



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Angels warm to the task, rally in ninth to take Freeway Series opener against Dodgers**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Failing to put much pressure on the Dodgers with their bats, the Angels instead used their legs.

The aggressive baserunning that has become a staple of the Angels' organizational philosophy seemed to force the Dodgers into three critical mistakes that led to all three of their runs in a thrilling 3-2 walk-off victory in the first game of the Freeway Series on Friday night.

"Occasionally you will run into some outs, but you are going to force mistakes and also gain some bases by staying aggressive," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "It's really important for our ballclub to keep that frame of mind."

Ian Kinsler, David Fletcher and Shohei Ohtani all used their legs to snap the Dodgers four-game winning streak, delighting the red-clad portion of the sellout crowd of 44,323 that braved an Angel Stadium record 108-degree first-pitch temperature.

Up until the bottom of the ninth, when Kenley Jansen took the mound with a 2-1 lead, all the Angels had managed was one run that scored on a Kenta Maeda balk in the sixth. Kinsler had disrupted him by taking off early from third, trying to steal home.

Still, that was all the Angels had produced out of their meager three hits by the time Ohtani stepped to the plate with two outs in the ninth against Jansen.

Ohtani fell behind 0-and-2, but Jansen ended up walking him. Scioscia said the threat of Ohtani's power probably led Jansen to pitching him so carefully, but Ohtani wasn't feeling much like a home run hitter at the time.

"I felt like I couldn't get a hit today," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "I knew I could get on base with a walk."

After going hitless in three at-bats – including two against countryman Maeda – Ohtani was standing at first base when he got the sign that he was free to run at his discretion.

Ohtani is the second-fastest player on the Angels, just behind Mike Trout, even though most of the talk surrounding him is about his power arm and power bat. On Jansen's first pitch to Fletcher, Ohtani took off in quest of his second big league stolen base.

Catcher Yasmani Grandal chucked the ball into center field, allowing Ohtani to advance to third.

Fletcher now just needed a hit to tie the score. Simply looking for a pitch up, he got one and whacked it into left field for an RBI single.

It was his second hero moment of the week, after a spectacular catch on Wednesday in Seattle that saved two runs in an Angels victory. He's hit .294 in his first 19 big league games.

"He's not overwhelmed with anything," Scioscia said. "He knows his skill at the plate is putting the ball in play and using the whole field. You can't say enough about what he's done since he's been up here."

Next up was Kinsler, who hit a little opposite-field bloop into right field, dropping just out of the reach of Yasiel Puig. Fletcher had been running hard all the way through third before coach Dino Ebel threw up a stop sign. Puig, however, bounced his throw to the plate and it hopped over Grandal's glove with no one backing him up, allowing Fletcher to score the winning run.

"I like to think we put some pressure on them," Fletcher said.

The aggressive baserunning helped the Angels win a game in which they had only five hits – one with a runner in scoring position – and struck out 14 times.

They were able to stay close enough to the Dodgers because Felix Peña gave up two runs in 5-1/3 innings in his fourth start of the season. Pushed into the rotation by injuries, Peña has a 2.75 ERA in those four starts. Scioscia said he thought the heat was getting to Peña when he pulled him after just 76 pitches in the sixth.

Peña wasn't quite as good as Maeda, who needed just 5-2/3 innings for his third straight nine-strikeout game. He now has a 2.54 ERA in five starts since he came off the disabled list.

He dominated for most of his game, allowing only one baserunner through five innings. That was an Andrelton Simmons' one-out double in the fourth, and he stranded him by striking out Trout and Justin Upton.

"I thought Kenta was really good," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "Aggressive with the fastball. He gave us a chance to win."

The Dodgers, though, didn't do much offensively either. They had only four hits, and one was Cody Bellinger's double that Upton appeared to lose sight of as he got near the left field fence.

Matt Kemp then drove in Bellinger, his first of two RBI singles. After his run-scoring hit in the sixth, he was at second when he believed Bellinger, who had been in a run down, was coming back to second. So Kemp went to first. Bellinger, however, had already been called out for going out of the baseline.

That odd play came in the top an inning that featured the Angels scoring on a balk in the bottom.

But it was nothing like the wild finish, with Fletcher scoring from first on a blooper into right to get the Angels an emotional victory.

“These guys battle to the end of every game,” Scioscia said. “The dugout is always upbeat. A lot of times you don’t come back. Depends if you get your pitch or miss it. We did tonight. The guys feel good about it. Hopefully, it will carry a little momentum for tomorrow.”

Rookie catcher Jose Briceno impresses Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Back when the Angels acquired Andrelton Simmons from the Atlanta Braves, they gave up two of their top pitching prospects and their starting shortstop.

The Angels got back more than Simmons, though.

Although there was little mention of him at the time, nowadays catcher José Briceño is making a name for himself as a legitimate major leaguer.

Briceño, who started behind the plate on Friday night against the Dodgers, went into the game hitting .300 with two homers in 30 at-bats, an admittedly small sample. He’s also left an impression on the pitchers for his work behind the plate, and he’d thrown out half of the four would-be base stealers.

“José is making a quick study of the major leagues,” Manager Mike Scioscia said. “He’s had a couple spring trainings with us. Once you get up here, that’s the first time you are going to be able to see what the beast is in the major leagues.”

Briceño, a 25-year-old from Venezuela, hit just .182 in Class-A in 2015 before the Angels got him. It was his sixth season without cracking Double-A. Once in the Angels’ system, he began to move up the ladder, finally getting his major league debut after René Rivera went on the disabled list.

Rivera, who is expected to come back shortly after the All-Star break, said he’s been impressed.

“He’s doing a great job,” Rivera said. “He’s calling a good game and hitting well too. ... Young guys in the big leagues want to show you they can play, and that’s what he’s been doing.”

UPTON’S SLUMP

One of the reasons for the Angels’ offensive inconsistency over the past month or so is that Justin Upton has not taken advantage of the opportunities presented by hitting behind Mike Trout.

Upton was hitting .165 with runners in scoring position heading into Friday’s game. He was just 3 for 30 with runners in scoring position since June 1.

Scioscia said it’s just temporary.

“He’s usually a terrific run producer and he will be,” Scioscia said. “There are some cycles guys get into. He’s having a little problem getting some hits to fall in with guys on. But he’s hitting some balls hard too. He’ll be fine.”

ALSO

Jo Adell, the Angels’ top prospect, was selected to play in the Futures Game, which will be next Sunday as part of the All-Star Game festivities. He’s the only Angels representative picked for the game. Adell has hit a combined .319 with 17 homers and a .975 OPS at two levels of Class-A. ...

Tyler Skaggs (hamstring) played catch on Friday and said it went well. He said he was scheduled for a bullpen session on Sunday, and that would determine when he can make his next start. He is likely to start either Wednesday or Thursday against the Seattle Mariners. ...

The Angels signed 29 of their 40 draft picks by Friday, which was the deadline. They signed the top 21, and used up almost all of their allowed bonus pool space, scouting director Matt Swanson said.

UP NEXT

Angels (Deck McGuire, 0-1, 7.59) vs. Dodgers (Ross Stripling, 6-2, 2.27), Saturday, 4 p.m., Fox/11, KLAA (830 AM)

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels rally in ninth inning in 3-2 victory over Dodgers

By Mike Digiovanna

One strike away from victory, the ball in the hand of their capable closer, the Dodgers let a one-run lead and a game slip through their fingers — literally — on a scorching Friday evening at Angel Stadium.

The Angels took advantage of two Dodgers errors and scored twice in a head-spinning ninth inning to steal a 3-2 walk-off victory over their Southern California rivals before a sellout crowd of 44,323.

“This is a frustrating one,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. “To give it away like that is tough.”

Kenley Jansen, who had successfully converted his previous 21 save opportunities, took over with a 2-1 lead in the ninth. He got two quick outs and jumped ahead of Shohei Ohtani with two strikes before throwing four straight balls.

“For me, it’s unacceptable,” Jansen said of the walk. “I had him where I wanted.”

Ohtani took off for second on the first pitch. Catcher Yasmani Grandal double-pumped before sailing his throw into center field for an error that allowed Ohtani to take third.

“He had a great read on the jump,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said, adding that Ohtani was running on his own. “It was a great read on the steal, and he got to third. That’s an important time and a big play.”

David Fletcher, who entered the game as a pinch-hitter in the seventh inning and remained at third base, lined a single to left to tie the score and tag Jansen with his first blown save since April 17.

“That guy is extremely tough,” veteran second baseman Ian Kinsler said of Fletcher, the rookie utility player who was called up in mid-June. “Huge hit for him.”

Kinsler followed with a huge hit of his own, flaring a single to right to advance Fletcher to third. Right fielder Yasiel Puig bobbled the hit but recovered in time to throw home, with Fletcher stopping at third.

But when Puig’s throw bounced past Grandal — and Jansen failed to back up the plate — Fletcher sprinted home with the winning run, his teammates pouring out of their dugout to celebrate their fourth walk-off win of the season.

“That’s my fault,” Jansen said. “This game is on me today. I take all the blame. I’ve got to be backing up home plate there. I saw the guy stop at third. That’s my fault. When I saw him stop, I kind of stopped with him instead of kept going.”

Until Jansen’s slip, the Dodgers got stout relief from left-hander Scott Alexander, who struck out Albert Pujols with the bases loaded to end the sixth inning and added a scoreless seventh, and Daniel Hudson, who threw a scoreless eighth.

Matt Kemp drove in both Dodgers runs with singles in the fourth and sixth innings, but starter Kenta Maeda was denied a win after a superb effort in which he gave up one run and three hits in 52/3 innings, struck out nine and walked two.

The 108-degree temperature at first pitch was the hottest in Angel Stadium history, passing the previous high of 106 degrees, set in a noon start against Boston on Sept. 4, 1988, and a 6 p.m. start against Oakland on Sept. 3, 2007.

There was physical evidence that Maeda broke a sweat in the first five innings, removing his cap several times and wiping his brow with both forearms, but it sure didn’t seem like it.

Maeda picked apart the Angels with clinical precision through five one-hit innings, teasing them with pitches off the corners that were hittable but impossible to barrel up. Then when he’d get ahead in the count, Maeda would expand the strike zone and get the Angels to chase.

The fifth inning was a prime example of Maeda’s mastery. First, he struck out Pujols swinging at a 2-and-2, two-seam fastball that started on the inner half of the plate and bore so far and hard inside that it nearly hit the slugger.

Maeda jammed Ohtani with a 1-2 fastball, inducing a weak popup to shortstop. Up stepped Luis Valbuena, who swung through three pitches, a pair of shoe-high sliders and an 85-mph, down-and-away changeup.

“He was on top of his game,” Ohtani, speaking through an interpreter, said of Maeda.

Trouble finally arrived in the sixth, Kinsler leading off with a single to left and No. 9 hitter Jose Briceno singling off Maeda’s glove.

Maeda struck out Kole Calhoun looking at a full-count fastball. Andrelton Simmons fled to deep left, the runners advancing, and Mike Trout was awarded first base, his major league-leading 15th intentional walk.

With a 1-and-0 count on Justin Upton, Kinsler broke for home, stopping about half-way down the line. Maeda, who was working out of a windup, rushed his delivery and was called for a balk, Kinsler scoring to cut the lead to 2-1.

Upton drew a walk to load the bases, but Alexander replaced Maeda and struck out Pujols with a 95-mph fastball to end the inning.

What we learned from the Angels' 3-2 walk-off victory over the Dodgers

By Ethan Bauer

Here’s four things we learned from the Angels’ walk-off win over the Dodgers:

Shohei Ohtani can run when he needs to

The Angels’ 24-year-old Japanese rookie can hit, and his .278 batting average proves it. He can pitch, and his 4-1 record proves it. And Shohei Ohtani, at least in spurts, can also steal bases.

His climactic steal against the Dodgers in the bottom of the ninth Saturday that helped the Angels secure a 3-2 walk-off win proved it.

“I think I still lack the skill part of stealing a base,” he said through a translator, “so I only try to go when it’s close to 100% that I’m going to be safe.”

Manager Mike Scioscia said that while it only marked Ohtani’s second stolen base of the season, his ability to make things happen with his legs isn’t a surprise.

“We knew from our reports that he could run,” he said. “He’s the second-fastest guy on our team.”

Ohtani may also be improving as a hitter

On Friday, Ohtani played in his fourth game since returning from the disabled list, but he’s still not cleared to pitch. That’s allowed him to focus some extra time on his hitting.

Scioscia said he doesn’t think it will affect Ohtani because he was already so regimented with the way he practiced hitting, but Ohtani himself is trying to use the time away from pitching to his benefit.

“I’m not sure if it’s a positive or a negative that I’m not pitching,” he said. “Hopefully it turns out to be a positive.”

Kenley Jansen isn’t invincible

The Dodgers’ closer hadn’t blown a save since April 17, converting 21 straight. That streak ended Friday.

Aside from going from an 0-2 count to walking Ohtani, as well as allowing hits to David Fletcher and Ian Kinsler, Jansen was upset with himself for not backing up home plate on the errant throw from Yasiel Puig that allowed the Angels’ winning run to score.

He approached Puig after the game to apologize.

“That’s my fault. This game is on me today. I take all the blame,” he said. “... I’ve got to be backing up home plate there.”

Mike Scioscia’s bullpen could be thin Saturday

The Angels have relied heavily on their bullpen the last three days. The team has used eight relievers over that span, with five of them having pitched twice.

The good news for Scioscia is that only one — Hansel Robles — has thrown more than two innings.

Still, that’s a lot of pressure on starter Deck McGuire, who has only started once for the Angels and sports an ERA of 7.56.

New stance gives glimpses of old Kole Calhoun

By Mike Digiovanna

The difference in **Kole Calhoun’s** stance and approach at the plate is reflected in manager **Mike Scioscia’s** new moniker for his right fielder.

“It’s like Kole Calhoun Version 2.0,” Scioscia said. “He’s made some serious adjustments, but he’s letting his skill set play. He’s always had great hands, great balance, and he’s getting back into that feel. There’s no doubt that he’s more comfortable in the box.”

When Calhoun went on the disabled list because of a right oblique strain on June 2 he was batting .145 with a .374 on-base-plus-slugging percentage, one home run, one double and 11 RBIs in 50 games. He had almost four times as many strikeouts (43) as walks (11).

A three-week absence gave Calhoun time to refresh mentally and tinker with his mechanics. He returned on June 18 with a new stance, going from an upright position to one in which he is more hunched over and bent at the knees.

Better results followed. In his first 16 games back, Calhoun hit .288 with a .905 OPS, four homers, three doubles, nine RBIs, 10 strikeouts and four walks to boost his season average to .178 and OPS to .497 entering Friday.

"I'm trying to get into a better spot to put a better swing on the ball," Calhoun said. "It's a spot I used to get to in years' past. It's trying to simplify things, really. It's going well so far."

Calhoun spent so much time in the batting cage trying to swing his way out of his slump that it probably led to his oblique strain. But the injury allowed him to step off that treadmill.

"It kind of snowballs after a while and you start putting too much pressure on yourself," Calhoun said. "I got some time off to put things in perspective, come back and simplify things. I'm trying to have fun, help the team win and not worry what the numbers are."

Eject button

Mike Trout nearly achieved a career milestone Thursday night in Seattle, pushing himself to the brink of his first ejection when he argued a pair of called third strikes in the first and fifth innings of a 4-1 loss to the Mariners.

"No, no, I'm not gonna get tossed," Trout said Friday, chuckling about his exchanges with umpire **Mark Ripperger**. "I can't in a 1-1 game. I was upset ... but you want to stay in the game. You don't want to hurt the team."

Trout, a two-time most valuable player in his seventh big-league season, said it's a point of pride to not let his temper get the best of him.

"Obviously, I respect the umpires," he said. "I think that's just how I was brought up and taught to play the game."

Future's so bright

Top prospect **Jo Adell**, an outfielder who was the 10th overall pick in the 2017 draft, was the only Angels minor leaguer selected to play in the July 15 All-Star Futures Game at Washington.

Adell, 19, began this season at Class-A Burlington, where he hit .326 with a 1.009 on-base-plus-slugging percentage, six homers, 19 doubles, 29 RBIs and 11 stolen bases in 25 games.

That earned Adell a May 22 promotion to advanced Class-A Inland Empire, where he entered Friday with a .315 average, .954 OPS, 11 homers, 12 doubles, 29 RBIs and seven stolen bases in 39 games.

"Everything he does is explosive," said **Mike LaCassa**, Angels director of minor league operations. "He brings every tool to the table."

Short hops

Reserve catcher **Rene Rivera**, out since May 17 because of surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee, has been catching bullpen sessions, hitting and running. He hopes to begin a minor league rehabilitation assignment next week and be activated after the All-Star break. ... Reliever **Jim Johnson** (lumbar strain) expects to begin a rehab stint next week. ... Reliever **Oliver Drake** was recalled on Friday, and right-hander **Miguel Almonte** was optioned to triple-A Salt Lake.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Halos walk off as Dodgers wilt in 2-error 9th

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- **Shohei Ohtani** may be limited to hitting right now, but he's still finding ways to be a difference-maker for the Angels.

The Angels were down to their final strike on Friday night before Ohtani battled back from an 0-2 count to work a two-out walk against Dodgers closer **Kenley Jansen**, setting into motion an improbable ninth-inning rally that lifted the Halos to a 3-2 walk-off win in the Freeway Series opener at Angel Stadium.

"My previous at-bats, I wasn't able to do my job really well, but I still wanted to get on base and help the team come back and win," Ohtani said through interpreter Ippei Mizuhara. "I think we just showed them that we're never going to give up until the last out." Trailing, 2-1, in the ninth, the Angels tied the game after Ohtani stole second, advanced to third on a throwing error by **Yasmani Grandal** and scored on **David Fletcher**'s RBI single to left field, saddling Jansen with his first blown save since April 17.

Ian Kinsler then blooped a single to right field, prompting Fletcher to advance from first to third. Fletcher held up as he rounded third, but **Yasiel Puig** uncorked an errant throw to the plate that skipped past Grandal, allowing Fletcher to score the winning run.

"It was a great at-bat [by Ohtani]," Kinsler said. "He did what he needed to do. The report on Kenley is that he loses track of runners and concentrates a lot on the hitter, and you have an opportunity to steal against him. Shohei took second. It was huge. He got himself in scoring position, and that's what you're supposed to do."

Ohtani's ninth-inning contributions helped make up for his hitless night against Dodgers right-hander and countryman **Kenta Maeda**, who held the Angels to one run on three hits over 5 2/3 innings. Ohtani struck out on three pitches in his first at-bat in the second inning and then popped out in the fifth, making him 2-for-9 against Maeda in his career.

"He was on top of his game," Ohtani said. "He kept our lineup pretty quiet. When the starting pitcher was pitching that well, and we were able to come back and win like that, it was really huge."

With a record 108-degree temperature at first pitch, converted reliever **Felix Pena** delivered another strong performance, yielding two runs on three hits over 5 1/3 innings in his fourth start for the Angels.

He struck out a career-high eight batters, walked one and threw 76 pitches. The 28-year-old right-hander now has a 2.75 ERA with 25 strikeouts over 19 2/3 innings since moving into the Angels' rotation.

"Today he was just in the zone with everything," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think he had both sides of the plate with command and good movement, spun the ball well. I think the heat got to him in the sixth, but that's a great game from Felix."

Pena opened the game with three scoreless innings, but the Dodgers got on the board in the fourth. After **Max Muncy** and **Justin Turner** struck out, **Cody Bellinger** reached on a double off the left-field wall that **Justin Upton** did not track well. **Matt Kemp** followed with an RBI single to center field, giving the Dodgers a 1-0 lead.

Maeda retired the first 10 batters he faced before **Andrelton Simmons** doubled to left field with one out in the fourth. Simmons shot a slider just inside the third-base line and then slid head-first into second base, just ahead of **Chase Utley's** tag. The Dodgers challenged the call, but the ruling was confirmed following a replay review.

But the Angels couldn't capitalize, as Maeda subsequently struck out **Mike Trout** and Upton to strand Simmons at second.

Pena struck out Muncy to start the sixth, but he was removed from the game after walking Turner. **Noe Ramirez** was summoned to pitch in relief, but he walked Bellinger and then surrendered an RBI single to left field from Kemp that extended the Dodgers' lead to 2-0.

The play also yielded a wild baserunning sequence for the Dodgers, as Bellinger was caught in a rundown between second and third and was subsequently called out for running out of the baseline. Kemp had advanced to second on the play, but he needlessly retreated to first after Bellinger tried to return to second.

The Dodgers continued to threaten after Ramirez issued a two-out walk to Yasmani Grandal, but the Angels escaped further damage after **Hansel Robles** struck out **Chris Taylor** looking to end the inning.

After being one-hit by Maeda through five innings, the Angels' offense finally began to stir in the sixth. Kinsler and **Jose Briceno** strung together back-to-back singles, and the Dodgers intentionally walked Trout to load the bases with two outs. The Angels then scored their first run of the evening with savvy baserunning from Kinsler. With Upton at the plate, Kinsler broke for home, drawing a balk from Maeda that cut the Dodgers' lead to 2-1.

Kinsler said he was planning on attempting to steal home on the play but held off after he saw Maeda speed up his delivery. He said he's deployed the tactic previously, though he acknowledged that it's not often successful.

"Not very often, but you try it and try to keep them guessing," Kinsler said. "Maybe distract them a little bit to make a mistake to the hitter. Whatever it is. But I was going. I was going to try to steal home there."

After Maeda walked Upton to load the bases again for the Angels, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts opted to bring in left-hander **Scott Alexander** to face **Albert Pujols**, who struck out swinging to end the rally.

SOUND SMART

The first-pitch temperature in Anaheim was 108 degrees, the highest in franchise history. The previous record was 106 degrees, done twice on Sept. 4, 1988, and Sept. 3, 2007.

HE SAID IT

"He's a ballplayer. He's always in the right spot. You put him anywhere in the field, he's making plays. He's not intimidated by the big leagues. He's having quality at-bats, playing good defense, running the bases well. He's definitely a great addition." -- *Kinsler, on Fletcher's impact*

UP NEXT

Right-hander **Deck McGuire** (0-1, 8.64 ERA) will oppose righty **Ross Stripling** (6-2, 2.27 ERA) as the Angels and Dodgers continue their Freeway Series on Saturday at 4:15 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. McGuire was charged with the loss in his first start of the season on Sunday in Baltimore after yielding five runs over 3 1/3 innings. He is set to make his first career appearance against the Dodgers and his first start at Angel Stadium.

Top prospect Adell to play in Futures Game

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Outfielder Jo Adell, who is ranked the Angels' **No. 1 prospect** by MLB Pipeline, has been chosen to participate in the 2018 SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game at Nationals Park on July 15.

The Angels drafted Adell with the 10th overall pick last year out of Ballard High School in Louisville, Ky., and he's lived up to the hype so far.

Adell, 19, was promoted to Class A Advanced Inland Empire last month and has put up impressive numbers in the California League, batting .315 with .954 OPS, 11 home runs, two triples, 12 doubles and 29 RBIs over 39 games. He will play for the U.S. Team, which holds a 12-7 edge over the World Team in the all-time series.

Former Angel Torii Hunter will manage the U.S. Team, while Triple-A Salt Lake skipper Keith Johnson will serve as the third-base coach. Vladimir Guerrero, who will become the first player to enter the Hall of Fame with an Angels cap later this month, will serve as the World Team's hitting coach.

MLB.com will live stream and MLB Network will exclusively televise the SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game at 1 p.m. PT on July 15, with Greg Amsinger, Harold Reynolds, Lauren Shehadi and Jim Callis calling the contest live from Nationals Park. The game will also be available to SiriusXM subscribers.

Resurgent Calhoun

The Angels knew it was only a matter of time before **Kole Calhoun** emerged from his early season slump, and he's finally starting to reward their faith. Since coming off the disabled list on June 18,

Calhoun has batted .288 with a .905 OPS, four home runs and nine RBIs. Before the injury, he was hitting .145 with one home run over 50 games.

"It's like Kole Calhoun version 2.0," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He made some serious adjustments in his game, but he's letting his skill set play. He's always had great hands, he's always had great balance and he's getting back into that feel, so there's no doubt that he's more comfortable."

Ohtani vs. Maeda

Shohei Ohtani started at designated hitter and batted sixth against countryman **Kenta Maeda** on Friday. Ohtani went 2-for-7 with four strikeouts against Maeda in Japan, though they rarely faced each other since they played in the Pacific League and the Central League, respectively.

Roster moves

The Angels recalled **Oliver Drake** and optioned **Miguel Almonte** to Triple-A Salt Lake on Friday ahead of their series opener against the Dodgers. To clear a spot for Drake on the 40-man roster, the Angels transferred **Jake Jewell** (right fibula fracture) to the 60-day disabled list.

Drake, 31, logged a 10.13 ERA over 2 2/3 innings in four appearances for the Angels this season before being designated for assignment last month.

On the mend

Backup catcher **Rene Rivera**, who underwent surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee in May, has progressed to catching bullpen sessions and is inching closer to beginning a rehab assignment. Rivera said he has resumed most baseball activities, though he has yet to run the bases. Rivera, who is on the 60-day disabled list, isn't eligible to return until after the All-Star break.

High heat

With temperatures projected to reach a high of 113 degrees in Anaheim on Friday, the Angels decided to skip many of their usual pregame activities, including team stretch and batting practice.

"There's no doubt we backed off on some of the things we were going to do outside," Scioscia said.

"When it gets to this extreme, I think less is more. We'll be ready to play, but we'll get ready inside in the cages."

Friday's top prospect performers*

By Manny Randhawa

Other top prospect performances from Friday's action:

- **Angels No. 5 prospect** -- and the No. 91 prospect overall -- Griffin Canning gave up a run over 4 2/3 innings during Triple-A Salt Lake's 7-3 loss to El Paso. The right-hander allowed two hits, walked three and struck out seven. In four Triple-A starts this season, Canning's ERA is 8.27. Prior to that, he posted a 1.97 ERA in 10 starts for Double-A Mobile.

- Another Angels prospect, Brennon Lund (No. 18) had a big night in Double-A Mobile's 7-3 win over Jacksonville, belting a pair of two-run homers -- his first career two-homer game -- as part of a 3-for-5, five-RBI performance. The outfielder is hitting .264/.345/.407 with six home runs and 17 steals in 70 games this season.

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

FROM THE ATHLETIC

Angels flip the script on the Dodgers, even if it's just for one hot summer night

By Fabian Ardaya

ANAHEIM, Calif. — There haven't been too many nights like this in Anaheim this year. The same could be said in Los Angeles.

While the Dodgers (47-40) found themselves with at least a share of first place for the first time this year as play opened Friday, the Angels (45-44) had spent the previous pair of months tumbling to .500 — beaten, battered and shorthanded. The Dodgers, gearing up and getting healthy, have played their best baseball as the temperature has warmed. But on the hottest night of the season thus far — at 108 degrees at first pitch, it was the hottest game in Angel Stadium history — the script flipped.

The scrappy Angels had forced the Dodgers' hand, sneaking their way to a thrilling 3-2 comeback win at Angel Stadium.

Angels rookie David Fletcher, recalled to make his big-league debut and forced into action last month due to the wave of injuries, drove in the tying run and scored on Yasiel Puig's throwing error as the Angels squeezed their way through.

Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen hadn't blown a save since April 17. For the Angels, just once had they entered the ninth inning with a deficit and came back to win.

"To give it away like we did in the ninth, we haven't lost a game like this in quite some time," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Ian Kinsler got jammed. Jansen had thrown a cutter inside — over the plate, but just in enough to draw a check swing. The ball floated to right field, dropping just in front of Puig.

For a moment, Jansen peered over at third base and saw Fletcher slam on the brakes rounding, and mirrored him. He, too, stopped. But where Jansen stopped, Fletcher revved up again, taking home to score the winning run as Puig's throw from right field overshot the cutoff man and skipped past catcher Yasmani Grandal, the ball rolling in the spot Jansen should've been.

"It was not a good play all the way around," Roberts said.

Jansen quickly assumed blame, going so far as to approach Puig at his locker and say as much. It was his fault, he said. He hadn't backed up the throw.

Only two batters earlier, the game had been just about done. Jansen had Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani down 0-2, then reared back for his trademark high cutter. He missed high. He'd miss the zone three more times, walking him.

For Ohtani, it was a form of redemption. The Dodgers, among the seven finalists for Ohtani's services both as a hitter and pitcher this past offseason, were seeing him for the first time in a regular season game. He'd be squaring off against a familiar face, fellow Japanese countryman Kenta Maeda, who'd cross paths with Ohtani as an opponent during parts of three seasons while the Angels star was then with the Nippon Ham Fighters of the NPB.

In Japan, Ohtani had recorded two hits off Maeda in seven career at-bats. On Friday, Maeda, got the best of him, striking him out on a changeup on three pitches and getting Ohtani to pop out.

"He was on the top of his game," Ohtani said.

Ohtani would whiff a second time in the seventh against Scott Alexander, nearly spinning out of the batter's box on a slider. But as he sat down 0-2 to Jansen, his sights weren't on leveling the score with a blast. He would walk, an "unacceptable" result, Jansen said, as he lost the feel for his cutter.

"I felt like I couldn't get a hit today, so I had to get on base and the best way to do that was a walk," he said.

Back at the Angels' spring training complex in Tempe earlier this year, Ohtani had flashed his abilities on the back fields. Video reports from years of scouting Ohtani in Japan revealed much about the two-way star's all-around game, with the wheels to match the prodigious power and high-velocity arm. But as Ohtani scampered around, Angels manager Mike Scioscia saw the confirmation.

"We were like, 'This is the real deal,' as far as his talent," Scioscia said.

He gave Ohtani the freedom to go if he felt he could take the bag. He did, breaking on Jansen's first movement and getting as far as third base when Grandal's throw sailed into the outfield. Again, Jansen had missed high. It was another high cutter that Fletcher would slap into left field, tying the game.

Fletcher had seen Jansen just once to that point in his life, in a spring training game earlier this year. In that at-bat, he struck out. So as he settled in, he searched for a cutter up in the zone he could hit. This time, he didn't miss, even against one of the game's best.

"He's not overwhelmed with anything," Scioscia said of Fletcher, who's now hit .294 through his first 51 career at-bats while emerging as a critical utility piece.

"He's just a ballplayer," Kinsler said.

In many ways, in Fletcher, Kinsler could see some of himself. Fletcher turned hard around third in the inning, waiting until the last second to heed to third-base coach Dino Ebel's stop sign to draw the eventual game-winning misfire.

Kinsler had generated the Angels' first run the same way. With the bases loaded and Maeda combing through the Angels lineup, he saw his window. He'd noticed the time Maeda would take delivering toward home plate, and he went for it.

He broke for home on Maeda's 1-0 pitch, seeing a clear window to slide in and beat Grandal's tag at the plate. Instead, Maeda attempted to quick-pitch, getting the ball home as soon as he could. As Kinsler hit the brakes, Maeda's foot came off the rubber — it was a balk, automatically generating a run on a move Kinsler said has been in his bag for years.

"That's the idea when you're on the bases, to make something happen," Kinsler said. "It's just the way I play the game."

How often does it work?

"Not very often, but you try it."

This time, the aggressive baserunning did work.

"We didn't do as much on the batter's box as we did on the bases," Scioscia said. "Occasionally, you're going to run into some outs, but you're going to force some mistakes also and get some bases. It's very important for our ballclub to keep that frame of mind."

To buy or to sell? Eight teams on the bubble going into the trade deadline

By Cliff Corcoran

To buy or to sell. That is the question facing teams on the bubble of contention as we inch closer to the July 31 non-waiver trading deadline. Whether it is nobler to make every effort to win in the season at hand, or wiser to acknowledge the long odds of such outrageous fortune and, by turning one's focus to subsequent seasons, end them.

One need look no further than last year's Royals to find a team that, fearful of the slings and arrows of its fans and deceived by a mid-season surge and late-July winning streak, opted to buy when it should have sold. Those Royals had a bounty of impending free agents they could have cashed in to restock a flagging farm system, including Eric Hosmer, Lorenzo Cain, Mike Moustakas, Jason Vargas, and Mike Minor. Instead, they went for it, finished below .500 — five games behind the Twins for the final playoff spot in the American League — then watched as all but Moustakas departed as free agents, with only Hosmer and Cain returning draft pick compensation. As a result, the Royals entered this year with a farm system ranked 29th out of 30 by Baseball America and a major league team that has won just 29 percent of its games, the second-worst record in all of baseball, entering Friday's action.

That is the risk of buying when one should sell. The risk of selling when one should buy is obvious, as are the potential rewards of buying. The trick is that teams would often rather repair the ills they have than fly to others that they know not of. With this regard, their currents turn awry and lose the name of action.

Yet, conscience need not make cowards of us all. Below, I take stock of eight teams on the buy/sell bubble, listed here according to their chances of reaching the postseason per Baseball Prospectus' Playoff Odds Report prior to Friday's action.

Washington Nationals

Record: 43-43 (.500), 3rd place NL East
6 GB, 5 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 29.4 percent

Impending free agents: OF Bryce Harper, 2B Daniel Murphy, C Matt Wieters, 1Bs Mark Reynolds and Matt Adams, SPs Gio González and Jeremy Hellickson, RPs Kelvin Herrera, Ryan Madson, Shawn Kelley, and Joaquin Benoit

Biggest need: Catcher

The Nationals have been in freefall since early June, last winning consecutive games on June 5 and 6 and winning just one series since then, that coming against the major league-worst Orioles two weeks ago. On the season, they are 4-6 against the each of two teams they are chasing in their own division, the Braves and Phillies. The latter is the team currently occupying the second wild-card spot in the NL and thus the lowest-hanging fruit for these borderline teams to pick off in their pursuit of the playoffs. In the last two weeks, the Nationals have gone 2-5 against Philadelphia.

The source of Washington's struggles has been their offense. Since June 10, the Nats are 6-17 and, setting aside a pair of double-digit-run outbursts, have averaged just 2.8 runs scored in the other 21 games over that stretch. Bryce Harper is hitting .176/.349/.376 since June 8. Adam Eaton returned from the disabled list on June 9 and has slugged just .294 since. Daniel Murphy returned on June 12 but has yet to recapture his typical form at the plate, hitting .256/.302/.359 over his last 11 games after a 3-for-29 start to his season.

Given that the Nationals entered the season as one of three presumed super teams in the National League (along with the Cubs and Dodgers, who were also not in first place on Thursday morning), the idea of Washington selling at the deadline might seem ludicrous. Yet, outside of a tremendous 22-6 stretch from April 29 to May 30, the Nats have gone 21-37 this season. They entered Thursday's action below .500, and their list of impending free agents above could dramatically alter both this month's trade market and their own farm system for the better.

That said, the Nationals' farm system isn't barren, as the recent graduations of teenage slugger Juan Soto and right-handed starter Erick Fedde can attest. With Soto looking like an in-house replacement for Harper, top prospect Victor Robles still on the way, and Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg both under

contract through at least 2021, the Nats don't seem likely to tear things down and start over even if all of the free agents listed above head elsewhere this winter.

Indeed, the Nats declared themselves buyers back on June 18, when they got ahead of the market and added Kelvin Herrera to their bullpen. Harper, Eaton, and Murphy can all be expected to round back into form. The team just got Matt Adams back from the DL and hopes to get Ryan Zimmerman, Matt Wieters, and Stephen Strasburg back by the All-Star break. So, not only are we taking a snapshot of the Nationals a day after the apparent nadir of their season, but there are legitimate reasons to expect things to improve.

The obvious move for Washington is to upgrade at catcher, where Wieters has hit .226/.296/.349 (68 OPS+) over the last two seasons and the Nationals as a team have hit .190/.284/.273 (65 sOPS+) thus far this season. Former Nat and likely AL All-Star starter Wilson Ramos, who is also due to reach free agency this November, is the obvious target, assuming, of course, that the Rays are selling (see below).

St. Louis Cardinals

Record: 45-41 (.523), 3rd place NL Central
6 1/2 GB, 3 games out of second-wild card spot

Playoff odds: 21.4 percent

Impending free agents: SP Adam Wainwright, RPs Greg Holland and Bud Norris

Biggest need: Starting pitcher

The buy/sell calculation is primarily about opportunity cost. Each team needs to decide which is of greater value: their chances of making the playoffs and a championship run, or the potential return for their impending free agents. For a team like the Cardinals, with very little to sell, the decision to buy is an easy one. Wainwright, who has been out for most of the season with elbow inflammation, appears done at age 36. Holland has looked far better since returning from a hip impingement on June 19, but has still been awful more often than not since last August. Norris, finally fulfilling his destiny as a relief pitcher, has been excellent, but his limited track record in that role at the age of 33 and impending free agency make it safe to assume he wouldn't net a franchise-altering return in a trade.

The Cardinals already spent down their farm system in acquiring Marcell Ozuna over the winter, so they're unlikely to make a huge splash on the trade market. They also lack a glaringly obvious need, beyond the need for Dexter Fowler, who is currently away on paternity leave, to rediscover his 2017 form at the plate. The bullpen has stabilized. Paul DeJong is expected to return from the DL this weekend. The offense could use a boost, but the return of DeJong and a course-correction from Fowler could provide it. With Michael Wacha still lacking a timetable for his return from a strained oblique, and Luke Weaver having posted a 6.42 ERA over his last six starts, including Thursday night's gem, the Cardinals' best move might be to add a starting pitcher, though the pickings are slim there, especially for a team unlikely to target the top of the market.

San Francisco Giants

Record: 45-44 (.506), 3rd place (tied) NL West
3 1/2 GB, 4 1/2 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 14.3 percent

Impending free agents: OFs Andrew McCutchen and Hunter Pence, C Nick Hundley, LHP Derek Holland

Biggest need: Outfielder

The Giants haven't missed the playoffs in an even year since before Barack Obama was elected for his first term, which I believe was roughly 1,500 years ago. In 2018, San Francisco is back in the hunt, and with Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija rejoining Madison Bumgarner in the rotation this week, the Giants are poised to make noise in baseball's flattest division. Mix in one of the most optimistic front offices in baseball, and the Giants seem sure to be buyers.

That's just as well. Hundley and Holland would be compelling pieces on the market but unlikely to bring much return, while Pence looks finished at 35, and McCutchen is no longer an impact player, though he is still an above-average one. With their rotation returning to full strength, what the Giants need most is an upgrade on the Austin Slater/Alen Hanson combination they're currently employing in left field. Adam Jones will top the outfield market, but Curtis Granderson has been more productive thus far this season, and Leonys Martín could provide the defensive upgrade the Giants need, as the team is currently 26th in the majors in defensive efficiency due in large part to the poor play of its outfielders.

Oakland A's

Record: 48-39 (.552), 3rd place AL West
9 GB, 7 1/2 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 8.4 percent

Impending free agents: IF Jed Lowrie, C Jonathan Lucroy, OF Matt Joyce, RP Santiago Casilla, LHP Brett Anderson

Biggest need: Starting pitcher

Lowrie — a 34-year-old, bat-first infielder having a career year — is the only one of the players listed above likely to draw much interest should the A's decide to sell. Lucroy has sunk to replacement level. Joyce isn't hitting. Anderson is hurt, as always, and Casilla has walked 18 men against 21 strikeouts on the season. So, what would happen if the A's took a chance and added a starting pitcher or two?

Truth be told, not much. Barring a collapse by the Mariners, the AL playoff field seems fairly set. The Yankees, Red Sox, Astros, and Indians, the four teams that were heavily favored coming into the season, are all at or above a 99.7 percent chance of making the playoffs, per Baseball Prospectus' numbers, while Seattle was at 87.9 percent entering Thursday's action. Meanwhile, the starting pitching market is thin, and the A's aren't likely to be big spenders even if they do buy. The A's have some depth on the farm in areas other than starting pitching, so they do have the currency to add a mid-range arm or two to their rotation, but they're just as likely to stand pat.

Colorado Rockies

Record: 44-43 (.506), 3rd place (tied) NL West
3 1/2 GB, 4 1/2 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 6.7 percent

Impending free agents: 2B DJ LeMahieu, OF Carlos González, RP Adam Ottavino

Biggest need: Relief pitching

The Rockies' rotation has stepped up of late to deliver a pair of series wins against NL West opponents, taking two of three from the Dodgers in L.A. and sweeping the Giants in a three-game homestand. That pushed Colorado over .500 and shaved four games off its deficit to the division-leading Diamondbacks in the span of just six days.

Still, this is not a good team. The Rockies' -35 run differential is the worst of the eight teams on this list. Their offense is the third-worst in the NL per the park-adjusted OPS+, and their bullpen, with the exception of impending free agent Ottavino, is an arson squad. Third-order record considers Colorado a .466 team.

On the other hand, with the Royals having already dealt Herrera, Ottavino just might be the most desirable reliever on the market. Meanwhile, the Indians and Red Sox may both be in the market for a second baseman, and with Brian Dozier having an off year, LeMahieu, a sparkling fielder who has hit well on the road the last two seasons, could trail only the Reds' Scooter Gennett on their lists. The Rockies would better off cashing in Ottavino and LeMahieu, clearing room in the middle infield for top prospect Brendan Rodgers in the process, and setting their sights on 2019 and beyond than on trying to recapture last year's fleeting wild-card berth.

Tampa Bay Rays

Record: 43-43 (.500), 3rd place AL East
15 GB, 12 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 2.9 percent

Impending free agents: C Wilson Ramos, SS Adeiny Hechavarria, OF Carlos Gómez, SP Nate Eovaldi, RP Sergio Romo

Biggest need: An outfield bat

The Rays are better than you think. They're the best defensive team in baseball by a safe distance, per park-adjusted defensive efficiency. Their pitching staff has been among the best in baseball since late May, thanks in part to the emergence of Blake Snell as a true ace. Their offense has been close to league average in park-adjusted terms and has been buoyed by the addition of first base prospect Jake Bauers in the three-hole. They have also been slightly unlucky in one-run games, and have been without Chris

Archer since early June due to an abdominal strain. Per third-order record, they have been the fourth-best team in the American League this year, performing like a .584 team despite their .500 record.

With Archer expected back on Monday, it's not hard to see the Rays as the sixth-best team in the American League should their luck even out and they add a corner outfield bat. Unfortunately, only five teams will make it to the postseason, and the Rays already showed their hand by dealing Alex Colomé and Denard Span — who wasn't quite the outfielder they needed but whose absence has only made that need greater — to the team they're ostensibly chasing for that fifth spot, the Mariners. Instead, look for Tampa Bay to shop all five of the players above and to land a solid return for Ramos.

Los Angeles Angels

Record: 44-44 (.500), 4th place AL West
13 1/2 GB, 12 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 1.2 percent

Impending free agents: 2B Ian Kinsler, Cs Martín Maldonado and René Rivera, OF Chris Young, SP Garrett Richards, RPs Jim Johnson and Blake Wood

Biggest need: Pitching

I suppose there's still a way to dream on this team. Shohei Ohtani's ulnar collateral ligament may keep him from pitching for the rest of the decade, but if that means he can be the everyday DH for the remainder of this season, that's a big bat back in the lineup. Rookie David Fletcher appears to be staking his claim to third base in the wake of Zack Cozart's season-ending shoulder labrum injury. Fletcher hit .350/.394/.559 in 58 games for Salt Lake City in Triple A and is off to a hot start through his first 18 major league games. Albert Pujols hasn't been the disaster in the field many anticipated. Ian Kinsler's glove is compensating for his aging bat. Kole Calhoun has raked in 15 games since returning from the disabled list. Andrelton Simmons is having a career year at the plate. The rotation just got Garrett Richards back. Tyler Skaggs is expected to make a quick return from his groin injury. They are tied with the A's for the best run differential (+14) of any AL team not currently in a playoff spot. And, of course, Mike Trout is a god.

Then again, since opening the season 13-3, the Angels have gone 31-41 (.431). They've been ravaged by injuries. Their rotation is held together with chewing gum. Their bullpen has been average at best, and they are 1-5 in their last six head-to-head games against the Mariners, the team they'd need to surpass to reach the playoffs. In what is likely to be a seller's market for pitching, the Angels would likely have to overpay to get anything close to the pitching they need to try to catch Seattle, whereas they could benefit from that market should they make Richards available.

When one looks to the Angels' immediate future, however, one gains clarity on their current predicament. They have the oldest lineup in baseball, and no elite near-ready prospects on the farm. If they're going to be without Ohtani entirely next year, a distinct possibility should he require Tommy John surgery, their outlook may only diminish from here before Trout hits free agency after the 2020 season. With Trout at his best and Ohtani still available in at least one capacity, the opportunity cost of

folding on this season may be greater than the cost of overspending from a middling farm system in the hope that they hit that 1.2 percent.

Pittsburgh Pirates

Record: 40-46 (.465), 4th place NL Central
11 1/2 GB, 8 games out of second wild-card spot

Playoff odds: 1.2 percent

Impending free agents: SS Jordy Mercer, UT Sean Rodríguez

Biggest need: Pitching

I'll be honest, the Pirates are only here because, in terms of games behind and Postseason Odds, I couldn't omit them while also including the Angels, who I felt needed to be included. The reality is, the Pirates are three games below .500, have a -29 run differential, a .462 third-order winning percentage, and a mere 1.2 percent chance of reaching the postseason. The only thing keeping them from selling is that they have so very little to offer. Still, infielders Josh Harrison and David Freese, who have club options for 2019, and right-hander Ivan Nova, who is owed \$8.5 million for next season, could be on the move.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohtani helps Angels rally past Dodgers 3-2

By Jill Painter Lopez

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Shohei Ohtani is limited to hitting these days because of an elbow injury.

He remains quite the presence for the Los Angeles Angels.

Ohtani's two-out walk helped set up a dramatic 3-2 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Friday night in the opening game of the Freeway Series.

The Angels were down to their last strike in the ninth inning when Ohtani battled back from a 0-2 count all the way to a walk against Kenley Jansen (0-2). Ohtani then stole second and advanced to third on catcher Yasmani Grandal's throwing error before David Fletcher hit a tying RBI single to left.

"I think it speaks to the threat Shohei is at the plate," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "(Jansen) is as good as there is at the back end of the game."

It was Ohtani's second stolen base of his rookie season. The two-way star has more time to practice other parts of the game while he is staying off the mound.

"I wasn't absolutely going to go on the first pitch but for the hitter it's easier to steal a base earlier in the count," Ohtani said through an interpreter.

Ian Kinsler followed with another base hit, and Fletcher scored when Yasiel Puig's throw skipped by Grandal for a game-ending error. Blake Parker (2-1) pitched a scoreless inning for the win.

"It was a great at-bat. (Ohtani) did what he needed to do," Kinsler said. "The report on Kenley is that he loses track of runners or concentrates a lot on the hitter. You have an opportunity to steal against him. Shohei took second. It was huge. We got in scoring position and obviously the throw got away. He got himself in scoring position and that's what you're supposed to do."

The 108 degree temperature set a record at first pitch for a game in Anaheim. The previous record was 106, which happened in 1988 and 2007.

The Dodgers wasted a solid start by Kenta Maeda, who struck out nine in 5 2/3 innings. They had won four in a row.

"For me it's unacceptable at 0-2 to lose him there," Jansen said. "I had him where I wanted to. I just feel I almost lost my feel on the fastball up in the zone. I couldn't get it where I wanted to. That walk irritated me. I've got to keep my composure."

Matt Kemp hit run-scoring singles in the fourth and sixth to help the Dodgers jump in front, but the Angels rallied in the sixth.

Kinsler and Jose Briceno opened the inning with singles. Kole Calhoun then struck out and Andrelton Simmons flied out before Mike Trout was walked intentionally, loading the bases.

Maeda then was called for a balk, allowing Kinsler to score. Justin Upton walked to load the bases again, and Scott Alexander struck out Albert Pujols to end the inning.

Angels starter Felix Pena, a converted reliever, allowed two runs and three hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Fletcher had faced Jansen once before in spring training. He struck out. This time he got the big hit.

"The experience was good. Obviously, when you see a pitcher more than once it can help you," Fletcher said.

SHO-DOWN

Maeda and Japanese countryman Ohtani faced each other for the first time in Major League Baseball. Ohtani was 0 for 2 with a strikeout and a groundout. Ohtani went 2 for 7 against Maeda when the two played professional baseball in Japan.

"He was on top of his game I felt like," Ohtani said. "When the starting pitcher is pitching that well, to come back and win like that is big."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Dodgers: LHP Tony Cingrani (left shoulder inflammation) threw a light bullpen of 20 to 25 pitches and then went to Arizona for more rehabilitation ... RHP Walker Buehler (right rib micro fracture) threw a bullpen and will throw a five-inning simulated game Sunday morning.

UP NEXT

Dodgers: RHP Ross Stripling (6-2, 2.27 ERA) starts Saturday night. He allowed four earned runs in six innings in the Dodgers' 6-4 win over Colorado on Sunday. It was just the second time he allowed four runs in a start this season.

Angels: RHP Deck McGuire (0-1, 8.64 ERA) lasted just 3 1/3 innings against Baltimore in his last start.

FROM MiLB.COM

Lund goes yard twice for BayBears

Angels No. 18 prospect ties career high with five RBIs

By Chris Bumbaca

Not until the ball cleared the fence did **Brennon Lund** know he'd done something that eluded him throughout college and, until that point, his professional career.

The **Angels' 18th-ranked prospect** recorded his first multi-homer game and tied his career high with five RBIs, leading Double-A Mobile to a 7-3 victory over Jacksonville on Friday at Hank Aaron Stadium.

"I didn't think it was going over the fence," Lund said of the second roundtripper. "It was just one of those balls that just makes it out. I thought about it when I was running. I was like, 'That was the first time I'd ever done that in my whole baseball career, even college.' That's cool that I was able to do that."

Batting in the first inning, Lund sent a hard shot back to the box, where the ball deflected off Jumbo Shrimp starter **Merandy Gonzalez** for an infield single.

The 23-year-old outfielder came up with a runner on first in the third and turned on a 2-0 fastball from Gonzalez, sending it over the right field wall for his fifth homer of the year. With the bases loaded the next inning, he fought off an 0-2 pitch and grounded to third to drive in another run.

Facing right-handed reliever **Reilly Hovis** with one out and a runner on third in the sixth, Lund pulled an 0-1 pitch down the right field line, just clearing the fence near the foul pole for his second two-run jack of the night. He struck out looking in the eighth to finish 3-for-5 -- his eighth three-hit game of the season and sixth since May 24.

Entering Friday with 13 career home runs across three seasons, Lund doesn't consider himself much of a power hitter. The Brigham Young product long tried to create most of his offensive value by spraying balls to the gaps.

"But it's good to hit a couple of home runs every once in a while," he said, adding that he's realized hitting for more power would be an improvement for his overall game. "So that's what I've been focusing on a lot this year."

The adjustment did not provide immediate results. He hit .221 with a .634 OPS in April, driving in four runs with no homers.

"I struggled a little bit in the beginning here to try and figure out some things that [are] different from how I've hit my whole life," the 5-foot-10, 185-pounder said. "It's been good. I'm starting to see a bit more lift on my balls instead more of a line drive. My work's been paying off a little bit so far, starting to come out a little bit now."

Lund's night upped his slash line to .264/.345/.407 with 44 RBIs. The 2016 11th-round pick set his high mark with five RBIs on Aug. 2, 2016 during his first professional season with Class A Burlington in the Midwest League, and he tallied four RBIs this June 20 against Biloxi.

To get more lift on the ball, Lund made a tweak to how he loads his hands. He now keeps them moving as he readies his swing.

"That's one thing that's been hard for me, because my whole life, I've hit with my hands in one spot," he said. "So I don't generate a lot of power when you do that. ... That's what I've been trying to learn this year. It's starting to get more consistent as we go, but still not all the way there. I've still got a lot of work to do."

The left-handed hitter also realized early this year that the only way to test what he's learned during the offseason is to hit live pitching.

"You've got to sacrifice a little bit of your average or whatever to be better at one aspect," he said. "I realized that, changing stuff in my swing. I've gone to high peaks, but then I've gone down with my average. It's been like a roller coaster ride this year with the hitting. Hopefully, I can level it out and start to get more consistent with what I need to do so I can get a little bit more power with my swing."

Lund was born in Salt Lake City and raised in the suburb of Jordan. With the Angels' Triple-A affiliate located in Salt Lake, he would love a homecoming that would leave him one step from the Majors.

"It's a cool motivator," said Lund, who frequented Bees games in his youth. "I'm just not really going to try to press my way there. I mean, I'm just going to play and do my best here. When the opportunity comes, I'll be happy for it when I get there. I'm just trying to help the team win here for now. When the time arises, that would be awesome."

Marlins No. 7 prospect Isan Diaz reached base three times, delivering an RBI double and walking twice for Jacksonville. Miami's top-ranked prospect, **Monte Harrison**, scored twice.

FROM ESPN.COM

Shohei Ohtani provides spark as Angels rally vs. Dodgers in ninth

By Alden Gonzalez

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- Shohei Ohtani chased a changeup in the dirt, mishit a blooper that didn't leave the infield, flailed at a slider outside, then fell behind in the count 0-2 against Kenley Jansen, one of the game's best closers, with one out remaining in front of a sold-out crowd at Angel Stadium.

Then, in a matter of moments, Ohtani breathed life back into the reeling Los Angeles Angels, for one Friday night and, they hope, for the rest of this summer.

The Japanese two-way sensation worked a walk, stole second base, took third on an errant throw, scored on an RBI single by David Fletcher and watched from the dugout as Ian Kinsler delivered the walk-off base hit to right field, sending the Angels into an improbable 3-2 victory over the surging Los Angeles Dodgers.

Ohtani entered that final plate appearance 2-for-12 since being activated off the disabled list -- including 0-for-3 with two strikeouts in the Freeway Series opener -- but displayed his composure in a tight situation.

It started with watching four consecutive Jansen cutters sail above the strike zone.

"I think it speaks to the threat he is at the plate," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said of Ohtani, who joined Shin-Soo Choo as the only players to work a walk after falling behind 0-2 to Jansen this season.

"Jansen, he's as good as there is in the back end of a game. He's going to try to elevate that cutter, and he knows he has to get it up because if it's not quite where he wants it to go, Shohei has a chance to barrel it, and with his power he can drive it out. He tried to elevate it, and he was just missing up too far."

Scioscia called Ohtani "the second-fastest player on our team," behind only Mike Trout -- but he didn't send him.

Ohtani "was on his own" to steal, Scioscia said, and he broke for what was only his second stolen base all season on the next pitch Jansen threw.

"I wanted to make sure one base hit could get me home," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "I wasn't absolutely going to go on the first pitch, but it's easier on the hitter if I steal the base earlier in the count."

Ohtani has not thrown a baseball since June 6. He was given a stem cell and platelet rich plasma injection in hopes of treating a Grade 2 sprain on his ulnar collateral ligament without the need for Tommy John surgery, and he is still waiting to find out if it worked. The 24-year-old was cleared for hitting on June 28 and will be re-evaluated on July 19, at the earliest, to determine when he might be able to restart his throwing program.

In the meantime, the Angels are comfortable with Ohtani helping them as a hitter because the inside part of his lead elbow -- Ohtani pitches right-handed and bats left-handed -- isn't affected as a hitter.

In an interview with ESPN, Angels general manager Billy Eppler previously expressed concern that random events on a baseball field -- awkward swings, collisions, bad headfirst slides -- could affect Ohtani's right elbow and thus impact his recovery as a pitcher. But Scioscia said stealing bases is not necessarily a problem, specifically because Ohtani is sliding feet first.

"We're past that with his elbow," Scioscia said. "He's not going to slide headfirst. That's the thing you would worry about with any player, let alone a guy who pitches."

Ohtani struck out and popped out in his first two at-bats against countryman Kenta Maeda, moving to 2-for-9 lifetime against the Dodgers' starting pitcher. He then chased a breaking ball way off the plate against lefty reliever Scott Alexander, but later helped hand Jansen his first blown save since April 17.

"I had him where I wanted, and I feel like I almost lost the feel of my fastball up in that zone," said Jansen, whose Dodgers have won 31 of their last 45 games. "I couldn't get it where I wanted to."

Ohtani's batting average is still .278 -- more than 30 points above the league average -- but it has dropped 76 points over his past 20 games. He came up representing the tying run, for an Angels team that had dropped nine of its previous 12 games. But staying patient, and not searching for the home run, came easy to him.

"I couldn't get a hit today, so, any way I can get on base," Ohtani said. "And that was a walk."

Angel Stadium sees temperature reach 108 degrees, sets new record

By Alden Gonzalez

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- First pitch for the Freeway Series opener between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Los Angeles Angels was a blistering 108 degrees late Friday afternoon, setting a new Angel Stadium record.

The previous high in Anaheim, California, was 106 degrees, which occurred during a September day game in 1988 and a September night game in 2007.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts called it "uncommonly hot" on Friday and shortened his team's on-field batting-practice session, and opted to conduct his pregame media session from inside an air-conditioned interview room between the two clubhouses.

Angels manager Mike Scioscia had his players skip outdoor batting practice entirely.

"There's no doubt we backed off some of the things that we do outside," Scioscia said before the Angels' 3-2 win. "Our guys, usually they're out there every day, getting ready, working hard. But when it gets to this extreme, I think less is more. We'll be ready to play, but we'll get ready inside."

FROM CBS SPORTS**Dodgers' Stripling gets another shot at Angels**

Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Ross Stripling is scheduled to make his second major league appearance against the Los Angeles Angels when they meet in the middle game of their three-game interleague series at Angel Stadium on Saturday evening.

By STATS

Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Ross Stripling is scheduled to make his second major league appearance against the Los Angeles Angels when they meet in the middle game of their three-game interleague series at Angel Stadium on Saturday evening.

He last faced the Angels just over two years ago in his first season with the Dodgers. That game likely stands out to Stripling because it's the only time he hit a batter in 257 2/3 innings in the majors.

That miscue forced in a run and ended the night after 4 2/3 innings for Stripling, who had walked two other batters in the inning. The bullpen then gave up the lead with the inherited runners and Stripling took the loss in the 7-4 defeat at Angel Stadium.

Stripling (6-2, 2.27 ERA) has not only avoided hitting another batter since then, but has mastered his overall control, entering Saturday with 96 strikeouts and just 13 walks this season. His ERA is seventh best in the majors among pitchers with at least 12 starts.

Not bad for a pitcher whose first 10 appearances this season came out of the bullpen, where he's 0-0 with a 0.59 ERA this season.

Stripling will try to get the Dodgers (47-40) back atop the NL West after Kenley Jansen blew a save in the series opener on Friday night and the Angels won 3-2. The Dodgers had taken over first place for the first time this season while idle on Thursday, but the Arizona Diamondbacks moved back into first with the Dodgers' loss to the Angels (45-44).

Angels rookie David Fletcher continues to cement himself as a major leaguer. He drove in the tying run with a two-out pinch-hit single off Jansen, then scored the winning run from first on a check-swing single by Ian Kinsler, followed by a throwing error by Dodgers right-fielder Yasiel Puig.

"If I can help the team win, it's a big deal," Fletcher told FOX Sports West after the win.

Stripling knows he needs to be sharper on Saturday than he was in his last outing, when he allowed four runs and a season-high nine hits in six innings of a 6-4 victory against the visiting Colorado Rockies on Sunday.

Stripling told the Southern California News Group following the game that he didn't believe he was getting fatigued. Stripling has thrown 83 1/3 innings this season, more than the 77 1/3 he logged last season, but less than the 104 1/3 he accumulated during the 2016 season.

"They've seen me throw 80 innings now this year," he said. "I think they've got an idea what's coming. I've just got to stay sharp."

Angels center fielder Mike Trout faced Stripling twice on May 17, 2016, and had a solo homer and a two-run single.

Deck McGuire (0-1, 7.56) is scheduled to make his fourth appearance with the Angels after he was acquired from the Texas Rangers for cash considerations on June 19. Texas had claimed the 28-year-old McGuire from the Toronto Blue Jays a few days earlier.

He made two relief appearances for the Angels before making his first start on Sunday and allowed five runs and five hits in 3 1/3 innings of an 8-2 loss against the Baltimore Orioles.

McGuire was sent down to Triple-A Salt Lake following that game, but was recalled on Wednesday, the day Tyler Skaggs was scratched from his scheduled start on Thursday against the Seattle Mariners because of a strained abductor.

McGuire has never faced the Dodgers in his career.

FROM AL.COM

Mr. Baseball Jeremiah Jackson, 2 other state stars honored as MaxPreps All-Americans

By Ben Thomas

Alabama's Mr. Baseball Jeremiah Jackson was one of three in-state players honored as MaxPreps All-Americans this week.

Jackson, the Class 2A Hitter and Overall Player of the Year at St. Luke's Episcopal in Mobile, was named a first-team All-American infielder.

The Los Angeles Angels' second-round draft pick was in the running for the National Player of the Year Award, eventually won by Nolan Gorman of Phoenix, Ariz.

Jackson, who started at shortstop for six years for the Wildcats, hit .637 in his final year of high school baseball with 15 home runs and 49 RBIs. Committed to Mississippi State for more than two years, Jackson instead decided to sign with the Angels after he was chosen No. 57 overall.

His numerous awards as a senior included the AL.com Coastal Alabama Player of the Year Award and the 2018 Perfect Game/Rawlings National High School Player of the Year Award.

He was the only Alabama player to make the first team.

The state had two players on the second-team, however. Hartselle pitcher and Gatorade Alabama Player of the Year Garrett Wade and Homewood's record-setting base stealer Josh Hall were both honored as second-team All-Americans.

Wade, an Auburn signee, was also Prep Baseball's State Player of the Year and was a first-team Class 6A All-State selection. He was drafted in the 38th round by the Tampa Bay Rays. He went 7-2 as a senior with a 1.02 ERA and 109 strikeouts in 54.2 innings.

Hall was named Class 6A Player of the Year. He hit .500 with 26 RBIs and 82 stolen bases. He is the nation's career leader in stolen bases. He signed with Ole Miss.

MaxPreps named a 30-member first and second team. Florida placed five players on the first and three on the second team to lead the way.

FROM SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Bees manager Keith Johnson chosen to coach in MLB All-Star Futures Game

Salt Lake Bees manager Keith Johnson was named third base coach for the U.S. team at the 2018 All-Star Futures Game in Washington D.C.

Rosters for the game were announced by Major League Baseball today.

The Futures Game is part of MLB All-Star Sunday featuring the top Minor League prospects from all levels in a U.S. vs. World Team format. The game will take place on July 15 at Nationals Park and will be broadcast at 2 p.m. MT on MLB Network and simulcast on MLB.com.

Johnson is in his seventh year as the manager for the Salt Lake Bees and his 16th season in the Angels organization. He became the first former Salt Lake player to manager the club in 2011 and was named the PCL Manager of the Year in 2013 and Angels Minor League Manager of the Year in 2016. With 463 wins in his Salt Lake career, Johnson is 18 wins away from matching Phil Roof as the winningest manager in franchise history.

Both coaching staffs at the Futures Game have plenty of Salt Lake ties. Along with Johnson, the U.S. team will be managed by Torii Hunter and includes Matt LeCroy as bench coach and LaTroy Hawkins as pitching coach. Hunter, Lecroy and Hawkins all spent time with the Salt Lake Buzz and will face former Buzz teammate David Ortiz, who will manage the World Team.

FROM SB NATION**Interview: Mexican League pitcher Winston Lavendier**

Clinton Riddle gives us a window into the life of a minor league lefty, his experiences in the US and in the Mexican League

By Clinton Riddle

A 33rd round pick in 2015 by the Los Angeles Angels from Cal State Dominguez Hills, left-handed pitcher **Winston Lavendier** is taking a somewhat-indirect path up the ladder of professional baseball.

After early success in the Arizona League (1.65 ERA in 27 1/3 IP), continuing on to the Midwest League's Burlington Bees (3.16 ERA in 42 2/3 IP, 45 K), the 2017 season went completely sideways for the then-24-year old hurler (6.16 ERA in 57 IP).

A dominating Spring Training performance in 2018 somehow didn't keep him in the Angels organization, and he was released near the end of March. However, a previous call in search of information on winter leagues drew attention from the Mexican League and led to a chance for Lavendier to reestablish himself as a prospect.

CR: Take me back to when you got drafted, back in 2015. What was that process like, for you? Were you just sort of waiting around to see when your name was called? How did it feel, sitting through that process, dealing with the anticipation?

WL: It was pretty nerve-wracking, because I knew a week before the draft that the Angels had said they were drafting me. They just never told me when they were picking me. I was like, "Am I going to get picked?" So, I had to wait 33 rounds. I was happy and excited, ready to see when I was going to get picked, and then I had to do stuff to *distract* myself from the draft. And then my name gets called.

Actually, I didn't hear it. My little brother did, and he started freaking out, and I obviously knew what that meant. It was a pretty cool experience. So I started freaking out. My dad started freaking out. My grandpa, as well. So it was pretty cool.

CR: What did you feel your biggest strengths were, heading into professional baseball?

WL: Definitely the mental game. I studied psychology. I felt like I had a big advantage, in terms of the mental game. I would say that would be my strength. Also, having a funky delivery helps out a lot with the adjustment, because in the beginning I wasn't a hard thrower. I've since built that up.

CR: Was there a particular adjustment that you made? Anything that really clicked for you, or was it just simple fundamental things that you worked on?

WL: Well, I decided to do DriveLine without letting the team know, because I didn't know how they felt about it.

I was kind of hiding it, and I was just afraid that they were going to tell me no, so I just did that without telling them. And then once I did get the velocity jump in the middle of the season when I started it, they called me from the front office and said, "We know you've been doing weighted ball (exercises). We have no problem with it, but tell us what you did to get the velocity."

I've heard a lot of mixed feelings about working with weighted balls, and it seems like people are either pro or con. I've seen both sides because I'm on Twitter. I follow a lot of people that are way against DriveLine. I've just personally seen my velocity jump, my arm bounces back very well, very well. I've never really had a problem in my shoulder or elbow, anything like that.

So yeah, it helps. I mean, I am big on having the right mechanics, and I study other pitchers' mechanics. I had my own pitching coach at home (Kyle Brown). I'm big on mechanics, and I'm big on (lower half) drive.

CR: That was something that I wanted to ask you about. I've always had a real interest in the guys who can fill multiple roles in a bullpen; short man, long reliever, spot starter. Being able to do that and do it well is a huge advantage to any team. So you've never had any serious arm trouble, ever?

WL: When I was in high school, I had a little elbow trouble. But I had an x-ray and MRI, and it showed that there was nothing wrong with my arm. The doctor said it was tendinitis, and I needed to take maybe two weeks off.

Other than that I've never really had any issues with it. I feel like I take my arm care very seriously. And back to the mechanics part: my pitching coach is the one who taught me how to use my legs when I pitch. I feel like that's a big thing, because most pitchers don't know how to use their legs, they don't get their legs involved much.

CR: That's a huge deal.

WL: Yeah. I feel like it goes hand-in-hand with me being able to bounce back, as well. If I'm going to be sore the next day, it's going to be my hamstring and my hip. That's fine.

CR: Tell me about your first year in pro ball. Did you have any sort of preconceived notions about what you were up against? Had you heard any stories from anybody, any friends who had been in minor league ball before you, or did you just go into it with an open mind and take things as they came?

WL: I kind of went in blind, I guess, other than talking to my coaches and stuff like that. I mean, I just kind of kept doing what I did in college. Nothing different. It's the same game. It's just a higher level.

CR: Were there any particular experiences in that first year (2015) that really stuck out for you? Any particular moments?

WL: It was a pretty big shock I guess, because I used to go to the field a hour and a half before the game started, and then I'd warm up and it was pretty much time to go. Then in rookie ball, for a 7 o'clock game, it was practice in 110-degree heat. Arizona weather. Yeah. And then having to shag every round. It was a relief that I didn't have to go into the game early, because of that. And so I'm out there five

hours, six hours before the game, and working myself to exhaustion, then had to be ready to pitch by 9:30 because that's when you came in, in rookie ball. I came in around the eighth or ninth inning.

It was a shock. It wasn't like it was a lot harder, or anything. It was just completely different than what I was used to.

So I would say Arizona is no joke, with that heat.

CR: It seems like you cruised through that first season. Must not have been much of a challenge for you.

WL: It was all about having my routine. I already had that set before I went into the pros. So I just kept that routine. I do a good job of disconnecting after ballgames, when I need to, sometimes playing video games in my hotel room. I think that was a big help that I kind of got away from in the couple of years after that. I guess video games, for me, are a good way to reset my brain.

CR: Did you feel like it was a pretty big jump coming into 2016, going to Class-A ball, then High-A, playing with Inland Empire? Did it feel like the competition was measurably tougher?

WL: I feel like you could get away with more stuff (in Low-A). I went from the Midwest League to the California League. In the Midwest League, if you leave a fastball down the middle of the plate, they hit it pretty hard most of the time but they won't get out of the yard. Then I go to the California League. They swing with their (expletive) out. So I guess, in that sense, you can't get away with as much in Cali.

CR: When you were back in Inland Empire in 2017, what happened there? Did you have some adjustment issues? Any sort of minor injuries?

WL: No, I think it was a combination of a couple of things. I've never had any sort of injury issues. It was more mental.

Last year, I went through that spring training without giving up a single hit. The *whole* spring training. And I threw quite a few innings for the Triple-A squad. So I wasn't facing rookie-ball guys. At the end of training I'm thinking, "Okay, for sure, I'm going up".

I guess it rattled my cage when I went to High-A. I felt like I deserved to get called up.

But I think that kind of played into it. I was angry at the situation, and felt the way I was going to get to Double-A was to throw harder. I feel like I tried to focus too much on throwing hard instead of doing what I did my first two years in pro ball, when I was just pitching to my strengths. I'm not an upper-nineties thrower.

So I think instead of pitching, I was a thrower, and I think that's what kind of messed me up. And then, also, I relied way too much on my fastball. I kind of got away from my out pitches, my curveball.

CR: When I called your agent, he said the Angels had released you a couple of days before the end of Spring Training. He also said that the GM of Acereros de Monclova in the Mexican League had been calling about you. Was this move out of the blue, for you? Did you expect somebody from the Mexican League to be calling about you?

WL: I got their number from one of my buddies a year prior, because I was trying to play winter ball, and so I had talked to the GM. I told them that I'm half-Mexican, it would be an easy transition. He said that he wasn't involved in the winter league, but he would like me to play for him in the Spring. Both teams are here in Mexico, so he said he would stay in touch with me.

So when I got released, I told my agent (Derek Marques, of Lakeridge Sports Management) right away and he immediately called the GM in Mexico. It was that night that I had an offer from Mexico.

It's pretty different from the US. My mom's fluent in English and Spanish. She's from Mexico. Whenever she would get mad at us, she'd yell at us in Spanish (laughs). I understood pretty much everything in Spanish. My mom's mom, she spoke only Spanish. So if I wanted to have a conversation with her, I had to speak the language. I was never really top-notch. I took Spanish for three years in high school. Since I've come here, it's become a lot better. That's for sure.

Culturally here, it's very different here. For example, the cops here carry around assault rifles, and every cop out here is wearing full battle gear. The kind you would see with SWAT teams, and it's pretty crazy. And they all wear face masks, so you can't see their eyes.

CR: Doesn't it had something to do with keeping their identity secret? So they won't be targeted by gangs?

WL: Yeah, exactly.

And the fans...the fans at the game are actually into (the game). I think there's a drum line in every stadium, and they get there early and hang out throughout the whole game. But I notice that a lot of the fans in the States are on their phones during the game; they're just completely distracted from the game. So I feel like the fans out here in Mexico, they get their money's worth because they're into every pitch. They're banging on their drums. Just having a *ton* of fun getting into the game.

CR: One of the things I always liked about the Mexican League is that there are dozens of former MLB players on the rosters. They're scattered all over the league.

WL: My throwing partner ended up being **Phil Coke**. It was pretty sweet, at the time, having Coke as my throwing partner, because we're both lefties, and obviously he pitched something like nine years in the big leagues, so he knew what he was doing on every throw and all that. I give him credit to how well I've done so far this season, too, because every single day he'd be on me if I made a bad throw. He'd tell me I was throwing my shoulder open too soon, for example. He also helped me with my curveball a lot, because in the beginning I was losing it up and outside a lot. He made an impression on me in terms of the mental side of the game, too. He's a fireball.

CR: Well, he always seemed to have that closer mentality, to me, and maintained that aggressive approach in any role in which he was used.

WL: Exactly. And he has that mentality on and off the field, as well. He did a lot to make sure that I had that same approach, and I feel like that's helped me a great deal.

CR: So far, you've been pretty much lights-out. You've done very well (13 appearances, 12 IP, 9 H, 6 BB, 13 K, 0.00 ERA). I'd imagine that you might be thinking of a call from the States, somewhere in the back of your mind.

WL: It's definitely something that's on my mind. One of the things that motivates me to pitch well out here is to make it back to the States. I mean, it's been my lifelong goal.

I grew up, you know, just a 45-minute drive from Dodger Stadium. So I went to a bunch of games when I was younger. Now I'm seeing a bunch of my former teammates that are getting called up right now, and you know, they're doing well and I'm thinking, "Wow, I should be there." And that gives me more motivation to not only meet my goals, but also to be up there with them.

I feel like I've just got to get back to doing what I did in my first year of pro ball. I need to really just have fun doing what I do, again. But I think it's good that I made that jump from High-A to Triple-A. I guess I feel like it's good for my resume and it just shows teams what I can do. And I feel like I've shown that I can fill any role a team needs me to fill.

CR: If I'm a GM in the States, I know there are a lot of guys down there who have tons of experience, guys who I can slot into higher levels in the minors or just sign and add to the 40-man, if necessary. But I wonder if some guys might lose focus because they might not have the same visibility that some players here in the US have, and wonder if they're getting any attention. Do you think some players feel like they're just going through the motions, sometimes?

WL: Yeah, some players will just tell you, "I'm just here to make money", or "I'm just going to enjoy it all while I can." And I think there are some players that have that mentality, that they feel they're not going to make it back.

CR: Is there a story you'd like to share about your time in Mexico, so far?

WL: We were on a road trip, was about a five-hour bus ride to Laredo, Texas. Once you get out of Monclova, you pretty much lose your cell signal, and that lasts about three hours. We're probably at the halfway point in the bus ride. We get stopped at a checkpoint. It's a *Marine* checkpoint.

So these guys are not only fully armed, like the cops in Mexico, but on the back of a pickup truck there is a mounted 50-caliber machine gun pointed at our bus.

Now, our bus is unique because it has our logo on it, and you *know* that we're a ball team. So one of the Marines comes up to the driver's window and says, "Hey, we need to search your bus." So he says "OK." A Marine comes up the steps in our bus with a gun, and we're thinking we're pretty much ready to go ahead and tape anything that happens.

He tells us in Spanish that everyone needs to get off the bus, with their passports, and he says, "We're going to search your bus," so everyone just slowly gets up and gets off the bus. Then we waited for about 15 minutes for them to search our bus, and for some of the guys who brought their backpacks

with them to get off the bus, and we all got in a single file line and we're getting checked out by the Marines. They're asking us each about our address, and so on, just to make sure we weren't lying.

Then we get back on the bus, one by one, and the whole time they've got this 50-cal trained on us. It's definitely something I'll never forget, that's for sure.