shallow end of the learning curve.”

Ward has hit .214 with three homers and a .640 OPS in his first 92 big league plate appearances. Defensively, he’s made two errors, although there have been a handful of others plays that have shown his inexperience.

Simmons said Ward needs to learn how much time he has to make a throw, which is partly the experience of knowing how fast the opponents are. Also, he sometimes has trouble deciding when to try to backhand a ball and when he can get in front of it.

“No matter how much you practice things, you need to experience things in the game,” Scioscia said. “He’ll improve.”

The same goes for hitting.

A year ago, Ward had hit a combined .258 with nine homers at Class-A and Double-A, as a catcher. He went home for the winter and reworked his swing to – surprise! – focus on getting the ball in the air.

Ward said he stands a little more upright now, and he added a leg kick.

Just as he was trying that in spring training, though, he got the news that the Angels didn’t want him to catch anymore.

“It was pretty devastating at the time,” Ward said, adding he got over the shock in a couple days.

The Angels told him that their testing showed how much faster and stronger he was before the season, a clear indication that the grind of catching was hurting him physically. They also relieved him of the mental strain of the position.

Without the physical or mental toll of catching, and with a new swing that helped him get more balls in the air, Ward hit .349 with a .977 OPS between Double-A and Triple-A.

Clearly, there was nothing left for him to prove as a hitter in the minors, so a month ago the Angels brought him to the majors and planted him at third. He’s gone out for early defensive work three or four days a week, and he’s remained in the lineup despite his struggles at the plate.

Hitting coach Eric Hinske said he believes Ward will get better with experience because of the way he thinks hitting. Ward said he's reviewed video of every at-bat this season.

"He's pretty deep," Hinske said. "He's got a good approach. He has strike zone discipline. He doesn't chase. He's definitely trying to hit the ball in the air. There's no slug on the ground."

Whether Ward's approach will work in the majors remains to be seen. Other hitters—including Kole Calhoun—have found themselves slumping in the majors because a mis-applied fly ball approach led to too much head movement.

Ward acknowledges that's an issue, and he's going to try to fix that over the winter. He also said he needs to learn to handle fastballs at the top of the zone, which minor league pitchers couldn't throw for strikes as effectively as the big leaguers.

"I think I've gotten a lot better at the way I view the game now, the way I go about things and what I need to do to be successful," he said. "I wish I knew this a few years ago. Now, I'm just going to run with it."

He said his goal is to prove this month that he can be the everyday third baseman next season.

"Absolutely," he said. "I just need to prove it here. This is the time to show it."

Nick Tropeano will miss end of Angels' season because of nagging shoulder issue

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Nick Tropeano's season officially ended with the decision to put his throwing program on hold and get a platelet-rich plasma injection on Friday.

The Angels' right-hander has been bothered by bursitis off and on all season, and the latest bout of shoulder discomfort never quite subsided enough for him to get back in a game.

"It's tough," Tropeano said Tuesday. "It really (stinks). I'm going to take it for what it is. Hopefully, this relieves some of the symptoms."

Tropeano said he underwent an MRI that showed no structural damage to his shoulder, so he's confident he doesn't need surgery. He said he'll have about 10 days off after the PRP injection, and then he'll have a normal winter.

Tropeano, 28, underwent Tommy John surgery in 2016. He returned early this season and posted a 4.74 ERA in 14 starts. In three of his starts, he pitched at least six innings and gave up one or no runs. He last pitched in a game on Aug. 6.

ALSO

Tyler Skaggs (groin) will throw a simulated game on Thursday, according to general manager Billy Eppler. Skaggs has been out for about a month, but he's expected to return in time for the last couple weeks of the season...

Manager Mike Scioscia said there is still no decision from Shohei Ohtani about if, or when, he will have Tommy John surgery. Ohtani is expected to relent and have the surgery, although he could potentially wait until after the season and still have time to be ready to hit by opening day 2019. ...

Parker Bridwell returned to the majors for the first time since April. Bridwell had missed most of the minor league season with tightness in his elbow, which eventually led to arthroscopic surgery in July to remove bone chips. Bridwell has been rehabbing in Arizona since then. "I'm happy where I'm at right now," he said.

UP NEXT

Angels (RHP Felix Peña, 2-4, 4.04) vs. Rangers (RHP Yovani Gallardo, 8-4, 6.22), Wednesday, 7 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels flirt with a combined no-hitter in 1-0 win over Rangers

By Mike Digiovanna

A "bullpen game" is a lot easier to absorb in September, when expanded rosters give managers a dozen or more relievers to work with, but that doesn't necessarily make them more palatable.

The Angels, whose rotation has been ravaged by injuries, opened Tuesday night's game with reliever Jim Johnson, who was making his first start since his major league debut in 2006 — that was 666 appearances ago — and backed the right-hander with seven relievers.

"They're not by design," manager Mike Scioscia said before the game. "We wish we had Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, Nick Tropeano and JC Ramirez. You go down the list. These are the guys you wish you had at this point of the season, not a bullpen day."

After the tag-team relief effort of Johnson, Noe Ramirez, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian, Justin Anderson, Jose Alvarez, Blake Parker and Ty Buttrey came within five outs of a no-hitter in a 1-0 victory over the Texas Rangers in Angel Stadium, Scioscia started to come around to the idea of a "bullpen game." Well, kind of.

"We used a lot of guys tonight, and we got it done," Scioscia said. "It can be effective, but as a rule, our team is not set up to do that three days a week."

The Angels gave up only two hits and almost made history, falling just short of the franchise's second combined no-hitter and the 11th overall no-hitter.

Johnson opened the game with 11/3 innings. Ramirez (5-5) struck out three batters in 12/3 innings. Robles, Bedrosian, Anderson and Alvarez each threw perfect innings, sparking some much-needed September drama to a season in which the Angels were essentially eliminated from playoff contention in mid-August.

Parker retired Willie Calhoun on a fly ball to center field to open the eighth inning, but catcher Isiah Kiner-Falefa lined a 91-mph fastball into right field for a clean single.

"I was bummed, big time," Parker said. "I was following the game. As much as it's something you don't want to be focused on, it's always in the back of your head."

Parker got Drew Robinson to fly to left for the second out, but Rougned Odor singled to advance Kiner-Falefa to third. Scioscia replaced Parker with Buttrey, the hard-throwing right-hander who was acquired from Boston in the July 30 trade for Ian Kinsler.

Odor stole second. Jurickson Profar shot a one-hopper that appeared headed down the left-field line before third baseman Kaleb Cowart intervened. Cowart made a nice backhand stop of the ball and a long, accurate throw to first to end the inning. Buttrey threw a one-two-three ninth for his second save.

"It was one of those games where you're going bullpen, you're not scoring runs, and it takes one hiccup for the game to swing in the other team's favor," Scioscia said. "Lucky for us, in the eighth, we got a big play from Cowart and Butt came in and made some great pitches."

The Angels had only two hits, but one was Jose Fernandez's first career home run, a solo shot to right field against Adrian Sampson (0-1) in the second.

The Angels gave the 30-year-old first baseman the silent treatment upon his return to the dugout. Mike Trout ended the prank, and started the celebration, by throwing a cup of water in Fernandez's face.

The Rangers hit only two balls out of the infield before Kiner-Falefa's single. Second baseman David Fletcher preserved the no-hitter with a nice play to end the fifth, ranging toward the middle to make a backhand stop of Robinson's grounder and making an off-balance throw to first base.

Taking it all in from behind the plate was catcher Joe Hudson, who was acquired from Cincinnati on June 30 and nearly caught a no-hitter in his first big league start.

"In the back of your mind, you're like, 'Has this ever been done before?'" Hudson said. "It would have been pretty cool. We almost got it done, but it was still fun, regardless. We got the zero. We got the win. It was a very special day."

Short hops

Tropeano, limited by shoulder inflammation to 14 starts, will receive an injection of platelet-rich plasma Friday and sit out the rest of the season. The right-hander sat out the 2017 season because of elbow

ligament-replacement surgery. An MRI test showed no structural damage, so Tropeano does not anticipate needing surgery. ... Parker Bridwell, who had surgery July 17 to remove bone chips from his elbow and sat out most of the triple-A season, was added to the roster Tuesday.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Halos' bullpen takes no-no into 8th for shutout

Fernandez hits first career home run in second inning

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Bullpenning for the win.

That's the blueprint the Angels followed Tuesday night, as eight relievers combined to throw a two-hit shutout in a 1-0 victory over the Rangers at Angel Stadium.

Jim Johnson, Noe Ramirez, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian, Justin Anderson and **Jose Alvarez** combined to hold the Rangers hitless through seven innings before **Isiah Kiner-Falefa** broke up the no-hit bid with a one-out single off **Blake Parker** in the eighth. The Angels had been vying to become the first MLB team to throw a combined no-hitter with more than six pitchers.

"I had a good feeling we'd get through it after the seventh," said catcher **Joe Hudson**, who made his first MLB start Tuesday. "Almost."

The Angels came close to letting their one-run lead slip away, too. After coaxing a flyout from pinch-hitter **Ronald Guzman**, Parker surrendered another single to **Rougned Odor** that put runners on the corners with two outs. Manager Mike Scioscia opted to bring in rookie **Ty Buttrey** to face **Jurickson Profar**, who bounced a grounder to third base that was fielded nicely by **Kaleb Cowart** for the final out of the inning.

Buttrey returned to the mound in the ninth and worked a scoreless inning to collect a four-out save and secure the Angels' ninth shutout victory of the season.

"They all did a great job," Scioscia said. "It's one of those games where you go bullpen, we're not scoring runs, and it just takes one hiccup for the game to swing in the other team's favor. Luckily for us, in the eighth inning, we got a big play from Cowart, and Buttrey came in and made some good pitches to Profar."

Jose Fernandez delivered the lone run of the evening by blasting his first MLB home run off Rangers right-hander **Adrian Sampson** in the second inning.

The Angels have been forced to use bullpen games over the last month to fill the holes in their rotation left by the injuries to **Tyler Skaggs, Nick Tropeano** and **Shohei Ohtani**. Hours before Tuesday's game, Scioscia made it clear that the tactic was one they'd prefer not to be deploying.

"They're not by design," Scioscia said. "You wish you had **Garrett Richards**, you wish you had Tyler Skaggs, you wish you had Nick Tropeano, you wish you had **JC Ramirez**. You can go down the list. These are the guys you wish you had at this point in the season, not a bullpen day."

Still, the Angels' cavalcade of relievers came within five outs of throwing the franchise's second combined no-hitter.

Johnson, who had not started a game since his MLB debut with the Orioles in 2006, opened the bullpen game with 1 1/3 scoreless innings, though he issued a pair of walks to Profar and **Joey Gallo**. Ramirez replaced him and worked around a two-out walk to Profar in the third to post 1 2/3 clean innings, and he wound up getting the win.

Robles, Bedrosian, Anderson and Alvarez then combined to throw four perfect innings. The closest the Rangers came to a hit during that span was in the fifth, when second baseman **David Fletcher** made a nice backhanded grab to field a grounder off the bat of **Drew Robinson** and end the inning.

"The past couple of years, we've been kind of under the radar as far as bullpens, but we've always had confidence in ourselves and we champ at the bit when we get a bullpen day," Parker said. "We kind of take pride in that and going out and hanging up zeros, and trying to keep our team in the game.

"I didn't get it done, but maybe we'll have that chance again to go out and get it done."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

The Angels produced only two hits against Sampson, but one was Fernandez's second-inning homer. After returning to the dugout, Fernandez received the silent treatment from his teammates and compensated by high-fiving a line of invisible people. **Mike Trout** finally ended the ruse by splashing him with a cup of water.

Fernandez was once one of the top players in Cuba, but his career stalled following a failed defection in 2014. He had to wait until age 30 to finally make his MLB debut with the Angels on June 8, and is now batting .293 over 23 games this season.

"This is one of the greatest successes that I've had in my career," Fernandez said in Spanish. "I had to work hard and fight to get here. I'm here now in the big leagues and day by day, I'm showing my worth."

SOUND SMART

The Angels tied an MLB record by using eight pitchers in a nine-inning shutout. The club also accomplished the feat against the A's on Aug. 30, 2014.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Hudson appeared to sneak into first base in the fifth inning, but the call was overturned in favor of the Rangers after a review. Hudson hit a ground ball to shortstop and **Elvis Andrus'** high throw took first baseman Profar off the bag. But replay showed that Profar reached down to apply the tag in time on a diving Hudson to end the fifth inning.

UP NEXT

Right-handers **Felix Pena** (2-4, 4.04 ERA) and **Yovani Gallardo** (8-4, 6.22 ERA) will face off on Wednesday

as the Angels and Rangers close out their three-game series at 7:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. It will be Pena's first career appearance against Texas. He has logged a 6.17 ERA in nine home starts this season compared with a 2.21 ERA in seven starts on the road.

Ohtani humbled by AL Player of Week honor

Angels rookie rebounds after learning he needs TJ surgery

By Maria Guardado

It would have been easy to forgive **Shohei Ohtani** had he metaphorically "packed it in" after hearing he would need Tommy John surgery on his pitching elbow. But, as the Angels star has done throughout his sensational rookie campaign, Ohtani defied expectations.

Ohtani overcame a tough prognosis to capture his second American League Player of the Week Award on Monday -- and it was well deserved. The Japanese phenom hit .474 last week with four home runs and 10 RBIs, reminding everyone that he can still make a major impact at the plate.

"I'm very humbled by it, especially after missing six weeks with the injury," Ohtani told MLB Network on Tuesday. "I was very proud that I was able to come back and win this award again."

Ohtani acknowledged he was saddened by the news that he would not be able to pitch, likely until the 2020 season, due to a torn UCL in his right elbow. But he responded better than just about anyone could imagine hours after the Angels' announcement on Wednesday, going 4-for-4 and clubbing two homers against the Rangers.

"I wasn't the only one who was kind of down," Ohtani said. "Everyone around me who has supported me was down as well. So, I wanted to keep everyone in good spirits by performing well on the field."

Ohtani's week in total included a .474/.565/1.263 slash line and his first two dingers of the season off left-handed pitchers. Entering Tuesday, Ohtani's .595 slugging percentage ranked fourth among players with at least 250 plate appearances behind AL MVP Award candidates **J.D. Martinez**, **Mookie Betts** and **Mike Trout**. Ohtani has homered in roughly one out of every 16 plate appearances

Tropeano's frustrating season comes to end

Angels right-hander shut down after shoulder rehab stalls

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- **Nick Tropeano** will have to wait until 2019 to pitch again for the Angels.

Tropeano was shut down for the season after his rehab from right shoulder inflammation stalled. He is slated to receive a platelet-rich plasma injection Friday. It's a disappointing outcome for Tropeano, who returned from Tommy John surgery this season, but was limited to 14 starts for the Angels because of his ailing shoulder.

The injury sent Tropeano to the disabled list for the third time this year on Aug. 7, though he was initially optimistic that he would be able to pitch before the end of the season. Tropeano resumed a throwing progression and completed three bullpen sessions, but the symptoms did not subside.

"It's frustrating because I worked my way back from Tommy John, and it's something I had to deal with the entire year this year," Tropeano said Tuesday. "It's just tough. Frustrating. It really sucks on my part. But you've got to take it for what it is. I'm going to get this injection, kind of head into this offseason a little earlier than expected, obviously. But hopefully this will relieve some of those symptoms."

Tropeano, 28, said surgery is not currently an option, as he underwent an MRI exam that revealed no structural damage in his shoulder. The underlying cause of the inflammation is bursitis.

"It's just kind of one of those annoying things that the only thing you can do is rest," Tropeano said.

Tropeano finishes the 2018 campaign with a 5-6 record and a 4.74 ERA over 76 innings.

Bridwell returns

The Angels recalled right-hander **Parker Bridwell** from Triple-A Salt Lake on Tuesday ahead of their scheduled bullpen game against the Rangers. Bridwell went 10-3 with a 3.64 ERA for the Angels last season, but he was limited to only seven starts between the Majors and the Minors in 2018 due to elbow trouble.

"I don't think it's uncommon for a guy maybe to hit bumps in the road after they come up and have some success," manager Mike Scioscia said. "But I think Parker is very confident, and he's healthy now. Hopefully he'll get back on track, and when he gets that opportunity, he pitches as consistently as he did last year."

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Angels nearly get no-hitter from bullpen, beat Rangers 1-0

By Jill Painter Lopez

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — The Los Angeles Angels nearly came through with a no-hitter in a bullpen game.

However, Blake Parker gave up Isiah Kiner-Falefa's single to right with one out in the eighth inning for Texas' first hit and the Angels held on for a 1-0 victory over the Rangers on Tuesday night.

"I left that ball up to Isiah Kiner-Falefa," Parker said. "If I get that down, it's probably a ground ball."

The Angels' starting rotation was decimated by injuries this season, paving the way for what was the fifth bullpen game of the season. Jim Johnson made his second career start and pitched 1 1/3 innings. He was followed by Noe Ramirez, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian, Justin Anderson and Jose Alvarez, who combined to get through seven innings without giving up a hit.

Parker found difficulty in the eighth. After Kiner-Falefa's single to break up the bid, he got pinch hitter Ronald Gumzan to fly out to left field, then allowed a sharp single by Rowned Odor. Scioscia opted to change pitchers, and those two hits would be all the Rangers could muster. The Angels got out of the inning on a nice defensive play at third base by Kaleb Cowart with runners on second and third.

"(Odor) was out front a little bit and he got some good wood on it and it fell in," Parker said. "I was glad (Ty) Buttrey came in and nailed that down for us and kept us in it."

As he walked off the mound, Parker looked to the sky and smacked his hand lightly in his glove in obvious disappointment he wasn't able to keep the no-hitter going.

Ramirez (5-5) got the win, and Buttrey earned the save.

"They made some great plays behind their pitchers, and I thought their pitchers did a heck of a job retiring 12 in a row at one point," Rangers manager Jeff Banister said. "We had a couple opportunities early but couldn't cash in. We stayed in the game well. During the eighth, we gave ourselves an opportunity."

Jose Fernandez hit his first career home run for the Angels in the second inning, adding another milestone to the 30-year-old Cuban's rookie season after making his major league debut June 8.

"I feel very proud of what I accomplished and helped the team to win," Fernandez said through a translator. "I'm very happy to be here. It's a great moment."

Catcher Joe Hudson made his major league debut for the Angels, calling a game for eight pitchers in a shutout and near milestone game.

Hudson obviously knew the no-hitter was on the line, and he figured it would happen as the game wore on.

"I'd be lying if I told you no," he said. "I had a good feeling we'd get through it after the seventh. Almost."

Adrian Sampson (0-1) made his first start for the Rangers this season and second career start. His last previous start was with Seattle in 2016, but his career went off track when warming up for what was supposed to be his second start with the Mariners. He was injured, had to have surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon and worked his way back.

Sampson allowed Fernandez's homer among two hits in five innings.

Fernandez got the silent treatment from his teammates when he walked through the dugout, arms outstretched looking for teammates to high-five. When he got to the end of the dugout, Mike Trout splashed him in the face with a cup of water.

“He actually said that a few days ago so I was expecting that,” Fernandez said. “He wanted my first home run to be celebrated that way, throwing water on my face.”

ANGELS BULLPEN GAMES ARE A THING

The eight pitchers used in a nine-inning shutout ties the major league record last done by the Angels on Aug. 30, 2014, against Oakland.

LAST NO-NO

Jered Weaver threw the last no-hitter for the Angels on May 2, 2012, against Minnesota.

LONG TIME BETWEEN STARTS

Johnson made his last start in his major league debut with Baltimore in 2006. He made 666 relief appearances between starts.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Angels: RHP Nick Tropeano (right shoulder inflammation) will have a plate-rich plasma injection Friday and after 10 days begin his rehab program. He will not return this season.

UP NEXT

Rangers: RHP Yovani Gallardo (8-4, 6.22 ERA) is 1-3 over his last five starts after a 7-1 stretch before that. He faced the Angels once this year, allowing two runs on six hits in six innings but was not involved in the decision of the Rangers’ 4-2 win Aug. 19.

Angels: RHP Felix Pena (2-4, 4.04 ERA) got the win in his last start Friday after allowing two runs in seven innings with six strikeouts and no walks in Chicago He makes his first career appearance against the Rangers and 15th start of the season.

Angels’ combined no-hit bid broken up in eighth inning

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Isiah Kiner-Falefa singled off Blake Parker with one out in the eighth inning, spoiling the Los Angeles Angels’ bid for an unprecedented no-hitter against the Texas Rangers.

Los Angeles was closing in on the record for most pitchers used in a no-hitter. The Houston Astros set the mark with six pitchers while shutting down the Yankees in 2003. Roy Oswalt started that game but was injured in the first inning. The Mariners matched that record in 2012.

Jim Johnson opened Tuesday night's game with 1 1/3 innings, and Noe Ramirez, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian, Justin Anderson and Jose Alvarez followed with no-hit ball. Parker retired Willie Calhoun to start the eighth before Kiner-Falefa lined a clean single into right field.

The Angels led 1-0 through seven innings.

Unlike the Astros in their no-hit bid, the Angels planned to make this one a bullpen game, following a trend started by the Tampa Bay Rays this season of using relievers as openers. Los Angeles is using the strategy to cover for an injury-decimated rotation that is without Shohei Ohtani, Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs and more. Manager Mike Scioscia used four bullpen games in August.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Dustin Ackley wonders 'What am I doing here? I'm in Triple-A' and dreams of one more crack at the big leagues

By Fabian Ardaya

SALT LAKE CITY — Let's be clear. Dustin Ackley is not bitter.

He is not bitter that he is here in Salt Lake City. Not bitter that he has not played a game in the majors in more than two years. Not bitter that the game he loves so much is squeezing out guys like him. Not bitter that he is not even an everyday player anymore. Not bitter that injuries robbed him of his power and opportunities where he felt he could make a comeback.

On this late-summer day, he sits just outside the nap room at Smith's Ballpark, still stuck in the minors. On a team full of guys in their early 20s, Ackley is nearly a decade their senior. As some of his teammates still struggle to grow full facial hair, the 30-year-old Ackley's beard has grown to cover his entire neck. Donnie Ecker, the club's hitting coach, is just two years older than him.

To the Salt Lake Bees, the Angels' Triple-A affiliate, Ackley isn't viewed as the former No. 2 overall pick. Over three games in late August, the Bees hosted the Reno Aces, and Ackley didn't earn a single plate appearance.

Not too long ago, he was seen as a potential franchise cornerstone. Now, he's struggling to even be a regular on the farm.

"It definitely was an adjustment," Ackley said. "It was frustrating at times."

In 2009, the Seattle Mariners made Ackley, then a college star at North Carolina, their first-round pick, right after Stephen Strasburg went first overall to the Washington Nationals. Six picks later, the Cincinnati Reds chose Mike Leake. Nine selections after Leake, Arizona took A.J. Pollock.

And later in that first round, the Angels selected a promising high school outfielder named Mike Trout.

But Ackley tries not to think about that. His draft position never mattered to him. He just wanted to be a big leaguer. He once was one. He thinks, some day, he can be one again.

Ackley is healthy, feeling as good as he ever has. The confidence in his swing is back, the lack of consistency in approach largely cured as he's become increasingly self-aware of his own swing. His words brim with optimism.

Says Ackley: "I'm still in a position where I know that I can just continue to grind and continue to push up my way until I get back there."

It didn't take long for Dustin Ackley to make it to the big leagues the first time. He remembers the day fondly.

It was June 17, 2011, just over two years to the day that he was drafted. He shot through the minors, and during that spring he proposed to his college girlfriend Justine. He singled in his first at-bat. He ran out a .273/.348/.417 line with six home runs and seven triples that first season, collecting a staggering 3.7 bWAR in just 90 big-league games. Justine and Dustin married that offseason.

Things were good.

The Mariners weren't. They finished 67-95, but that didn't matter. Ackley had made it, achieving a goal he had since he was a kid idolizing Pete Rose. The weight of being the No. 2 overall pick didn't register. Nothing else mattered.

A slow first half tanked Ackley the next season, dropping his wRC+ from 117 the previous year to a lowly 75. It became a trend, as Ackley's development teetered and Seattle stagnated. The Mariners brought in Robinson Canó, moving Ackley off second base and into the outfield. The franchise cornerstone became an afterthought.

The concept of failure became a self-diagnosed weakness. Each time Ackley struggled, the droughts would become more and more severe. He abandoned himself and the player he was, tinkering with his swing and approach to the point that he was endlessly searching for answers.

His walk rate plummeted, and he found himself venturing more and more outside the strike zone as he pressed for results.

"I think there were times when I was up there where I had a bad game, and it's all hands on deck," Ackley said. "It's panic mode.

"You're trying to change this, change that on the fly and at the same time, you're facing big-league pitching. I think all that was pretty tough and pretty overwhelming at times, especially when I didn't really know myself, didn't really know how to get myself out of certain situations."

A trade-deadline deal to the Yankees in 2015 served as a brief refresh. The organization that had drafted him had given up on him, but for the first time, Ackley was in a postseason race. He played out the

stretch run as a semi-regular, accruing a 144 wRC+ and experiencing what he still considers to be the best per-game run of his career.

If he could contribute to a regular contender, Ackley thought, he'd get his shot and finally stick.

Instead, the Yankees acquired Starlin Castro from the Cubs that offseason, supplanting Ackley and moving him to a bench role. He played 28 games in 2016 before dislocating his right shoulder, an ailment that eventually required surgery to correct.

He hasn't played in the big leagues since.

An invite to spring training with the Angels last season proved fruitless. His shoulder still ached, still came loose, still felt tight. He couldn't play the field without pain, and the little power he did have — his career slugging percentage sits at .367 — was sapped. He languished in Triple-A, hitting just .261 in his first stint with the Bees, not feeling comfortable with the shoulder for months until he finally regained range of motion in August.

"I don't think I was nearly as strong or had the strength that I needed," Ackley said. "I would hit balls in BP that I would think I was crushing and they weren't even getting to the warning track. I realized this isn't what I remember. I don't really feel anything, but I know something isn't quite right."

Maybe the opportunity to come back would've been there had he been healthy. The Angels struggled to find second-base production after designating Danny Espinosa for assignment. Cliff Pennington, Kaleb Cowart, Nick Franklin and August acquisition Brandon Phillips all got opportunities Ackley felt could have been his, but the shoulder wouldn't cooperate.

At times, Dustin Ackley stops and wonders aloud if the game has passed him by.

He feels the hours he has spent each day talking hitting with Ecker, the Salt Lake batting coach, have made him more consistent. The knowledge of his own swing has grown, allowing him to self-diagnose and stave off slumps. For most of the season, his batting average swelled above .300, even as playing time was hard to come by, his OPS slightly above average.

A second year in Salt Lake wasn't what Ackley wanted. Just recently, he felt like he was a starting-caliber player for a major-league contender. But he wasn't even a minor-league regular. He waited during spring training, hoping a call from a big-league team would come. Instead, he fell into the glut of veteran free agents struggling to find jobs as more and more clubs began prioritizing younger players and shorter contracts. He ultimately settled for another minor-league deal with the Angels in early April, feeling optimistic yet frustrated as no options presented themselves.

"I've got a family, got two kids," Ackley said. "You get to stages within the season where like, you think to yourself, 'What am I doing here? I'm in Triple-A, playing two or three times a week, hitting over .300 and nobody wants me?' It gets you wondering, 'What is wanted here? What do I need to do to get myself back to playing every day, at least at the Triple-A level?'"

"There's guys out here at the big-league level hitting under .200 and in the low .200s and guys in Triple-A that aren't really doing that well and you're like, 'How do I not fit into this equation?' You really ask

yourself that question a lot. But ultimately, if I keep doing my thing, eventually if you play well enough, a good team will find you. That's the goal, to keep doing my thing. If you hit well enough for long enough, you can't be turned down every time. That's where it's at."

Ackley, a high-contact bat with little power, heard the murmurs from agents — maybe he, too, should embrace launch angle and reconfigure his swing to generate more fly balls. He refused.

"I think that, when I'm playing at my highest level, I'm not going to strike out anyway, even if I'm hitting home runs or not," Ackley said. "I think maybe changing my game isn't for me. It's just continuing to get stronger, and doing that type of thing. I think if I'm playing every day, I'm going to put up the numbers that I need to put up, and the numbers will ultimately show."

Major-league rosters expanded on Sept. 1, allowing clubs to keep as many as 40 players. Ackley, unsurprisingly, wasn't among the first call-ups. It's been a trend he's been noticing. Young prospects, the next Dustin Ackleys, get the start as he sits on the bench. He kept his focus, though, serving as a mentor to young prospects, such as Matt Thaiss, who are trying to grapple with failure for the first time.

"I might pick Dustin Ackley's mind a little too much," Thaiss jokes.

Ackley also talked about life in the big leagues to the eager ears of Taylor Ward and Michael Hermsillo, telling them tales of Yankee Stadium as he struggled to get on the field in front of the near-7,000 fans who opted to watch the Bees at Smith's Ballpark instead of attending the University of Utah's home football opener some 15 minutes away. He became something of an extra coach on the staff, leading Ecker's hitter meetings and mapping out plans of attack against upcoming pitchers.

"I ask him as many questions as I can every day, because I learn from him," Ecker said. "The whole staff does. ... He's just a tremendous resource."

"When you have a guy like that who's been around for a long time, that helps out the coaching staff," said Bees interim manager Eric Chavez, himself a former big leaguer. "Having a guy like Ackley has been really helpful for the organization, for sure."

But Ackley doesn't see himself as a resource. In his mind, he's still a ballplayer.

"It felt like these could be opportunities that other teams that would have interest (would've used me in)," Ackley said. "I think all of that was kind of tough, just knowing that I'm feeling well, and I'm just kind of wasting these opportunities that I am feeling well on."

"I'm not in my mid-to-late-30s yet. I'm still just 30 years old, and so I think the fact that I wasn't getting those opportunities was pretty tough. But at the same time, I was going to take it as a positive and not try to just sit there and pout about it. I was just going to go and continue to work."

Dustin Ackley won't lie. He considered calling it quits.

"Man, is this the end?" he said to himself. "Is this happening? Is this not?"

He thought about the days spent in Salt Lake sitting on the bench when he very well could be pursuing another interest outside of baseball. He thought of his two kids, Parson and Percy, and how he spent his road trips wondering if he made the right choice to be gone and leaving them alone with Justine instead of being home with them.

"It's at a hectic, fun age right now," he said of his 3-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter.

He thought about that house in Michigan, with 150 acres of land near Justine's family, the home where he trains in the offseason and hopes to make permanent once his playing days are over, saying it's "going to be an awesome place" for his kids to grow up. Instead, his family is with him in Salt Lake as he hopes and waits for a big league call.

"That's nice, not having to go home to an empty house and just it being in your thoughts all night about should I be here or should I be there," Ackley said. "You don't have to think about that when you've got your family around."

He knows he could easily be done. After all, he's not getting the chance he desires. For a former No. 2 overall pick, his current life is quite anonymous, and he's OK with that. But he still feels like he can play, and as long as he has that motivation, he is going to keep playing.

Chavez can relate. He is not too far removed from the end of his own playing days. He thought his career was over in 2010, when his tenure with Oakland ended with a string of injuries and the club's declining of his option. After 13 years, he pondered if his time in the big leagues was done.

The former Gold Glove-winning third baseman worked a kids camp in San Diego that offseason, spending days talking about his love for the game before it clicked that it wasn't quite the time for him to retire. He signed a minor-league deal with the Yankees and ended up playing four more years before calling it quits.

"I've always heard, 'Make them rip the shirt off your back,' and baseball's a small window," Chavez said. "Right now, I know I will never play baseball ever again. When you get to that point, you better be ready to accept that because I've seen guys who are retired that are still in this game thinking they can still play. I know in my head, physically, I can't play but I'm good with it. I'm over with playing and now it's time for the next step, whatever direction that's going to be in."

"Dustin, he loves baseball. He loves the competition."

So Ackley will keep working. He arrives each day at the park around 2 p.m., spending most of the next four hours bouncing between the batting cage and the video room, then working to get the treatment needed to go out and play. He hopes that elusive call will finally come to give him that next chance.

"It'd be easy for me to come in here and do motivation, saying you've got to do X, Y, Z to get to the big leagues, but it's all a bunch of wasted energy," Ecker said. "He's a man of strong faith, and he really focuses on the present moment. I'm sure I've aligned our teaching based on that."

Dustin Ackley is not bitter. He is just waiting for his chance to be Dustin Ackley again, the big leaguer he always thought he should be.

“Teams maybe think I’m just a guy that had an injury and who has fallen off,” he said. “ ‘He’s done,’ they’ll say. That’s the real challenge, to play well enough for long enough to get people to see you.

“It just has to be one team. I think that’s the ultimate goal. One team likes you, and you get your in, you get your opportunity and then you take advantage of it and then you’re back in the race again. That’s the tough part, but that’s also the ultimate goal, especially at this point when jobs are hard to find.”

Armed with a cluster of arms and a rookie catcher, the Angels just miss out on history

By Fabian Ardaya

ANAHEIM, Calif. — As Noé Ramirez walked back into the Angels clubhouse on Tuesday night, he entered with a sense of relief. He’d been called upon, and for 1 2/3 innings, he’d put up a zero without allowing a hit.

He didn’t realize he wasn’t the only one until he heard Fox Sports West color commentator Mark Gubicza on one of the clubhouse TVs. As reliever Blake Parker prepared for his 1-1 pitch to Isiah Kiner-Falefa in the eighth, Gubicza spilled.

The Angels, relying solely on a Johnny Wholestaff of relief arms, had not yet allowed a hit.

Kiner-Falefa dumped Parker’s next pitch to right field for the Rangers’ first hit, one of just four combined knocks between the two clubs in a 1-0 Angels victory.

“Damn!” The Angels bullpen contingent of Jim Johnson, Ramirez, Hansel Robles, Cam Bedrosian and José Álvarez said inside the clubhouse. All six Angels pitchers had gone at least an inning, each denying the Rangers a hit — until Gubicza issued the jinx (Note: jinxes don’t exist).

“That was kind of disappointing, especially coming from Gubi,” Ramirez said.

Hours earlier, Angels manager Mike Scioscia couldn’t help but lament the precarious position his club had settled into. Even with rosters expanded in September, there just simply aren’t enough arms capable to start out of his pitching staff, meaning even then he would have to rely on a bullpen game. Shohei Ohtani can hit, not pitch as he awaits likely Tommy John surgery. Garrett Richards, J.C. Ramirez and John Lamb have already gone under the knife for the same reason. Nick Tropeano was officially shut down for the season Tuesday as he deals with bursitis in his right shoulder. The club has set a record for pitchers (35) and players used (59) as they’ve limped through the year.

“You wish you had Garrett Richards, wish you had Tyler Skaggs, wish you had Nick Tropeano, wish you had J.C. Ramirez, going down the list,” Scioscia said of his mangled group of starters. “These are the guys you wish you had at this point in the season. Not a bullpen day.”

Instead, he opted for Johnson to start for the first time since July 29, 2006 — the day of his big league debut. The 666 relief appearances he’d made between the starts was the second-longest stretch in big

league history, just four behind Tyler Clippard. He was the 16th different starter for the Angels this season — the same as Tampa Bay and their “openers.”

Johnson delivered 1 1/3 shutout, hitless frames with a pair of walks. Ramirez went 1 2/3, the only baserunner coming on a walk. Robles, Bedrosian, Anderson, and Álvarez each worked a perfect inning before Parker. It was an amalgamation of parts and pieces as Scioscia attempted to manage his way through innings and destroy scorebooks in one fell swoop.

All that with a catcher, Joe Hudson, making his first big league start.

“From that perspective, it pretty much couldn’t have gone much better, outside of a no-hitter, right?” Hudson quipped.

Hudson, a former Reds farmhand, arrived in the Angels organization midseason, fifth on the club’s catcher depth chart behind Martín Maldonado, René Rivera and rookies José Briceño and Francisco Arcia. Even as Maldonado and Rivera were shipped off, Hudson was an afterthought before being a late September call-up.

For as young as this Angels bullpen is, few were even familiar with Hudson. Instead, the 27-year-old catcher worked vigorously in the bullpen over the last week, looking to familiarize himself with a new staff he’d be handling. Between innings Tuesday, he continued to pore over scouting reports with Steve Soliz, the club’s catching and information coach.

Lauded throughout the organization for his skills as a receiver and game-caller, Hudson put together one of his finest displays in his first opportunity to start.

“He showed tonight how special he was,” Ramirez said.

Hudson even briefly saved the no-no with some instincts and intuition. In the second inning, Rangers center fielder Drew Robinson tapped a ball just in front of home plate, which spun back toward Hudson and appeared destined for foul territory. Hudson adjusted, quickly snatching the ball and applying the tag before Robinson could even get out of the batter’s box.

He calmed his nerves through each inning, the no-hitter well in his mind. He noticed it early, as did Parker, who said he knew the club was hurdling toward potential history by the fourth inning. As Álvarez worked a clean seventh, Hudson thought they were going to do it. Only two no-hitters have been successfully completed this year, including a combined no-hitter from the Dodgers back in May. But the Angels’ potential brush with history was different — on that night in Mexico, Dodgers right-hander Walker Buehler worked six no-hit innings from the start. The Angels would have to use eight members of their 14-man ‘pen to get the shutout Tuesday.

“You can’t help but think about it,” Parker said of his awareness of the situation.

It was a pair of fellow Angels rookies who sealed the win and capped Hudson’s catching masterpiece.

José Miguel Fernández waited until he was 30 to earn his major league chance. After starring on the Cuban national team in the 2013 World Baseball Classic, a team that included eventual big leaguers José

Abreu, Raisel Iglesias and Guillermo Heredia, he attempted — unsuccessfully — to defect from Cuba. He remained under police surveillance for the greater part of a year before leaving successfully, missing the entire next season as he attempted to establish residency.

When he was dropped by the Dodgers after a successful first American pro season in the minors, the Angels signed Fernández to a minor league deal. Given the logjam at first base between Albert Pujols and Jefry Marte, his big league playing time has been limited, even as he chased the Pacific Coast League batting title. With Pujols out for the season, Fernández has essentially become the Angels' everyday first baseman.

He slugged his first career home run Tuesday, taking Rangers starter Adrian Sampson deep to the State Farm sign in right field. After he rounded the bases, he returned to the dugout to silence, holding his hands out to no return reaction. Then Mike Trout turned his full cup of water into a weapon, splashing it in Fernández's face — a request he'd made days prior when this day finally came.

"Obviously, it was a long road," Fernández said. "I had to train, had to really fight for this. Day by day, I've shown I've been worth it."

Fernández gave the Angels the lead, and as he's done essentially since the Angels acquired him from Boston in the Ian Kinsler trade, Ty Buttrey locked it down. The right-hander has posted a 0.77 ERA in his first 11 2/3 big league innings, getting Jurickson Profar to ground out with the tying run on third in the eighth before working a clean ninth.

"There's nothing that compares to it," Buttrey said of his brief excellence in the bigs. "It's very easy to be a rookie and let things speed up on me. In Triple A, it's like I was trying to pitch so perfect to get called up that everything to me was speeding up on me in Triple A. Now that I'm here, things almost have slowed down."

The days have come often, usually with bad results. The Angels' bullpen has been as taxed as much as any in baseball, and has largely held — even if it's with duct tape and pitchers like Álvarez and Ramirez toward the top of baseball's leaderboards in appearances.

"We champ at the bit when we get a bullpen day," Parker said. "We take pride in that, going out and hanging up zeroes."

A day that mapped out so potentially painful for the Angels and their pitching staff went (almost) according to perfection. It was a night that could only come with the expanded rosters of September — the Angels are not built like the Rays, as Scioscia said, and cannot afford to mix in openers and long men consistently given the state of their bullpen, so they have to rely on one-inning outings. The concept of the opener "has a lot of merit," he said, but simply cannot be done given the club's current state of affairs.

So they'll hope the next time they run into this unfortunate set of circumstances, they can have at least a similar result.

"It was a good bullpen day," Scioscia said. No kidding.

FROM MLB.COM

Which team has the youngest lineup in baseball?

By Gemma Kaneko and Jake Mintz

You could call the 2018 MLB season "The Year of" a lot of things. The Year of the Dinger, the Year of the Opener, The Year of the Rain Delay ... so why not The Year of the Youth Revolution?

The Braves' Ronald Acuña Jr. and Ozzie Albies are just 20 and 21 years old, respectively. Gleyber Torres, manning the infield at Yankee Stadium, born Dec. 13, 1996, has never lived in a world without the internet. Nationals outfielder Juan Soto is 19. He's a *teenager* who plays baseball like this:

But which team is fielding the youngest starting lineup, overall? To answer that question, we calculated the average age of each team's starting lineup, using their ages as of Sept. 10.

These numbers do not include a team's entire roster. Starting DHs are included for AL teams, and utility players for NL teams. Each lineup also includes a team's ace pitcher.



Surprisingly, the youngest starting lineup in baseball right now does not belong to the Nationals, Braves or Yankees, though the latter two appear in the youngest 10. MLB's youngest starting nine is none other than the Padres.

Without a single starting player over the age of 28, San Diego has far and away the youngest team in baseball. On average, the Padres are just 25.6 years old. Their youth movement is led by 21-year-old second baseman and recent September callup Luis Urias, and his future in baseball could be an exciting one:

It's not all fresh-faced kids, though -- trusty veterans like Eric Hosmer and Wil Myers (28 and 27, respectively) share the benefit of their experience without raising the average age too much.

The White Sox, 26.1 years old on average, are chock-full of sluggers in their mid-20s trying to prove they belong on the next competitive South Side team. The Yankees and Marlins both average 26.5 years, but the Yankees have a wider spread in age -- the oldest member of their starting lineup is Brett Gardner, at 35, and the youngest is the aforementioned Torres.

Earlier this year, the Braves fielded the three youngest players in baseball, though that changed after pitcher Mike Soroka went on the DL and Soto debuted in D.C. But they're still a young team, averaging

26.6 years old. And everyone on the team is young at heart, including 34-year-old first-time All-Star Nick Markakis:

The Rays, also 26.6 years old on average, may have two 30-year-olds (Jesus Sucre and Tommy Pham), but they're complemented by Jake Bauers and Willy Adames, who are 22 and 23, respectively.

The Twins, Angels and Royals all hover at or around 27 years on average, thanks to a mix of team icons and young up-and-comers. In the Angels' case, their team icon is keeping their average low -- even though Mike Trout has been in the league for 8 years, he's only 27. (And he's also already historically great but that's another story.)

The Phillies are starting three players over 30 in their lineup (Wilson Ramos, Carlos Santana and Asdrubal Cabrera), but six players on the roster are 26 or under. Compare that to the Mariners, the oldest starting lineup in baseball, where six players are 30 or over. No player starting for the Mariners is younger than 27.

FROM ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Tipsheet: Battered Pujols vows to battle on after surgeries

By Jeff Gordon

Albert Pujols underwent minor knee surgery two weeks ago. This week he will have bone chips removed from his elbow.

Such is life in baseball when you're pushing 40.

But Pujols is optimistic he can handle first base for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, Orange County, California next season so the sensational **Shohei Ohtani** can get his at-bats as the designated hitter.

Ohtani needs **Tommy John** surgery on his tattered elbow and isn't likely to pitch again until 2020. But the repair shouldn't impact his ability to hit, so Pujols is preparing to return to the field.

"Whether we've got Shohei or not, every year I get myself ready to play first base because that's my position," Pujols told reporters Monday. "I wasn't able to do it in '15 or '16 because of injuries, but I get myself ready every year."

He underwent right knee surgery after the 2012 season, The next year he tore the plantar fascia in his left foot. After the 2015 and '16 seasons he underwent repairs on his right foot. Then Pujols injured his left knee on a slide late in the 2017 season.

He played through the injury this season, but opted to bow out early for repairs to better prepare for 2019.

"I could've easily played the rest of the season, but I felt that it was just getting a little bit worse and worse and we had to take care of it," Pujols said. "It wasn't too much the pain, it was just uncomfortable. There were several times when I had to get it drained. It was just time to shut it down, and we made that decision. You have to look at the long run. I have to be able to get myself ready for next year.

"On top of that, I have to take care of my elbow and little things that were bothering me, too."

Pujols, 38, posted a modest .245/.289/.411 slash line this season. He hit 17 homers and drove in 64 runs in 117 games. He also managed to play 70 games at first base after primarily serving as designated hitter in recent seasons.

"I mean, nobody was expecting me to play 70-plus games (at first base) this year and I did it," Pujols said. "I could've played more. If I'm healthy, I'm expecting myself to play 162 games. That's who I am. I love to be on the field, I want to be on the field. I'm a Gold Glove first baseman. I showed that, that I still could do it out there. And I love that."

Pujols will make \$28 million next season, then \$29 million in 2020 and \$30 million in 2021.

THE GRIDIRON CHRONICLES

Here is what folks are writing about college football:

Andy Staples, *SI.com*: "Sure, **Dan Mullen** shouldn't have been the first Florida coach to lose to Kentucky since **Galen Hall** in 1986. Florida pays Mullen \$6 million a year to win every game. But the practical reality is that Mullen inherited a team that is much more similar in terms of talent to Kentucky than it is to Alabama or Georgia, and he's going to need a little while to correct that. On Saturday, the Gators and Wildcats looked about equal in talent with one glaring exception: Kentucky had a dynamic quarterback in **Terry Wilson** . . . The bottom line is that for the Gators to be what they want to be, they can't be comparable to Kentucky in terms of talent. They need to be comparable to Alabama, Georgia or Auburn. But to do that, they'll have to start beating out those schools for recruits. At the moment, that isn't happening. And Saturday showed how much Florida fell in terms of talent during the **Jim McElwain** era."

Andrea Adelson, *ESPN.com*: "Dan Mullen and **Willie Taggart** arrived in the state of Florida to rousing welcomes and outsized expectations, hailed as the latest saviors at rival schools just 150 miles apart. Two games in, Florida and Florida State look like broken-down programs stripped of their parts, exposing problems that demand immediate answers. Rather than showing tangible progress under their new head coaches, both Florida and Florida State earned guffaws on Saturday night -- Florida for losing to Kentucky for the first time in 32 years; Florida State for going down to the wire against FCS foe Samford, a week after getting blown out at home by Virginia Tech. It was an embarrassing weekend, if only because beating Kentucky and rolling FCS teams have been a given at both programs for more than three decades. The Florida and Florida State brands no longer intimidate opponents the way they once did; nor do their respective home stadiums."

Pete Fiutak, *College Football News*: "No, no, no, no, no ... **Herm Edwards** isn't going to do for Arizona State what (**Pete**) **Carroll** did for the Trojans, but every once in a while, the seemingly crazy call works. Of course it's only been two weeks, but with the dumpster fires needing to be put out in Tucson and

Westwood two games in, it just might be possible that there's something interesting brewing here. After all, going the safe and sane route hasn't worked out all that hot for the Sun Devils in the recent past. There wasn't a question about the talent level at the ASU program – there were several fantastic pieces to work with – but the schedule looked too brutal, and the head coach was hired from behind the TV desk. If, say, ASU had hired **Chip Kelly** or **Kevin Sumlin**, the preseason prognostications would've been far better. But Edwards? What does this guy remember about coaching football? As it turns out from the PhD-level job done late on Saturday night against Michigan State, a whole lot."

Pat Forde, *Yahoo! Sports*: "The (South Florida) Bulls have won 17 of their last 19 games, including a 24-point beating of the Illini last year in Tampa. USF is looking to put a second straight Power Five skin on the wall, after beating Georgia Tech on Saturday. Illinois is 2-0 but trailed Kent State for more than half the game in the opener and also trailed FCS Western Illinois for a quarter-and-a-half before taking charge. The Illini are not good."

Paul Myerberg, *USA Today*: "The Jayhawks played a game, as they do every week. But something funny happened: Kansas won. On the road. In football. Yeah, I'm talking about the Jayhawks. One week after losing to Nicholls State, KU went on the road to Central Michigan and won 31-7 for the program's first road victory since Sept. 12, 2009. That's a 46-game span. An NCAA record. I'm just saying: The Jayhawks aren't technically eliminated from the playoff race. That's true, technically."

MEGAPHONE

"Potentially playing 30 days in a row is — listen, I love all my teammates, but seeing them 30 days in a row is not what I intend to do."

Chicago Cubs slugger **Anthony Rizzo**, on his team having to soldier on without a break.

FROM THE JAPAN TIMES

Shohei Ohtani's eight-game hitting streak ends as Angels beat Rangers

Shohei Ohtani saw his hitting streak end at eight games after going 0-for-3 as the cleanup hitter during the Los Angeles Angels' 1-0 win over the Texas Rangers.

Ohtani left teammate Mike Trout stranded three times, first when he grounded out against recently-recalled right-hander Adrian Sampson with two outs in the opening inning at Angel Stadium, leaving Trout at first base.

After Trout, batting third in the lineup, was hit by a pitch in the fourth, Ohtani fouled off five pitches and took Sampson to a full count but eventually struck out. Trout advanced to second on a wild pitch, but Sampson retired the next two batters to end the threat.

Trout drew a walk and stole second in the sixth, but Ohtani grounded out to end the inning.

On Monday Ohtani was named the American League Player of the Week for the second time. The 24-year-old rookie batted .474 with four home runs, 10 RBIs, eight runs scored and two stolen bases in five games last week.

In a bullpen game for the Angels, Noe Ramirez (5-5) fanned three in 1⅓ innings for the win, while six pitchers took a no-hitter into the eighth. Both teams allowed just two hits each.

Jose Fernandez provided the game's only run with a second-inning solo shot off Sampson (0-1).

At Coors Field, Yoshihisa Hirano earned his first major league save for putting out a fire in the ninth inning of the Arizona Diamondbacks' 6-3 win against the Colorado Rockies.

Hirano relieved Jake Diekman in the ninth after the lefty gave up a leadoff double to Carlos Gonzalez and a bunt single to Ryan McMahon that put runners on the corners.

Hirano got back-to-back strikeouts, but McMahon advanced to second on defensive indifference. With the game on the line, Hirano got Charlie Blackmon to line out to seal the victory.

The 34-year-old reliever said he did not feel anything particularly special, however, on getting his first big league save.

"I closed out games all the time in Japan. I was prepared to do that anytime here," said Hirano, who had 156 saves over 549 games with Nippon Professional Baseball's Orix Buffaloes between 2006 and 2017.

The Diamondbacks ended a three-game skid and evened the four-game series at one apiece, moving within 2½ games of the National League West-leading Rockies.

In his MLB rookie season, Hirano is 4-2 with 55 strikeouts in 70 appearances. He signed a two-year, \$6 million contract with the Diamondbacks last December.

At Safeco Field, San Diego Padres reliever Kazuhisa Makita was called up from the minors before their game against the Seattle Mariners. He did not take the mound in the Padres' 2-1 win.

Makita was joined by three other players from Triple-A El Paso as the Padres look to bolster their bullpen. He was relegated to the minors for the sixth time last month.