



Press Clips

(April 9, 2018)

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**What, the Angels worry about center fielder Mike Trout's batting slump?**

By Elliott Teaford

ANAHEIM — Right-hander Kendall Graveman and the Oakland Athletics were already trailing the Angels 2-0 when center fielder Mike Trout stepped to the plate to lead off the third inning Sunday afternoon at Angel Stadium. Graveman started their confrontation with a sinker that didn't sink.

Trout crushed it, sending it sailing over the center-field fence, over the ficus trees behind the wall and over the railing that forms the lower border of Bo Jackson Country. The ball traveled an estimated 440 feet for Trout's third homer of the season, a blast that ended an 0-for-14 skid.

Trout went into Sunday without a hit in eight at-bats against the A's during the series. He was only 1 for 18 on the homestand, seemingly the only regular who wasn't off and running as the Angels raced to a 6-3 record before they defeated Oakland to make it 7-3 on Sunday.

In addition to his homer, Trout also dropped a run-scoring single into right field off Graveman in the fourth that made it 4-0 and marked only his third multi-hit game of the season. Graveman exited the game and then Trout stole second off reliever Liam Hendriks.

Trout also became the ninth player in baseball history to score 700 runs and hit 200 homers before turning 27.

Overall, Trout is hitting .220 (10 for 41) going into Monday's game against the Texas Rangers, the start of a seven-game trip that also takes the Angels to Kansas City. Trout, Shohei Ohtani and Justin Upton lead the Angels with three homers apiece. Trout also has seven RBIs.

"If we're worried about Mike, we've got a lot of big problems," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Mike Trout is going to hit. You're going to have stretches with any great hitter when you're not quite in sync. It's going to happen with every player. Mike had a really good day this afternoon."

RAMIREZ UPDATE

The Angels placed right-hander JC Ramirez on the 10-day disabled list because of an elbow strain that forced his departure from Saturday's loss to the A's. Scioscia said the Angels had no further clarity on the severity of his injury or what caused it.

Scioscia also said he wasn't concerned the Angels' starting rotation was heading for a repeat of last season's march to the disabled list. However, they're already without Matt Shoemaker, who is scheduled to undergo tests on his strained right forearm Monday.

Andrew Heaney made a rehab start Friday and could join the rotation soon as he recovers from inflammation in his left elbow. But there is no firm date for his return, although he could be slotted into Wednesday's spot in the rotation at Texas. As of Sunday, the Angels' starter was still TBA.

Garrett Richards is scheduled to pitch Monday and Tyler Skaggs is set to start Tuesday.

MOVES, MOVES, MOVES

In addition to placing Ramirez on the DL, the Angels also optioned Akeel Morris to Triple-A Salt Lake and recalled fellow right-handers Eduardo Paredes and Felix Pena from their top minor-league club. Pena pitched the ninth inning against the A's giving up a homer to Matt Joyce.

WELCOME TO THE CLUB

Third baseman Ryan Schimpf homered in his first start with the Angels, after they recalled him Saturday from Salt Lake to replace Nolan Fontana, who was sent the other way. The Angels are Schimpf's fourth team since the end of last season. He's also been with San Diego, Tampa Bay and Atlanta.

Alexander: Ohtani gives fans their money's worth, and then some

By Jim Alexander

ANAHEIM — Before Shohei Ohtani's second big league start as a pitcher Sunday, I was toying with this concept: The way he'd been hitting the ball in his starts as a DH for the Angels, if you were showing up to see him only pitch you'd almost feel cheated.

Never mind.

The only ticket-holders to Sunday's game against the Oakland A's who may have felt regret were those who, for whatever reason, couldn't use their tickets. Those who showed up among the announced crowd of 44,742 got their money's worth, and then some, watching Ohtani merely pitch in the Angels' 6-1 victory.

As for those who will claim they were in the ballpark Sunday for his first home start as an Angel? Make them show their tickets and prove it.

Yes, we are only two starts into Ohtani's big league career, and in fact two outings against the A's. (Or should we call them the AAAA's? You know, too good for Triple-A, not good enough ... etc.)

But I think it's safe to say this now can officially be labeled the Ohtani Phenomenon, and it is something that goes way beyond the club's merchandise sales or marketing agreements with Japanese companies. Baseball's only two-way player is actually pulling this off, at least so far.

As a hitter he has three home runs, which are as many as the Marlins have as a team and more than the Tigers or Royals. (And, shall we say, one fewer than the Dodgers.)

As a pitcher, he now has pitched 13 innings, with 18 strikeouts and two walks.

And in his second appearance against Oakland in eight days, against hitters who had already faced him once last Sunday in Oakland, Ohtani made them look foolish in taking a perfect game into the seventh inning before Marcus Semien's one-out single broke it up. He finished with 12 strikeouts, all swinging, in seven innings.

His four-seam fastball was consistently in the high 90s, up to 99 mph, and seemed to gain steam as the afternoon went on. His splitter was in the upper 80s, and both were punchout pitches; five of his first six strikeouts were on splitters, and his next three were clocked at 99, 98 and 99.

"He was throwing the fastball any time he wanted it, and that's why the hitters feel pressure to swing at his splitter," catcher Martin Maldonado said.

He also threw some sliders in the low 80s, less effectively but good enough to keep the A's honest. And, just to toy with their minds, he'd mix in a slow curve or two. He started Matt Joyce with a 68 mph offering in the fourth and got a called strike one, a pitch that deserved an "oooooooooh" from the crowd.

Asked to recall someone he caught with the same amount of poise and ability to keep hitters off balance, Maldonado came up with a familiar name, albeit one you might not necessarily have expected.

"I would say Zack Greinke when I caught him in Milwaukee," he said. "The way he could hit spots back then ... he didn't have that much speed on his fastball, but he was a really smart guy and can do any pitch on any count, like Shohei."

And to think some of us saw the spring training performances, noted that Ohtani was carefully shielded from big league competition toward the end of the spring, and wondered if he might be better served starting the season in Triple-A.

(That probably illustrates why ballclubs generally don't trust the opinions of those of us in the media when it comes to personnel decisions.)

"My favorite thing about him is that when the media was crushing him in spring training, he stayed the course, just like he is right now," Angels infielder Zack Cozart said. "You couldn't tell the difference.

"That's what's so cool about him. He's so even keel, no matter what's happening on the field, which for me makes him that much better."

Ohtani, speaking through an interpreter, acknowledged that coming out of that so-so spring training, "I wasn't really imagining (myself) to be this good, to be honest, but I feel I'm getting better every day. I'm getting used to everything, more and more each day."

Then he said something that suggests we haven't seen close to the best of Shohei Ohtani.

"This is just the first week and everything went well," he said. "But I'm pretty sure there's going to be a wall somewhere down the road. Once I hit that wall, that's where I need to start working harder and figure out what I need to do to get past that wall."

In the meantime, he'll be trying to go over the wall again. Remember, Ohtani DHs again in a couple of days.

And it may be a while, depending on how the Angels manage their rotation, but there will come an interleague game in a National League park where he can hit and pitch the same game.

I'd hit him fifth. But I doubt Mike Scioscia will ask.

Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani nearly perfect in Big A mound debut

By Elliott Teaford

ANAHEIM — Mike Trout told a TV interviewer he was “getting bored in the outfield” Sunday afternoon.

Martin Maldonado said he didn't want to “(expletive) it up.”

Zack Cozart said “it didn't look like they had a chance up there the way he was throwing.”

Shohei Ohtani turned Angel Stadium electric, striking out 12 in seven innings in his first appearance on the mound in his home stadium. He was perfect through 79 pitches, retiring 19 consecutive before Oakland's Marcus Semien singled sharply to left field in the seventh.

Many in a sellout crowd of 44,742 groaned as the ball rocketed between third baseman Ryan Schimpf and shortstop Andrelton Simmons and into the outfield. Then the fans rose to their feet and roared their appreciation for the 23-year-old rookie from Japan.

It wasn't the first or the last standing ovation he would receive Sunday.

Another followed after Ohtani walked Jed Lowrie, retired Khris Davis on a groundout and then struck out Matt Olson to end the seventh inning with a six-run lead intact. Ohtani pumped his right fist as he walked from the mound, a rare display of emotion.

The Angels were well on their way to a 6-1 victory by then, improving their record to 7-3 to start 2018. Trout homered and singled, drove in two runs and stole a base. Albert Pujols delivered a run-scoring double and Schimpf homered in his first start with the Angels.

Ohtani's command performance overshadowed everything and everyone else, including the game's best player ending an 0-for-14 skid. He gave up one hit and one walk while making 91 pitches, one more than in his major league debut April 1, a 7-4 victory over the Athletics at the Coliseum.

“I wasn't sure if that was my last hitter or not, but I had two guys in scoring position and I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board,” Ohtani said through an interpreter of striking out Olson. “One hit would mean two runs. It would be a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout and I got it.”

Ohtani (2-0 with a 2.08 ERA) created a playoff-like buzz at the Big A by striking out the side on 15 pitches in the first inning. As his strikeout total began to climb, the largest crowd for a regular-season day game since the stadium's renovation in 1998 began a full-volume cry for more.

Cheers rose to a crescendo each time he got two strikes on a batter. He struck out one in the second inning, two in the third, one in the fourth and then fanned the side in the fifth. He retired the A's in order in the sixth and then retired Matt Joyce on a line drive to Simmons to start the seventh.

Semien then stroked an outside fastball into left to end Ohtani's bid for a perfect game.

Blake Wood replaced Ohtani to start the eighth.

Asked for his view of Ohtani from behind the plate, Maldonado joked, "You didn't see it?"

When the laughter in the postgame news conference died, the Angels' catcher grew serious.

"It was amazing," he said. "It was nasty."

Ohtani's four-seam fastball reached as high as 99-mph, his splitter hovered in the low-90s and his slider was in the mid-80s. His fastball set up his splitter and his splitter set up his slider. Just for fun, Maldonado called for a 68-mph curveball that baffled Joyce on his first pitch to start the fourth.

"I think I was most impressed by his ability to calm down after that big hit," Maldonado said.

Maldonado compared Ohtani to four-time All-Star Zack Greinke, a teammate while with the Milwaukee Brewers in 2011 and '12. Maldonado said Ohtani's slider was as good Sunday as Greinke's, but that his splitter was "probably as good as any I've ever caught."

Ohtani couldn't or wouldn't say it was his best game as a professional.

"Probably my best outing ever was when I was in elementary school," he said.

Japanese reporters in the room laughed, but Ohtani did not.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Achieving perfection doesn't seem out of the question for Angels' Shohei Ohtani

By Dylan Hernandez

The anticipation increased with every zero that was posted on the Angel Stadium scoreboard.

This was going to happen. Shohei Ohtani was going to pitch a perfect game.

Marcus Semien ruined the fantasy, but only for the day. The seventh-inning single by the Oakland Athletics shortstop felt more like a delay of the inevitable than a death of a dream.

So the expectation remained when the Angels' 6-1 victory was complete, only in a slightly altered form.

This will happen. Ohtani will pitch a perfect game.

It's silly to predict any pitcher will do something that has happened only 23 times in major league history, but that speaks to how dominant Ohtani was in his first start at Angel Stadium, as well as how the 23-year-old has already expanded the public's collective sense of what is possible in baseball.

"That's as good a game as you can ever see pitched," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

Ohtani had pitched against the Athletics in Oakland only seven days earlier, which was supposed to work to his opponents' advantage. If anything, it was Ohtani who gained an edge.

He struck out the side in the first inning and again in the sixth. He touched 99 mph on the in-stadium radar gun. His split-finger fastball was devastating, so much so the only pitch as effective that catcher Martin Maldonado could recall was the slider Zack Greinke threw at the height of his powers.

Ohtani carried a perfect game into the seventh inning, when he allowed a one-out single to left field by Semien. He walked the next batter, Jed Lowrie, but preserved his team's 6-0 advantage by forcing Chris Davis to ground out and striking out Matt Olson.

The splitter Olson missed for the third strike the last of 91 pitches delivered by Ohtani, who struck out 12.

The start capped a one-of-a-kind week in which Ohtani homered in each of the three games he started as a designated hitter, all of them Angels victories.

He was his typically low-key self in the wake of his domination of the Athletics.

He said he became conscious around the fifth inning that he was throwing a no-hitter, but never let himself imagine completing it.

"I knew I hadn't given up a hit, but I didn't feel like I was going for a perfect game," Ohtani said in Japanese. "If anything, I was waiting for the hit to come. When the hit comes, I think that how you arrange your feelings and approach the next hitter is very important."

He lamented following up Semien's single with a four-pitch walk to Lowrie.

Ohtani was asked if the game was the best he had ever pitched. Ohtani didn't pitch a no-hitter in his five seasons with Japan's Nippon-Ham Fighters.

"No. 1 in my life was around when I was in elementary school," he joked.

He made it a point to mention the home fans, who rewarded him with a standing ovation when his perfect game was broken up.

"I'm happy I was able to respond to their expectations, however little," Ohtani said. "Every time, I'd like to perform in a way that won't betray their expectations. That's why I'm practicing every day."

He credited the capacity crowd with helping him record the final outs of the seventh inning.

"I was really pushed by their cheers," he said. "The entire stadium created an atmosphere that made it possible for me to hold the other team."

Ohtani has twice completed the cycle of transitioning from hitter to pitcher, but wasn't ready to declare his move to the major leagues a success.

"It's just started," he said. "I think combating fatigue will be more of an issue later."

He also downplayed his early season success.

"It's a situation where the opponents still don't know much about me, so things are rolling this way," he said. "But when it gets difficult, I want to be prepared to break through that wall."

That he would say something like this was expected. From the time Ohtani decided to make his move to the major leagues, he has spoken almost romantically about the setbacks he would encounter, how they would harden his resolve and force him to improve as a player.

Ten games into his major league career, the obstacles haven't presented themselves.

Unless he finds a league in another planet, there's a chance they never will.

Shohei Ohtani was nearly perfect in his home pitching debut; Angels win 6-1 over Athletics

By Bill Shaikin

It was not even 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. The Angels would play the Oakland Athletics, but not for another three hours.

At that hour, the players usually speed right on into the parking lot. Not on this day.

"There's a carnival going on out there," one of the players said as he walked into the clubhouse.

The player spoke not out of jealousy, but out of wonderment. The concept that traffic would be so clogged so many hours before a game in Anaheim is something new, something different, something amazing.

So is Shohei Ohtani.

The Angels sold out. They sold 44,742 tickets, more than for opening day, more than for any regular-season day game since they downsized their stadium 20 years ago.

What could be more dramatic than Ohtani hitting a home run in his first at-bat at Angel Stadium? How about pitching a perfect game in his first start at Angel Stadium?

Ohtani very nearly did, nearly enough to get the crowd cheering in anticipation of third strikes in the fifth and sixth innings. With one out in the seventh, when Marcus Semien ended the perfect game by slapping a 96-mph fastball into left field, the crowd rose and rewarded Ohtani with a warm ovation.

In response, he flashed a thumbs-up sign.

He struck out the side in the first inning, and 12 in all. He gave up one hit, in seven innings. In an on-field interview after the game, Mike Trout joked that he was kind of bored while minding the outfield.

Ohtani's fastball ran as fast as 99.6 mph. His last fastball – on his next-to-last pitch, his 90th – hit 98 mph. He got strikeouts with his wicked splitter. He dropped in a curve at 68.5 mph, just for the heck of it, to a stunned Matt Joyce.

"That's as good as game as you could ever see pitched," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia, a man who does not traffic in hyperbole.

Ohtani never pitched a no-hitter in Japan. If this was not his best game, then what was?

"Probably my best outing ever was when I was in elementary school," he said, smiling as the answer was translated into English.

Ohtani became the first player in 99 years to win two games and hit three home runs within the first 10 games of a season. The last: Jim Shaw, he of the "Grunting Jim" nickname, for the 1919 Washington Senators.

In those first 10 games, Ohtani has a 2.08 earned-run average and a .389 batting average. He leads the team in wins, and he is tied with Trout and Justin Upton for the team lead in home runs.

There was little suspense about whether Ohtani would win. After he struck out the side in the first inning, Albert Pujols doubled in a run in the bottom of the inning. The Angels scored twice in the first, Trout homered in the third, and the Angels were well on their way to a 6-1 victory.

There was plenty of suspense as Ohtani flirted with a perfect game. The Angels, born in 1961, have one perfect game – by Mike Witt, not Nolan Ryan.

Ohtani said he had not imagined pitching this well, this soon, based on his poor results in spring training. As the innings passed, and perfection appeared increasingly attainable, what thought was running through the head of Angels catcher Martin Maldonado?

"Don't (bleep) it up," Maldonado said.

Ohtani induced 25 swinging strikes, the most by any major league pitcher this season. Of the 20 splitters he threw, the A's swung and missed at 15.

He was so dominant that Scioscia was asked whether he might have had to make a decision about whether to let the pursuit of a perfect game override the concern about Ohtani's pitch count.

"Possibly," Scioscia said.

Where might that have been?

"We'll never know," Scioscia said.

Trade secrets, you know. The Angels wouldn't want the enemy to know how far beyond 91 pitches Ohtani might go.

Ohtani's feats inspired a walk through baseball history.

He became the third player in major league history with a double-digit strikeout game and a home run in three consecutive games, joining Babe Ruth (1916) and Ken Brett (1973).

Ohtani tied an Angels record with 18 strikeouts in his first two games. He tied the American League record with 12 strikeouts in one of his first two starts.

And he accomplished all these feats with a world watching, including a live broadcast on NHK that started at 5 a.m. in Japan.

The baseball world is watching, too. Ohtani has more home runs than either Kris Bryant or Aaron Judge, more strikeouts than either Chris Sale or Max Scherzer.

Miguel Rojas, the former Dodgers infielder now with the Miami Marlins, hit the Marlins' third home run of the season Sunday.

"At least," Rojas jokingly said to reporters, "we have as many as Ohtani now."

With three starters on disabled list, Angels could use some help

By Bill Shaikin

If you're an Angels fan, this all might seem so predictable, and frustrating.

The Angels are 10 games into the season, and three of their starting pitchers — Andrew Heaney, JC Ramirez and Matt Shoemaker — already are on the disabled list. They are among six Angels starting pitchers to spend time on the disabled list because of an arm injury within the past two seasons.

The greatest risk factor for an injury is a previous injury. And yet, in advance of a season in which they intend to contend, the Angels did not add a veteran starter with a track record of delivering innings.

Perhaps the Angels might have waited out the free-agent market, as so many teams did. But after they signed Shohei Ohtani as a pitcher-designated hitter last December, they counted on nine candidates to start: Ohtani, Heaney, Ramirez, Shoemaker, Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, Parker Bridwell, Nick Tropeano and prospect Jaime Barria.

"Nine felt like a reasonable number," general manager Billy Eppler said Sunday.

So within a week of signing Ohtani, they filled vacancies by adding Ian Kinsler at second base and Zack Cozart at third base.

"We had an opportunity, so we seized it," Eppler said. "I think anybody could have sat there and looked at our roster and said, 'Where do the Angels have more depth? Do they have more depth in the infield, or do they have more depth in starting pitching?'"

"You saw us maximize our potential to invest our dollars."

Still, of the nine starters, only ace Garrett Richards and the injured Shoemaker have pitched even 150 innings in a major league season. If the Angels need to get another starting pitcher, Eppler said he is confident owner Arte Moreno would approve the expense.

"I know that our owner is always interested in winning," Eppler said. "If we have an opportunity to put this club in a good position, he's supported it before, just like last year, with Justin Upton. With Brandon Phillips, with one month to play, he spent \$4 million."

The Angels officially put Ramirez on the disabled list Sunday, citing a strained right elbow. They are expected to make an announcement about Ramirez on Monday. He left Saturday's game after two innings and had a medical examination Sunday.

The Angels also optioned pitcher Akeel Morris to triple-A Salt Lake and promoted relievers Felix Pena and Eduardo Paredes, so they played Sunday's game with a 10-man bullpen.

King fish

Mike Trout was hitless in his past 15 at-bats when he crushed a 440-foot home run Sunday. He also singled, walked, stole a base and scored two runs.

Trout lifted his batting average to .220 from .184, not that anyone is sweating his temporary association with the Mendoza line.

"If we're worried about Mike Trout, we've got a lot of big problems," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Mike Trout is going to hit."

Ohtani retires first 19, fans 12 over 7 innings

By Avery Yang

ANAHEIM -- Nineteen up, 19 down. The sold-out crowd at Angel Stadium was buzzing, chanting and screaming. The Angels' two-way phenom Shohei Ohtani was eight outs from perfection in just his second career start before a base hit in the seventh inning -- the only one Ohtani would allow all afternoon over seven scoreless innings -- ended his bid to become the 22nd pitcher to throw a perfect game.

Ohtani notched 12 strikeouts -- eight on his splitter alone -- and, aided by some first-inning run support in the form of an Albert Pujols RBI double and Kole Calhoun RBI single, shut down the A's to nab his second victory of the season, an Angels' 6-1 win over the A's.

"That's as good a game as you can see pitched," manager Mike Scioscia said.

With the win, Ohtani became the first Major League player with two wins and three home runs in his team's first 10 games since Jim Shaw for the Washington Senators in 1919.

Additionally, Ohtani became the third player to homer in three consecutive games and have a double-digit strikeout game in the same season. The first to do so? Babe Ruth in 1916.

Ohtani induced 25 swinging strikes -- the highest total in a start this year, beating Max Scherzer's 23. That was largely due to his splitter -- of which he has two varieties, one that he uses primarily against righties that cuts inside, and his main one, which dips sharply after starting its trajectory like a fastball.

It is Ohtani's best secondary pitch, but it might very well be the most lethal offspeed pitch in the Majors this season. A's hitters -- who have faced Ohtani in each of his first two career starts -- have now swung and missed on 26 out of their 37 swings against the 23-year-old's splitter: a startling 70.3 percent of the time, the highest for any MLB starting pitcher on a single pitch type this season (minimum 10 swings against that pitch).

"His splitter just kind of drops off the table," Zack Cozart said. "[It] looks like a strike I feel like almost every time, but it never is. It just drops below the zone. That's how it comes out, the same as his fastball. It makes it tough as a hitter."

Though his splitter was deadly, being able to command his fastball -- which hit 100 mph -- was the key to setting up his secondary pitches, his catcher Martin Maldonado said. Indeed, Ohtani's fastball hit the corners of the strike zone consistently for strikes, accounting for four strikeouts of its own. Even a 68

mph curveball was able to land safely for a called strike in the wake of his well-controlled high-90s fastball.

"Without the fastball command, people wouldn't have been swinging at his splitter," Maldonado said. "I think the ability to throw the fastball wherever he wanted, made the hitter feel pressure to swing at his splitter."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Trout snaps out of slump: Mike Trout led off the third with his third home run of the season, a 440-foot shot to center field off Kendall Graveman that snapped an 0-for-14 drought and gave the Angels a 3-0 lead. The homer had an exit velocity of 109.9 mph, making it his hardest-hit ball of the season, according to Statcast™.

Angels chase Graveman: The Angels extended their lead to 5-0 by adding two more runs in the fourth. Ryan Schimpf drew a one-out walk and advanced to second on Cozart's single before scoring on Trout's bloop single to right field, which knocked Graveman out of the game. Justin Upton then brought in Cozart from third with a sacrifice fly to center off reliever Liam Hendriks.

Ohtani gets out of a seventh-inning jam: In the seventh, Ohtani gave up his first baserunner of the game, surrendering a single to Marcus Semien after falling behind in the count 2-0. Ohtani proceeded to give up a four-pitch walk to the next batter, which forced pitching coach Charles Nagy to come to the mound for a visit. Ohtani settled himself, throwing a first-pitch slider that Khris Davis rolled over on, resulting in a weak ground ball that the two-way phenom corralled and fired to first, but that put runners on second and third.

In his first sign of overt emotion all game, Ohtani proceeded to strike out Matt Olson on a 3-2 splitter to get out of the jam with his 91st and final pitch of the outing.

"I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani said. "One hit would have been two runs -- that's a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout and I got it."

QUOTABLE

"Don't [mess] it up." -- *Maldonado, on what he was thinking as Ohtani took a perfect game into the 7th inning*

"Probably my best outing ever was when I was in elementary school." -- *Ohtani, on whether this was the best outing he has had in his career*

"I actually told the infielders 'please get me that double play,' so that's probably why I had that smile on my face." -- *Ohtani, on why he was smiling when Nagy came up for a mound visit during the seventh inning*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Pujols' double in the first inning brought home Trout for Trout's 700th career run, making him one of nine players to hit 200 home runs and scored 700 runs prior to their age-27 season, joining Pujols, Alex Rodriguez, Frank Robinson, Hank Aaron, Mickey Mantle, Eddie Mathews, Mel Ott and Jimmie Foxx.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Angels will travel to Texas to take on the Rangers in a three-game series starting Monday at 5:05 p.m. PT at Globe Life Park. Garrett Richards will make his third start of the season, six days after notching a win against the Indians, a game in which he threw for 5 2/3 innings and gave up only one hit - a two-run homer. Richards last pitched against Texas on Sept. 17, 2017, when he completed five innings, giving up two earned runs and striking out seven in a loss. He is 3-3 with a 2.76 ERA in his past seven starts against Texas.

Angels marvel at Ohtani's near-perfect outing

Two-way star retires first 19 batters he faces in home debut

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- He imposed his dominance early, unleashing a lethal barrage of sizzling fastballs and diving splitters that rendered the A's hitters helpless. Matt Joyce, Marcus Semien and Jed Lowrie all went down swinging in the breezy first inning, a trio of strikeout victims that signaled the beginning of more magic from a 23-year-old rookie phenom who continues to captivate the baseball world with his seemingly bottomless fountain of talent.

And so began Shohei Ohtani's first start on the mound at Angel Stadium, an outing in which he flirted with perfection and once again asserted himself as the Japanese incarnation of Babe Ruth. Ohtani retired the first 19 batters before Semien singled with one out in the seventh to break up his bid for a perfect game. Ohtani then walked Lowrie on four pitches, but it proved to be the extent of the damage against him.

"I was conscious of the no-hitter, but I wasn't really thinking about the perfect game," Ohtani said. "I figured they were going to get a hit sooner or later. Once I gave up that hit, I was going to react and try to reset everything."

He did, racking up 12 strikeouts over seven brilliant innings to headline the Angels' 6-1 win over the A's in their series finale on Sunday afternoon. Ohtani allowed only one hit, walked one and threw 91 pitches (59 for strikes), extending the incredible run of success he's enjoyed as both a pitcher and hitter during the Angels' first 10 games of 2018.

"Amazing," Angels catcher Martin Maldonado said. "He was nasty."

Eight of Ohtani's 12 strikeouts came via his devastating splitter, whose nastiness Maldonado could only compare to Zack Greinke's slider. His fastball averaged 96.6 mph, and it hummed with more ferocity as the game wore on, topping out at 99.6 mph. Ohtani induced 25 misses over 44 swings overall for an eye-popping 57 percent miss rate.

"He had the stuff, I feel, to go the whole way," infielder Zack Cozart said. "It didn't look like they had a chance up there, the way he was throwing. They got the hit, but it didn't diminish how he pitched. He was lights out."

Every A's batter except for Jonathan Lucroy struck out at least once against Ohtani, who wasn't tested until Oakland managed to put a pair of runners on in the seventh. Still, Ohtani worked out of the jam by inducing a groundout from Khris Davis and striking out Matt Olson swinging on a splitter to cap his outing.

Ohtani was visibly fired up after finishing the inning, pumping his fist as he walked off the field with the Angels leading, 6-0. He received a standing ovation from the 44,742 fans in attendance, the largest regular-season day game crowd at Angel Stadium since it underwent renovations in 1998.

"I wasn't sure if that was my last batter or not, but I had two guys in scoring position, and I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani said. "One hit would be two runs, and that's a huge difference. I wanted a strikeout, and I got it."

Asked if it was the best game he ever pitched, Ohtani joked that he'd peaked at a much younger age.

"Probably my best outing ever was when I was in elementary school," he quipped.

Sunday marked Ohtani's second victory against the A's, whom he also defeated with six strong innings in his pitching debut at the Coliseum one week ago.

"He looked even better today," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's got a deliberate delivery, and it makes his fastball play even better. And he has a really good [split-finger fastball]. The difference in speeds between his split and his fastball and when he locates his split down in the zone, it's very tough to pick up."

Superlatives almost feel inadequate to describe what Ohtani has accomplished over his first week in the Majors. He is now 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA and 18 strikeouts over his first two pitching appearances, and he's been equally impressive at the plate, going 7-for-18 and homering in three consecutive games as the Angels' designated hitter.

Ohtani is the first Major League player with two wins and three home runs in his team's first 10 games since Jim "Grunting Jim" Shaw for the Washington Senators in 1919. Ohtani admitted that he's surprised even himself with his run of early success.

"Especially how my Spring Training went, I wasn't really imagining being this good, to be honest," Ohtani said. "But I feel better every day. I feel like I'm getting more used to everything more and more each day. It's just the first week. Everything went well, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to hit a wall somewhere on the road. Once I hit that wall, then that's where I need to start working harder and figure out how to get past that wall."

That might very well happen, but until it does, the Angels and the rest of the world are more than happy to enjoy the Sho.

Ramírez (elbow strain) placed on 10-day DL

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- JC Ramirez was placed on the 10-day disabled list on Sunday with a right elbow strain, becoming the third injured starter for the Angels in their nascent 2018 season.

Ramirez, 29, experienced tightness in his forearm during the Angels' 6-3 loss to the A's on Saturday night and departed his start after giving up three runs and walking five in two innings. It's unsettling news for Ramirez, who did not pitch after Aug. 19 last year after undergoing stem-cell therapy to treat a partially torn ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow.

The Angels were already without Matt Shoemaker, who is officially out with a strained right forearm but will undergo more tests on Monday to determine a precise diagnosis, and Andrew Heaney, who will likely rejoin the club soon after sitting out the opening week of the season with an inflamed left elbow.

Injuries have decimated the Angels' rotation the past two years, with Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, Heaney and Ramirez all missing substantial chunks of the 2017 season. Aside from Shohei Ohtani, the Angels made no additions to their rotation over the offseason, as they were optimistic that they would enter 2018 with a healthier and deeper pitching staff.

But this season is now off to an eerily similar start, serving as a painful reminder of their previous misfortunes. Before Sunday's game, manager Mike Scioscia knocked on wood -- literally -- after being asked if the early injury developments reminded him of what happened last year.

"I think we're better equipped to handle some issues," Scioscia said. "It looks like we're going to get Andrew Heaney back, which is going to give us a big lift. We'll await news on JC, and we'll await news on

Matt Shoemaker. Hopefully, it's not to the depth of what happened the last couple years with our rotation. We'll keep our fingers crossed."

In a pair of corresponding roster moves, the Angels recalled right-handed relievers Eduardo Paredes and Felix Pena from Triple-A Salt Lake ahead of Sunday's series finale against the A's. Right-hander Akeel Morris, who threw 36 pitches over 2 1/3 innings in his Angels debut on Saturday, was optioned.

The Angels currently have 10 relievers in their bullpen, as their starters have combined to go 3 2/3 innings over their past two games. With only three starters on their 25-man roster, the Angels will need to add another pitcher on Wednesday to start their series finale at Texas. Heaney, who threw 6 1/3 innings in a rehab start on Friday, will likely fill the slot, though the Angels have not made an official announcement yet. Nick Tropeano, who is currently at Triple-A Salt Lake, is another candidate to join the Angels' rotation this week.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Angels' Shohei Ohtani, making his first home start, continues his record-breaking ways

By Steve Dilbeck

It's Shohei Ohtani's world and we're all just trying to make sense of it. Clearly, he has it figured out. For us mere mortals, the challenge continues, interesting as ever.

Ohtani, the Angels' 23-year-old power hitter, became Ohtani the power pitcher on Sunday, and the results were just a step beyond disbelief.

What he did to the A's hitters is probably a crime in over 30 countries. He's a rookie making just his second major-league start, and first ever at home, and he left the A's looking more overmatched than Michael Phelps vs. shark.

"It didn't look like they had a chance up there," said Angels second baseman Zack Cozart.

Ohtani warmed up by striking out the side in the first inning, his fastball peaking at 96.7 mph. It hit 97.7 in the third and 99.6 in the fourth. The game went on and he somehow became more ferocious.

He carried a perfect game into the seventh inning and Angels catcher Martin Maldonado said by then he had a single thought: "Don't fuck it up."

With one out in the seventh, Ohtani's dream – when he was still in high school he created a detailed goal list that included throwing a no-hitter at age 24 – came to an end when Marcus Semien hit a clean single to left. The sellout crowd rose and gave Ohtani a standing ovation. He then provided the rest of baseball hope that he is less than supernatural, walking Jed Lowrie on four pitches.

A mound visit by pitching coach Charles Nagy left the typically stoic Ohtani smiling.

"I actually told the infielders, 'Please get me a double play,'" Ohtani said. "That's probably why I had the smile."

The runners advanced when Khris Davis bounced back to Ohtani. He struck out Matt Olson to end the threat, allowing himself a rare display of emotion with a slight fist pump at getting his final batter.

"I wasn't sure if that was my last batter or not, but I had two guys in scoring position and I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani said. "One hit would be two runs. That's a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout."

He pretty much got what he wanted all afternoon in the Angels 6-1 victory. His fastball was blazing. His splitter suddenly pulled to the earth at the last moment. His slider was nasty. His command exceptional.

"He had them off balance," Cozart said. "His splitter just kind of drops off the table, looks like a strike almost every time and then just drops below the zone. It comes out the same as his fastball. Makes it tough as a hitter."

Ohtani arrived in Anaheim last week first as the team's designated hitter for three games. All he did was homer in each contest.

Given his first start at Angel Stadium, he shut out Oakland for seven innings on one hit and a walk, striking out 12 on 91 pitches. After two career starts (both against the A's), he is 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA and 18 strikeouts in 13 innings.

Of the 44 swings the A's took, they missed 25 times. Eight of his 12 strikeouts came via his devastating splitter.

"That's as good a game as you could ever see pitched," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia.

In the process, naturally, he set even more records.

— He's the third player all-time to pitch seven-plus innings with one or fewer hits and 12 strikeouts in one of his first two starts (Steve Woodard, Milwaukee, 1997 and Juan Marichal, San Francisco, 1960).

— The 12 strikeouts tied the AL record for a player in one of his first two games (Tim Lincecum, Angels, 1992 and Elmer Myers, Philadelphia A's, 1915).

— He is the first player with three home runs and two wins in his team's first 10 games since Jim Shaw for the 1919 Washington Senators.

And on it figures to go, the wonder of Ohtani taking us on a remarkable ride this early in the season.

His success even led Ohtani to let his guard down with the media Sunday, the young sensation showing the first signs of a personality. Asked if this was the best game he's ever thrown, Ohtani said: "Probably my best ever was when I was in elementary school."

He also showed signs of being a draw. The Angels announced a sellout of 44,742 on Sunday, the largest crowd for a regular-season day game since Angel Stadium was renovated in 1998.

Ten games into the new season, the Angels are 7-3 and all is well in what some feared would be a troubled world for Ohtani after a shaky spring both at the plate and on the mound. Even Ohtani admitted some surprise at his early success.

"Especially how my spring training went, I wasn't really imagining it being this good," he said. "But I feel better every day. I'm getting used to everything more each day."

The Angels, with recent history on their minds, are concerned about JC Ramírez

By Steve Dilbeck

The Angels did not need this, not that they couldn't have seen it coming. Maybe not *this*, exactly, but their recent history told them to be prepared for something of its ilk.

Right-hander J.C. Ramírez left Saturday's game after just two innings with tightness in his right forearm.

Ramírez did not pitch after Aug. 19th last season because of a partial tear in the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. He elected to treat it with stem cell therapy instead of surgery, and in four spring training starts, the elbow responded as hoped.

But there he was Saturday against the A's, walking five in just two innings and giving up three runs. He had little control and a marked dip in his velocity.

"I was trying to survive today," Ramírez said.

The Angels could see he was clearly off.

"He didn't seem like he was comfortable from the get-go," said manager Mike Scioscia. "And then he felt a little tightness in his forearm, so we'll get him evaluated tomorrow."

“They saw my velo, my velo was really down today,” Ramírez said. “They asked me and I told them I didn’t feel comfortable throwing, so they took me out of the game.

“This early in the season, I hope it’s just tightness and can just miss a couple starts and get back to normal.”

Given how the Angels staff was continually diminished by injury last season — they used 13 different starters — they may find optimism difficult.

The first two fastballs Ramírez threw were clocked at a meager 92.3 and 92.5 mph. And he never hit 92 mph again. Ramírez said the forearm had not been an issue in his first start of the season, though he surrendered four runs in 4 2/3 innings on five hits and two walks.

“Warming (tonight) up I felt a little tightness,” he said. “I thought when the game got started it would disappear, but it never happened.

“Spring training was perfect. The first outing was good. Just today.”

The Angels have little choice but to hope for the best and await the medical staff’s evaluation. Their struggles last season left them with some rotation depth, but it’s hardly a surplus.

Left-hander Andrew Heaney started the season on the disabled list with a sore arm, but had an impressive rehab start Friday and could return soon. Right-hander Matt Shoemaker went on the DL after one start with what could be the same nerve injury that led to surgery last season.

Meanwhile, concern about Ramírez remains real.

“Any time a pitcher has an issue with his arm, you’re always concerned,” Scioscia said. “But hopefully this will be something that’s manageable. We’ll wait for our doctors to evaluate him.”

It’s an all too familiar path for the Angels. Ramírez is also apprehensive, but takes some comfort because the pain does not feel the same as last season’s elbow injury.

“It’s on my mind right now,” he said. “But I didn’t feel the same thing that I did last year. Tomorrow we’ll see the doctor and see what he says.”

FROM MLB.COM

17 amazing Ohtani stats after 12-K perfecto bid

Two-way sensation takes perfect game into 7th inning

By David Adler, Daniel Kramer and Manny Randhawa

Somehow, Shohei Ohtani continues to not only live up to the hype, but exceed it.

Ohtani made his Angel Stadium pitching debut on Sunday -- and he was nearly perfect. In just his second career MLB start, Ohtani carried a perfect game into the seventh inning against the A's, before Marcus Semien finally broke up the bid with a one-out single.

That was the only hit Ohtani allowed in his seven brilliant innings. He struck out 12, leading the Angels to a 6-1 win. With Angel Stadium packed with 44,742 fans, Ohtani delivered everything the fans could have imagined, and more.

The two-way phenom has been amazing both at the plate and on the mound. With another page written in a storybook start to his big league career, MLB.com is breaking down all the key facts and figures to emerge from Ohtani's first start in Anaheim.

Total dominance

- Before Ohtani, only two other pitchers in Major League history had thrown at least seven innings, allowed one or fewer hits and struck out at least 12 batters within their first two career pitching games. Steve Woodard did it for the Brewers on July 28, 1997, and the legendary Juan Marichal did it for the Giants on July 19, 1960.
- Ohtani's 12 strikeouts also tied the American League record for a pitcher in one of his first two career games on the mound. Woodard was the last to do it. Before him was another Angel: Tim Lincecum on July 25, 1992. The only other? Elmer Myers for the Philadelphia Athletics all the way back on Oct. 6, 1915.

Ohtani is the 14th Major Leaguer to strike out at least 12 batters in one of his first two career starts. The most recent before him was Stephen Strasburg, who struck out 14 in his MLB debut for the Nationals on June 8, 2012.

- Ohtani's Game Score of 90 on Sunday is tied for the seventh-highest Game Score for a pitcher making his second Major League start. Only George Baumgardner (101 on April 20, 1912), Dick Selma (96 on Sept. 12, 1965), Marichal (96 on July 19, 1960), Karl Spooner (93 on Sept. 22, 1954), Clay Buchholz (93

on Sept. 1, 2007) and Woodard (91 on July 28, 1997) had higher Game Scores in their second career start.

- Ohtani's 18 strikeouts in his two starts this season tied the Angels record for the most within a pitcher's first two career appearances. Fortugno also notched 18 K's through his first two games.
- Along with Fortugno in 1992 and Jorge Rubio in '66, Ohtani is now the third Angels rookie in franchise history with 12 or more strikeouts in a game.
- Ohtani retired the final eight A's batters he faced in his Major League pitching debut on April 1 at the Oakland Coliseum. Combined with the 19 straight Oakland batters he retired on Sunday before giving up a single to Semien, Ohtani retired 27 A's in succession spanning the two starts.

Statcast™ star

- Ohtani got 25 swinging strikes among the 91 pitches he threw on Sunday -- the most by any pitcher in a game this season. Sixteen of those came on his splitter. But all his pitches were working beautifully -- Ohtani was throwing in the upper 90s even in his final inning. The last fastball he threw -- to Matt Olson as his 90th pitch of the day -- was 98.5 mph, per Statcast™.
- As he did in his first start, Ohtani topped out at 99.6 mph, according to Statcast™. He hit that max velocity on his fourth-inning strikeout of Semien. That's the second-fastest strikeout by a starting pitcher in 2018 so far, behind a 100.2 mph strikeout by the Yankees' Luis Severino on March 29.

Hitters have now whiffed on 26 of their 37 swings against Ohtani's splitter across his two outings. That 70.3 percent whiff rate is the highest for any MLB starting pitcher on a single pitch type this season (minimum 20 swings against that pitch).

- Ohtani's 25 total whiffs on Sunday came on just 44 swings by the A's -- a whiff-per-swing rate of 56.8 percent. Since Statcast™ began tracking in 2015, only three other starting pitchers have recorded a higher whiff rate in an outing (minimum 20 total swings against them in the game). Those three:
Corey Kluber -- 64.9 percent on June 1, 2017
Danny Duffy -- 59.3 percent on Aug. 1, 2016
Francisco Liriano -- 57.8 percent on July 23, 2015

Two-way sensation

- Ohtani's dazzling game on the mound Sunday capped a jaw-dropping week in which he also homered in three straight games as a hitter. The combination makes him just the third player all-time to homer in three consecutive games as a hitter and have a double-digit strikeout game as a pitcher in the same season. The others: Ken Brett in 1973 and -- who else? -- Babe Ruth in '16.

- Ohtani has picked up the win in both of his first two starts. It's been nearly 100 years since a player had at least two wins as a pitcher and at least three home runs as a hitter within his team's first 10 games of a season. The last to do so: Jim Shaw for the Washington Senators in 1919. (Shaw's home runs all came in games he pitched, while Ohtani's hitting and pitching performances have been separate.)
- Ohtani became only the sixth player in Major League history to hit three home runs in his first four games when he homered off Oakland's Daniel Gossett in the second inning of the Angels' 13-9 victory last Friday. He joined Trevor Story (four homers in first four games in 2016), Trey Mancini (three in '16), Yoenis Cespedes (three in '12), Trent Oeltjen (three in '09) and Mike Jacobs (three in '05).
- As a batter, Ohtani leads all Major Leaguers who have had at least 10 batted balls this season in hard-hit rate: 71.4 percent of his batted balls (10 of 14) have had an exit velocity of at least 95 mph.

By contrast, the batters who put the ball in play so far this season while Ohtani has been on the mound have a hard-hit rate of 20 percent (five hard-hit balls out of 25 batted balls overall). Only one of them came in Sunday's game -- Semien's single, with an exit velocity of 101.1 mph.

As a pitcher, Ohtani's 97.1 mph average four-seam fastball velocity is the third highest in MLB, behind only Severino and Noah Syndergaard. As a hitter, his 97.3 mph average exit velocity also ranks third in MLB, behind only Yoan Moncada and Miguel Sano (among the 273 hitters with at least 10 batted balls entering play Sunday).

- Ohtani has faced 55 batters over his first two Major League starts, six of whom have reached base. Two of them reached via walk and four via hit. At the plate, Ohtani has reached base eight times in 19 plate appearances, with a walk and seven hits, including three homers.

In his first Angel Stadium start, Shohei Ohtan and his video game pitches were perfect into the seventh

By Adrian Garro

Every time Shohei Ohtani has taken the field at Angel Stadium so far this season, it's been a big deal. He homered in his first three home games as the team's designated hitter, which is pretty ridiculous, and on Sunday he took the mound for his first pitching start at his new home ballpark.

To say he didn't disappoint wouldn't be accurate. He was so dazzling, his pitches baffled the A's so thoroughly that Ohtani *took a perfect-game bid into the seventh inning*. Throughout the afternoon, he had some definite swagger out there on the hill:

Sunday marked pitcher Ohtani's second start, exactly one week since his first. That happened to come against the A's up in Oakland, where the 23-year-old put on a clinic of totally unfair strikeout pitches and changeups that dropped off the table faster than your favorite gravity-defying ride at an amusement park.

Would it surprise you to find out that Ohtani did the same again on Sunday?

Against many of the same A's hitters who challenged him last week, he just found a way to change speeds (from 99-mph fastballs to mid-80s offspeed stuff, nearly interchangeably) effectively enough to not allow any hits or baserunners until Marcus Semien lined a clean single in the seventh inning:

Ohtani's final line: 7 innings, one hit, one walk, 12 strikeouts in the Angels' 6-1 win. Unfair.

His teammate, Mike Trout -- who had a great game of his own, going 2-3 with a home run -- is pretty impressed with Ohtani too:

So far, so nearly perfect for Ohtani in his young MLB career. Good luck hitters (and pitchers!).

FROM ESPN.COM

Real or not? Amazing Shohei Ohtani ups the ante again

By David Shoenfield

To recap, this is what Shohei Ohtani accomplished over the past eight days:

- Won his major league pitching debut, allowing three runs over six innings.
- Homered in his first at-bat in front of the Los Angeles Angels' home fans, a three-run homer in the first inning off Josh Tomlin.
- Hit a two-run homer the next night off reigning Cy Young winner Corey Kluber in the fifth inning to tie a game that the Angels eventually won 3-2 in extra innings.
- Following an off day, homered for the third straight game, a mammoth 449-foot blast near the waterfall in left-center at Angel Stadium, to jump-start the Angels as they rallied from a 6-0 deficit to the Oakland Athletics.
- In his first start at home, took a perfect game into the seventh inning on Sunday against the A's and finished with 12 strikeouts, one hit and one walk over seven frames, while registering 25 swing-and-misses -- the most in the majors in 2018.

Maybe aside from some postseason pitching performances, it might have been the most exhilarating individual week and one day in major league history.

You can call that an exaggeration, and maybe you're more impressed by Johnny Vander Meer's back-to-back no-hitters over five days in 1938 or Ken Griffey Jr. matching Don Mattingly and Dale Long with home runs in eight consecutive games in 1993. But Ohtani pitched, he slugged, he dominated and the Angels went 5-0 in the games he played -- all in his first full week in the majors.

It was something else.

As my colleague Christina Kahrl tweeted, this is Fernandomania plus Nomomania wrapped around the enthusiasm for the streaks of Griffey and Mattingly. It's all coming from a two-way wunderkind from Japan adapting to a new culture and with an enormous spotlight of hype.

The A's had no chance Sunday. In terms of raw stuff for a starting pitcher, Ohtani was right up there with Noah Syndergaard and Max Scherzer. He had fastball command, starting 15 of 23 batters with first-pitch strikes, hitting the corners or keeping it down in the zone. His slider doesn't have the wicked side-to-side movement like Scherzer's but rather works more like a change-of-pace curveball, spinning in at 80 mph to 82 mph. It was the splitter, however, that made the difference Sunday.

Ohtani threw the splitter 34 times. The A's swung 21 times. They missed 16 times. In his two starts, batters have missed on 26 of 37 swings against the splitter and are 0-for-19 against it. When you have to gear up for an upper-90s fastball and then Ohtani throws an 88 mph splitter that dives down ... well, good luck.

The splitter is a popular pitch in Japan. Masahiro Tanaka has a good one, although he'll hang it from time to time and he doesn't throw as hard as Ohtani. Hisashi Iwakuma had a good one, but since his fastball topped out at 90 mph to 91 mph, hitters had a little better chance to adjust between the pitches. As Kahrl pointed out, Ohtani's dominance was reminiscent of Mike Scott in 1986, when Scott combined a good fastball with a splitter (back when few pitchers threw one) to strike out 306 batters and win the Cy Young Award.

Ohtani's best splitter might have been his final pitch of the outing. Marcus Semien had broken up the perfect game when he lined a base hit into left field off a 2-0 fastball. After a walk and groundout, Matt Olson came up with two outs and runners at second and third. Ohtani was tiring and this was pretty clearly his final batter, as the bullpen was getting loose. Olson laid off two splitters to get ahead in the count 3-1. Ohtani then painted the outside corner with a 98 mph fastball. I think everyone knew the splitter was coming, even Olson. He couldn't lay off it this time. Swing, miss, seven shutout innings.

Ohtani pumped his fist and slapped his glove in excitement. Yeah, he plays the game with some emotion, as well.

Welcome to the big leagues, kid. I can't wait to see what happens during your second week.

Power Rankings: Astros remain on top, but who is closing in?

Now that the regular season is underway and we have more than a week's worth of action to consider, it's time to fire up ESPN.com's Power Rankings. Unlike our preseason Power Ranking, which used projected wins to sort MLB teams from No. 1 to 30, from this week forward we turn things over to our panel's votes based on results as well as expectations. While the initial action didn't convince the panel to move away from ranking the reigning champion Astros as baseball's best, it wasn't unanimous -- one voter identified the Red Sox as baseball's top team in light of their already strong start.

While there's a good amount of overlap between expectations and initial results -- six teams beyond the Astros were voted into the same slots -- some club's good or bad starts have already produced significant moves up and down the rankings. The teams that clambered highest from their preseason pegs were the Pirates making a nine-slot jump to almost reach the top 10, and the Braves, escaping the bottom tier by moving up eight rungs. The Diamondbacks and Mets were the other big upward-bound clubs as both cracked our top 10. Having gotten there, with health both teams might have the ability to stick. And perhaps thanks in part to Shohei Ohtani's already impressive debut at the plate and on the mound, the Angels moved up to No. 7.

Less happily, some clubs have already disappointed initial expectations and taken a quick tumble. Cold starts (and cold bats) dropped the Dodgers and Indians down six rungs, though both teams managed to remain in the top 10. Their initial fade in the rankings was matched by the Phillies' fall six spots after a few high-profile losses and an overused bullpen helped put rookie manager Gabe Kapler on the spot. In the NL Central, the Cardinals and Brewers took five-slot drops from the voters.

This week, our panel comprises David Schoenfield, Eric Karabell, Tim Kurkjian, Bradford Doolittle and Sarah Langs.

7. Los Angeles Angels

Record: 7-3

Preseason ranking: 9

Written off by many in spring training, Shohei Ohtani has instead lived up to or even exceeded the hype so far. After going 4-for-32 with zero extra-base hits this spring, Ohtani is 7-for-19 through four games as a hitter and has hit a home run in each of his past three games at DH. He also has flashed a nasty splitter on the mound and his average fastball velocity ranks among the best for starting pitchers. Ohtani's incredible run has helped overshadow an unusually slow start for Mike Trout. -- *Paul Casella, ESPN Stats & Information*

FROM SPORTING NEWS**Shohei Ohtani is the real deal, so we should go ahead and declare it**

By Jason Foster

Sure, we've only seen a handful of games. But after Shohei Ohtani's latest show-off outing on a baseball field, the only thing on my mind is this question: How much longer? As in, how much longer do we have to wait to declare him a bona fide two-way success? Because with each dominant showing on the mound and multi-hit game at the plate, it feels more and more like what we've seen is what we'll get.

In other words, let's go ahead and declare it.

What we saw Sunday in his second MLB pitching start was a pitcher in total control, casually having his way with an A's lineup that looked mostly helpless and hopeless as this mesmerizing Japanese import pitched 6 1/3 of perfect ball en route to seven shutout innings, one hit, one walk and 12 strikeouts in a 6-1 Angels win.

It was hardly normal for a rookie in his second big-league start, and it's certainly not the norm for someone who also happens to hit 400-foot bombs when he's not toeing the rubber. But, of course, Shohei Ohtani is not normal. (Debate is ongoing as to whether he's actually human.)

Sunday's outing came two days after Ohtani hit his third home run of the season in just 19 plate appearances. (For context, that's as many home runs as the entire Marlins roster managed in the first nine games of the season.) Those long balls are part of his overall .389/.421/.889 slash line and his 1.310 OPS. That would be outstanding for any player. That such offense has come from a "pitcher," well, this is exactly what we were told would happen — despite his decidedly subpar spring training. But as Angels broadcasters joked Sunday, that showing in Arizona might've just been the greatest six-week troll job in baseball history.

Coming into the season, we were promised a two-way superstar. We were promised that the "Babe Ruth of Japan" had the tools to dominate MLB in a way not seen in 100 years. Well, it appears thus far that the promise happened to be true.

On the mound, his fastball has topped 100 mph, with a splitter and off-speed stuff that are just silly and, if we're being honest, not really fair for a 23-year-old human to possess. He paints the corners with precision. He's forever poised.

By the start of the seventh inning Sunday, he had 24 swings and misses — the most of anyone in baseball so far this season. He finished with 25 whiffs on 44 swings. Translation: His stuff was consistently nasty. Flukes tend not to be *that* nasty.

In his debut outing a week earlier, also against the A's, Ohtani went six innings and allowed three runs — all coming on one hit — and recorded six strikeouts. That the A's looked so befuddled Sunday, after having already faced him, is a telling detail. With a week to prepare and adjust, they were even more helpless. That bodes well for the Angels as the season progresses, and bodes poorly for the rest of the American League.

So, again, I ask: Is this enough? Can we say with certainty that Shohei Ohtani is the first legitimate two-way superstar since Babe Ruth? How much bigger of a sample do we need? Sure, there will be adjustments as the league(s) figure him out, or try to figure him out, but we've not seen anything so far that would indicate his early success on the mound or at the plate is some kind of a lucky mirage.

What's left to see? Five starts? Ten? Fifty at-bats? One hundred?

Or do we know already?

After Sunday, it's hard to argue that we don't.

Shohei Ohtani stirs awe vs. A's: 'As good a game as you're ever going to see pitched'

By Joseph D'Hippolito

ANAHEIM, Calif. — In the film adaptation of Bernard Malamud's novel "The Natural," a hard-boiled veteran sportswriter marvels at the 30-something rookie wonder taking baseball by storm, Roy Hobbs.

"Anything he wants to do," Max Mercy says in amazement, "he does."

Though he is a full decade younger than his fictional counterpart, Shohei Ohtani demonstrated the ability to generate similar awe Sunday.

After a singular display of offensive prowess in the days preceding, Ohtani took a perfect game into the seventh inning of his first start at Angel Stadium as a pitcher. He lost the perfect game but earned his second victory by throwing seven shutout innings, amassing 12 strikeouts and conceding just one walk and one hit in a 6-1 win against the Oakland Athletics.

"That's as good a game as you're ever going to see pitched," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "To pitch as well as he did through seven innings is not easy. They've scored a lot of runs off us this year. But he's got great stuff and he made some terrific pitches."

Yet when asked whether Sunday's performance was his best as a pitcher, Ohtani's answer caused chuckles among the Japanese reporters.

"Probably my best outing ever," Ohtani said through his translator, "was when I was in elementary school."

Nevertheless, the right-hander believed he never approached either a perfect game or a no-hitter in his five seasons with the Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan's Pacific League.

"I don't remember fully," the 23-year old said, "but this was probably as close as I got."

Ohtani began the game by striking out Matt Joyce, Marcus Semien and Jed Lowrie, all swinging. In the process, the 23-year-old displayed not only a fastball that would reach 99 mph but also skill in keeping hitters off-balance with a slider in the low 80s and a splitter in the mid-80s. Eight of the 12 Oakland batters who struck out ended their at-bats by swinging at splitters and missing.

"If he didn't have the fastball command, people wouldn't be swinging at the splitter," Angels catcher Martin Maldonado said. "He can throw that fastball anytime and anywhere he wants. That's why the hitters feel pressure to swing at the splitter. I think that was the best splitter I ever caught. The one today was falling off the table. He can throw any pitch in any count. That makes my job easy."

The sellout crowd of 44,742 — the largest attendance for a day game since Angel Stadium was remodeled in 1998 — began to appreciate the moment with one out in the fifth. Fans began rhythmic clapping when Ohtani had an 0-2 count on Matt Olson before finishing him off with a 99 mph fastball.

With a 2-2 count on the next batter, Matt Chapman, fans started roaring and rising to their feet for another strikeout. Ohtani obliged by using an 87 mph splitter to dispatch Chapman.

Despite the excitement, Ohtani maintained perspective.

"I was conscious of the no-hitter but I really wasn't thinking about the perfect game," he said. "I figured they were going to get a hit, sooner or later. I was thinking, 'Once I gave up that hit, how was I going to react and try to reset everything?' That's something I need to work on."

Ohtani got that chance in the seventh, when he started losing his fastball command. With one out, Semien lashed a 95 mph fastball to left field for a single, ending the perfect game. The crowd's collective groan soon gave way to a standing ovation. Then Lowrie walked to put runners at first and second, and bring pitching coach Charles Nagy to the mound.

As the conversation ensued, Ohtani smiled.

"I actually told the infielders, 'Please give me that double play,'" he said. "That's probably when I had that smile on my face."

But Kris Davis moved Semien and Lowrie into scoring position by hitting a comebacker to Ohtani. Olson, the next batter, worked the count to 3-1. Ohtani threw a 99 mph fastball to get the count full. Then with the crowd standing and cheering, Ohtani made Olson chase an 89 mph splitter — the right-hander's 91st and final pitch.

"The ability to calm down after that big hit and after a walk, to get those two guys," Maldonado said, "that was more impressive."

Even in the midst of his impressive start, Ohtani never expected to pitch so well so early.

"Especially how my spring training went, I wasn't imagining it to be this good, to be honest," he said. "But I feel better every day. I'm feel like I'm getting used to everything more and more each day.

"But it's just the first week. I'm pretty sure there's going to be a wall somewhere down the road. Once I hit that wall, that's when I need to start working harder and try to figure out what I need to do to get past that wall."

For Angels fans, that wall remains somewhere at the edge of the universe. As one banner proclaimed, "We believe in Ohtani-san."

MLB Power Rankings: Reigning World Series champs Astros occupy top spot

By Ryan Fagan

10. Angels

Fun fact: Shohei Ohtani faced 22 batters in his MLB pitching debut. Only three managed hits off him, but they came back-to-back-to-back: a single, a single and a three-run homer.

Why they're here: The Angels are kind of a fascinating team. They have Mike Trout, of course. And now they have Ohtani, with all eyes on him. But that rotation is really intriguing. They've been plagued with pitching injuries the past couple of seasons, and now those guys are finally pretty much all healthy and back in the mix. If those starters stay healthy, the rotation will be solid, and deep. If they don't? Wouldn't be stunning to see them miss the playoffs again, for what would be the sixth time in Trout's seven full MLB seasons.

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS**10 Degrees: Dear Shohei: I'm sorry. I was totally wrong about you.**

By Jeff Passan

Dear Shohei,

I'm sorry.

Getting something wrong is the worst part of this job, and in writing a piece during spring training about your hitting abilities, I did just that. I relayed the words of scouts with well over 100 years of combined experience who shared the same opinion: That your swing was flawed, and that the difficulty of what you were attempting – to become the first player in a century to start in a rotation and on non-pitching days take regular at-bats, and do so in a new league, speaking a new language, adjusting to a new country – would prevent you from making the necessary adjustments to hit major league stuff.

Over the course of the last week, not only have you invalidated that premise, you have done so in such convincing fashion that during my third helping of crow – one for each of your home runs – I realized I needed to explain how I came to the flawed conclusion. Over the last few days, I've essentially re-reported the story to better understand what the scouts may have missed, what biases may have influenced me not challenging the certainty with which they spoke and what I can do going forward to avoid another such a spectacular whiff.

Let's start with this: For all the substance and intelligence of scouts, their craft is an inexact science. The best scouts collate a lifetime's worth of seeing players into their brains and make judgments based on what they've witnessed lead to success and failure. Their conclusions aren't guesses; they are educated assessments. Their deep knowledge of baseball and passion for it lends a deep, complementary perspective to the statistical analysis that likewise enriches the game. The emergence of a true outlier – and that's what you are – doesn't invalidate their expertise. It offers them another data point to hone their evaluations moving forward.

The first scout to express concern with you in early March spoke with conviction about the issues he saw – namely balance at the plate, trouble with inside fastballs and difficulty hitting major league curveballs. I called others and asked if they'd seen the same. They concurred. One international scout, who had marveled watching you hit multiple times while in Japan, asked where that guy went. Each of the scouts, sensitive to how difficult the game is, wondered how anyone could do an on-the-fly reimagining of his swing in such a short period of time.

And there it was, in the last exhibition game of the year against the Los Angeles Dodgers, seemingly out of nowhere. You ditched your leg kick and tried a new timing mechanism: a slight inward twist of your

front ankle. The balance issues disappeared. You weren't late on fastballs anymore. The scouts weren't wrong. Something did need to change. You just changed with such ease that they're still flummoxed.

"I think it has more to do with great athletes making quick adjustments," the scout said this week, "and teams not knowing how to attack him yet."

It was a good lesson for me in rendering judgment before a player even tries to adjust. In baseball, the best athletes are often the ones most capable of fixing themselves and finding something new that works. Giancarlo Stanton, one of the game's purest athletes, reinvents his swing all the time when he slumps badly and finds a way each time to tap into his deep power reserves. All spring, your teammates were telling anyone who would listen: You should see Ohtani in batting practice. It's special. And I scoffed, having seen dozens of guys who put on a BP show only to shrink during games.

Then you hammered a Josh Tomlin curveball for a home run in your first at-bat at Angel Stadium. And the next day you took reigning American League Cy Young winner Corey Kluber deep to center field. And a day after that, it was a 450-foot shot to the opposite field. I received a text from a longtime scout with whom I didn't speak for the original story – one who has spent more than a decade scouting baseball in Asia.

"It is safe to assume you are learning the first lesson of scouting Asians," he said. "Never evaluate them in spring training. They are on their own program. Ichiro and [Akinori] Iwamura didn't hit a ball hard or to the right side of shortstop their first spring."

I'd dismissed this the first time through, fearful of lumping you with dissimilar players simply because they're your countrymen. The scout had a point, though: Baseball culture in Japan differs from that in the United States, and guiding principles accompany most who try to jump to MLB.

"It's been my experience that Asians are so drilled and regimented in their approach they put no performance stock in spring training," the scout said. "They work on tracking, sequencing and other process-type stuff. Performance is last. Unlike the vets, they do not appear to turn up the performance side the last week of spring training and instead do so opening day."

Now, the original story did note that this wasn't a case of scouts looking at your spring-training performance, though in hindsight I wonder: If you had a couple extra hits here or there, would they have been as inclined to doubt you? I don't know. I do know that I tried to get a cross-section of younger scouts and veterans, ones with experience in Asia and those without, and that the agreement among them was universal. Maybe there was a subconscious selection bias in those I chose to ask. Perhaps I should've kept poking around until I found a contrarian, if only to see if that viewpoint invalidated any of the others'. All good lessons to learn.

There's also the sabermetric element, something I was loath to consider because of the tiny sample of plate appearances when I wrote the piece. Another scout not consulted for the original piece chimed in

this week and said: “I did happen to know his exit velos were goofy.” And, yes, in Japan, your speed off the bat was elite.

This brings up an important part of the story, one that caused a fair bit of consternation. One scout said you were “basically like a high school hitter because [you’ve] never seen a good curveball.” My hope was this would be seen for the hyperbole it was. By and large, the curveballs in Japan do not match the quality of those in the big leagues. I should have paraphrased it nonetheless. Because lost in its inflammatory nature was a truly salient argument: Curveballs did perplex you all spring, and the criticisms about the balance were on-point.

The other faux pas was the headline: “The verdict is in on Shohei Ohtani’s bat and it’s not good.” If I replace “verdict” with “early report,” it sounds plenty more reasonable. Still wrong, but at least more fair.

And fairness isn’t just the goal. It’s an imperative. Those exit-velocity numbers would’ve at very least helped balance the story – and looked prescient. All seven of your hits have left the bat traveling at least 100 mph. The hardest-hit ball: 112.8 mph. The last home run: 112.4 mph. Only 32 players in the big leagues this year have reached 112 mph even once.

“He still has work to do as the league catches up and is only 23,” the scout with significant experience in Asia said, “but seen him too much to have doubt. Power to the big field. Bat stays in zone for a long time with strength and bat speed. Has some holes and will have his share of Ks but has some hitterish feel to it. Was better with each view. Thought he was just a free swinger with big bat speed in 2015. By last spring, I was buying in.”

That makes two of us – and the rest of America that enjoys watching a guy hit home runs in three consecutive games and then take a perfect game into the seventh inning and punch out 12. Don’t get me wrong: I think you’re going to struggle sooner than later. Teams are going to adjust and pitchers are going to start respecting your power and you’re going to need to hunt mistakes. But you’ve shown the malleability and fortitude already to thrive in this environment, and for that ...

1. Shohei Ohtani, you’ve earned the respects of plenty more doubters in front offices around the game. Sorry to report that scouts, executives, pitching coaches, analysts and pitchers already are workshopping a new approach to you.

“I’d go hard up and in and work away with off-speed, same way I’d approach [Cody] Bellinger,” one official said. “These long guys usually aren’t super strong and they are super long, so bust them in and try to limit their path to the ball. You can’t let these guys extend because then the leverage is in play and they can really launch. I’d also try to move his feet in the box by throwing inside early in counts. You can’t let guys like him find comfort because then they can lean out over the plate and cover the outside better.”

This would be a far better strategy if more pitchers threw inside these days. They don't. So instead, the diet may consist of high fastballs and those off-speed pitches away – changeups from right-handers and sliders from lefties. Might work. Might not. At very least you've got the talent to figure it out.

Because let's not forget, a week and a half into your major league career, you've got a .389/.421/.889 slash line and 2.08 ERA.

10. Shohei Ohtani's world and the rest of us are but servile inhabitants. Something like you – an actual phenomenon in baseball – does not come along all that often, so when it does, it's worth enjoying.

Nobody is loving it more than the Angels, whom you chose because ... well, executives around the league still aren't sure. They're just getting more jealous by the day. The Angels didn't panic when you struggled. They had a plan. They stuck to it. They didn't ditch the bat like some short-sighted people might have suggested.

And now they're reaping the rewards. They have a 23-year-old right-handed pitcher who's dotting 100-mph fastballs on the corners and devastating fools with a splitter. They have a 23-year-old left-handed-hitting DH with uncommon power, a decent eye and room to grow. It still boggles the mind that those are the same guy.

While a couple of the scouts still do believe that pitchers will exploit you offensively in the long run – “Anyone can have a great week in April,” one said – more than a few had a-ha moments this week. I hate to go back to the original column, but it's important, because there's a paragraph at the end that wasn't a hedge but rather an acknowledgment that baseball is weird and that what's never been seen today shows up tomorrow. Pardon the self-quoting here, but: “Ohtani's confidence in his bat is admirable, and perhaps he is the rare sort who can adjust on the fly, whose talent is overwhelming enough to change perceptions overnight. Special players do special things.”

Yes. Yes they do. And of all the ways to describe you, and what you're doing, special about sums it up.

Sincerely,

Jeff Passan

The curiosity of Shohei Ohtani continues to grow after phenomenal start

By Tim Brown

ANAHEIM, Calif. – It's becoming something. Maybe not a mania. Maybe not even a day, yet. But something. A spectacle. A curiosity. A hope. A reason to wipe out half a paycheck for a Sunday afternoon on which the draw is 100 mph on the black, 68 mph from the sky, 88 mph that – poof – disappears.

If not for that, then another day, for the 450-foot home run, 112-mph off the bat, elegant but for the cool and easy violence, almost sleepy except for the explosion at the end.

In the shadow of the behemoth up north, for a franchise working on a decade of a lot of Mike Trout and not much else, a reasonably full ballpark leaned into two-strike pitches, dragged its finger over the new jerseys in the team store, sang his name, mourned a baserunner in the seventh (the first), and carried him from the field.

At the end of a week in which he homered, homered and homered again here, Shohei Ohtani on Sunday afternoon got around to his specialty, which, so far, is to torture the Oakland A's. He pitched Sunday. Amid the Little Leaguers, thumping music and fireworks. In the syrupy bog of expectations. With the assuredness that comes with being 23, in a game that speaks of – honors, even – failure, except it's never come for you.

And now a town believes, which is great and, whoa, maybe a little scary, because home runs in every game followed by a seven-inning, 12-strikeout, one-hitter is probably not the norm, probably not the thing you should be promising. Except the pitches keep coming and you keep swinging, and the batters keep coming and you keep sending them back, and this is what 11 days in the big leagues look like for Shohei Ohtani:

.389 batting average, three home runs, seven RBIs, 1.310 OPS

2-0 record, 2.08 ERA, 13 innings, 18 strikeouts, two walks, four hits

5 days off

So, yeah, it's becoming something, unless it already is something, him breathing life into the notion the presumed impossible has at least a chance. When 11 days turns into 30. When a month turns into two, three and six. When the A's become the Houston Astros, the Boston Red Sox, the New York Yankees, the Los Angeles Dodgers. When morning comes and the night before is heavy in his joints, and the oh-for-four has become oh-for-eight, and threatens more, and there's a bullpen to be thrown and batting practice to be taken, and some left-handed beast is on the mound, waiting. Will it still have a chance then?

“Especially with how my spring training went, I wasn’t really imagining it being this good, to be honest,” Ohtani said after his start. “But, I feel better and I feel like I’m getting more used to it, more and more each day. It’s just the first week. Everything went well. I’m pretty sure there will be a wall somewhere down the road. Once I hit that wall, that’s when I’ll need to start working harder and figure out how to get past that wall.”

He had, maybe an hour before, struck out the last of 12 A’s hitters, on a split-fingered fastball. It’d required seven innings for those 12 strikeouts, 23 hitters in all. One of them – Marcus Semien, an out into the seventh inning – reached on a hit. Ohtani had been perfect until then, and hardly just perfect in the usual sense, but perfect in the they-never-had-a-chance sense. The fastball that arrived at 96 mph in the first inning was, by the sixth and seventh, regularly at 99 and 100. The split-fingered fastball was, even by the standards of a dotted hyper-speed fastball, devious. He threw a curveball that tickled the eyebrows of an entire stadium, strike one to Matt Joyce, the A’s leadoff hitter, in the fourth inning. In the distance, the A’s driver started the bus, or could’ve.

Stoic, earnest, Ohtani threw 10 pitches in the fourth, one of them his first 100-mph fastball of the afternoon. He threw 13 in the fifth, when he struck out the Nos. 4, 5 and 6 batters for the A’s. Another 12 pitches in the sixth, with another strikeout.

“I was conscious of the no-hitter, but I really wasn’t thinking of the perfect game,” Ohtani said. “I figured they’d get a hit sooner or later.”

He may have been alone in that, including both dugouts. But, so far, that’s been an Ohtani trait. Like a guest in your home, he wouldn’t mention the cobwebs in the corners of the ceilings. He’d put up with the dog, even if he were allergic. Before he bats, he touches the brim of his helmet and bows – it’s subtle – to the umpire and catcher. He did the same Sunday from the mound. In conversations with reporters, he speaks softly, and then only in orchestrated groups. His translator speaks even softer. He speaks only a few words, as though saving you the hassle of too many. Though, clearly, this serves him well. The fewer the words, the fewer the chances for misinterpretation. Also, the fewer chances to really know him. And less time spent with strangers and their questions.

And more time for the impossible.

For the splitter catcher Martin Maldonado put on par with any of the wipeout pitches he’s ever caught or tried to hit. For the swing that, so far, has worked. For the career that has inched into the second week of his first big-league season. For the fans three and four deep on the foul line, dugout to bullpen, screaming as he strides past before his start.

At the end for him Sunday, when there were two runners on base, the only two he’d allow, and two were out in the seventh inning, Ohtani would have one more pitch to throw. He chased a 99-mph fastball with a splitter. Maldonado raised his mitt, the ball inside. The splitter was his 34th, the swing

and miss on that pitch alone his 16th. In a rare release, Ohtani punched the air, shook his shoulders, let it all out.

“I wanted that strikeout,” he said. “And I got it.”

He smiled.

It’s becoming something now.

Shohei Ohtani flirts with perfect game in mesmerizing first home start

By Tim Brown

ANAHEIM, Calif. – Los Angeles Angels right-hander Shohei Ohtani, the two-way player from Japan making his second major league start, struck out 12 Oakland A’s across seven shutout innings on Sunday in a 6-1 win. Pitching for the first time at Angel Stadium, Ohtani did not allow a hit until there was one out in the seventh inning.

In 2 1/2 breathtaking hours of power and finesse, the 23-year-old Ohtani mixed fastballs that reached 100 mph with a curveball that fluttered at 68 mph. In between, Ohtani frustrated A’s hitters with an array of split-fingered fastballs and sliders.

He retired the first 19 hitters in order, 11 by strikeout. Only three balls reached the outfield. By the fifth inning, Angels fans rose and cheered two-strike counts, urging Ohtani forward, celebrating his dominance.

Attempting to become the first regular two-way player of significance in nearly a century, an effort that has brought him recognition as “the Japanese Babe Ruth”, Ohtani is batting .389 with three home runs in four games as the Angels designated-hitter. As a pitcher, he is 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA, with 18 strikeouts in 14 innings.

On Sunday, facing the A’s for the second time in eight days, Ohtani struck out the A’s first three hitters. By the end of the third, once through the lineup, he’d struck out six batters, five of them on split-fingered fastballs. In the middle innings, as thoughts of a perfect game floated through a crowd of 44,742, Ohtani’s fastball gained velocity. He struck out A’s cleanup hitter Kris Davis on a 99-mph fastball in the fifth, next struck out Matt Olson on a 99-mph fastball, then finished Matt Chapman on a splitter.

In the seventh inning, which he began with 75 pitches, Ohtani retired A’s leadoff hitter Matt Joyce on a soft liner to shortstop. Then, on a two-ball fastball, Marcus Semien grounded a single through the left side of the infield. Angels fans groaned, then honored the rookie pitcher with a standing ovation. Ohtani

finished the seventh inning with a strikeout of Olson, his 12th. Sensing the end of his day, Ohtani followed that splitter with a fist pump.

Four months ago, Ohtani, a free agent, chose to sign with the Angels over six other teams – the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Diego Padres, Seattle Mariners, Texas Rangers, San Francisco Giants and Chicago Cubs. He struggled with his pitching and hitting in spring training, bringing speculation from scouts and other experts he might be better served to begin his U.S. career in the minor leagues. The Angels disagreed, however, and in the first 11 days of the season Ohtani has been among the league's better hitters, along with one of its better pitchers.

FROM NBC SPORTS

We're not appreciating Shohei Ohtani as much as we should be

By Craig Calcaterra

Shohei Ohtani's early season performance is the talk of baseball. He couldn't hit all spring and he's come out of the gate banging, going 7-for-18 with three homers in the early going. He got beat up pitching all spring and all he did yesterday was dominate, pitching perfect baseball into the seventh inning while striking out 12 and looking more dominant than any pitcher we've seen in some time. Worth noting: it was against the Oakland Athletics, who had seen him a week before, so it's not like they weren't at least somewhat prepared for him. Didn't matter.

Ohtani's early spectacular performance allows us to return to the conversation which was cut short when he struggled during spring training. The conversation about how special he can truly be and how unprecedented what he is trying to do truly is.

Ohtani was given the nickname "The Japanese Babe Ruth" a couple of years ago. Some scoffed at this because, hey, there's only one Babe Ruth, and Ohtani is not gonna either win 24 games on the mound nor hit .360 and smack 50 dingers. The nickname, though, was not given because anyone thought he'd be as *good* a hitter or pitcher Ruth was, but because he's a dual threat like Ruth was, able to both hit and pitch at a high level, all at a time when the level of competition and the grind of the season is far greater than it was back in 1920.

Still, the nickname might turn out to still be something of an insult . . . to Shohei Ohtani.

Babe Ruth was an outstanding pitcher and, historically speaking, remains a massively underrated one. Obviously he was one of the best hitters in the history of baseball. But he was not really a two-way player the way Ohtani is attempting to be for very long. Indeed, he was only a true two-way player for part of the 1918 season and for the 1919 season with Boston.

Ruth was a part-time hitter at best before he turned 23, Ohtani's current age, before the 1918 season. In 1918 Ruth got a bit more exposure as a hitter, playing in 95 games in the field and making 382 plate appearances while making 19 starts and one relief appearance, tossing 166.1 innings. In 1919 he was basically a full-time offensive player, making 543 plate appearances in 130 games, while backing off a tad on the pitching, appearing in 17 games, starting 15, and tossing 133.1 innings. It's worth noting, though, that as the batting workload increased, his typical pitching workload dramatically decreased. Indeed, he pitched over 320 innings in 1916 and 1917, so for the era, it's probably to consider what he was doing in 1918 and 1919 as part-time pitching. Following his purchase by the Yankees in 1920 all pretenses of him being a two-way threat were dropped. He would appear in only five more games as a pitcher over the next 13 years, all one-offs, gimmicks or emergency spot appearances.

Ohtani, in contrast, is currently set up to be a full-time pitcher for his era. Barring injury or being skipped for strategic purposes, he'll probably make 30 starts, maybe a couple more than that, and pitch close to 200 innings. He's on pace for that now anyway. As a hitter he's hit in four of the Angels' first ten games. If he keeps that pace up he'll only be a DH for around 65 games, but if he keeps hitting well, and as he gets more comfortable with the major league routine, it's not hard to imagine Mike Scioscia putting him in the lineup more often. How could he not? Could that give him 300 plate appearances? 400? That's probably a bit much, but it's not totally out of the question if he's raking and the Angels are in the playoff hunt.

No, I am not insane, and no I will not even suggest that Ohtani will pitch or hit as well as Babe Ruth did. But he may very well come pretty close to the workload Ruth had as a dual threat, and he may very well do it for a longer time than the, at best, one and a half seasons Ruth ever did. All at a time when the baseball schedule, the crush of the media and the mental demands of the game are far greater than they were in Ruth's era and when the competition is far tougher.

Maybe you're already sick of all of the talk about Shohei Ohtani. But it's worth remembering that there's a good reason no one has done what he is trying to do for close to a 100 years. That he's doing it and that, so far anyway, he's doing it at such a high level, means that, in my view, we're not talking about Shohei Ohtani enough.

Shohei Ohtani wrapped up best week in baseball history against A's

By Ben Ross

It's been nearly 100 years since we've seen anyone come even close to doing what Shohei Ohtani has done already this season.

The 23-year-old Angels rookie from Japan has taken Major League Baseball by storm, with his bat and his arm.

On Sunday, Ohtani capped off arguably the greatest week in baseball history, carrying a perfect game into the seventh inning, and striking out 12 Oakland A's in seven scoreless frames to improve to 2-0 as a pitcher.

That performance followed a three-game stretch that saw Ohtani go 6-for-13 at the plate with three home runs and seven RBI. If MLB awarded individual hitter and pitcher of the week awards, he would likely win both.

The numbers are truly staggering. As a pitcher, Ohtani's two wins are tied for the most in MLB, while his three home runs are tied for fifth among all hitters.

He has 18 strikeouts, fifth-most in baseball, while ranking seventh in the American League with a .389 batting average.

Ohtani's 2.08 ERA is better than Justin Verlander and Corey Kluber. His .889 slugging percentage ranks higher than Kris Bryant, Mike Trout, and Aaron Judge.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Ohtani is just the third player in MLB history to record two wins and hit three home runs in his team's first 10 games of a season, and the first to do it since Jim Shaw in 1919.

While Ohtani's numbers at the plate may drop off as opposing pitchers continue to scout him and discover his weak spots, he appears to be unhittable on the mound. On Sunday, he painted the corners with his 99 mph fastball, while his splitter forced 16 swings and misses out of 21 pitches. Mix in a nasty curveball and you can see why he only allowed one hit in seven innings.

Before even beginning his MLB career, Ohtani was dubbed the "Japanese Babe Ruth," an impossible nickname to live up to. Incredibly, Ohtani hasn't just lived up to the hype, he has exceeded it.

FROM CBS SPORTS

Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani caps remarkable week with perfect game bid

By R.J. Anderson

Los Angeles Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani had an impressive week. How impressive? So impressive that he became the first player to do something since Babe Ruth: Homering three times in between starts.

Ohtani made his second pitching start on Sunday, taking on the Oakland Athletics once again. The first encounter is supposed to favor the pitcher, the second the hitter. Ohtani is both a pitcher and a hitter, so perhaps convention doesn't apply to him in any true sense. For evidence of that, consider how Ohtani took a perfect game through six innings.

Unfortunately, for Ohtani, he yielded a single to Marcus Semien with one out in the seventh, ending both his bids. He still managed to get through the seventh having allowed just one hit, one walk, and no runs, while striking out 12. What's more is Ohtani recorded an absurd 24 swinging strikes on just 91 pitches. He missed bats with 16 of his 34 splitters, and eight of his 42 fastballs. His fastball topped out at 99.6 mph, and he even threw a curveball that clocked in at 68.5 mph. That's a 31 mph gap between fastest and slowest pitches. Ridiculous.

Had Ohtani closed out the perfect game, it would've been the second in franchise history. Mike Witt twirled one back when the Angels still went by the "California" moniker. (It's perhaps worth noting that John Lackey retired 27 batters in a row in a July 2006 start, but it came after a leadoff double.) Meanwhile, an Ohtani no-hitter would've been the 11th in franchise history, and the first since Jered Weaver blanked the Minnesota Twins in 2012.

Alas, none of the above was meant to be on Sunday. That doesn't mean Ohtani won't accomplish one or the other before the season is out.

FROM USA TODAY

Shohei Ohtani leaves Angels teammates saying one thing: 'We haven't seen that before'

By Jorge L. Ortiz

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Los Angeles Angels manager Mike Scioscia says there was a plan to Shohei Ohtani's spring, and now we're seeing the end result of it.

That plan was clearly to lull the rest of baseball into a false sense of security.

After arriving from Japan amid enormous hype, the two-way star promptly deflated expectations by taking a spectacular pratfall in the Cactus League. He batted .125. His ERA was a laughable 27.00. Questions arose about whether he would make the team or start the season in the minors.

It was just a show, hey.

The real Ohtani seems to have materialized in the first 11 days of the season, and he has been a sight to behold.

In Sunday's first start in front of the home fans — who turned out 44,742 strong, the largest crowd for a day game since Angel Stadium was renovated in 1998 — Ohtani delivered an outing that prompted Scioscia to say, "That was as good a game as you could ever see pitched."

Of course, he's only been in the major leagues as a player or manager for 32 years.

A week after Ohtani earned his first major league win by holding the Oakland Athletics to three hits and three runs over six innings, they had another shot at him and came up empty. As in no runners and 11 strikeouts over the first six innings, conjuring thoughts of a rookie throwing a perfect game in his second major league start.

It didn't happen. Marcus Semien's one-out single in the seventh ended the suspense in what wound up as a 6-1 Angels victory, and Ohtani settled for seven brilliant innings of one-hit ball, with one walk and 12 strikeouts.

At one point, Ohtani retired 33 of 34 Athletics between the two starts. He has struck out 18 and walked two while yielding four hits.

The rest of the league is on notice.

"If he's hitting his spots, they're going to have a really hard time with him," said A's outfielder Matt Joyce, who accounted for Oakland's only run with a ninth-inning homer off Felix Pena but went 0-for-3 against Ohtani.

"But it's a game of adjustments. The big leagues is the top level and these guys can make adjustments like that. Next time we see him we'll make some adjustments and hopefully have a little bit better of a game. But, no doubt, he's going to have a lot of success. Obviously he's been doing it on both sides of the ball and he's an exciting player for baseball to have."

Oh yes, there's that other part of the game at which Ohtani has been pretty good so far this season. In becoming the only Angels rookie ever to homer in his first three home games last week, he took over the team lead in batting average (.389) and on-base plus slugging percentage (1.310) while sharing top honors for home runs (three).

Friday's shot was a 449-foot blast that landed in the fountain part of the artificial rock formation well beyond the center-field fence.

"It was loud," Semien said. "The guys on their team talk about how far he hits the ball in BP (batting practice), his raw power. He showed it off there."

It bears mentioning that Ohtani has only 18 at-bats, which is not just a small sample, it's tiny. And because the Angels don't want to lose the designated hitter in his American League starts, and he sits on the day before and after he pitches, Ohtani doesn't figure to hit more than four times a week.

Plus, his two starts have come against an Oakland team that, while stocked with power hitters, has finished last in the AL West each of the last three seasons and is projected to bring up the rear again.

But suddenly, Ohtani's quest to become the first major leaguer to pitch and hit regularly in nearly a century doesn't look so quixotic.

The so-called Babe Ruth of Japan can already claim equaling the Bambino in one regard: He's the first player to homer in three consecutive games during a season in which he made a pitching start since the Babe in 1930.

"Especially with how my spring training went, I wasn't really imagining being this good at this spot," Ohtani said after notching his second win and lowering his ERA to 2.08. "I feel better every day. It's just the first week. Everything went well. There's going to be a wall somewhere. Once I hit that wall, that's when I need to start working harder and figure out what I need to do to get past it."

That wall came hard and fast at Ohtani early on. Despite his batting practice exploits, he managed no extra-base hits in 32 Cactus League at-bats. So during the Freeway Series exhibition games against the Los Angeles Dodgers at the end of March, he unveiled a different hitting style, ditching the leg-kick he employed during his whole career in Japan for a toe-tap that has allowed him to time pitches better.

It's the kind of major change that may take some hitters months to implement, but Ohtani — while also tending to his pitching duties — put it into practice in a matter of days or weeks, a sign of the analytical mind Scioscia has noticed.

"I have changed my batting form during the season in the past. I think everybody does that," Ohtani said dismissively. "I will try out different things to find the right feel."

When Ohtani decided to try his hand at the major leagues, the scouting reports from Japan indicated he had a better chance to succeed as a pitcher, considering his repertoire includes a fastball that touches 100 mph, a wicked splitter — the pitch Oakland hitters flailed at much of Sunday — along with a tight slider and change-of-pace slow curveball.

But the A's, who have seen him more than any other opponent, are not so sure now which part of his game is more advanced. They marvel at both his pitching and hitting.

Perhaps Angels catcher Martin Maldonado put it best, saying, "He never looks like he's out of place. He looks like a hitter when he's batting and looks like a pitcher when he's pitching. It's impressive. We haven't seen that before."

Shohei Ohtani: 13 astonishing facts from his historic, two-way MLB entrance

Shohei Ohtani is following a path forged by few others.

The Japanese sensation and Los Angeles Angels two-way star is making history each time he's penciled in the lineup -- either as the starting pitcher or designated hitter.

Earlier this week, Ohtani, 23, became the first Major League player to earn a win in one game, then homer in a start as a non-pitcher in his next game since Babe Ruth in 1921.

A look back at eight astonishing days that suggest the hype that preceded Ohtani was very much real:

April 1

- Ohtani notches his first major league win, as the Angels prevail 7-4 in Oakland. In that game, he retires 14 of the last 15 batters he faces.
- Ohtani throws 92 pitches, 63 of them strikes and tosses first-pitch strikes 14 times in 22 tries, including against eight of the first nine men he faced.
- Ohtani induces 18 swings and misses, a total surpassed by Angels starters only three times last season.
- His hits 100 mph twice.

Tuesday

- Just two days after picking up his first major-league win on the mound, Ohtani blasts a three-run home run off Indians starter Josh Tomlin in his first plate appearance at Angel Stadium. He finishes 3-for-4 with three RBI and two runs.
- He is the first player to earn a win in one game, then homer in a start as a non-pitcher in his next game since Babe Ruth in 1921.

Wednesday

- Ohtani homers in his second straight game -- this time off Corey Kluber, the reigning AL Cy Young winner.
- He becomes the first Angel to homer in his first two career home games.

Friday

- For the third consecutive game, Ohtani blasts a home run -- a solo shot in his first at-bat off Daniel Gossett of the Athletics.

- Ohtani's homer flew off his bat at 112.4 mph and traveled an estimated 449 feet, according to Statcast. It stands as the hardest-hit and longest home run for the Angels this season.

Sunday

- In his second start as a pitcher, Ohtani retired the first 19 batters he faces, with 12 strike outs to beat the Athletics 6-1. He allows just one hit over seven innings to improve to 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA
- Ohtani induces 24 pitches for swinging strikes -- the highest total accumulated in a start this year. Of the 12 strikeouts, only three are foul balls.
- The only pitchers who in their first two career starts had a game in which they pitched at least 7 innings, allowed 1 hit or fewer, 1 walk or fewer and struck out at least 12: Steve Woodard in 1997, Juan Marichal in 1960.

Shohei Ohtani nearly perfect: 12 strikeouts, seven shutout innings, wins second MLB start

By Jorge L. Ortiz

ANAHEIM - Shohei Ohtani could not reward Los Angeles Angels fans with a home run on Sunday, as they had probably grown used to from his three previous appearances in a home uniform.

They would have to settle for a brilliant pitching performance instead.

Making his first start at Angel Stadium, the Japanese two-way sensation retired the first 19 batters he faced before yielding a one-out single in the seventh to Marcus Semien as the Angels defeated the Oakland Athletics 6-1.

In front of a rare April sellout crowd of 44,742, Ohtani unleashed a fastball that touched 100 mph and paired it with a devilish splitter and an effective slider. He overwhelmed A's hitters from the get-go, striking out the first three batters he faced and 10 of the first 15.

"That's as good a game," says Angels manager Mike Scioscia, "as you could ever see pitched."

In the middle innings, fans started getting up when Ohtani would reach strike two on a batter, anticipating a K. He complied time and again, striking out the side again in the fifth. He finished with 12 strikeouts, a hit and a walk in 91 pitches - 59 strikes - over seven shutout innings.

Suddenly, his quest to become the first player to pitch and hit regularly in nearly a century doesn't look so quixotic.

Ohtani, who homered in three consecutive games as a DH this past week, yielded three runs on three hits over six innings last Sunday to notch his first major league win, as the Angels prevailed 7-4 in Oakland. In that game, he retired 14 of the last 15 batters he faced.

On Sunday at Angel Stadium, the only A's batter to make solid contact off Ohtani through the first six innings was Khris Davis, who led off the second with a liner to center field, caught by Mike Trout on the run. The rest of the A's barely made a peep until Semien's line single.

"The kid's obviously incredibly talented. He totally lives up to the hype," says A's leadoff hitter Matt Joyce. "A pitcher that sits 95-98 with some life to his ball, and then he has a splitter and a slow curveball he can flip in for a strike when he wants to, and then a slider, he's got the total arsenal.

"When a pitcher like that is hitting his spots, getting ahead – I think he had a couple of calls go his way – it makes it really tough on hitters. I think the biggest difference today is he was throwing his splitter to the locations he wanted."

A's manager Bob Melvin had cautioned before the game that, while seeing Ohtani for the second time in a week could benefit the club's hitters, it was no guarantee of success.

"When you're that talented, it could be just as difficult the 15th time you face him," Melvin said. "But at least they kind of know a little bit what to expect, whereas the first time there were a lot of unknowns."

Knowing Ohtani a little better proved of no help.

Because the Angels don't want to lose the designated hitter in his American League starts, Ohtani did not get to bat on Sunday, depriving the L.A. offense of its top hitter by batting average (.389) and on-base plus slugging percentage (1.310) as well as its co-leader in home runs (three).

No matter. Ohtani's teammates provided him two first-inning runs against Oakland starter Kendall Graveman and then added on against him and the bullpen.

After signing with the Angels in the offseason as the game's most coveted free agent, Ohtani endured a rough spring that brought into question his ability to transition right away from Japan to major league baseball. He hit just .125 in 32 at-bats and pitched to a 27.00 ERA.

Some batters suggested that, while Ohtani threw hard, his fastball was straight and hittable. That hasn't been the case once the regular season started.

"When you have good off-speed pitches, it makes that fastball effective no matter what," Semien said before Sunday's game. "If it's 99 and you have two or three awesome pitches to supplement that for strikes, then you have a pretty good pitch on your hands."

Indeed, Sunday's start was more or less a pick-your-poison proposition for A's hitters.

“He had good command of his fastball,” says Angels catcher Martin Maldonado, “so the hitters felt pressure to swing at the splitter.”

Ohtani, 23, has fashioned a 2.08 ERA through his first two starts, with 18 strikeouts, two walks and four hits allowed in 13 innings.

And after ditching his high leg-kick for a toe-tap in his hitting stance late in the spring, Ohtani has been a terror at the plate, going 7-for-18 with seven RBI in four games.

Ohtani has been sitting the day before and the day after he pitches, so his next chance to extend his stretch of homering in three consecutive games will come Tuesday on the road against the Texas Rangers.

The possibilities now seem endless.

Perhaps Maldonado put it best when he described Ohtani this way:

“He never looks like he’s out of place. He looks like a hitter when he’s batting and looks like a pitcher when he’s pitching. It’s impressive. We haven’t seen that before.”

FROM WASHINGTON POST

Shohei Ohtani dual-role dominance could produce MLB’s best statistical season ever

By Neil Greenberg

The baseball season has only just begun but we already have the biggest story of the year: Los Angeles Angels rookie phenom Shohei Ohtani, who has the potential to completely redefine the definition of MVP.

Ohtani has been worthy of the hype surrounding his arrival in Major League Baseball. The Japanese star, who works as both a starting pitcher and a hitter, ended his second week in the majors with a dominant start on Sunday against the Oakland A’s, carrying a perfect game into the seventh inning. He ultimately yielded one walk and one hit with 12 strikeouts. It was his second win in two starts, but that’s not doing his season justice.

Not are not only witnessing history, we might also be recalibrating what it means to be the most valuable player in the league. Since 1931, the first year the award was voted on by the Baseball Writers’

Association of America, 12 pitchers have won the award, with Clayton Kershaw (2014) the most recent recipient. But we've also never seen a player like Ohtani in modern times.

The value Ohtani presents as a player who contributes both as a pitcher and a hitter is simply dripping with potential if he can continue his early-season success.

Ohtani's four-seam fastball is averaging 98.7 mph and topping out at 100 mph, producing a swinging strike rate of 8 percent, the sixth-highest this season. His split-finger fastball, meanwhile, has struck out 13 batters in 19 at-bats ending on the pitch. He's allowed just one hit on the sweet spot of the bat — tied for the lowest among 104 pitchers with at least 150 pitches thrown in 2018 — and is the league leader in overall swinging strike rate (24 percent). Only Patrick Corbin of the Arizona Diamondbacks, Gerrit Cole of the Houston Astros and Noah Syndergaard of the New York Mets have a larger differential between their strikeout and walk rates than Ohtani this season.

Oh, by the way, Ohtani rakes, too. The 23-year-old also acts as the Angels designated hitter on off days and is batting .389 with three home runs in 19 plate appearances, producing runs at a rate that is almost triple the league average after adjusting for league and park effects (278 wRC+). And these aren't just run-of-the-mill home runs — Ohtani hit one off Daniel Gossett at 112.4 mph that had a projected distance of 449 feet.

"It was loud," Oakland shortstop Marcus Semien said of the hit. "The guys on their team talk about how far he hits the ball in BP [batting practice], his raw power. He showed it off there."

Ohtani is just the third player in baseball history to get two wins on the mound and hit three dingers in his team's first 10 games. The last person to do it was starting pitcher Jim Shaw in 1919, but his three home runs in the Washington Senators' first 10 games ended up being the only ones he hit all season.

Ohtani is also the third player to hit a home run in three consecutive games and also record a double-digit strikeout game in the same season. Ken Brett (1973) and Babe Ruth (1916) are the others. However, it took Ruth until the end of June to make the cut and Brett needed until the end of August. Ohtani has done it in the first 10 games of his major league career.

Let's do some back-of-the-envelope math. Ohtani has two starts and six games in the batter's box this season, which projects to 97 games as a hitter and 32 starts as a pitcher. That equates to roughly 300 plate appearances and 200 innings pitched. Using his wins above replacement to date (1.0 fWAR), and assuming Ohtani continues his torrid pace both as a hitter and on the mound, we could expect him to be worth 15.5 total fWAR (9.2 pitching and 6.3 hitting) for the season, a staggering amount that would beat the best season on record, Ruth's 1923 MVP campaign (15 fWAR). Of course, that was a year in which Ruth was not used as a pitcher, so just let that thought sink in for a second and appreciate how good Ruth was at the plate that season.

But sustaining greatness is obviously difficult, and Ohtani's 2018 projections are much lower: He is penciled in for 13 to 15 home runs and 1.0 fWAR as a hitter and is expected to go 10-7 with a 3.46 ERA (3.2 fWAR) as a pitcher in 2018. Yet there hasn't been a player like Ohtani since Ruth, so it's quite possible the projections underestimate what he can do. And since the knock on voting for a pitcher as MVP has always been the fact they play just once every five days, Ohtani also has a chance to recast this vision of what the MVP should and could be.

The AL doesn't have as strong a track record as the NL when it comes to rewarding the league leader in fWAR as the MVP, but the first-place finisher has been named the MVP four times since 2007 and in two of the past three seasons. Ohtani could make it three of four if he continues to play like he has to start the 2018 season.

FROM SB NATION

The 2018 season is all about Shohei Ohtani, and that's good for baseball

By Matt Collins

We're only just over a week through the 2018 season, and there is so much that's going to happen between now and the start of the postseason that no rational person would get too carried away with any early trend just yet. Or, normally that would be the case. It's already clear what the story of *this* season is going to be. It's not going to be Bryce Harper even though the star has already slugged six home runs and is getting ready to be courted in one of the most anticipated free agencies of all time. It's also not going to be the Red Sox despite them winning eight in a row and being one bullpen meltdown away from a 9-0 record right off the bat. Those are great stories, and any other year they'd be what we're talking about today. This isn't any other year, though. This is the year of Shohei Ohtani.

What the man known as the Japanese Babe Ruth has done to start his major-league career has been nothing short of incredible, and he's taking not only the baseball world but the sports world in general by storm. On Sunday, he gave a nice little reminder that, for as exciting as the home runs have been at the plate, it's the pitching that teams have always been most excited about. He was facing an A's team that obviously isn't great, but I don't care if he was facing a college team. His stuff was incredible, the results were undeniable, and he just generally set the world on fire in this game. Every day it's something new, and it's starting to become clear that there's nothing he can't do. Oh, and he's only 23 years old, which often gets lost in all of this.

Really, this is the best thing that could have happened to Major League Baseball as they look to get back in the casual sports fan's conscience. The "baseball is dying" takes have always been somewhat overblown, but there's no denying that the sport *is* lagging behind sports like football and basketball on the national landscape right now. Ohtani is trying to change that, and he's becoming the kind of player

that everyone feels the need to check on every morning when they wake up. The game has always had great players -- hell, his teammate is on a track that could make him the best of all time -- but there hasn't been this kind of buzz since Barry Bonds was in his prime. Baseball was looking for its next transcendent talent, and they found it in Ohtani.

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

Shohei Ohtani is pretty good, Andrew McCutchen is a delight, and Tim Tebow is in this headline for SEO purposes

By Grant Brisbee

What Shohei Did

Well, this section sure feels a lot different this week.

Last week, it was still okay to be cautiously optimistic about Shohei Ohtani. He had one quality start under his belt, albeit with a ton of strikeouts. He was 1-for-5. This all came after a rough spring. So you'll forgive me if prudence was the better part of valor in this case.

And then Ohtani started firing lighting bolts out of his eyes and demanding our fealty. Yes, yes, we cried. We are yours to do with as you wish. We're so sorry, Shohei. How could we have been so blind?

The Shohei-o-meter just seven days ago was stuck on "timid," and we spent an hour on the phone with tech support trying to get it unstuck.

Shohei-o-meter: half-Luis Castillo, half-Gregor Blanco

See, he was a wild, unproven fireballer with a .200 average, so I thought ... look, forget it. I was wrong.

Let's update that Shohei-o-meter:

Shohei-o-meter: half-Tim Lincecum in his prime, half-Bryce Harper

THIS IS WHAT WE WERE PROMISED.

Deep breaths. Stay with me. But it's completely okay to freak out.

This doesn't mean that we'll keep getting it all year. He could be half-Vince Velasquez, half-Eric Thames, where the early returns are drowned by a tidal wave of baseball being extremely hard.

Dating back to his first start, last Sunday against the A's, Ohtani retired 27 batters in a row.

Ohtani has appeared in six of the Angels' 10 games, and his impact has been undeniable, whether on the mound or at the plate.

- Mar. 29 vs. A's: Went 1-for-5 on opening day, but singled in his first major league at-bat against Kendall Graveman.
- Apr. 1 vs. A's: Struck out six in his first major league pitching appearance, allowing three runs (all on a three-run home run) in six innings for his first major league win.
- Apr. 3 vs. Indians: In his first at-bat at home in Anaheim, Ohtani took Josh Tomlin deep for a three-run home run. He went 3-for-4 with a pair of runs scored.
- Apr. 4 vs. Indians: Ohtani homered again, this time against reigning Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, one of two hits for Ohtani on the day.
- Apr. 6 vs. A's: Ohtani homered again, a bomb that traveled 449 feet.
- Sunday: 12 strikeouts in seven scoreless innings against the A's.

The true two-way nature of Ohtani's gifts have him doing things the sport hasn't seen in 90 years. He was the first player to earn a win and then hit a home run as a non-pitcher in his next game since Babe Ruth in 1921.

Ohtani is the first American League player to hit a home run in three straight games in the same season he started a game as a pitcher since Ruth, who did it last in 1930, per STATS LLC.

Then there is this, more obscure Ohtani comp: Shohei Ohtani today tries to become the first major leaguer with 2 wins and 3 HR in his team's first 10 games since Jim "Grunting Jim" Shaw for the 1919 Senators. Shaw hit 4 career HR.

Gotta love a good "Grunting Jim" reference.

Sure these are ridiculously small sample sizes — two starts pitching, and 19 plate appearances batting — but Ohtani's major league numbers are sublime: a 2.08 ERA with 18 strikeouts in 13 innings, while hitting .389/.421/.889.

This is such a joy to watch. Ohtani is a must-see player in baseball, and I can't wait to see what he does next.

A closer look at Shohei Ohtani's home runs

Shohei Ohtani blasted three home runs in his first week at Angel Stadium. Let's dissect each one of them.

By Chris Anders

Do you have Ohtani fatigue yet? No? Good. That would be insane.

We're talking about the potential of a front-line pitcher who might be capable of handling the high offensive expectations that accompany the designated hitter position. This is something we've never really seen before — at least in our lifetime — and while it's early, it sure looks like the Shohei Ohtani experience will be a lot of fun.

Upon returning to Anaheim after their opening series in Oakland, Shohei Ohtani started at DH in the second, third, and fourth games of the Angels' home-stand. In all three games he went yard. It's been an astonishing beginning to the career of this burgeoning two-way marvel and a quick answer to those who would take his spring training struggles at the plate as a sign of things to come.

Since it's early in the season and everything that happens is magnified simply for the fact that we're watching real baseball that matters again, I thought it might be interesting to take a look at all three of Ohtani's homers.

We knew that his carrying tool as a hitter was raw power, but there is still something we can learn regarding Ohtani's impressive early showing of game power. Just as detractors jumped to conclusions during spring training, we have to be careful not to overreact to this small sample either, but Ohtani's early power display does answer a few early questions about his capabilities. Let's dive in and take a closer look.

Home Run #1

Opposing pitcher: Josh Tomlin

Pitch Type: Curveball (73.6 mph)

Count: 2-2

Tomlin had a clear plan of attack against Ohtani — pound him down and in with cutters and curveballs. The sequence went like this: cutter, cutter, curveball, curveball, cutter, curveball. On the sixth pitch, that third curveball, Ohtani blasted a home run 397 feet to right-center field.

The ball left Ohtani's bat at 104.5 miles per hour, but it wasn't a meatball over the heart of the plate, it was a legitimately tough pitch that he just crushed. What was most impressive, is that Ohtani had to go down and get the curve as it straddled the inside part of the lower-third of the zone. Sure, he had a hint that the offering would be down and in as Tomlin's plan of attack had been made clear, but to actually drop the bat head down and drive that ball as far as he did was impressive. According to Statcast, left-handed hitters had an xwOBA of just .268 against pitches in that zone last season. That's not a totally feeble mark, but it shows how that particular pitch location is not exactly a prime location for left-handed dingers.

Home Run #2

Opposing pitcher: Corey Kluber

Count: 1-1

Pitch Type: Four-Seam Fastball (91.6 mph)

As nice as Ohtani's first home run was, it came against Josh Tomlin, who is not a frontline starting pitcher. That's not meant to insult Tomlin — who by the very act of pitching in the major leagues is demonstrating his incredible talent — but Ohtani was bound to face tougher tests as his journey continued. That test came the very next day in the form of two-time Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber.

The nice thing about this homer is that it's almost the complete opposite of his first. Just as we move from bottom-of-the-rotation starter to ace, our pitch-type characteristics do a 180. His first home run came on a down-and-in curveball, but his second was against an elevated fastball on the outer third. And did I mention it was against *Corey Kluber*?!

Historically the four-seam fastball has been one of Kluber's more mediocre offerings — with a career wOBA and wRC+ against of .315 and 109 respectively — but he's coming off of a season that saw those marks drop to .252 and 66. Those numbers can be altered by sequencing changes, but there's no doubt Kluber's four-seamer was more effective last season than it typically had been. This particular fastball caught more of the plate than Kluber would've liked, but it wasn't a meatball. Ohtani had to extend his arms and drive it to the opposite field. The ball left his bat at 100 miles per hour and traveled 400 feet over the left-center field wall.

Two home runs, two vastly different pitches to hit, and two incredibly impressive swings.

Home Run #3

Opposing pitcher: Daniel Gossett

Count: 2-0

Pitch Type: Two-Seam Fastball (93.8 mph)

Part of being a successful major league hitter isn't just putting good swings on decent pitches, but being able to punish bad pitches. If Ohtani's first two home runs were impressive hitting displays against solid offerings, his third was the demolition of a meatball.

As Travis Sawchik noted for FanGraphs after the first game in which Ohtani homered, the Japanese wunderkind immediately verified for us that he hits the ball hard. It seems simplistic, but it's a necessary skill to possess to hit at the major league level; and once demonstrated, it's a skill that must be respected.

Daniel Gossett fell behind on two straight fastballs that missed away and inside. His third pitch clocked in at 94 miles per hour, but was essentially down the middle, allowing Ohtani to send it 449 feet away onto the rocks in center field. The ball left his bat at 112 miles per hour, which — as Travis Sawchik noted in the above linked article — eclipsed his highest known mark in Nippon Professional Baseball in Japan.

Shohei Ohtani's third home run was the worst of the three home run pitches he saw, but was also his most extreme display of his power. Do me a favor and go back and watch all three of the home run gifs. You don't have to be a hitting coach to notice how he maintains the same balance in all three instances. That has to be a good sign, right? What we see are three different pitches requiring three different swings, but all seem to show a hitter who stayed within himself and maintained his mechanics. Ohtani has not been overmatched at the plate.

It's early, and he'll surely experience some growing pains as pitchers make adjustments to him, but nothing we've seen so far indicates that Shohei Ohtani won't hit in the majors, as many anonymous scouts seemed to voice during his spring training struggles. The power is clearly real and he seems to have enough bat control to handle different pitch locations and types.

Oh, and Ohtani has a fastball sits in the upper 90s with a devastating splitter that falls off the table like an upset toddler's dinner plate... good luck with that, MLB hitters.

FROM SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Forget the Sample Size, Shohei Ohtani Already Looks Like One of Baseball's Best Players

By Jon Tayler

The month of April in baseball is full of performances that can't be trusted. Hot starts and early-season slumps invite us to issue definitive takes on who's figured it out and who's washed up, on your MVP favorites and your next Cy Young winner. April invites you to fall into its small-sample-size traps, with every at-bat and inning another chance for an overreaction built on the most precarious foundation. As such, you tend to spend games telling yourself not to get too excited or down on whatever's happening; there's a lot of season left, and no matter how good or bad a player looks, regression to the mean is coming.

This is the wise and prudent course for any baseball fan. It also doesn't stand a chance against Shohei Ohtani. How can you stay calm or rational in the face of what he's already done? On Sunday afternoon in Anaheim, the Angels' 23-year-old righthander was perfect through six innings against the Athletics and ultimately allowed only one hit and one walk in seven shutout frames, striking out 12. If that weren't enough, in the week between his MLB pitching debut on April 1 and Sunday's tilt, he homered three times and drove in seven runs in three games as the Angels' designated hitter. For the season, Ohtani is hitting .389/.421/.889 in 19 plate appearances and has whiffed 18 batters in 13 innings while giving up just three runs.

To put those numbers into context: He's hit more home runs than Kris Bryant, Carlos Correa, Manny Machado and Aaron Judge, and he's struck out more batters than Max Scherzer, Noah Syndergaard, Chris Sale and Corey Kluber.

But right, it's April: Those numbers, while impressive, don't necessarily mean that Ohtani can already see the code of MLB's matrix. Ozzie Albies also has three home runs on the year, but you're not going to see many thousand-word paeans to his first two weeks. But it's the underlying stats that make you realize just how special Ohtani is. His three home runs have gone an average of 415 feet, including a 450-foot bomb off A's righty Daniel Gossett on Friday night. His fastball, meanwhile, sits at 98 mph and routinely touches 100, and his split-finger fastball tumbles out of the strike zone like a drunken acrobat.

You saw that whole absurd array on display against Oakland. Ohtani needed just 91 pitches to get through seven innings, and he got an astonishing 25 swings and misses on those offerings—16 of them on 22 splitters. He didn't just dominate A's hitters; he made them look like Little Leaguers going up against the kid who says he's 13 but stands six feet tall and already shaves. The hit that broke up Ohtani's perfect game bid—a single to left by Marcus Semien—was just about the only hard contact he allowed all day. Every other at-bat was a parade of empty swings against his hard fastball and diving splitter. Here, watch this highlight video, and put a bib on to catch the drool that's going to spill out of your mouth.

It's crazy to think about any rookie coming up and hitting for those numbers or pitching like that. It's even wilder to think about a rookie doing that while also adjusting to a new league in a foreign country against the best players on earth. And it's positively brain-shattering to realize that Ohtani is accomplishing both of those things at once, making it look frighteningly easy to boot. What he's doing hasn't been attempted in decades or pulled off in nearly a century. Want proof? The last player to pick up two wins as a pitcher and homer three times as a hitter in his team's first 10 games: Washington Senators righty Jim Shaw, who did it all the way back in 1919.

The early 20th-century star that Ohtani will invariably draw the most comparisons to, though, isn't the man rather rudely known as "Grunting Jim," but the player whose sobriquet was simply "Babe." A hundred years ago, 23-year-old Red Sox lefty George Herman Ruth led the majors in home runs with 11, hit .300/.411/.555 in 382 plate appearances, and posted a 2.22 ERA in 166 1/3 innings over 19 starts. A year later, he broke MLB's single-season home run record with 29 dingers and finished with a 2.97 ERA in 133 1/3 innings. That was the last season in which he was a regular starter. Wanting to play full-time, Ruth became an outfielder upon joining the Yankees in 1920, when he ascended to true superstardom. No one has reached those heights as a two-way player since then.

Ruth is the easy comparison for Ohtani, and understandably, it's also heavy and fraught. No one, no matter the numbers, should be measured against one of the greatest players of all-time. And yet this is the company Ohtani already finds himself in because of what he seems capable of. As a hitter, he's blessed with plus power, and as a pitcher, he features easy velocity and that wipeout splitter. This is the version of Ohtani we were promised when scouts filed rave reports from Japan of the man who threw 100 mph and hit 500-foot home runs. Spring training—when that same Ohtani was battered by B-lineups and looked as if he'd never seen a breaking pitch in his life—left some thinking that he needed time in Triple A, or that those scouting reports must have been fueled by too many Sapporos. The truth, as always, is that spring training doesn't matter: Once the games counted, the real Ohtani showed up, and he looks even better than advertised.

The biggest question with Ohtani was whether reality could match the hype, but after Sunday's start and the week he put together, we're now left to wonder if the bar wasn't raised high enough. The tools Ohtani has put on display are those of an MVP-level player on both sides of the ball. No one could have imagined this start or these results, or how easy he's made it look. In the second outing of his major

league career, Ohtani was eight outs away from a perfect game, and the craziest thing about it is that it's doubtful anyone would've been surprised if he'd finished it, given how good his stuff is. Ohtani hasn't just met the expectations; he's blown right by them.

Every April stat should be taken with a pillar of salt, and every early-season performance should invite skepticism and restraint, regardless of how good or bad it is. But that's a tough task when presented with someone as jaw-dropping as Ohtani, who in just two starts and four games' worth of at-bats already promises to be something truly special. Maybe this all blows up and we look back on this first week of April not as the beginning of something but a fleeting glimpse of unfulfilled brilliance. Or maybe this terrific start keeps going, and Ohtani becomes the player who takes those Ruth comparisons and makes them reality. The truth will likely be somewhere in between, but for now, disregard that April advice and let your imagination run wild. In Ohtani, MLB may have found its next game-changing superstar. Let's all hope that's the case.

Shohei Ohtani Flirts With Perfect Game, Strikes Out 12 in Second Major League Start

By Nihal Kolar

In just his second major league start, Angels pitcher Shohei Ohtani threw a perfect game through six and 1/3 innings against the Oakland Athletics on Sunday, striking out 11 batters in the process.

Ohtani recorded one out in the seventh inning before allowing a sharp base hit to left field by Marcus Semien, ending his bid at history. He finished the day allowing one hit and one walk with 12 strikeouts through seven innings of work, leaving to a roaring standing ovation by the home crowd.

Ohtani opened the game by striking out the side in the first inning, setting down Matt Joyce, Semien and Jed Lowrie on 15 pitches. The Angels would quickly provide him with run support, as Albert Pujols and Kole Calhoun recorded RBI base hits in the bottom half of the inning.

The 23-year-old then struck out seven batters through the next four innings including striking out the side again in the fifth inning.

In the seventh inning, Ohtani needed just two pitches to retire Joyce, but quickly fell behind 2-0 on Semien before he raked a 96 MPH fastball to left field for a single. After a four-pitch walk to Lowrie, Ohtani settled down, getting Khris Davis to ground out before striking out Matt Olsen for his 12th and final strikeout.

Ohtani signed for the Angels in December and was the MVP of Japan's top league, NPB, in 2016, after hitting 22 homers with a .322 batting average and recording a 1.86 ERA in 140 innings pitched. His dominance on the mound and at the plate led to the only slightly hyperbolic nickname "the Japanese Babe Ruth."

Through two starts in the majors, Ohtani is 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA and 18 strikeouts. Offensively, the versatile star has hit .389 with three home runs and seven RBIs in just four games.

FROM DEADSPIN**It All Feels Possible For Shohei Ohtani**

By Tom Ley

We'll start with this: No living baseball fan has ever seen anything like Shohei Ohtani.

Five days after going 3-for-4 with a home run, four days after going 2-for-5 with a home run, and two days after going 1-for-4 with a home run, Ohtani took the mound against the Oakland A's on Sunday and turned in the best start of the young season. He carried a perfect game through six innings and finished the day with 12 strikeouts and one hit allowed in seven innings. He needed just 65 pitches to strike out 10 guys through five innings. He made the A's swing and miss 25 times. He spotted 100-mph fastballs on every corner of the strike zone. He threw hard, disappearing splitters that were never under any threat of being touched by a bat. At one point, just for kicks, he threw a 68-mph curveball for a strike.

And so now the Angels have a player who is slashing .398/.421/.889 to go along with three home runs, and has started his career as a pitcher with two dominant starts that have yielded 18 strikeouts in 13 innings. Again, nobody has done anything like this on a baseball field in the last 100 years.

Here is the part where we're supposed to remember that 19 plate appearances is nothing but a slight shuffle down the long road one has to walk before proving anything about what kind of hitter they are, and that the Oakland A's are not very good.

And yet this feels like a rare occasion in which cries of "small sample size!" truly do not matter. The point isn't that Ohtani has a losing battle with regression ahead of him—he almost certainly does—but that he is *this*, right now, right in front of our very eyes. It's 2018 and the current most dominant pitcher in baseball is also rocking 449-foot homers to straightaway center. It's 2018 and Angels fans can turn on the TV one day to watch their rookie pitcher throw like peak Roger Clemens, and then turn it on a day or two later to watch the same player hit balls like Bryce Harper.

It's not easy to wrap your head around something like this, mostly because of all the possibilities it opens up. Yes, Ohtani will find his struggles, but what if... what if... he mostly keeps doing this? What if he wins the Cy Young award then becomes the Rookie of the Year and hits 35 homers? What if he sets the single-season WAR record? What if he eventually becomes the most expensive free agent in baseball history? What if every dominant high school pitching prospect who is also a cleanup hitter starts refusing to put the bat down once the time comes? Will Ohtani become the planet's new God King?

A week ago, these would have been stupid questions to ask. But after just two starts and 19 plate appearances, they seem a lot less stupid. That's the power of Shohei Ohtani, and the reason why you should not, under any circumstances, take your eyes off him.

FROM REUTERS**Baseball: Guardian Angel Ohtani maintains Major League magic**

Japanese two-way star Shohei Ohtani continued to display Babe Ruth-like brilliance in the early stages of his Major League career as he flirted with a perfect game while pitching for six-plus innings in a Los Angeles Angels victory on Sunday.

The 23-year-old rookie allowed just one hit and struck out 12 over seven scoreless innings as he improved to 2-0 as a pitcher in his team's 6-1 win over the Oakland Athletics.

The performance only increased the buzz that Ohtani, who hit home runs in three consecutive games last week, could become the highest-profile player since Hall of Famer Ruth to succeed on both the mound and at the plate.

Ruth managed to dominate both disciplines for the Boston Red Sox in 1918 and 1919 before his fateful move on to the New York Yankees, where he became the Sultan of Swat and seldom pitched.

"I think he's mature beyond his years," Angels manager Mike Scioscia told reporters when asked about the right-handed pitcher before Sunday's game.

"He's been challenged at a young age, so he's seasoned to what a lot of players have to get acclimated to. He's been playing at a very high level of baseball from a very young age.

"Shohei, he's very confident, he works very, very hard at what he needs to do, and there's a lot on his plate. But he has the talent to do it."

CLEAN ZERO

Ohtani showed plenty of that talent when he retired the first 19 batters he faced, throwing a perfect game until Marcus Semien lined a fastball into left field for a single with one out in the seventh.

"Probably my best outing ever was when I was in elementary school," Ohtani, who shone for the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan before joining the Angels in December, said through an interpreter.

He pumped his fist as he walked off the field after striking out the last batter he faced with two runners on in the seventh inning, receiving a standing ovation from the 44,742 in attendance as he departed.

"I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani said of his last out. "One hit would have been two runs — that's a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout and I got it."

Nicknamed the Babe Ruth of Japan because of his dual threat, Ohtani became the first Major League player with two wins and three home runs in his team's first 10 games since Jim Shaw for the Washington Senators in 1919, according to mlb.com www.mlb.com.

He also joined Ruth (1916) and Ken Brett (1973) as the only players in Major League history with a double-digit strikeout game and a home run in three consecutive contests.

Ohtani homered in his first ever at-bat at Angels stadium last week and has continued to thrill fans with a .389 batting average at the plate, where he has three homers and seven RBIs.

On the mound, which is where the Angels plan to use him primarily, Ohtani has 18 strikeouts in two games, helping to push Los Angeles to an impressive 7-3 start.

FROM THE NEW YORK POST

The con is over, and Shohei Ohtani looks Ruthian

By Joel Sherman

Shohei Ohtani pitches, hits and apparently hustles.

It feels now like all of spring training for the Japanese phenom was a sandbag, an effort to lower expectations after he arrived with about as much fanfare as any player in quite a while.

I saw the righty pitch against — wait for it — the Tijuana Toros on March 9 in Tempe, Ariz., and if you watched the actions on the pitches without looking at who was delivering them, you could have been convinced it was, say, Jordan Zimmermann, but certainly not someone whom 30 teams were ready to do everything short of changing naming rights on their stadium for.

He was beaten up that day by a bunch of players far from the majors in every way, throwing in the low 90s and talking afterward about the need to better familiarize himself with different-sized baseballs and different-shaped mounds.

That blended into a spring in which he hit poorly (4-for-32 without an extra-base hit) and pitched worse (nine runs in 2 ²/₃ innings in games against actual major league teams). There were calls for him to go to the minors or just concentrate on pitching or that this all was an elaborate hoax because no player had extensively pitched and hit in the same season since 1919, so this was darn near impossible — especially because that player was the actual Babe Ruth and not nicknamed the Babe Ruth of Japan.

And then the season started, and like an illusionist he has quickly made the spring disappear.

He has homered in three of the four games in which he has batted. He pitched well in his debut in Oakland on — fittingly — April Fools' Day. And then Sunday, Ohtani was almost downright perfect.

Ohtani showed his slider, but mainly used the devastating combination of high-octane fastball and disappearing split to retire the first 19 A's he faced. Marcus Semien then lined a clean single to left in the seventh inning and Jed Lowrie walked. But the 23-year-old then induced Khris Davis to ground back to the mound before registering his 12th strikeout to end his effort.

Ohtani threw 91 pitches and got swings and misses on 24. He averaged 96.5 mph with his fastball — reaching or topping 99 four times — and got a swing and miss on nearly half of the splitters he threw, 16-of-34.

So, at this moment, he has a 2.08 ERA, a 1.310 OPS and a growing group of believers. Obviously, he will have to expand his success beyond the A's.

But there is no doubt Ohtani is showing the power on both sides of the ball that had so many try to seduce him to their franchise. He has a touch now of Mark Fidrych and Fernando Valenzuela about him, which is to say a chance to be the biggest star in the game in his rookie year. To have a baseball year remembered specifically for him.

In the offseason, the two biggest additions and, thus, the two biggest players to watch in 2018 were Ohtani by the Angels and Giancarlo Stanton by the Yankees. And it has been Stanton — who only switched from the NL to the AL — who has to date flopped, a strikeout machine evoking boos in The Bronx. He has not done well honoring the legacy of the great slugger imported by the Yankees, a lineage that began with Ruth.

Meanwhile, nearly 7,000 miles from home — and what feels that distance now from spring training — Ohtani has appeared both comfortable and dominant hitting and pitching.

Two weeks into this experiment, he has met the greatest hopes. Ohtani has been Ruthian.

FROM BBC NEWS, TOKYO

Japan's baseball star, Shohei Ohtani draws Babe Ruth comparisons

By Haruka Tsuboi

The hype surrounding baseball sensation Shohei Ohtani, arguably one of Japan's most promising young athletes for generations, has been building for years.

Last week saw his first big test in the North American Major League (MLB) and he more than lived up to it.

Before he even went to the Los Angeles Angels, Ohtani had been called "the greatest thing to happen to baseball in a century" and a "modern day Babe Ruth".

The headlines coming out of the US following a game on Sunday night show that even the US media are beginning to come on board, with talk of an "unreal" start, an "insane" achievement and some conjecture that "Shohei Ohtani is very clearly not from this planet".

Ohtani is a rare example in baseball of a top class all-rounder. Able to both bat and pitch, he's called a two-wayer.

So what has he actually achieved? Well, it was more than Babe Ruth did in his first two weeks, that's for sure - but here are some highlights:

- Ohtani is only the third player in history to get two pitching wins and three home runs in the first 10 games for his team
- Pitching his second game, he forced 12 strikeouts, equalling an American League record for a pitcher in one of his first two games
- He is only the third player ever to hit a home run in three consecutive games and pitch a game with more than 10 strikeouts in the same season. One of the others was Babe Ruth

Japan has the second biggest baseball league outside the US, so it is no surprise that it has produced a player of this calibre. Ohtani's family background also counts.

According to one report that tracked the nascent career of the young athlete, his father, Toru, was an avid player and encouraged his children to play catch when he'd return home from the Mitsubishi plant where he worked.

In his high school in northern Iwate prefecture, Ohtani threw the fastest pitch ever recorded by a Japanese high school pitcher, at 160 km/h (99 mph).

He initially wanted to enter the MLB directly from high school rather play in Japan's professional league. But Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters won out in the end, after lengthy negotiations.

Their final presentation to the young player was called: "Shohei Ohtani: The Way to Dream" and set out the plan to make him a two-wayer.

He had his fair share of record-setting in Japan, becoming in 2014 the first player to both remove 10 batters and record 10 or more home runs in a season. Nobody has broken that record.

Now the player, seen in Japan as a quiet but effective presence on the pitch, is proving his mettle on American soil.

If US sports commentators have been left rubbing their eyes in disbelief - after all Ohtani had not performed well in spring training - the Japanese public has also been euphoric.

The well-known Japanese manga artist Tsunomaru, tweeted: "No, No Ohtani. My editor will not accept such a great story. It should be more realistic."

Another Twitter user said "we are witnessing a kind of myth", while another said the "MLB has been given a harsh lesson by Ohtani".

The Japanese media have been no less enthusiastic, calling his first two weeks in the Major League an example of "shockingly perfect pitching" and noting how US media had been left stunned.

Both sides of the Pacific are watching to see if he can do more.

FROM NEWSWEEK

What if Shohei Ohtani Really Is This Good? Japanese Star Dazzles in Home Debut

By Dan Cancian

Shohei Ohtani made his home debut for the Los Angeles Angels on Sunday and ensured it was an occasion to remember.

The Japanese rookie threw seven shutout innings of one-hit ball as the Angels beat the Oakland Athletics 6-1, with no runners and 11 strikeouts in the first six innings.

Shohei Ohtani #17 of the Los Angeles Angels pitches in the first inning of the game against the Oakland Athletics at Angel Stadium on April 8 in Anaheim, California. Jayne Kamin-Oncea/Getty Images

Marcus Semien's one-out single disrupted Ohtani's chances of throwing a perfect game but the 23-year-old still ended his first home game with seven innings of one-hit ball, with one walk and 12 strikeouts.

"I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani was quoted as saying by ESPN. "One hit would [mean] two runs, and it's a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout, and I got it."

Mike Scioscia, the Angels manager was full of praise for the two-way rookie.

"That was as good a game as you could ever see pitched," he told USA Today.

Ohtani's performance was even more impressive considering he endured a very difficult spring training, struggling both on the mound and with the bat. The Japanese rookie batted .125 and his ERA was 27, prompting speculation over whether he could handle himself in the major league.

However, Ohtani has swiftly quelled those fears. On Tuesday night he crunched his first home run—becoming the first Angels rookie to do so in the first three home games of the season—as he helped his team to a 13-2 win over the Cleveland Indians and he is clearly growing more confident.

"Especially with how my spring training went, I wasn't really imagining [the start of the season] to be this good, to be honest," Ohtani said, as reported by ESPN.

"I feel better every day. I feel like I'm getting used to everything more and more each day. But it's just the first week."

His performance on Sunday certainly drew praise from both teammates and opponents.

"If he's hitting his spots, they're going to have a really hard time with him," the Athletics' outfielder Matt Joyce told USA Today.

"But it's a game of adjustments. The big leagues is the top level and these guys can make adjustments like that [...] Obviously he's been doing it on both sides of the ball and he's an exciting player for baseball to have."

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, during the win against Cleveland on Tuesday, Ohtani became the first player since the American League adopted the designated hitter (DH) in 1973 to start a game in a season as a pitcher and then hit a homer in another game as DH.

Angels second baseman Zack Cozart suggested the Japanese rookie's ability to deliver in two different roles singled him out as a special talent.

"It's a rare kind of talent to do it both ways, and it's great to watch," he said. "It didn't look like [Oakland] had a chance up there, the way he was throwing."

FROM AFP

Phenom Ohtani dazzles with his bat and arm for Angels

Anaheim (United States) (AFP) - Shohei Ohtani flirted with a perfect game in his home pitching debut on Sunday, retiring the first 19 batters to power the Los Angeles Angels to a 6-1 rout of the Oakland Athletics.

The two-way Japanese sensation is exceeding expectations with his fairytale season as he struck out 12 batters and allowed just one hit over seven shutout innings at Angels Stadium.

Marcus Semien singled to left field to break up the bid for a perfect game, but the 23-year-old rookie kept his cool and hung in there to eventually get the side out and end the inning in front of a crowd of 44,700.

"Especially with how my spring training went, I wasn't really imagining (the start of the season) to be this good, to be honest," Ohtani said through a translator. "I feel better every day. I feel like I'm getting used to everything more and more each day. But it's just the first week."

The highly sought after offseason free agent is living up to the Ruthian hype. Ohtani joined Babe Ruth in the record books, becoming just the third player in league history to hit a home run in three straight games and post a double-digit strikeout game in the same season. The first to do it was Ruth in 1916 and the other Ken Brett in 1973.

He is also the first major leaguer to record two wins and three home runs in his first 10 games since Jim Shaw in 1919.

Ohtani had performed poorly in spring training, but if there was any doubt he could hit and pitch at the major league level it was erased this week.

Ohtani blasted three homers between his pitching debut last weekend and his first win at Angel Stadium on Sunday.

He started quickly on Sunday, striking out the side in the first inning on just 15 pitches. He struck out the side again in the fifth inning as only one A's batter managed to avoid being a strike out victim on the night.

"That's as good a game as you are going to ever see pitched," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia.

After yielding the lone hit he eventually struck out Matt Olson to end the seventh inning and celebrated with a scream and a fist pump.

"I wanted to keep a clean zero on the board," Ohtani said. "One hit would (mean) two runs, and it's a huge difference. I wanted that strikeout, and I got it."

Ohtani, who played with the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters last season, said this would have been his first no-hitter. Asked how he compares this outing to previous ones he said, "probably my best outing was when I was in elementary school."

In his pitching debut last Sunday, he allowed three runs on a second-inning homer by third baseman Matt Chapman, but that was his only blemish in the 7-4 victory.

- Home run hero -

Since then, Ohtani moved to designated hitter for games Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and homered in all three in dramatic fashion.

His three-run blast in his first at-bat in front of the Angels Stadium home crowd lifted Los Angeles to a 6-2 lead against the Cleveland Indians on Tuesday, and they eventually won 13-2.

The next day, he hit a game-tying two-run homer off two-time AL Cy Young winner Corey Kluber in the fifth inning, and the Angels went on to win 3-2 in 13 innings.

After an off day on Thursday, Ohtani belted a 449-foot solo home run to centre field with two outs in the second inning and Los Angeles rallied from a huge deficit to win 12-9.

Angels third baseman Zack Cozart said Ohtani also has a variety of pitching weapons.

"His splitter just kind of drops off the table," Cozart said. "It looks like a strike I feel like almost every time, but it never is. It just drops below the zone. That's how it comes out, the same as his fastball. It makes it tough as a hitter."

FROM SPORTSNET

Ohtani by the numbers: More power than Judge, more Ks than Scherzer

By Ben Nicholson-Smith

Shohei Ohtani has batted only 19 times and faced just 45 hitters since making his MLB debut, and yet what he has shown us seems significant. After all, wouldn't it be impossible to do what he has done if he were anything other than a star in the making?

He pitched well in his first Angels start and took a perfect game into the seventh inning of his home pitching debut. In 13 total innings he has a 2.08 ERA with 18 strikeouts compared to two walks and four hits. At the plate, he's been just as impressive, hitting .389/.421/.889 with three home runs and four singles.

As Angels catcher Martin Maldonado told USA Today over the weekend, "He never looks like he's out of place. He looks like a hitter when he's batting and looks like a pitcher when he's pitching. It's impressive. We haven't seen that before."

To this point in the season, Ohtani has more home runs than Aaron Judge and more strikeouts than Max Scherzer, as Alex Putterman noted on Twitter. Here are some more memorable numbers from Ohtani's first 10 days in the big leagues...

23.5 Hitters have whiffed on 23.5 per cent of Ohtani's offerings, which means he has been tougher to square up than Scherzer, Chris Sale, Noah Syndergaard or any other starter to throw a pitch this year. For context, Corey Kluber and Scherzer, the eventual 2017 Cy Young winners, led MLB last year with whiff rates of 15.6 per cent and 15.5 per cent, respectively. Even Craig Kimbrel, who led all relievers in whiff rate, induced swinging strikes on 19.8 per cent of his pitches.

99.6 Ohtani topped out at 99.6 m.p.h. Sunday, and he's averaging 97.2 m.p.h. with his fastball. Only two starters are averaging harder fastballs: Luis Severino and Syndergaard.

16 Even with a powerful fastball, Ohtani relies heavily on his off-speed stuff. He threw 34 splitters Sunday, and hitters whiffed on 16 of them.

100 Ohtani's making legitimately hard contact at the plate. The ball has left his bat travelling at least 100 m.p.h. on eight different occasions, matching sluggers such as Giancarlo Stanton, J.D. Martinez and George Springer. It'd be one thing to hit .389 because you fluke your way into a few singles. That's not what Ohtani's doing, though. You can't luck your way into 449-foot blasts or homers against Kluber.

3 Ohtani homered in three consecutive games then struck out 12 as a pitcher later in the week. Only two other players in baseball history have ever combined a three-game homer streak with a 10-K game in the same season: Ken Brett in 1973 and Babe Ruth in 1916.

29.8 Not only can Ohtani pitch and hit, he has already demonstrated elite sprint speed by approaching 30 feet per second on the bases.