



Press Clips

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CLIPS CONTENT

FROM THE OC REGISTER (PAGE 3)

- **Andrew Heaney dominates as Angels edge Astros**
- **Keynan Middleton added to list of Angels pitchers with UCL injuries**
- **Alexander: Angels' Keynan Middleton, and his balky elbow, are part of a trend**

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (PAGE 8)

- **Andrew Heaney strikes out 10; Angels pull even with the Astros**
- **Angels reliever Keynan Middleton has a damaged elbow ligament**

FROM ANGELS.COM (PAGE 11)

- **Heaney K's 10 Astros as Halos knot up AL West**
- **Canning leads Mobile to second no-hitter**
- **Middleton returns to DL with UCL damage**
- **Here are the early poll results for MVP Awards**

FROM THE ATHLETIC (PAGE 16)

- **Keynan Middleton's ligament issue is an all-too-familiar one for the Angels**
- **"It's probably the best game I've pitched": Andrew Heaney returns to form in eight-inning gem**
- **What Andrew Heaney has to do to break out for the Angels this season**

FROM MiLB.COM (PAGE 23)

- **Canning chips in again on BayBears' no-no**
- **MiLB and FIS extend strategic relationship, enhance fan experience through advanced payments solutions and emerging technology**

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (PAGE 26)

- **Andrew Heaney shuts down Astros in Angels' 2-1 rivalry win**

FROM ESPN.COM (PAGE 28)

- **Weaknesses that could sink MLB's 10 best teams**
- **Angels reliever Keynan Middleton has damaged UCL in right elbow**

FROM NBC SPORTS (PAGE 33)

- **Keynan Middleton has UCL damage, to get second opinion**

FROM CBS SPORTS (PAGE 33)

- **Why it's up to older fans to save MLB's future unless baseball reinvents itself**

FROM SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (PAGE 35)

- **Angels Outfielder Kole Calhoun is having a historically awful start to the season**

FROM NJ.COM (PAGE 36)

- **Yankees' Masahiro Tanaka vs. Angels' Shohei Ohtani: Japanese stars on track for showdown**

FROM KYODO NEWS (PAGE 38)

- **Asics to sell replica Ohtani baseball gear set**

FROM DEADSPIN (PAGE 38)

- **Shohei Ohtani's Starting to Reveal All His Powers**

FROM THE OC REGISTER**Andrew Heaney dominates as Angels edge Astros**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Nearly an hour after the final out had been recorded in the Angels' tense 2-1 victory over the Houston Astros on Monday night, Andrew Heaney emerged from the weight room, dripping in sweat.

It had taken Heaney a little longer to finish his postgame work for the night because he'd gotten a late start, which was well worth the wait.

It's what happens when you pitch eight innings, instead of five or six.

"This is probably the best game I pitched in my career," Heaney said after holding the defending World Series champs to one run, with 10 strikeouts.

Heaney delivered a gem for the Angels when they needed it. Not only did he help them pick up the first game of the three-game series against their division rivals, but he became the first Angels starter to get into the eighth inning.

Heaney did so on a night when the Angels had announced that Keynan Middleton had a damaged ulnar collateral ligament, removing a key piece from a bullpen corps that has been overworked by short outings from the starters.

On Monday, Heaney left just one inning for the bullpen, and rookie Justin Anderson picked up his first career save, with a huge assist from Kole Calhoun.

After Anderson had allowed a leadoff single to George Springer, Alex Bregman hit a drive down the right-field line. Calhoun made the catch against the railing in foul territory, then threw a strike to second to nail Springer trying to move into scoring position.

Calhoun, who has been in a maddening slump offensively for most of the season, could take solace in helping the team win with his defense.

"Kole is such a gamer," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He knows that it's important what he does in right field for us. ... He's going to help us any way he can. He is working so hard, almost too hard, on the offense. He is taking some baby steps, but he's not going to let that affect his defense."

Anderson and Calhoun collaborated on the save for Heaney, who has continued his run of impressive pitching.

In the four starts since he's moved back to the first base side of the rubber, where he had been for most of his career before an unsuccessful experiment on the third base side, he's posted a 1.80 ERA. He has 26 strikeouts in 25 innings in those four games.

This time, he came out blowing the ball by Houston hitters. He retired six in a row to begin the game, three with strikeouts. The only run he allowed came on back-to-back hits in the third. He struck out three in a row after a leadoff double in the fifth.

“Today it was there from the beginning,” Heaney said. “I could tell in the bullpen I had a good feel for my stuff. Days like today, you hope they come more than not. You try to bottle it up and do it more.”

Perhaps most impressive about Heaney’s outing was that he was efficient enough to get through eight innings on 100 pitches. While the Angels have been getting effective starting pitching lately, even the best outings have mostly ended after 18 outs, or less, leaving significant work for the bullpen.

“Usually when you are striking that many guys out, your pitch count will get elevated, but he was very pitch efficient,” Scioscia said. “He was on both sides of the plate, throwing strikes with everything. He got a couple double-play balls, which helped. To finish eight innings on 100 pitches against a tough offensive club that you have to grind every out, it’s a great outing.”

Heaney outpitched Houston’s Lance McCullers Jr., who so far has been the “weak” link in the majors’ best rotation. McCullers brought a 3.72 ERA into the game.

The Angels got a run against him in the second, when Andrelton Simmons singled, stole second and scored on a Luis Valbuena single.

They snapped a tie in the sixth. Martín Maldonado drew a walk and went to second on a Mike Trout walk. Justin Upton then lined a single into left, and Maldonado chugged home.

Keynan Middleton added to list of Angels pitchers with UCL injuries

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — A day after Keynan Middleton walked off the mound with a sore elbow, the MRI exam came back with the bad news.

Middleton has a damaged ulnar collateral ligament and will seek a second opinion, the Angels announced on Monday.

Pending that opinion, there is no prognosis for the type of treatment or the amount of time Middleton will miss. Depending on the type of damage to his UCL, Middleton could be headed for Tommy John surgery and a rehab of 12-18 months.

“It’s tough news, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Manager Mike Scioscia said. “Let’s take it one step at a time.”

Even if the Angels opt for non-surgical treatment, like stem-cell therapy, Middleton would be out for a matter of months.

Middleton is the sixth Angels pitcher to have some degree of UCL damage since August 2014, when Tyler Skaggs underwent Tommy John surgery. In April 2016, both Garrett Richards and Andrew Heaney suffered UCL injuries and underwent stem-cell therapy.

In Richards' case, it successfully healed the ligament, although he came down with a separate injury the next year. Heaney ended up having Tommy John surgery. Nick Tropeano, who was diagnosed with a damaged UCL in July 2016, ended up having Tommy John surgery in August.

Last year, JC Ramírez was injured in August. He appeared to be a stem-cell therapy success story until last month, when the ligament gave way and he succumbed to surgery.

Although at first blush it seems the Angels have had a poor track record with keeping their pitchers healthy, it's an industry-wide issue. General Manager Billy Eppler last year cited statistics that the Angels were in the middle of the pack with regard to pitching injuries.

The Angels have tried changing personnel with the medical and training staffs, including a significant staff makeover between 2016 and 2017.

"I know our medical department is on the cutting edge of everything that's out there," Scioscia said. "Since I've been here, the first 12 years really no Tommy Johns, and in the last couple years we've got hit with some. Billy is looking into everything. The medical department is looking into everything, as all of baseball is."

Middleton's absence, for however long, is a blow to a bullpen that has been in flux. Middleton has a team-leading six saves and a 2.04 ERA. He had emerged as Scioscia's preferred closer, although the manager had never publicly named him the closer.

Jim Johnson, Cam Bedrosian and Blake Parker have all closed games at various times for the Angels. Even rookie Justin Anderson, who has been dominant at times, got an opportunity to close, but he couldn't convert.

"I think we have a lot of guys," Scioscia said. "I don't think we ever had one guy that was the ninth-inning guy. We've got some guys in the back end who are going to have to get outs for us. How they line up in a certain game will be dictated by how the game unfolds and the match-ups. We're confident we have the arms down there that will get the outs we need."

If the Angels look outside the organization for bullpen help – as they might have done even before Middleton's injury – pitchers like the Kansas City Royals' Kelvin Herrera and the Tampa Bay Rays' Alex Colome figure to be available. Generally, it's difficult to make those type of trades this early without overpaying, though.

ALSO

The Angels recalled right-hander Felix Peña from Triple-A to take Middleton's roster spot. Peña had competed for a spot in the bullpen during spring training, but the Angels moved him to the rotation at Triple-A last month. "He's throwing the ball very well," Scioscia said. "There is no doubt he can come in

and give us the two-plus, three-plus innings to give us a bridge to get to certain matchups later in the game.” ...

Blake Wood (elbow impingement) pitched a scoreless inning in a rehab assignment for Class-A Inland Empire on Monday. Wood could be activated any day, or he might pitch again in the minors. ...

Parker Bridwell (elbow inflammation), who has been on the Triple-A disabled list, pitched on Saturday at extended spring training in Arizona. He is scheduled to return to action at Triple-A on Friday, according to Eppler. ...

Matt Shoemaker said he has two days worth of appointments scheduled with a nerve specialist in Missouri, on Wednesday and Thursday.

Alexander: Angels' Keynan Middleton, and his balky elbow, are part of a trend

By Jim Alexander

ANAHEIM — Dodgers chairman Mark Walter put it succinctly a few years ago during a discussion about signing pitchers to long-term contracts.

“Pitchers break,” he said.

The parade of breakage continues.

Since spring training began in February, 12 pitchers have undergone Tommy John surgery. Some were prospects, others (including the Angels' JC Ramirez, the Padres' Dinelson Lamet, and Arizona's Taijuan Walker) are big leaguers.

Are we about to see a 13th name on that list?

The Angels learned Monday that an MRI of reliever Keynan Middleton's right elbow showed “damage” to his ulnar collateral ligament. Their announcement was purposely vague, noting that Middleton would get a second opinion “in the near future.”

But “damage” to the UCL is never good. The question is the severity, and whether stem cell therapy might be a viable alternative to the ligament reconstruction procedure.

Garrett Richards and Andrew Heaney both faced the same choice in May, 2016. Both opted for the therapy in which stem cells were injected into the area.

Richards' therapy worked, and he was back on the mound by the start of spring training in 2017. Heaney's didn't. He underwent Tommy John surgery in July 2016 and was out until last August.

The aforementioned Ramirez tried the same tack when he was hurt last August, but he had to shut it down and have the surgery last month.

Yet it's probably a risk worth taking, because if Middleton has the surgery he'd be out for most or all of 2019 anyway.

It is not just an Angels trend, although starters Tyler Skaggs, Nick Tropeano and Heaney have all gone through what Ramirez is enduring now and what might be in Middleton's future. It is a baseball trend.

This is a telling statistic: From Dr. Frank Jobe's pioneering operation on John in July 1974 through 1989, just 11 professional pitchers and two position players underwent the procedure.

There were 47 patients in the 1990s, 68 from 2000 through 2005, 61 from 2005 through 2010 ... and 242 this decade, 105 since 2014.

Most have been pitchers, but not all. When the Dodgers' Corey Seager underwent the operation this month, he was the third position player this year and eighth in the last five years.

Now balance those numbers with the reality that pitchers are treated far more gingerly today than ever before, with strict adherence to pitch counts. The night in the 1981 World Series when Fernando Valenzuela threw 150 pitches – you can look it up – in a complete-game victory? That's nearly two starts for some pitchers today.

And that's not a bad thing at all. Pitching is an unnatural motion, and the stress involved in throwing a baseball with any velocity – and its deleterious effect over time – is understood far better now than it was then.

"Pitching a softball is the way your arm was made to throw," John said in a 2017 interview. "Your arm was made to go underneath and not go over the top. You're going against the natural motion of the shoulder, throwing the baseball."

And what of those relievers of yore who would pitch multiple innings for saves, or those starters who would make 35 or 40 starts and complete 20 to 25 of them?

"This is how they were trained," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Monday. "... I don't know if any pitcher was pushed past what they were capable of, but it certainly was a different mindset to handling your starters and your bullpen 40 years ago.

"... Before I came up in 1980, and I think all the way through probably the mid-70s, it was a four-man (rotation) and that was it."

He paused.

"A lot of them had really short careers, too," he added. "Some didn't. Some kept going."

Much of the wear and tear takes place before a player even signs a contract now, because the innings and pitches pile up for young pitchers in the summer, in travel ball and showcase events. But more often than not, Scioscia said, an organization signing a pitcher has sufficient information about his previous usage and can manage his workload accordingly.

That's not always enough to prevent injury. But here's the other modern baseball reality: There is pitching life, and sometimes plenty of it, after Tommy John surgery.

One example was on the mound Monday night for the Angels. Heaney, in his sixth start of 2017, was brilliant for eight innings against Houston, holding the defending champs to a run and four hits and striking out 10 on exactly 100 pitches.

Middleton might have been downcast after hearing his injury report Monday, but back stories like that should keep him going. He is, after all, only 24.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Andrew Heaney strikes out 10; Angels pull even with the Astros

By Jeff Miller

Facing the game's best rotation, the Angels flexed Monday, specifically their left arm.

Andrew Heaney's eight innings of dominance lifted them to a 2-1 victory over Houston, the team that typically wins by holding down the opposition.

"That's huge from Heaney ... against an offense like that," teammate Kole Calhoun said. "He threw one of the best games I've seen him throw. It was definitely huge for us."

These are the top two teams in the American League West and two of the top four in the AL.

It's much too early to fixate on the standings. But when is it not a good time to be measured against the best?

The Astros are the defending World Series champions and armed, quite literally, to make a spirited run at winning a second consecutive title.

Yet, it was Heaney who threw the most effective pitches in this game, aided at the end by a brilliant strike from right field by Calhoun.

Heaney retired the first six Astros in order, three by strikeout, setting a tone early that was impossible to miss.

Then, in the span of four pitches, he experienced his only truly damaging sequence of the night.

Heaney gave up a double to Josh Reddick on his second pitch of the third inning and, two pitches later, a run-scoring single to Max Stassi.

Other than that, Heaney gave Houston almost nothing, surviving a leadoff double by Evan Gattis in the fifth inning by striking out the next three batters.

Heaney (2-2) didn't work around the danger as much as he bullied his way right through the Astros, those three strikeouts coming on 12 pitches.

"He was very pitch efficient," Scioscia said. "Throwing strikes with everything, on both sides of the plate. ... He was grinding for every out. That was a great outing."

Heaney's eight innings represented a career best for him and a season best for an Angels starter.

His 10 strikeouts matched his career high on a night when he was the best version of Andrew Heaney the Angels have seen.

He finished at 100 pitches, 64 of which were strikes and nearly all of which were effective.

The ninth inning belonged to rookie reliever Justin Anderson — until Calhoun stole it away.

Anderson retired the three batters necessary to save the game, but it was Calhoun who saved the night.

After a leadoff single by George Springer, Alex Bregman lifted a fly ball down the right-field line and toward the short wall in foul territory.

Calhoun measured the situation, jumped into the wall to make the catch and fired to shortstop Andrelton Simmons to get Springer attempting to advance to second base.

"That was huge, two outs right there," said Calhoun, who leads the majors with six outfield assists. "Helped us win the game."

This key contribution came from a player batting .158, a player who has been relegated to the bottom of the order and, for a few days recently, the end of the bench.

"Kole is such a gamer," Scioscia said. "He knows that what he does in right field is so important for us. He's going to help us any way he can."

"He's working so hard, almost too hard on the offense. Just taking some baby steps. But he's not going to let that affect his defense."

Entering this series, Houston led the majors in earned-run average, strikeouts and opponent batting average at .196.

Scioscia prefers to temper the significance of every game, noting that each date on the schedule presents a challenge.

But by playing Houston this week, the Angels are facing a team particularly tough to defeat since baseball games are ultimately decided by runs scored.

And they got only two Monday against right-hander Lance McCullers Jr. (5-2), who hadn't lost since April 6.

But two runs were just enough, thanks to Heaney's start and Calhoun's finish.

"To get a start like that," Calhoun said, "in the first game of a big series, definitely huge for us."

Angels reliever Keynan Middleton has a damaged elbow ligament

By Jeff Miller

The scene wasn't encouraging Sunday and neither was the news Monday for **Keynan Middleton**.

The Angels reliever was diagnosed with a damaged elbow ligament, an injury that could end his season.

Middleton will get a second opinion before deciding what to do next. Whatever course he and the Angels choose, he likely won't pitch for a while.

"It's tough news," manager **Mike Scioscia** said. "But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Let's take it one step at a time."

The hard-throwing Middleton had emerged in his second big league season as the Angels' best option to close games. He leads the team with six saves.

But he began May on the disabled list because of elbow inflammation. Middleton returned Thursday and appeared in three games before going down again.

He was lifted mid-batter after two outs and 12 pitches in the eighth inning Sunday against Minnesota.

His loss depletes a bullpen that has been heavily used and takes away the reliever who has appeared most comfortable pitching the ninth inning.

Jim Johnson, **Blake Parker** and **Cam Bedrosian** have a save apiece, Scioscia is likely to move forward with a community approach to the late innings unless one of the relievers steps into the closer role.

"We've got some guys at the back end who are going to have to get outs for us," he said. "How they line up in certain games, right now, will be dictated by how the game unfolds."

Middleton is the sixth Angels pitcher to suffer elbow ligament damage since the summer of 2014 and the second to be significantly affected this season. Starter **JC Ramirez** had ligament-replacement surgery last month.

Felix Pena was recalled from triple-A Salt Lake to take Middleton's roster spot.

On rehab road

On a rehabilitation assignment, reliever **Blake Wood** (elbow impingement) pitched a scoreless inning Monday for Class-A Inland Empire.

Heaney K's 10 Astros as Halos knot up AL West

By Avery Yang

ANAHEIM -- **Andrew Heaney** struck out a career-high-tying 10 and held the Astros to one run in eight innings, outdueling **Lance McCullers Jr.** for a 2-1 Angels win on Monday night at Angel Stadium and creating a first-place tie between the clubs in the American League West.

Heaney's stellar outing featured few mistakes and excellent command of his curveball-sinker combination, with a smattering of changeups fit in for good measure. In one at-bat in the eighth inning, the lefty threw five straight curveballs to **Josh Reddick**, ultimately getting him swinging for strikeout No. 10.

Reddick had roped a leadoff double in the third, when Heaney threw him two straight sinkers, leading to the Astros' only run. He made the adjustment.

"Usually I'm not a guy that throws that many breaking balls, but I think early on we obviously saw -- the double by Redick, it was early in the count, he was looking for a heater -- you don't want to feed that guy that many of those," Heaney said. "Maldy [catcher **Martin Maldonado**] saw something, and I was feeling it."

After Reddick scored on a **Max Stassi** single, Heaney was rarely tested. **Evan Gattis** led off the fifth inning with a double to left field, but Heaney struck out the side to escape the jam. His last sinker of the game, to get **Jose Altuve** on a flyout to right, was the same velocity as his first, 92.4 mph, to **George Springer**.

Heaney lowered his ERA to 3.93 in what the 26-year-old lefty said was probably the best start of his career.

"He made his pitches," Astros manager AJ Hinch said. "I thought he was really executing the game plan that he wanted."

The Angels started their scoring in the second inning, when **Andrelton Simmons** knocked a one-out single off McCullers, stole second base, then scored when **Luis Valbuena** promptly hit a single to right field. Simmons has hit safely in 16 of his last 17 games and has reached base in his last 21. His .340 batting average is fourth in the AL.

Justin Upton drove in the winning run with a single in the sixth. He has hits in 12 of his last 14 games, going .328 (19-for-58) with a big league-leading 19 RBIs over that span.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Calhoun cuts down Springer: With rookie reliever **Justin Anderson** nursing a one-run lead, Springer led off the ninth with a single. The next batter, **Alex Bregman**, lifted a fly ball to right field in foul territory, and **Kole Calhoun** sprinted to make the catch, lunging into the crowd as he gathered the ball. Springer tried to tag up and advance to second, but Calhoun nailed him with an incredible throw to shortstop

Andrelton Simmons for the double play. Calhoun leads the Majors with six outfield assists. No other outfielder has more than four.

"It's not just a good play by Calhoun, it's a great play," Hinch said. "He's diving into the stands or at least leaning into the stands, and he was able to clear himself from the fence enough to make a full throw, which is probably why he leads the league in assists in the outfield. He had to make a perfect throw to get him out, and he did."

Anderson's high-wire act: After Calhoun's play cleared the bases with two out, Anderson faced another jam following an Altuve single and an intentional walk of **Carlos Correa**, but the rookie was able to induce a groundout out of **Yuli Gurriel** to pick up his first career save.

Anderson has been entrusted with two save opportunities in the past few days despite making only eight previous appearances in the Majors.

"Shows that [manager Mike Scioscia] trusts me, and that the guys trust me, too," Anderson said. "He's got confidence in me, and I've got confidence in myself that, no matter what, I can get it done. Feels good that someone trusts me like that."

Angels saves leader **Keynan Middleton** landed on the disabled list for the second time this season on Monday.

UP NEXT

The Angels will turn to **Jaime Barria** (3-1, 2.45 ERA) on Tuesday at 7:07 p.m. PT against the Astros in the second game of a three-game set. It will be the fifth start of his career, and his first against Houston. Barria threw 5 1/3 scoreless innings against the Rockies his last time out, allowing five hits and one walk with a career-high seven strikeouts. He will face Newport Beach native and former UCLA star **Gerrit Cole** (4-1, 1.43), who leads the American League in strikeouts (86) and has the second-lowest ERA in MLB.

Canning leads Mobile to second no-hitter

Angels' No. 7 prospect has started both no-hitters

By Mike Rosenbaum

For a second time this season, Griffin Canning was the driving force in a combined no-hitter.

Canning, the **Angels' No. 7 prospect**, set the tone with 4 1/3 hitless frames before turning the ball over to a trio of relievers to secure Double-A Mobile's second combined no-hitter in three weeks with a 9-0 win over Birmingham on Monday. He issued two walks and recorded eight of his 13 outs via the strikeout, throwing 49 of his 81 pitches for strikes.

Canning previously paced the BayBears to a combined no-hitter on April 28, when he and a pair of relievers combined to no-hit Montgomery. Including that performance, the 22-year-old right-hander has

allowed just one earned run in his past 19 2/3 innings (four starts), with six hits allowed and 22 strikeouts in that span.

Altogether, the Angels' second-round pick from a year ago has pitched to a 1.95 ERA with 30 strikeouts in 27 2/3 innings (six starts) in his first taste of the Double-A level after logging a pair of scoreless starts with Class A Advanced Inland Empire to open the season.

Left-hander **Greg Mahle** replaced Canning in the fifth inning and furthered Mobile's no-hit bid with 1 2/3 perfect frames. He fanned three of the five batters he faced in the relief outing and, in the process, recorded his third win (3-0).

Adrian Almeida, a 23-year-old right-hander handled the next 1 2/3 innings, albeit while pitching around three walks, before Ryan Clark worked the final 1 1/3 frames to seal Mobile's third no-no in franchise history.

The four BayBears hurlers received plenty of run support in the victory, too, as first baseman **Matt Thaiss** and designated hitter Taylor Ward combined for six hits, four RBIs and four runs scored.

Thaiss (Angels' No. 9) matched his season high with four hits, going 4-for-5 with a triple, two runs scored and a walk. The 23-year-old is hitting .289/.353/.489 on the season, with 15 extra-base hits and 22 RBIs in 34 games.

Ward (No. 13), meanwhile, went 2-for-4 at the plate and paced the BayBears' offense with a season-high four RBIs. He plated three with an eighth-inning home run, his sixth of the season and second in his past four games. As with Thaiss, the 24-year-old Ward has swung a hot bat in the early going, slashing .362/.458/.551 over 36 games.

Middleton returns to DL with UCL damage

Angels reliever seeking second opinion before deciding course of action

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- The Angels placed right-hander **Keynan Middleton** on the disabled list for the second time this season Monday after an MRI exam revealed damage to the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. No decision has been made regarding the course of treatment, as Middleton will seek a second opinion.

"It's tough news," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think anytime a pitcher has news that there's some damage to any part of their arm, obviously there's great concern. We're going to take this one step at a time and see what happens."

Middleton missed nine games earlier this month with right elbow inflammation, but he was activated off the DL on Thursday. The 24-year-old pitched two scoreless innings after returning before departing his

outing against the Twins on Sunday with discomfort in his elbow. Middleton's final two fastballs to **Eddie Rosario** were clocked at 88.2 and 92.7 mph, significantly below his 97.2-mph average in 2017.

Middleton has been a key cog in the back end of the Angels' bullpen this season and was the club's primary closer before his initial DL stint, logging a 2.04 ERA with six saves over 17 2/3 innings. No other Angels reliever has more than one save this year, though veteran **Jim Johnson** has drawn most of the closing opportunities of late.

"I don't think we ever had one guy that was the ninth-inning guy," Scioscia said. "Keynan was pitching the eighth inning the other day. We've got some guys in the back end that are going to have to get outs for us, and how they line up in a certain game right now will be dictated by how the game unfolds and some matchups and things like that. But we're confident that we're going to have arms down there that will get the outs we need."

The Angels recalled right-hander **Felix Pena** from Triple-A Salt Lake on Monday to replace Middleton in the bullpen. The Angels had been stretching Pena out to be a starter in the Minor Leagues, so he will likely be used as the long man in the bullpen. He has recorded a 4.50 ERA over 18 innings in six appearances (five starts) for Salt Lake this year.

"There's no doubt starting has given him some length, which is going to be important to us," Scioscia said. "He's throwing the ball very well. There's no doubt that he can come in and give us the two-plus innings, three-inning bridge to get to certain matchups late in the game. And he can be part of that back-end, depending on how it goes. But he's been throwing the ball very well."

The Angels are also hoping to incorporate right-hander **Blake Wood** into their relief corps soon. Wood, who has been on the DL since April 23 with an elbow impingement, pitched a scoreless inning in his first rehab appearance with Class A Advanced Inland Empire on Monday night.

Here are the early poll results for MVP Awards

Trout receives 20 of 32 votes in AL; Pollock atop NL with 22

By Anthony Castrovine

Seven weeks was long enough to decide the Austro-Prussian War, but it's not nearly enough time to decide the American League and National League MVP Awards. This isn't war, it's WAR. As in, **wins above replacement** ... or whatever metric you prefer to utilize to decide who is the best of the best. We need the full 162-game slate to give us a satisfying statistical picture.

That said, it can be fun to check in on the race even before it's won. And so each week this season, we're polling our MLB.com reporters on one of the three major Baseball Writers' Association of America awards -- MVP, Cy Young and Rookie of the Year -- to get a gauge on where things stand. We begin this week with the MVPs.

Our poll asked the 32 participants to make their pick for the best player in each league if the season ended today. Here were the results:

American League

Mike Trout (20 votes)

Gee, who would have thought Trout would be in the AL MVP Award conversation? How rare.

For the first time, well, ever, Trout looks to have serious MVP competition on his own team, as the two-way **Shohei Ohtani** experience would certainly make for an interesting ballot equation if he's able to build off the extremely enticing start to his Major League career. For now, though, our voting panel is still, understandably, Trout devout.

At the start of the week, Trout was leading all MLB position players in Baseball-Reference.com's Wins Above Replacement by at least half a win with a 3.5 mark. Trout was tied for the lead in the AL in walks (34, against just 32 strikeouts) and first in on-base percentage (.450) amid continued improvement in the power department (his 12 homers were one shy of the MLB lead). Going by his weighted runs created plus (**wRC+**) of 193 and **OPS+** (198), this is the best offensive version of Trout we've ever seen. Now there's a scary thought. And it could lead to his third AL MVP Award.

Mookie Betts (10 votes)

While the Supreme Court was **clearing the way for bets**, 10 of our "judges" cast a vote for Betts. In FanGraphs' version of WAR, Betts and Trout are even at 3.0 wins apiece. And after finishing as the runner-up to Trout in the 2016 AL MVP Award voting, Betts' early performance -- a .360/.440/.772 slash with 13 homers, 15 doubles, seven steals and elite outfield play -- is a pretty good indication that he's shaken off his statistical decline from 2017 and is ready to vie for the MVP honor yet again. His 213 wRC+ mark is the best in the game.

Didi Gregorius (two votes)

The fumes from Gregorius' magnificent March/April (10 homers, 30 RBIs and a 1.116 OPS), which earned him AL Player of the Month honors, were strong enough to sway a couple of voters. A much-less-magnificent May (Gregorius enters Tuesday with one hit in his past 35 at-bats) cools his case considerably. Because these votes are a moving target, it wouldn't be a surprise to see back-to-back AL Player of the Week **Francisco Lindor** gain traction the next time we poll our voting body.

National League

A.J. Pollock (22 votes)

Pollock appeared to be blossoming into one of the league's best players until he broke his right elbow on a slide at home plate at the end of Spring Training 2016. Injuries limited his availability and impact the past two seasons. And prior to **spraining his left thumb** Monday, we'd seen this dynamic player at his baseball-bashing, run-saving, basestealing best, with a .293/.349/.620 slash, dynamite D and nine stolen bases. Pollock has powered an otherwise slow-starting D-backs offense and therefore been a big reason why Arizona has owned the top spot in the NL West every day this season. He leads NL position players in fWAR (2.3) and is second in bWAR (2.1).

Oh, and Pollock is a free agent at year's end. Good timing, Mr. Pollock.

Max Scherzer (four votes)

It takes a pretty extreme circumstance for a pitcher to assert himself in the MVP Award conversation, and, ladies and gentlemen, here is your extreme circumstance.

The mighty Max has made nine starts and allowed no more than two earned runs in any of them, striking out 91 batters in 58 2/3 innings against 13 walks with 35 hits. That's a 0.82 WHIP and incredible 14 strikeouts per nine (from a starting pitcher!), to go with the 7-1 record. Pure dominance and length at a time when the impact of starting pitchers seems to be diminished by the day.

Freddie Freeman (three votes) and Nick Markakis (two votes)

It's easy to get swept up in the stories of the game's two youngest position players -- **Ozzie Albies** and **Ronald Acuna Jr.** -- and their impact on this awesome-ahead-of-schedule Atlanta squad. But our voters gave some love to a pair of more aged Atlantans.

Freeman has received only down-ballot NL MVP Award love thus far in his career (his highest finish was fifth in 2013), but he's routinely churned out excellent offensive seasons, and 2018 is no different. He enters Tuesday with an NL-best .433 OBP and a 1.008 OPS.

Markakis' big impact, on the other hand, is a bit more surprising. He hasn't had what advanced metrics would classify as an above-average offensive campaign since 2015, but with an MLB-best 56 hits and a homer total (seven) just one shy of his 2017 tally, he's had quite the resurgence. Of course, as Albies, in particular, keeps collecting extra-base hits, the Braves' MVP conversation is getting complicated. And that's a good thing for them.

Tommy Pham (one vote)

After submitting a .306/.411/.520 slash in an age-29 season that qualified as his first legitimate big league opportunity, what would Pham do for a *phollow-up*? Well, he's been even better -- .319/.432/.552. Pham has had some minor injury issues in the early going, but that hasn't prevented him from being the Cards' best bat, by far.

FROM THE ATHLETIC**Keynan Middleton's ligament issue is an all-too-familiar one for the Angels**

By Fabian Ardaya

Angels manager Mike Scioscia struggled to find an explanation.

"Since I've been here, the first 12 years we really had no Tommy Johns, to now within the last couple years we've been getting some," he said.

Another could possibly be added to the list. Keynan Middleton, the club's de facto closer, underwent an MRI on Monday morning that revealed damage to the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. A second opinion will be needed before Middleton elects a course of action.

If the diagnosis is confirmed, Middleton would likely need a procedure that at best would jeopardize his season, and at worst could keep him out for 12 to 18 months.

“It’s tough news,” Scioscia said. “But let’s not get too far ahead of ourselves. Take it one step at a time.”

It’s a course of action that has become all too familiar for the Angels. Middleton is part of a clubhouse littered with horror stories involving the UCL over the past four-plus seasons.

Tyler Skaggs underwent Tommy John surgery in August of 2014, returning to the big leagues in 2016. He’s had a cluster of injury concerns in the time since, limiting him 34 starts since his return. Nick Tropeano also went directly for the surgery in 2016, making it back on a big league mound earlier this season.

Middleton could go for an alternative method to heal the damage to his ligament, seeking a shorter recovery time. Garrett Richards elected against having Tommy John surgery in 2016, instead opting for an injection of stem cells into the area to promote regrowth. After initially suffering the injury on May 1, Richards made it back in time to pitch in the Arizona Fall League that same year. However, he, too, has struggled to stay healthy, making just 14 big league starts post-tear.

The procedures aren’t an end-all, be-all. J.C. Ramírez received a platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injection into his ulnar collateral ligament in August, seeking to avoid surgery. He made just two starts this season, and wound up needing Tommy John surgery. Left-hander Andrew Heaney attempted his stem-cell injections at the same time as Richards in 2016, eventually needing the surgery before returning to make five starts last season.

There have been organizational efforts made in recent years to find some sort of reason or correction to the troubling trend of UCL tears. Before the beginning of last season, the Angels beefed up their medical and training staff, introducing new workouts and hiring new staff to try to quell the spate of ailments. Among the additions to the staff was physical therapist Bernard Li as director of sports science and performance. There’s no readily clear reason for why six players have now shown significant damage to their ligaments in the last four years, with four now bearing Tommy John scars.

“We know our medical department is on the cutting edge of everything that’s out there,” Scioscia said. “There’s no doubt that I think Billy is looking into everything. Our medical department has been looking into everything, as all of baseball is. Sometimes, there’s just a cyclical thing where guys just happen to reach an endpoint where they need some help.

“Most guys pitching in the major leagues don’t have pristine shoulders, don’t have pristine elbows and they continue to pitch with it. I’m sure there’s other guys on our staff that are the same way.”

Middleton’s issues have lingered, even while he posted a 2.04 ERA and recorded six saves in 16 appearances this season to follow up a breakout rookie season. He spent time on the disabled list last month with right elbow inflammation, returning Thursday against the Twins to throw a scoreless eighth inning. He would make just two more appearances, including Sunday, when he left after 2/3 of an inning accompanied by a trainer. He’d thrown 10 pitches, his last an 88.2 mph fastball — nearly a double-digit drop from his average of 96.67 mph, according to Brooks Baseball.

The back end of an already-thin Angels bullpen is becoming a muddied picture. The unit entered Monday having thrown 164 innings, most in the American League and second-most in baseball. Felix Peña, recalled Monday in a corresponding move to Middleton's return to the disabled list, had been stretched out as a starter in Triple-A Salt Lake and could provide length. That doesn't fix the problem at the end of the game, however.

Not one member of the group, excluding Middleton, has recorded more than one save this season. Jim Johnson, with 177 career saves entering Monday, would seem to be the most likely candidate to fill the role, though Scioscia said he will likely choose his ninth-inning man on a by-committee basis for the time being.

Justin Anderson got the first crack on Monday, preserving a 2-1 victory over the Astros for his first career save.

"We've got a lot of guys," Scioscia said. "I don't think we've had one guy that was just the ninth-inning guy. Keynan was pitching in the eighth inning the other day. We've got some guys on the back end that are going to have to get outs for us, and how they line up in a certain game, right now will be dictated by how the game flows and some of the matchups and things like that. We're confident we're going to have the arms down there to get three outs in the ninth."

"It's probably the best game I've pitched": Andrew Heaney returns to form in eight-inning gem

By Steve Dilbeck

That's how it was supposed to look, the plan all along. Andrew Heaney in command, hitters flailing away, the left-hander almost making it appear routine.

He was the Marlins' No. 1 prospect when traded to the Angels in 2014. He had even been dubbed the top left-handed prospect in all of the minors by Baseball America. He quickly became the Angels' No. 1 prospect.

And all that began to vanish with the bane of every pitcher – a torn ulnar collateral ligament after his first start in 2016. Platelet-rich injections administered in an effort to stem Tommy John only delayed the surgery.

It's been a long road back for Heaney since, but Monday night against the world champion Houston Astros, he looked very much the pitcher many thought could become a No. 1 starter.

He went eight innings against the Astros, striking out 10 and allowing only four hits to lead the Angels to a 2-1 victory. He looked a lot like the pitcher he was always expected to be.

"It's probably the best game I've pitched in my career," Heaney said. "I'll savor it tonight and then come back to work and try to do the same thing in five or six days."

Heaney, 26, surrendered his only run in the third when Josh Reddick doubled and scored on a Max Stassi single. Otherwise, he was a man in control.

Over half his pitches were fastballs, but he also threw 26 breaking balls – six that were swung at and missed – and 17 changeups. He worked both sides of the plate, in and out, up and down, and threw with an ease that left the Astros befuddled.

For an Angels team whose starters were averaging just over five innings a start and learned prior to the game they had lost closer Keynan Middleton to an UCL injury, those eight innings were much-needed.

“Usually when you strike that many guys out, your pitch count will get elevated,” said Angels manager Mike Scioscia. “But he was very pitch efficient on both sides of the plate. Throwing strikes with everything. Got a couple double-play balls.

“But to finish the eight innings with 100 pitches against a tough offensive club where you have to grind every out — it’s a great outing.”

One Heaney hopes to build upon, and that may finally put his own elbow injury behind him.

“It makes me feel like I’ve gotten back to what I was doing before I had surgery and some of the issues,” Heaney said.

The 6-foot-2 Heaney said he knew early that Monday might offer something special.

“Honestly, today it was there,” he said. “From the beginning in the bullpen I could tell I had a good feel from my stuff. Days like today, you hope they come more often than not, and try to bottle it up and do it more.”

Heaney came back from his surgery slightly ahead of schedule last season, but in five starts went 1-2 with a 7.06 ERA and with teams hitting .300 against him.

This season he’s moved his starting position slightly on the rubber and grown increasingly at ease as the season has progressed.

“If a pitcher has a comfort level, some good things can happen,” Scioscia said. “He just feels at home on that side of the rubber. It’s not a huge jump. It’s subtly, but he feels like he can execute his pitches better.”

The Angels have now beaten the Astros three times in four meetings this season, though none may have offered as much promise as Heaney in control.

“That was huge from Heaney,” said outfielder Kole Calhoun. “I mean, eight innings, one-run baseball against an offense like that?”

“He threw one of the best games I’ve seen him throw. That was definitely huge for us.”

Heaney understands more challenges await, but after everything he's been through the past three years, he believes things are beginning to fall into place. He partially credits basic repetition.

"Sometimes it just takes time," he said. "I kind of got off to a slow start. I was making adjustments early on, coming off the DL. Sometimes it's just a little slow.

"I'm getting some things ironed out a little more with the consistency. Trying to get fastballs on both sides of the plate. Get the changeup in there for strikes. Whenever I don't throw that for strikes, I become more dependent on the fastball."

The Angels plan to become more dependent on Heaney, once more a pitcher of great promise.

What Andrew Heaney has to do to break out for the Angels this season

By Eno Sarris

Andrew Heaney, the former Marlins lefty, was a Dodger for five minutes, a really good major league starter for around 100 innings, and injured forever, so it's easy to forget that the current Angels starter has only been on this planet for 26 years. And that he possesses good stuff, good command, and just needs to rethink some of his approach in order to break out. Don't believe me? Let's go to the tape.

To make the following table, I went to my toolbox of existing research on the relationship of spin, velocity, and movement to outcomes. Here's what I found on four-seamers, sinkers, curveballs, sliders, changeups, average movement per pitch type, average results per pitch type, and spin rate. When looking at the information, assume that a higher percentile in each of the boxes is a good thing when it comes to the outcomes.

Andrew Heaney Pitch Percentiles

| Pitch | Spin | Horizontal | Vertical | Velocity |
|--------|------|------------|----------|----------|
| Sinker | 98 | 54 | 6 | 60 |
| Curve | 38 | 11 | 11 | 67 |
| Change | | 39 | 61 | 52 |

It's a weird mix, and Heaney is aware of that, to a degree. Like that curve that some people call a slider?

"It's a curve, I hold it on the horseshoe," he told me in late March. "I know it doesn't drop all that much, though."

You might call it a slurver if you wanted to denigrate it — it has the drop of an above-average slider and the velocity of an above-average curve. For his career, he has a 23% whiff rate on the pitch, which would rank third this year among starting pitchers ... *if you called it a curve*. Even this year's whiff rate (18%) would rank in the top third if compared to this year's sliders thrown by starting pitchers. He's never given up a home run on the pitch.

And it's a particularly good pitch when he back foots it to righties.

Meanwhile, his change, as you can see from the table above, has good drop and above-average velocity gap. But it doesn't have a standout feature, so it's no surprise that it's been just below average for his career.

The change has its uses, though. It gets above-average grounders and allows fewer home runs than his fastball, and helps him turn over the lineup the last time through the order. He helps it by generally commanding it well — his Command+ score on the pitch (105) puts him right there with David Price (105) and Mike Clevinger (105).

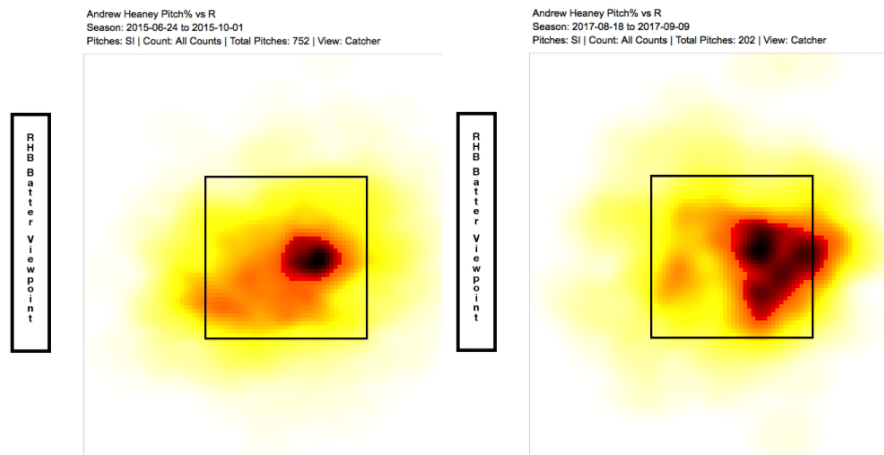
A good person to compare (and contrast) Heaney with is the Athletics' Sean Manaea. They both throw weird fastballs, and though Manaea's change might be better than Heaney's, the Angels' lefty has the better slider. They have similar release points, and though Heaney's fastball has more velocity, Manaea's has more movement.

What has separated the two so far this year has to do with command and with spin. Heaney is struggling to find the best command strategy for his particular stuff.

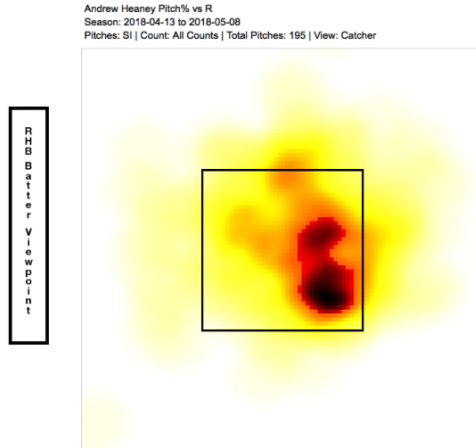
"Last year's struggles were just execution," Heaney told me, at the same time admitting that "I moved to the first base side of the bag so I can be more direct to the plate."

Last year, coming back from Tommy John surgery, he tried a different spot on the mound. Here he is throwing in his return, a full 18 inches away from his setup in 2016.

That shift has had an effect on his command, perhaps because the pitcher is throwing across his body less. Here's his sinker heat map from 2015 (left) compared to last year (right).

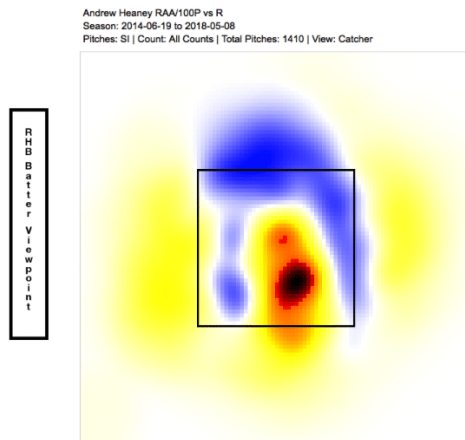


At first, it looks like the new spot was working — he hit the outside edge more, and threw low and away more often. But the results turned out to be not so good after all, and he went back to his old position this year. His 2018 heat map, though, remained more like 2017 than 2015.



It looks like Heaney is putting the ball where he wants to now. His Command+ score overall was in the top third, and pitching coaches get all tingly when you can hit low and away with regularity. Here's the thing, though: maybe he shouldn't be aiming for down there.

Take a look at how righty batters have done, career, against his sinker.

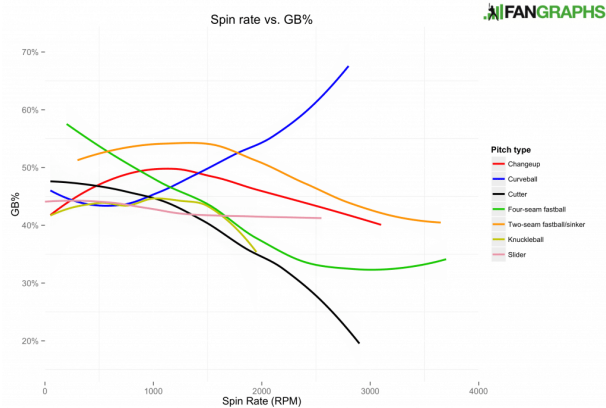


They love that outside corner sinker, at least when it creeps toward the middle. There were a lot of sinkers that went fairly close to where Heaney wanted them to that still got spanked.

We talked about that phenomenon in the context of spin. Heaney's spin is elite, which means he doesn't get great sink, and the ball appears a little higher at the plate than the batter thinks it will. That surprise leads many pitchers to throw over the top and harness 'ride' from their spin — think Clayton Kershaw. For Heaney and his lower slot, that ride might create some difficulties for him.

"Yeah, they think the stuff will be good, and then — surprise — it's not," laughed a frustrated Heaney.

High spin two-seamers are an interesting beast. Often thought of as a pitch best used for grounders, two-seamers get fewer grounders as spin increases. From Jonah Pemstein at FanGraphs, this excellent graph:



See that orange line go down? Heaney had the fourth-highest spin in baseball on his sinker, so he's right on that line between 2000 and 3000. He shouldn't expect to get ground balls on his sinker. He should use the two-seamer more like Garret Richards does than Sean Manaea does; he has more in common with a high-velo, high-spin two-seamer than a low-velo, low-spin two-seamer.

Nothing is absolute, and there are no universals in pitching. But while command might be part of what is leading Heaney closer to Manaea's outcomes this year, it's a realization of their differences that may be the most important for Heaney. More two-seamers high and away, paired with fewer two-seamers low-middle, and we could be talking about how exciting this Angels rotation is with the addition of a breakout lefty.

FROM MiLB.COM

Canning chips in again on BayBears' no-no

Angels No. 8 prospect, Mahle, Almeida, Clark rack up another one

By Vincent Lara-Cinisomo

Just three weeks ago, **Griffin Canning** and **Ryan Clark** bookended a **no-hitter by Double-A Mobile**.

On Monday, Canning and Clark did it again.

Right-hander Canning fanned eight and walked two over 4 1/3 innings en route to the BayBears' 9-0 historic win over the Barons. Left-hander **Greg Mahle** followed the **eighth-ranked Angels prospect** by striking out three in 1 2/3 perfect frames, southpaw **Adrian Almeida** withstood three walks over 1 2/3 innings and **Ryan Clark** shut the door with two walks and a strikeout for the third no-hitter in team history.

"I only went 4 1/3 ... the guys behind me, Mahle, Almeida, Clark, they did the bulk of the work. They did an awesome job," Canning said.

Mahle's brother **Tyler Mahle** of the Reds threw a no-hitter in 2016 and **a perfect game** on April 22, 2017 for Pensacola against, coincidentally, Mobile.

The BayBears are the second Southern League team to have two no-hitters in one season. The first was Columbus in 1971.

Canning, a second-round pick in 2017, struck out two hitters in the first and second innings and fanned three in the third around a fielding error by third baseman **Zach Houchins**. The UCLA product struck out top White Sox prospect **Eloy Jimenez** in the fourth and departed with one out in the fifth, having thrown 81 pitches.

"I'll go back and take a look at the video, because I shouldn't be throwing 81 pitches and only going 4 1/3," said Canning, who walked two Monday after issuing six passes in the combined no-hitter.

"I think the biggest thing was fastball command," Canning said when asked about the difference between the two historic feats. "I had lost it, but I found it again tonight, thanks to working on it in bullpen sessions."

BayBears pitching coach Pat Rice agreed.

"[In the last outing] his command wasn't wild enough to walk six and tonight it was similar," Rice said. "He hit the strike zone, rather than just missing it. He commanded the fastball really well and the velocity was a tick higher [than April 28]. Maybe 97ish."

Rice, who pitched in the bigs for the Mariners in 1991, said the weather played a part in Canning's velocity uptick.

"I think just that it ended up being a cooler night and that played into a more comfortable warmup. Also it's just the natural give-and-take from start to start," he said. "[But] his fastball was special tonight. He was mixing in [offspeed pitches] to get to his fastball. He was pitching a little backward, but I think his fastball was just special, had a little extra."

Rice said the next step for Canning is pitch efficiency.

"He threw a lot of strikes, but they had a lot of foul balls and that was a lot of what made the pitch count higher than what it usually is," he said. "I thought they had a lot of good at-bats against him."

"He has really good command, he throws a lot of strikes, but I think he just needs to know when he can take a little more plate and not waste as many."

Canning was originally projected to be a first-rounder in last June's Draft, but concerns about his medical reports pushed him down the boards. Not that the Southern California native is upset about being picked by his hometown club.

"I can't control anything that happened in the Draft, I'm just grateful that the Angels drafted me."

Offensively, Los Angeles' No. 13 prospect **Taylor Ward** belted a three-run homer and eighth-ranked **Matt Thaiss** went 4-for-5 with a triple and two runs scored.

MiLB and FIS extend strategic relationship, enhance fan experience through advanced payments solutions and emerging technology

JACKSONVILLE, Florida -- **FIS**[™] (NYSE: FIS), a global leader in financial technology, announced today that it has extended its commitment to be the official technology provider to Minor League Baseball[™] (MiLB[™]) through 2022. With technology as its foundation, the relationship supports MiLB's fan-centric approach to drive engagement with its 111 million self-designated fans, according to a 2017 ESPN Sports Poll. FIS announced a relationship with the league as its **official payments and loyalty technology provider** prior to the 2017 season.

The agreement serves to integrate FIS' advanced payment, loyalty and other solutions within the league's **"Ballparks of the Future"** initiative. FIS' technology powers a range of enhanced experiences for fans at MiLB ballparks, from simplifying payment transactions to driving new fan loyalty programs. For MiLB teams, FIS technology also streamlines accounting and management of travel expenses, simplifies business expense management through real-time, prepaid technology and provides other advanced capabilities.

Since announcing the relationship last year, more than 20 teams have begun to leverage FIS solutions and services leading to greater efficiency and overall fan engagement. As an extension of the relationship and to showcase its solutions and services, FIS created and launched an "Innovation Dugout" where it will showcase its innovative technologies and business solutions for the "Ballparks of the Future" at Bragan Field at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville, home of the Double-A[®] Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp.

"Continuing to super-serve our fans across the consumer journey is a core area of focus as we look to the future," said David Wright, Minor League Baseball's chief marketing & commercial officer. "Technology is at the root of these efforts and a key-driver in our quest to tailor to the next-generation consumer. Our long-term extension with FIS is a great example of our commitment to be a dynamic leader in sport and entertainment."

"We are excited to be working with a growing number of Minor League Baseball teams to enhance service to their fans and make a day at the ballpark an even more enjoyable experience," said Bruce Lowthers, chief operating officer, FIS Integrated Financial Solutions. "By using technology in innovative ways, Minor League Baseball remains at the forefront of fan-friendly entertainment."

About FIS

FIS is a global leader in financial services technology, with a focus on retail and institutional banking, payments, asset and wealth management, risk and compliance, and outsourcing solutions. Through the depth and breadth of our solutions portfolio, global capabilities and domain expertise, FIS serves more than 20,000 clients in over 130 countries. Headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., FIS employs more than 53,000 people worldwide and holds leadership positions in payment processing, financial software and

banking solutions. Providing software, services and outsourcing of the technology that empowers the financial world, FIS is a Fortune 500 company and is a member of Standard & Poor's 500® Index. For more information about FIS, visit www.fisglobal.com.

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About Minor League Baseball

Minor League Baseball, headquartered in St. Petersburg, Florida, is the governing body for all professional baseball teams in the United States, Canada, and the Dominican Republic that are affiliated with Major League Baseball® clubs through their farm systems. Fans are coming out in unprecedented numbers to this one-of-a-kind experience that can only be found at Minor League Baseball ballparks. In 2017, Minor League Baseball attracted 41.8 million fans to its ballparks to see the future stars of the sport hone their skills. From the electricity in the stands to the excitement on the field, Minor League Baseball has provided affordable family-friendly entertainment to people of all ages since its founding in 1901. For more information, visit www.MiLB.com.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Andrew Heaney shuts down Astros in Angels' 2-1 rivalry win

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- After Andrew Heaney induced a long flyout with his 100th and final pitch, he left the mound with the fervent hope that the Los Angeles Angels were on their way to a victory that would deliver a statement to the mighty Houston Astros.

With late help from Kole Calhoun's arm in right field, the Angels made it.

Heaney struck out 10 during a career-high eight innings of four-hit ball, and the Angels pulled percentage points ahead of Houston atop the AL West with a 2-1 victory over the Astros on Monday night.

"It's good to get a win to start a series against a divisional team, and a team that we think we're going to be fighting tooth and nail with to the end," said Heaney, who also matched his career best in strikeouts.

Justin Upton singled home the tiebreaking run in the sixth inning for the Angels (25-16), who beat the defending World Series champions (26-17) for the third time in four meetings this season.

Luis Valbuena drove in an early run for the Angels in the opener of a three-game series between the Astros and their most significant early-season rival in the AL West. The Angels entered the week trailing the Astros by just one game after trailing Houston by eight games at the same point last season.

Heaney (2-2) led the way, limiting Houston to five baserunners over eight innings while outpitching Lance McCullers Jr., who took his first loss in seven starts since April 6.

"I think we want to establish that it's not a (surprise) we just won that game," Heaney said. "It's (saying) we can beat those guys. We're just as good, if not better than these guys."

Houston native Justin Anderson allowed three baserunners in the ninth, but the Angels rookie still earned his first career save with help from Calhoun, whose profound struggles at the plate haven't affected his superb defense.

After the right fielder caught Alex Bregman's long fly in foul territory, he pivoted and threw out speedy George Springer, who tagged up and attempted to take second.

"It helped us win the game, so that's why I liked it," Calhoun said.

Calhoun's throw and Andrelton Simmons' clever tag on Springer completed a double play with Calhoun's major league-leading sixth outfield assist.

"That's a hard throw to make, but he's one of the best," Springer said of Calhoun. "He made a great throw, and you move on to tomorrow."

Anderson then allowed Jose Altuve's single and walked Carlos Correa in the ninth, but survived when Yuli Gurriel grounded out.

Max Stassi drove in an early run for the Astros, who lost for only the second time in seven games.

"That's a big win for us, playing one of the hottest teams in baseball," Anderson said. "Took a little longer, made it a little more interesting for everybody, but it was fun."

McCullers (5-2) pitched six innings of four-hit ball while striking out six. But in the sixth, McCullers walked Martin Maldonado and Mike Trout before Upton's two-out single to left.

The RBI was the 19th of the month for Upton, who came into the night leading the majors in RBI in May.

HEANDOG VS HOUSTON

The 26-year-old Heaney has excelled against the powerhouse Astros, who have scored just one earned run and struck out 19 times against him in 19 career innings over three games. He returned late last season from Tommy John surgery, and is gradually rounding into the form long expected from the former ninth overall selection in the 2012 draft.

"It's probably the best game I've pitched in my career, for sure," Heaney said. "Hopefully not of a lifetime. Hopefully there's a lot more of those to come."

MIDDLETON HURT

Reliever Keynan Middleton went back on the 10-day disabled list with ligament damage in his right elbow, dealing another potentially serious blow to a pitching staff annually plagued by injuries. He is expected to seek more medical advice before deciding on a course of treatment.

ANOTHER NO-NO

Griffin Canning, the Angels' second-round pick last summer, started his second combined no-hitter of the season for Double-A Mobile. Canning, a UCLA product, threw 4 1/3 innings as the BayBears blanked Birmingham 9-0.

UP NEXT

Astros: Gerrit Cole (4-1, 1.43 ERA) is off to a stellar start with his new club, leading the AL with 86 strikeouts. The Orange County native and UCLA product will make just his second career start at Angel Stadium, where his parents had season tickets.

Angels: Rookie Jaime Barria (3-1, 2.45 ERA) makes his fifth career start after pitching scoreless ball into the sixth at Colorado last week.

FROM ESPN.COM

Weaknesses that could sink MLB's 10 best teams

By David Schoenfield

A quick glance at the standings reveals that it's shaping up as a strange season. The Red Sox and Yankees both started 28-12, the first time two teams have won 28 of their first 40 games since 2002. In the National League, 10 of the 15 teams are over .500. Meanwhile, seven teams begin the week under .400, with the Dodgers sitting right at that mark. It all means we have a lot of good teams -- at least, so far.

Even good teams have major flaws, however, so let's look at the top 10 teams in this week's Power Rankings and examine their biggest problems.

New York Yankees

Biggest problem: SP Sonny Gray (6.39 ERA, 46 hits and 24 walks in 38 innings)

Also of concern: 3B Miguel Andujar (.282/.296/.458, but 28/3 SO/BB and minus-6 Defensive Runs Saved)

Thanks to strong starts from Luis Severino and CC Sabathia, the Yankees' rotation is fourth in the American League in ERA, helping to cover for Gray's abysmal start. He has been able to go more than five innings in just three of eight starts, and the walk rate is way too high. His swing-and-miss rate is still in line with his career norms, but batters are swinging less because he's not throwing enough strikes.

Andujar has certainly shown the hitting skills that could make him a long-term solution at third base, but the defense is a problem -- he kind of slingshots his throws from the side, leading to accuracy issues -- and the OBP is poor, leading to a player who has merely been replacement level. At a position with talent potentially available via trade (Manny Machado, Adrian Beltre, Mike Moustakas) or even in-house, if Brandon Drury recovers, the Yankees could upgrade.

Boston Red Sox

Biggest problem: Red Sox catchers are hitting .178/.228/.224 for the worst wOBA in the majors (.209).

Also of concern: Jackie Bradley Jr. is hitting .171, including .088 against lefties.

I'm not as worried about the bullpen as everyone else. The pen is second in the majors in FanGraphs WAR and sixth in Win Probability Added. Sure, Dave Dombrowski might look to add another arm in July, but it has to be a very quality addition -- say, a guy like Brad Hand -- to provide a significant upgrade.

The Red Sox love the defense Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon provide, but it also means they're punting a position on offense right now. Good luck finding somebody on the trade market, however, unless you want to pay a hefty price for J.T. Realmuto.

Bradley's underlying stats are actually similar to last season, so there's been some bad luck, although the Red Sox are starting to sit him against lefties.

Houston Astros

Biggest problem: Who is the closer?

Also of concern: Jake Marisnick has become unplayable with a "Holy crap, that actually is happening" stat line of 41 strikeouts and one walk with a .141 average. Derek Fisher hasn't hit. Marwin Gonzalez hasn't hit like 2017. So, they could look for outfield help.

There are good pitchers in the bullpen: Chris Devenski, Brad Peacock, even Hector Rondon has been solid so far. The big question will remain unknown no matter the numbers: Can you trust Ken Giles in the postseason? He's off to an interesting start: He hasn't walked anybody, but his strikeout rate is down -- in part because he's throwing more fastballs and fewer wipeout sliders. Does he not trust his slider, the pitch that abandoned him last October?

There are potential closers out there in Hand, Kelvin Herrera and maybe Zach Britton if he gets healthy, but it's not clear those guys are any better than what the Astros already have. It could lead to another October of A.J. Hinch winging it with his bullpen.

Los Angeles Angels

Biggest problem: The always reliable Kole Calhoun is hitting .158/.187/.195.

Also of concern: Albert Pujols isn't good.

What's happened to Calhoun? The defense is still very good, but he's completely lost at the plate with 37 strikeouts and just five walks and is getting blown away by fastballs with a .151 average and .330 OPS (after an .800-plus OPS against fastballs the past three seasons). That looks like a guy playing through an injury or somebody who woke up one day and the bat speed was gone.

The other outfield options are Chris Young and Jabari Blash, and Young is hitting .146. Adam Jones isn't great, but he'd likely be available, and the Padres have a glut of mediocre outfielders who might provide a small upgrade at this point.

As for Pujols, I wouldn't anticipate a move here, although it seems Jefry Martemight have to start getting more opportunities, even in the games Shohei Ohtani is the designated hitter.

Arizona Diamondbacks

Biggest problem: Their catchers are almost as bad as Boston's group, hitting .183/.257/.310.

Also of concern: Well, Paul Goldschmidt isn't hitting like a superstar, and they need him to hit like a superstar given some of the other holes in the lineup (both middle infielders have sub-.300 OBPs).

Arizona's catching problem is exacerbated even more because the D-backs carry three catchers, meaning Alex Avila and John Ryan Murphy are often used as pinch hitters.

Getting Jake Lamb back will help the offense, but the key is Goldschmidt, who is struggling with a .211/.337/.374 line. You blame the new humidior, but that hasn't affected A.J. Pollock.

His problem has been a lot of swing-and-misses -- but the trend line there isn't good:

2016: 22.9 percent miss rate

2017: 26.5 percent miss rate

2018: 31.1 percent miss rate

Ruh-roh.

St. Louis Cardinals

Biggest problem: Dexter Fowler, Matt Carpenter and Kolten Wong are all hitting under .200, and Marcell Ozuna has a lackluster .658 OPS. I guess that's four problems.

Also of concern: It's the Cardinals, which means the bullpen is always of concern.

The guy to be least concerned about is Ozuna, who is still showing strong exit velocities and showing signs of coming out his slump. He was hitting too many ground balls early and pulling too many pitches, and the walk rate isn't good (but the chase rates and miss rates are the same as 2017). He should get going soon.

Fowler and Carpenter are harder to figure out. They are at that scary age when decline can happen. Fowler has his usual strong plate discipline, but his swing-and-miss rate is up 5 percent from 2017, and he has hit a lot of popups. Carpenter's miss rate is *way* up, from 19.5 percent to 28.2 percent. Maybe he has taken the whole plate-discipline thing too far and is finding himself in too many pitcher's counts.

The good news is these guys should improve, but the Cardinals also have options: Jedd Gyorko in the infield and Harrison Bader in the outfield. They also have the depth to make a splashy move for a Machado.

Chicago Cubs

Biggest problem: Yu Darvish is 0-3 in six starts with a 6.00 ERA (he has also been on the disabled list with a virus, which sounds suspiciously like a "Let's give him a 10-day break" virus).

Also of concern: Jason Heyward ... this just in ... still can't hit.

Of the 10 teams listed here, the Cubs are probably the team least likely to make a big move, barring some kind of major injury. Anthony Rizzo has recovered from a poor April with a hot May, and Addison Russell has just one home run. Darvish will be fine. In my fantasy scenario, they flip Russell for Machado and go all-in for 2018. Hey, flags fly forever.

Washington Nationals

Biggest problem: Bullpen depth. Closer Sean Doolittle is fine, but the pen is 20th in the majors in ERA.

Also of concern: With Adam Eaton on the 60-day DL, they've started six different left fielders.

Washington is one contender obviously in need of relief help, and the Nationals will be tied to every available reliever. It will be interesting to see what they eventually do in the outfield. Michael Taylor is a plus defender but hasn't hit, and Matt Adams has hit, but you don't really want him in left field. Maybe Eaton gets healthy, or maybe top prospect Victor Robles, who injured his elbow on a diving catch in Triple-A in April, is ready to contribute later in the season.

Philadelphia Phillies

Biggest problem: Closer Hector Neris has three blown saves (and three losses) and a 5.17 ERA.

Also of concern: The right fielders are hitting .166/.287/.290.

Neris has racked up strikeouts the past couple of seasons, but he also has had home run issues that aren't solely attributable to Citizens Bank Park. With a deep farm system, the Phillies have the resources to make a deal if they stay in the race.

Aaron Altherr had a solid 2017, his walk rate is up and his Statcast numbers suggest he's underperforming his expected production. He should be fine.

Atlanta Braves

Biggest problem: Third base. Braves third basemen have actually hit well, but bringing in Jose Bautista shows the team wasn't buying Ryan Flaherty's strong start.

Also of concern: Bullpen depth.

Bautista is more of a shot in the dark than a likely solution, given his poor performance at the plate with the Blue Jays in 2017 -- let alone his ability to play the position regularly for the first time in years. Given the potential glut of third basemen on the trade market, is there a more perfect fit for Machado to land for three months? The Braves have pitching depth in the minors to make that move.

The bullpen has actually been surprisingly decent so far, ranking ninth in ERA with some good results from Arodys Vizcaino (a little wild, but a 1.93 ERA), Dan Winkler (1.02 ERA, strong peripherals) and Shane Carle (0.75 ERA). This group has allowed just nine home runs in 150 innings, but adding a quality reliever or two would help balance some of the inevitable regression. The Braves have to be careful about not pushing too early, but this is looking like a team that can contend all season.

Angels reliever Keynan Middleton has damaged UCL in right elbow

An MRI performed on Los Angeles Angels reliever Keynan Middleton revealed damage to the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow, the team announced Monday.

Middleton is seeking a second opinion, the team said.

He has been placed on the 10-day disabled list. Right-hander Felix Pena was recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake.

Middleton, 24, was removed from Sunday's game against the Twins in the top of the eighth inning because of elbow discomfort with a 1-1 count on Minnesota's Eddie Rosario.

Middleton had just returned from the disabled list last Thursday after being sidelined with elbow inflammation.

He leads the Angels with six saves. He has a 2.04 ERA in 17 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings over 16 appearances, with 16 strikeouts and nine walks.

FROM NBC SPORTS**Keynan Middleton has UCL damage, to get second opinion**

By Bill Baer

The Angels announced on Monday that closer **Keynan Middleton** underwent an MRI on Monday that revealed damage to his ulnar collateral ligament. He will get a second opinion that will determine if the right-hander needs Tommy John surgery.

Middleton, 24, was placed on the 10-day disabled list at the beginning of the month and was activated on Thursday. He was forced out of Sunday's game against the Twins with more discomfort in his right elbow.

In 16 appearances this season, Middleton has six saves with a 2.04 ERA and a 16/9 K/BB ratio in 17 2/3 innings. **Jim Johnson**, **Cam Bedrosian**, and **Blake Parker** are all candidates to handle save situations while Middleton is out.

FROM CBS SPORTS**Why it's up to older fans to save MLB's future unless baseball reinvents itself**

Appealing to the next generation is no easy task, but that doesn't mean it can't be a simple one

By Cody Benjamin

If you've been following baseball in recent years, you probably know that Major League Baseball has been openly trying to combat the rise in average age of its fans -- now a not-so-spring-chicken-y 57 years old -- with a plethora of tweaks and proposals meant to speed up the game and appeal to the next generation.

What you probably don't know is that absolutely none of them will work.

That, essentially, is what's proposed by Susan Jacoby, former *Washington Post* reporter, in her new book, *Why Baseball Matters*.

And it is not without merit.

Part of a Yale University Press series, the book acts as both a personal and historical tribute to baseball as well as a commentary on MLB's future, and in it, Jacoby tries to unearth how the game can reclaim its fading factions of young fans -- including women and African-Americans.

But rather than peddle the league's current efforts, which shave a couple minutes off three-hour game times to cater to "a culture of digital distraction," she suggests something far more radical, yet far more

logical: Unless MLB opts to change the very fabric of its game, it's up to older fans to pass onto kids the beauty of its seemingly "boring" pace.

If that sounds simplistic, that's because it is. It's a lot easier said than done, after all, to will a new generation into a better attention span. But the reality is that MLB is headed down one of two paths if it's serious about changing for the times:

1. Further tinkering with baseball's "timeless" structure (pitch clocks, commercial break limitations, etc.) in order to continually decrease the average length of games, if only by seconds or minutes.
2. Polarizing upheaval of traditional rules (automatic extra-inning base runners, pitching change limitations, etc.) that completely change the dynamics of the game and, thus, accelerate action.

The dilemma is not entirely dissimilar, at least in principle, to the crossroads the NFL could ultimately face in countering its concussion crisis, with the league either steadily uprooting its commitment to contact in the name of safety or running full bore with the notion that football is, and forever will be, a play-at-your-own-risk venture.

The problem for baseball is also twofold, as Jacoby succinctly explains in *Why Baseball Matters*.

Nothing beyond a massive rules overhaul -- like one cited idea of quickening extras by allowing each team's best hitter 10 pitches to try to hit a walk-off home run -- will either cut more than a couple minutes off average game times and/or inject "excitement" into a patient game. (Plus, aren't most people who stick around for extras the ones who actually care about the whole game anyway?) And yet *with* a massive overhaul, MLB would, as Jacoby puts it, be risking a rerun of Coca-Cola's infamous "New Coke" experiment of 1985 -- an alienation of fans who like baseball for what it is.

"Baseball should not run away from its strongest selling points," Jacoby writes. "The game stands up and out in the lowest-common-denominator American culture of distraction, disruption and interruption."

Bingo. These days, most of us are so conditioned to want things quickly and on demand (it's a Netflix culture, people) just like most of you probably no longer have the desire and/or power to read this sentence carefully, word for word.

But baseball is all about the sanctity of stillness. The quiet anticipation of a pitch. The hopeful -- or nervous -- crack of a ninth-inning bat. The hum of background ballpark chatter. The knowledge that redemption is possible as long as a team still has three outs to spare.

And protecting that stillness, Jacoby eloquently argues, is the most viable -- not to mention probably the most healthy -- route forward for MLB.

That's where the older fans come in.

There are countless other ways baseball must attract younger audiences, like upping its African-American representation and ingratiating itself as an affordable and affable sport for kids -- many who

studies show drift from baseball fandom if they don't play themselves. But both the simplest and most overarching thing that can be done falls on the shoulders of the seasoned fans.

"The future of baseball depends not only on its institutions," Jacoby writes, "but on individual adult fans making an effort to show the young why we love the game and why they might love it too if they surrendered themselves, as an experiment, to time uninterrupted by clocks and clicks."

If that sounds too idealistic to you, well, you might be right. Truth be told, it remains to be seen if all those "clocks and clicks" of a world increasingly built for multitasking -- a society raising kids on screens and valuing an excess of mild interests over a couple of serious ones -- will ever lose enough luster for future sports fans to do more than swipe through fantasy lineups or choose app-ready highlights over the uncontrolled patience of a live game.

At some point, if consumption -- or lack thereof -- so dictates, maybe baseball will have no choice but to reinvent itself as something other than the beautiful process it is.

Until then, however, Jacoby is right. It's largely up to MLB's current fans -- those same ones weighing down the average-age studies baseball executives long to overcome -- to save its product for the fans to come. Because unlike the NFL, where safety concerns are driving the biggest changes to football, MLB has little reason to abandon the makeup of its unique offering other than the fact most people just need to relearn how to sit still.

So get to a game. Get the family some Ball Park Franks. (Maybe that's the real answer to all of this.) Bask in the breaks between innings. Play catch. (This one probably requires putting the phone down.) Just let the sport speak for itself in a time when everything else is barking for attention. And play ball.

MLB's future depends on it.

FROM SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Angels Outfielder Kole Calhoun is having a historically awful start to the season

By Emma Baccellieri

Kole Calhoun's season has been one great downward slide through the Angels' lineup. After batting fifth to begin the year, he's tumbled through the order as his performance has worsened—and it's worsened considerably. Calhoun occupied the eighth spot on the lineup card for a few weeks until Sunday, when manager Mike Scioscia decided to try something different. He tried batting Calhoun second.

It didn't work. The rightfielder went 0-for-3, striking out twice and stranding three men on base before being yanked for a pinch-hitter in the seventh. But considering Calhoun's year so far, Scioscia's desire to reach for something new is easily understood. Calhoun has been not just bad, but disastrously so: He's the worst everyday player in the major leagues so far, in a start that's been nearly historically bad.

The Angels have plenty of more exciting things to focus on; Calhoun's struggle has been perhaps the lone depressing footnote in what's been a dynamite team story so far. (Case in point: Yesterday's batting-order shake-up came during a walk-off victory in which Shohei Ohtani struck out eleven, and the pinch-hitter who replaced Calhoun was none other than Mike Trout.) The 30-year-old's season has been easy to overlook, then, but in a sense, he's been remarkable. After all, an 11 OPS+—no zero missing at the end there—isn't something you see that often.

That translates to a hideous triple-slash of .165/.195/.205, and there's no bright spot to be found in any of his numbers beyond that. He's seemingly lost his sense of the zone, drawing walks at scarcely a third of the rate that he did over the past several seasons and striking out far more. For the first time in his career, he's swinging at more than half of the pitches that he sees, but making less contact than he ever has. And the majority of the contact that he *does* make is weak, with grounders making up nearly 60% of his batted-ball profile. Relative to the rest of the league's performance, it's the worst March-April from an everyday player since Greg Vaughn hit .099/.192/.110 in 2002; in the last half-century, only three other players have had similarly poor starts.

It's uncharacteristic for Calhoun, who's been solidly competent, if nothing else, for several seasons now. A small decline in power last year meant that he posted an OPS+ below 100 for the first time in his career—only just below, at 96. This season, in other words, is something notably weird for him. It's unlikely that he can possibly continue playing quite this poorly for too much longer, but the fact that he even has the chance to *try* is a testament to the Angels' faith in the Calhoun of years past. The team has a replacement (albeit an uninspiring one) ready in Jabari Blash, but for now, the starting job still belongs to Calhoun, which means that the unofficial title of baseball's worst everyday player does, too.

It's still early in the year, of course, and that title requires a delicate walk on a replacement-level tightrope—playing terribly, yet not quite so terribly that your play can't be justified in the first place—but there are a few other guys who have been navigating it almost as impressively as Calhoun. There's Ian Desmond, who's followed up his injury-ridden struggles from last year with something even worse, posting an OPS+ of 43. There's Chris Davis, seemingly doing his best to provide a new answer to the question of just how poorly a first baseman can hit without losing his job. And then there's one figure who should strike fear (relief?) in the hearts of everyone in contention to be baseball's worst—last year's arguable champ, Rowned Odor, who came back this weekend from a month on the disabled list. Since his return, he's struck out in five of his seven plate appearances; if that doesn't scream *repeat* for a guy who hit .204/.252/.397 while appearing in every single game last year, what could?

FROM NJ.COM

Yankees' Masahiro Tanaka vs. Angels' Shohei Ohtani: Japanese stars on track for showdown

By Mike Rosenstein

When the Yankees visited the Los Angeles Angels last month for a three-game series in Anaheim, the MLB world was buzzing about a possible showdown between two of the top players to come from Japan: New York's Masahiro Tanaka and Los Angeles' Shohei Ohtani.

Ohtani was in the lineup as the DH for game one of the series on April 27, facing Luis Severino. But Ohtani would only get two at-bats before leaving the game with a sprained ankle.

Tanaka pitched the next day for the Yankees but Ohtani was out with the bum ankle.

Ohtani also sat on the bench for the final game of the three-game series.

Fast forward to the end of May, when the Angels visit the Yankees for a three-game series beginning on Friday, May 25.

Now, Tanaka is pitching tonight against the Nationals in Washington (weather permitting). With two more off-days before the Yankees host the Angels, Tanaka would set up to be on the mound on Sunday, May 27 against Los Angeles.

Ohtani, who has recovered from the ankle injury, is lined up to pitch one time per week. He last threw on Sunday, May 13. Before that, Sunday, May 6.

If the Angels keep Ohtani on his schedule of one pitching performance per week, and that day continues to be Sunday, the worlds will align and give us the pitching matchup everyone has been waiting for: Ohtani vs. Tanaka.

Per MLB.com, the pitchers do have some history of facing each other, with Ohtani as a hitter:

Tanaka said he recalled facing Ohtani in 2013; batting for the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters, Ohtani was 0-for-11 with six strikeouts, a walk and a hit-by-pitch that year against Tanaka, who went 24-0 for the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles before scoring a big contract with the Yankees.

As of right now, the Angels have not let Ohtani hit when he is the starting pitcher. But that could change, according to the Los Angeles Times:

Scioscia on Sunday even left open the possibility of the Angels one day going without a designated hitter in an American League game started by Ohtani, allowing him to bat.

Such a move would put the team at a tactical disadvantage because of a need to pinch-hit for the pitcher's spot once Ohtani is relieved, straining an already thin bench.

"We have considered it," Scioscia said. "It would take an extreme, you know, something you might consider in September, if it was something that was really critical and you needed his bat in the lineup."

So mark your calendar for Sunday, May 27. At the very least, we could see a pair of Japan's best imports on the mound at Yankee Stadium. And if Angels manager Mike Scioscia has a change of heart, we just might get the must-see moment of Ohtani digging in against Tanaka.

FROM KYODO NEWS**Asics to sell replica Ohtani baseball gear set**

Japanese sporting goods maker Asics Corp. said Tuesday it will sell limited-edition replica baseball gear of Los Angeles Angels pitching-slugging sensation Shohei Ohtani.

Each set, to be sold for 324,000 yen (\$2,900), includes batting gloves, a pitching glove, shoes and a bat. The pitching glove and shoes bear Ohtani's initials "SO" and uniform number 17.

In tribute to his uniform number, 17 sets are being offered. Online reservations started Tuesday.

The set comes with a showcase with a serial number, and Ohtani's signature engraved on its pedestal.

According to Major League Baseball, Ohtani is the first player since Babe Ruth in 1919 to start as a non-pitcher on opening day then start as a pitcher in his team's first 10 games. The 23-year-old was named the American League Rookie of the Month for April.

FROM DEADSPIN**Shohei Ohtani's Starting to Reveal All His Powers**

By Tom Ley

Shohei Ohtani has a fastball that he can pump up to 100 mph and dot on all four corners of the strike zone. He has a splitter that dives straight into hell and takes the souls of many batters with it. Those are two very good pitches. If you throw those two pitches exclusively, you're basically late-era Roger Clemens with a bit more velocity. You can have a long, fruitful career as a starting pitcher by throwing those two pitches over and over and over again.

Ohtani has more than just those two pitches, and he's starting to show off. If you watched Ohtani dissect the Twins' lineup yesterday—11 strikeouts in 6.1 innings—you saw plenty of the fastball and the splitter from hell, but you also saw him using a slider and a curveball to toy with his opponents. The slider sits in the low 80s and has a big hump on it. The curve comes in at 72-77 mph and drops 12 to 6. He can use either as a get-ahead pitch early in counts, and both are good enough to get strike outs in 0-2 counts.

He has these two pitches in addition to one of the best splitters in the game, and what's scarier is that he's starting to show his ability to array them in such a way that opposing hitters have nothing to pray for but a quick death. When Ohtani nearly no-hit the A's in the second start of his career, he threw 34 splitters while serving up just 15 combined curveballs and sliders. During his last start against the Mariners, he switched things up: 11 splitters, 11 curveballs, and 28 sliders. Yesterday's start brought the same sort of variety, with the same sort of results:

Forget all the two-way player stuff for a second and just think about what it means for a 23-year-old rookie pitcher to be in possession of this menu of pitches and to have this kind of control over all of them. Max Scherzer is the best pitcher in baseball right now. Max Scherzer fucks people up. We all love Max Scherzer. When Max Scherzer was 24 years old and completing his first full season in the big leagues he was not throwing the ball like Shohei Ohtani is right now. He was throwing it hard, sure, but he was also just sort of winging it, firing pitches at hitters in that feral way young pitchers tend to.

So far, Ohtani is all shine and polish. He's showing a mastery of his abilities that most pitchers—even the really good ones!—have to wait years to achieve. If he's this good now, try to imagine what he'll be like with a few hundred major-league innings in his log.