



Press Clips

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CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **Mike Trout belts monster homer, but Angels lose two slugfests to Giants**
- **Shohei Ohtani's next start for the Angels will be in a major league exhibition**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 5)

- **Scrutiny grows as Angels' plan for Shohei Ohtani begins to falter in spring training**
- **Mike Trout hits first home run of spring training, Angels lose twice to Giants**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 8)

- **Trout's first spring HR clears batter's eye**
- **Barria optioned, nearly ready to help Angels**

FROM CBS SPORTS (PAGE 11)

- **Scott Boras denies Moustakas was offered three-year, \$45 million deal by Angels**

FROM YAHOO SPORTS (PAGE 11)

- **The verdict is in on Shohei Ohtani's bat and it's not good**

FROM FANSIDED (PAGE 13)

- **Angels need to let Ohtani focus on pitching**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Mike Trout belts monster homer, but Angels lose two slugfests to Giants**

By JEFF FLETCHER

THE GAMES: The Angels lost a pair of games to the Giants on Saturday, dropping a 9-8 decision in Tempe and losing 11-7 at the Giants' home park in Scottsdale. The Angels (6-11) have now lost six games in a row.

PITCHING REPORT: In Tempe, left-hander Andrew Heaney gave up two runs in 3-1/3 innings. He had not allowed any runs in his first two starts of the spring. Heaney struck out five, giving him 11 strikeouts in 8-1/3 innings. He said he's noticing a difference from moving back to the first base side of the rubber this spring. "It's just something that might not have looked any different from video, but I can tell the swings I'm getting are totally different," Heaney said. ... Right-hander Felix Peña, who had not allowed a run in five innings in his first five games, got the chance to work multiple innings for the first time. He struck out two to finish the fourth, but then he gave up two hits and a walk to start the fifth, recording just one out before he was pulled. ... In Scottsdale, right-hander Parker Bridwell gave up four runs on five hits in three innings. He did not walk a batter and he struck out five. ... Right-hander Luke Bard, a Rule 5 pick, pitched two scoreless innings, with two strikeouts.

HITTING REPORT: In Tempe, Mike Trout hit his first homer of the spring, a long blast that cleared the batter's eye in center field. Trout said he'd hit balls over it in batting practice, but never before in a game. He also had two singles, after coming into the game with one hit in his previous 14 at-bats. ... Kole Calhoun had two hits, improving to 8 for 15 this spring. ... The Angels had eight consecutive singles to produce six runs in the third inning. ... In Scottsdale, Luis Valbuena had two hits, including a three-run homer, his second of the spring. ... Chris Carter and Jabari Blash also homered.

DEFENSE REPORT: In Tempe, third baseman Zack Cozart couldn't handle a hard ground ball to his left. It was ruled a hit. Cozart, who has been a shortstop for his entire career, is learning to play third. ... In Scottsdale, third baseman Kaleb Cowart ranged far into found territory to make an over-the-shoulder catch.

UP NEXT: Angels (JC Ramirez) vs. Rangers (Bartolo Colon), Sunday, 1 p.m. PT, Tempe Diablo Stadium, Fox Sports West, KLAA/830

Shohei Ohtani's next start for the Angels will be in a major league exhibition

By JEFF FLETCHER

TEMPE, Ariz. — Shohei Ohtani, the pitcher, is finally going to get a significant crack at some major league hitters.

A day after Ohtani gave up six runs against the Tijuana Toros of the Mexican League, Manager Mike Scioscia said Ohtani's next start will be in a major league exhibition game.

That game will be on Friday, at the earliest, Scioscia said. If it is on Friday, Ohtani would face the Colorado Rockies at Tempe Diablo Stadium.

So far Ohtani has pitched three times, and barely seen any major league hitters. He twice pitched against the Milwaukee Brewers, once in an early spring game when the Brewers had only a few players expected to make their opening day roster and once in a "B" game with only fringe major leaguers. His third start was against Tijuana.

Scioscia said the evaluation of Ohtani goes beyond the caliber of the hitters he's facing. The Angels lean heavily on the objective data they collect from his outings, and that was not as discouraging as the results from Friday.

"A lot of internal numbers would predict a much better outcome than what we saw," Scioscia said.

Ohtani threw 42 strikes among his 64 pitches on Friday, which is a solid ratio. His velocity was mostly in the 92-95 mph range, which is not quite what he has thrown at his best.

"It's comparable to where some of our other pitchers are at this stage in the spring," Scioscia said. "It's not going to be an issue."

The Angels are proceeding with a plan of giving Ohtani more rest than their other starters, which is partly because of the once-a-week routine he was accustomed to in Japan and partly to allow him to hit. Ohtani had five days rest before his second start, six before his third and at least six before his fourth.

The Angels would like to get Ohtani up to about 75 pitches in his next game. That's the standard limit for the fourth of a normal six spring starts.

His next time hitting in a game will be on Sunday, Scioscia said. Ohtani will be in the lineup as the Angels DH against the Texas Rangers, who are starting Bartolo Colon.

ROSTER MOVES

The Angels sent down pitchers Jaime Barria and Victor Campos and catcher Taylor Ward before Saturday's game. Barria and Ward have both been considered among the Angels' top prospects, with Barria in particular coming to camp as the closest pitching prospect to the majors, aside from Ohtani.

Barria gave up three runs in 5-2/3 innings in two outings in major-league exhibitions. Barria, a 21-year-old who pitched in the Futures Game last year, is expected to be ready to contribute in the majors sometime in 2018. He is likely to be a starter at Triple-A.

"He's got great presence, really good command and can throw three or four pitches in any count," Scioscia said. "He knows how to pitch."

INJURY UPDATES

Andrelton Simmons (strained left shoulder) was scheduled to do some light work on the field, but no hitting or defensive drills. Simmons, who was hurt diving for a ball on Thursday, is still day to day.

Jefry Marte (groin) took batting practice on the field and ground balls. Scioscia said he could get back into game action "within a couple days."

Chris Young (strained calf) took live batting practice for the second day in a row and did some outfield drills. Young still has not played in a game, but he has said he believes he still has time to get ready by opening day.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Scrutiny grows as Angels' plan for Shohei Ohtani begins to falter in spring training

By JEFF MILLER

After only three pitching starts and 14 plate appearances, all under conditions that don't count, the speculation is as rabid as the expectation that daily dogs Shohei Ohtani.

He should shorten his swing. He should abandon hitting altogether. He should be more pitch efficient. He should open the season in the minors.

Trying to do something rarely accomplished in the modern era of baseball, Ohtani to date has been given more grief publicly than time.

"Like any player here, Shohei wants to achieve," manager Mike Scioscia said Saturday. "He knows the talent he has. ... You gotta be patient at times in the spring."

Ohtani and the Angels are discovering that the outside world isn't terribly interested in giving breaks to phenoms, at least not international ones attempting to regularly pitch and bat in the big leagues.

Instead, Ohtani's unsteady pitching results and one-for-11 start as a hitter have been reasons enough for many people, mostly media members and anonymous scouts, to ponder how long the Angels can stick to a blueprint from which they have promised not to waver.

With the season opener only 19 days away, the scrutiny promises to only intensify, especially if Ohtani's performances continue to lag.

"We're not telling Shohei not to do anything," Scioscia said. "He has a plan on what to do, and he's following that plan. We'll make sure he passes every level until he moves on to the next one."

What's next for Ohtani is starting Sunday as designated hitter in a Cactus League game against Texas.

Ohtani should receive more at-bats as the week progresses before making his next pitching start. Scioscia said the right-hander won't return to the mound until Friday, at the earliest. The Angels play Colorado at Tempe Diablo Stadium that afternoon.

Scioscia did confirm that Ohtani's next pitching appearance will come in a Cactus League game after the Angels threw him in consecutive "B" games in an attempt to better control his pitch count.

Catcher Rene Rivera suggested Friday that Ohtani would benefit from going against big league hitters because the heightened competition should boost his adrenaline.

Scioscia said ideally Ohtani would work five innings, with the plan being to "definitely try" to get him in the range of 75 pitches.

"Shohei needs to focus on what he needs to do," Scioscia said. "If he does what's laid out, then he's not doing too much."

The latest round of debate and consternation mostly centered on Ohtani's three-inning stint Friday against the Mexican League's Tijuana Toros, roughly the equivalent of a triple-A team.

He struggled with his command at times and gave up six runs and six hits, including a long homer. He did strike out six.

"His K-zone percentage, everything that was in the zone, was probably an indicator that he would have had better results," Scioscia said. "There's some positives there. We're going to have to keep building with him."

The manager also dismissed the notion that the velocity of Ohtani's fastball should be a concern. His top-end speed Friday was 95 mph, and he ranged in the mid- to low-90s.

In Japan, Ohtani threw over 100 mph, one of his fastballs clocked at 102.

"It's been pretty good," Scioscia said. "It's been comparable to where some of our other pitchers are at this stage of the spring. It's not going to be an issue."

Roster moves

The Angels optioned Jaime Barria to triple-A Salt Lake, and reassigned catcher Taylor Wade and pitcher Vincente Campos to minor league camp.

Barria, 21, one of the organization's top-10 prospects, appeared in three spring-training games, striking out six and walking one in 5 2/3 innings. He had a 4.76 ERA.

"He's got great presence, really good command and can throw three or four pitches in any count," Scioscia said. "He knows how to pitch."

Short hops

Shortstop Andrelton Simmons (shoulder) reported that he is feeling better and doesn't expect his soreness to linger, the Angels confident he'll be able to return soon. ... The same goes for outfielder Chris Young (calf) and corner infielder Jefry Marte (groin) as both also continue to progress.

Mike Trout hits first home run of spring training, Angels lose twice to Giants

By JEFF MILLER
MAR 10, 2018

Giants 9, Angels 8 in Tempe, Ariz.

Giants 11, Angels 7 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

AT THE PLATE: In Tempe, Mike Trout had three hits, including his first home run, a mammoth clout that cleared the batter's eye in center field. He said he never had hit one there at Tempe Diablo Stadium in a game, only during batting practice. "I hit it good," he confirmed. Kole Calhoun had two hits and two RBIs, and Albert Pujols drove in two runs. In Scottsdale, Luis Valbuena had two hits, including a home run, and three RBIs. Chris Carter and Jabari Blash also homered, No. 2 of the spring for each.

ON THE MOUND: In Tempe, starter Andrew Heaney gave up one earned run and struck out six batters in 3 1/3 innings. After five straight scoreless appearances, reliever Felix Pena gave up two runs. In Scottsdale, starter Parker Bridwell gave up two homers and four runs in three innings. He struck out five and had no walks. Veteran reliever Jim Johnson surrendered a run, pushing his ERA to 3.60. Rule 5 pick Luke Bard pitched two scoreless innings as he continued his bid to get a spot in a somewhat crowded bullpen.

EXTRA BASES: Eight consecutive Angels singled in a six-run third inning in Tempe. ... Tyler Skaggs and Nick Tropeano will pitch in minor league settings Tuesday when the Angels have a scheduled day off.

UP NEXT: Texas at 1 p.m. Sunday at Tempe Diablo Stadium. TV: FS West; Radio: 830.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Trout's first spring HR clears batter's eye

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- Mike Trout is rounding into form.

After a 1-for-14 start to the spring, Trout delivered three hits -- including his first Cactus League home run -- in the Angels' 9-8 loss to the Giants in a split-squad game at Tempe Diablo Stadium on Saturday.

Trout collected a pair of line-drive singles in the first and third innings before crushing an 0-1 pitch from Joan Gregorio over the batter's eye in center field to extend the Angels' lead to 7-3 in the fifth. For reference, the center-field wall is located 420 feet from home plate, and the batter's eye stands 30 feet high at Tempe Diablo.

Though Trout has cleared the batter's eye during batting practice, Saturday marked his first time accomplishing the feat in a game.

"I just put a good swing on it and barreled it," said Trout, who departed after playing five innings in center field. "We try to do it in BP all the time, so it's pretty cool to do it in a game."

Heaney's day

Left-hander Andrew Heaney gave up three runs (one earned) on four hits while striking out six and walking one over 3 1/3 innings against the Giants. Heaney, who moved back to the first-base side of the rubber after experimenting with the third-base side last season, said he feels the move has already yielded positive results.

"I can already tell," Heaney said. "The swings that I'm getting are totally different, and I know that. It's something that I went back to. I tried on the third-base side. It's just not for me."

Meanwhile, in Scottsdale ...

Right-hander Parker Bridwell started the Angels' 11-7 loss to the Giants in the other split-squad game Saturday at Scottsdale Stadium, yielding four runs on five hits over three innings. Bridwell, who is vying for the final spot in the club's rotation, walked none, struck out five and surrendered home runs to Brandon Belt and Jarrett Parker in the third inning.

Luis Valbuena and Chris Carter homered for the Angels, who have now lost six consecutive Cactus League games.

The Ohtani brief

Shohei Ohtani is scheduled to serve as the Angels' designated hitter against the Rangers on Sunday. Ohtani has hit in five Cactus League games, going 1-for-11 with three walks.

Ohtani, who allowed six runs over three innings in his most recent outing in a "B" game against the Tijuana Toros, will make his next pitching appearance in a Cactus League game. The earliest Ohtani could return to the mound would be Friday, according to manager Mike Scioscia.

Scioscia added that some of the Angels' internal data suggested that Ohtani pitched better than what was reflected in his line score against the Toros.

"A lot of his internal numbers would predict a much better outcome than we saw," Scioscia said. "There are some positives there. We're going to have to keep building with him."

Camp battle

The Angels have started to give some of their bullpen candidates the chance to pitch multiple innings. Rule 5 Draft pick Luke Bard fired two scoreless innings in Scottsdale, while Noe Ramirez allowed one run over 1 1/3 innings in Tempe. The Angels will likely carry at least one multi-inning reliever in their bullpen this season to fill the void left by Yusmeiro Petit.

Injury updates

- Shortstop Andrelton Simmons (left shoulder strain) was cleared to do some light jogging but has not yet resumed swinging.
- Infielder Jefry Marte (right groin tightness) hit on the field during batting practice and fielded ground balls. Scioscia said Marte is "within a couple days of being able to play."
- Outfielder Chris Young (right calf strain) took live batting practice for the second consecutive day and performed an outfield drill.

Saturday's moves

The Angels reassigned catcher Taylor Ward and right-hander Vicente Campos to Minor League camp and optioned right-hander Jaime Barria to Triple-A Salt Lake. Fifty-two players remain in big league camp.

Up next

Right-hander JC Ramirez will make his third start of the spring Sunday, when the Angels face the Rangers at Tempe Diablo Stadium. First pitch is scheduled for 1:10 p.m. PT, and the game can be viewed live on MLB.TV.

Barria optioned, nearly ready to help Angels

Pitching prospect expected to open season in Triple-A rotation

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- Angels pitching prospect Jaime Barria was among the players sent down to Minor League camp on Saturday, but chances are that he'll be back with the big league club at some point this season.

The 21-year-old right-hander is considered one of the most advanced arms in the Angels' farm system and is coming off a breakthrough season that saw him climb from Class A Advanced Inland Empire to Triple-A Salt Lake. In November, the Angels added Barria to their 40-man roster, putting him a step closer to the Majors.

"It was really special since it's where all ballplayers want to be," Barria said in Spanish before being optioned to Triple-A on Saturday. "I got the opportunity because of the year that I had, so I'm going to keep working hard to try to reach the Majors as soon as possible."

Signed out of Panama for \$60,000 in 2013, Barria posted a 2.80 ERA over 141 2/3 innings with 117 strikeouts and 31 walks across three Minor League levels last season. He has a three-pitch mix that includes a low-90s fastball, a changeup with good deception and movement, and an 82-83 mph breaking ball. Barria is ranked the Angels' No. 7 prospect by MLB Pipeline, which also rated his control as one of the best tools in the club's farm system.

"He's got great presence, really good command and can throw three or four pitches in any count," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He knows how to pitch."

After earning his first invitation to Major League camp, Barria was able to test himself against big league hitters in three Cactus League appearances this spring. He had a rough debut against the Padres on Feb. 26, when he allowed three runs on five hits -- including two home runs -- over 1 2/3 innings, but he rebounded by posting four scoreless innings over his next two outings.

"My first outing, I was kind of surprised to put up a bad line," Barria said. "After that, I started to adapt, and my last outing went well, thanks to God."

Barria will likely open the season in the Triple-A rotation, but he'll be a key piece on the organizational depth chart and should be ready to contribute in Anaheim soon.

"It feels good," Barria said. "I'm happy with the job that I've done. It hasn't been easy. I spent five years in the Minors to get here, so I'm going to keep working for what's to come."

FROM CBS SPORTS**Scott Boras denies Moustakas was offered three-year, \$45 million deal by Angels**

The reported offer came from before the Angels signed Zack Cozart to a relatively similar deal

By Matt Snyder

Royals third baseman Mike Moustakas is back in Kansas City after a prolonged period of free agency and an agreement on a contract that looks incredibly club-friendly. It could be as little as one year and \$6.5 million. Coming off a season in which he set a Royals record with 38 home runs, no one in the world would have predicted he'd get such a deal heading into free agency.

It's possible Moustakas turned down a significantly higher deal in free agency. Of course, we already know he turned down the qualifying offer, which was a \$17.4 million deal for 2018. Sam Mellinger of the Kansas City Star further reported that Moustakas had a three-year, \$45 million deal from the Angels earlier this offseason.

Moustakas's agent, Scott Boras, denied the report.

"There was never a multi-year contract offer made to Mike Moustakas by the Angels or any other major-league team," Boras said Friday (kansascity.com).

I'm not going to call anyone a liar here, but the report makes sense. The Angels signed shortstop Zack Cozart to play third base on December 15 to a three-year, \$38 million deal. Cozart is changing positions and is roughly three years older than Moustakas, so giving him \$7 million less over the course of three years makes sense as a fallback option for the Angels, who were one of the few teams beefing up this winter instead of either offloading or just standing pat.

If this report is true, the Royals deal had to ultimately be a bitter pill for Moustakas and Boras to swallow -- at least as much as making \$6.5 million in a year to play baseball can be bitter.

FROM YAHOO SPORTS**The verdict is in on Shohei Ohtani's bat and it's not good**

By Jeff Passan

TEMPE, Ariz. – They want to be wrong. For the sake of baseball, they want Shohei Ohtani to blossom into a true two-way player, a starting pitcher extraordinaire and power-hitting dynamo, a multinational marketing sensation. They want their eyes – the ones that have seen Ohtani this spring and believe he cannot hit at the major league level today – to be lying.

Only here are eight major league scouts, seven of whom have seen Ohtani this spring, and the reports they shared with Yahoo Sports sound almost identical. They acknowledge his raw power and uncommon speed. They also believe major league pitchers are going to punish him with inside fastballs, that his swing contains flaws in balance and mechanics, and that he needs at least 500 plate appearances of seasoning in the minor leagues to give him a chance at becoming a productive major league hitter.

And for anyone other than the 23-year-old, that would be all well and good. Except the Los Angeles Angels not only have Ohtani slotted in their starting rotation, they have rejiggered it to accommodate his transition to Major League Baseball, moving to a six-man staff. While they could theoretically pull the ripcord on that and start Ohtani in the minor leagues – the rest of their starting pitchers have thrown on the standard four days' rest this spring – the prospect of a player as hyped as any in years starting the season in Salt Lake City is farfetched.

Which leaves them with a bit of a conundrum – a first-world problem, yes, but a challenge nevertheless: If Ohtani really does struggle at the plate as evaluators expect, how long of a leash do the Angels offer until encouraging him to focus on pitching, where scouts see frontline talent?

Certainly the Angels don't intend to make any substantive proclamations after 14 plate appearances this spring. They signed Ohtani for \$2.5 million, plus a \$20 million posting fee, following a frenzied bidding process and want to kid-glove him as much as possible. Here's the thing: It's not the one hit in 11 at-bats (with three walks) that's any concern to scouts – spring training is the home of grain-of-salt numbers – as much as what they saw in those times at the plate that gives them pause so quickly.

One evaluator, who is familiar with Ohtani after watching all of his plate appearances from recent seasons in Japan, believes the biggest issue stems from the quality of the pitches in Japan vs. MLB. It was illustrated in a recent at-bat against Zack Godley, the Arizona Diamondbacks starter who backed Ohtani off the plate with a front-door sinker for a strike, then finished him with two curveballs, the last of which Ohtani flailed through.

Another scout at the game focused on how Ohtani moved his 6-foot-4, 220-pound body – and while he believes Ohtani can be a good hitter with time, there were obvious issues. He did not, the scout said, hit from a balanced base. His front hip leaked out during his swing. He needed to cheat on inside fastballs, leaving him susceptible to a spate of other pitches. He showed a heavy top-hand swing, which is not necessarily a problem – Bryce Harper, like Ohtani a left-handed swinger and right-handed thrower, focuses intensely on his top-hand movement – but as presently constituted with Ohtani could cause a significant number of rollover groundouts, according to the scout.

Like the evaluator, he took a more universal view of the pitch selection Ohtani will see. It's not just the sinkers. Heavy, hard-spinning curveballs are particularly rare in Japan, where the strikeout pitch of choice is a split-fingered fastball, and the curve's rebirth in MLB recently makes for at least two pitches that could pose particular trouble for Ohtani.

“He’s basically like a high school hitter because he’s never seen a good curveball,” the scout said. “He’s seen fastballs and changeups. And you’re asking a high school hitter to jump to the major leagues?”

With any other player, the remedy is obvious: Allow him to prepare for what’s to come against lower-level players. With the Angels intent on winning this year, they could find themselves in something of a Catch-22 with Ohtani. His greatest gift – his right arm – might be the thing that prevents him from fulfilling his desire to be a true two-way player.

“You don’t learn on the job in the major leagues,” another scout said. “You can’t.”

Pitching in the major leagues is hard enough, something Ohtani is learning quickly. The Tijuana Toros, a Mexican League team, lit him up for six runs in three innings on Friday afternoon. He allowed a monster first-inning home run to Dustin Martin, a 33-year-old who topped out at Triple-A. He gave up a pair more in the second inning. By the third, his fastball velocity dipped as low as 90 mph, a bit of a surprise but not worth alarm at this point in the spring.

Ohtani has enough to worry about already. He said the most difficult part of his transition is getting used to a schedule with no days off – and should he play designated hitter two or three times a week, as is the plan, that only exacerbates the intricacy of his days. Each facet of the game takes incredible amounts of work. There’s a reason no one has done both.

When asked which side of his game was further along, Ohtani said: “About the same progress-wise. Hitting-wise, adjusting isn’t going to be as big as pitching.” The major league ball and mound are different, he said. He did not mention anything about the major league arms, which evaluators believe to be a far greater concern.

Ohtani’s confidence in his bat is admirable, and perhaps he is the rare sort who can adjust on the fly, whose talent is overwhelming enough to change perceptions overnight. Special players do special things.

“That’s true,” an American League scout said, “but I don’t know if anyone is that special.”

FROM FANSIDED

Angels need to let Ohtani focus on pitching

By Zach Houle

The Los Angeles Angels signed Japanese phenom Shohei Ohtani in the offseason, but will his past success translate to MLB?

The Los Angeles Angels have the best player in baseball, Mike Trout. In the offseason, they signed the Japanese Babe Ruth, Shohei Ohtani. He was a stud in Japan, but will it translate in America? He hasn't looked good at the plate in spring training, and has given up balls over the fence as well.

Still, it's only spring training and players aren't back to their best selves. So maybe we should give Ohtani some more time before drawing any sweeping conclusions. MLB insider Jeff Passan wrote a great article about Ohtani and how scouts think he has a lot of work to do at the plate. Here's the key quote about the holes in his offensive game:

Another scout at the game focused on how Ohtani moved his 6-foot-4, 220-pound body – and while he believes Ohtani can be a good hitter with time, there were obvious issues. He did not, the scout said, hit from a balanced base. His front hip leaked out during his swing. He needed to cheat on inside fastballs, leaving him susceptible to a spate of other pitches. He showed a heavy top-hand swing, which is not necessarily a problem – Bryce Harper, like Ohtani a left-handed swinger and right-handed thrower, focuses intensely on his top-hand movement – but as presently constituted with Ohtani could cause a significant number of rollover groundouts, according to the scout.

Ohtani needs to adapt to major-league hitting if he wants to be successful. The scout made a good point that his top-hand swing isn't necessarily a problem, since other successful players, including Bryce Harper, do the same thing. He just needs to learn how to hit in MLB.

At 23, he still has time to adjust. Unfortunately, the Angels are putting him in the starting rotation already, as well as making him play DH every couple days. He's being shoved into the thick of things with little to no experience. The Angels should send him down to Triple-A to get experience before playing as an MLB regular.

LA is making a mistake if they think he's ready to go in such a short amount of time. The club looks to be putting the burden on him way too soon. Ohtani isn't even in the prime of his career yet, so there shouldn't be any rush. If he's that special, he will adapt and be an impact player.

It's not likely that it will happen on both sides of the ball. The Angels lineup has improved this offseason, even without Ohtani. The club should let him focus on the mound, and worry about offense later. Ohtani's best suited as an impact player on the hill, not at the dish.